

TALL IN THE SADDLE – THE WESTERN STATES

WOMEN IN RODEO - HISTORICAL TIMELINE

1882

Buffalo Bill Cody made women's riding and shooting events part of his Wild West Show and Fourth of July celebration in North Platte, Nebraska.

1885

Cody hired sharpshooter Annie Oakley, who was skilled and beloved by crowds. Later that year Cody hired a dozen lady riders to star in his show. Other western-themed shows that featured women riding and shooting were started up across the country and remained popular through the 1930's.

1897

The first Cheyenne Frontier Days was held in Cheyenne, Wyoming. It became the most popular rodeo of its time, and today claims to be the "largest outdoor rodeo and western celebration." Women competed in bronc riding, the cow pony event and trick riding.

1898 – 1920's

The success of Cheyenne Frontier Days prompted the formation of regional rodeos across the country, many of which provided opportunities for women to compete. While some of the competitions were legitimate, many others were simply crooked beauty pageants.

1930 – 46

It is documented that 50 women participated in rodeo between 1930 and 1941. The numbers began to decline at the onset of WWII. In 1942 there were 26 women competing, and from 1943 – 1946 there were only 12, and most were paid performers.

June 26-29, 1942

Fay Kirkland organizes the first "All-Girl" rodeo to entertain the troops. The baton was passed to famous bronc rider Vaughn Krieg who organized a very successful traveling women's rodeo that entertained troops until tire and gas rationing forced her to shut it down.

Early 1947

The Rodeo Cowboy's Association (RCA) sanctioned over 1,000 rodeos annually. There was a strong faction of the association that did not want women involved in the rodeo – it wasn't "ladylike." Women competed in beauty contests to be rodeo queens, or occasionally rode broncs outside of the competitive realm. During this time women could compete in a limited number of amateur rodeos in events such as barrel racing and cutting.

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September 23 – 26, 1947

The first ever all-women's competitive rodeo was held as part of the Tri-State Fair in Amarillo, Texas. The visionary founders were former rodeo queens; twenty five year old Nancy Binford and nineteen year old Thena Mae Farr. 75 women competed in bareback bronc riding, calf roping, barrel racing, cutting and team tying. The founders and all of the event winners were eventually inducted into the Cowgirl Hall of Fame.

February 28, 1948

38 women gathered at a hotel in San Angelo, Texas, and the first-ever rodeo association for women was born– the Girl's Rodeo Association (GRA). The group agreed that the primary purpose of the GRA was to give women “legitimate, honest opportunities to compete in all-girl rodeos as well as to establish an alliance with the RCA to host women's events in conjunction with RCA-sanctioned rodeos.” They drafted rules and regulations, and enacted a point system to crown world champions. The GRA was renamed the Women's Professional Rodeo Association (WPRA) in 1981.

Today

The WPRA has more than 2000 members and sanctions some 800 barrel races per year in conjunction with Professional Rodeo Cowboy's Association (PRCA) rodeos. WPRA sister organization, the Professional Women's Rodeo Association (PWRA) sanctions events at all-women rodeos across the US, and holds it's own annual world championship finals.

Note: Information gathered by Meg Shiffler, Gallery Director SF Arts Commission Gallery. This timeline represents only a fraction of the historical events and organizations that support women in the rodeo. Primary sources for this content include Women in the Rodeo by Julie Wells, posted on the WPRA web site.

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