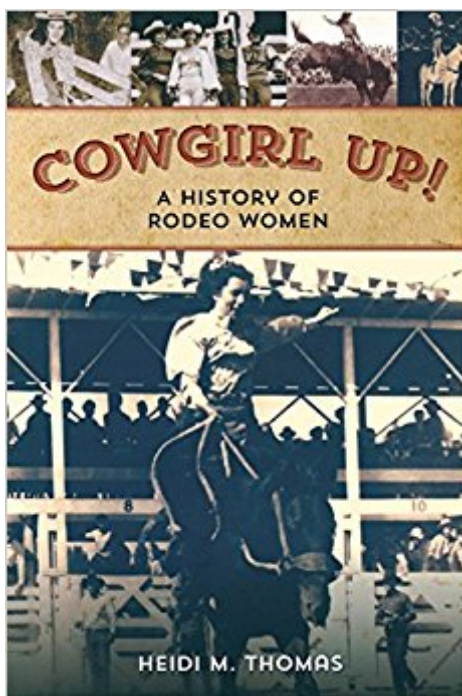


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# Cowgirl Up!: A History Of Rodeo Women



## Synopsis

When someone says "Cowgirl Up!" it means rise to the occasion, don't give up, and do it all without whining or complaining. And the cowgirls of the early twentieth century did it all, just like the men, only wearing skirts and sometimes with a baby waiting behind the chutes. Women learned to rope and ride out of necessity, helping their fathers, brothers, and husbands with the ranch work. But for some women, it went further than that. They caught the fever of freedom, the thirst for adrenaline, and the thrill of competition, and many started their rodeo careers as early as age fourteen. From Alice and Margie Greenough of Red Lodge, whose father told them "If you can't ride, walk, to Jane Burnett Smith of Gilt Edge who sneaked off to ride in rodeos at age eleven, women made wide inroads into the masculine world of rodeo. Montana boasts its share of women who "busted broncs" and broke ranks in the macho world of rodeo during the early to mid-1900s. Cowgirl Up! is the history of these cowgirls, their courage, and their accomplishments.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Heidi Thomas's story struck a resounding chord with me as I began chapter twelve. I loved the book up to that point, but on page 111 the stories of rodeo women intersected the story I tell, about the forgotten women pilots of World War II, the WASP. The seat hit the saddle and the rubber met the runway. From early in the twentieth century, women began making it in the rodeo, in aviation in life but the Depression followed by the War changed everything. The years since are witness to a world where women have had to re-earn what

they were on the verge of having in the early 1940s. Here, a descendant of a rodeo cowgirl spins a fascinating tale of hard-won accomplishment, and she tells it artfully, with love, honesty, and respect. — Sarah Byrn Rickman, author of five fiction and nonfiction books about the WASP of World War II

Heidi M. Thomas grew up on a working ranch in eastern Montana, riding and gathering cattle for branding and shipping. She had parents who taught her a love of books and a grandmother who rode bucking stock in rodeos. She followed her dream of writing with a journalism degree from the University of Montana and then wrote for the Daily Missoulian for several years and did freelance work over a period of 15 years for a number of magazines, including Montana Magazine, Front Sight Magazine, and the Business Monthly. Her first novel, *Cowgirl Dreams*, won an EPIC Award and the USA Book News Best Book Finalist award. She is a member of Women Writing the West, Pacific Northwest Writers Association, Skagit Valley Writers League, Skagit Women in Business, and the Northwest Independent Editors Guild.

Heidi Thomas might have further expanded her title to say "A History of Rodeo Women from Montana". She concentrates her words on the famous cowgirls from the big sky state. Plenty of great, famous and durable cowgirls came from Montana, as did ranch raised Heidi Thomas herself. Rodeo fans and history buffs will like this info packed volume. Heidi Thomas takes her readers back in time to the beginning of cowgirl involvement in the man dominated sport of Rodeo. For a few short decades, up until the beginning of the Great Depression, cowgirls participated in the sport on a more or less equal footing with their male counterparts. They had slightly different rules when riding rough stock but they had a solid presence in the sport. A combination of reduced gate money due to the depression and two tragic deaths in the arena led to the side lining of traditional bronc riding and the like. Two of the greatest cowgirls of all time lost their lives while doing the thing they loved most—riding a thousand pounds of muscle and fury to the roar of the crowd. When one of the greatest of them all met her Waterloo a fan said "I could hear that girl's head hit the ground, right up there in the bleachers." Bonnie McCarroll fought for a week before her injuries overcame her. Thomas introduces us to the greats in the sport over a century of time. We meet the four Greenough girls, four sisters that performed in hundreds of rodeos. Bonnie McCarroll had a grand career before her untimely death. More recently Jane Burnett led a new generation of cowgirls into the 21st Century. Listen to the way Thomas strings her words—"A breeze swirled mini dust devils as horses whinnied, calves bawled, and bulls kicked the slats in the pens." Thomas puts you right there in the

arena with the cowgirls. She also puts in plenty of quotes from the cowgirls themselves. "It's no disgrace to fail. The only disgrace is in not trying." Said cowgirl Jane Burnett, long after suffering many broken bones. Margie Greenough on cowboys..."They were gentlemen. If anyone was cussing or talking dirty, they'd tell'um to hush. And if they didn't, they'd punch 'em." The cowgirls all had grit, that unique Western term that means that the cowgirls 'had no quit in 'em.' We admire the cowgirls for their athletic skill. We hold them in our hearts for the force of will inside a 120 pound girl that puts her on the back of a 2,000 lb. bull, in the face of danger and in the very teeth of an often hostile rodeo industry. The cowgirls in this book are the very best of Americans, people who follow their own path and... let ....nothing...at...all...stop them. Bronc busters, barrel riders, trick riders or racers the cowgirls made a mark on the rodeo industry. They suffered broken bones, crooked promoters and poverty to participate in the sport they love. They still do. In the current century two cowgirls regularly participate alongside the cowboys in the saddle bronc and bull riding events. Dale Evans said "Cowgirl is a pioneer spirit, a special American brand of courage." Heidi Thomas shows that Dale had the right of it. Montana cowgirl Heidi Thomas also writes novels including "Cowgirl Dreams" and "Follow the Dream", both novels won awards .

This was a bit of a different type of book for me. I liked the history and how the cowgirls were able to do the same events as men but only after time and much effort on their parts. To "Cowgirl up" means to not whine, cry, complain, but rather to be tough and handle whatever comes your way. It was interesting how there were so many injuries, yet they recovered only to get back in the saddle. This was a well researched book on this topic. The stories that were written about were of cowgirls from Montana, their shows and competitions. It was a very interesting historical book.

Cowgirl Up! A History of Rodeo Women by Heidi M. Thomas provides an exciting insight into women's role in one of America's greatest passions, rodeo. American rodeo started at small ranch gatherings when cowboys showed off their roping, bulldogging (steer wrestling), and riding prowess. In those days, it was pretty much a male sport. Many ranch girls learned to rope and ride as they helped their fathers, brothers and later their husbands with ranch work. These girls learned to "cowgirl up," which means to rise to the occasion without whining or complaining. As local competition became popular events, girls got into the spirit and began competing with the men. Girls' involvement raised some eyebrows, but they persisted, often wearing cumbersome skirts to be less offensive and more ladylike. Even so, many people thought of rodeo cowgirls as

“loose women.” Cowgirl Up! is about these women of rodeo, many of whom started their careers as young as fourteen, competing against and often earning higher points than seasoned cowboys. The 1920s were rodeo heydays for cowgirls, producing more champion female riders than any time since. These girls knew hardships, but persisted in their rodeo dreams. Soon organized circuits formed and performers traveled from rodeo to rodeo, paying their own travel expenses and fees, often sleeping in tents. Many women brought their babies with them. It was a tough life for both men and women, but in addition to roping, riding bucking broncs, staying atop a writhing, twisting bull, these women made it their business to still appear feminine when not in the arena. Two fatal injuries in 1929 and 1933 among notable women competitors contributed to eliminating women from the Rodeo Association of America (RAA), later renamed Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA), events. Despite these setbacks, women persisted in rodeo competition, turning to smaller privately-produced rodeos. Many became national stars, sought after by such venues as Madison Square Garden in New York. New events geared toward women were added including trick riding, barrel racing and breakaway roping (where a calf is roped, but not thrown). Cowgirl Up! is a riveting and personal account of individual Montana women who followed their dreams to hard-won fame. Tenacity is a common thread among their impressive achievements. One thing that surprised me was that despite broken bones, concussions, torn muscles and ligaments, many of these strong women have lived into their nineties. Each chapter begins with a quote from a notable personality. My favorite is Oprah Winfrey’s “Where there is no struggle, there is no strength.” That quote perfectly sums up the cowgirls’ struggle for rodeo recognition. Author Heidi M. Thomas grew up on a working Montana ranch and speaks with authority on rodeo history. Her grandmother rode bucking stock in the early days of rodeo and Thomas’ trilogy--Cowgirl Dreams, Follow the Dream, and Dare to Dream--are fictionalized accounts of her grandmother’s life. Her latest work, Cowgirl Up! is a well-researched history of individual women’s impressive role in rodeo. For more information about the author and her work, visit <http://heidewriter.wordpress.com/>

The best kind of history lesson; Informative and entertaining. Thomas does a great job of showing the lifestyles of these women in a very male dominated world, and how through hard work and determination they gained the respect of many people not only in the U.S., but throughout the world. You can’t help but be impressed with the toughness of these women, who competed even with broken bones and other injuries. An eye-opening look at the world of rodeo, and the

accomplishments of these women.

Heidi M. Thomas has done an admirable job of bringing the cowgirls of old to life for us to know and appreciate. She has done a lot of research and it shows. These women were brave, courageous and impressive. This is a good read and I recommend it.

I've read all three of Ms. Thomas's cowgirl series and thoroughly enjoyed them. I don't read too many non-fiction books but thought I'd give this one a try since I enjoyed her fiction. I wasn't disappointed. Not only did I learn something, but the true tales of fearless women of the west kept me turning the pages.

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