

A letter from the gold rush days

The following letter, reprinted from the June 28, 1956, edition of the Eagle is said to have been written in 1863 by Bradford C. Trowbridge, father of Charles Trowbridge of John Day, to his father in Dixon, Illinois:

Dear Father,
This is the first chance I have had to write you since I arrived at this gold discovery last June 9. The first pony express leaves here today with Frank McBean rider, so I will try to tell you briefly what has happened.

Some of those who came in here with me are Phil Metschan, Bill Southworth, George Hazeltine, Oliver Cresap, Van Middlesworth, Pat Mulcare, Martin Lucas and of course, my brothers, Noble and Lyman. Atwood Sproul is digging a ditch to wash upper benches.

We have arrived here on June 9 last year and were the first arrivals after Bill Alred made the discovery of gold on what we have named Hog Point. Miners kept coming in by the hundreds and now there must be several thousand here and they are still coming. They have discovered placer gold in the country east of here and a town has been built named Marysville about two miles east, and there have also been rich discoveries at Prairie Digging farther east. The miners had a meeting a short time after we got here and they decided to let a miner locate a claim 75 feet up and down the bottom of Canyon Creek and from hill to hill. I didn't take one of those claims, but decided to take squatter's rights on the John Day River above the mouth of Canyon Creek and go to farming

as I had brought in some good cows and could sell milk and vegetables to the miners. I delivered some radishes and onions today and found a ready market as you can imagine. Later, I'll have corn and potatoes and some other vegetables.

A saloon was started on what we have named Whiskey Gulch, which is a gulch with no pay dirt in it. They put up a tent and a few barrels of whiskey was brought in by mule team from The Dalles, up on the big Columbia River. Some hurdy-gurdy girls have come in and they have a dance hall in another tent with a floor made from puncheon logs and strips from small logs. The dance hall is getting a good play, and it and the saloon are getting a lot of the gold. Ralph Fisk, who came in with us last year is the fiddler and some Swede plays the accordion.

A few women have come in and some of the men who are married have built log houses. Some of the women are Mrs. Lucas, Mrs. Andrew McCallum, Mrs. George Hazeltine and Mrs. Van Middlesworth. Both the latter are McCallum's daughters. He is a Scotsman and flour miller and millwright, and is talking of building a mill here as a few of the miners have turned their hands to farming, and wheat and oats are doing fine.

Hope that you and mother can come out as soon as the Indians quiet down. Once in awhile, there is trouble with them and we expect a real outbreak anytime now.

I'll give this letter to McBean and hope it reaches you within the month.

Your affectionate son,
Bradford

Kickin' up Prairie dirt — yesterday and today

School football field was once a rodeo grounds

By Cheryl Hoefler
For the Blue Mountain Eagle

If you close your eyes, you can almost see a calf being roped at about the 40-yard line.

For years, players of one kind or another have been kicking up dirt — along with spills and thrills — to cheering crowds in the open air at the south end of Prairie City.

Today, the town's Panthers football team punts, kicks and throws pigskins on autumn Friday nights at the Prairie City Athletic Complex. Years ago amateur rodeo contestants bucked, rode and roped live animals on summer weekends in the same location.

For over 40 years, from about 1920 to at least 1963, Prairie City was home to its own annual amateur rodeo. The gala featured all the calf roping, bull riding, bronc bucking and horse racing action you'd expect from a top-notch rodeo, with contestants from Oregon and beyond vying for cash and prizes. Festivities also usually included children's competitions, a main parade plus one for the kids, live music, lots of food, a dance and the pageantry of a royal court reigning over it all.

According to an Aug. 2, 1956, Eagle article, the first Prairie City Rodeo was held 37 years prior, and was produced by Ab Bradford of the Cowboy Stampede, longtime sponsors of the Prairie City



Eagle file photo

Nellie Carter, center, reigned as queen of the Prairie City Rodeo held July 14-15, 1962, at Prairie City. Carter, along with princesses Melda Kelly, left, and Beverly Newton, right, rode in the street parade Saturday, preceding the first day's rodeo events.



Contributed photo/Jim Hamsher

The Prairie City Rodeo Grounds, unknown date.

event. In the early years, the rodeo was held on Indian Creek at the Muldrick Ranch, later owned by R.J. Stanbro.

For three years during World War II, there was no

rodeo. However, when it resumed in 1947, riding on post-war enthusiasm, it flourished into a two-day event in mid-June.

The date fluctuated from

year to year, but the rodeo was always a summer event. Through the 1940s and early 1950s it was usually held in mid-June. In 1954, there were even two rodeos — in June and September.

In 1955, it was moved to Labor Day weekend. The next year, organizers decided to bump the date back up a month, to early August, to allow more time between it and another major area event, the Grant County Fair.

The rodeo court usually hailed from all corners of Grant County. In 1949, Queen Patsy Galbraith of Prairie City was attended by princesses Kathryn Swearingen of Prairie City, Betty Cant of Dayville, Arlene Carson of John Day and Pauline Fanning of Long Creek.

Some years the rodeo had a theme. The 1953 two-day event was dubbed, "The Fastest Show in the West." The 1960 rodeo, with the theme, "Something Old, Something New," featured a Sunday afternoon chariot race.

Occasionally over the years, rodeo events were held at other locations in Prairie City. However, the main rodeo grounds was where today's school football games and track meets are held — with contestants and spectators gathered, enjoying the same spectacular Strawberry Mountain backdrop.

So the next time you're at a Panthers home football game, look beyond the goalposts, the new eight-lane track and those dazzling lights. You just might hear the echoing cheers and yells from rodeo days gone by.

And even spot a calf being roped at the 40-yard line.

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