

Rodeo First Saw Light of Day in 1922



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McNamer, Gentry, Latourell Were Originators

Organization Plan So Popular That Show Perpetuated

As we approach the 16th annual Heppner Rodeo, let us hearken back to the year 1922 when the first show was staged as the fruition of work and plans of three men.

C. W. McNamer, who served as the president of the association until three years ago; L. V. Gentry, stockman and public spirited citizen, and Chas. H. Latourell, progressive Heppner business man, served as the board who brought the first show into being. It was held September 28-29-30, 1922.

They conceived the plan of putting on the Rodeo as a community cooperative enterprise, non-profit in nature, with the performing talent volunteered to compete for prizes offered by the association. Rodeo workers generally were to be taken from citizens of the community who would donate their services. No one connected with the association was to receive any remuneration. The profits, if any, were to go into civic enterprises.

The idea was readily "sold" to leading business men of the community who donated a fund with which to embark the venture. The association was formed to include all citizens of the county who were sufficiently interested to participate in the meetings.

The plan of organization proved so successful that it has been followed since with slight alterations.

So enthusiastic about the plan was Mr. Gentry that he had the lower end of his Hinton creek farm worked over to provide grounds for staging the show. Sufficient land was provided to construct a quarter-mile oval race track, circling an ample arena, barns and bleacher space. The site, later purchased by the city for public recreation grounds because of its fine suitability, lies just outside the city limits at the east edge of town.

The first Rodeo was an all-home talent show. There were a goodly number of top-hands, among whom J. D. Bellenbrock emerged champion in the bucking contest. Lloyd Matteson placed second. The queen, selected each year up to 1924 by the directors, was Miss Marjorie Clark, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. M. D. Clark, now Mrs. Gordon Ridings. Judges at the first show were R. J. Carsner, Chance Wilson and Ben Jory.

Walter Richardson was secretary the first year, and W. W. Smead had charge of carnival and concessions, which job he handled each year up til three years ago.

That the first Rodeo was a success is attested by the popular acclaim which has caused it to be staged each fall since.

Len L. Gilliam took over the job as secretary the second year and Jack French was added to the board of directors. Mr. Gilliam has served efficiently in his office since. Mr. French, son of Mr. and Mrs. J. D. French, pioneer stock operators, entered the list of performers as well as aiding in directing the show's destinies, and in 1925 emerged as champion in the bucking contest.

For many years, C. L. Sweek, Walter E. Moore, L. E. Bisbee and Chas. B. Cox headed the organization committee who assisted by naming sub-committees of workers to handle the sale and taking of tickets at the show and dances, parking and other volunteer help needed. Their efforts secured ready cooperation from citizens of the community generally.

The old organization worked effectively til the time of Mr. McNamer's retirement as president three years ago. There had been good years and lean years, to be sure, but


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