

That Famous Western Hospitality Didn't Include Picking Up Tabs

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SAN ANGELO — The “Wool Capitol” at this writing (last week) is overflowing with people. The city folks, you see, are busy carrying out their annual rodeo and fat stock show. Inn keepers and owner of hamburger and chili joints are wearing themselves out, opening and slamming their cash drawers. Streets in the downtown are shaded by the traditional bunting. The aura of western flavor hanging over the city would make Buffalo Bill feel out of place.

Radio announcers have been blabbing continuously about the amount of western hospitality to be found in San Angelo during the festivities. To date I haven't been able to find an iota of change. If the customs are different, I've been going to the wrong places.

I stood around the fat lamb show this morning, and I didn't run into any hombres who acted like they'd been overcome by an urge to entertain out-of-town people. There wasn't anything happening around there that would have challenged Diamond Jim Brady's reputation.

My town-based compadres were still having trouble sorting the coffee money from the Roll-Aids, and the agricultural pundits were having the same terrible time remembering if their expense accounts were active. The county agents were all hovering over privately held percolators

The only thing I saw that was free was a stack of pamphlets advertising mineral salt.

Later, a bunch of us got together for lunch. If the spirit of the West includes an act where the check-grabbing arm and the pocketbook reach becomes paralyzed, this crew was ready for a try-out on Gunsmoke. I thought they were laughing awfully loud at my stories. It was plenty evident afterward that if you'll host a banquet for a pack of hungry Angeloans, you won't have to pay for any canned laughter.

Included in the group was the executive secretary of the sheep and goat herder's association. He been working so hard that he'd ruined his vision since he'd quit the county agent game. Our waitress passed the check right over his left shoulder and he didn't even blink his eyes. The old boy next to him was too busy waving his arms and carrying on about how the politicians down in the state capital had given his district a whipping last year to see the check. One thing for sure, the slick-tongued vote tabulators might have outfoxed him in the cloak rooms, but they couldn't have come close to matching him in side stepping a tab on a meal.

The nearest he ever came to the check was when his arm gyrations upset his tea glass.

Tomorrow, I'm going to rematch that crowd of money clinchers. We'll just see if that herd of professional free-riders are going to reach their goal of making me an honorary member of the city's restaurant association.

Granted, the odds of putting it on a high stepping tractor dealer or a quick-handed medicine peddler are awfully slim. And it's no secret that representatives of livestock associations are stingier than a pawn broker's widow. But come the new day, the Wool Capitalities are going to either stop bragging about their open-handedness or shut up.

I don't know what this old world's coming to when an American can't spend a couple of days in town without blowing a \$10 bill.