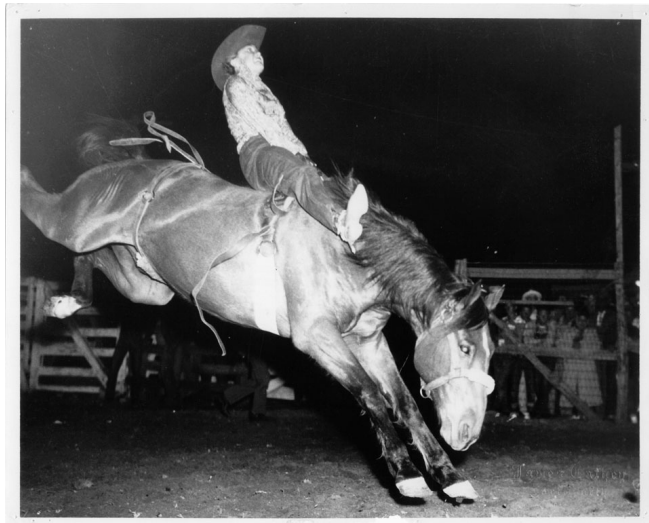


COWGIRL ICONIC



James Cathey Photo
Images courtesy of The Cowgirl

MARGARET OWENS

By Diana Vela, Ph.D
National Cowgirl Museum & Hall of Fame

Every cowgirl inducted in The Cowgirl Hall of Fame has earned her place; they are the who's who of cowgirls. Margaret Owens' (Montgomery) story is singular because it illustrates the fact that cowgirl history is about women supporting women, and the amount of women directly impacted by her, generations over, continues to grow.

After exclusion from larger rodeos, and while competing at all-girl events where rules were understood rather than established, cowgirls knew they needed to formalize and standardize their events or risk losing the opportunities they still had. In 1948, at the St. Angelus hotel in San Angelo, Texas, the Girls Rodeo Association (GRA) came into existence to do just that, and more. Margaret Owens and her sister, Sug Owens Bloxom, had researched legal requirements on founding a non-profit organization, and Margaret, at age 26, was elected its first president.

Margaret managed all incoming correspondence from home while travelling the country (at her own expense), to explain the mission of the new Association (now known as the Women's Professional Rodeo Association, WPRA), recruit members, and build support. And, it was her idea to hire a paid publicity manager, a radical idea for a female sports organization in the 1940s.

Early rodeo cowgirls supported each other in ways beyond words of encouragement, even when that cowgirl was their next competitor. They loaned horses, taught each other new skills, and helped each other improve. The women who formed the GRA, led by Margaret, started a movement, and built an organization that transformed opportunities for thousands of female athletes. The WPRA is the oldest continuously

operating women-run female professional sports organization *in the country*.

Margaret's efforts, with those of the founding board, helped to grow the new organization to 74 members in its first year. After her presidency ended, she agreed to stay on the board for another year and attended every all-girl rodeo for three consecutive years. She became the GRA's first World Champion Barrel Racer, and added World Champion All-Around and Cutting titles to her resume in the first year of the organization. During her first four years as a GRA member, she won over a dozen buckles and five saddles while continuing to grow the organization.

This organization that began with Margaret personally financing recruiting efforts now consistently boasts over 3,000 members with annual payouts exceeding \$5 million. Margaret could have said no to the presidency, left after the first year, or have done the bare minimum. Instead, she committed to creating opportunities that would outlast her.

Margaret was killed in an automobile accident in 1955 at the age of 33. Twenty years later, her sister, Sug, assembled a nomination that led to her induction into the newly established Cowgirl Hall of Fame in 1976. Margaret Owens' story illustrates the enduring power of women supporting women, and is the ultimate example of paying it forward.



Cowgirl Iconic is developed in partnership with and draws from the rich archives of the National Cowgirl Museum & Hall of Fame. Go to cowgirl.net to learn more.

Margaret Owens' 1948 Champion All Around Cowgirl trophy saddle
National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame Collection

 **The COWGIRL**
NATIONAL COWGIRL MUSEUM & HALL OF FAME