IN THE BEGINNING

The Oakdale Saddle Club was started by a group of local "horsemen", and incorporated in July of 1945. They started out by putting on some local horse activities after completing basic work on the grounds they had purchased. First a horse show and local amateur rodeo were held in 1946, and then in 1947 the Clover Fair and Horse Show included such events as horse racing on the quarter mile track; and an amateur rodeo that had bareback riding, calf roping, saddle bronc and bull riding, and team roping. In 1947 Phyllis Hansen was our rodeo Queen. In 1948 John Bowman and John Markham leased the grounds for an RCA rodeo. There were 115 contestants, and Ike Rude and Willie Clay won the All-Around title. John Bowman had been a world champion Steer Roper in 1933, and won the All Around RCA title in 1936. Slim Pickens clowned the rodeo.

Rodeos' emerged in the late 1800's from local cowboy competitions, often held at round-up time. Oakdale, which sits in the fertile valley below the Sierra foothills, seemed a natural place for the sport to be held. It keeps alive a colorful tradition, as the first known "rodeo" was held at Deer Trail in Colorado in 1869. In 1883 Pecos Texas held a rodeo with "actual prizes". In 1887 the first spectator rodeo was held in Prescott, Arizona. Up until recently the "Big Four" rodeos of the professional world, which started in 1911, were: Cheyenne Frontier Days in Wyoming; Pendleton Round-Up in Oregon; Calgary Stampede in Canada; and the California Rodeo in Salinas. If you're from the west you pronounce RODEO, as "row-dee-oh". If you're new at the game or a foreigner, you might pronounce it as "row-day-oh". So don't forget you are in the WEST!.

Several amateur rodeos were held, and then in 1953 the Oakdale Saddle Club along with Bruce Clinton/Bob Barmby, rodeo promoters--put on an RCA sanctioned rodeo. There were 126 contestants, and Clay Carr who later moved to the area, won the All-Around title. He had a well documented career in professional rodeo. In 1954 the Saddle Club took over its' own RCA rodeo and has put one on every year since, on the second full weekend in April. Rain or shine the show goes on! Wanda Weekes, sister of OSC Director Gene Weekes, was the rodeo Queen in 1954. The Christensen Brothers from Oregon were our stock contractors for the first 37 years, until they then went out of business. Mel Lambert announced the rodeo from 1954 to 1977, and is still active in the announcing business. The number of competitors grew from the original 115, to as many as 371 in 1994, and in 2000 we reached 588, which makes us one of the biggest "middle-sized" outdoor 2 day rodeos in the country.

Oakdale was a prime area for horse-related activities and putting on a professional rodeo seemed very appropriate, in this valley of ladino clover, cows and horses, as well as many agricultural products.

In 1957, Harley May of Oakdale won the All Around here and was a top contender for the RCA All-Around championship for 10 years--winning Steer Wrestling world titles in 1952,56, and 65. He also was PRCA president for 5 years, and an OSC Director. Slim

Pickens clowned for the third time. Bill Lane from Riverbank began clowning for the Saddle Club Rodeo in 1959, as well as fighting bulls, and being a barrel-man. He continued working our Rodeo for 25 more years. Local Bill Martinellie won the All Around at our rodeo in 1967, and competed in the national ranks, at the NFR in 1963-67 and again in 1971-72.

The Camarillo brothers, Leo and Jerold between them, competed in a total of 36 NFR's . Leo tied for the All-Around title with Tom Ferguson in 1975, and won the word title in Team Roping in 1972-73, 75-76, and 83. He came in 2nd numerous times and was in contention for the All Around title in 1969, and from 72-82. Jerold competed in 17 NFR's, from 1968 to 1985, and won the Team Roping in 1969 and 1977. He was in the top five for many years. A cousin, Reg Camarillo competed also competed at the NFR for many years.

Ace Berry was another All-Around Champion in 1972, and won-dual titles as one of the youngest competitors (starting at age 15-11) in two different events, bareback riding and team roping in 1972, and won honors as in the NFR in both a riding and timed events.. He won in the saddlebronc's in 71, and team roping in 67. He had the distinction of being a winner of 2 NFR average titles in the same year. Sonny Tureman was also an early competitor from the area, winning a world title in bareback riding in 1948, and going on to compete in this event at the NFR level in 1951, 53 and 56, and then in team roping in 1971-72.

Other local competitors include Ted Nuce who qualified for 10 NFR appearances in Bull Riding, and who won the world title in 1985 and came in 2nd five times. He also sports a Gold Medal won as part of the U.S. rodeo team that competed against Canada in the 1998 Calgary Olympics. Jim Charles competed and the NFR level in 1959-63, and 65-67. Names of others who competed from this area at the NFR included: Clay Carr and John Bowman in the 1930's and 40's; Bill Ward; John Hawkins; Al Hooper; Les and Ed Hirdes; Bob Eidson; Don McBride; Doyle Gellerman; Alan Bach; and Daniel Green. Daniel is a current competitor, who has competed at the NFR from 1994 to the present. He and his partner Alan Bach (another world champion in 1979 and 1990) came in second in 1999. He also was an All Around contender (adding steer wrestling) in 1994-96, and in 1999.

In 1951 a Rodeo dance and parade were held along with the Saturday rodeo. That year rodeo great, Casey Tibbs competed at Oakdale, along with Bill Linderman, the 1950 All-Around RCA winner. The total purse for the rodeo in 6 events was $3,015, and felt to be a good sized "purse" in its day. By today's standards it is considered pitiful. Six events were put on, including: bareback; saddle bronc; bull-riding; steer wrestling which at that time was called "bull-dogging"; calf-roping and it was the first time team roping was included, with 37 competitors. Bill Ward of Angel's Camp, the PRCA "logo" man on Sea-Lion, won the All Around.

In 1955 John Bowman who put on the first RCA rodeo, was our arena manager. In 1960 his daughter Betty established the lovely sterling silver trophy cup for the All Around winner at our rodeo. There were 152 contestants that year. Oakdale was billed as the "first western outdoor" rodeo of the year. 1956 was one of our best advertised rodeos in the "old days".

In 1957, the Oakdale Rodeo was billed as the WORLD'S LARGEST one day outdoor rodeo, with close to 200 entries. Again Slim Pickens clowned. Local activities in 1959 included two nights of dancing, one a street dance where Hiway 120 was blocked off. .

In 1959 we became a two day rodeo, and had around 200 contestants. In 1960 Oakdale earned the title of "COWBOY CAPTIAL OF THE WORLD" due to the large number of successful professional rodeo contestants both local, and those who came here under the tutelage of Harley May, who competed at the National Finals Rodeo level. After starting out as "small potatoes" in the professional rodeo world, we finally came into our own.

The Oakdale Saddle Club Rodeo is unique in that it is one of the very few rodeos of it's size in the U.S. to be put on completely by members of the club, not by professionals or a corporation. Starting in December or early January, the membership become as busy as bees, with preparations that are necessary to put on a quality show. It becomes an everyday chalenge to get things done in time. Some of the jobs include: improvements on our grounds and facilities; hiring a stock contractor to provide the animals for different events; contract acts; concessionaires; publicity and advertising; down to public restroom facilities; and clean-up crews. Every week members are planning and doing the things necessary to present the high caliber rodeo that the audience has come to expect from us. As many as 10,000 people a day have come to our performance, and as few as 3,000 on a weekend, for the those rainy days we occasionally encounter in the 2nd weekend in April.

ENJOY!!   j. conner,   OSC Historian & SECRETARY