

rural youngsters. The Agricultural Department was given the mandate to help organize school fairs across the province with Belgrave being just one of the several throughout Huron County alone.

Early in 1920 school trustees from Morris and East Wawanosh met with S.B. Stothers, the first provincial agricultural representative in Huron County.

Richard Procter of Morris was the first fair board president and John Wightman of East Wawanosh was the first secretary. The first fair was held in October 1920 with eight schools participating.

3) For 75 years whenever anyone in the Townships of East Wawanosh or Morris has said they are getting something ready for the fair, or were going to put something into the fair there was never any doubt what "fair" they were talking about – The Belgrave School Fair.

Since the first fair in Oct. 1920 Belgrave has played host to generations of pupils, first from the one room school sections and later from the central schools at Belgrave, Blyth and Brussels. A fair has been held every year with the exception of 1937 when all the county fairs were cancelled due to an outbreak of polio.

Thousands of school children have learned about friendly competition through their years as fair exhibitors. But they learn more than that. The fair is an example of a closely-knit community working together. As long as there are volunteers willing to pitch in, the school fair will endure at Belgrave. The world can change around it but remarkably this fair is one thing which remains constant year after year from its parade of school children to displays of school work, crops, flowers and vegetables.

This year the Belgrave School Fair was held on Sept. 15, 1995. A recent article from *The Citizen* by Bonnie Gropp on the Belgrave Fair is reprinted with permission.

By Bonnie Gropp

For 75 years, the community of Belgrave has been the site of an annual school fair. Once the mainstay of agricultural life and education, like Christmas pageants and music festivals, these student fall fairs were abundant. Today, the Belgrave Fair stands as only one of two remaining in the province.

A spirit of its early years adds vintage flavour to the fair, which is devoted to the same thing it was in the days of one-room schools.

To help commemorate this anniversary year, which will be marked Friday, Sept. 15, Harold Vincent, who was a young schoolboy at the first fair in 1920, and his wife Edith, have compiled an extensive history from memories and documents. Vincent recalls how much time and effort has been donated so willingly by community people towards the fair since its inception.

It all began in 1920 when an agricultural representative with the county met with some school trustees to organize that first event. There were nine schools taking part, three from Morris Twp. and six in East Wawanosh Twp.

The first fair was held on Oct. 5, with several buildings being used to house the exhibits. It was a time to draw the

community together and has, every year since, with the exception of 1939 when a polio epidemic resulted in the cancelling of the school fairs.

In 1921 the first school fair concert was held in the Forester's Hall. It continued for 45 years. The first concert was put on by the school children, while subsequent ones featured adult talent as well. The concerts sometimes took the form of contests between Morris and East Wawanosh, with themes such as Scottish versus Irish, Vincent recalls.

In 1970, the Belgrave fair was 50 years old and a celebration was planned with the music festival and variety concert being held on May 15. The children put on the program at the Belgrave arena. There was a princess contest and the new board of education began an annual grant of \$800. In 1987 this was raised to \$900.

An impressive parade marked that fair with a pipe band and a trumpet band taking part. It began with a parade of dignitaries and school children, some of them on decorated bicycles. Eleven floats from former school sections and one carrying the exhibitors from that first fair, were highlights. The school parade is still a major part of the fair.

In 1990 Vincent helped prepare a float for the parade which carried 26 of the participants from the first Belgrave School Fair.

The following year saw a new addition to the arena front in Belgrave which meant some changes to the fair. Opening exercises, where the youngster shuffle impatiently waiting for the fun to begin, took place at the home plate of the new ball diamond. The games were also moved to the diamond.

That year the fair parade marked the celebration of East Wawanosh's and Canada's 125th anniversary.

Though 75 years of success is behind it, the Belgrave Fair Association has not been without some anxious moments. On April 9, 1932 the government decreased its funding so that the students would no longer be supplied with vegetable and flower seeds. In 1935 the Department of Education donated the seeds, and since 1936 the Belgrave School Fair Board has purchased them from fair funds.

In 1939, an agricultural representative attended a directors meeting and informed them that there was strong urging to drop school fairs. Vincent says a carload of people representing the Belgrave fair went to a meeting to discuss its future. They were told that a letter had been written to the Department of Agriculture in Queen's Park and the reply stated that the Belgrave Fair should continue.

When the little one-room schools were closed and Brussels, Blyth and East Wawanosh central schools were established in 1967, Vincent says some felt this would be the end. "We were not about to give up." The committee sought funding from the board of education and received \$700.

That is what the survival of the Belgrave School Fair has been about all these 75 years. It is an event that has 100 per cent community support and involvement. The