

Bill Herron

Bill Herron knew his father would be furious about the risk he was taking.

In the fall of 1937, drilling superintendent Bill Herron was under pressure from his boss and father, Stewart Herron, to produce results.

Bill started drilling on Okalta No. 7, using a cable tool drilling rig. As the bit banged its way into the ground, 300 feet below the surface, the drilling cable broke. For several days the bit and drilling tools lay in a tangled heap at the bottom of the hole, they could lose weeks trying to fish the bit and tangle of tools out of the well.



Bill Herron on palomino horse, Calgary, Alberta
Glenbow Archives NA-5676-8

Fearing the reaction of his father if drilling was delayed any longer, Bill stuffed a fur hat full of rags to protect his head (safety gear was scarce on rigs in the thirties) and ordered a driller to lower him into the bore. He was in lethal danger from falling rocks and poisonous fumes, but with a flashlight in one hand and the drilling cable in the other, Bill descended 290 feet and retrieved the equipment.

Although he ordered his men to keep the incident quiet, by evening Bill's exploits were the talk of Turner Valley, Alberta's watering holes. His father, William Stewart Herron, found out and fired him on the spot, only to rehire him a few days later.

That brash initiative reflected Bill Herron's life. He took Turner Valley into serious development, fought the speculative penny stock promoters from the east and tried to circumvent American take-overs. When he sold Okalta Oils, he used the wealth to back Calgary's unique identity. He came up with the white Stetson to represent our hospitality.

Although he didn't learn to read until he was 11, Bill Herron's alphabet combined drill logs, shareholdings, and takeover bids.

Western Style

Bill Herron's fascination for cowboy culture clearly influenced his personal tastes and past times.

Just four years old when he attended the first Calgary Stampede in 1912, Herron's ties to the Stampede continued into adulthood. His western wardrobe set the style for the Stampede parade while his Pontiac convertible – transformed into a cowboy culture icon by a Hollywood folk artist – was a mainstay in the annual event.

Herron became a leader in the development of Calgary's "cow-town" image, including designing and financing the creation of the white Stetson as a symbol for the city. He and his peers even created Calgary's brand of community: hospitable, charitable, and generous.

Born: May 4, 1908 – Died: June 10, 1989

Additional Resources

- **Smithbilt Hats Inc.**
<https://smithbilthats.com/product-category/the-white-hat/?v=707f3a40153b>

Our Collections

Glenbow Museum

<https://www.glenbow.org>

Glenbow Western Research Centre | Glenbow Library and Archives

<https://libguides.ucalgary.ca/glenbowlibraryandarchives>

Glenbow Library and Archives | Digital Collection

<https://digitalcollections.ucalgary.ca/asset-management/2R340826N9XM?WS=PackagePres&Flat=1>