

*THE HISTORIC STRATER HOTEL PRESENTS*

# ROOM 327: THE MIKE JOHN LEONARD ROOM

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## Cowboy, Cowboy Poet, Singer and Song Writer



*Top: A young Mike and Shorty in North Dakota.*

Mike was born in the badlands of western North Dakota along the Little Missouri River, an area made famous by our 26th President Theodore Roosevelt. It was, and still is, cowboy country, a land well-suited for Mike, an aspiring cowboy youngster who spent his days emulating the cowboys he saw during the day and dreamed about at night. He was a hands-on little tyke who broke and trained his first pony, Shorty, when he was only 6 years old. Together, Mike and Shorty loved working cattle and participated in many a roundup, branding, and rodeo.



These were great times for Mike, he spent time around real working cowboys who helped him polish his cowboy skills. He was regarded even by some of the real old top hands, as a fine student, of the cowboy way. He went on to train many more horses for himself and local ranchers; and although he took some spills along the way, he found that patience and kindness rather than force, made better mounts.



In addition to cowboying, Mike found he had a knack for poetry and song, these also became lifelong passions. After his formal schooling years, he began a career in the oilfield, his work took him to South Dakota, Wyoming, Montana, and finally New Mexico. Mike fell in love with the Four Corners area and decided to make it his permanent home. Mike began to put his poetry and musical talents to good use by entertaining at family gatherings, civic functions, schools, colleges and cowboy poetry gatherings around the West.

Durango, Colorado was a natural draw for Mike. The Strater Hotel and its Old West charm were like a magnet for him and the Diamond Belle Saloon a natural venue. The rollicking ragtime piano and the lovely décor were perfect accompaniments for his poetry and singing.







*Mike "Yahooing" on Gus*

Mike has performed there for years, always spawning laughter and good times.

And so it happened that his oil field work brought him to Durango on most Tuesdays; it became a custom of sorts for cowboys to gather at the Belle on that day. So much so, that it became known as Cowboy Tuesdays at the Belle, and this tradition carried on for many years. It was on one of these Tuesdays that an idea was hatched by well-known western painter and sculptor, James Bramlett, to do a painting featuring some the Tuesday Cowboy regulars. Bramlett and Mike were great friends, as they shared a passion for living and preserving cowboy way; the painting was to be done as a testament to it. Several photos were taken of Mike on his favorite horse, Gus, and the others according to Bramlett's specifications, then he began his work.

Upon completion, the painting was christened "Yahooing the Diamond Belle". It was displayed at the Durango Art Center show during the Durango Cowboy Gathering in 2005. It found its home in the Diamond Belle, where it graces the wall to this day. It features Mike riding thru

the swinging doors and firing his six shooter into the ceiling, while other patrons looked on in shocked amazement. The characters in the painting are based on actual people, except the Wild Bill Hickok character which Mike also portrayed.

Although the formal Cowboy Tuesdays gathering, along with some of the characters, has passed away, the painting, remains serving as a fond reminder to all, that the western spirit is still alive and well at the Strater Hotel, in Durango.



*Cowboy Tuesdays at the Belle*



*Mike and Bobbie*

Today, Mike and his lovely wife, Bobbie Nell, divide their time between their home near Aztec New Mexico, as well as their cattle ranch near Lindrith, New Mexico. They both love to visit the Strater Hotel and Diamond Belle Saloon whenever they can.

