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#### THE LAST TENTH AVENUE COWBOY

Since the 1999 establishment of Friends of the High Line — the “rusty trestle’s very own fashionable 501 (c)(3)” — made the park an international *cause célèbre*, the story of the West Side Cowboy has become embedded in the High Line’s narrative.

The job of urban cowboy was created by an 1850s city ordinance that permitted freight cars to run along the streets so long as they didn’t exceed six miles per hour and dictated that the railroad — first the Hudson River, later the New York Central — “shall employ a proper person to precede the trains on horseback, to give the necessary warning in a suitable manner on their approach.” Still, so many accidents and deaths occurred on the at-grade tracks along Tenth Avenue between 17th and 30th Streets that it came to be known as “Death Avenue.” The “proper persons” were the West Side Cowboys; they waved a red flag by day and a red

lantern by night to give their necessary warning.

New York’s urban cowboys figured in Mario Puzo’s 1965 novel, *The Fortunate Pilgrim*, in which they were known as “dummy boys.” A scene in the novel, which is set in the Hell’s Kitchen neighborhood where Puzo grew up, describes two boys gazing out their childhood window: “Far down Tenth Avenue they could see the red lantern of a dummy boy and behind it, like a small round ghost, the white dot of the trailing engine searchlight.”

It was at 10:50 a.m., not high noon, that the last cowboy rode down Tenth Avenue. It was March 29, 1941. He was George Hayde, age twenty-one, mounted on what one reporter dubbed “his faithful bay, Cyclone.” The two led a string of fourteen freight cars loaded with oranges.

The team of reporters that covered the event agreed afterward that George and Cyclone had completed the trip without exceeding the speed limit.

*The horses used in this unusual service are tried and true, and are perfectly aware of their important mission in life. They know traffic and excitement, thick fogs and blinding storms, the deep-throated adieus of departing liners and the tremendous thrill of screaming fire engines, but through it all they move surely and serenely, carrying out the Law of the City Council and giving opportunity for their gallant riders to amuse the passerby with amazing variation of the routine waving of the red lanterns. The effective term of duty of these mounts for this service is over eight years . . . and when their usefulness on the city pavements is over they are auctioned off at the Bulls Head Horse Market to continue their lives on softer turf in greener pastures.*

— from “Cowboys of the Cobblestones”  
London Terrace *Tatler*, January 1934

*Larry Angeluzzi spurred his jet-black horse proudly through a canyon formed by two great walls of tenements, and at the foot of each wall, marooned on their separate blue-slate sidewalks, little children stopped their games to watch him with silent admiration. He swung his red lantern in a great arc; sparks flew from the iron hoofs of his horse as they rang on railroad tracks, set flush in the stones of Tenth Avenue, and slowly following horse, rider, and lantern, came the long freight train, inching its way north from St. John’s Park terminal on Hudson Street.*

— Mario Puzo  
*The Fortunate Pilgrim*, 1965