

125-year-old Milton Fair has long history

By Roy Downs

This year Milton Fair celebrates its 125th anniversary and the directors plan a special historical display in the main hall at the fair grounds, detailing some of the fair's interesting historical background.

Directors Joan Marshall and Ruth Ford are in charge of the history research and they have collected several printed articles on the fair's history, plus some old record books, prize ribbons, photos and early prize lists for the display.

Milton Fair is sponsored by the Halton Agricultural Society, a group of men and women who serve voluntarily on a year-round basis to put the fair together, for the enjoyment of rural and urban people who come to participate or see the displays.

Because Milton has always been in the centre of a large agricultural district, the annual fall fair has been an important event in the community. Despite encroachment by highways, homes and shopping centres, there is still much rural land in Halton and many "hobby" farmers and gardeners participate in the fall's agriculturally-oriented competitions as well as the full time bona fide farmers.

But the fair also caters to children, urbanites and women from all walks of life. It always has, and it always will.

It was on March 16, 1853 that Halton Agricultural Society was first organized. Some of those responsible for its formation were Levi Wilson, John Jarvis, H. M. Switzer, Alex and John McNaughton, John White, Adam Sproat, William Barber, George Brown, Absalom Bell, Hugh Mason, Johnson Harrison, D. R. Springer, Joshua Freeman, John Turnbull and James Menzies.

Thomas Douglas was the first president, W. Barber and D. R. Springer vice-presidents and Samuel Clark secretary-treasurer.

There were 100 members that first year and a government grant of \$100 was obtained. The fair paid out \$305 in prize money.

By comparison, in 1976 the fair board paid out \$17,118 in prize money, received government grants of \$8,500 and municipal grants totalling \$2,300.

There were five agricultural shows in Halton in those days, with one in each of the four townships (Nelson, Trafalgar, Esquesing and Nassagaweya) and local fair winners would head for the county show in Milton for the "finals". Picture the scene — the gentlemen in their best tall hats and neatly combed beards, the ladies with parasols and long skirts, climbing aboard their horse-drawn wagons and heading for the county fair to compete or observe the contests.

According to historians, the fall fair was often the settlers' only contact with fellow pioneer families.

The first show in Milton was at the farmers' market behind what is now the post office on Martin St. and the main exhibits were grain, stock, merchants' and ladies' home made articles. Across the road, according to early records, an old wooden workshop housed the displays of

The building was 40 feet wide, 80 feet long and had interior posts 22 feet high.

Joshua Norris of Nassagaweya, president of the fair board, occupied the chair for the opening ceremonies and Colonel E. W. Thompson was guest speaker, says The Farmer.

A Champion report on the 1864 fair indicates there was a floral hall on the grounds. The same hall? Who knows.

Receipts that year were \$427 and prize money totalled \$225.

Town council records show a grant of \$200 was given the agricultural society, to help

pay for the new hall.

Fair records say the directors were so well satisfied with the success of the new hall, the 1864 officers were re-elected and the secretary, W. A. Beaty, was presented with a gold watch and chain.

The following year \$400 was spent to expand the new hall. Some years later, however, the hall burned down and a second hall was erected in the centre of the fair grounds.

Records indicate the fair was a spring fair in the 1800s, and there was a spring plowing match as well. The spring plowing died out in the 1880s.

A spring show of stallions was another project of the fair board, and the tradition was carried on for many years.

Horses were shown in the north part of the grounds, cattle in the east, pigs in the south and sheep in the west.

In 1912 the directors decided more land was needed, and they purchased an additional seven acres. William Hamilton sold the land to the fair board. Then a half mile track was added to

allow horse races, and the hall was moved outside the track.

Six more acres were added in 1951. Since that time several quonset-type halls have been added, also a horse barn and two cattle barns.

The old wooden grandstand was struck by high winds sometime in the 1950s and it had to be removed. A new 2,000-seat grandstand replaced it in 1959.

The ladies' section in 1953 donated the beautiful Centennial Gates at the Robert St. entrance, in memory of the pioneers who had founded the fair.

Inflation caught up with the fair organizers over the 125

years the fair has been operating. An 1864 prize list offers \$4 for the best heavy draught horse, \$2 for the best horned bull calf, \$3 for the best ram, \$1 for the best dozen carrot, and 50 cents for the best bottle of raspberry wine. Today's prize list for the 1977 show offers \$30 for the best horse team, \$45 for the winning bull, \$20 for a top sheep, \$2 for the nicest carrots, and — of course — there is no class for wine, raspberry or any other kind.

Early prize lists also offered prizes for the best barrel of flour, box of candles, pair of hams, sample of Buckwheat flour, bag of hops and 10 pounds of maple syrup — all competitions which have gone by the wayside in

succeeding years.

Presidents of the fair over the years have included many well known local names.

Some of the early presidents were named Douglas, White, Switzer, Bussell, Willmott, Hume, Norrish, Bowes, Sproat, Campbell, A'ton, McKindsey, Preston, Ramsay, McGibbon, Book, Brothers, Pettit, Waldie, McDougall, Wilson, Watson, Patterson, Elliott, Stewart, McMillan, Dixon, Scott, Stark, Lawrence and Greenlees.

Many others have taken a turn at heading up the organization.

Presidents in the last 15 years have included Elmer

Douglas, Lloyd Chishblm, Gordon Rayner, Archie McKinnon, George Readhead, Alfred Ford, Jim McKay, Gerald Carton and the current incumbent, Lloyd Stokes.

The pioneers of Halton laid a firm foundation for the modern fall fair, when they organized the first county agricultural society back in 1853. There have been many hours of toil expended on organizing the succeeding 125 fairs and this year's 125th anniversary fair is a tribute to their efforts.

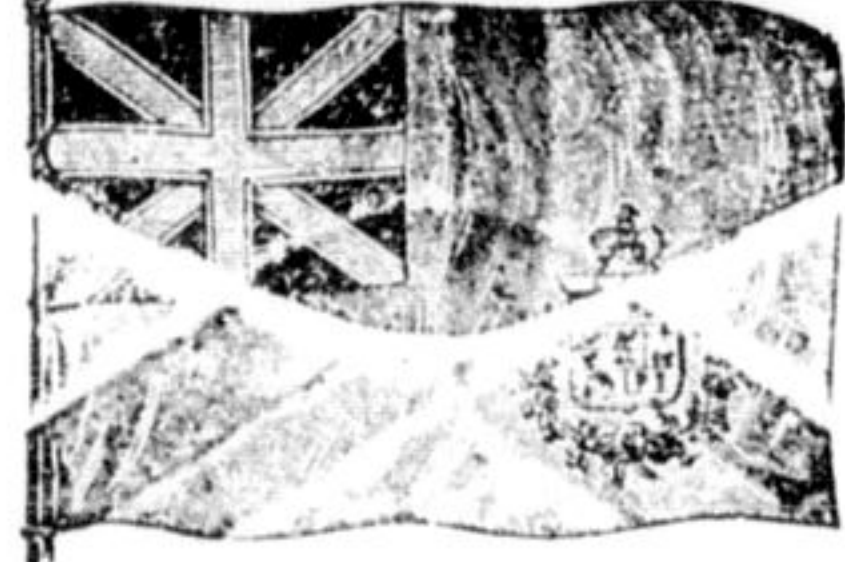
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New Grounds added! New buildings for Carriage, etc. Prize List Greatly Increased.

SPECIAL ENVELOPE advertising Milton's September fair in 1900 is one of the pieces of memorabilia the fair's historical committee has obtained for display at the Sept. 23-25 event. The fair board has planned a special history display for the 125th annual fair.

butter, eggs, bakery, fruit and other articles. The shoemakers and the tailors were there, too, displaying their wares and taking orders for pre-Christmas deliveries. Heavy horses and colts were shown up and down Main St. while the light horses and road classes were driven up and down the First Line (Bronte St.).

The first fair hall was later occupied by Bundy and Halm, blacksmiths. Later the hall was used as a town hall, and later William McKenzie owned it.

In 1864 the directors and Milton Driving Park Association got together and purchased eight acres of land beside Thomas St., the nucleus of the present fair grounds. The fair board built a hall, at a cost of \$2,300. It was formally opened on Sept. 23, 1864 with "a large assemblage of yeomanry of the county, with their wives and families, gathered for the occasion," according to The Canadian Farmer magazine.

The hall was described as a "commodious frame building, ornamental in external appearance and convenient as to internal arrangement."

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with **Bill McDonald**

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Where to store crochet needles? The plastic container a new toothbrush comes in is perfect.

Encourage your youngster to help with the dusting—make a "duster puppet" out of an old white sock. Draw on a face and slip it over the child's hand.

Store small jigsaw puzzles separately in sandwich bags.

Save the heavy wax envelopes gelatin desserts come in—they make great moisture-proof containers for pickles or olives in the lunchbox. Fold over and fasten with a rubber band.

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