



Virginia (Vale) Kelly

Notable – Accomplishments/Contributions

Ballooning for Ginger (Vale) Kelly began in 1972 when she and her husband Nat Vale met Chauncey Dunn at Whitmore College in Walla Walla, Washington. He was there to inflate a hot air balloon for the homecoming event. They invited Chauncey to their ranch for dinner and that was the beginning of a long relationship and was the beginning of her ballooning career. In 1973 she contacted Gladys Buroker, a long time aviator and balloon pilot in Athol, Idaho and began taking lessons in Gladys' Semco balloon. After 2 training flights she was signed off to solo with an admonishment "not to go out and kill herself." In 1974 she attended the Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta and was signed off by Sid Cutter as a commercial pilot. She had the distinction of being the first female commercial balloon pilot in the State of Washington.

In 1974 the Vales' along with other Washington pilots, the Lloyd's, attended the World's Fair in Spokane where 10 balloons launched at high noon. They made the front page of the Spokesman Review, along with President Richard Nixon who cut the opening ribbon that sent them into the sky. Also, in 1974 Ginger and Nat Vale with balloons flown by the Mick/Sally Vale, Gladys Buroker along with another balloon flew from the wheat fields of the Vale Ranch. The next day, 3 of the same balloons lifted off the Veteran's Hospital grounds in Walla Walla. That was the beginning of the Walla Walla Balloon Stampede that has survived to this date.



The Surviving members of the organizers of the Balloon Stampede taken at the 40th event.. Mick Vale, Ginger (Vale) Kelly, Scott (Irving) Shields, Jeff (Kong) Shields

Ginger became a member of the Balloon Federation of America and was a 4 year correspondent for the national Ballooning Journal. She was a charter member of the National All Female Balloon Pilot's Association, a member of the Ninety Niners and the Northwest Balloon Association.

Ginger flew at the National Balloon Championships in Indianola, Iowa from 1974 to 1976. She told a reporter from the *Walla Walla Union-Bulletin* that the event in Iowa was "sort of like the Pendleton Round-Up without the horses. They've got balloons instead." She flew at the Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta and many more events throughout the Western states and the Midwest. *She also participated in Malcom Forbes attempt to cross the Atlantic in 1975.*

Ginger's enthusiasm for ballooning was contagious and she loved sharing her interest with students, adults and many local service organizations. She continued her interest in writing about ballooning and had several articles published in national publications.



Virginia Kelly and Nat Vales balloon Demeter flies near the Blue Mountains in the Walla Walla Valley in 1974

She helped organize the first BFA sanctioned event in the Pacific Northwest and was a scoring officer in the first City of Roses Race in Portland. In 1976 Ginger placed 3rd in the first BFA National all-female competition held in Reno, Nevada.

In 1978 Ginger was named Volunteer of the Year at the Walla Walla Balloon Stampede for her dedication and support of the event. In 1999, she was the honorary balloonmeister at Walla Walla. In 2004 she was presented the President's Award by BFA President Charlie Sundquist for outstanding service to the history of ballooning. Ginger is an icon in ballooning. She continued to volunteer in an area that she loves.



See a 1976 article from the *Ballooning Journal* on the Balloon Stampede in Walla Walla, Washington and an article from the Fall 2019 *Columbia Magazine of Northwest History* about Virginia on the following pages:

Balloon Stampede



in Washington

by Ginger Vale

The first BFA-sanctioned balloon race of the Pacific Northwest was launched May 1st and 2nd in Walla Walla, Washington with thirteen balloons from Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and California. Labeled as the Walla Walla Balloon Stampede because the Northwest is so completely horse oriented, organizers Bill Lloyd and Nat Vale figured "Stampede" smacked just enough of the horse lingo to draw the interest of the area people.

Marsh Aviation, City-County Airport of Walla Walla, served as briefing headquarters for balloon inspection, registration, weather checks, and general meeting of pilots, crews, and officials. The notorious Fudpucker World Airline stewardess/Walla Walla Division greeted the sleepy balloon enthusiasts in the morning with coffee and donuts for the fun two-day flying event.

With the blessings of clear skies, kind winds and instructions from Balloonmeister Col. Chauncey Dunn, twelve pilots lifted off from the Walla Walla High School in hot pursuit of Gladys Buroker as the Hare in her red, white, and blue Challenger. Dennis Bradley and Lorie Torgerson, a Seattle team, sneaking in on a higher wind, landed only 37 yards from the Hare. Bill Lloyd of Walla Walla was 108 yards away from Harry Wilcox of Lewiston, Idaho landed 165 running yards from target.

Pilots, crews, race officials and all interested balloon followers (totalling some 300) descended on the Vale's wheat ranch for a potluck supper, swim, and rest in the sun to discuss the morning's flight and watch the local sky divers "drop in" for lunch. After several attempts to launch in the late afternoon, the racing for the day was cancelled because of wind. The pilots and crews collected at a local Pizza parlor and after a few cold beers and a lot of pizza, were well into the night with balloon stories and slides.

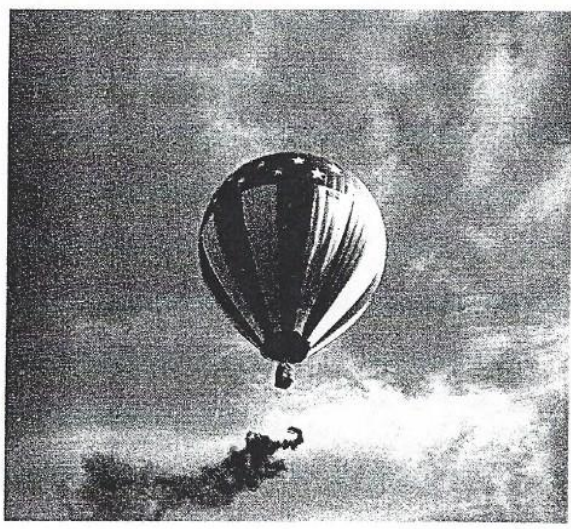
Sunday's flying was much more challenging with winds aloft from 12 to 20. After a two hour wait on weather, Dick Simundson led off as Hare with 10 balloons spread all over the sky. High



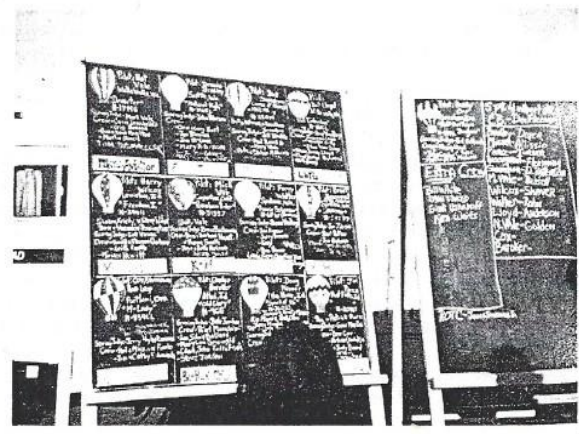
Thirteen balloons at the Walla Walla Stampede got off to flying starts with the popular airborne game of 'hare-and-hounds'. Photo by Dr. Lee Ballard.

rolling wheat fields made it an Easter egg hunt for the chase crews trying to locate the balloons. As the wandering pilots and crews returned, the weather cleared for an awards brunch at Bill and Rosemary Lloyd's home and yard. Handcarved balloon plaques, ceramic wall hangings, kites, balloon paperdolls and one very ugly Walla Walla tie were among the awards presented. Wilcox, Lloyd, and Bradley received a 3-way tie for first for the 2 events.

The following weekend, an extension of the Stampede was held at an alternate launch field (only 200 miles northeast of Walla Walla) at Henley Aerodrome in Athol, Idaho. Nat Vale of Prescott, Washington won the three mile target drop, hitting



Gladys Buroker of Athol, Idaho flies anything from tiger moths to gliders to balloons. Here, she commands the Hare balloon in the Walla Walla Balloon Stampede. Photo by Ginger Vale.

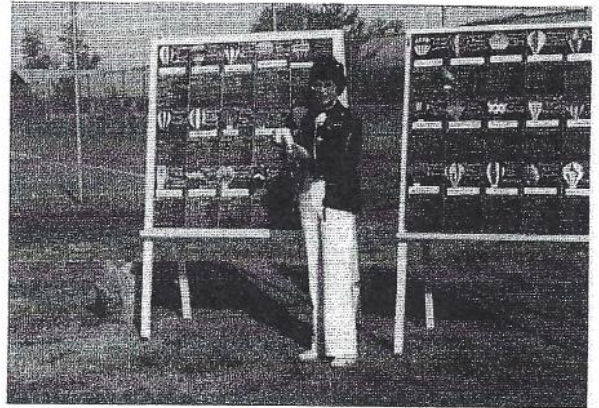


This scoreboard, designed by Cyndra Lloyd Van Donge and Ginger Vale, shows the color and design of each participating balloon, information on the pilot, his scoring judge, crew, and sponsor. It's a great idea for any rally. Photo by Ginger Vale.

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WASHINGTON GALLERY

Historic images from museums and
archives around the Evergreen State.



GINGER KELLY AND THE WALLA WALLA BALLOON STAMPEDE

Ben Murphy, Whitman College and Northwest Archives

"Balloon fever" began for Ginger Kelly in September 1972 when she and some friends saw a flight demonstration on the Whitman College campus as part of homecoming festivities. They met and spent time with pilot Chauncey Dunn and his all-female crew. From that point, Kelly and friends were hooked.

Kelly and a few other local Walla Wallans took ballooning lessons, and by February 1974, Kelly attended the third annual Balloon Fiesta Race in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where she completed requirements to earn her balloon pilot's license.

Not long after, Kelly and her then-husband Nat Vale bought their first balloon—a Raven Aerostar Balloon named *Demeter*—and began flying it at events around the country. They were one of ten balloons invited to fly at the opening ceremony of Expo '74, the Spokane World's Fair. That same year, Kelly began attending the National Balloon Championships in Iowa, and later told a reporter for the *Walla Walla Union-Bulletin* that the event in Iowa was "sort of like the Pendleton Round-Up without the horses. They've got balloons instead."

In 1976, Kelly and Nat brought their passion back to the Walla Walla Valley and, with Bill Lloyd, organized the first Walla Walla Balloon Stampede. The event was a success from the start and has remained a local favorite for nearly 50 years. Walla Walla will host the 43rd Annual Stampede from October 16 through October 20, 2019.

Ginger Kelly helped run the Stampede until 1985, when the Walla Walla Valley Chamber of Commerce was invited to take the reins. Kelly was named Honorary Balloonmeister in 1999, and in 2004 the Balloon Federation of America gave her an award for outstanding service to the history of ballooning.

TOP LEFT: Ginger Kelly and Nat Vale's balloon *Demeter* flies near the Blue Mountains in the Walla Walla Valley in 1974.

TOP RIGHT: An aerial shot of balloons taking flight from Walla Walla High School during the first annual Walla Walla Balloon Stampede in 1976.

ABOVE: Ginger Kelly with the scoreboards at the first annual Walla Walla Balloon Stampede in 1976. These hand-drawn chalkboards recorded the names, colors, pilots, crews and hometowns of each balloon, both for score-keeping and for those in attendance to identify the balloons in flight.

Kelly took pride in her role as a historian for local ballooning. She compiled 55 scrapbooks of material including news clippings, photographs, programs, newsletters and other ephemera documenting her travels, and especially the Stampede. She donated these materials, including those seen here, to the Whitman College and Northwest Archives in December 2018.

Even with all these experiences and all that history, the feel of ballooning is difficult for an experienced pilot to describe. In a 1995 profile in the *Walla Walla Union-Bulletin*, Kelly put it simply.

"You've got to go for a ride to understand," she said. ☺