

Biography - Alexander

Local History

SIX — SUNNYSIDE SUN

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Young saddle maker opens shop

They were the mechanics of the Old West, keeping the equipment in shape. Nearly every western town had a shop where cowboys could come to get their saddles repaired and if they were flush, or if the old one was beyond fixing, cowboys could purchase a brand new, hand-crafted saddle.

Jordan Alexander opened a saddle shop here, and while he won't be relying on the Old West's cowboys to come into get their saddles fixed, he hopes that the many persons in the Valley who keep and ride horses for pleasure will bring him their saddles and tack for repair and occasionally even buy a new saddle.

Originally from Montana, Jordan came to Sunnyside by way of Hermiston, Ore., after his girlfriend showed him her home town and he found that there isn't anyone in the business here making and repairing saddles.

The new saddlemaker, and he is fairly new in the business, has completed a two year course in saddle making and custom tack work at Spokane Falls Community College, one of the few institutions in the nation which offers an extensive training program in saddlery.

"Back home in Montana, when I was a 4-H Club member, I exhibited some leather tooling work I had entered in a fair," Jordan said, "and

a saddle maker was one of the judges. He took me aside and encouraged me to go into saddle making and tack work."

Jordan, 21, opened his store at 632 Decatur Ave. in Sunnyside, just across from the Seattle First National Bank. In the window he has a few of the new saddles he has made and behind a counter he has all of his working tools and benches which he uses for working new saddles and repairing old ones.

It takes between two and two and a half weeks to make a new saddle and about two and one third side of leather.

"Making a saddle is much like making a suit," he said, "there are fittings and consultations with the client, and I have to also measure the horse, for a saddle must not only fit the rider and be comfortable for him, it must also fit the horse, otherwise sore spots develop and the horse will become useless to its owner."

The base price for a custom made saddle is about \$850 and from there the sky is the limit, depending on the type of leather a client may wish to use, silver which is used generously in some show saddles and the type of ornamentation requested in the leather.

Jordan apparently got his artistic bend from his father and mother. His dad was many years, head of the

Art Department at Montana State University and his mother does ceramics for a living. He himself has always enjoyed working with leather, "it makes me feel good and it is such a good material to mold and to use creatively."

After fitting rider and horse to a new saddle and getting the proper measurements, Jordan sends away for the wooden saddle tree, which he will modify still to make it a better fit to rider and horse. From then on it is all his own work fitting the various layers of leather and doing the stitching and the creative ornamentation which is to be found on every custom made Jordan saddle.

The new saddle maker owns his own horse, a registered Quarter horse, which has helped him a great deal in learning more about the anatomy of a horse and how a saddle should fit.

"A good custom made saddle," Jordan explained, "should last the owner a lifetime with proper care. As a matter of fact I purchased a saddle which was made sometime in the 1880's and after some repair it is in as good shape as it was when it was first purchased."

Surprisingly the saddle is larger than those which are being made today, because 80 or 90 years ago many horses were used for a

variety of jobs, not only for riding, but also for field work. Consequently the horses very often were bigger than the pleasure horses which are so much in vogue today.

But whether the horse is large or small, to be used properly it has to be cared for and part of that care is a proper fitting saddle and Jordan is banking on Valley residents want-

ing to take good care of the horses they ride and use good equipment. He hopes that his new business venture can help horsemen enjoy their steeds more.



IT WILL TAKE about two weeks and two and one third side of cow hides to complete a new saddle, said Jordan Alexander, a saddle maker who has set up shop here. He is pictured smoothing out

leather on the seat of the saddle. A custom made saddle takes more than two weeks to complete, including all of the ornamental work on the leather.



JORDAN ALEXANDER stitches tack by hand in his new saddle and tack shop on Decatur Ave. The young saddle maker came to Sunnyside from Hermiston, Ore. He is a graduate of Spokane Falls Community College where he took a two year course in saddle making.

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