

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Alonzo Pettie

PERSON

Pettie, Alonzo, 1910-2003

Alternative Names: Alonzo Pettie;

Life Dates: June 18, 1910-August 2, 2003

Place of Birth: Tyler, Texas, USA

Residence: Denver, Colorado

Occupations: Cowboy

Biographical Note

Named for a grandfather born in slavery, Alonzo Pettie was born on June 18, 1910 in Tyler, Texas. His mother died in 1919 and after his father's death in 1926, Pettie learned to break horses to support himself. Two years later, he began working on a West Texas ranch, and the rancher saw his skill with horses and taught him to ride. Pettie began riding professionally in rodeos and, although he no longer rides horses, he has been a cowboy ever since.

In 1929, Pettie failed to dismount from a bucking bronco on the correct side in an Odessa, Texas, rodeo. He was thrown, dislocating his shoulder. Undaunted, he went on to win the bull riding contest the same day with his arm in a sling. In the years that followed, he suffered many serious injuries, including a ruptured navel that required surgery and a broken pelvic bone in 1930.

Pettie served in the U.S. Army from 1942 to 1944. Returning to the United States, he continued in the rodeo circuit, traveling to Colorado, Oklahoma and Texas. While competing in Colorado's first black rodeo in 1947, he broke his pelvic bone again, spending three months in a body cast. After that, he stopped riding broncos and bulls. In 1962, Pettie began working in the maintenance department at the Sears Seminary South store in Fort Worth, Texas. The next year, he tied for first place in a best-dressed cowboy competition. He transferred to Denver in 1965 and eventually retired from Sears ten years later. He continued to ride horses until 1995 and was featured in a 1996 Levi Strauss ad campaign for Red Tab jeans.

Pettie, a storyteller and speaker of renown, is chronicled in the Black American West Museum and Heritage Center in the Five Points district of Denver. "The Champ," or "Ole Alonzo," as he was called, was an active member of the Colorado Black Cowboys

and Horseman Association member since its formation. Working with youth, the association organizes rodeo events with bareback riding, calf and steer roping, and barrel racing.

Pettie passed away on August 2, 2003.

Pettie was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on June 17, 2002.

Related Entries

Greenville School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Pleasant Green School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Red Oak Elementary School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Denham Garage [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1944 to 1946]

Brown Garage, (Denver, CO) [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1946 to ?]

Western Spring and Wire Ltd, Denver [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1946 to ?]

ABC Bowling Lanes [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1954 to 1961]

Sears Roebuck & Company [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1962 to 1965]

Sears Roebuck & Company [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1965 to ?]

Colorado Black Cowboys and Horseman Association [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]