

Queen returns to Grand Marshal Parade

Ilene Kenny, Queen of the 1935 Morrow County Fair and Rodeo has come home after 50 years to be the Grand Marshal of the 1985 Fair and Rodeo Parade.

Queen Ilene was born in Heppner, in 1917 and raised on a ranch in Sandhollow. The daughter of John and Bridgett (Bea) Mollahan Kenny; the granddaughter of Michael Kenny and Mary Doherty Kenny, who immigrated from County Leitrim Ireland in the 1870's to establish stock and wheat

ranches, which are still in operation. The Sandhollow Ranch is under the ownership of Ilene's brother Bill Kenny and the Buttercreek Ranch by a cousin Bill Healy.

Queen Ilene was the third of 7 children: Eddie Kenny of Spokane; Matt Kenny of Portland; Emmett Kenny of Pendleton; James Kenny of Lake Oswego; Bill Kenny of Heppner; and a sister Patricia Erwin of Pendleton.

Her father, John Kenny was one of the founders of the first rodeos and

participated for many years as a field judge. In 1963 he was given the award for the oldest cowboy in the parade. In 1966 he was chosen Co-Grand Marshal with Frank W. Turner.

All of the seven Kenny children were blessed with beautiful Irish singing voices. They were the main attraction at many of our grade school and high school musical programs. They still come back each year to sing at St. Patrick's

Day Celebration on the KUMA Koffee Hour.

The Kenny kids rode each day to catch the Hinton Creek school bus from their home in Sandhollow, a distance of seven miles round trip. A lean-to barn was erected near the poplar trees below the Floyd Jones Ranch to house the horses while the children were at school.

Fifty years ago they had a much different way of making the Queens' selection. The four county granges each chose a candidate. In 1935 the

candidates were: Ilene Kenny, Lexington Grange; Eileen Farley, Willows Grange; Maxine McCurdy, Rhea Creek Grange; Camille Stanley, Lena Grange. During the summer, rodeo jitney dances were held at each grange and the finale was held at the old Fair Pavilion (the site where our Library and Museum now stand). Each candidate had a locked box with their name on it. As each person entered the dance area, they bought their tickets and deposited them in the box of their favorite candidate for

1985 fair result of many changes

The Morrow County Fair Grounds at its present location since 1939, accommodates the schools sports and physical education; public and private gatherings; four years of weekly senior citizen dinners; and has provided adequate facilities to accommodate annual events which have become traditional, and could not have been accommodated elsewhere in the community. The annual Pioneer Picnic, the Artifactory, St. Patrick's Day events, Morrow County Grain Growers dinner, Wheat League Historical Society Dinner, and Soroptimists and Senior Citizens rummage sales all attract large crowds, second only to the annual Morrow County Fair and Rodeo. Heppner can be justly proud of having one of the better fair ground facilities on any of the smaller-populated counties in the state.

The first county fair was held in 1912 in what is now the city park and the north of Main Street in Heppner. Wallace Smead was the first Fair manager and is credited with having a great influence on its promotion. Records show there were 200 entries and no premiums paid.

The first fair pavilion was located in the park area on Main Street along with a large shed for storing county road equipment. The pavilion was built by ranchers and volunteers who donated time to build this building specifically for a fair. When the fair was not in progress it was used for dances and roller skating. Records show that the 1915 fair paid \$1500 for premiums. The 1916 fair was held Sept. 14, 15, and 16.

In 1918 the dance hall floor was ruined because of flooding and 1919 was a severe year of drought with meager crops. That year Irrigon won first in community exhibits, and Boardman had the best school exhibit.

In 1920, Boardman held the first Commercial Fair, Sept. 23. Exhibits were sent by express to the state fair in Salem. Boardman was the only county fair held that year. Fairs in the south end of the county were held intermittently for a number of years. The Fair at Heppner became a permanent annual event in 1939 when it was moved to the present site on Hinton Creek. This acreage was acquired when the county traded the block on Main Street to the city for the C.C.C. camp location which had been vacated. Old barracks buildings were converted into usage for the same. The north end of the county discontinued their fair. When it became a state law in 1954 limiting each county to one fair. From 1923 through 1930 the County Extension Agent took the lead in putting on the fair, until the County Court appointed three persons to form a Fair Board.

In 1952, a block building was built at the fair grounds, known as the pavilion, and the annex and other additions were added later. The

large steel barn was built in 1965; the seats and bleachers inside in 1966. A new south grandstand was erected in 1968 to replace the old wooden structure. A large portion of the rodeo arena was seeded to grass, and is used for football, sports, P.E. classes, as well as baseball throughout the summer. A small block building was built, known as the dormitory to replace an old wooden building, formerly a supervisor's residence during the C.C.C. encampment. The Wranglers Riding Club renovated a wooden building for a barn, and supervised the horse show, starting in 1952, as part of the fair activities. Box stalls for horses were built late and in 1975 the wooden barn building was converted into Shorty's Museum, which now houses a large variety of antiques. Additional antique machinery is sheltered under an outside area which was added by Harold Peck. In the fall of 1981, Pecks moved a log cabin to the grounds from the foot of Madison Butte, and completely refurbished it with authentic furnishings. Recent major improvements include a large fill adjacent to highway and installation of cyclone fencing. 1984 necessitated installation of sewer lines throughout the grounds, and three-phase electrical service to accommodate increasing power demands.

Endeavors to continuously upgrade facilities are reflected in the work which has gone into the grounds and activity is now in high gear to prepare for a combined new format, which will see the Fair and Rodeo running concurrently Aug. 14-18.

Floral displays expanded

Visitors who have enjoyed floral decorations on the fair grounds the past few years can expect to see expanded displays this year as the local garden clubs from Heppner, lone and Lexington are planning to make the grounds come "Alive in '85" with containers of blooming plants.

Garden club container gardeners have watered, fertilized, snipped faded blooms, and fought the grasshoppers to a standstill on over three hundred planters to be used around the fair grounds. Tri-chairman of the staging committee Pat Pettyjohn, Babe Harris, and Martha Doherty are planning some new garden spots and other floral surprises.

In conjunction with the Fair Flower Show, the clubs are also sponsoring a new contest, a Scarecrow Contest. See the premium book for details. The scarecrows are to be entered on Tuesday and will be staged on an outside wall of the exhibit hall. They will be judged by a public ballot. Cash prizes of \$10, \$6 and \$4 will be awarded by the garden clubs.






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