

This Week in Saratoga County History - The Saratoga County Fair

Submitted by Sarah Welch, July 16,2020

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The Saratoga County Fairgrounds – Early 20th century

The history of the Saratoga County Agricultural Society and Fair dates its official beginning back to 1841 when the organization was formed under an act of the State Legislature of that year. However, before the founding of the Agricultural Society earlier fairs were held from 1819 to 1825 at the Courthouse and an adjacent lot in Ballston Spa under a previous funding provision of the Legislature. Saratoga County shares the honor of the oldest county fair in New York State with Jefferson County.

The organizational meeting of the Society was held on June 24, 1841 at the County Courthouse under the direction of it's first president, Howell Gardner of Greenfield. However, a fair was not held that year due to the lateness of the season. The first fair was a one-day event held on October 4, 1842.

The fair was held in several locations during its early years before permanently settling in its current location in Ballston Spa in **1882**. During the 1840's the fair rotated between Ballston and Saratoga Springs before moving to Mechanicville in 1848 for the next ten years, where it was held in the rear of McKinney's Hotel on the bank of the Hudson River.

During the Civil War years, the fair was held on eleven acres of land on Crescent Street in Saratoga Springs. Part of the grounds was leased for the training of Union troops, who also maintained a recruiting booth at the fair. The fair then moved to the Glen Mitchell site off North Broadway near the present Maple Avenue Middle School, where it was held through 1881.

Premiums have been issued for farm and household entries throughout the history of the fair. Premiums were awarded for best pair of matched horses, best bull and other livestock, knit socks, sheets, home spun yarn and other household items, as well as home baked and canned goods. In 1876 it was a site of activities related to the nation's Centennial celebration.

In 1882 Colonel Frank D. Curtis of Charlton was instrumental in permanently relocating the fair to its present location in Ballston Spa. The Grandstand was built in 1896 at a cost of \$4,000. In 2019 attendance at the fair exceeded 100,000 and we look forward to returning in 2021 with many activities on the grounds for residents to enjoy.