

Rodeo ROYALTY

by Diane Rice

Florence Price Youree
has played a major role in
advancing women's rodeo



Even as a newly married young woman in the early 1950s, Florence Price Youree was the object of admiration and a role model for up-and-coming young women in rodeo.

"I saw her in a *Western Horseman* magazine article when I was 12 and lived in the mountains of New Mexico, and I dreamed of meeting her," says Joyce Loomis Kernek, nine years Florence's junior.

Joyce's dream came true nine years later, in 1963, after she'd won the Miss Rodeo America title. "Florence was at the Denver Convention in a booth promoting the barrel race," Joyce continues. "I stood off in the distance and watched the woman I had dreamed of meeting. She was like a hero to me; I'd dreamed of a life of barrel racing.

She was all dressed up in a lamé outfit, signing up rodeos for the Girls Rodeo Association (GRA, now the Women's Professional Rodeo Association, WPRA). She was tireless in that effort; she had bulldog tenacity, in a quiet way.

"I watched her the whole year while traveling to pro rodeos," Joyce adds. "Later, I was elected to the GRA's board of directors and the meetings were held in Florence's home in Addington, Oklahoma. Years later, we also helped found the Barrel Futurities of America [BFA] and served on its board together."

"I just wanted bigger and better things for the girls," Florence says. No one — least of all Florence — knew what her quiet, bulldog tenacity would bring about.

YOUREE
RANCH

FLORENCE'S FOUNDATIONS

Florence was born April 19, 1933, to John Henry and Lena Price in Duncan, Oklahoma, and raised 18 miles south of there in Addington, Oklahoma — which remains her home town.

She and her younger sister, Sherry (Price Johnson), grew up working cattle on the family ranch and attending rodeos with their parents, who were avid rodeo fans. "It was straight barrels then, three barrels in a row," Florence says. "I came home and got one of the ranch horses, Chubby Dun was his name, and started training him. He belonged to my grandfather, and he ended up being a good one."

On one annual family pilgrimage to the Fort Worth Stock Show and Rodeo, Florence became fascinated by the interest in rodeos among women. It was while watching women compete in musical chairs on horseback that she realized there was a place in rodeo for women like her.

Before Florence graduated from high school in Addington, one of a graduating class of 16, she'd met her husband-to-be, Dale Youree. "He was a calf roper," she says. "Although we'd been introduced before that, I first met him at a rodeo, I wanted to ride in the grand entry, and I walked up to him and asked if I could borrow his horse."

They married on February 18, 1950, and after Dale graduated from Oklahoma A & M (now Oklahoma State University), the couple supported themselves by working on Florence's parents' ranch while they rode the rodeo road along with Sherry. A son, John, and a daughter, Renee, joined their family in 1951 and 1958, respectively.

While Florence was pregnant, Dale also started helping out with the barrel horses, and training and selling horses gradually became the young couple's livelihood. They'd frequently ride the same horse at an event — be in calf roping and she in barrels — and then somewhere along the line, sell that horse and start a new one. Wash, rinse, repeat. That process grew into training horses for the public as well.

"I just wanted bigger and better things for the girls."



Florence Youree and Jo Star Junior at the 1966 Houston Rodeo.



Florence's daughter Renee Youree Ward, a member of the Pro Tour Outfit, at the 1985 National Finals Rodeo.

Florence's granddaughter Janice Ward Massey



Florence's granddaughter Cassie Ward Ambrose



Florence's granddaughter Kylie Ward West



Reaching Women In Rodeo
And Fans Of Women In Rodeo

GRA Girls Rodeo
Association



This is
**GIRLS
RODEO**

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1966 All Around Champion Florence Youree (right) with her sister Sherry Johnson, 1962 Champion Barrel Racer, and granddaughter Janae Ward Massey, 2003 Champion Barrel Racer.



Florence (center) with daughter Renee Youree Ward and granddaughter Kyle Ward West.



Florence performing at the Folklife Festival for the Smithsonian Institute on the National Mall in front of the White House in Washington, D.C. on Fourth of July Weekend in 1981.

GETTING INVOLVED

In 1951, at her first GRA-sanctioned event 30 miles from home, friends in the Rodeo Cowboys Association (RCA, now the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association, PRCA) encouraged Florence and Sherry to join the GRA. They did so that season at a GRA All Girl rodeo in Dallas, where true to the custom at that time, Florence got a new pair of Justin boots rather than a cash payout for her barrel race win.

In her first season as a professional, Florence finished third in the World in GRA barrel racing. By 1954 she'd been appointed as GRA barrel racing director.

Beginning in 1959, Florence qualified for the NFR six times, riding a different horse each time: 1959 in Clayton, New Mexico; 1960 in Scottsdale, Arizona; 1962 in Dallas; 1965 and 1966 in Fort Worth; and 1967 in Oklahoma City. Riding Sherry's horse, Red Flaudit, who became a ProRodeo Hall of Fame inductee in 2017, she won the All-Around title in 1966 competing in cutting, barrel racing, flag racing and breakaway roping.

Twice, Florence qualified by default. "When the NFR was in Clayton, I think there was \$200 added and it wasn't worth it for the girls like Sammy Thutman [1965 World Champion] to come all the way from California; they couldn't win enough."

COMPETING AND PROMOTING

From GRA director, Florence became president, where she served from 1960 to 1964. She then resigned to take the secretary-treasurer position. In that capacity, she initiated the monthly *Girls Rodeo News* (now *WPRA News*) with a staff of Dale, John and Renee addressing, stamping and stapling copies while sitting in a circle on the living room floor. "I didn't have any education," she says. "I graduated from this little old school and just did things like I thought they ought to be done; I didn't know any other way."

She also campaigned to get the PRCA to restrict barrel races at their events to GRA-sanctioned events. "Back then," she says, "you could go to a PRCA rodeo and maybe they'd add \$50 or \$100 and anyone could ride."

She recalls her biggest challenge was convincing committees and the PRCA to recognize the GRA. "I talked to a lot of them, and to rodeo producers as well, including Lynn Beutler and Harry Vold, who came here from Canada," she says. "Many of them helped me out."

"Florence Youree is unbelievably gifted when it comes to dealing with people of all walks of life," says barrel racing photographer and longtime friend Kenneth Springer. "She's used that God-given talent to further the goals of not only their horse operation but to advance the GRA/WPRA and the BFA."

During the mid-1960s, Florence became aware that all-girl rodeos were struggling, so she and Dale began producing some in Duncan,



Dale and Florence on the National Mall with the horses they rode for the 1981 Folklife Festival.

Oklahoma, and Wichita Falls, Texas. With necessity as the mother of invention, they used Florence's dad's young bulls and flanked their barrel horses to use for the bareback riding.

The couple also launched Youree Horsemanship Camps, teaching barrel racing and roping to as many as 100 kids for a month at a time. Among their successful graduates were GRA/WPRA World Champions Connie Combs, Missy Long and Jackie Jo Perrin; for several years, Carol Goosee helped teach.

Florence credits her mother and friends with helping care for John and Renee during those busy years. "God has blessed us more than we deserve," she says.

Also during Florence's time as secretary-treasurer, the small purses prompted her to campaign to get barrel racing included at the NFR as one of main events. In 1965, when the NFR moved to Oklahoma City, Florence lobbied Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce Director Stanley Draper to commit to including GRA events with the RCA contests.

With the support of NFR General Manager Clem McSpadden, the NFR featured GRA competition for the first time in 1967. Florence was among that inaugural year's competitors, finishing fourth in the average and sixth in the World in what was to be her final NFR. "An agreement was made that the women competitors would help in the office, carry flags and ride in the parade," she says. Due to its crowd-pleasing success, the next year purse money jumped from around \$1,000 to \$2,500.

In 1970, Florence stepped down after 17 years of GRA service and left her role as road warrior behind. However, she continued to barrel race in futurities, and she and Dale continued their roles as rodeo boosters by starting the Oklahoma Youth Rodeo Association and in 1986, by helping found the wildly successful Barrel Futurities of America (BFA), where Florence served as president for 18 years.

PASSING THE SCEPTER

Florence didn't hang up her competition spurs until forced to do so by a horse accident that resulted in damaged vertebrae in her neck in 1980. But even that didn't prevent her from riding; in 1981, Dale and Florence ran barrels in an exhibition on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., in conjunction with the 15th annual Festival of American Folklife, with many other horse-related events representing the state of Oklahoma.

Her family carried on her winning tradition in the rodeo arena. Her sister, Sherry, had also earned a GRA World Championship in barrel racing, aboard Star Plaudit, in 1962.

Florence's daughter, Renee Youree Ward, qualified for the NFR in 1985. And Renee's three daughters have also earned many titles in the rodeo arena:

- Janae Ward Massey qualified from 2001-2003, winning the WPRA World Championship and the NFR Championship in 2003;
- Kylie Ward West qualified for and ran the fastest time in the finals at the NFR in 2018;
- Cassie Ward Ambrose earned the 2009 and 2010 Southwest Region Intercollegiate All Around Championship and is a three-time College National Finals Rodeo qualifier.

Renee and her girls have now taken over the training and sales operation of Youree Ranch, and these days, Florence and Dale bask in the glow of their rodeo family. "I like to watch the girls work their horses, and we have two little great-grandsons that stay with us while the girls are out working," she says. "The girls have started taking the boys to little playdays on their Shetlands. We have a very close-knit family and we just enjoy them so much."

Through a lifetime spent competing and bearing the standard for women's rodeo for her family and the entire industry, Florence continues to live in her happy place. "Florence's whole life has been a succession of working for and promoting barrel racing, all the while competing as well," Joyce says. "She's the grand dam of barrel racing." ❖

FLORENCE PRICE YOUREE HONORS

- 1993 Named Coca-Cola Woman of the Year for her contributions to the sport of rodeo
- 1996 inducted into the National Cowgirl Hall of Fame
- 2009 Inducted into the National Rodeo Hall of Fame at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum
- 2018 Won WPRA's NFR Lifetime Achievement Award
- 2019 Inducted into the Pro Rodeo Hall of Fame as the first person chosen under the "Notable" category



Dale and Florence Youree when she was inducted into the National Rodeo Hall of Fame at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum in 2009.



The 1996 National Cowgirl Hall of Fame induction ceremony. Pictured from left to right: Post President Jimmie Monroe, Post Vice President Pam Minnick, Post President Florence Youree, and Post President Billie McBride.



The 2019 ProRodeo Hall of Fame Class in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Florence is pictured fourth from the left on the front row.