

The Healing Hoofbeat: Honoring Black Horsemen Who Shaped the Western Story



February is Black History Month, when we honor leaders whose courage, talent, and perseverance shaped the world around them.

The American cowboy story is richer and more diverse than many of us were taught. Historians estimate that **one in four cowboys in the Old West were Black**. After the Civil War, many formerly enslaved men became highly skilled livestock handlers, trainers, and working cowboys. Their horsemanship helped build the cattle industry across the American West, even when their stories were overlooked.

This month, we recognize a few who helped shape the equine world we know today.

William “Bill” Pickett (1870–1932) is credited with inventing “bulldogging,” now known as steer wrestling. Inspired by watching cattle dogs work livestock, Pickett perfected the daring technique of leaping from his horse onto a steer and wrestling it to the ground. Despite racial barriers that sometimes forced him to claim different heritage just to compete, his talent could not be denied. He toured internationally and later became the first Black cowboy inducted into the ProRodeo Hall of Fame.

Fred Whitfield, an 8-time World Champion tie-down roper, became the first Black cowboy to win a PRCA world championship in 1991. His excellence at the highest level of rodeo expanded visibility and opportunity for future generations.

Modern professionals like **Jonathan Williams of Steady Horse** continue influencing today’s horsemanship culture through steady, thoughtful training built on clarity, trust, and feel, reminding us that true leadership with horses is quiet, consistent, and earned.

Did You Know?

- William Pickett performed internationally in the early 1900s including England and South America.
- The Bill Pickett Invitational Rodeo was founded in 1984 to celebrate and preserve the legacy of Black cowboys and cowgirls.

- Fred Whitfield qualified for the National Finals Rodeo more than 20 times.
- An estimated 25% of working cowboys in the late 1800s were Black.

At FaithfulHearts, we believe the horse reflects truth. The horse does not see race, status, or title, only authenticity and leadership.

Scripture reminds us in **Galatians 3:28** that “*There is neither Jew nor Greek... for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*” In Christ, we are united. In Christ, every story matters. In Christ, every life carries purpose and dignity.



As we honor those who rode before us with grit, courage, and faith we recommit to building a community where every rider feels seen, valued, and welcomed.

Because healing happens through connection.

Legacy matters.

Representation matters.

And at FaithfulHearts, we continue the work, grounded in Christ’s love,

One Hoofbeat at a Time.