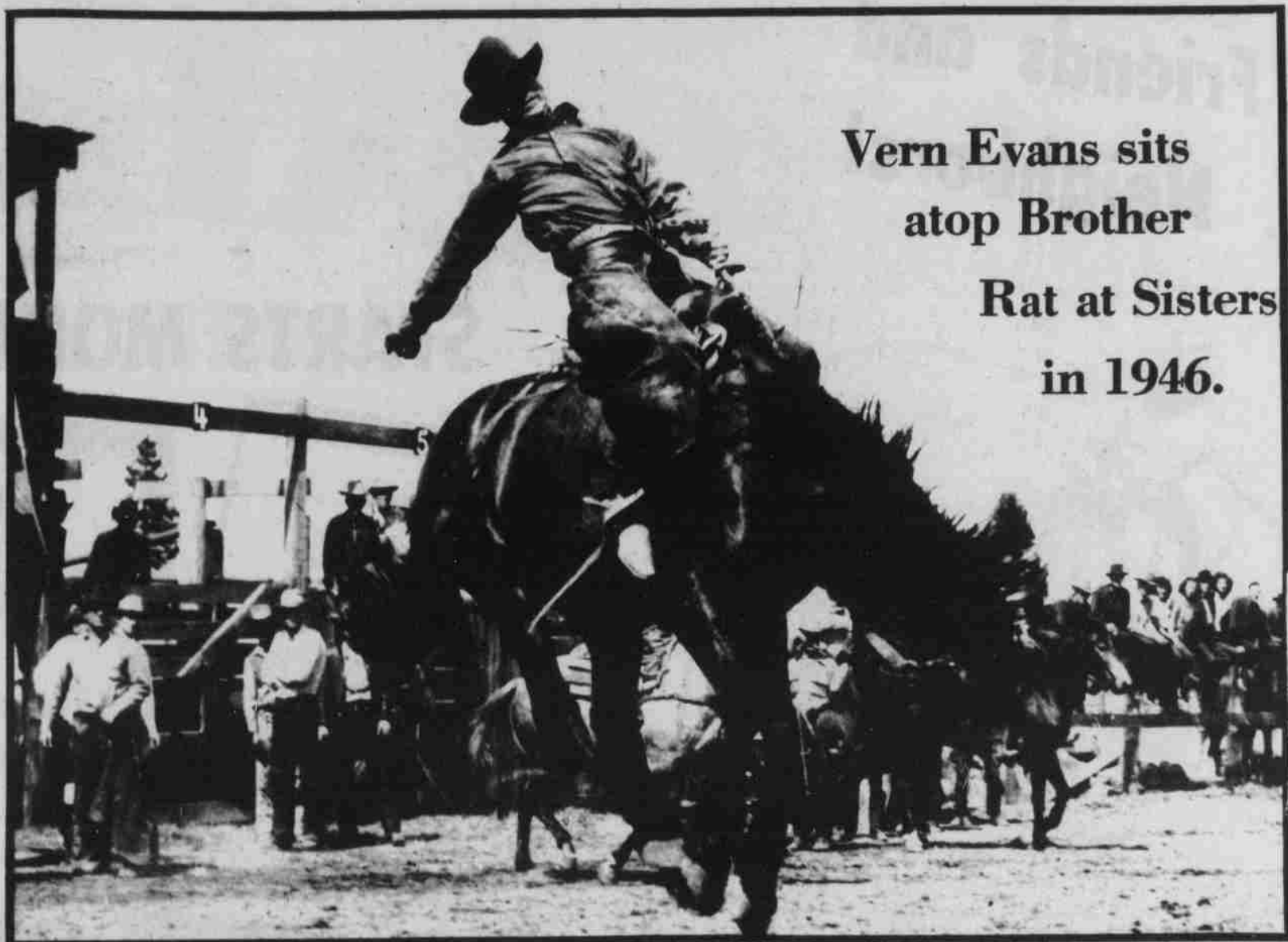


RCA Gold still in his blood...



Vern Evans sits atop Brother Rat at Sisters in 1946.

...Grand Marshall Evans will ride from stands

Funny thing about those Rodeo Cowboy Association gold cards. All you need to earn one is to remain an RCA member for at least 10 years. But the fact that there are so few card holders around tells you there's something special both about the man who carries the card and the occupation he chose to pursue.

Vern Evans carries one of the cards—certifying him a lifetime RCA member—and is the only man in Morrow County to still do so.

He'll be at the rodeo next week, just as he has been for the past 20 years he's lived in Heppner. But this time he'll be carrying an additional honoraria—one not quite so permanent but one every bit as rewarding and deserved. Vern Evans is the 1977 Grand Marshal of the Morrow County Fair and Rodeo.

"This is all something new to me," Evans said. "I'm sure I'll stay pretty busy all week." Despite the schedule, Evans plans to be in the stands for the rodeo sessions—watching a sport that has seen a lot of changes since Evans broke into the pro circuit in 1938.

The rodeo way of life isn't the easiest way to make a

buck but most hands probably wouldn't give it up without a fight. Like everything else, it has been through some transitions, some for the better, some for the worse.

"Rodeo has become much more businesslike these days," Evans said. "Everything is in and out on a tight schedule and the cowboys are flying back and forth and traveling all the time."

Evans was a bronc rider by trade, mainly because that was the only event a lot of the contests had. Some of the bigger shows had some roping and dogging but broncs were the staple and Evans rode his share. He competed mainly in the Northwest with a few treks into California. The shows were steady during the summer but the day of the year round rodeo circuit was still ahead.

"In those days, a hand would have to travel all through the South to find shows other than during the summer," Evans said. "We just didn't travel like they do now."

Along with the commercialization of rodeo came the demise of one practice which Evans calls "a lost art". Snubbing, or readying a bronc

in mid-arena with only a rope and saddle horse, has given way to packing the animals into chutes before the ride.

"Sure the chutes are faster and probably more efficient but when snubbing went out, the rodeos lost a good event for the crowds," Evans said.

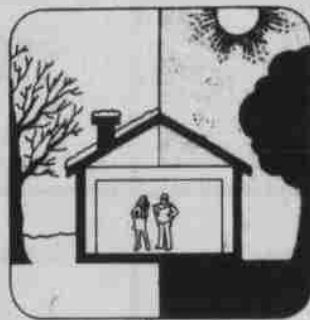
Another change he has noticed has been the increase in programs for the younger competitors. "PeeWee, Junior and High School rodeos let the kids get an early start on things," Evans said. "Before, the kids just had to wait until they were older to compete with the men."

Evans said he enjoys the Junior competition as much as the full-blown action. "It's nice to see the younger kids coming up," he said. The oldest son of Evans and his wife, Fern, tried his hand at rodeo for a while and now a grandson is just entering the Junior age group.

"Sure things have changed," Evans said. "But some of us oldtimers still show up at some of the shows to rehash the way it was."

Even if you can't have it both ways, Vern Evans, this year's Fair and Rodeo Grand Marshal, still has the best of both worlds.

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