

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received APR 10 1985
date entered MAY 9 1985

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Garfield County Frontier Fairgrounds (GF00-12)

and/or common Burwell Rodeo Ground

2. Location

street & number N/A N/A not for publication

city, town Burwell vicinity of

state Nebraska code 031 county Garfield code 071

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>N/A</u> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: recreational

4. Owner of Property

name Garfield County Frontier Fair Association

street & number c/o Sandy Lowery, Route #6

city, town Burwell vicinity of state Nebraska

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Register of Deeds Office, Garfield County Courthouse

street & number N/A

city, town Burwell state Nebraska

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date On-going federal state county local

depository for survey records Nebraska State Historical Society

city, town Lincoln state Nebraska

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date <u>N/A</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Garfield County Frontier Fair and Rodeo Grounds is a 40 acre tract of level land upon which are situated grandstands, rodeo arena and related structures, race track, animal barns, exhibit buildings and other structures. Dating to 1922, this fair and rodeo grounds is in possession of all of its original facilities.

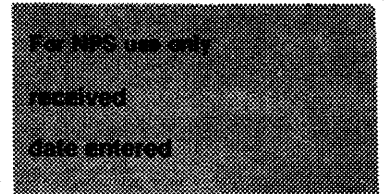
The 40-acre Garfield County Frontier Fair and Burwell Rodeo Grounds are situated on a tract of level ground on the southeast edge of Burwell, Nebraska (1980 population 1383). The fair and rodeo grounds consist of several buildings, structures and corral areas.

While the emphasis of this nomination is being placed on the rodeo and its physical environment, the entire fairground is being included since the county fair is an integral part of the rodeo weekend. Many facilities are shared, (i.e. concession stands, barns, parking, etc.), as the county fair and three-day rodeo occur simultaneously. The structures, buildings, etc. are described below and are numbered according to accompanying site plan.

1. Walk-in Gate, built 1922, frame structure with an arched entrance flanked by twin towers. These towers have buttress-like supports which feature paintings of a bronc and bull rider. (see photo #1).
2. Original Grandstand, built 1922, wooden structure with steel shed roof supported by a truss system. Raised benches provide spectator seating. (See photos #2, 3, 4, 9). Exhibit space located under this grandstand.
3. and 4. Southeast and Southwest Grandstands, built ca. late 70's, attached to original grandstand, same construction as #2. (See photo #9).
5. West Grandstand, built ca. 1930's, same construction as #2. (See photo #10).
6. East Grandstand, ca. 1930's, same construction as #2. (See photo #11).
7. Bucking Chutes, built ca. late 1920's, 10 wooden chutes with gates opening onto the arena. "Crow's Nest" or announcer's booth situated on top. (See photos # 5, 6, 7).
8. Roping and Dogging Chute, built ca. late 1920's, wooden structure with spring-loaded gate for releasing animals. (See photo #8).
9. "Queen's" Barn, construction date unknown, rectangular frame building with horse stalls for use by contestants in the Miss Rodeo Nebraska contest. Access is made to each stall through individual outside doors. Barn has gable roof. (See photo #12).

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10. Three "Browse" barns; dates unknown, similar frame structures, gable roofs. Used for county fair exhibitions. Constructed like site #12 animal barns.
11. Dance Floor; recent addition to fairground, concrete slab for dancing.
12. Animal Barns; built throughout 1920's, nine like frame structures with steel gable roofs. Used for housing and exhibiting livestock during fair and rodeo. (See photos #11, 12).
13. Concession Stands; dates unknown; 3 small frame gable roofed structures used by various organizations for selling refreshments.
14. Rest Rooms; modern restroom facilities housed in a concrete block building with gable roof.
15. Exhibit Building; date unknown; frame structure, gable roof.
16. Shed; date unknown, frame building, gable roof, used for storage.
17. Track, ca. 1922; half-mile dirt race track, circles arena, holding pens and most of the grandstands.

The remainder of the property is grassland and is used for parking during the fair and rodeo.

The Garfield County Frontier Fair Association is very interested in the preservation of the facilities and they maintain a regular program of repair and repainting of the structures.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) recreation

Specific dates 1922 Builder/Architect n/a

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Garfield County Frontier Fair and Burwell Rodeo Ground is significant socially as a place for people to gather who enjoy the sport of rodeo and the other activities which accompany the annual rodeo and county fair. The production and promotion of this grand scale event serves to unify the local citizens and also the rodeo participants who represent many areas of the United States and Canada. The nationally recognized Burwell Rodeo has recreation significance as the oldest (1922) continuous rodeo in Nebraska and possibly the United States, in which the original structures are still in use.

The sport of rodeo began in the late 19th century as a natural result of the working cowboy's desire for recreation. They created their own games on the isolated range using horses, cattle and ropes. Especially after the annual spring and fall roundups, cowboys seemed to have an instinct for competition and matching skills used in their daily work. When round-up work was completed, the men would relax and "play" at riding and roping. Usually there would be spectators from nearby ranches cheering the cowboys on. Soon the riders were competing for prizes even during these relatively unstructured, casual competitions.

The first actual publicized rodeo was held in Prescott, Arizona ca. 1900. Public interest was high due to the daring, skill, courage and "romance" of the event.

As rodeo's popularity grew, problems developed. In 1936, the Cowboy's Turtle Association was created to protect cowboys from misuse by promoters. This organization gave way to the Rodeo Cowboys Association (RCA) in 1945 which continues to govern the world of professional rodeo. The RCA makes the rules for fair and honest competition, penalizes cheaters and is concerned with protecting livestock. This association schedules rodeos around the country so there is little or no conflict, and has a point system for selecting champions.

The major events in rodeo include the following:

Women's Barrel Racing. This is a timed event in which the contestant must cover a course around three barrels placed in a triangular or cloverleaf pattern in the arena. A rider must complete this course and return to the starting line in 16-17 seconds to "make a good showing" and hope to place.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 40 acres See continuation sheet
Quadrangle name Burwell, SE Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A	<u>1</u> <u>4</u>	<u>4</u> <u>8</u> <u>9</u> <u>9</u> <u>7</u> <u>0</u>	<u>4</u> <u>6</u> <u>2</u> <u>4</u> <u>8</u> <u>0</u> <u>0</u>	B	<u>1</u> <u>4</u>	<u>4</u> <u>8</u> <u>9</u> <u>9</u> <u>7</u> <u>0</u>	<u>4</u> <u>6</u> <u>2</u> <u>4</u> <u>4</u> <u>3</u> <u>0</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C				D			
E				F			
G				H			

Verbal boundary description and justification

This property is described as the NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 24, T21 North, R 16 West, which contains 40 acres and includes all historically associated property.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
NA			

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Janet Jeffries Spencer

organization Nebraska State Historical Society date February, 1985

street & number 1500 R Street telephone 402/471-4767

city or town Lincoln state Nebraska

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Marion O. Knecht date 3/25/85

title Director, Nebraska State Historical Society

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register
**Entered in the
National Register**

John A. Byers
Keeper of the National Register

date 5/9/85

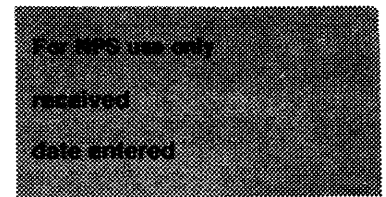
Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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Continuation sheet Significance Item number 8 Page 2

Calf and steer roping. This timed event requires a coordinated effort between the horse and rider. One end of a lariat rope is tied to the saddle horn while the other forms the catch loop. After the calf is released from the roping chute the rider attempts to twirl his rope and drop the loop around the calf's neck from the back of a galloping horse. Once the calf is caught the horse backs up to pull the rope taut around the calf's neck while the cowboy throws the calf to the ground, ties three of his legs together with a "pigging string." This can be done in a matter of just a few seconds.

Bull Riding. Riding a Brahma bull requires excellent balance. A woven rope with a single handhold is wrapped around the bull's body just behind his shoulders. The rider must stay on the animal eight seconds to make a qualifying ride.

Saddle Bronc and Bareback Bronc Riding. These two bucking horse events also require that the cowboy ride the animal for eight seconds while spurring the horse (with dulled spurs) from neck to flank.

Steer Wrestling. This timed event calls for a mounted rider to start out after a fast moving steer while another cowboy or "hazer" rides along side the steer to keep him running straight. The steer wrestler or "dogger" leaps from the back of his running horse, grabs the steer's horns, stops the animal and wrestles it to the ground.

Other events such as wild horse racing, cowpony racing and the Clown Classic bull fight competition add to the excitement of the rodeo.

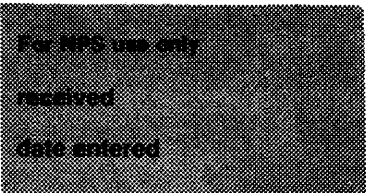
The idea of permanent rodeo at Burwell conceived by local real estate man Homer C. Stokes. In July 1921 while on a business trip into western Kansas, Stokes stopped at Norton, Kansas where a rodeo was being held and after attending the show, he decided that Burwell would be a good location for such an event to be held in conjunction with the Garfield County Fair.

Stokes devised a plan whereby local businessmen donated \$25.00 each and a local show was held in a field just north of the present rodeo grounds. An admission of 30¢ was collected from spectators and after the books were balanced a \$500 profit was made. Enthusiasm was high and a meeting was held to make plans for a permanent rodeo at Burwell. A corporation was formed and stock was issued at \$50.00 a share. Land was purchased and the erection of permanent structures began. Barns for horses, cattle, hogs and poultry, chutes, race track and a grand stand capable of seating 500-800 people were completed just 30 days before the first big rodeo in September 1922.

This 1922 rodeo attracted nationwide interest with riders from states other than Nebraska competing.

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Aside from the regular events, the Burwell Rodeo has also included other western entertainment. Bands of Sioux Indians staged exhibitions in the early years and trick riders have long been a part of the entertainment between events. Recording artists and other musical groups have also been featured.

In 1947, the Burwell Rodeo Queen contest was instigated. This has continued to be an annual event. By the 1950's, the contest drew competitors from across the state who were judged on personality, appearance and horsemanship. The winner is crowned Miss Rodeo Nebraska and is eligible to compete in the Miss Rodeo America contest.

By the 1930's, the Burwell Rodeo had grown and improved and become one of the big shows on the rodeo circuit. The rodeo has held memberships in the Cowboys Turtle Association and the RCA since their inceptions. Considered a middle-sized rodeo on the national circuit, Nebraska's Big Rodeo falls just behind the nation's "Big Four" rodeos in Salinas, California; Cheyenne, Wyoming and Pendleton, Oregon.

Though attendance has slacked off in recent years, Nebraska's Big Rodeo at Burwell continues to be a popular attraction in the State.

The Burwell Rodeo Ground has social and recreational significance. For over sixty years, people have been gathering at the fair and rodeo ground for social interaction, sporting entertainment, and participation. The members of the Garfield County Frontier Fair Association spend much time and effort working together to produce and promote the rodeo. This big event serves as a unifying force for the people in the county.

In terms of recreation, the Burwell Rodeo is the oldest continuous rodeo in Nebraska, with all of the original 1922 structures still in use. In checking with State Historic Preservation Offices in other states where rodeo is a popular sport, it was determined that this may very well be the oldest professional rodeo facility in the United States as far as extant original structures. In the world of professional rodeo, the Burwell Rodeo is highly regarded as a well organized and well executed RCA event.

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Continuation sheet

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Continuation sheet Geographical Data cont. Item number 10

Page 1

NO UTM REFERENCES AVAILABLE

Quadrangle Name Burwell, Nebraska

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

C latitude 41° 46' 24" longitude 99° 07' 32"

D latitude 41° 46' 37" longitude 99° 07' 32"

NORTH ENTRANCE



GARFIELD COUNTY FRONTIER FAIR GROUNDS (GF00-12)

NO SCALE
 MAP DRAWN BY STEPHEN PONDELIS, JULY, 1984.

- KEY:
1. WALK-IN ENTRANCE
 2. ORIGINAL GRANDSTAND
 3. SE GRANDSTAND
 4. SW GRANDSTAND
 5. WEST GRANDSTAND
 6. EAST GRANDSTAND
 7. BUCKING CHUTES
 8. ROPING & DOSSING CHUTE
 9. QUEEN'S BARN
 10. BROWSE BARN
 11. DANCE FLOOR
 12. ANIMAL BARN
 13. CONCESSION STAND
 14. REST ROOMS
 15. EXHIBIT BUILDING
 16. SHED
 17. TRACK

