

DEADWOOD WALL OF FAME 2005

Josephine "Josie" Arsaga

Born: April 23, 1909

Died: December 13, 2001

Visitors to Deadwood's Old Style Saloon #10 can usually count on certain standbys: a lively crowd, free-flowing drinks and a vibrant music scene. Up until late 2001, patrons had one other constant on which they could always count: Josie Arsaga and her dancing.

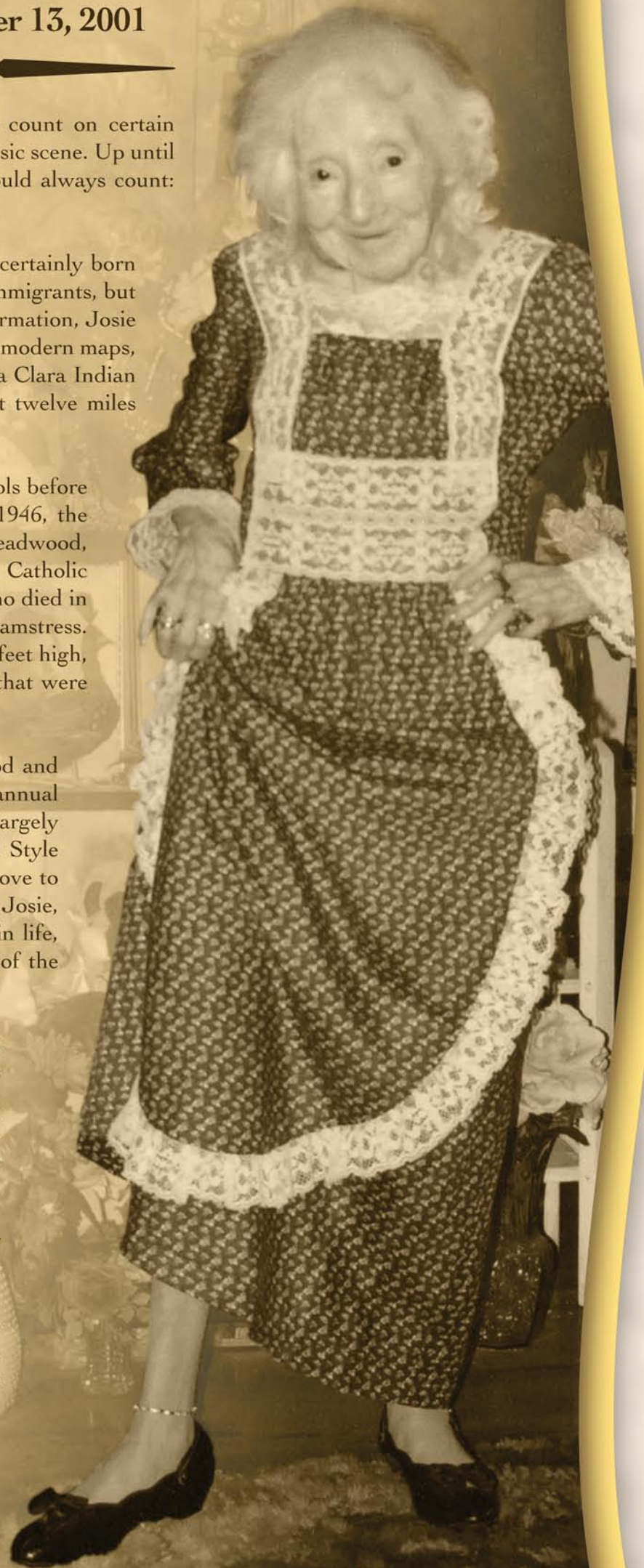
Very little is known about Josie's early life. She was almost certainly born on April 23, 1909 to Felipa and Tiburcio Almeraz, Mexican immigrants, but her place of birth is more mysterious. According to family information, Josie was born in Los Mesia, New Mexico. No such town exists on modern maps, though there is the village of La Mesilla, located on the Santa Clara Indian Reservation north of Santa Fe, and La Mesa, a town about twelve miles north of the border with the Mexican state of Chihuahua.

Josie made it through the second grade in New Mexico schools before leaving for Colorado, where she married John Arsaga. In 1946, the Arsagas moved to the Black Hills and took up residence in Deadwood, where Josie became an active member of Saint Ambrose's Catholic Church. In between taking care of her nine children - two who died in infancy - Josie learned to become an excellent cook and seamstress. The latter was a necessity for Josie, who stood just over four feet high, because she could rarely find clothing in department stores that were small enough to fit.

John passed away in 1971, but Josie remained in Deadwood and soon became a local legend. Although her participation in the annual Days of '76 parade is still noted among locals, her fame grew largely from her spirited dancing. She became a regular at the Old Style Saloon #10, where she would use her boundless energy to move to the beat of the modern rock music that was usually played. Josie, who was driven to and from the bar by its employees later in life, would typically stay until the bar closed in the early hours of the morning.

Although Josie's musical tastes were modern, her sensibilities were more old-fashioned: she would dance with men only after a polite and proper request was delivered. Fortunately, Josie acquired a legion of fans among both local residents and travelers passing through, and she was never at a loss for a willing dance partner.

Josie continued to dance at the Old Style Saloon #10 until her death on December 18, 2001. She was buried in the Oakridge Cemetery outside the city. She still has a throng of admirers, including her seven surviving children (many who still reside in the Black Hills) and her grandchildren, great grandchildren and great-great grandchildren, who collectively number more than three dozen.



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