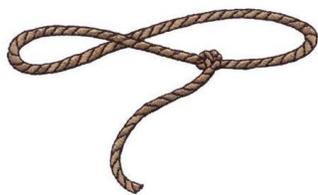




# HOW THE WEST WAS DRESSED



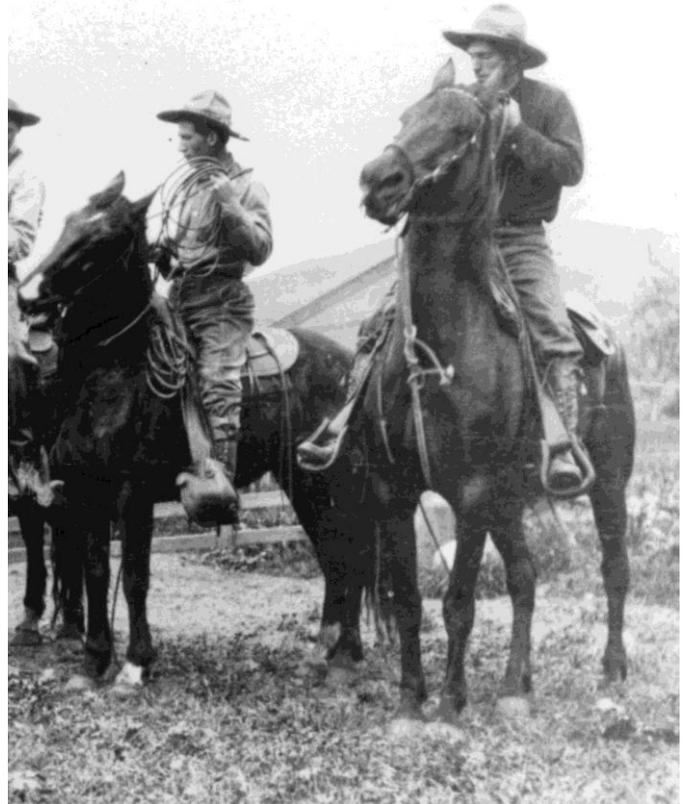
WESTERN FASHION  
IN THE ERA OF  
WILD WEST SHOWS

1865-1910

Star performers of the rollicking Wild West shows were international celebrities. By the turn of the twentieth century Buffalo Bill Cody was the most famous American in the world. His vision of the Wild West became part of our national identity and his cowboy became the American Hero. Not surprisingly, Wild West costumes inspired the dress code for the West.

This exhibit showcases historically correct western clothing in styles made fashionable by actors in the Wild West shows. Cowboys were naturally flamboyant dressers, and the shows gave them a stylish image to live up to. Many a paycheck was spent on colorful silk scarves, fancy shirts and ornately tooled belts.

Most of the pieces in this exhibit were created by Allen Wah, who provided “vintage” clothing to Western retail stores, museums, historians, Cowboy Action Shooters, re-enactors, as well as the movie and television industry. Allen Wah’s designs helped to change the “Hollywood Cowboy” look to a more authentic portrayal of Old West style.



Conejo Valley cowhands at the Skelton Corral

Have a gander, then burn the breeze to the nearest general store to get your own wild rag and duckins!





## SOME WILD WEST HISTORY

After the Civil War, the first Wild West Shows were indoor stage productions, more like vaudeville shows. 1883 marked the debut of William “Buffalo Bill” Cody’s outdoor extravaganza, *Buffalo Bill’s Wild West*; the show thrived for more than three decades.

Dozens of smaller-scale outdoor shows followed.

BY THE LATE 1880S, Texas “waddies” pushing cattle north to Abilene along the Chisholm Trail were a thing of the past. In 1890, the frontier was declared officially closed.

By 1910, the Wild West Shows had lost popularity, and by 1917 the Wild West era had died along with its greatest promoter, William “Buffalo Bill” Cody.

As the great herds of buffalo disappeared, the open range was carved up by barbed wire fencing; the telegraph and railroad replaced the Pony Express; fierce Indian tribes were subdued; and the wilderness was mapped; it was the Wild West shows that kept the legends of the frontier West alive and fed the nation’s romance with the Westward, Ho! movement.



Annie Oakley

Buffalo Bill Cody’s Wild West show traveled around the world and was an international sensation. The show carried grandstand seating for 20,000.

Performers—as many as 500— included Annie Oakley (nicknamed “Little Sure Shot”), Wild Bill Hickok, Calamity Jane, Will Rogers, Tom Mix, Chief Joseph, Geronimo, and Chief Sitting Bull, as well as hundreds of animals.



Will Rogers in a publicity photo



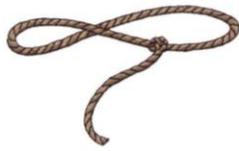
Shows opened with the “Grand Processional”, a parade that included mountain men, Indians, wagon trains, cowboys and cavalry.

The energy kicked into high gear with bucking broncs, sharp shooting demonstrations, and roping, trick riding and other feats of daring.



The “Cowboy Band” played through re-enactments of famous battles, buffalo hunts, attacks on a stagecoach and a settler’s cabin, and Custer’s Last Stand.

After the parade and two-hour performance, the show was loaded onto two trains, totaling 50 cars, and moved to the next town.



## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

If he worked with cattle, a ranch hand was known as a “Waddy”.

Bandanas are relatively modern. Back in the day, fashionable cowboys wore a “Wild Rag”—a colorful scarf made of cotton or silk—around their necks.

“Stovepipes” were the tall boots with square toes worn by most cowboys.

“Duckins” were high-waisted trousers originally made from sturdy canvas duck, held up with suspenders and cinched tight with a buckle in the back.

If cowhands could afford it, their leather items like cuffs, belts, spur straps and holsters were heavily tooled or decorated with silver or nickel studs called “Spots”.

“Bronc Buster Belts” started out larger as kidney and back support for ridin’ those ol’ sunfishers, but were sized down and decorated when they became a fashion item.

Most fellers wore spurs and many added “Jingle-bobs” to their spurs to complete the look. The jingle made folks turn their heads when a waddy walked into the bar.

“Bib Shirts” originated with army cavalry troops. The bib gave extra protection to the chest from wind, freezing rain, brush, dust, you name it. Ex-Civil War soldiers found it just as useful herding cattle.

Cowboys being show-offs, their go-to-town bib shirts were worn as a fashion statement with colorful piping and embroidered artwork on the bib.

If you look at photos of **Billy the Kid**, for example, you can see an anchor design embroidered on his shirt. Chinese motifs came from silk and old tapestries that were imported from China. Young fellers might open the bib and button it over to the side, but an ol’ cowpoke **NEVER** wore his shirt unbuttoned in public.

# OUR COSTUMES WERE DESIGNED BY ALLEN WAH

Allen was raised ridin' and ropin' on the Yuma Indian Reservation in Arizona. His cowpoke creds go back generations: Allen's grandfather, who emigrated from China in 1884, was a cattle rancher in Port Townsend, Washington. The business, *Joe Wah Provisions*, supplied the lumber mills with beef. Allen's father opened a general store and trading post on the Rez, and was highly regarded for helping the tribal Indians survive the Depression years.

With a degree in Industrial Design and a minor in Anthropology from UCLA, Allen took a right turn into clothing design, creating a new concept in the Western clothing industry with the label "WAH00." It was an authentic Old West frontier collection from the 1800s. The label was later changed to "WAH-MAKER." Allen provided "vintage" clothing to Western retail stores, museums, historians, Cowboy Action Shooters, re-enactors, as well as the movie and television industry—*Unforgiven, Tombstone, Lonesome Dove, Geronimo, Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman, Legends of the West, Young Riders*— and became the largest supplier of period cowboy clothing in the USA and in many countries.

Allen was a major sponsor of SASS (Single Action Shooting Society) which promotes the sport of Cowboy Action Shooting in competition at world-wide costumed reenactment events.

Wahmaker clothing was worn by both shooters and spectators.

Dressed in period cowboy clothing, you might see him on a trail ride, in charge of the dutch oven as the chuck wagon "Cookie" on cattle drives, or at cowboy action shoots.



## Posters on Cover and Page 3:

### Cover:

(ca. 1899) *Buffalo Bill's wild west and congress of rough riders of the world*. United States, ca. 1899. [Photograph] Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/97503242/>.

### Page 3:

*Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World In the grandest of illuminated arenas, 2 electric plants, 250,000 candle power.* , 1895. [N.Y.: The Springer Litho. Co] Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2002719218/>.