



WEBFOOTER EXTRA

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Happy Trails of the Wild, Wild West



Cowboy King Roy Rogers – Honorary Grand Marshal – 1954 Rose Festival Grand Floral Parade.

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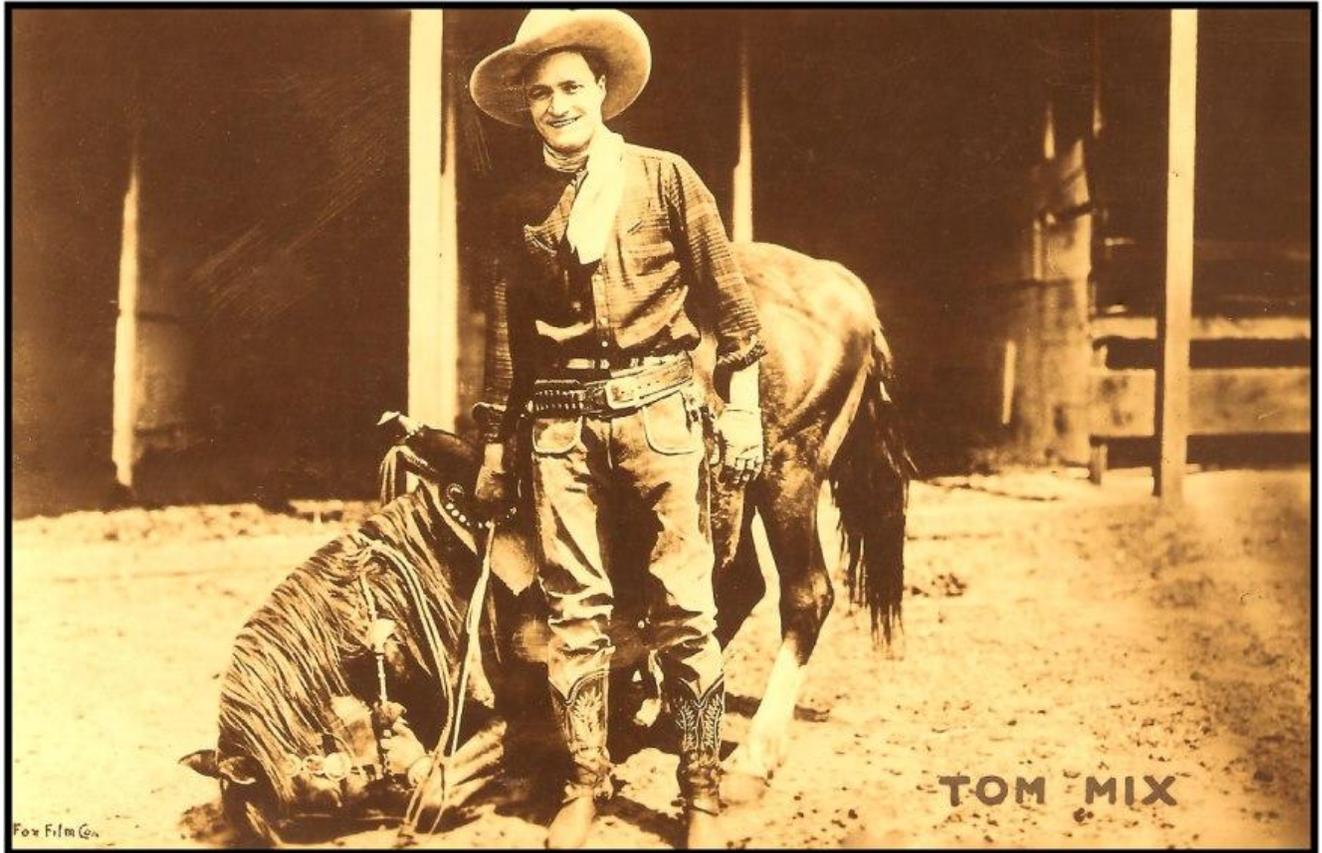


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Happy Trails of the Wild, Wild West



For more than three decades, the western genre dominated what we saw on the silver screen. We grew up with western movie stars like John Wayne, Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, Audie Murphy, Randolph Scott and many more.

Western actor Bob Steele was born Robert Adrian Bradbury on January 23, 1907 in Portland, Oregon, into a vaudeville family. After about ten years of touring, the family settled in Hollywood, California, where his father soon found work in the movies, first as an actor and later as a director. Bradbury actually directed John Wayne in more westerns than any other director, albeit low-budget ones. By 1920, Robert Bradbury hired his son Bob and Bob's twin brother, Bill (1907–1971), as juvenile leads for a series of adventure movies titled *The Adventures of Bob and Bill*.

Steele's career began to take off for good in 1927, when he was hired by production company Film Booking Offices of America (FBO) to star in a series of westerns. Renamed Bob Steele at FBO, he soon made a name for himself by working for almost every film studio, including Monogram, Supreme, Tiffany, Syndicate, Republic (including several films of the *Three Mesquiteers* series) and Producers Releasing Corporation (PRC) (including the initial films of their "Billy the Kid" series), plus he had a role in an adaptation of John Steinbeck's novel, *Of Mice and Men* in 1939.

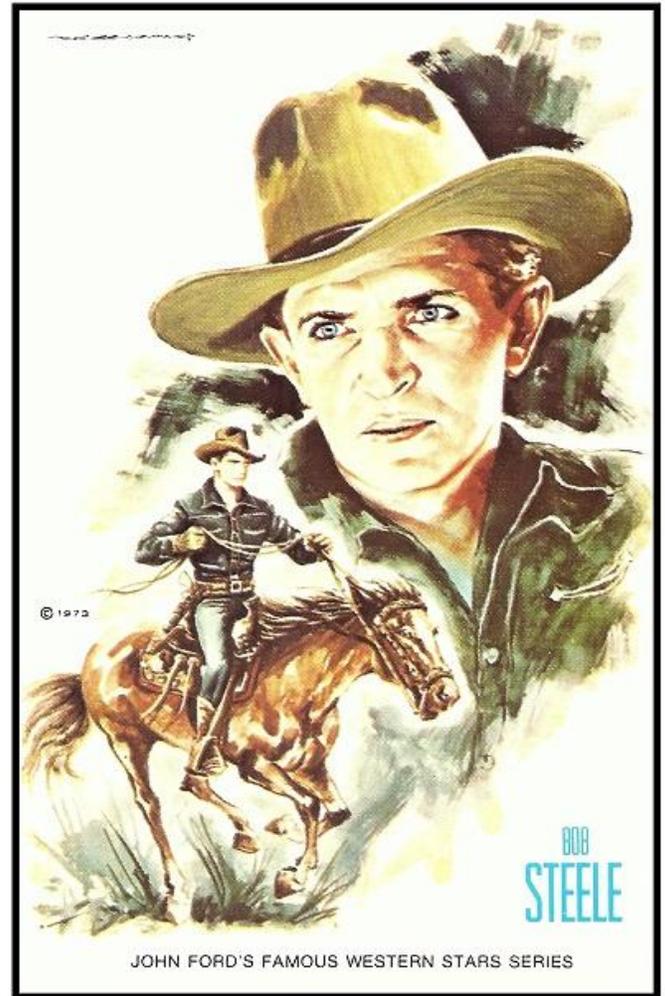
In the 1940s, Steele's career as a cowboy hero was on the decline, but he kept himself working by accepting supporting roles in big movies like Howard Hawks' *The Big Sleep*, and several John Wayne movies. Besides these he also made occasional appearances in science fiction films.

Steele also performed on television, including the role of Sergeant Granger in the premiere episode of the ABC/Warner Brothers western series, *Colt 45*, entitled "The Peacemaker," in 1957. Bob was also cast as Sam Shoulders in another ABC/Warner Brothers western series, *Sugarfoot*, with Will Hutchins in the "Bunch Quitter" episode.

In 1958 and 1959 Steele appeared in two episodes of the NBC western, *The Californians*, as well as three episodes of *Maverick* with James Garner. Steele appeared in *The Rebel*, which starred Nick Adams. He also appeared as Deputy Sam in four episodes of Hugh O'Brian's *The Life and Legend of Wyatt Earp*. In 1959, he appeared in an episode of the syndicated series, *Death Valley Days*. Steele appeared in six different episodes of the Walt Disney's western television series *Texas John Slaughter* with Tom Tryon. On January 25, 1960, Steele was cast as the frontier gunfighter Luke Short in an episode of the CBS western series, *The Texan*, starring Rory Calhoun.

In the mid-1960s, Steele was cast in a regular supporting role as Trooper Duffy in ABC's *F Troop*, which allowed him to show his comic talent. Trooper Duffy in the *F Troop* story line claimed to have been "shoulder to shoulder with Davy Crockett at the Alamo" and to have been the only survivor of the battle forty years before.

In real life, forty years before *F Troop*, Steele played a supporting role in his father's 1926 film *Davy Crockett at the Fall of the Alamo*. Bob Steele died on December 21, 1988 from emphysema after a long illness. He was survived by his third wife of forty-nine years, Bertha Virginia Nash Tatum Steele (1914–1992).



John Wayne — America's Cowboy

John Wayne was probably the best known western star of all time. He was born Marion Robert Morrison on May 26, 1907 in Winterset, Iowa and he became an American actor, director, producer and an Academy Award-winner for *True Grit* which was released in 1969. Wayne was among the top box office draws for three decades.

Wayne's family moved to Palmdale, California, and then in 1916 to Glendale, California, where his father worked as a pharmacist. A local fireman at the station on his route to school in Glendale started calling him "Little Duke" because he never went anywhere without his huge Airedale Terrier, Duke. He preferred "Duke" to "Marion," and the nickname stuck. Wayne attended Wilson Middle School in Glendale. As a teen, he worked in an ice cream shop for a man who shod horses for Hollywood studios. He was also active as a member of the Order of DeMolay, a youth organization of the Freemasons. He played football for the 1924 league champion Glendale High School team.

Wayne applied to the U.S. Naval Academy, but he was not accepted. He instead attended the University of Southern California (USC), majoring in pre-law. He was a member of the Trojan Knights and Sigma Chi fraternities. Wayne also played on the USC football team under Coach Howard Jones. A broken collarbone injury curtailed his athletic career; He lost his athletic scholarship, and without funds, had to leave the university.

As a favor to USC football Coach Howard Jones, who had given silent western film star Tom Mix tickets to USC games, director John Ford and Mix hired Wayne as a prop boy and extra. Wayne later credited his walk, talk, and persona to his acquaintance with Wyatt Earp, who was good friends with Tom Mix. Wayne soon moved to bit parts, establishing a longtime friendship with the director who provided most of those roles, John Ford. Early in this period, he had a minor, uncredited role as a guard in the 1926 film *Bardelys the Magnificent*. Wayne also appeared with his USC teammates playing football in *Brown of Harvard* (1926), *The Dropkick* (1927), and *Salute* (1929) and Columbia's *Maker of Men* (filmed in 1930, released in 1931). While working for Fox Film Corporation in bit roles, Wayne was given on-screen credit as "Duke Morrison" only once, in *Words and Music* in 1929.

Initially working for Fox, he mostly appeared in small bit parts. His first leading role came in Raoul Walsh's lavish widescreen epic *The Big Trail* in 1930, which led to leading roles in numerous B movies throughout the 1930's, many of them in the western genre. Walsh saw him moving studio furniture while working as a prop boy and cast him in his first starring role in *The Big Trail*. For his screen name, Walsh suggested "Anthony Wayne", after Revolutionary War general "Mad" Anthony Wayne. Fox Studios chief Winfield Sheehan rejected it as sounding "too Italian." Walsh then suggested "John Wayne." Sheehan agreed, and the name was set. Wayne was not even present for the discussion.

Wayne's career took off in 1939, with John Ford's *Stagecoach* making him an instant mainstream star. Wayne went on to star in 142 pictures. Biographer Ronald Davis says: "John Wayne personified for millions the nation's frontier heritage. Eighty-three of his movies were westerns and in them he played cowboys, cavalymen and unconquerable loners extracted from the Republic's central creation myth."

Wayne's first color film was *Shepherd of the Hills* (1941), in which he co-starred with his longtime friend Harry Carey. Wayne was exempted from service in World War II due to his age (34 at the time of Pearl Harbor) and family status, classified as 3-A (family deferment). Despite his desire to serve, Republic Pictures thought he was too valuable to expose to danger in the War. Wayne toured U.S. bases and hospitals in the South Pacific for three months in 1943 and 1944 with the USO.

John Wayne — America's Cowboy

The following year, Wayne appeared in his only film directed by Cecil B. DeMille, the Technicolor epic *Reap the Wild Wind* (1942), in which he co-starred with Ray Milland; it was one of the rare times he played a character with questionable values. He would appear in more than 20 of John Ford's films throughout the next two decades.

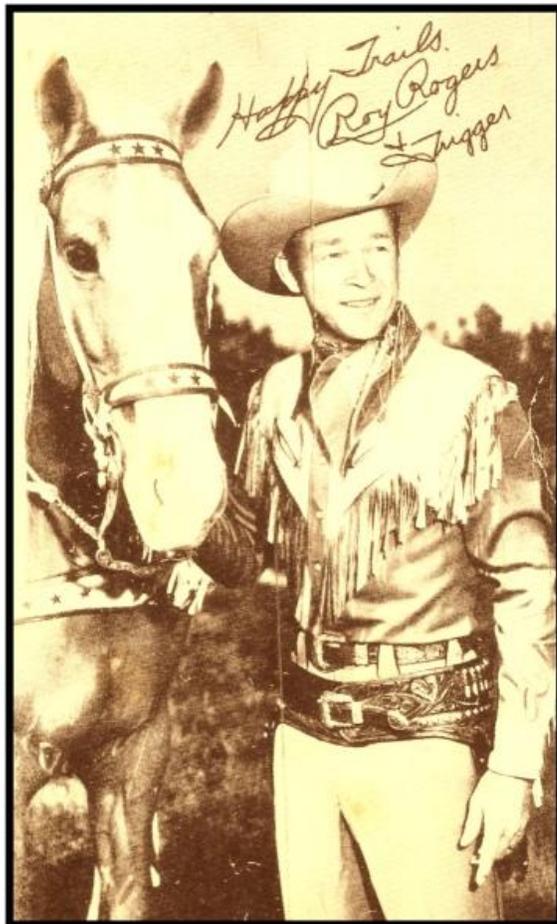
Wayne's other well-known western roles include a cattleman driving his herd north on the Chisholm Trail in *Red River* (1948); *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949); he also played the part of a Civil War veteran whose young niece is abducted by a tribe of Comanches in *The Searchers* (1956); and a troubled rancher competing with an Eastern lawyer for a woman's hand in marriage in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962) with James Stewart: the first movie in which he called someone "Pilgrim."

He is also remembered for his roles in *The Quiet Man* (1952), *The Wings of Eagles* (1957), *Rio Bravo* (1959) and *The Longest Day* (1962). In his final screen performance, he starred as an aging gunfighter battling cancer in *The Shootist* in 1976. He appeared with many important Hollywood stars of his era, and his last public appearance was at the Academy Awards ceremony on April 9, 1979.

Wayne was married three times and divorced twice. He was fluent in Spanish and his three wives were each of Hispanic descent. Several of Wayne's children entered the film and television industry; Michael Wayne and Patrick Wayne appeared in several movies with their father; Wayne's son Ethan was billed as John Ethan Wayne in a few films.

Wayne's hair began thinning in the 1940's, and he started wearing a hairpiece by the end of that decade. He had been a chain smoker of cigarettes since young adulthood and was diagnosed with lung cancer in 1964. He underwent successful surgery to remove his entire left lung and four ribs. Five years later, Wayne was declared cancer-free. Wayne died of stomach cancer on June 11, 1979, at the UCLA Medical Center, and was interred in the Pacific View Memorial Park cemetery in Corona del Mar, Newport Beach.





Roy Rogers — Happy Trails

One of America's most-beloved cowboys, Roy Rogers, was born November 5, 1911 in Cincinnati, Ohio and he was named Leonard Franklin Slye. He was an American singer and cowboy actor who was known as the "King of the Cowboys." Rogers appeared in more than 100 films and numerous radio and television episodes of *The Roy Rogers Show*. In many of his films and television episodes, he appeared with his wife Dale Evans, his golden palomino Trigger, and his German shepherd dog Bullet. His show ran on radio for nine years before moving to television from 1951 through 1957. His productions usually featured a sidekick, often Pat Brady, Andy Devine, or George "Gabby" Hayes.

In his early years, Leonard Slye grew up on a houseboat along the Ohio River. His father worked in Portsmouth, Ohio in a shoe factory and returned home to be with his family on weekends, bearing gifts following paydays. A notable gift was a horse on which young Len Slye learned the basics of horsemanship. Living on the farm with no radio, the family made their own entertainment. On Saturday nights, the family often invited neighbors over for square dances, during which Len would sing, play mandolin, and call the square dances. He also learned to yodel during this time, and he and his mother would use yodeling calls to communicate with each other across distances on the farm.

By the time Len was in his second year of high school, he realized that his family needed his financial assistance; Len quit school and joined his father at the shoe factory. He tried to attend night school, but after being ridiculed for falling asleep in class, he quit school and never returned.

By 1929, after Len's older sister Mary and her husband moved to Lawndale, California, he and his father quit their factory jobs, packed up their 1923 Dodge, and drove the family to California to visit Mary. They stayed for four months before returning to Ohio. Soon after returning, young Len had the opportunity to travel again to California with Mary's father-in-law, and the rest of the family followed in the spring of 1930. The Slye family rented a small house near Mary. Len and his father found employment driving gravel trucks for a highway-construction project.

In the spring of 1931, after the construction company went bankrupt, Len traveled to Tulare, California where he found work picking peaches for Del Monte. During this time he lived in a labor camp similar to the ones depicted in John Steinbeck's novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. The economic hardship of the Great Depression was just as severe in California as it was in Ohio.

After 19 year old Len Slye's second arrival in Lawndale, his sister Mary suggested that he audition for the Midnight Frolic radio program, which broadcast over KMCS in Inglewood, CA. A few nights later, wearing a Western shirt that Mary had made for him, Leonard overcame his shyness and appeared on the program playing guitar, singing and yodeling. A few days later, he was asked to join a local country music group called The Rocky Mountaineers. Len accepted the group's offer and became a member in August 1931. By September 1931, Slye hired Canadian-born Bob Nolan who answered the group's classified ad in the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* that read, "Yodeler for old-time act, to travel. Tenor preferred." Although Nolan stayed with the group only a short time, he and Len stayed in touch. Nolan was replaced by Tim Spencer.

In the spring of 1932, Len Slye, Spencer, and another singer, Slumber Nichols, left the Rocky Mountaineers to form a trio, which soon failed. Throughout that year, Len and Tim Spencer moved through a series of short-lived groups, including the International Cowboys and the O-Bar-O Cowboys. When Spencer left the O-Bar-O Cowboys to take a break from music, Len joined Jack LeFevre and His Texas Outlaws, who were a popular act on a local Los Angeles radio station. In 1932 a palomino colt foaled in California was named "Golden Cloud"; when Len acquired him, he renamed him "Trigger."

In 1932, Len met an admirer named Lucile Ascolese. Roy and Lucile were married in 1933 by a justice of the peace in Los Angeles. The marriage was a failure, and the couple divorced in 1936.

In early 1933, Len Slye, with Bob Nolan, and Tim Spencer formed a group called the Pioneers Trio, with Slye on guitar, Nolan on string bass and Spencer on lead vocals. The three rehearsed for weeks refining their vocal harmonies. During this time, Slye continued to work with his radio singing group, while Spencer and Nolan began writing songs for the trio. In early 1934, fiddle player Hugh Farr joined the group, adding a bass voice to the group's vocal arrangements. Later that year, the Pioneers Trio became the Sons of the Pioneers when a radio station announcer changed their name because he felt they were too young to be "pioneers." The name was received well and fit the group, who were no longer a trio.

By the summer of 1934, the popularity and fame of the Sons of the Pioneers extended beyond the Los Angeles area and quickly spread across the country through short syndicated radio segments that were later rebroadcast across the United States. After signing a recording contract with the newly founded Decca label, the Sons of the Pioneers made their first commercial recording on August 8, 1934.

Sons of the Pioneers

One of the first songs recorded by the group during that first August session was "Tumbling Tumbleweeds" written by Bob Nolan. Over the next two years the Sons of the Pioneers would record 32 songs for Decca, including the classic "Cool Water."

While on tour with the "O-Bar-O Cowboys" in June 1933 Len met Grace Arline Wilkins at a Roswell, New Mexico radio station. They were married three years later in Roswell on June 11, 1936 after having corresponded since their first meeting.

From his first film appearance in 1935, Rogers worked steadily in western films, including a large supporting role as a singing cowboy while still billed as "Leonard Slye" in a Gene Autry movie. In 1938, when Autry was demanding more money for his work, Slye was immediately rechristened "Roy Rogers." Actually, there was a competition for a new singing cowboy, and many western singers sought the job, including Willie Phelps of the Phelps brothers who appeared in early western movies. Slye ended up winning the contest and became Roy Rogers.

Slye's stage name was suggested by Republic Picture's staff after Will Rogers and the shortening of Leroy and he was assigned the lead in *Under Western Stars*. Rogers became a matinee idol and American legend. A competitor for Gene Autry as the nation's favorite singing cowboy was suddenly born. In addition to his own movies, Rogers played a supporting role in the John Wayne classic *Dark Command* (1940). Rogers became a major box office attraction. Unlike other stars, the vast majority of Rogers' leading roles allowed him to play a character with his own name in the manner of Gene Autry.

In 1941, Len and Grace adopted a daughter, Cheryl Darlene. Two years later, Grace gave birth to the couple's daughter Linda Lou, followed by son Roy, Jr. ("Dusty") in 1946. Grace Arline Wilkins died of complications from the birth a few days later, on November 3.

Rogers met Dale Evans in 1944 when they were cast in a film together. They fell in love soon after Arline's death and Rogers proposed to her during a rodeo at Chicago Stadium. They married on New Year's Eve in 1947 at the Flying L Ranch in Davis, Oklahoma, where they had filmed *Home in Oklahoma* a few months earlier. Together they had five children including Robin Elizabeth, who had Down syndrome and died of complications with mumps shortly before her second birthday.

Rogers and Evans's famous theme song, "Happy Trails", was written by Evans; they sang it as a duet to sign off their television show. In the fall of 1962, the couple co-hosted a comedy-western-variety program, *The Roy Rogers and Dale Evans Show*, which aired on ABC. It was cancelled after three months, losing in the ratings to *The Jackie Gleason Show* on CBS. Roy also made numerous cameo or guest appearances on other popular television shows, starring as himself or other cowboy-type characters, such as in an episode of *Wonder Woman* called "The Bushwackers". Rogers also owned a Hollywood production company which handled his own series. It also filmed other undertakings, including the 1955–1956 CBS western series *Brave Eagle* starring Keith Larsen as a young peaceful Cheyenne chief. In 1968, Rogers licensed his name to the Marriott corporation, which converted its Hot Shoppes locations to Roy Rogers Restaurants, with which Rogers otherwise had no involvement.

When Rogers died of congestive heart failure on July 6, 1998, he was residing in Apple Valley, California. He was buried at Sunset Hills Memorial Park in Apple Valley, as was his wife, Dale Evans, three years later.



Photo of Roy Rogers and Dale Evans courtesy of Stephen Kenney.