



HORSE HEROES

True Stories of Amazing Horses

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Genre

Expository Text recounts a true event or series of events. Think about your own desired outcome for reading this selection to establish your own purpose for reading.



Question of the Week

How can people and animals work as a team?

Horses and humans have worked together for thousands of years. From the vast wilderness to the Hollywood movie set, horses have served us faithfully while playing an important role in history. Horses can be found in our art, religion, and mythology. Let's look at some of history's most famous horse heroes.



Long Journey

Pony Express riders took the mail 2,000 miles from Missouri to California.

Pony Express

When the little mustang came into view, the crowd began to cheer.

Her rider, Johnny Fry, led her into the packed town square of St. Joseph, Missouri, that warm April evening in 1860. Johnny checked the mail pouch on the mustang's back for the last time as she snorted excitedly.

A cannon boomed. They were away! The mustang raced off into the evening twilight,

This poster for the Pony Express service dates from 1861.



The cost of sending a letter on the Pony Express was worked out by weight. A letter cost \$5 per ounce.

First Delivery

Johnny Fry's mail sack held 49 letters and three newspapers.

leaving the cheering crowds far behind.

Horse and rider had entered history as the first ever Pony Express team.

In 1860, there were no such things as telephones and fax machines. If you lived on the West Coast of the United States, keeping up to date with the latest news on the East Coast was almost impossible. It could take more than a month for mail to travel across the continent by wagon.

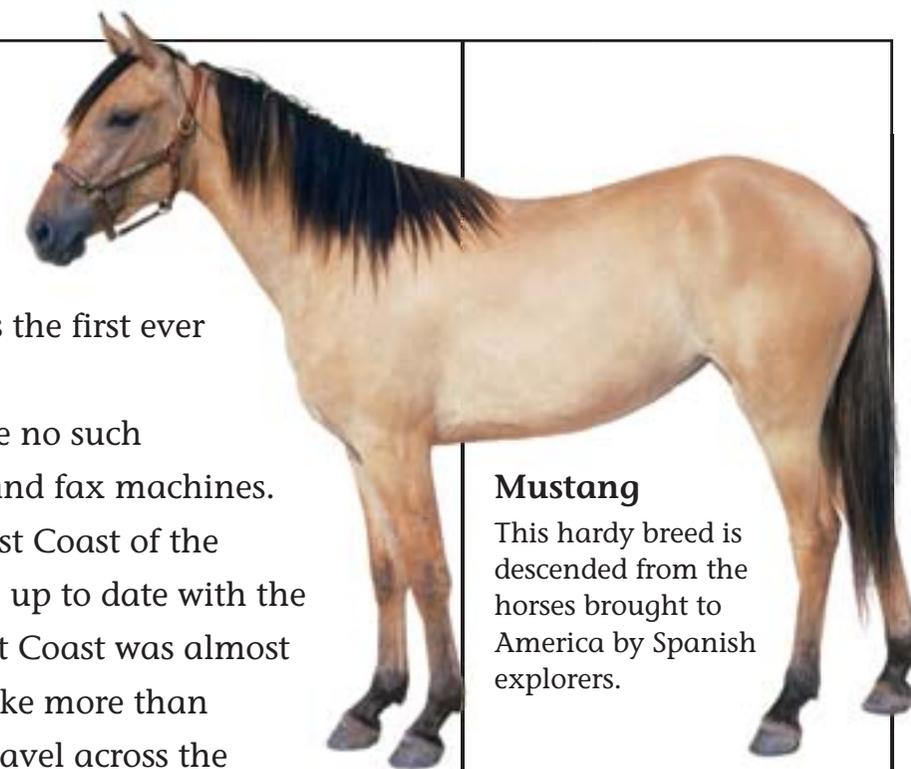
The Pony Express was a horse relay designed to keep the mail moving day and night. It cut down the time taken for mail to reach California to just eight days.

Each horse and rider galloped at top speed to the next station. The rider leaped off the exhausted horse shouting, "Pony rider coming!" The mail was transferred to a fresh horse, and the rider galloped off again on his new mount.

There were 157 relay stations, and riders changed horses about six to eight times.

The teams risked death together on a daily basis.

Much of the route lay through the homelands of American Indians, some of whom declared war on the invaders of their territory.



Mustang

This hardy breed is descended from the horses brought to America by Spanish explorers.



Express Riders

Pony Express riders had to be under 18 years old and weigh less than 126 pounds, so as not to slow down their horses.



One of the bravest riders was “Pony Bob” Haslam. In May 1860, he arrived at a station in Nevada to find the keeper dead and all the horses gone. He set out for the next station, which was 40 miles away.

Transfer

It took a rider two minutes to transfer between horses.

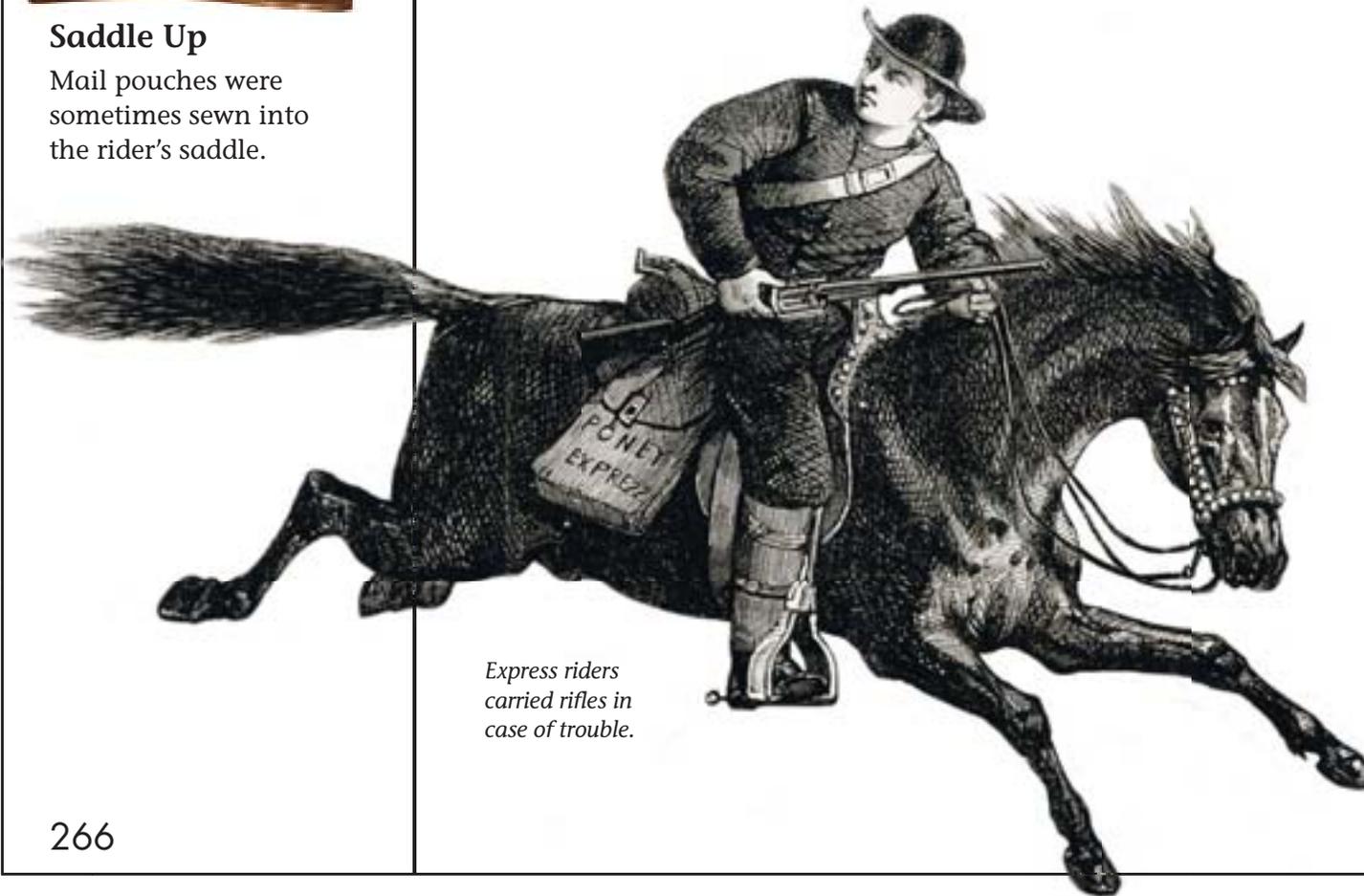


Saddle Up

Mail pouches were sometimes sewn into the rider’s saddle.

“I knew I had to carry on. As I rode through the night, I kept watching my pony’s ears. I knew he’d hear any ambush before I did.”

At the next station he persuaded the keeper to leave with them. Bob and his tireless horse saved the man’s life—the next night that station was attacked.



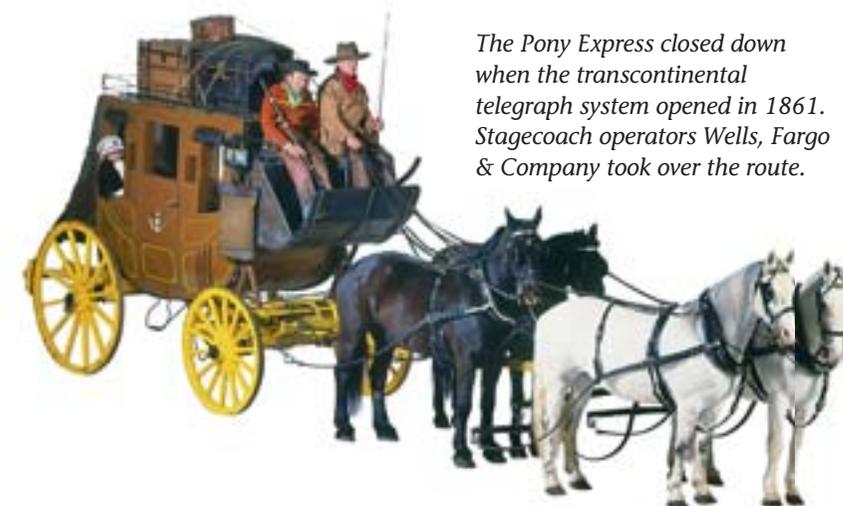
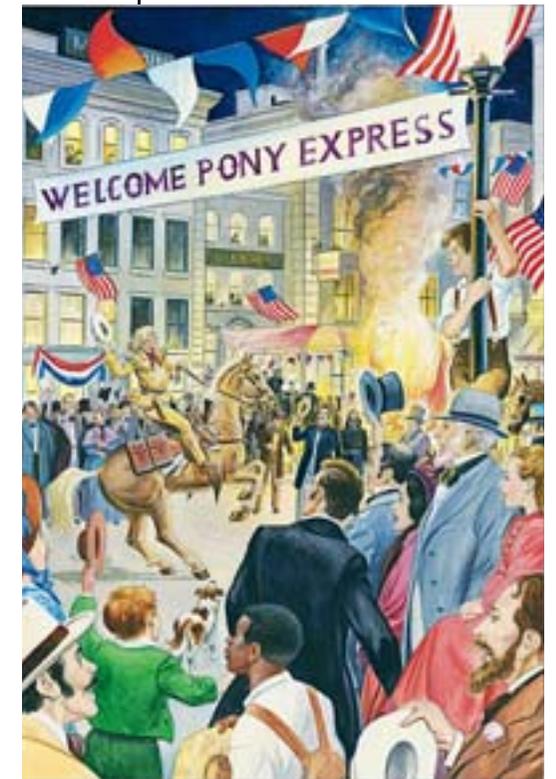
Express riders carried rifles in case of trouble.

The Pony Express teams rode across rocky mountain passes and wide, empty plains in scorching sun, pouring rain, and freezing blizzards. If their rider fell off, some brave horses carried on alone to the next station.

The final stop was Sacramento, California. Crowds of eager people would gather to watch the arrival of the last rider on the route bringing them their mail and newspapers.

The success of the Pony Express teams proved that it was possible for the East and West coasts to keep in touch. It was a milestone on the way to modern America. The horses and riders that ran the Pony Express were real pioneers.

The Pony Express is remembered today by horse lovers who ride the Express’s desert tracks for pleasure. Their journeys pay tribute to the riders of 1860, who insisted that “the mail must get through.”



The Pony Express closed down when the transcontinental telegraph system opened in 1861. Stagecoach operators Wells, Fargo & Company took over the route.



Lincoln

In 1860, Abraham Lincoln’s first speech as U.S. President was carried by the Pony Express.



Aimé Tschiffely

Aimé Tschiffely was a Swiss teacher living in Argentina.

Americas

Tschiffely wanted to ride from South to North America across the Panama Canal.



Tale of Two Horses

When Aimé Tschiffely (Ay-may Shiff-ell-ee) told people about his idea early in 1925, they thought he had gone mad.

“Impossible! It can’t be done!”

Tschiffely wanted to be the first man ever to ride from Buenos Aires in Argentina all the way to Washington, D.C.

He realized that the 10,000-mile journey would be full of difficulties, but it had been his secret **ambition** for years.

Tschiffely knew that he needed two tough and resourceful horses if he was to succeed.

He chose Gato and Mancha, Criollo horses ages 15 and 16. They had belonged to an Argentinian Indian chief and **roamed** free on the plains.

They were not handsome and they were headstrong, but they knew how to survive in the wild.

Tschiffely and the horses set off in April 1925. After four months, the travelers crossed over into Bolivia.

In that time the trio had learned to trust each other and to work together as a team.

One day, as they rode along the shore of a lake in Peru, they reached a shallow strip of water. Gato reared up and refused to go on.

A man rushed toward them, shouting that the water hid dangerous **quicksand**. He led them to a safe trail. Tschiffely was amazed. The horse had saved their lives!

As they rode on through Peru, they began to climb the Andes—a huge range of snow-capped mountains.

One morning, they came to a sight that made Tschiffely’s blood run cold. The way forward was along a **rickety** old rope bridge that stretched over a deep gorge. One slip would prove fatal.

When they reached the middle, the bridge swayed violently. If Mancha panicked and turned back, they would both fall to their deaths. But Mancha waited calmly for the bridge to stop moving, and then went on. When Gato saw his companions safe on the other side, he crossed the bridge as steadily as if he were walking on solid ground.



Criollo

These horses are very tough and can carry heavy weights over long distances.

Horse Sense

People believe that horses have a sixth sense that warns them about danger.





Herd Instincts

Wild horses stay in groups, or herds. Mancha and Gato would instinctively follow each other, whatever the dangers.

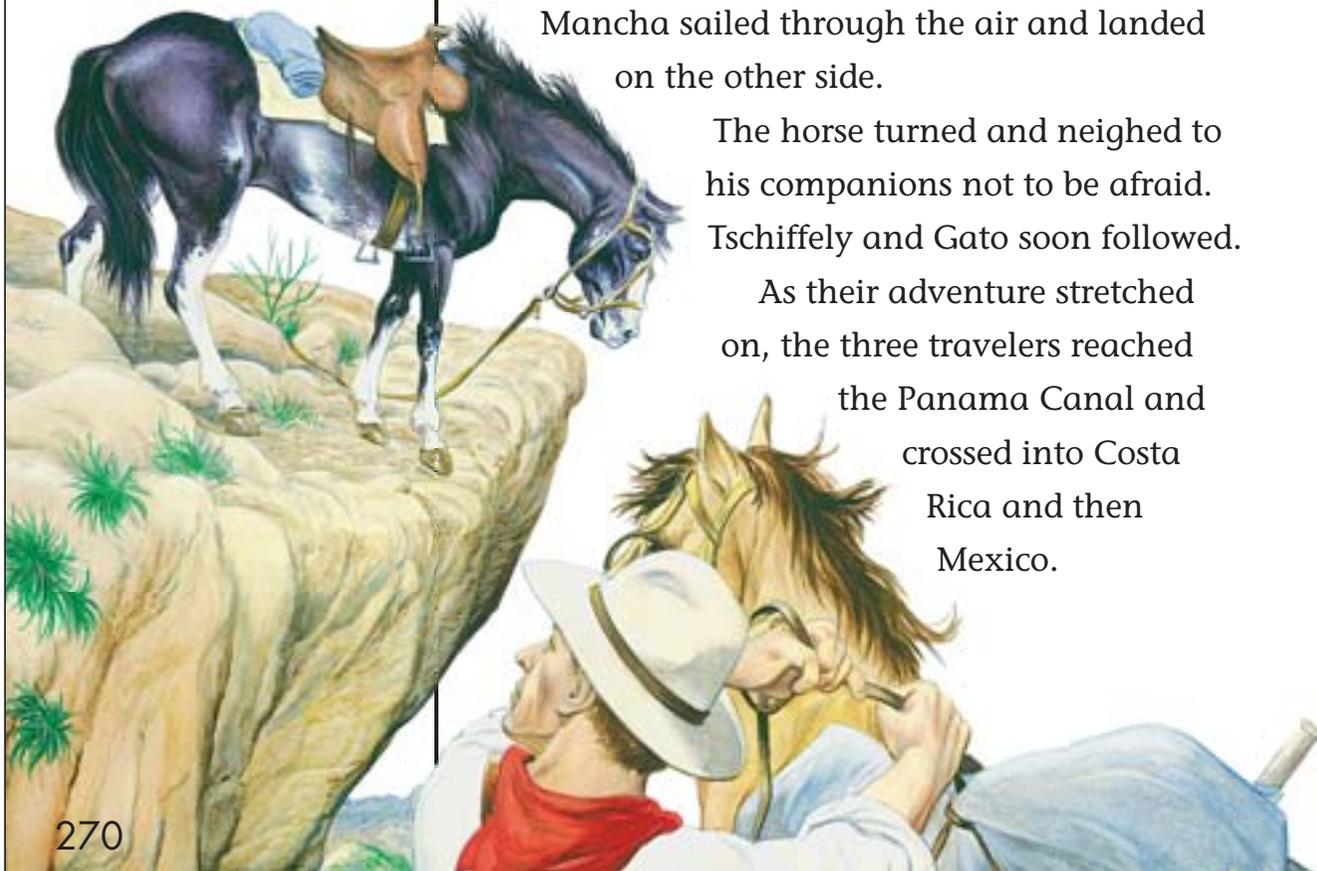
From Peru, Tschiffely headed into Ecuador and followed a series of tracks through lush forests over high mountains and down into valleys. At night, Tschiffely never tied up the horses. He knew they would not run. The three travelers were sharing a great adventure, each showing the others the way.

Zigzagging up a narrow trail one day, Tschiffely saw that the path ahead had been swept away by a **landslide**, leaving a sheer drop. There was no choice but to turn back and find another route. Tschiffely tightened Gato's packs to get ready for a long detour.

But Mancha had other ideas. Tschiffely saw with horror that Mancha was preparing to jump the gap. His heart rose in his mouth as Mancha sailed through the air and landed on the other side.

The horse turned and neighed to his companions not to be afraid. Tschiffely and Gato soon followed.

As their adventure stretched on, the three travelers reached the Panama Canal and crossed into Costa Rica and then Mexico.



Moving through dense jungle, the trio had to cope with mosquito bites and attacks by vampire bats and poisonous snakes.

Once Mancha slipped into a crocodile-infested river. He only just managed to find a foothold and pull himself up the bank as Tschiffely clung on for dear life.

Two and a half years after setting out from Buenos Aires, Tschiffely reached Washington, D.C. He had achieved his lifelong ambition.

"I could never have done it," he said, "without Mancha and Gato. My two pals have shown powers of **resistance** to every hardship."

Tschiffely was given a hero's welcome, even meeting President Coolidge in the White House. Admirers suggested that the horses should live in a city park. But Tschiffely took Mancha and Gato back to Argentina and set them free.

Horses seem to remember that their ancestors were hunted by crocodiles and know to be afraid of them.



Dense Jungle

The jungles of Central and South America are home to some of the world's most dangerous snakes, such as the 30-foot (10 meter) anaconda.

Born Free

Horses who grow up in the country can become sad and listless if confined in a city.



Hollywood Hero

In 1932, a star was born. He was a beautiful golden color with a white, flowing mane and tail. Son of a palomino mare and a racehorse, Golden Cloud was to

become the most famous horse of his day.

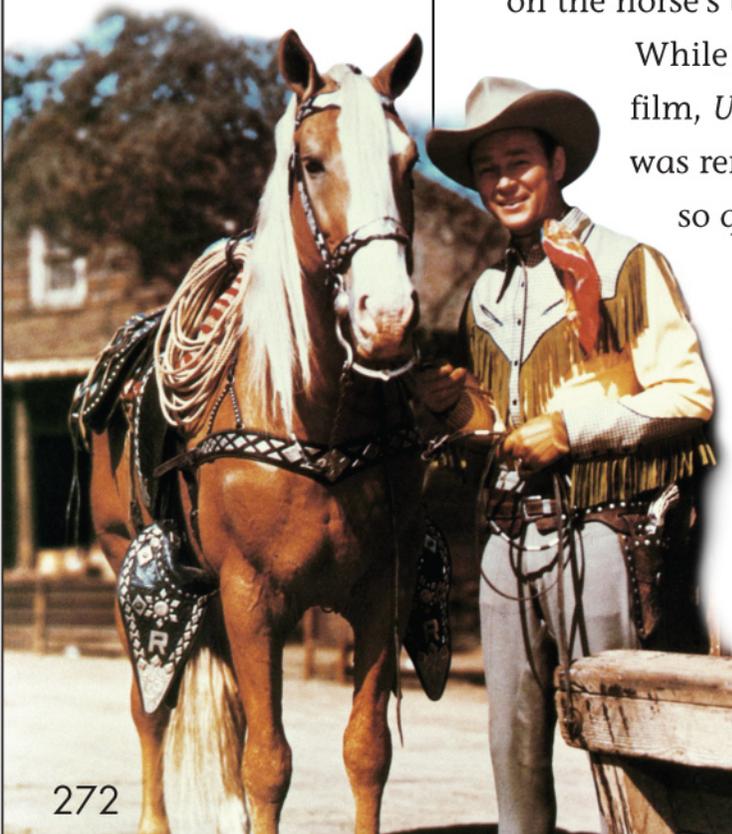
Golden Cloud made his big-screen debut in 1938. His owners, Hudkin Stables, lent him out to play a part in the Hollywood film *The Adventures of Robin Hood*.

Later that year, Republic Studios decided to make a series of Westerns featuring the singing cowboy actor, Roy Rogers. They brought several horses round for Roy to audition. He fell for Golden Cloud the moment he climbed on the horse's back.

While they were making their first film, *Under Western Stars*, Golden Cloud was renamed "Trigger" because he was so quick.

Roy loved Trigger so much that after their third film, he bought Trigger for \$2,500. From then on, they became full-time partners.

Trigger loved the camera. He often stole the show from Roy Rogers with a well-timed yawn or a graceful dance step.



He knew more than 60 tricks. He could walk 150 steps on his hind legs, stamp his hoof to count, and draw a gun from a holster.

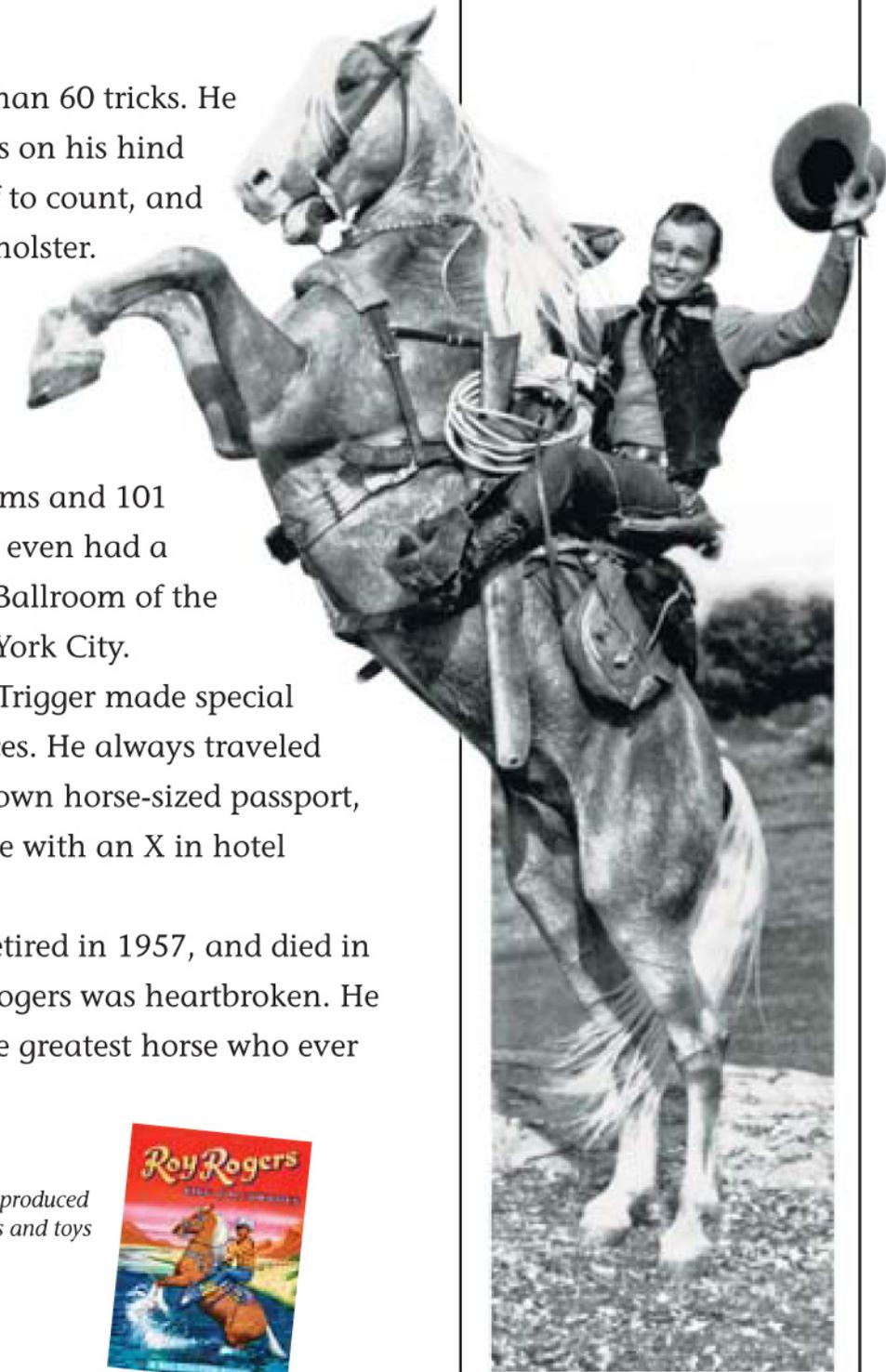
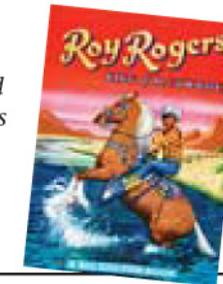
Trigger became one of the most popular characters in show business.

He starred in 887 films and 101 TV shows, and once even had a party in the Grand Ballroom of the Astor Hotel in New York City.

Like a true star, Trigger made special personal appearances. He always traveled in style, carried his own horse-sized passport, and signed his name with an X in hotel registers.

Trigger finally retired in 1957, and died in 1965, age 33. Roy Rogers was heartbroken. He said he had lost "the greatest horse who ever came along."

Trigger's fan club produced hundreds of books and toys for its members.



Today, we may be less dependent on the horse for transportation and work, but we continue to be amazed by stories of its strength, speed, and intelligence. Humans and horses will always make a great team.