



LOOKING BACK

A history of the Lions Dixie Roundup

By Lyman Hafen

Shortly after 2:00 p.m. on November 11, 1935 the first chute gate opened in the first Dixie Roundup. The old grandstand at the old race track must have been jammed with excited people, and there must have been a horde of busy cowboys hovering around the chutes. The air was probably brisk, and Walter Shelley and a lot of his buddies from the Arizona Strip must have been cutting loose with hoops and hollers as high kicking broncs were turned out, and steers and calves were chased across the square. It was the beginning of something

1200 attend Lions Club Rodeo. May be annual event.

Twelve hundred spectators, the largest crowd ever to attend a sports program in Dixie, turned out to the rodeo sponsored by the local Lions Club and run off under the direction of Robert Hurley, Armistice Day, November 11, at the city park.

To many, the unusual feature of the rodeo was the dispatch with which the various events were run off. With two chutes to work from, Robert Hurley was able to present one event after another. Over two hours of entertainment was offered the crowd.

Between 60 and 70 head of stock were used which featured kid calf riding, calf roping, team tying, bronco riding, and wild cow milking. Three purses were offered by the sponsors. These were for bronco riding, calf roping, and team tying. Winners in these events were: first place in bronco riding, Dick Lockett with Roy Kurt and Walter Shelley tied for second and third; first place in calf roping, Clyde McQuaid; second, Walter Shelley; third, Pearlie Morris; first in team tying, Joe Beach and Walter Shelley; second, Lee Hafen and Pearlie Morris.

Because of the number of local men and boys that took part in the contests, unusual interest was evoked from the crowd which expressed itself as being well-satisfied with the program. To the *News* reporter it appeared that those present were pleased with the program and that Lions should make it an annual event. However, Marion Snow, president of the Lions Club, points out that it will be necessary to charge more next time since a loss was taken on the show, even though it was well-attended.

President Snow is anxious that the businessmen, band members, Dixie College, and all who assisted them in making this rodeo successful entertainment, know the club's appreciation for their assistance and he declares that with this same cooperation it will be possible to give the people of Dixie similar entertainment in the future.

Washington County News
November 14, 1935

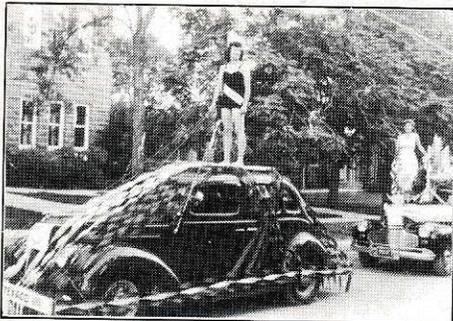
were held in the early years. There were no fences for an arena, so cars and wagons formed the barriers, and without chutes, bucking horses were snubbed up to saddle horses to be saddled and mounted.

Horse race tracks moved from one part of the town to another, depending on where the best straightaway could be found. One was on 700 South, on the straight stretch running east and west where the road now crosses under the freeway. But eventually, probably in the late 1920s, the activity shifted to where the Sun Bowl and ball diamonds now sit in the heart of the city.

Most of that block became a large oval race track, with a tall, elegant grandstand built of wood facing south, right about where the baseline runs from third to home on the present-day Elks ball diamond. To the west was a large, green barn where the city kept its hearse and race horse owners stalled their horses.

Mid-winter race meets were held there for years in December, and they began bucking horses out on the race track infield between races. By 1932 or '33, they began holding a more organized rodeo. Then, in 1935, the newly-organized Lions Club teamed with the American Legion to produce the first official Dixie Roundup on Armistice Day.

Marion Snow was president of the Lions that year, and Gordon Mathis was Legion Commander. Bob Hurley brought the bucking stock. When the show was over, it was questionable whether the rodeo would be continued on an annual basis. Though the crowd was well pleased, and the program went off fine, money was lost on the venture.



big, the birth of a tradition. But for those people, on that day, it was nothing more than a smashing good time.

Looking back, it is hard to conceive of a time when there was no Dixie Roundup. And if it hadn't been for a dedicated group of men back in the thirties, there never would have been one.

There were always people in St. George who saw beyond the ridges that tightly line the community, and looked and hoped for more for the city. It was many of those men who gathered in 1934 to organize the St. George Lions Club. And in many ways, that was where a good share of St. George's greatest stories began.

Recreation and entertainment have always meant different things to different people—but most everyone agrees that most everyone needs at least a little of it once in a while. In the early part of the century the variety of recreation in St. George was sparse. The high school and college basketball teams were good, even great—achieving national notariety. But that was one sport, one season. As most of the community in those days was tied to the land and to livestock, it was natural that the sports of rodeo and horse racing would emerge as important forms of recreation.

On the old square below the Woodward School and the Tabernacle, many rodeos

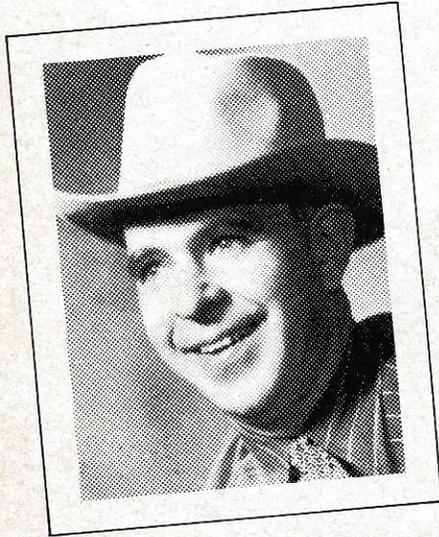


Opposite page:

This nostalgic cowboy scene was shot near Zion National Park. Bottom left, early calf roping somewhere in St. George. Bottom right, Howard Ingell coming down from a bronc at the old arena—note temple in background. This page: Upper left, early Roundup parade beauty. Lower right, Gray Wilkin's 1946 all-around buckle.



But when 1936 rolled around, the Legion and Lions teamed again to produce a rodeo, gathering stock from around the area, and drawing good cowboys like Mellin Cropper, Nig Graham, and Arch McCain. Marion Snow was president of the Lions again that year and was backed up by a whole crew of dedicated club members whose names would



Dick Hammer was an early promoter and participant in the Dixie Roundup.

show up as presidents and chairmen in later years.

The Armistice Day celebrations were more than just a rodeo, though. For example, the 1937 program consisted of a parade at 9:00 a.m. and program in the Tabernacle at 10:00 a.m. (consisting of band and chorus performances, prayer, talks, and tributes). At 11:15 a.m. a football game between Dixie and B.A.C. was played. Then at 2:00 p.m. the rodeo started, and at 8:00 p.m. a big dance was held.

L.A. Porter was president of the Lions in 1937, and that was the first year a rodeo queen was chosen. Helen Seegmiller had that honor.

In 1938 the Dixie Roundup was held in September for the first time. That tradition has continued to the present. Two days of rodeo, September 8 and 9, and three days of celebration, were directed by the Lions, their president Rulon A. Snow, and the American Legion. Addie Hammer was queen.

By 1939 the Lions Club, now led by Dr. L.W. McGregor, had pretty well taken over the Dixie Roundup. The chamber of commerce and other civic groups were involved in various aspects of the celebration, as they always have been. But it was the Lions who officially sponsored the celebration and made the whole thing happen. Ez McArthur was in charge of the rodeo that year which featured a new system for handling the stock at the rodeo grounds. The system was designed to send the bucking stock and riders directly in front of the

grandstand for a more exciting show. Addie Hammer was again crowned queen of the rodeo and reigned over the September 7 and 8 festivities.

In the early years of the Roundup, the queens were chosen by paid ballot. Anyone wishing to vote for a nominee had to pay so much for a ballot. It was a good fund raising scheme for a while, but was soon replaced by a more fair and equitable system of impartial judging.

1940 marked several milestones for the Dixie Roundup. Noma Andrus was queen

"This was the first night rodeo to be staged in southern Utah and was met with hearty approval by those attending."

*Washington County News
September 12, 1940*



"A unique feature of last night's performance was the roping of a Brahma calf by Walter Shelley from his saddle on an Army Jeep which was driven by Gray Wilkin. Miss Eula Whipple, a queen contestant, did fine bronc riding."

*Washington County News
September 12, 1946*

that year. Rodeo Chairman Howard Cannon was backed up by Lions President Wesley Nelson, and they brought in the first outside professional rodeo production company headed by Paul F. Hill. There were also specialty acts such as trick riding, trick roping, and a clown. But most important of all, this was the first year a rodeo had ever been held at night in southern Utah. Lights had been installed at the arena just in time for the 1940 Roundup. The program boasted "Southern Utah's First Night Rodeo—See Them Ride 'Em and Rope 'Em Under the Lights." And come they did. It was one of the greatest spectacles St. George had ever seen.

It was in 1940, or possibly earlier, that the Lions "Kangaroo Court of St. George" was instigated. The court was set up to furnish entertainment for the public, advertise the city and merchants, and aid the Lions Club in paying expenses of the Roundup each fall.

In the 1940 rodeo program, the rules for the Kangaroo Court read, "Any man without a beard will be fined according to the discretion of the court. All fines will be left to

the judgement of the court as to amounts and penalties. Every person not wearing western apparel will be fined. Any person showing unusual success in life will be fined and penalized for being so outstanding in his or her particular field."

Neal Lundberg remembers the court even taking jurisdiction in such offenses as jay-walking. "When Mike Hutchings was the Kangaroo judge, he was considered a hanging judge—he'd get you for two or three dollars for an offense. And that was a good piece of change in those days. It was law west of the Pecos."

The court was also noted for its dunking pools which were often used as an alternative to fines.

In 1941 A.W. McGregor was Lions president and Brown Hail was chairman. Hail, a rodeo participant himself who won his share of the money in those days, continued with Paul Hill's rodeo company that year. Laura Lytle was queen, and the show was a great success.

A grand tradition of parades was begun early in Roundup history. In 1941, and years previous, the Grand Parade was held on Thursday, the Junior Parade on Friday, and the Beauty Parade on Saturday. That tradition has also carried through the years, and each year the parades have become more colorful and exciting.

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Brown Hail chaired the 1941, '42, '47, and '48 Dixie Roundups. He also won his share of the money in the rodeos.



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It was also in 1941 that the first plans for another rodeo grounds were discussed. (See story, "The Building of the Sun Bowl" in this issue.) But it was not until 1947 that the Sun Bowl was complete and the rodeo was moved there.

World War II put a damper on a lot of activities between 1941 and 1945, but the Roundup continued undaunted. Maxine Bowler was queen in 1942, Paul Hill returned with his fine bucking string, Dick Hammer did a bang-up job of publicizing the rodeo, and everyone was proud of the end result. On the front page of the *Washington County News*, the rodeo report was placed among the many pictures of soldiers who were serving their country overseas. "The rodeo was very good," the *News* reported, "but the parades were not as large or spectacular as other years."

In her address from the Lady Lions in the 1942 rodeo book, Mary Phoenix wrote, "Now, more than ever before, we need this Roundup. We can emerge triumphantly from the blanket of chaos and darkness the war has cast over the world, if only our morale is high. Wholesome, exciting recreation of this type is an excellent morale builder."

Come 1943 the Roundup was the "most profitable and gratifying ever." Governor Herbert B. Maw attended, and during lulls in the show he made War Bond Drive talks, receiving rousing applause from the 2,500 spectators. Slat Jacobs and Lindau Foremaster brought the stock that year, and the paper said it would "take a good horse to catch the calves," and the steers were plenty salty too. Will Mackleprang gathered the bucking horses. The parade was limited to floats drawn by horses or cars built before 1915.

During the war years of 1943 and 1944 no

queens were named at the Roundup. In 1944 Neal Lundberg was Lions president and Ez McArthur was rodeo chairman. The paper reported that Miss Betty Jo Morris, in the basket of roses on the Liberty Hotel float, walked off with the \$25 War Bond as first place beauty.

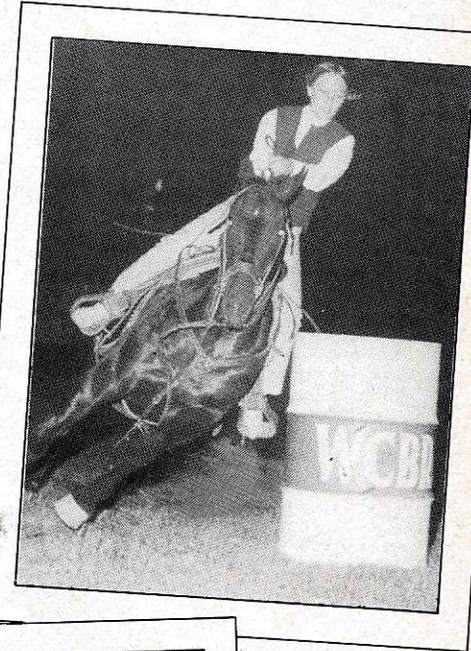
Dick Hammer was rodeo chairman in 1945, and he remembers that as being the first year the rodeo was sanctioned by the Professional Rodeo Association. "We had to put up \$800 to be sanctioned," he remembers. "It was hard for a lot of the club members to accept, but we got a lot of good professional cowboys here, and it paid off." Slat Jacobs was the stock producer again that year, and contestants came from five states to get bucked off his Brahma bulls. Specialty acts that year included Huie Hughes and his famous Ford and bag of tricks. Also, Charlie Brumley and his two trick horses, "Pal" and "Buddy."

By rodeo time in 1946 most of the boys were home from war and ready to rodeo. Gray Wilkin was one of them. He won the All Around Cowboy title that year. (See related story in this issue.)

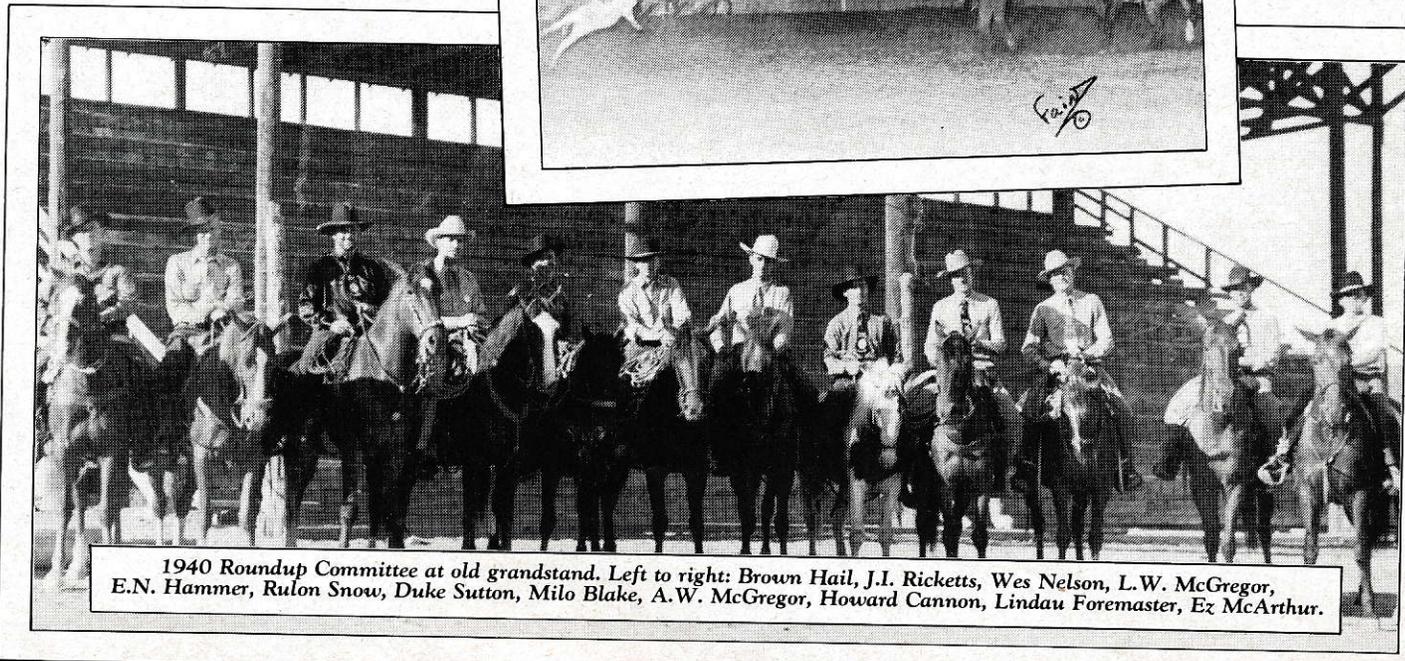
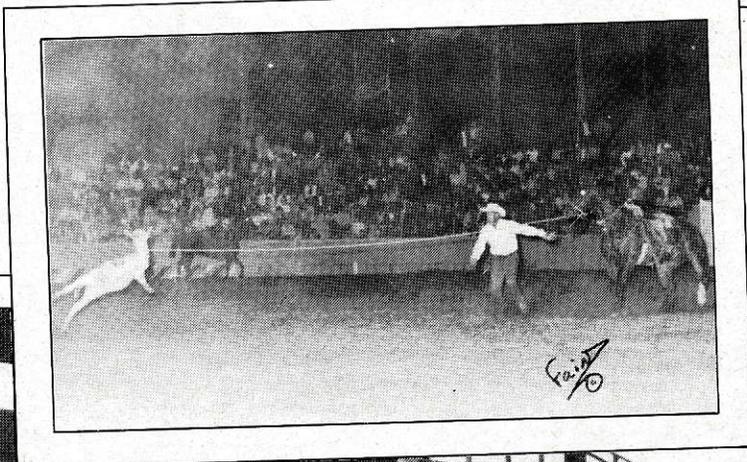
Early in 1947, the Lions began work on the Sun Bowl. (See story, "The Building of the Sun Bowl," in this issue.) It was barely completed in time for the '47 Roundup, and marked the beginning of a new era of sport in St. George.

Originally, the cables on the Sun Bowl fence were not as high as they are now. "The first night we held a rodeo in the Sun Bowl a bull jumped out the southeast end of the arena," recalls Neal Lundberg. "The next morning the rodeo committee met and was real concerned about what we were going to

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Top, Louise "Tweet" Gardner running barrels at the Dixie Roundup. Left, local professional cowboy, George Andrus, roping a calf in the 1968 Roundup.



1940 Roundup Committee at old grandstand. Left to right: Brown Hail, J.I. Ricketts, Wes Nelson, L.W. McGregor, E.N. Hammer, Rulon Snow, Duke Sutton, Milo Blake, A.W. McGregor, Howard Cannon, Lindau Foremaster, Ez McArthur.

ROUNDUP HISTORY

do about it," he says. "We were worried no one would come that night. Well, that night we had more people out to the rodeo than we had ever seen."

Brown Hail chaired the '47 rodeo, as well as the one in '48. Stock contractor Earl Hutchison was brought out of Idaho to put on the show, Jack Oakey was the announcer, and world famous Wilbur Plaughter came to be the rodeo clown, as well as compete in the rodeo. One of the greatest specialty acts that has ever come to St. George appeared in

1947. He was Dick Griffith, a trick rider and roper.

It seems that once the Roundup went to the Sun Bowl, it reached a new plateau of quality and sky-rocketed from there.

Chairmen like Ez McArthur, Anthony Atkin (who served three consecutive years as chairman), Roy Renouf, and Bill Barlocker continued the pace by bringing in stock producers like Earl Hutchison, Ray Skinner, Andy Jauregui, and Wilford Cline. Wilbur Plaughter kept coming back, Slim Pickens came one year, Joaquin Sanchez, Johnny Tatum, and other clowns came. During the mid-fifties, a favorite specialty act at the Roundup was Jay Sissler and his trained dogs. Hobart Normand came to announce, and Governor J. Bracken Lee attended one year.

For many years Dick's Cafe had served as not only the social center for the rodeo, but a rodeo headquarters. In 1951, the VFW Hall was remodeled and became the rodeo headquarters. But Dick's always was, and continues to be, a key gathering point during the rodeo.

"All great cowboys have been here," Dick Hammer says. "They used to come a week before the rodeo, and we'd have jackpot ropings at my arena." Being a professional, card-carrying cowboy himself, Dick was personally acquainted with many of the legends of pro rodeo—men like Dean Oliver, Slim Pickens, and Wilbur Plaughter. Dick roped in many Dixie Roundups with Mark Hopkins, Slats Jacobs, and Matt Cropper.

The posse known as the Ute Rangers began coming to the Roundup from northern Utah thrilling the crowds with precision drill riding. For many years the posses from Las Vegas had been coming. There had been a mutual exchange of support between the Dixie Roundup and the Heldorado rodeo which was put on each May in Las Vegas. "We'd all go down and support their rodeo, and they'd all come up and support ours," remembers Neal Lundberg.

In 1957 a new Roundup era began as Cotton Rosser and his partner Dick Pascoe began putting on the Roundup. That was the first year Clayton Atkin was Chairman of the rodeo. He had signed Cotton after going to see his rodeo in the Cow Palace in San Francisco. Clayton's wife, Joy, began her long involvement in the Dixie Roundup that year as a secretary, liason, and general trouble shooter—an involvement which continued through the years to the present. She is one of many, many people who have worked behind the lines making the Roundup what it is today.

Rosser put on the rodeo in '57 and '58 under chairman Atkin, then in '59 and '60 under chairman Andy Lytle. In 1961, Ray Kohrs produced the rodeo under chairman Barney Seegmiller, then Rosser came back from '62 to '65. People around St. George still talk about the great bucking horses Cotton Rosser brought to town each year. Horses like "Billy Buck," "Heaven Bound," "Broken Blossom," "High Tide," and "Cheyenne." During those years there were

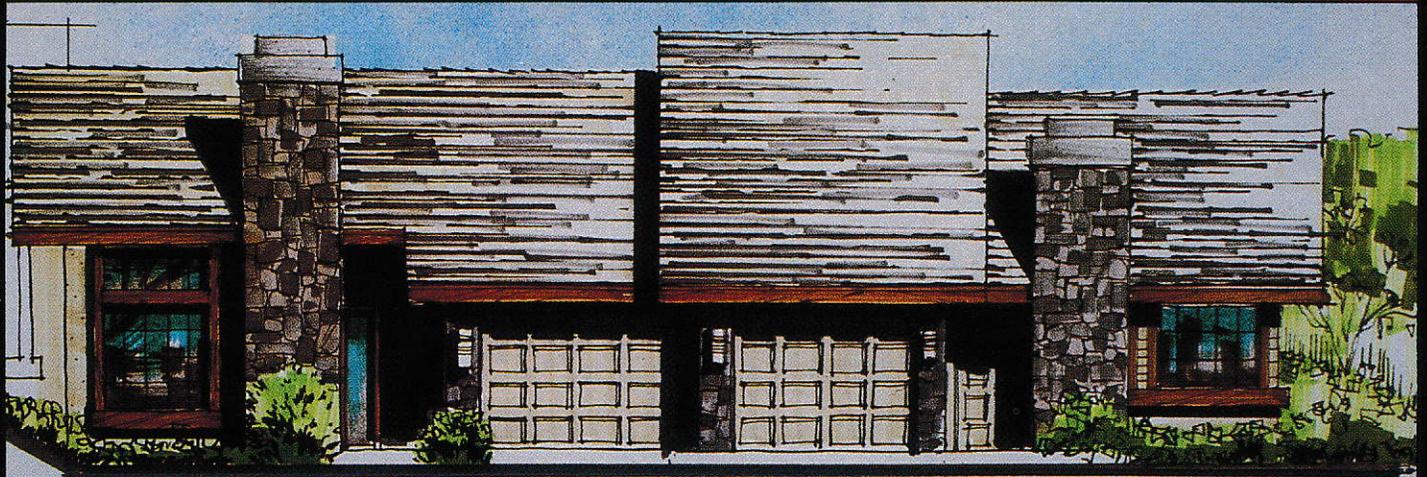
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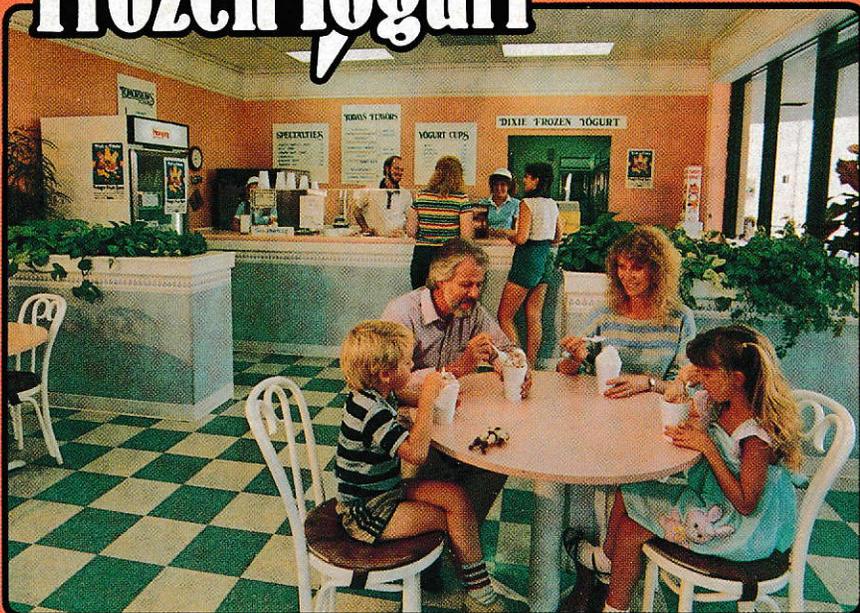
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more people attending the Roundup in one night than lived in St. George.

In 1966 the rodeo committee, under chairman Karl Hutchings, determined it was time for a change. That was the year D.A. "Swanny" Kerby was signed to produce the show—and he has done so to the thrill of southern Utah audiences every year since. With bucking horses like "Alley Cat," and "Hyrum Special," and bulls like his immortal "Number 13," Kerby has consistently put on a top rate rodeo for the Lions for 18 years.

In recent years Roundup-goers have been treated to a wide range of specialty acts, from Roman riders, to monkeys riding sheepdogs. But never were they so thrilled as the year back in the '60s when Jay Ence, Billy Minear, Dean Branham, and Dean Terry rode chariots into the Sun Bowl and proceeded to race in an arena that was not designed for such sport. With Roman gowns flapping in the breeze and horses stomping wildly across the grass, the local charioteers were lucky to get out with their lives.

The greatest cowboys of our time have been to the Roundup. Larry Mahan was here during his reigning years as an all around champion. Shawn Davis, Don Gay, Tom Ferguson, Paul Tierney, Paul Mayo, Bill Smith, Bobby Berger, Leo Camarillo—they've all been here.

Through the years the local cowboys have won their share at the Roundup too. Among the money winners in recent years have been

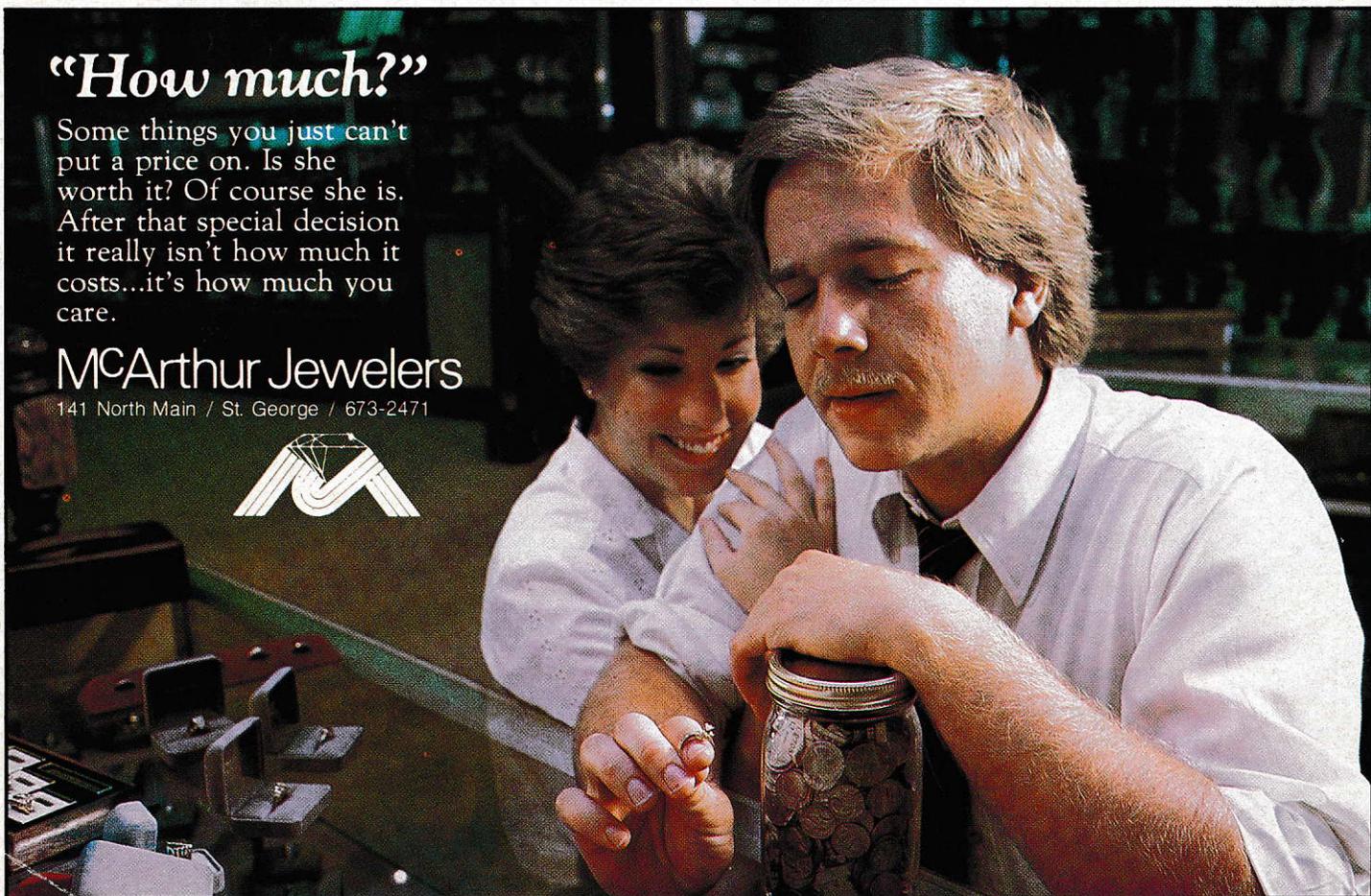
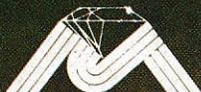
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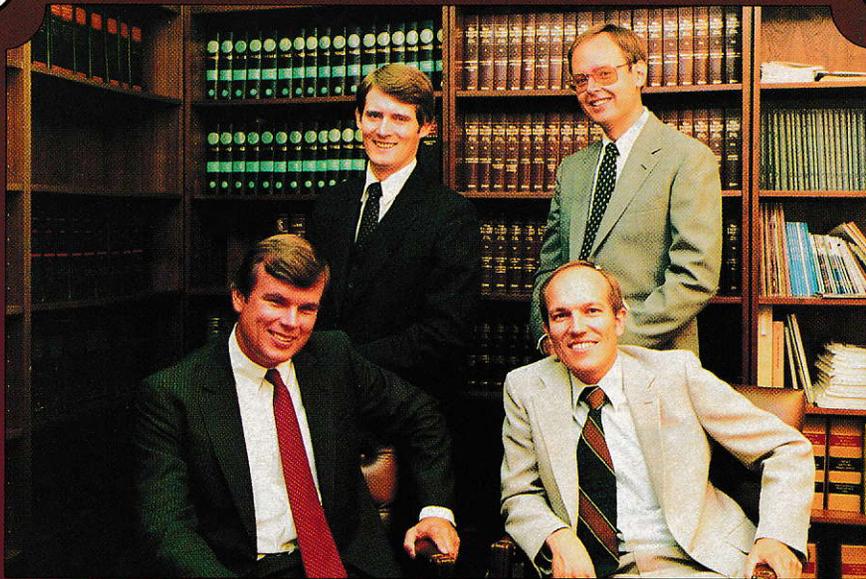
George Andrus, Randy Bowler, Brent Atkin, Doyle Atkin, Tom Drake, Jeff Barlow, Clay Barlow, Doug Sorenson, Mike Peterson, Jay Hardy, Sherman Shelley, Lynn Gardner, and Charles Welch. Many other fine local ropers and riders have participated in the Roundup, as well as many women barrel racers who have thrilled the crowds and won their share of the money.

Through the years, the Roundup has been made possible by hundreds of hard working Lions and local citizens. Some of the people who have worked the hardest have received the least recognition. It is impossible to acknowledge all of the people and all of the contributions. Men like Ronald McArthur, who has been the Lions Club secretary for 29 years, have worked countless hours for the good of the Roundup, and the list could go on for pages.

Dick Hammer believes the secret to it all has been community spirit. "The Lions have always worked together better than any group I've known," he says. "They've worked hard, been dedicated, and what we have now is a result of that hard work, coupled with tremendous community spirit."

Clyde McQuaid couldn't have won more than \$30 in that first Dixie Roundup 50 years ago. But he's seen a lot of things change. Last year he watched world champion Paul Tierney win over \$1,800 at St. George's fall rodeo classic.

And the story just keeps on going. ■



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