

**1949
RODEO
COURT**

YOU ARE INVITED! TO THE FOURTH ANNUAL

“Chief Joseph Days”

••• JULY 29-30-31 •••

FRIDAY, July 29— Winner of the “Queen for a Day”
Radio Program will be presented during Rodeo

SATURDAY MORNING, July 30— 10 a.m.
Big Parade— “The Old and The New”

FRIDAY EVENING, July 29th
SADDLE HORSE SALE

SATURDAY AFTERNOON, July 30th
Second Day of Big Rodeo

Sunday morning, July 31—
Cowboy Breakfast at Edel-
weiss— Speed Boat Regatta
at 10 a.m.

GENERAL ADMISSION DAILY:
Adults— \$1.50 ea. inc. tax Children— \$1.00 ea. inc. tax
ADM. SAT. and SUN., JULY 30 & 31:
Reserves— \$2.00 ea. inc. tax Boxes— \$3.00 ea. inc. tax

Sunday afternoon, July 31—
Finals of Fast
Rodeo Events
Be Sure To Attend

HELL'S
CANYON
•
DANCING
•
GAMES
NIGHTLY
•
BIG
CARNIVAL

See the
PRIZE - WINNING
WRANGLERS
Mounted
Drill Team
•
Champion-Style
Bulldogging
Bareback Riding
Saddle Bronc Riding
Brahma Riding
Calf Roping

THE WEST'S FASTEST RODEO!

As this ad in the July 28, 1949 Wallowa County Chieftain notes, the 1949 Chief Joseph Days celebration ran for three days. It included a carnival and speedboat races, as well as the rodeo.

constructed arena. Temperatures were torrid for Wallowa County — highs in the 90's. A total of 82 cowboys entered the contests, including Eddie Acreage, who had just won the all-around title at the prestigious Calgary Stampede. Mr. Acreage rode away with the all-around cowboy title at Chief Joseph Days as well. “We had some really good riders at those early rodeos,” Ruby Zollman said.

“Back in those days,” said Marian’s husband, rancher Mack Birkmaier, “many of the cowboys in the rodeo were pretty local. And a lot of them worked on ranches. A few came from Lewiston or Walla Walla, but that was a long way to haul a horse. To have a cowboy from so far out of the area as Acreage was kind of unusual.” Mack also remembers that the bulls were all Brahma bulls. “They weren’t as mean as those bulls today,” he said. “They weren’t out to get you.”

Seventy years ago, additional attractions of Chief Joseph Days included speedboat races on Wallowa Lake for boats with 22 hp, 33 hp and 50 hp outboard motors. Midwest Shows Carnival provided extra entertainment for

rodeo-goers, along with the Nez Perce Indian band which was organized and conducted by celebrated actor and local rancher Walter Brennan. Although the Nez Perce and other Native American presence was substantial, Marian Birkmaier recalled that Indians all had to sit in the northeast section of the stands, which faced into the afternoon sun.

A national attention-getter for the 1949 rodeo was the presence of Mrs. Juanita O’Connell of Hollywood, California. Mrs. O’Connell was a winning contestant on the very popular Mutual Broadcasting radio program “Queen for a Day.” That program, hosted by Jack Bailey, brought women who had endured financial and emotional hardships or losses onto the air. Each contestant was asked what she needed most. The requests ranged from medical care for a polio-stricken child, to a new washing machine, and often found the contestants sobbing as they described their needs. One of Mrs. O’Connell’s rewards for her winning plea was to be the “Queen for a Day” at the 1949 rodeo, which she did on Friday, July 29, replacing Queen Beverly Oliver. The

rodeo court rode their horses out to the Joseph Airport to welcome O’Connell, Zollman recalled. But, Birkmaier said, instead of galloping around the arena on horseback, O’Connell was driven sedately around the rodeo grounds in a buggy, waving to the crowd. Her tour as rodeo queen for a day also included a ride in a racing speedboat on the lake. “She was a really nice, nice, quiet lady,” Zollman said.

The people of the community and the Chamber of Commerce have always rallied around this rodeo, Zollman said. “People would work at the mill all day and then right after work they would go to the rodeo grounds and they would build, build, build. The town was really behind the rodeo. Chief Joseph Days was something for the community to support, and it put Joseph on the map. The cowboys were good. The livestock was good. It was a good, fast rodeo,” she said. “It was much better than the Pendleton Roundup.”

“The rodeo, and the things that the Rodeo Court do, are so much better now,” Marian Birkmaier said. “But we were there at the beginning. We had a good time.”