

Siringo: Cowboy, private detective, novelist

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A native son who brought recognition to Matagorda County through his adventures and writings was well-known cowboy-detective, Charles Angelo Siringo.

He was born Feb. 7, 1855, on the Matagorda Peninsula to Antonio and Bridget White Siringo, who had married in Matagorda on Oct. 12, 1852.

At the age of 12 he was "drafted" into the life of a cowboy when he got a job working for Mr. Faldien near Boggy.

His father, a native of Sicily, had died when he was a year old, and on August 15, 1867, his mother married William Carrier in Matagorda.

The family sold their property in Matagorda to go north where Mr. Carrier was supposed to have property.

After spending all of the family's money, Mr. Carrier deserted them.

Charlie worked at odd jobs, and finally worked his way back to Texas, landing at Indianola.

He began work on Matagorda County ranches, working for Tom Nye, Shanghai Pierce, Wiley Kuykendall, Robert Partain and W.B. Grimes.

He spent two years living with the Horace Yeamans family on Cash's Creek.

Then he hired out driving cattle north from the LX Ranch.

While at the LX Ranch, he first met Billy the Kid.

The Kid's two-way rustling operation - stealing horses in New Mexico and selling them in Texas, and rustling cattle in Texas for the return trip and selling them in New Mexico - let to Siringo's first experience as a detective.

Siringo led a posse of the top guns of the LX to try to stop the rustling and to capture Billy.

Charlie left the posse on a side venture to find out what happened to the stolen cattle, and the Kid was killed in a shoot-out with the posse led by Pat Garrett.

In the spring of 1886, Charlie went to Chicago and applied for a position with the Pinkerton Detective Agency.

He received a dangerous assignment in the mining camps of Idaho's Coeur d'Alene region.

He assumed the alias of C. Leon Allison, and applied for a job as a miner and joined the miner's union.

Hired by the mine owners, he was appointed a United States Marshall and was the star witness in the trials held in the United States courts at Coeur d'Alene City and Boise.

His next assignment was the four-year task of trailing the Wild Bunch, Butch Cassidy's (George Leroy Parker) gang.

These feared outlaws were Harvey Logan, the infamous Kid Curry; Ben Kilpatrick, the Tall Texan; Harry Longabaugh, the Sundance Kid; Will Carver; and Flatnose George Curry.

This work took him as much as 1,000 miles at a time on horseback in the most remote and wildest part of the West.

Altogether he traveled 25,000 miles trailing the Wild Bunch, most of it on horseback.

In the four years he worked on the case, most of the outlaw members were killed, put behind bars, or left the country for South America.

Charlie was the first cowboy to put his real life experiences in writing.

His books in order of publication are: *A Texas Cowboy*, or *Fifteen Years on the Hurricane Deck of a Spanish Pony* (1885); *A Cowboy Detective* (1912); *Two Evil Isms: Pinkerton-*



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Chas. A. Siringo

ism and Anarchism (1915); *A Lone Star Cowboy* (1919); *A Song Companion of a Lone Star Cowboy* (1919); and *Riata and Spurs* (1927).

The following was written to Charlie by Will Rogers when he filled out an order for *Riata and Spurs*: "Dear Charley: Somebody gave me the proof sheet of our new book, *Riata and Spurs*, and wanted to know what I think of it. What I think of it? I think the same of it as I do the first cowboy book I ever read, *Fifteen Years on the Hurricane Deck of a Spanish Pony*."

"Why, that was the Cowboy's Bible when I was growing up. I camped with a herd one night at the old LX Ranch, just north of Amarillo, in '98, and they showed me an old forked tree where some old bronc had bucked you into."

"Why, that to us was like looking at the Shrine of Shakespeare to some of these 'deep foreheads.'"

"If you live to be one thousand years old, you couldn't write a bad book about the cowboys - the stuff they did might be bad, but you could tell it so well it would sound almost respectable."

Well-known folklorist, J. Frank Dobie, wrote of him: "Charlie Siringo had almost nothing to say on life, he reported actions. He put down something valid on a class of livers, as remote now from the Atomic Age as Ramses II. His



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Charles A. "Charlie" Siringo in front of the Hotel Palacios on his 1913 trip to Matagorda County. The horses were Rowdy and Pat and the Irish Wolfhound, Eat 'Em up Jake.



Most of these photos of Charles A. Siringo shown on this page were of his later years, with the exception of a photo taken when he was younger, above.

cowboys and gunmen were not Hollywood and folklore. He was an honest reporter."

Charlie Siringo had married as a young man, and in 1907, he resigned his job with the Pinkertons after 22 years and retired to his Sunny Slope Ranch near Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Retirement bored him, and he worked on several cases for William J. Burns Detective Agency.

In the spring of 1916, Governor William C. McDonald of New Mexico persuaded Charlie to take a job as a ranger with the Mounted Police for the Cattle Sanitary Board of New Mexico.

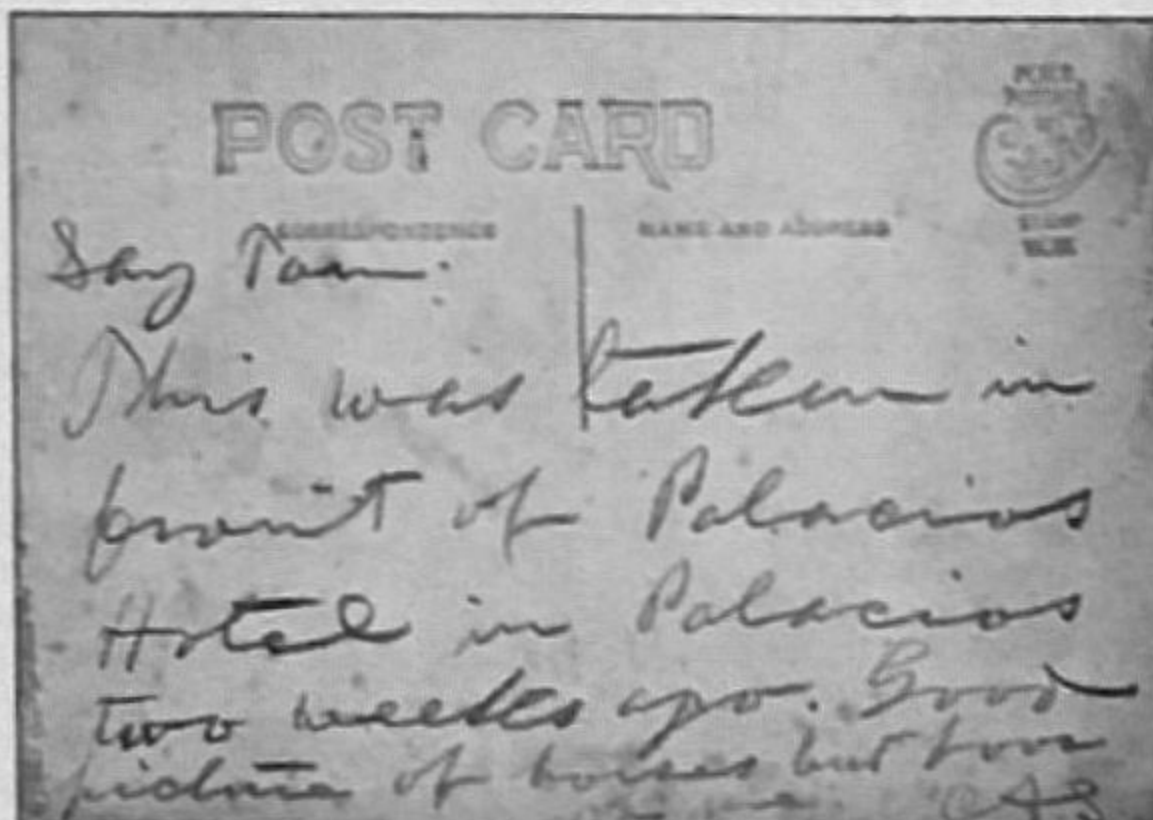
His health failed, and in December of 1922 he left Santa Fe for San Diego, California, to live with his daughter, Mrs. Viola Reed, and his 14-year-old granddaughter, Margaret.

They nursed him back to health.

Subsequently he moved to Los Angeles, and there to Venice, near Hollywood, where he died on October 19, 1928.

He requested the following verses by Badger Clark, Jr. be carved on his tombstone:

"Just plant me in some stretch of West
That's sunny, lone and wide.
Let cattle rub my tombstone down
And coyotes mourn their kin,
Let hawses paw and tromp the mound
But don't you fence it in!"



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Siringo sent this postcard describing the photo at Palacios Hotel to his friend, Thomas Jefferson Williams, also known as "Sly Tom." The card reads: "Sly Tom, This was taken in front of Palacios Hotel in Palacios two weeks ago. Good picture of horses but poor of me. C.A.S."

