

Bill Pickett -Legends of the West



The U.S. Post Office did not do its homework when producing the original Legends of the West Sheet of 20 stamps. They copied the wrong photograph and instead of Bill Pickett the stamp depicted his brother Ben Pickett, (stamp on the left). The stamps were recalled but some had already been sold and were worth several thousand dollars. The Post Office then issued 150,000 of the error sheets to recipients selected by lottery thus lowering the value. However, the error sheets still bring about \$175 to \$275 on the market today and you can buy the full pane of 20 stamps on a First Day cover for about \$20 to \$25.

Bill Pickett was born on December 5, 1870 in Williamson County, Texas. He was one of 13 children and his parents were former slaves. Bill completed 5 years of primary schooling and then hired on as a ranch hand where he began to hone his skills in roping and riding. Bill married in 1890 to Maggie Turner and was the father of 9 children.

Growing up in West Texas cattle country, Bill learned roping and riding tricks at an early age and he began to perform in town during the weekends. Bill began traveling with Lee Moore's Rodeo Show around 1900. He was a rodeo star until around 1916.

Bill is credited with inventing the Rodeo event known as Bulldogging. He said that he learned the method by watching the ranch dogs subdue cattle by biting them on the lip. One day in 1903, Bill grabbed the horns of a bull to save his horse from being gored. He wrestled the steer to the ground while biting the steer's upper lip in a bulldog grip.

"Bulldogging" became one of the five standard rodeo events, but later the rules were changed to eliminate the lip biting and the event was renamed *"Steer Wrestling."*

In 1907 he went to work for the *101 Ranch and Wild West Show* where he quickly became the star performer. He performed in rodeos and shows around the world and was the first Black Cowboy movie star.

Bill retired from the rodeo circuit in 1916 and bought his own ranch. While helping out his old boss on the 101 Ranch in 1932, Bill was kicked in the head by a wild stallion and died 11 days later on April 2, 1932.

Bill was honored in 1971 by becoming the first Black Cowboy to be inducted into the National Cowboy and Rodeo Hall of Fame. Bill Pickett is considered to be one of the greatest Rodeo Riders and Cowboys that ever lived.

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