

131 YEARS AS A COMMUNITY INSTITUTION

A profile of Georgetown's fair



Fair exhibits sometime during the 1950's

By GARFIELD MCGILVRAY
 As Georgetown Fair is to form the setting for the town's Centennial celebration, it is fitting that some mention of the history of this organization should be recorded, not only for posterity, but to give the newer residents of our town some knowledge of this time-honored institution.

The Esqueing Agricultural Society which operated the fair up until this year when the name was changed to Georgetown Agricultural Society, is older than Confederation itself. The first fair was held in 1846. To commemorate their centennial in 1946 a monument and flag pole was erected in Georgetown Park, given by the Department of Agriculture for one hundred years' contribution in the agricultural field. It was the first pylon to be erected in Western Ontario only five having been erected in Eastern Ontario prior to that date.

So, it is only fitting that as the fair celebrates its 121st exhibition, that the town should want to celebrate Canada's centennial at the same time.

PIONEER BEGINNING

As we endeavor to trace the history of this organization, picture if you can, the pioneer farmers of the last century who decided to organize for the first fall fair and agricultural society. Much of this country was still in a very primitive state, the log cabin was still in evidence, especially farther to the west. There was not a great deal of cleared land, although the more up-to-date and wealthier farmer had progressed somewhat

by this time. Motor cars and airplanes were unheard of, and oxen teams were still in use on the farm. We can picture some of the pioneers came to that first meeting by oxen cart or at least in a democrat.

OLD JOURNAL REPORTS

It is almost impossible to get a true glimpse of proceeding at the first organizational meeting. Old-timers say it was held in the old township hall at Stewarttown and at that time Stewarttown was a thriving community with a large number of inhabitants, taverns, stores and industry. Government records do not reach back far enough from which to obtain information, but a paragraph from "Journal and Transactions of the Board of Agriculture of Upper Canada, Vol. 1, Toronto, 1856 extract from county report, p. 527, says: "The township of Nelson, Trafalgar and Esqueing have each societies established therein for some length of time, and from the exhibitions held during the summer in these fine townships, we can truly say that their agriculture is at present in an advanced state."

As late as 1858, pounds, shillings, and pence were still in evidence, and a further paragraph from the Journal reads as follows: "P. 71—One hundred and one members; amount of subscriptions £28; government grants £24; total receipts, including balance from previous year £75, 15s, 6d; total disbursement in premiums and general expenses \$62, 15s, 4d. Balance in the treasurer's hands £13, 0s, 5½d."

Then on Page 240—"Esqueing, one

hundred and thirty-six members; amount of subscriptions £26, 10s; balance from 1855, £13, 13s, 11½d; share of public grants £29, 5s; total receipts £84, 8s, 11½d; amount paid in premiums £52, 17s, 6d; incidental expenses £14, 1s, 4½d; balance in hand £17, 10s, 1d."

While the first fair was held in 1846, it was not until between 1864-68 that the society asked that a charter be filed.

THE FIRST FAIR

It must have been an exciting day for those pioneer farmers as they brought their produce and livestock to Stewarttown for the first exhibition. We understand the hall at Stewarttown was used for displaying the vegetables, grain, fruit, and ladies' work, while the fair proper took place in Murray's field, behind the old school house on top of the hill. There were probably lines of hooked rugs, mitts and socks as the women-folk vied for the honours, as well as those delicious loaves of homemade bread, huns and sausages that are inclined to be conspicuous by their absence at present day shows, as the modern cooks go for the fancy pastry.

While records are meagre to substantiate our claims, we believe that one Abraham Scott, was the first president of the society. Col. John Murray, grandfather of the late J. C. Murray, a resident of Stewarttown until his death a few years ago, was the first secretary-treasurer in the one hundred and twenty-one years, but we will deal with some of these later in this story.

About 1875 the fair was moved from Stewarttown to Georgetown, and was held in the Market Square, which was then vacant land, bordered by Market, Church and Factory Streets. Factory St. was changed a decade ago to Park Ave. Then, as now, it was only a one day fair and the square was bounded in by an eight foot fence along these streets for the fair. The old drill hall that stood below the present library was used for display purposes.

The first show on the present ground in the Georgetown Park took place in 1889. Around this time the fair, being a township fair, was held alternate years in Acton and Georgetown, and it was not until 1908 that the last fair was held in Acton by this group. It was in 1907 that W. A. Wilson became president, later becoming secretary, a position he held for over twenty-five years. It is of interest that Mr. Wilson's niece, Mrs. George Ironside, is the present secretary of the Georgetown Agricultural Society.

Joe Flynn of Acton was president in 1906, and John Cunningham in the year 1909. In 1907 the society organized the first plowing

match in the township, holding it on William Cleave's farm. It drew considerable attention.

In 1946 when the Esqueing Society celebrated its centennial, we talked to two of the oldest members at that time (both are now deceased) and gleaned much of the history of the fair. W. A. Wilson said he could remember his father showing a Preston bay mare at Esqueing fair in 1879. W. J. Alexander had a good memory and could recall many of the early exhibitors - back in the early 80's and 90's. Brain Bros. of the Norval district showed oxen; imported Short-horns were exhibited by Thomas Cook; Leicester sheep were shown by Brain Bros; also; while Henry Ross was the first exhibitor of Holstein cattle, John Brownridge was an outstanding exhibitor of Yorkshire, Tamworth and Berkshire pigs, and his early breeding of registered swine has been carried on down through the years by his descendants, who to this day breed and export high quality hogs. Thomas Brownridge and son Alan of R.R.2, Georgetown, are still taking the ribbons at the CNE and the Royal Winter Fair in Toronto.

Read and carriage horses were the pride of the early fairs as they are today, although not as plentiful as in former years. Around 1900 and previous, the names of exhibitors still ring familiar, were John Wrigglesworth, William Patterson, Joseph Brownridge, William Fisher, William Leslie, Sandy Waldie, Joseph Cottrell, W. Wilson, Henry Wilson, J. D. Orr, Neil Gillis, J. L. Clark, John MacDonald, Dave Brooks, Harrison Bros., Mark Given, D. L. Herbert, Allan Devereaux, Hugh Morrison, Andy Little, Alken Dolson, Ashenhurst Bros., Fuller Bros., R. J. Graham, John McKay, Goodson Appelbe, James Nickell, Dr. H. A. Reid, W. J. Alexander was one of the early exhibitors of fancy fowl and editor of Feather Fancier, a poultry magazine at the time of his death, started showing at Georgetown Fair in 1908.

Some of the early fairs that we can remember were a far cry from those of today. Not that they did not have some fine livestock shows, excellent hall exhibits and outstanding harness races, but the crowds were small in comparison; the town had only about 2,000 people at that time. Harness racing was the big attraction. In fact the society formed a driving club that sponsored races on the 24th of May. The midway didn't sport the rides for the children, but there were many games of chance, and booths with taffy apples, popcorn and horehound candy. We can remember when the late Cy Kennedy, father of Mrs.



This photo is believed to date back to following War

Jack Wilson, of Main St. used to travel the fair circuit with his team and wagon with goodies for the children.

OFFICERS THROUGH THE YEARS

Many presidents have captained the ship through its one hundred and twenty years. While all have made a fine effort for the good of the fair, at least three have stood out above others. The late Benjamin Petch was popular in the early '20's, while in later year Craig Reid and Harding Price did much to promote the fair and knit the board together.

While we don't have a complete record of presidents prior to 1931 these men did hold the top office before that time: J. B. Bessey, George Tolton, Joe Flynn, John Cunningham, W. A. Wilson, Thomas Moffatt, Al Clarridge, Herb Cook, Alex Joe, Jim Reid, J. A. Elliott, George Leslie, Henry Wilson, Ed Huffman, Thomas Cook, Hume Currie, W. C. Anthony.

It is interesting to note that in the 36 years from 1931 to 1967 the society has had only 16 presidents. In 1931 T. L. Leslie; 1932 Ed McWhirer; 1933-34-35 George Leslie; 1936 James Fisher; 1937-38 T. J. Brownridge; 1939 Frank Petch; 1940-41-42 Herb Cleave; 1943-44-45-46-47 Craig Reid; 1948-49 John Bird; 1950-51 Nelson Robinson; 1952-53-54-55 Harding Price; 1956-57 Spencer Wilson; 1958-59 Wilfrid Bird; 1960-61-62-63 Garfield McGilvray; 1964-65-66 Ken Ella; 1967 Keith Webb.

We have no knowledge of the secretary-treasurers prior to 1931, except to say that

Percy Cleave took the treasurer's position from the late J.A. Tracey and held that position for over thirty-five years, retiring in 1963. W. A. Wilson was also secretary for over twenty-five years.

Secretaries from 1931 to the present included: W. A. Wilson 1931-38; Oscar Lerch 1939; Frank Petch 1940-42; Garfield McGilvray 1943-1955; Trevor Williams (sec. -treas.) 1956-1961; Mrs. George Ironside 1962-67.

WHAT OF THE FUTURE

As the agricultural society approaches Canada's centennial celebration the directors are confident that future directors and townspeople generally will rally around and see that this time honoured institution will continue for many years to come.

You ask why it has succeeded so well? It is due to the hard work which succeeding directorates have put into each fair - always striving to make the next fair a little better than the one before. If a prize was offered for the best rural fair in Canada today, we doubt if any finer example could be found than that presented by your own. One has only to stand by the grandstand, looking out over the crowds of people and livestock; and turn and catch the beauty of the grove of maples in their autumn colors on all sides to realize that we have a good thing here for Canadians, we and with a will, go on striving for a fair that may eclipse those of the past in further progress of agriculture and entertainment for the community as a whole.

The show has grown in past decade

Since the above history of Georgetown Fair was published in Centennial Year 1967, the society has continued to grow and prosper.

During the decade, attendance and number of exhibitors has doubled; but so has the running expenses, and while the fair has always paid its way, profits haven't been too large.

However, the calibre of the show has improved tremendously, and has offered something for young and old alike. More and more businessmen and townspeople are taking a greater interest in the fair. Some see the advertising possibilities, while others find the refreshment stands a good place to add a few dollars to their organization coffers.

But the exhibition is the most important entity of the fair; for without them the show could not carry on. So each year more and more people are coming forward to take part in the show and keep this century-old institution afloat.

Unfortunately Georgetown fair has not been able to accumulate sufficient assets to have their own grounds. Each year recreation is taking over more and more of the available space of our park, but the society is making the best of it, for they know the public want to keep this time honored fair in operation.

The recreation commission and the town works department have been very helpful, they, too, want the fair to prosper.

In order to alleviate some of the congestion in the hall, a floor has been installed in the building at the far end of the park and will be used for exhibits and commercial displays. One of the horse shows has been dropped from the prize list to allow more space for exhibitors. You might say the fair has become too big for the grounds. It, too, will be fitted in.

The success of the fair during the past ten years, as was the case previously, was the interest and devotion of presidents, secretaries, treasurers and board members, all were committed to make the fair a showplace and the biggest attraction in the community year after year.

LIST OF OFFICERS

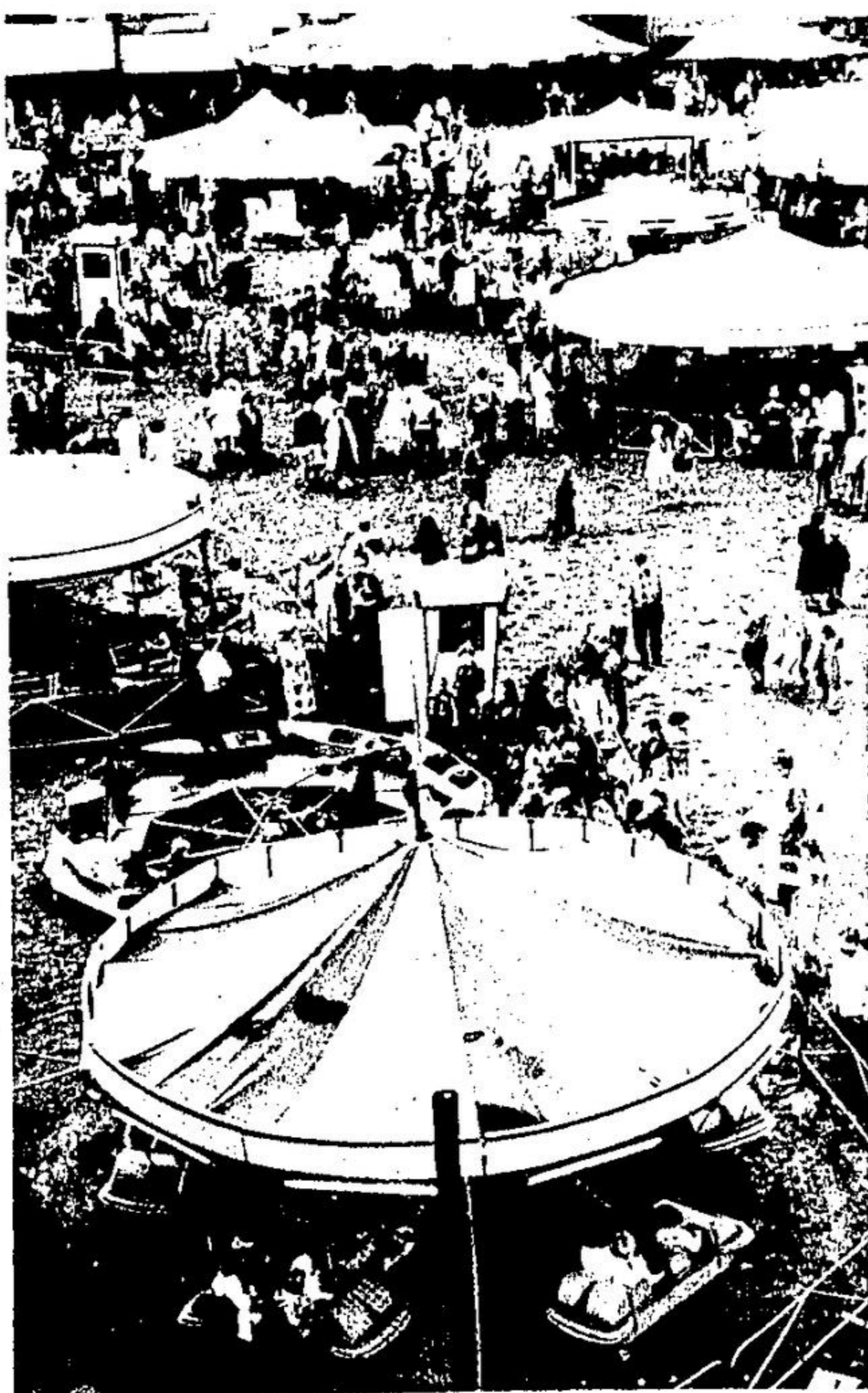
President Don Gosling
 President (Ladies' Section) Mrs. C.R. Fogal
 Treasurer Mrs. G. Ironside
 Secretary-Manager C.R. Fogal

What will the 1977 edition bring? Plans have been going ahead for some months and the usual fine show is promised.

Commercial displays and concessions are being added each week - while space for the refreshment booths have been sold out for some weeks.

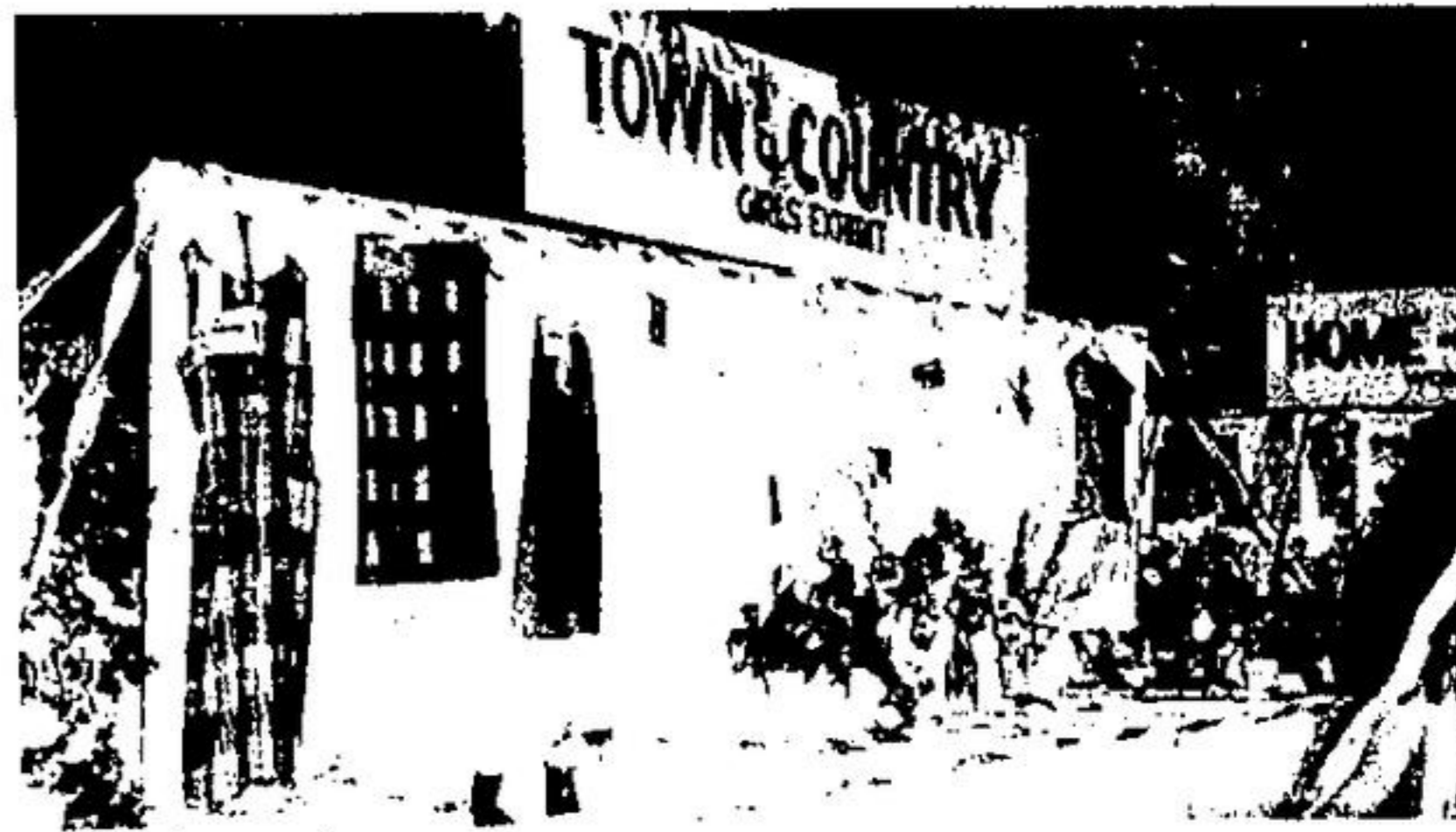
Besides the usual horse and cattle shows, there will be Old Macdonald's Farm, acrobatics, musical entertainment. The fair will be officially opened this year by Julian Reed, MPP for Halton-Burlington.

Don't miss the show—Sept. 30 and Oct. 1.



A view of the midway

Photos courtesy of Garfield McGilvray



One of the decorated exhibit tables

Every equestrian fan knows
MacMillan family name is synonymous with horses

The name MacMillan is so popular in horse show circles today that one might think it had been handed down from a previous generation. The fact is that the MacMillan Family have been showing horses for a comparatively short period of time, but they have made many friends all over the province and in the U.S. since taking up this hobby.

It all started back in 1942 when Ken MacMillan, popular Georgetown farm machinery dealer, and who also handled coal, traded two tons of coal for a Shetland pony, "Dolly" for their daughter Joyce. Later a corn binder changed hands for "Queenie" and it was soon a familiar sight in the home town to see a proud little girl riding around in a gig drawn by the two ponies.

The next year, 1943 Ken got the bug to exhibit at some of the fairs, the stable then being increased to three with Heromoin Chief, a hackney horse of good breeding. Soon Warwick Princess was purchased as a mate for Chief, and a pair of hackney ponies, Manor Barbara a Joy and Manor Lady Daviljoy, offspring of an English show pony, Kilgarry Joy, and sired by Daviburn Bantam, then owned by Mrs. Lula-Long Coombs, of Lee's Summit, Missouri, were added to make the hobby more interesting.

Since those early days in the show ring some changes have taken place in the MacMillan stable. Barbara's Joy and Manor Lady Daviljoy have been

replaced by Halton Performer and Sir David, and just recently Heromoin Chief was sold to Hugh McDonald of Winnipeg. Paddy and Sky Rocket are now the pride of daughter Joyce, while the Shetland pony "Dolly Dimples" was the mother of a brand new son this past summer.

It's a family affair — MacMillan's horses — for both wife and daughter share equally in the long line of ribbons that grace Ken's place of business — ribbons from all over the province, Quebec and the Chicago International. Mrs. MacMillan had never held a line in her hand before 1943, but she rapidly took to the hobby and now competes with the best. Daughter Joyce likes the saddle, too, and her biggest thrill must have been when she was singled out to take the spotlight role in the Royal Film — a film depicting the 1947 Royal Winter Fair.

The MacMillan's have derived untold pleasure from their venture — they have made friends wherever they have shown because their motto has been when going into the ring "every man for himself and may the best man win."

Their latest venture was at the Chicago International Horse Show, where they met with considerable success while competing against the strongest opposition.

Canadian Show News Georgetown Ont., January 1949