

## Comments/Responses

# On Renner, Russell, and “The Trail Boss”—A Footnote for a Footnote

By Roy S. Mann

I read with great interest Tamra L. DeCock’s excellent article in the October *Rangelands*, “Frederic Renner and Charlie Russell SRM Legacy.”

Of particular interest to me was Tamra’s footnote on the first page of her article referring to the history of the original “The Trail Boss”:

*The original of “The Trail Boss” was in pen and ink; however, somewhere along the line the original was watercolored over. According to Renner it was not watercolored by Charlie Russell and was very poorly done. SRM does not own the original “The Trail Boss,” this being one of the reasons.*

Regarding the reasons as to why SRM does not own the original, I thought I could offer some *almost* firsthand knowledge comments and perhaps a footnote to Tamra’s footnote. Other than the expense involved in acquiring the original pen-and-ink drawing, watercolored or not, SRM would be faced with the question of where is the original?

Although SRM may not own the original, it may own the second best thing to it. For nearly 40 years a print of a watercolored “The Trail Boss” has hung in the SRM headquarters offices. On the lower portion of the frame is a small brass plate that reads “Donated by Bob F. Scott.” Mr. Scott, who lives in Ft. Worth, Texas, is a former Soil Conservation Service employee and former member of SRM. He continues to have a keen interest in range management.

After leaving the SCS Bob managed a large ranch in Oregon and later joined the Kay Kimbell business enterprises, known as Kimbell, Inc., add period with headquarters offices in Ft. Worth. The founder of the large company was Kay Kimbell, who was an ardent fine arts collector with emphasis on eighteenth-century English painters, but he also collected many American west art pieces as well. For

many years Mr. Kimbell’s art collection was housed in the Kimbell corporate offices. One of the pieces owned by Mr. Kimbell was “The Trail Boss.” In time Bob Scott became President and CEO of Kimbell, Inc., and consequently had “The Trail Boss” hung in his personal office.

Mr. Kimbell had established the Kimbell Art Foundation, and upon his death his fortune went to the foundation with instructions to create a first-class art museum. Construction of the museum began in 1969 and opened in October 1972. The museum was neighbor to the Modern Art Museum of Ft. Worth and the Amon Carter Museum, which specializes in American western art. This proximity to the two prestigious neighbors brings us back to how SRM wound up having the print of “The Trail Boss” and the role Fred Renner played in it.

The museum does not own modern art because of the proximity to the Modern Art Museum, nor American art due to the collection of the Amon Carter Museum. This division of art realms prompted auctioning off of many works of art in the Kay Kimbell collection that would not be a part of the new museum. This included “The Trail Boss.”

*Note: The following is based on correspondence and personal conversations with Bob Scott and his wife Dorothe. Some dates are approximate, based on memory rather than notes.*

Prior to auctioning off the art that would not go to the new museum, Fred Renner identified the watercolored “Trail Boss” that was still hanging in the Kimbell offices. According to Bob, Mr. Renner reinforced the story that the original black-and-white drawing had been watercolored over, which had tended to “put a cloud over it.” Upon close examination of the Kimbell “Trail Boss,” Fred Renner told Bob that he could not be sure that this piece was indeed the original, but

he believed that it probably was. Fred also said that he could not declare that it was not the original. Mr. Renner told Bob that he had only seen the original one time in the home of Charlie Russell's widow and had lost track of it until the time he visited Scott at the Kimbell offices.

Upon the completion of the museum, Bob Scott had an exact duplicate made of the original piece that Fred had examined to be donated to the Society for Range Management. The reproduction was done at the Kimbell Art Museum labs, which are state of the art in restoration and reproduction of art. Bob does not recall the date that he donated the print to SRM, but it was probably late 1972 to early 1973.

So, in conclusion, Tamra DeCock is correct in her statement that SRM does not own the original "The Trail Boss." However, it is most likely that they do own a fine reproduction of the watercolored original. It is most unfortunate that the pen-and-ink original was colored over, thus precluding anyone from owning the original as Charlie Russell rendered it. Kimbell's "The Trail Boss" was sold at auction through Sotheby's.

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