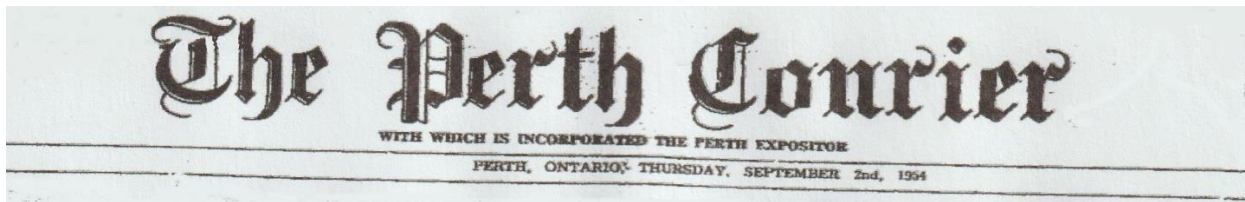

INTRODUCTION

On September 3, 1954, the South Lanark Agricultural Society dedicated a 'Centennial Gateway' at the main entrance to its fair grounds on Arthur Street in Perth. The ceremony included unveiling an Ontario Ministry of Agriculture plaque that recognized the Society's "One Hundred Years Service, 1845-1945". In promoting that occasion, and the fair's 108th annual exhibition that year, the *Perth Courier* edition of September 2nd published the following *History Of The Perth Fair*.



History Of The Perth Fair

When centuries celebrate, it is customary for friends and acquaintances to gather together to talk about old times and wish them bon-voyage upon a second century, and that is what the directors of the South Lanark Agricultural Society hope residents of the Ottawa Valley will do on September 3rd, 4th, and 5th, when that organization will hold the one hundredth and eighth annual fall fair on the society's grounds at Perth.

The history of the South Lanark Agricultural Society began with the settlement of the Bathurst District, and to obtain a full picture of the development of the Society during the past one hundred and eight years, it is necessary to glance briefly at the historical data dealing with the establishment of pioneer settlement with the townships adjacent to the Town of Perth.

In 1815 a proclamation was issued in England offering a free passage to such citizens of Great Britain as might want to go to Canada to establish homes. Free provisions were offered not only for the voyage, but also after their arrival in the colony, until such time as the land could be made to support them.

Hand Tools

Each group of four families were given a grindstone, a crosscut saw and a whip saw. While each family received an adze, a hand saw, drawing knife, an axe, shell auger, two gimlets, door lock and hinges, scythe, and reaping hook, two hoes, skillet, camp kettle and one blanket, for each of its members. When the first group of emigrants destined for South Lanark arrived in the early autumn of 1815, lack of preparations for their reception compelled them to remain at Brockville until the following summer.'

A group of surveyors proceeded to map out the area. Their first act was to lay out the site of Perth and the Townships of Bathurst, Drummond, North Elmsley and Burgess. The only member of this party whose name could be readily found in the records of the Registry Office at Perth was Thomas Cuddie¹, who later played an active part in the establishment of Perth Fair.

Perth Founded

In the summer of 1816, the Military Colony of Perth was founded chiefly of British Regulars whose term of service had expired in Canada, along with veterans of the Canadian Corps from the recent war with the United States.

The emigrants who had wintered at Brockville, along with new arrivals from Britain and a few United Empire Loyalists from the recently established United States, began to arrive early in the summer of the same year.

Registry Office records show that land was taken up in April of 1816 on what is still known as the Scotch Line.

It is interesting to note the number of descendants of the early settlers who are still occupying the same farm, handed down from father to son, in some instances to the fifth generation. Also, those who helped to establish the Agricultural Society and now to find their descendants carrying on and taking an active part in its present activities and development.

The year 1817 was one of great hardships and privation. The crop of potatoes was destroyed by frost and rust ruined the wheat crop. Some families were forced to live on wild leeks and other herbs found in the woods until the Government came to their aid with additional half rations and averted famine.

Wanted Good Stock

In spite of all these hardships and the rigors of carving a home from the vast Canadian wilderness, these early pioneers found time to give thought to the improving of their livestock and their community. According to a newspaper clipping of 1838, an organization known as the Perth Agricultural and Livestock Improvement Society, was organized which offered the services of a recently purchased horse of outstanding quality.

Just when this society was formed the present directors of Perth Fair have so far been unable to ascertain. However, the July 11th issue of 1843 of the *Bathurst Courier and Ottawa General Advertiser* carried the following report of a directors' meeting of the "Perth Agricultural Society".

¹ Thomas Cuddie (1791-1876) and his wife Christina Goodall (1796-1888) were among the party of settlers who spent the winter of 1815-1816 at Brockville.

"The quarterly meeting of the directors took place on Saturday last, the 1st instant, at the new Court House in Perth, and though the attendance was not very full, yet the meeting was interesting. It is to be remarked that while some of the directors from Lanark were in attendance, others in our own town and immediate vicinity were absent.

"H. Glass², Esq., the president, was in the chair and, after a few items of other business were disposed of the subject of the Plowing March came before the meeting. The result was as follows: That the following seven persons be named as judges, namely, Thomas Cuddie, James Jackson, Robert Ferguson, William Anderson, James McIlquham, Robert Blair, and Alex Montgomery. It was agreed that the seven could meet and come to some understanding, or draw lots, to see which three of them should act, or the whole seven might act if they thought fit.



"The judges are not to appear on the field till the plowing is done, so that they may not know who does the different work. The different plots that are plowed are to be ticketed No. 1, 2, 3, etc., and the ploughman who has the ticket corresponding with the plots adjudged the best ploughed to take the prize according to the decision of the judges. Horses or oxen may be used, but no driver besides the ploughman himself. The whole ploughing

to be done between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. on the day appointed. The tickets of the different plots to be put in a hat and get the competitor to draw and to get the plot corresponding to his ticket to do his work upon. None but member to compete.

"The managing committee are to get a field and the match is expected to come off in October. Due notice will be given in the *Courier* of the day and place.

"Any person knowing of a good field near the town which can be got will confer a favor by naming it to the president, H. Glass, Esq.

"It was a pleasure to observe that there was a feeling among those present at this meeting, who had tried an improvement of their stock, that they would succeed. After all that has been said about Monarch, his stock is remarked by different persons to be really fine. As there is a prospect that the society must dispose of some of its fine animals in a twelve month, the members should not neglect present opportunities.

² Henry Glass (1799-1866) kept a tavern at #1 Gore Street in the earliest days of the Perth Settlement, purportedly owned the first team of horses in the settlement, and later, 1836-1848, operated a store on Foster Steet in partnership with his brother-in-law Malcolm Cameron (1808-1878), founder of the *Perth Courier*.

“Our society requires a little new vigor and spirit among its members to be really successful. It has done and will do very much more if the farmers generally will only consult their own interest by coming forward to its support”.

William O. Buell³, Secretary.
Perth, 3rd July 1843

Much as Now

It can be readily gathered from reading the foregoing account, that the organization was beginning to experience that fatal condition which has brought about the death of so many worthy farm organizations. Lack of interest by the public, failure of directors to attend meetings, and a general need of support by those whom the society was designed to aid.

In 1846 the society was re-organized and renamed the South Riding of Lanark Electoral District Agricultural Society. Fortunately, this awkward and unwieldy title was soon shortened to the present, South Lanark Agricultural Society.

Part 2

The location of the first Fall Fair has apparently been lost in the lapse of time, as no definite record has so far been located. In 1852 the society held an exhibition in the Music Hall⁴. While no mention of the fact was made, it would appear that the livestock and poultry were exhibited out-of-doors in some nearby lot, as the Music Hall could not have accommodated them.

In that year the society issued a four-page list of premiums and invited exhibitors from the districts of Bathurst and Renfrew. All prizes were listed in pounds, shillings, and pence. Among the classes to be exhibited were:

For best span of working horses – 1st, £1; 2nd, 15s.

For best yoke of oxen over 2 years of age – 1st, £1, 2nd, 15s.

Best 20 lbs. of clover seed – 1st, 15s; 2nd, 10s.

Best bushel of apples – 1st, 5s; 2nd, 3s.

First Real Home

In March of 1874 the society purchased 7 ½ acres of ground at a point just north of what is now the junction of Highways 7 and 15,⁵ known locally as Greenlee's Corners⁶. Here, they erected a number of buildings.

³ William Oscar Buell (1818-1898), Perth lawyer and County Court Master of Chancery.

⁴ Robertson Music Hall, 11–15 D'Arcy Street, constructed 1846-1851.

⁵ In 1954 Highway-15 ran along Wilson Street to intersect with Highway-7.

⁶ Named for John Greenley (1775-1854), the 1816 grantee of the land at Drummond Township C-2/L-4(SW).

By 1882 the society had progressed to the point where a premium list and regulations for the annual exhibition to be held at Perth, September 27, 28 and 29, was issued in booklet form, with classes for livestock, fruits, flowers, vegetables, and handicrafts.

According to a copy of the prize list, on display in the Perth Museum, the following were officers at that time:

President, C. A. Matheson⁷; 1st Vice-President, John Armour⁸, Burgess; 2nd Vice-President, J. P. McIntyre⁹, Bathurst.

Directors, John Anderson, Bathurst; Peter McTavish¹⁰, North Elmsley; Abraham Ferrier¹¹, North Burgess; Thomas B. Moore¹², Drummond; and George Oliver¹³, North Elmsley.

Secretary, J. G. Campbell, Perth; Treasurer, C. A. Matheson, Perth; Auditors, W. H. Grant¹⁴ and R. Jamieson¹⁵, Perth.

Second Site

As the grounds were a considerable distance from the town proper, the directors of that time considered that it would be to the advantage of the Society to dispose of the property in favour of a location nearer to the center of the town. As a result, a new site west of Wilson Street¹⁶, was purchased in July of 1891, the former ground being sold.

In a few years, however, it was decided that the new grounds were too small, so these in turn were sold and converted into a housing project¹⁷, following the purchase of the present grounds at the southern boundary of the town in May of 1912. This site, equipped with an excellent half-mile track had been the scene of many athletic events. The Agricultural Society immediately proceeded to erect buildings.

Perth Fair, like many other societies of this type, has had its ups and downs. Following the purchase and development of the new grounds, the directors found themselves faced with the task of paying off a mortgage of \$5,000 and a note of nearly \$2,800.

⁷ Charles Albert Matheson (1843-1917), owner of Riverside Cheese Factory at Perth, son of Roderick Matheson (1793-1873) Perth merchant and Canadian Senator.

⁸ John Armour (1813-1899), farmer on C-9 of North Burgess Township.

⁹ John P. McIntyre (1838-1900), farmer, Bathurst Township.

¹⁰ Peter McTavish (1843-1919), son of John McTavish (1788-1880), North Elmsley Township farmer.

¹¹ Abraham Ferrier (182-1899), son of Abraham Ferrier (b.1807), North Burgess Township farmer.

¹² Thomas Buell Moore (1833-1909), Drummond Township Clerk, owner of Tayside Cheese Factory.

¹³ George Oliver Jr. (1847-1920), son of George Oliver Sr. (1821-1878), North Elmsley Township farmer.

¹⁴ William Henry Grant (1837-1914), Governor of Lanark County Jail.

¹⁵ Robert Jamieson (1848-1932), Division Court Clerk and partner in Jamieson & Dennison Real Estate Agents.

¹⁶ Bounded by Clyde, Sinclair, Alvin, and Glascott Streets.

¹⁷ Fairholme Park.

Despite one of the worst depressions in history, the society was able to struggle along and make its payments, September 1945 bringing the discharge of the mortgage, the note having been paid some years before.



South Lanark Agriculture Society Fairgrounds 1891-1912, Wilson Street, Perth

Mortgage Burned

One of the highlights of the centennial program was the burning of the mortgage.

With information gathered from the diaries of early settlers, one can almost picture those first Fair days. The early morning stillness broken by the squealing of the wooden wheeled, potash carts of the newer settlers as they bounced and jolted their protesting way along the Rokeby Road¹⁸. Travelling all night or stopping at the home of some friend along the way, they were always among the first to arrive, ready to exchange their loads of potash with G. S. B. Roberts, or some other merchant, for groceries or dry goods, and a little change to take in the Fair.

All through the morning farm wagons kept rumbling into town, father, mother and youngest perched upon the high pole seat, while the other children, along with two or three of the neighbors, rode in the box upon a thick carpet of marsh hay, their noisy babble adding a certain air of festivity

¹⁸ Rokeby was a village on the road from Elphin to McDonald's Corners, leading to Playfair, Fallbrook, and Perth.

to the occasion. Every once in a while, the son of one of the older established and more prosperous farmers would pass with his girl, on the way to the fair, the new side spring buggy, or two wheeled gig, drawn by a fast horse, the pride of the owner's heart.

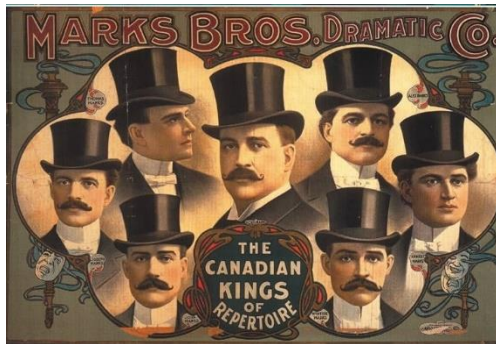
The Stock Arrives

Around 10 o'clock in the morning, the oldest boy, ably assisted by one or two neighbor lads of around the same age, (for persons necessary to deliver livestock shall be admitted free), began to arrive, leading, pushing, driving, or hanging on to some reluctant member of the animal kingdom. In fact, it can be gathered from the accounts, that persons with a broader sense of humor, had more fun watching the arrival of some of these exhibits than at the fair itself. Although there was a possibility that a balky cow might create a diversion, or a spirited horse throw its rider over the fence and dash wildly through the crowd.

What with McCallum's Tavern¹⁹ "setting up the good stuff", and William Lock's Brewery²⁰ offering malt whisky as 4 shillings gallon, it is safe to assume that some at least partook freely. Many of the older members of the community can still recall the horse races on the way home from Perth Fair. Neck and neck, wagon or democrat bounding on the cobble stones; it was take to the ditch and let them pass, or be run over.

Bargaining Starts

Yes, Perth Fair fifty to a hundred years ago was something to look forward to, and many were the hard bargains that were driven to earn the necessary funds to attend. One district resident, now prominent in the public life of the County, recalls an agreement whereby he arose at five o'clock every morning from June to September, and travelled more than a mile to bring the cows in from pasture for the morning milking, in order to earn 50 cents to take in Perth Fair. He



also recalled planting and tending a widow's garden all summer for a dollar, the extra money being required to attend the Marks Brothers Show²¹, on the evening of the fair, for it was said locally that you were not considered a man until you had been permitted to say and see the Marks' Show, while the rest of the family went home to do the evening chores. It did not matter that you had to walk eleven miles after midnight, or that our hair rose when you heard those pursuing footsteps as you passed through the loneliest part of the road.

Speaking of the Marks Brothers Show; no history of Perth Fair could be written without recalling these brothers of the Christie's Lake, a few miles from Perth.

On fair nights fifty year or so ago, the Perth Town Hall was crowded, as hundreds came to this big entertainment feature of the year, to watch, with necks craned above uncomfortable

¹⁹ John McCallum, proprietor of McCallum's Hotel at 64 Gore Street East, 1845-1853.

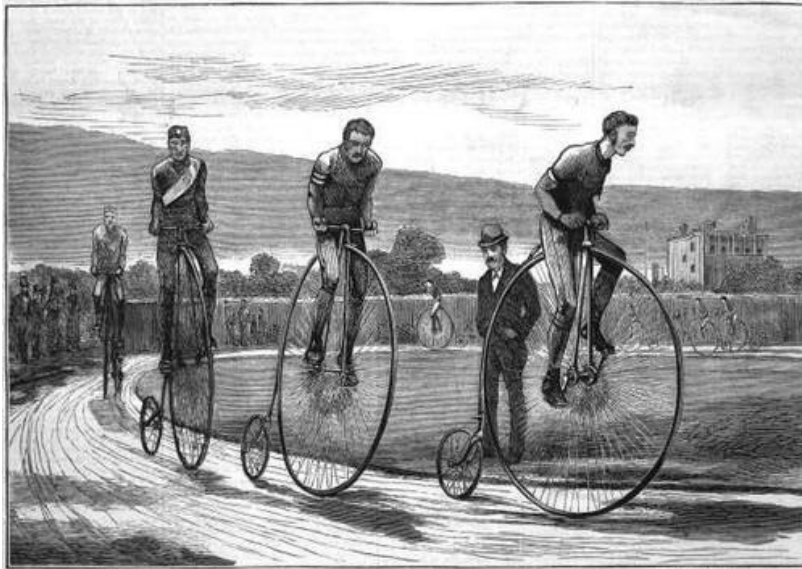
²⁰ William Locke (1800-1862) proprietor of Locke's Brewery & Distillery, at the corner of Gore and Harvey Streets.

²¹ Operating from a base at Christie Lake, from the late 1870s into the 1930s, the seven Marks brothers (and several of their wives), the 'Canadian Kings of Repertoire', toured vaudeville companies across Canada and the northern United States.

starched collars, the flying ankles of the dancers, or to cheer the valiant “Gerry the Tramp”, as he arose ragged and uncouth, to rescue the heroine from the clutches of the dapper villain.

Part 3

In this age of speed, a bicycle race would arouse but little interest. This was not the case away back in the era of the “High Fronts”, when only the more daring young gentlemen of the community even dared to clamber up upon “those infernal contraptions”, as angered horsemen were wont to call the first bicycles, with their high front wheel and small rear one, that rattled along doing its best to support the rider perched high above the widespread handlebars.



It was only natural then that the bicycle race held at Perth Fair, some time in the late eighties²², was considered an event of great importance. The race, a quarter mile affair, was held on the road before the grounds with the finishing line somewhere between the two gates.

Down the road they came, with the rider of the bicycle having the largest front wheel well in the lead. The pedals being fixed to the front axle, the riders swing their feet free as they crossed the finish line, and coasted on down the road, the winner swerving sharply through the gate, to strike a cow that was being led to the ring. The resulting excitement still bringing smiles to the faces of those recalling the incident.

That Balloon Event

One of the last events to take place at the old fair grounds at Greenlees' Corners, was the balloon ascent. Although the passage of time dimmed the event in the memory of many residents of the district, here are some of the details upon which most accounts agree:

The balloonist and crew, having spent the morning and most of the afternoon inflating the bag over a fire in a pit, made final preparations for the ascent by hauling the parachute into a tube-like affair suspended about the balloon. The balloonist clambered into the basket and upon a given signal the crew cut the anchor ropes.

²² The 'High Wheel' or 'Penny Farthing' bicycle first appeared in Canada in 1878. The chain driven 'Safety Bicycle', with two wheels of equal size, became available from about 1888.

Up shot the balloon leaving a breathless, spellbound crowd below. When considerable height was reached, the balloonist proceeded to do acrobatics on a trapeze, finally dropping from the basket feet first, followed by the parachute, which opened after an agonizing second or two.

A great cheer went up as the south wind began to drive the parachute and its passenger off towards the marsh lands north of the town. With one accord the young and more energetic set out in hot pursuit, bring part of the high board fence at the back of the grounds in their haste. The balloonist meantime had drifted ever so gently down to land, (so some reports say), in a small tree from which he was assisted by many willing hands and a couple of fence rails.

After Effects

But the story does not end there. One youthful admirer of this daring feat, aided by a large umbrella, attempted an equally daring parachute descent from the ridge of the old log barn the following morning. Results – one broken collar bone and one resolve to give up aviation for life.



The feature attraction of the 1913 fair was a Texan Show, complete with wild horses and beautiful cowgirls. The first evening in town, the star buckler of the show, “The hoss that had neva bin rid’n”, decided to prove that he was all that they said he was by kicking the end out of the horse barn. One farmer in recalling the incident, said he though more people went to see the hole in the stable stall, than went to see the show.

No Resting

Some sage once said: “To look forward is to progress. To look backward is to retrogress”, and with that sagely advice most will agree, for once individuals or societies rest upon their records, they too become things of the past.

With this thought in mind the directors of the South Lanark Agricultural Society have not only made plans for their celebration, but for the years to come.

It has been the custom of the Ontario Department of Agriculture to present fall fairs with a pylon and flagpole on the occasion of their centennial, in recognition of their 100 years of service to the community. The South Lanark Agricultural Society decided to postpone the acceptance of the pylon and flagpole until funds and material were more plentiful.



New Building

In 1946 the society was able to purchase a large shed from one of the local churches, and a contract was let for the moving of the shed to the fair grounds where it was placed upon a permanent concrete foundation. Temporary repairs were made to the main building, which was used until the larger and permanent main building had been completed.

Upon the occasion of the opening of the new Centennial Gateway, the South Lanark Agricultural Society extends a cordial invitation to everyone, near and far, to attend the greatest fair ever held in Perth.

Come and bring the family and enjoy yourself!