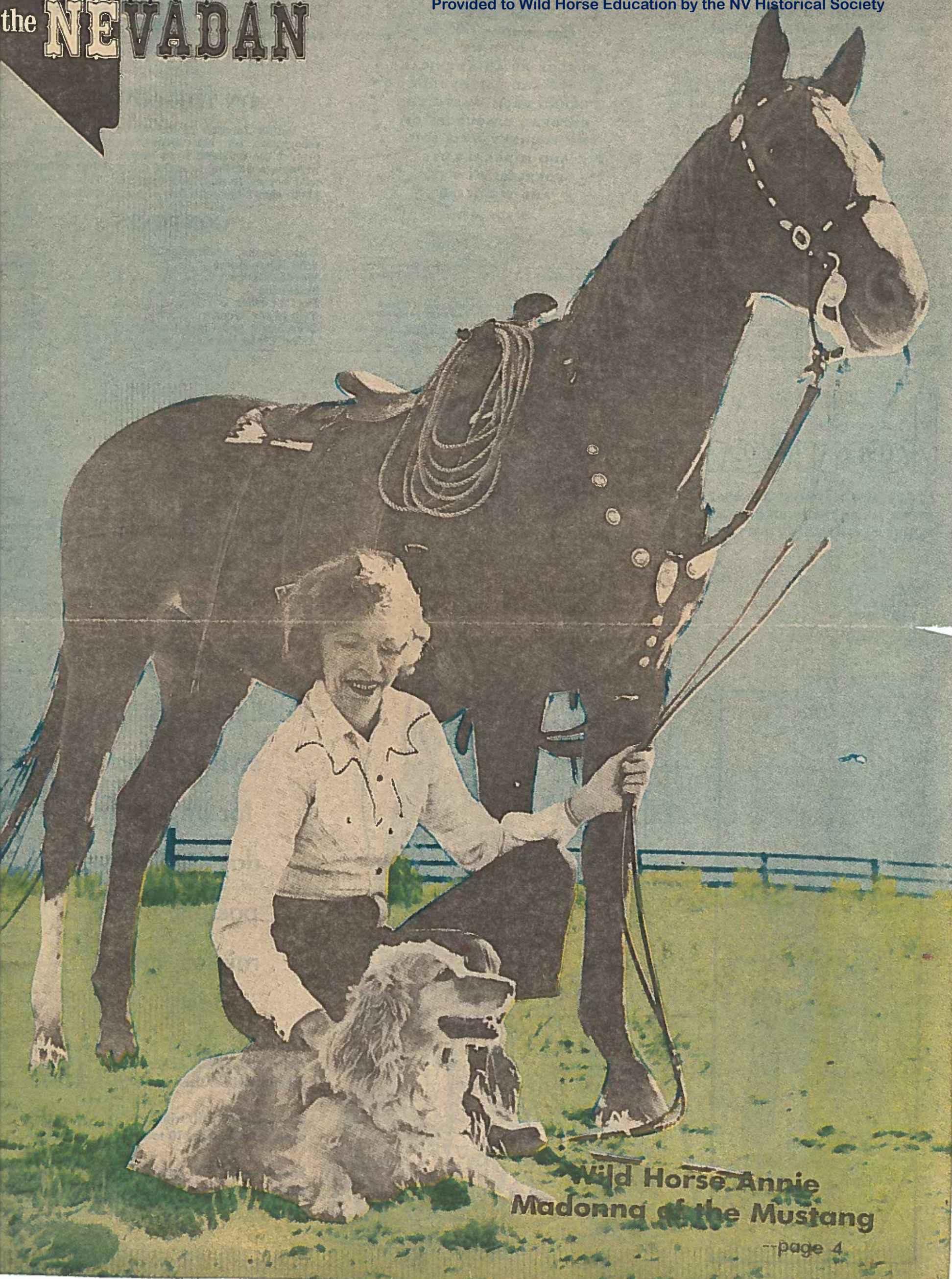


the **NEVADAN**

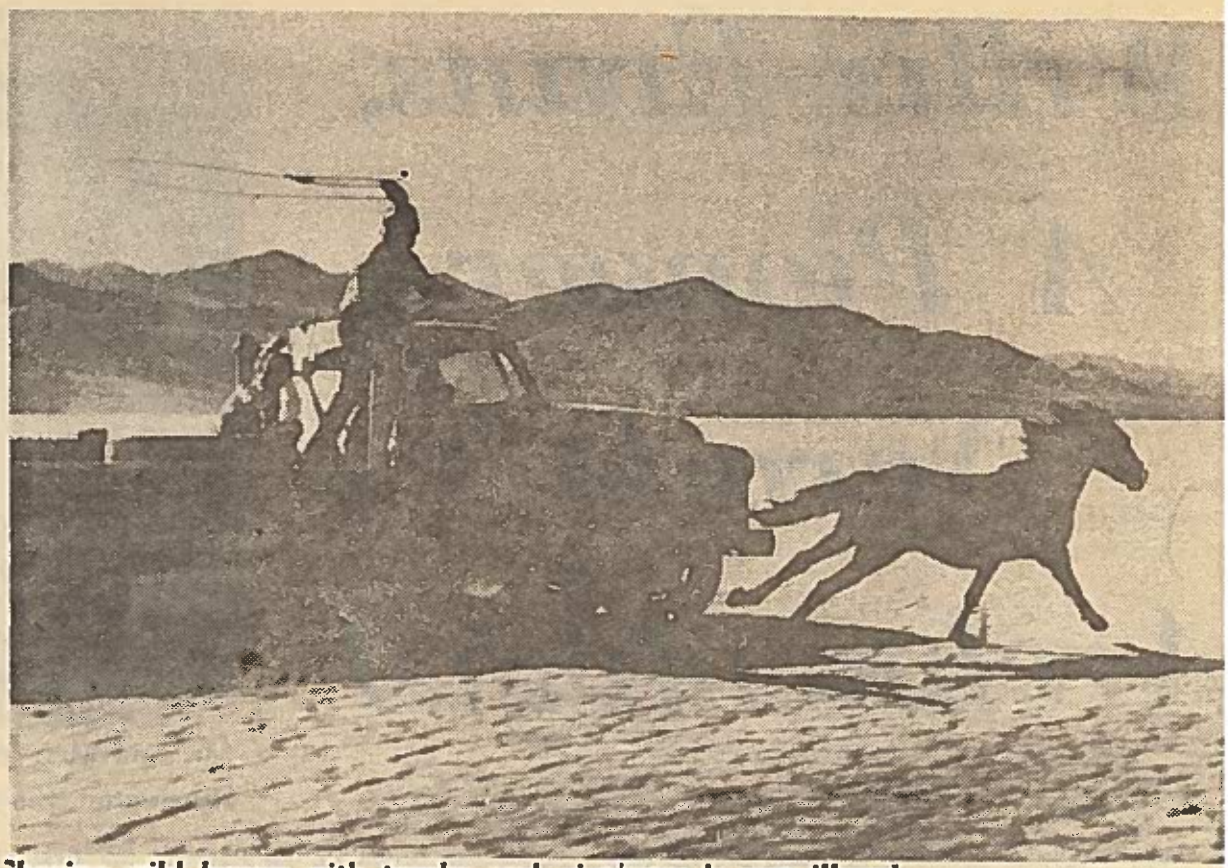


**Wild Horse Annie
Madonna of the Mustang**

Wild Horse Annie

Madonna of the Mustang

By Doris Cerveri



Chasing wild horses with trucks and airplanes is now illegal.

for ranchers by letting fliers roundup mustangs for delivery to rendering plants. The new state law had little effect as 85 percent of Nevada land belongs to the Federal Government, and most of the terrain where mustangs roam in Nevada is federal land. An appeal to the Wildlife Service did not help the situation, either, because mustangs were once domesticated stock and not considered wild. They therefore, did not qualify for protection under the Wildlife Service.

State and local legislation was good, but not good enough. If the mustangs were to be protected to a greater extent, higher authority was the answer. But how?

"Get the public stirred up," friends advised. "Get support from schools, churches, and civic-minded groups."

Compiling information, which was later forwarded to Congressman Walter S. Baring, was for "Annie" a labor of love. Unfortunately a bill, which Baring introduced, prohibiting the pursuit and capture of wild, unbranded horses by means of airplane or mechanical vehicles or the pollution of water holes, never got out of committee. More tedious work was needed, and still more support from many interested individuals.

Thousands of adults and many children wrote letters to Congressmen; various magazines and big-city newspapers throughout the United States featured sympathetic stories about Annie, the mustangs, and their fight for survival.

Sioux Chief Offered Braves To Hunt Rustlers

A barrage of letters found their way to the Johnston Ranch. They came from all over the world, from Japan, Australia, and Indonesia. A horse breeder from Portugal, and a sergeant in the regiment of the Scottish Highlanders, incensed over such cruelty to animals, took time to write. Equally stirred up was an old Indian chief who wished he could use a band of Sioux warriors to take care of those two-legged skunks of wild horse chasers.

In spite of some mail being addressed Reno, Texas USA, or simply "Annie, who is trying to save the wild horses," all letters were delivered. Most of the correspondence ended with the question, "How can I help?" Each letter was answered the same, "Write to Congress and ask your friends to write, too." When a second bill was prepared Annie

went to Washington, D.C., her expenses paid by the Society for Animal Protective Legislation. On July 15, 1959 she testified in behalf of the mustangs before the Judiciary Committee for several hours. In spite of protests from BLM officials, Congressman Baring's "Save The Mustangs Bill," with the help of Congressman Lane of Massachusetts, and Senator Bird of New Hampshire, was rushed through Congress in the closing hours of the session. It became a law on September 9, 1959 when signed by President Dwight Eisenhower.

The law not only made the pursuit and capture of wild, unbranded horses by means of airplane or mechanical vehicles a misdemeanor, but carried with it a fine of not more than \$500 or imprisonment of not more than six months or both.

Three years after the law was passed, the Department of Interior created the first wild horse refuge in America. Approximately 435,000 acres, located in the northeast corner of the practice range of Nellis Air Force Base northwest of Las Vegas, provided a safe home for about 200 horses. Supervision of the range is under a cooperative agreement between BLM officials, the Air Force Command, and the Nevada Fish and Game Commission. Future plans are to develop this sanctuary into a national park specifically for the preservation of the mustangs. Should they become too numerous or the rangeland overcrowded, a national board could be set up to control humane slaughter of the animals if necessary.

Nevada is reported to have the largest number of wild horses, but many hundreds are scattered over parts of 13 states. They are found mostly in the desert or semi-desert regions. Mustangs are considered to be of Spanish origin, strays from 16th and 17th century missions. In fact, the word mustang is derived from the Spanish *mestenos* meaning strayed or running free. However, the first roundup no doubt occurred when Indians coveted fast ponies. Today's horses bear little resemblance to those early strays or ferals. Now they are a mixture of the Spanish horse, Indian pony, and runaway domestic horse. They inhabit rocky ranges and basins, and because of scanty grazing and inbreeding are runty and big-headed with coarse hair. Somewhere along the line they have been given the derogatory title of broomtail.

Velma Johnston has received many gifts and medals of recognition for her efforts in behalf of the wild horses. On March 3, 1960 peace fanciers of New York honored her with a peace medal and she is the only woman to receive the Traphagen citation. Also presented to her was the Angell Gold Medal of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Only three of these medals have been awarded in 99 years and she has been the only woman to receive one. Another valued possession is the pen used by President Eisenhower when he signed the "Mustang Bill."

Perhaps one of the nicest honors was a tender appealing book depicting her life story with emphasis on her dedicated fight to save

Announcement recently of the arrest of three eastern Nevada men for illegally trapping wild mustangs brings to mind the unusual story of "Wild Horse Annie" — a story which actually started many years ago on the Painted Rock Ranch about 26 miles from Reno where "Hobo" her own horse, was friend, confidante, and constant companion. Also, her late father, Joe Bronn, was an old-time mustanger.

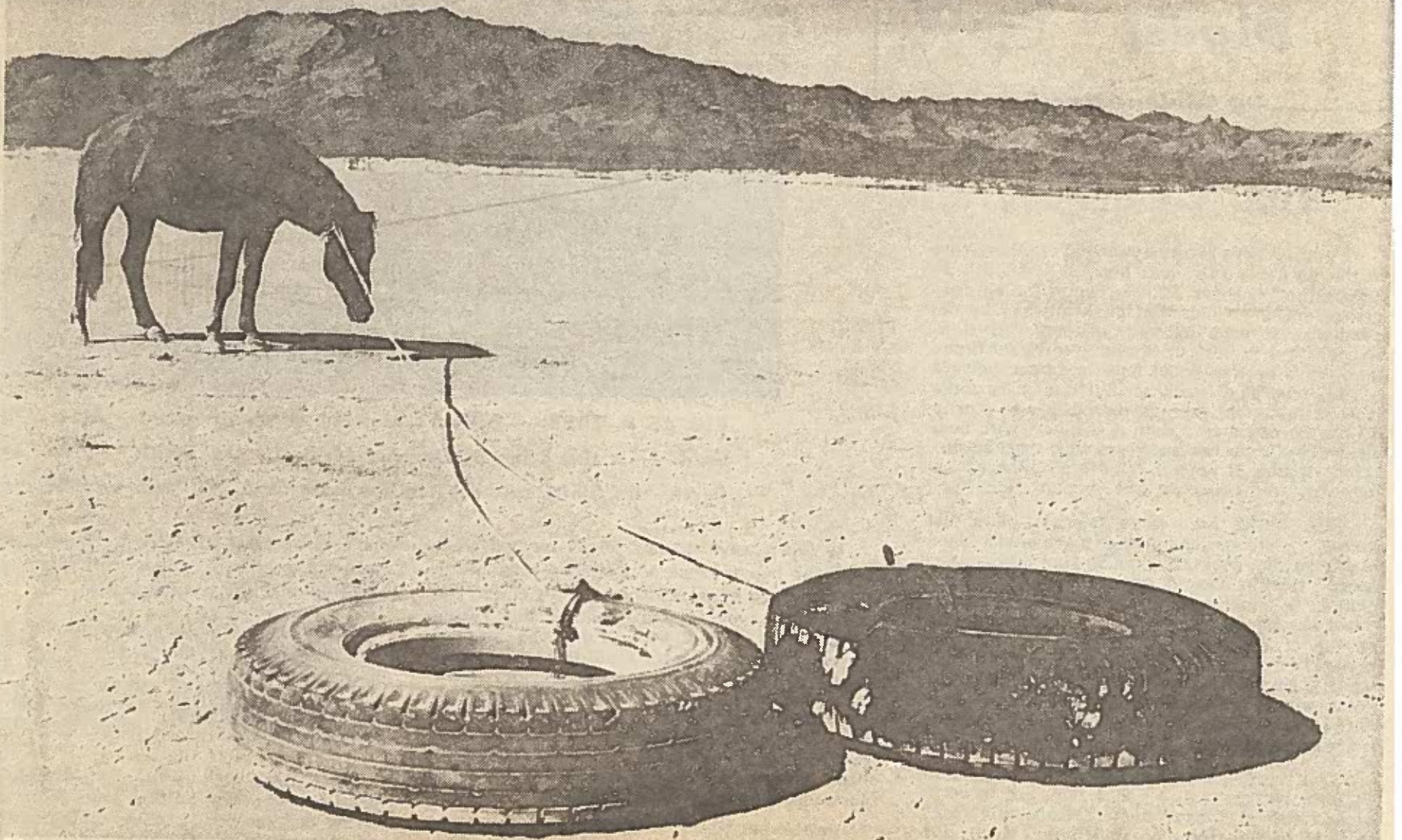
Annie's love for horses and concern for their well being was shared, too by her late husband, Charles Johnston. It was only natural then that Annie became troubled when she heard rumors that the demand for horsemeat to feed dogs, cats, and chickens was big business. So big, in fact, that rustlers could afford to ride roundup in private planes. Armed with permits from local officials of the Bureau of Land Management and boards of county commissioners in various counties, rustlers were hauling horses away in trucks by the hundreds. In Nevada alone 100,000 wild horses were removed from the state in the four years following World War II, by cruel and inhumane means. They were taken to rendering works where they were slaughtered for pet food.

After observing firsthand a load of horses wedged in a truck, blood trickling from their nostrils, eyes rolling with fright, and with hide and flesh torn, "Wild Horse Annie" vowed to do something about their plight.

Since 1950, "Annie", better known as Reno secretary, Velma Johnston, has waged a relentless and dedicated crusade to protect all wild horses. The name, "Wild Horse Annie" given her sarcastically at one time, now seems like a badge of honor.

Her first triumph came when Storey County Commissioners refused to grant a permit to rustlers who wished to round up mustangs in the foothills near the Johnston Ranch. Following this small victory, Senator James Slattery introduced a bill in the Nevada State Legislature which put a statewide ban on killing wild horses. This bill became a state law when signed by Governor Charles Russell in 1955.

The biggest fight, however, was yet to come because state law did not stop rustlers, or bring a change in the thinking of Bureau of Land Management officials. This agency believed it was saving taxpayers money keeping ranges clean



Mustangs were tied to tires after they were caught, and held without food or water until rustlers were ready to truck them to slaughter house.

the wild horses. Marguerite Henry, author of over 46 books for children, told Velma's story in *Mustang, Wild Spirit of the West*, published in November 1966.

When asked at a recent meeting of the Kiwanis Club where she was a guest speaker, how it feels to have a book written about you, she replied: "It is like being around to read your own obituary and enjoying it very much."

Velma is a gracious lady who finds time to enjoy many things. She is executive director of the Animal Welfare League of Nevada, Inc., and is vice president of the International Society for Preservation of Mustangs and Burros. In this capacity she appears before many civic groups and numerous organizations. The purpose of her talks is to interest people in setting up refuge areas in various western states where the wild horse can be protected, managed, and controlled not only by responsible agencies but by civilian representation equal to government control. She also visits many of the grade schools in the Reno area where children thrill to her tales of the out-of-doors, and they never seem to tire of hearing about horses. Velma is also past president of Executives' Secretaries, Inc.

Her activities with children have been a way of life over a period of years. Before she moved to Reno, she and her husband, Charles, operated a weekend and summer dude ranch for children at their Double Lazy Heart Ranch near Wadsworth. Nowadays children attending the story hour on Saturdays at the Washoe County Library also enjoy her stories. Grown-ups meeting her for the first time are impressed with her easy harm and friendliness. She is the kind of person you feel you have known all your life.

With passage of national legislation it seemed the wild horse could run free again. However, bootlegging or rustling has occurred from time to time since passage of the federal law in 1959. Velma has received numerous anonymous calls from individuals regarding supposed violations, but it seems each person was afraid to reveal his identity or testify against the law-breakers.

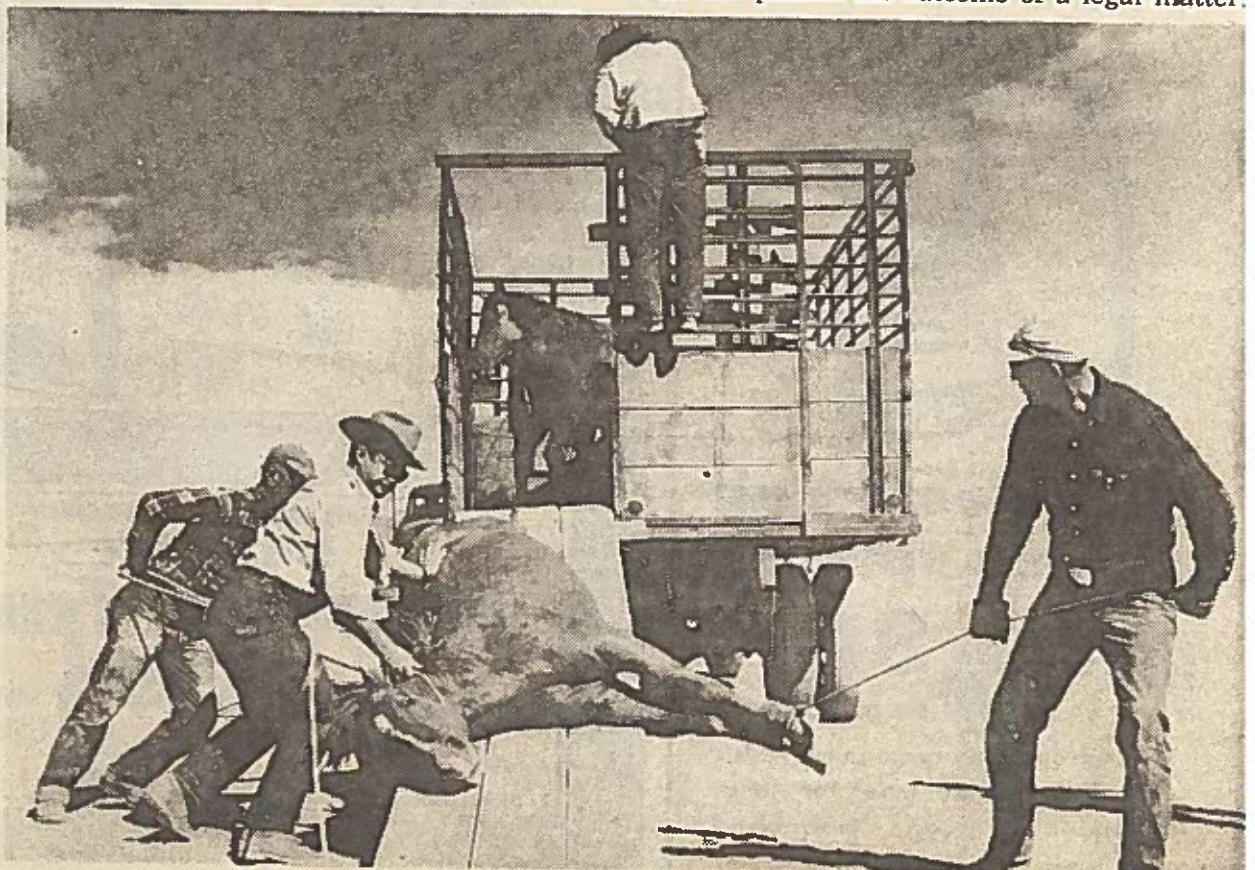
Just recently, though, White Pine County sheriff Archie Robinson and S. G. Robinson, an inspector for the Nevada Department of Ag-

riculture, witnessed an illegal roundup. They reported to the Federal Bureau of Investigation that Julian Goicoechea and Art Cook, White Pine County ranchers and Ted Barber of Winnemucca, were suspected of using an airplane to conduct a roundup. The FBI reported the incident to the federal grand jury in Las Vegas, which handed down an indictment on the matter on February 17.

Stan Routson, director of the livestock brands division of the Nevada Department of Agriculture, said that 39 horses were found at a slaughter-house in Newark, California in connection with the alleged incident.

According to the United States Attorney's office in Reno, legal counsel for the accused men filed a motion on March 8 for the government to produce records. On March 13 counsel for the government filed in opposition to this motion. The matter now rests with the presiding judge who will set a trial date. This may be several months as the court calendar is crowded for April and May.

This incident may very well prove to be a test case. Wild Horse Annie and others who worked tirelessly to secure federal and state legislation naturally hope for a conviction, but no one can predict the outcome of a legal matter.



Wild horses were loaded on trucks after they were too exhausted to walk.