

Laura Lee Mertz remembered the rodeo.

“Loved that Rodeo! What action and excitement to watch it happening in front of you. We used to sneak in under the fence!”

“We’d ride our bikes down there for days ahead of time to see if they were there yet with the horses!” said Mary Pflgearm.

There was no rodeo in 1971-1973. In 1974, the RCA held a rodeo again in Shakopee. There was no rodeo from 1976-1980. The RN Bar Pro Rodeo came to town in 1981 and 1982.

Since 1982, there were no more rodeos. In the spring of 1999, the Pat Thielen Rodeo Arena was dismantled. The area next was a sledding hill, and in 2007, when the park was redeveloped, the area was officially named the Pat Thielen Recreation Area.



Picture by LeRoy Lebens

Robert George Pat Thielen died on June 19, 1991. But as Mary Ann Mertz noted, the memory of Pat Thielen and the rodeo is still remembered by many. “That was so much fun! Community spirit was high for all of these fun events!”



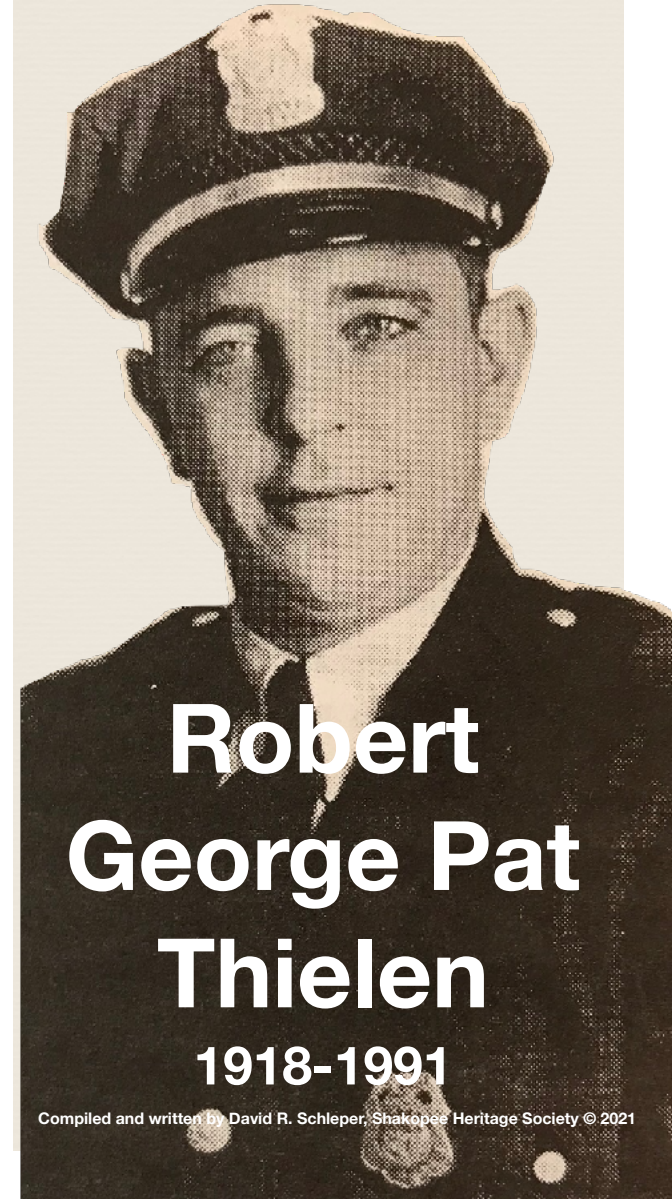
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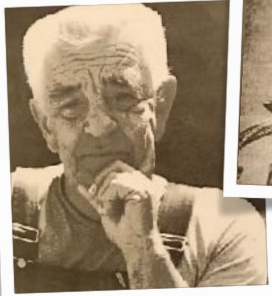


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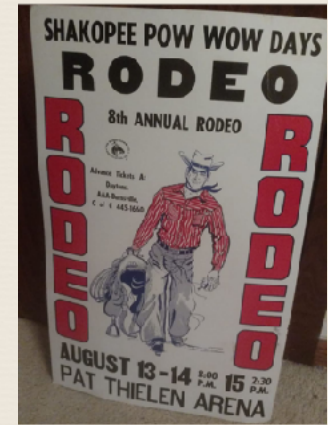
**Robert
George Pat
Thielen**
1918-1991

Compiled and written by David R. Schleper, Shakopee Heritage Society © 2021



On left is a picture of the Pat Thielen Rodeo Arena. Picture by Mary Pflieger.

On right is the Rodeo poster from 1964. Patty A Thielen-Best, Pat's daughter and member of the Shakopee Heritage Society, remembered this year because it was the first time she competed at the professional Barrel Racing competed.



Robert George Pat Thielen was born on October 26, 1918, one of nine children of John and Augusta Thielen in Shakopee. Pat, as he was called, married Eleanor Osowski in 1945.

Pat was a Shakopee law enforcement officer for 31 years, including 30 years as the Chief of Police. Pat visited every beer parlor and night club in 1947 and slowly stopped the illegal gambling and liquor operations in town. He was involved in various shootings. He trapped mud turtles. But the one area that many young children, now much older, remember best was the rodeo.

The first rodeo happened in August 1955. The 3-day event was held at Riverside Park. The rodeo was produced by the George Stichka Rodeo Company of Nebraska. Each of the four performances drew 5,000 people. Sunday before the rodeo's performance, a parade was held through the town's streets and down to the rodeo grounds. The event was sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce, and the proceeds funded youth recreation programs.

The next rodeo was sponsored by the Shakopee Boosters. Ticket prices were \$2 for reserved seats, and fifty cents for children. The weather didn't cooperate, and attendance was down. The chamber decided that it was too much work and expense to continue.

The police chief, R. G. Pat Thielen really loved the rodeo and wanted it to continue. He found some land by the Minnesota River, just east of the original spot, and the east end of Huber Park. He set out to build a rodeo arena. Pat filled in the site with large amounts of dirt and got the fencing and seating from the arena donated.

"Every time Pat would go down to Hal Warren at Northern Culvert, Hal would run and try to hide on him and say, 'Oh Christ, here comes Pat, he is gonna want fence post, he's gonna want culverts for the rodeo area.' Well, that whole rodeo area was all done with fencing, post, and culverts from Hal," said Officer Kaley.

One long-term Shakopee person remembered Pat Thielen and the rodeo. "Even though he chased me and others from one end of town to the other, he always made sure he rounded us up right before Pow-Wow-Days. Then he'd make us lug cement blocks and planks down to the Rodeo arena for the event seating." At the end of the week, the kids got free tickets and Buffalo burgers that Pat cooked in a pit next to the river. Pat would give us a big smile and tell us all "Stay out of trouble now or will see ya boys next year."

John A. Metcalf noted that "Pat loves the young people and they respect him. His philosophy is to talk to them, to advice and council them, before a situation became serious....Young boys like him and work for him, When Pat called for help the kids eight to eighteen, without adult help, build a rodeo park complete with stalls, fences, and a seating capacity of 1,000."

"Pat said, 'When the kids have something constructive to do they are not getting into trouble.'"

In 1964 the High School Rodeo was held at Pat Thielen's new rodeo grounds in Huber Park. There was just one performance. Admission was free with a Pow Wow Days bottom.

Mary Gerold Randklev said, "I loved the rodeo. At age 9 or 10, I got my first pair of NEW jeans that I wore to the rodeo!"

Ken Grunst remembered, "I would spend hours down there between shows. Got excited to see 3 red trucks bringing the horses cattle and the bulls. Of course, for working, we got in free that was a big deal back then!"

By 1970, the rodeo grounds were officially dedicated to Pat Thielen. A sign reading "Pat Thielen Rodeo Arena" was placed at the gate.