



## THE MUSEUM OF WESTERN FILM HISTORY

### Miller Brothers 101 Ranch



The 101 Ranch was a sprawling 110,000 acres of leased Indian lands that spread across four counties in the Indian Territory of Northeastern Oklahoma. It was founded in 1879 by Col. George W. Miller, a Confederate veteran, as a working showplace, self-sufficient and employing thousands of people. The 101 Ranch became one of the largest diversified farms with cross breeding of animals and agricultural products.

The ranch grew to include a school, show grounds, general store and cafe, hotel, newspaper, magazine, blacksmith shop, leather shop, dairy, saddle shop, meat packing plant, oil refinery and even had its own scrip (money). Homes for employees were available on the ranch along with guest houses and a dude ranch. It was a city within itself consisting of a population of around 3,000 people at any given time.

In 1903, Col. George Miller died and the ranch was taken over by his three sons. Each of his sons had a specialty that made the ranch pay off. The eldest was Joe Miller, an expert in grains and plants. The middle son, Zac, was a rancher-cowman. The third son, George, was a financial wizard.

In 1905, Joe started the 101 Ranch Wild West Show, a touring version of the yearly rodeos that featured roping, riding, bulldogging, Indian dancers, trick roping, riding and shooting. The show traveled all over the world. There were close to 80,000 people on the ranch for the first Wild West Show that featured such attractions as the [Apache Chief Geronimo](#), [Buffalo Bill](#), [Tom Mix](#), [Bill Pickett](#) and [Lucille Mulhall](#). Also featured were a buffalo hunt and barbecue, Indian sports and dancing, riding and roping contests, bands plus a gigantic parade.



As a part of his act, Geronimo was supposed to shoot a buffalo with his bow and arrow. After three tries the cowboys came in to finish the job. The buffalo's meat was later barbecued, mixed with previously prepared beef and sold in 50-cent sandwiches, which was quite a price for 1905.

Gala Day marked the debut of Tom Mix as a Western performer and featured Buffalo Bill driving a team of buffalo. The gay and gaudy rodeo offered many thrills, but to many the most exciting act was when Bill Pickett, Negro cowboy, performed for the first time in public his daring feat which originated the sport of "bulldogging".

## Bill Pickett Made 101 Ranch Wild West Show Popular



Pickett jumped from his horse onto the head of a running steer and threw him by sinking his teeth “bulldog style” in the animal’s tender nostrils. “I never saw anyone with as thick a neck as Pickett had,” a fan noted. “The cords in his neck were as big a man’s thumb and would stand way out as he strained and twisted with the animal. Of course today the cowboys just throw the steer by hanging on to its horns and wrestling it down. But you’ll have to admit it was pretty novel the way ole Pick did it.”

Newspapers of the time always stated, “It was a thrill to meet such people who have become ‘the greats’ in our western history – people like Buffalo Bill, Hoot Gibson, Pawnee Bill, Tom Mix, and Will Rogers.” NOTE: How could the newspapers know that these people would become “the greats” years before they became “the greats”?

As noted earlier, at its zenith the 101 Ranch seasonally employed two-to-three -thousand people. Many of the ranch hands were also performers in the Wild West Show. Although exaggerated and stylized, their work and their performance were one and the same. Hollywood actors and other famous people from a number of disciplines were among the attractions. Not all were physical performers but simply famous for their accomplishments.

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References:

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