

## Dorris Graves 2000 Fair and Rodeo Grand Marshal



**Dorris Graves**  
By Merlyn Robinson

Appropriately selected for the year 2000 is the Morrow County Fair and Oregon Trail Pro Rodeo Grand Marshal Dorris Graves, a descendant of Oregon Trail pioneers.

Her lifetime of many accomplishments in agriculture and home economics fields is a lasting legacy that will be remembered as striving to improve rural lifestyles and preserving a way of life that stems from her pioneering heritage.

Dorris, the third child of Robert Wilcox and Ethel Eskelson-Wilcox, was born in Morrow County, January 1, 1911, near Willow Creek close to Lexington. In 1915 the family moved to Oakland, Oregon, near the Calapooyia River for a year before relocating at Klamath Falls. She was indoctrinated into a rural, 4-H way of life at an early age by parents that were active 4-H leaders.

The Wilcox family returned to the Willow Creek ranch in Morrow County when Dorris was 11 and 4-H continued to be an important part of her growing-up years. She attended school at Lexington, playing tennis, basketball and taking part in other school activities. Summers were spent herding cattle on horseback in Blue Mountains in the Cutsforth Park area. Horses were a part of her everyday life,

therefore the Wilcox girls were natural candidates for rodeo royalty roles. A sister, Eva Wilcox-Brosten, now deceased, was the 1929 Heppner Rodeo Queen and Dorris and Kay Bisbee were her princesses.

Dorris and John Graves were married at Ione in 1928, just before the "boom and bust" years and the Great Depression. They farmed in the Heppner area when "sheep skin" script was used as local, legal tender when the banks closed. Teachers were paid by script which could be sold to money lenders at a 10 percent discount. Of necessity, most families like the Graves had to depend largely on home-grown food produced from gardens, milk cows, chickens and farm animals. Dorris recalls the drought years that reduced wheat yields to the point where 10 bushels per acre was considered a good crop. In some fields, rodents harvested what little grain did develop. Later here was also a Mormon cricket invasion that worked their way southward into what fields, stripping vegetation as they came.

She also recalls when public works programs began in the 1930s. The Civilian Conservation Corps gave unemployed young men, mostly from large cities in the past, jobs at low wages. At Heppner they were stationed in barracks buildings located on the present fairgrounds. These men worked at conservation measures, building dams and cleaning creek channels to prevent flooding as well as working on mountain projects.

When WWII boosted the slowly recovering economy in the 1940s the Graves family moved to Hermiston. John was a guard at the Umatilla Ordinance Depot during the war years. Dorris, who was still involved in home extension and 4-H, joined the Oregon Women's Ambulance Corps and stayed on active duty until the end of the war. She drove fifth-wheel vans loaded with bomb fins, transporting them from the igloos to railroad

cars at the depot and "wheeled" motorized equipment to the service shed.

When the war ended the family returned to Morrow County where they raised wheat and shorthorn cattle for 10 years while ranching in the Sandhollow area. They rejoined the Lexington Grange and led 4-H clubs. John was superintendent of beef cattle at the fair and Dorris was superintendent of different home economic departments during fairs. Like their mother, daughters JoAnne, Betty and Rieta were Fair and Rodeo princesses (representatives from the Lexington Grange) during the middle 1940s and into the 1950s. Their son, Deane, and their girls were active 4-H participants.

Along with her commitment to Home Extension, 4-H and school activities, Dorris was an active participant in the agendas of the Livestock Growers and the CowBelles, helping to promote beef. She also worked on farm programs to further Soil and Water Conservation practices. She joined the "Association of County Women of the World" to gain in-depth knowledge about agriculture in other parts of the world.

In 1954 the family purchased a cattle and wheat ranch on Rock Creek near Hardman that continues to be managed by her grandsons and families. Always the busy person, she continued working with Home Extension, 4-H, the Wheat Growers, CowBelles, the Rhea Creek Grange and the fair and rodeo. John Graves was the recipient of numerous awards from the Wheat League, Livestock Growers and the Soil and Water Conservation agency, along with serving 12 years as a Morrow County Grain Growers board member. Unfortunately he passed away from a major heart attack in November 1965.

Doris never let her grief slow her down. She was appointed by the Morrow County Court to the County Planning Commission

prior to the passage of the land use controls, serving in that position for 12 years. She received the "Women of the Year" award in the 1970s and received state and national awards for her work in 4-H and home extension. She served three years as director of District 7 for Home Extension at the state level, focusing on the development of subject material for county extension groups. As one of four voting delegates from Oregon to attend the triannual meeting of Associated Country Women of the World, she traveled to Perth, Australia, for the 1974 conference. As a home extension member representing land grant colleges in the United States, she was a qualified voting delegate on the board of The United Nations.

Recognized for her dedication to rural affairs, she was appointed by Governor Tom McCall to the Oregon State Soil and Water Commission, holding this position for eight years.

Adding to the jewels in her

crown, Dorris was honored with the "Diamond Jubilee Pioneer" award in 1984 by Oregon State University. Without resting on her laurels, she spent the 1980s traveling the United States to gain a broader prospective. Then she decided to spend winter in Mesa, Arizona, where she could continue to play golf or billiards, pursue crafts or bask in the sunshine.

She enjoys traveling backroads to visit national parks or scenic sites when traveling south in the fall and returns to her roots in Morrow County for the summers. Family has always had top priority with Dorris and she now enjoys her 12 grandchildren, 16 great-grandchildren and three great, great "triple grand" grandchildren.

"Hats Off" to the 2000 Morrow County Fair and Oregon Trail Pro Rodeo Grand Marshal Dorris Graves. Influenced by her pioneering heritage she has dedicated her life to improving and preserving a rural lifestyle for generations yet to come.

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