

North Lanark fair was born in Carleton Place

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by Edna Gardener Lowry

Who is there that doesn't like to go to the fair? We think of the old song which says 'Hi Ho, Come to the Fair'. There is excitement in the air, there is so much to see and to hear and so much going on all around you.

We cannot but look back to those early days so far in the distance when the pioneers of the area felt the need to get together each fall, and show with pride some of the highlights of the year's work; "where old friends could meet, to meet new friends."

The annual fair of the North Lanark Agricultural Society is one that we should enjoy. It is one of the oldest fairs in the Ottawa Valley, continuously in operation each year without a break. It began in Carleton Place, not Almonte, away back in 1840 when the Bathurst District Agricultural Society was formed.

The Bathurst District included Lanark and Renfrew counties and that part of Carleton County which included Bytown. It had Perth as its judicial centre, here all property was registered and all court cases tried, even for Bytown. However, the Bathurst District gave way to the riding of Lanark and Renfrew and finally the North and South ridings of Lanark were created in 1848.

The North Lanark Agricultural Society continued from the former district society.

The annual "Show Fair" was held for a number of years in Carleton Place. Then because many more Ramsay people were exhibitors, a meeting was held in the Ramsay town hall, on the 8th line near the Auld Kirk, Jan 22, 1858. There the Constitution was drawn up for the North Lanark Agricultural Society which was to hold its annual fair at Ramsayville, now Almonte.

For a few years the fair was held on the McFarlane Farm where Boyd Jamieson now lives. An annual picnic was also held there by the society.

However in 1862 three acres of land were purchased in the town beside the river where it has remained.

An agricultural hall and drill shed was built in 1865 for this was the time of the Fenian Raids. In 1868 the roof fell in from the great weight of snow so

the present agricultural hall had to be built the next year. It provides space for exhibits of fruits and vegetables, flowers, grain, baking, canning, sewing and children's exhibits, as well as commercial displays and refreshment counter and tables.

In 1868 the spacious grand stand was erected where over the years horse lovers have witnessed races, hurdle jumping and high stepping beauties, massive draft horses and parades of horses and cattle in the ring.

There were always several bands in attendance, brass bands and highland pipe bands and military bands. It was here that many people saw their first moving pictures and watched balloons ascend and float away. Their passengers would land somewhere, sometimes near, sometimes far away. Usually there was a display of trapeze work when you held your breath in fear lest the performer crashed to his death. There were wonderful shows with elephants walking on milk bottles, trained seals, playing drums and throwing blazing torches to each other to be caught in their mouth. There were clowns and trained dogs. The acrobats and performers were a great thrill. Boys and girls went home determined to try the same stunts or train their dogs or horses to perform like those at the show.

The climax came on the final night when a great delight was the marvelous display of fireworks which lit up the sky with rockets and sparklers such as we have not seen for many years.

In earlier days the agricultural society not only put on the annual fair but sought to improve livestock and farming practices. They imported fine herd sires and made them available to livestock breeders. They held field crop competitions and annual ploughing matches which attracted many farmers. They even had mowing matches where machines of different makes were in competition so that farmers could see which could do the best job. Cash prizes were awarded at the fair for ploughs and other farm implements manufactured in the area, prizes were given also for homemade cloth, blankets, carpets, homemade cheese and maple sugar.

We have reason to respect and admire the foresight and

determination of our forefathers in promoting improved agricultural practices through competition and encouragement to stimulate a desire for the best. Only good farmers can succeed now as then. The social aspect of the fair was also very important. It is good for the rural people to get together and meet with both their rural and urban friends and acquaintances. It is bound to create better understanding.

We also have reason to thank the present officers and workers for their untiring efforts and endless labour in building up this fine organization.

As the scope of the work grew, it was found necessary to expand the area and make additions to the property. The society has been able over the years to purchase and pay for expansion. Indeed it has the deeds for eleven parcels of land needed for its wider scope of activities.

The NLAS buildings have been a great asset and have been kept up to date. There are now new buildings for all of the livestock.

A fine commodious dining hall where the best of meals are served is another great asset, as well as further provisions for refreshments in the main hall and under the grandstand. The main hall is a very superior building in which to house exhibits.

The society has been very gracious over the years in sharing its facilities with the people of the town and community. The grounds have been used as a ball park and many spectacular games of baseball, football and lacrosse have been played here over the years. They have also shared the fine beach which has made it possible for the children to learn to swim under supervision. The main hall is used for wedding receptions and dances.

This NLAS Fair at first was a one day affair. In 1868 it became a two day fair and the attendance rose that year to between five thousand and six thousand people. Now a three day fair is held with the first day being the day on which exhibits are prepared and placed and Friday and Saturday for the crowd. Here's hoping that the weather is fine this year and the crowds are big.

Hi, Ho, Come to the fair.