Foreword

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I first met Rowland Rider at the home of a colleague, where he had come, escorted by his granddaughter Deirdre Paulsen, to tell "cowboy stories" to an assorted group of BYU English Department faculty members and spouses. As our host's basement-family room gradually filled with new arrivals and as talk flitted easily from the latest departmental gossip to the vagaries of suburban living, I watched Mr. Rider seated straight and uncomfortable on the edge of his chair, far removed, it seemed to me, from the time, place and spirit of the Arizona Strip he was to tell us about—and I wondered what the evening held in store for both him and us.

I needn't have worried. "I want to tell you a funny story," he began, rising to his full height. Then he laughed, a laugh so infectious that in short order we were all laughing with him, in spite of the fact that we had not yet heard his story. Two hours later we were still laughing. But in the interim that rough strip of land, which divides Utah and Arizona and which maintained its raw frontier character long after the frontier had disappeared elsewhere, had come vividly alive for us, his enthusiastic listeners.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the stories Mr. Rider told that evening was their unity. Though each story was capable of standing alone as a separate tale, the entire group of tales, taken together, formed an integrated and uniform whole. Mr. Rider achieved this unity partly through consistency in tone and narrative style but mostly through an interlocking technique whereby he would present in one story a character or event which he would then use in other tales. For example, the gambling cowboy, Highpockets, appeared in one story almost incidentally, but then showed up a few stories later as one of the leading characters, now already known to the listener from his earlier shenanigans. Similarly, The Roll Away Saloon, the nemesis of the local Relief Society sisters but the delight of its cowboy patrons, who rolled it from one side of the Utah-Arizona border to the other to escape the law, was fitted into a story wherever the plot needed it.

Through this interlocking device, Mr. Rider was able to create for us that evening a believable cast of characters, from Jim Emett the cattle thief to the idle cowboys in Kanab whittling the streets full of
shavings. Perhaps more important, he was also able to create an engaging and believable picture of the joys and hardships of cowboy life on the Arizona Strip just after the turn of the century. In short, the unity in his stories was a reflection of the unity he had perceived in the cowboy life of his youth and had tried to depict for us.

Rowland Rider's stories, those told at that storytelling session some years ago and those recorded in this book by his granddaughter, can both delight and instruct. Perhaps the scholars most interested in these stories will be oral historians and folklorists.

Until recently, oral historians—historians who record the happenings of the past directly from the people who experienced them—have focused primarily on those famous men and women who have played significant roles in shaping past events. More recently they have begun recording the stories of the common men and women who have lived through these events. Such a man was Rowland Rider. His memories of running cattle in the Kaibab Forest, on the Arizona Strip, and on the rim of the Grand Canyon provide a close personal view of a period of our history which we can scarcely get in other ways.

Yet if we are to use his stories for historical reconstruction we must do so with caution. Mr. Rider's excellent eye for detail and his constant attempts to document and verify the events he describes lend his stories of these events a credibility such accounts often lack. Still we must remember that memory usually does at least two things. It selectively chooses to remember those happenings that have special significance to an individual; and, through the years, it often embellishes these happenings, making them larger than life. As a result, storytelling often becomes an attempt by the teller to characterize the past in terms meaningful to him in the present.

Whether Mr. Rider has added details to his stories as he has told and retold them over the years, I have no way of knowing. But there is no doubt that he has carefully chosen the events he relates from what must have been a much larger storehouse. From his long and productive life, rich with a variety of experiences, he has chosen almost all his stories from that ten-year period when he worked as a cowboy. And from that cowboy period of time he has further chosen to tell only stories which, as his granddaughter points out, serve as a vehicle for his personal philosophy. The world that emerges from these stories is a much harder world than most of us know today,
but it is at the same time a much simpler one where an individual can be reasonably sure that if he obeys the rules he will prevail. Nature, animals, and man can all destroy. But nature treated with admiration and careful respect can sustain one; animals treated with both firmness and kindness can support one; and men treated squarely and honestly can become one's helpers and friends.

Whether or not such a world ever really existed is for the historian to say. But for Rowland Rider there is no doubt about its existence. It is his vision of this world that helps sustain him in the more complex and devious society in which he must now live.

Until recently most folklorists would have expressed only passing interest in Mr. Rider's stories, claiming that though a few of them have analogues elsewhere, most are personal experience narratives rather than the oft-told tales the folklorist generally seeks and studies. But just as oral historians have recently begun collecting experiences of the common folk, so too have folklorists begun paying more attention to personal experience stories.

There are a number of reasons for this. First, though Mr. Rider's stories may not be authentic folk narratives themselves, they do carry other kinds of folklore in them—for example, a rich store of cowboy folk speech and numerous descriptions of cowboy customs. Second, folklorists have come to realize that while the experiences a person tells may be unique to himself, the narrative forms he chooses to filter these experiences through are dictated by tradition. They thus shape stories like those told by Mr. Rider into typical-sounding tall tales, legends, and folk anecdotes, which, if told often enough, may indeed pass into oral tradition and become authentic folklore. Third, the principles involved in oral performance are essentially the same whether the story told is a personal experience or a traditional tale. Folklorists today are devoting at least as much study to the art of telling a story as they are to the story told, realizing that the art of a narrative lies more in its performance than in its appearance on the printed page, however faithfully recorded. Anyone who has watched Mr. Rider perform, has seen him get down on hands and knees to imitate a bull, or has watched him draw listeners into his stories through facial expressions, gestures, and mimicry knows what it is to witness a masterful storyteller.

Storytellers like Mr. Rider become in time what Richard M. Dorson has called sagamen. "Sometimes," says Dorson, "a fluent story-
teller launches into a stream of highly colored personal experiences that enthrall his audience as much or more than any folk tale. In his autobiographical sagas he plays a heroic role, overmastering the hazards and outwitting the dangers presented by vicious men, ferocious beasts, and implacable nature. These narratives rest on explicit factual detail and yet they are strongly flavored with romance” (Richard M. Dorson, Bloodstoppers and Bearwalkers: Folk Traditions of the Upper Peninsula [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952], p. 249). As time passes, the sagaman creates his own legend, or, as is the case with Mr. Rider, his own oral literary masterpiece. For Mr. Rider has told his stories to so many people on so many occasions, and has told them so well, that, taken as a whole, they have become what literature in general is conceded to be—an artistic rendering of significant human experience.

And perhaps herein lies the principal value of these stories. As noted earlier, they have become a sort of objective correlative for what Mr. Rider perceives life to have been on the Arizona Strip at the turn of the century. To be sure, they give a valuable picture of the style of life on the Strip at that time, but they give a still more valuable and moving picture of the man who experienced that life and who, through scores of different circumstances and for nearly seventy years, has kept it in his heart ever since, using it whenever necessary to maintain his balance in a world not always of his own liking. Telling stories is one of the devices people use to manipulate their environment to their own advantage. Through telling his stories, Mr. Rider has been able to maintain a strong sense of identification with the land of his youth and a continued commitment to the values he associates with that land.

William A. Wilson