
Honoring and Preserving the Sports History of Chautauqua County



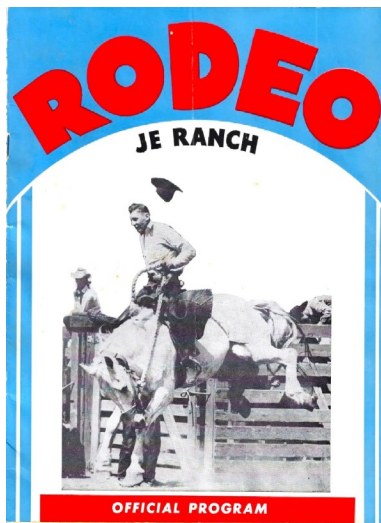
Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame

15 West Third Street - Jamestown, NY 14701

November 2023

78 Years And Counting

The Gerry Rodeo recently completed it's 78th annual event, a truly outstanding accomplishment. Below is a history of the popular Chautauqua County summer spectacular using material excerpted from 2017 CSHOF inductee Paul Cooley, the long-standing publicity director of the rodeo.



Many people thought that the idea of a rodeo wouldn't succeed for even one year, but the doubters were certainly wrong because for 78 consecutive summers, the tiny hamlet of Gerry, just north of Jamestown, New York, has celebrated the longest running Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association rodeo east of the Mississippi. For four days each year, the quiet little village of Gerry becomes "The Rodeo Capital of the East" as approximately 200 professional cowboys and cowgirls roll into town and pay their entry fees to compete for more than \$50,000 in prize money in four performances.

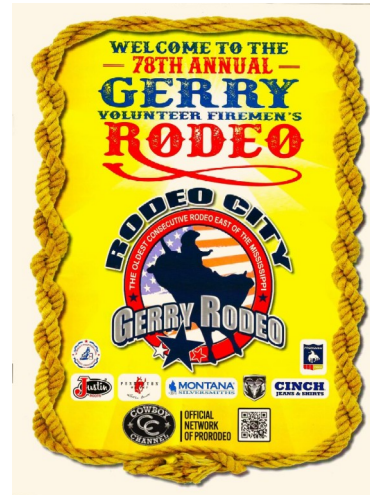
LEFT: Program cover from the very first Gerry Rodeo in 1945 (Greg Peterson Collection)

The event, sponsored by the Gerry Volunteer Fire Department, got its start in 1945 when a former working cowboy named Jack Cox moved from the West to Gerry and suggested a rodeo as a way of raising money for the newly formed fire department. In spite of the doubters, his dream became a reality as members of the department and other volunteers in 70 days turned four acres of swampland into an arena and parking lot in time for the arrival of the renowned Colonel Jim Eskew and the livestock that first year. Bleachers were borrowed from area schools and portable lights were rented.

In those early days the stock arrived by train in the middle of the hamlet, traffic was stopped, and the animals were herded down the middle of Route 60 to the rodeo grounds by volunteers, making for some exciting moments. Today the stock arrives by modern semi trucks, but the excitement of rodeo time still fills the air. Several hundred volunteers of all ages pitch in to make the event possible each year, filling jobs from painting fences to serving the famous beef barbeque dinners. Many residents take their vacation just to volunteer, and others who have moved away return to help.

The Gerry Fire Department felt from the beginning that their rodeo should be "top-notch" so they have always contracted for a rodeo sanctioned by the Professional Rodeo Cowboys' Association (PRCA). Participants pay an entry fee, and money earned in Gerry counts toward qualification to the annual National Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas in December.

Over the years, constant improvements have been made to the rodeo facilities. Additional land has been acquired, permanent bleachers have been installed in an arena seating 4000, new lighting turns night to day, and the old dining hall has been enlarged, refurbished, and air-conditioned to accommodate the hundreds who come each year just to enjoy the world-famous beef barbeque dinners.



Today the rodeo consists of the same competitive events it did 78 years ago: bareback bronc riding, tie-down roping, saddle bronc riding, bull riding, steer wrestling, team roping, and cowgirls' barrel racing, with all the entrants competing for cash which counts toward qualification for the National Finals Rodeo. In addition, there are specialty acts such as trick riding, animal acts, and clowns. A recently added feature allows young spectators to enter the arena to compete for prizes as they chase ribbons tied to calves' tails.

Over the years, the profits from the rodeos has enabled the Fire Department to purchase modern fire and rescue equipment for the protection of the residents of the town. Today the Department has two pumpers, a tanker, a rescue truck, an ATV with trailer, and a state-of-the-art ambulance to respond to more than 300 calls per year.

All the charter members who planned the first rodeo are gone, but the dream that began 78 years ago is still alive and well, proving what can be accomplished when neighbors have a common goal and work together to meet that goal.

Below are pages from the original 1945 Gerry Rodeo program. The advertising businesses present a stroll down memory lane. How many are still in business 78 years later?

PROGRAM

GERRY RODEO STADIUM

ON ROUTE 60

The Gerry Volunteer Fire Department

PRESENTS
The J-E Ranch Rodeo
 Produced and Personally Directed by
Col. Jim Eskew

July 31, thru
August 5, 1945
Eve. 8 P. M.

Matinees
Sat. and Sun.
2 P. M.
Wed. 2:30 P. M.

<p>RECKENS HOTEL CASSADAGA, N. Y.</p> <p>Club Atmosphere Noon Day Lunches Best Quality Liquors</p> <p>Package License</p> <p>"Route Sixty's Finest Village Hotel"</p>	<p>ARENA OFFICIALS Col. Jim Eskew Arena Director Charlie Aldridge Judge Bill Parks Judge</p> <p>Event No. 1 Concert—Cowboy Band, Al Lay, Director</p> <p>Event No. 2 Grand Parade of floats, bands and equestrian teams, led by the charming California drum majorette Bobbie Langley, followed by introductions of artists and special characters.</p> <p>Event No. 3 The Dance of Rangeland quadrille on horseback April Gulliam Betty Shaw Jack Jackson Buck Dwyer Nancy Dyer Johnny Chapman Adair Shaw</p> <p>"Pepsi-Cola Hits the Spot" PEPSI-COLA BOTTLING CO., Of Jamestown</p>	<p>Compliments of CASSADAGA FARMERS COOPERATIVE ASSN FEED FLOUR FERTILIZER SEEDS</p> <p>Compliments of Cassadaga, N. Y. Phone 60F11</p>
<p>THE HANDY GROCERY</p> <p>Compliments of Route 60 at KIMBALL STAND</p> <p>Grocery and Meat Market</p> <p>Open Nights and Sundays Phone Jamestown 74-272</p>	<p>"Success to your Rodeo," Gerry Firemen</p>	<p>Ben Nichols</p>

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PACKAGE LICENSE

Event No. 4
BARBACK BRONC RIDING
 Buck Dwyer
 Speedy Dosmore
 Buck Dwyer
 Ralph Collier
 Stanley Brennan
 Johnny Chapman
 Stanley Owen

Event No. 5
FANCY RIDING
 Featuring Buddy McFarland and April Gulliam, two of America's greatest lariat artists.

Event No. 6
 Rodeo Varieties, Jack and Bobbie Knapp

Event No. 7
COWGIRLS BRONC RIDING
 Am Gressley - - Mary Parks

Event No. 8
 Allen's Border Collies

Event No. 9
CALF ROPING
 Name _____ Time _____
 Johnny Chapman
 Ralph Collier
 Buddy McFarland
 Jack Jackson
 Irby Mundy

Event No. 10
 Tom Hunt, Nosed Rodeo Clown, and his educated mule.

Event No. 11
COWBOYS SADDLE BRONC RIDING
 Name _____ Horse _____
 Red Daugherty
 Jack Jackson
 Clayton Hart
 Bud Kessler
 Johnny Chapman
 Jack Talbot
 Bucky Brennan
 Red Hammerschmidt

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 PEPSI-COLA BOTTLING CO.,
 Of Jamestown

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 and
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