J. GRIFFIS SMITH

National Cowgirl Hall of Fame inductees Mollie Taylor Stevenson Sr. and Mollie Stevenson Jr. tell the lesser-known stories of winning the West at their family ranch and museum in Houston.

## How the West Was Won

History writers sometimes forget that the word "cowboys"—the boys who herded the cows—referred to the slaves, Mollie Stevenson Jr. says. Mollie and her mother, Mollie Taylor Stevenson Sr., were the first living African Americans inducted into the National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame (see story, page 20). The organization honored the pair last year for the cowgirl spirit they sustain on their family ranch in Houston. Designated as a Texas Century Ranch by the Texas Department of Agriculture, the Taylor-Stevenson Ranch is among the oldest black-owned ranches in the country. Seven generations of the family have lived on the land since Mollie Sr.'s grandmother was purchased as a slave.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Mollie Sr. and her husband responded to segregation by opening the ranch to the African-American community. "Our children weren't allowed in city parks," Stevenson says, "so we had outdoor activities they needed: picnics with good food, walks, horseback rides, even plane rides."

The ranch is home to the American Cowboy Museum, which chronicles the contributions to the American West of women, African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans. "There's an importance in the pictures and stories to recalling our Western heritage, but blacks were faceless," Mollie Jr. says. The museum, which emphasizes hands-on activities, is a small, rustic building filled with cowhorns and hides, old photos, artifacts of the vaqueros, and African-American quilts.

Outdoors, visitors can hold the chickens, ride horses, take hayrides, feed livestock, and make leather crafts. The museum's traveling exhibits and living historians provide a rich picture of the American West to thousands more. The ranch, at 11822 Almeda (713/433-4441; call ahead), is near Reliant Stadium, in south Houston.

*—Peggy Heinkel-Wolfe, Argyle*

## What's In a Name

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, TV viewers tuned in to a popular lighthearted Western called *Maverick*. The Ford "Maverick" cruised America's highways in the 1970s. In 1980, an NBA franchise, the Dallas Mavericks, came to Big D. How did the word "maverick" become part of the American lexicon?

South Carolinian Samuel Augustus Maverick (1803-1870) arrived in San Antonio in 1835. A Yale graduate, possessor of a Virginia law license, and loser of a bid for the South Carolina legislature, he immediately got involved in the fight for Texas' independence. He joined a group of several hundred men, among them Colonel Benjamin Milam, who fought the successful Siege of Bexar (December 5-9, 1835), which temporarily freed San Antonio from Mexican control.

Recognizing his leadership abilities, the Alamo defenders chose Maverick as one of two delegates to represent them at the upcoming Independence Convention. He left the Alamo on March 2, 1836, four days before the final assault. At the convention, at Washington-on-the-Brazos, Maverick signed the Declaration of Independence. A tireless advocate of equal opportunity and a fair judicial system, he would hold office in some capacity—including two terms as San Antonio's mayor—for the next three decades.

Over the years, Samuel Maverick bought some 300,000 acres in West Texas. He also bought a small herd of cattle, but, more interested in land than livestock, he left the animals on Matagorda Island, where they wandered at will, unbranded (he later sold them). By 1857, stray, unbranded cattle more than a year old were being referred to as "mavericks." The term came to denote a person who goes his own way. Synonyms include dissenter, loner, and nonconformist.

*—Lori Grossman, Dallas*