

# Fair story reveals history of Lambton Centre District

*The Brigden Fair is the only agricultural fair held in Lambton Centre. It attracts about 30,000 people every fall and many Women's Institutes members volunteer their time to the successful running of the fair. Here's a special history of the fair, written by Mrs. Muriel McCallum.*

The first Agricultural Fair held in Moore Township and sponsored by Moore Township Agricultural Society was held in the year 1850.

In spite of the difficulties and primitive tools the settlers had to work with they were enterprising enough to take pride in their livestock and the Fair was a means of showing it to the public. The Township was sparsely settled at that time with most of the settlers living along the river St. Clair and in the vicinity of Bear Creek. The first fair was held at Rileys farm in Moore Township and was called "Moore Fair".

The fair was nothing like we know it today. The only exhibits were horses and cattle, nothing for the ladies. Probably the women stayed at home all day while their men were at the fair.

As years went by men started bringing their wheat and oats for display. Ladies started taking butter and dressed chickens. The area became more settled and the fair outgrew the facilities at Riley's, and began wandering from place to place. Apparently the sponsors of Moore Fair got tired of roving from place to place and in 1881 a small tract of land was purchased in Brigden. In 1884 the fair was held in Mooretown and in 1888 in Courtright. Locals saw the advantage of having the fair in Brigden every year as it was the most centrally located of the villages. Three local gentlemen formed a company of other business men and local farmers of the community and purchased a 15 acre tract of land south of the village in 1889. The price paid was \$2,500. and this included a six foot board fence. This land was then rented to Moore Agricultural Society for a fair grounds. At last - after 39 years - the Moore Fair, (which then began to be called Brigden Fair) had

a home, though it was only a rented one. This land was purchased by Moore Agricultural Society in 1915.

Moore Agricultural Society had been exclusively a township fair, but at a meeting in 1928 the motion was made that "The Prize List be open to the world," except for the children's department. Since then the growth of Brigden Fair has been phenomenal.

The entry fee until 1948 was 25¢ for adults and 25¢ for each car, in 1949 the fee was raised to 35¢ for adults and 35¢ for cars.

Over the years small parcels of land have been purchased adjoining the original 15 acres, until now there is about 40 acres. The horse and cattle entries have increased considerably and so has the attendance.

Now the man of the house must bring his wife, or perhaps she comes without him, as she will probably have several items entered and will want to see what prizes she has won. And the kids, there is no leaving them home, for they must see the midway and go on every ride and eat popcorn, candy apples and hot dogs.

Since 1928 when it was made possible for anyone to enter exhibits in the fair, the number of exhibits and the variety has steadily increased. With the increase in exhibits the need for buildings to house them became pressing. In 1955 the ongoing building program began. The first building was the "Commercial Building," then two horse barns and the Administration building, two cattle barns, swine and sheep barn, chicken barn, a Junior Fair Building, Exhibition Hall and in 1983 a covered show building, with space for three rings of cattle or horses to be judged.

The ladies of Brigden Fair had always worked hard along with the men but in 1958 they formed their own division. Ina McKellar was elected as their first president. In June of 1983 they celebrated their 25th anniversary, with all former lady presidents and lady directors invited.

The Ladies Department exhibits are judged and displayed in Exhibition Hall. Although this is a fairly

large building it is usually filled to capacity with quilts, afghans, sewing, flowers, school exhibits, children's exhibits, and many and varied crafts. The Brigden Fair Ladies sell hot dogs, tea, coffee, pop and bran muffins from the large, well equipped kitchen in Exhibition Hall.

In 1982 a Photographic class was added to the prize list and in 1983 a rabbit show and a baby contest were held for the first time.

For several years now hot meals have been available on the grounds, along with the traditional hot dogs and candy apples.

The parade on Saturday and Monday is something else. Led by a Kiltie Band, there are horses, old and new cars, machinery, children, clowns, and floats in the parade. Each year there are more entries and more people lining the streets of Brigden and the road to the end of the parade route to watch it pass.

In 1972 "Miss C.N.E." Queen of the Fair Pageant was introduced.

Each year since then "Miss Bridgen Fair" has been chosen to represent Brigden in Toronto during the C.N.E.. 1983/84 Miss Brigden Fair is Laurie Shaw.

For many years 4H has been a very important part of the Fair. There are Homemaking exhibits and Agricultural exhibits. The 4H Championship shows include - Swine, Dairy, Beef, and Sheep. The "Queen's Guineas" is a big class as all beef club members must surely dream of their calf winning at Brigden Fair and going on to Toronto to the "Royal" and becoming Champion of the Queen's Guineas there.

Although the Fair has changed much from 1850, much remains the same. The early organizers were men of foresight who had no objection to hard work. Now in 1983 there are many more men involved than in 1850, and many, many more women, and none of these seem to be willing to sit back and rest, looking at what has been done, but look forward toward what can still be done to make Brigden Fair even better.