

1949
RODEO
COURT



Courtesy of Marian Birkmaier

The 1949 Chief Joseph Days Court. Left to right: unidentified Indian princess, Queen Beverly Oliver (Wallowa), Diane Snodderly (Lostine), unidentified man, Marian Mawhin (Enterprise), unidentified Indian princess and Ruby Mallon (Joseph)

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Chief Joseph Days began 74 years ago in 1946. And while many memories of that original rodeo have faded, those of 1949 Court members Ruby Mallon Zollman and Marian Mawhin Birkmaier and are still as fresh as the day they were made. Both former court members are Wallowa County natives, and now live in Joseph.

In 1949, Birkmaier said, the members of the Chief Joseph Days court were selected from each of the principal schools in the community. “They were high school seniors who were voted on by the students and faculty as someone who could represent the school and their community well,” she said. “We weren’t chosen for our ability to ride.” Queen Beverly Oliver hailed from Wallowa, Ruby Mallon (now Ruby Zollman) represented Joseph and Marian Mawhin (now Marian Birkmaier) represented Enterprise.

“Back then,” Zollman said, “the Chamber of Commerce didn’t have hardly any money. But they decided they needed a rodeo court, and people would be really enthusiastic if each community had a member on the court. So in the last week of May, they got each school to pick a court member. My high school (Joseph) voted. I rode horses and I’d grown up on a ranch, so the class stood behind me.”

In 1949 the rodeo court had special outfits. But their overall wardrobe was pretty limited, “We had to pay for