



ACWA mission is to preserve the heritage of the Chuck Wagon.

American Chuck Wagon Association April 2023 President's Message

Hello ACWA Members,

COLD. It almost seems silly to talk about “cold” since the first day of “Spring” was almost two weeks ago. But, here in the Flint Hills, Spring does not always mean warm days. Like last year we were cooking for a spring branding crew and the night temperatures were below freezing every night. The cowboys would crawl out of their bedrolls and head to the conversation fire to hold their leggings over the fire before they put them on each morning.

Guessing everyone has a story or two to share about cooking when it was cold. The hoodlum [or fireman] becomes the most popular person in camp with their reign at the cook fire. Coffee is truly the lifeblood of everyone – whether because of the hot coffee or the warm metal cups. Ever see people argue over who gets to wash the dishes because the dish water is hot? The cook is the bravest and toughest one of the crew because they have to shed a few layers and work with bare hands to prepare the food. I’m not sure I am tough enough to do that on really cold days. Sure, we all have cold, numb feet but cold, numb hands – nope!

It is easy to smile and laugh about working in the cold after the fact. But, when one thinks about cold conditions it brings forth one indisputable fact. Pioneers, chuck wagon crews, cowboys were solid, hardworking people. Try to imagine knowing that each day is going to be cold or cold & wet but your work still had to be done. No one was going to come along and do the work for you. The safety and well-being of the livestock [and your family] depended on you braving whatever nature had in store for the day [or night]. Not all cow crews had a tent for shelter – and the bunk house was miles away. Not all days were dry; not all nights were dry. Preparing hot food for the cowboys was not easy but the chuck wagon cooks did everything they could to keep the crews fed and well. Giving up and quitting was not something commonly considered.

This is the history we are passionate about within the American Chuck Wagon Association. This is the history we are preserving and demonstrating for people every time chuck wagons gather. Gatherings and competitions very seldom experience “perfect” weather and conditions. But, we all persevere and complete the task at hand. I will admit that I’m not nearly as tough as my predecessors but I strive to put forth my best effort whether cooking for a hard working cowboy crew or cooking for an event or competition. And I stand proudly with other members of the ACWA who approach life with the same stubbornness – uh, I mean determination.

Spring has come to the Flint Hills – the Turkey Buzzards have arrived!

John Conway
2023 ACWA President