

## Fruita Fall Festival History

Within a brief 1:06 minutes, Will Cobb cornered, roped and threw the rambunctious steer amidst the cheers of 5,000 onlookers. A cowpuncher from Fruita, Cobb walked away with the \$100 first-place winnings, leaving thirty competitors from eastern Utah, Pinon Mesa and Douglas Creek in the dust. His cohort, Claude Timball, bucked his way into first place on Tipperary, the Lazy Y's reputed outlaw.

That was 1914 during the first Cowpunchers' Reunion when a dollar could buy eighteen pounds of sugar or twelve cans of pork and beans. For two days cowboys competed in horse races, bull riding, roping and bucking contests. Organized by Fruita's Dr. Porter, the competitions were held in late September after the cattle had been rounded up and produce harvested. The rodeo grounds were located south of Patterson's Garage where City Market now stands. Stores closed down for the afternoon performances, and the entire town turned out for the entertainment.

Women showcased their crafts, fruits, vegetables, jellies, jams and baked goods. The Colorado Saxophone Band of Grand Junction provided the music for the first Cowpunchers' Reunion dance. Later, revelers from Grand Junction would ride the Interurban rail system to attend the dances both nights of the festivities.

Bud Johnston, long-time Fruita resident, recalls the Cowpunchers' Reunion as a wild fistfightin', rough-ridin' time. Although too young to participate in the competitions, he remembers that the dances included supper-- with the only whiskey found in the trunks of cars.

Johnston also recollects the Hunters Roundup and the Harvest Carnival, celebrations that began in Fruita after World War II. Held a week before hunting season started, the Roundup found locals gathered for a parade, barbeque, carnival rides and vendor booths. The businessmen barbequed in a pit fueled by wood, and for under \$1.50, diners could enjoy a full meal with soup, salad and dessert. Johnston barbequed for three years in the late 1960s until, he says, it got too hard to collect the wood.

The Fruita Chamber of Commerce inaugurated the Harvest Carnival in November 1945 as a benefit for its memorial building fund with the intention of continuing the carnival in the future as a means of raising funds for worthwhile lower valley projects. The carnival booths were manned by local Fruita service clubs including the Hospital Auxiliary, Loma Ladies Auxiliary, Progressive Women's Club, the Rainbow Girls, VFW, and Phi Alpha Sigma, among others.

With the end of the cowpunching and moonshining eras, the Cowpunchers Reunion, Hunters Roundup, and Harvest Carnival blended in the 1970s to become known as the present-day Fruita Fall Festival.

Today, nearly 50,000 people attend the Fruita Fall Festival, a three-day celebration of harvest and history. Many of the old Reunion and Roundup events continue intact in today's festival including the parade, baking & canning contest, and the Friday night street dance.

Please join the Fruita community for its annual Fruita Fall Festival. Best part of it, save that dollar for sugar or pork and beans. The festival is free!!!