

As youngsters, Harry Graber and his buddies Merle "Smick" Graber and Harry Kautzer spiced their farm lives by wrapping a rope around a steer in the corral and hopping on his back. If steers weren't available, cows would do. Horses, too. By the early 1930's they were competing in small rodeos in the area and bringing home their share of prize money.

In 1934, about the time the venerable Kingman Cattlemen's Picnic was fading from the social calendar for lack of support, the three young men from Pretty Prairie had the notion to put their budding skills on display for the local folks. They rounded up a few steers, a pen full of calves, a bull or two, and posted advertisements for the Reno and Kingman County Rodeo to be held Thanksgiving Day on the farm of Henry J. Graber, Harry's father.

A cold wind swept from the north that November afternoon, forcing riders to wear heavy gloves and coats, and keeping the audience huddled inside cars encircling the pasture. Despite nature's discourtesy, the crowd enjoyed calf roping, steer riding, relay races, wild cow milking, bronc riding, bulldogging, and a maverick race. With an admission price of only 10¢ for children and 25¢ for adults, no one complained that several of the "steers" used for steer riding looked like dairy cows.

The following week the Pretty Prairie Times noted, "Thanksgiving Day afternoon was an exciting time out on the Henry J. Graber farm, when Harry Graber and a bunch of his local associates staged a rodeo. Several hundred people were on the grounds, regardless of the beastly weather, and the show was pulled off in good shape."

Harry Kautzer won top prize of \$30.50 in the calf roping event. Chet Boyer of Kingman took home \$17.50 for first place in wild cow milking. Dick Vanlandingham and Irish Lattimore, both of Spivey, each won \$10, taking first in the steer riding and bulldogging events, respectively. George Furry of Rago won the \$2 maverick race purse and Harry Graber won the pony race.

None of the promoters walked away from that rodeo with a bulging wallet, but, rest assured, none walked away without first having a grand time. The following year they decided to have a grand time again.

The local rodeo may have remained a thrilling Thanksgiving Day gathering in the country if it hadn't been for a football game in Pratt. Pretty Prairie High School football coach W.W. Graber had all the ingredients for a spectacular season in 1935—size, speed, bulldog determination. However, a season-opening trip to Pratt indicated his squad lacked one element—illumination.

"We played Pratt the opening game and they beat us 12-7," Graber remembered. "We were picking on some pretty big boys when we played Pratt, and it was the first time we'd played under lights. Pratt and Hutchinson were the only schools around that had them. Everyone here was so impressed with the lights that we got together and decided to go ahead and get some for Pretty Prairie. The poles were hauled in on the rails and the football players dug the holes."

Eight sixty-foot poles were installed at the high school field, each with four 1500 candlepower light bulbs. Playing under the lights, the PPHS team did not lose a game that season.

"We lost that first game at Pratt, but we got lights as a result," Graber said.

And got a night rodeo, too.

W.W. Graber joined forces with Harry Graber, Merle Graber and Harry Kautzer to sponsor the first Pretty Prairie Night Rodeo in September of 1936.

"Posters announcing the coming of a rodeo to Pretty Prairie are being distributed and on the nights of the 3rd and 4th of September you will have an opportunity to see a real Rodeo show, under the lights at the High School football field," reported the Times. "This is the first time the lights have been used since the close of the football season last year, and it will be a pleasure to sit out under the cool night air and watch the fellows do their stunts from the backs of ponies and steers. No better lights in the country than those over our grounds and when the entire outfit is turned on you can see even better than in the daytime, as all the lights are focused on one spot."

Horses, calves and steers were driven from the Henry J. Graber farm to the Santa Fe stockyard next to the railroad tracks by a band of cowboys. Brahma bulls were hauled in from the Lattimore Ranch near Spivey. Wooden bleachers borrowed from McPherson and Kingman supplemented the football field seats. Initiating a practice which was to become a tradition, sponsors contracted with a well-known rodeo personality, Charlie Shultz, to provide entertainment. Schultz, a rodeo clown from the 101 Ranch in Texas, brought his son and daughter, both trick ropers, and his famous trick mule. To assure everyone had a joyous time, the sponsors hired a carnival company to camp just outside the rodeo grounds and provide rides and games for youngsters.

It was intended to be a community gathering, a two-day frolic. But those were not frolicsome days. Dust storms regularly blew hopes away. Jobs were few. Money was tight. The good intentions of the sponsors aside, families couldn't be expected to come to the football field and fill the stands both nights. But they did.

"Pretty Prairie No. 1 Rodeo is now a thing of the past, and believe us it was a big success," proclaimed the Times. "Attendants at the gate gave us an estimate of something over 4,000 people in attendance at the two performances, and that is going some. We don't think the boys who sponsored the event made very much money, but they didn't have any idea that they would for this first effort. The surprise of the two evenings is the peace and quiet of the crowd; nothing marred the pleasure of either evening, no rough stuff was pulled, no drunks were in evidence, and the entertainment was ideal from every standpoint. The threatening clouds just before the first evening's performance may have kept