

# A good year 1934

By Mark Niblett

1934 was an interesting year.

It was the deepest and darkest of the Depression years. Soup kitchens were a common sight in Canadian cities.

In 1934 the whole world was excited over the birth of the Dionne quintuplets. Mackenzie King was Prime Minister of Canada, and Ramsay MacDonald headed the British government.

It was in 1934 that Adolf Hitler became Fuhrer of Germany, and Benito Mussolini started to build up to a war with Ethiopia. The Queen Mary was launched; Bruno Hauptmann was arrested for the Lindbergh kidnaping; John Dillinger was killed in Chicago.

It was the year of the Morro Castle disaster; the year that Soviet Russia was admitted to the League of Nations.

These were the big events, the memorable history-making things that happened in 1934. Just as important to thousands of people, though, was a local event: the 79th annual Markham Fair.

The preparations must have been going on for weeks, perhaps months. The Fair Board members would be arranging all the details of the event: prize-lists had to be printed, the buildings and grounds made ready, invitations had to be sent to special guests.

Village merchants would have been busy too. Grocery stores and restaurants would order extra food; gas stations would make sure there was plenty of fuel on hand; hotels would brace to receive the influx of Fair visitors.

The Town and Township police forces would make ready in their own ways. Vacations would probably be deferred in order to have the full strength of the force available for traffic duty, patrolling the grounds, and performing other tasks related to the fall event.

All through September the preparations would gather intensity. At the schools the students, still not reconciled to classroom confinement after a summer of freedom, would excitedly discuss the Fair. Teachers might assign special projects in penmanship or art, with a view to displaying something at the Fair.

On the farms it would be harvest season. A farmer might pause in his labours to consider his entries in the forthcoming competitions. This sheaf of wheat, that squash, these potatoes — they should go in the fair; a fine, healthy crop this year, with the prospects

of a blue ribbon or two, maybe.

Their wives would be hard at work in the kitchens, baking pies and cakes. Preserves would be turned out amid clouds of steam, destined to represent the family in the food exhibition.

Mountains of food — ham, devilled eggs, loaves of bread, vegetables — would be packed into baskets for the great adventure. The party-lines would buzz with gossip and plans for the Fair.

The men would take a shrewd look at their animals. The hog, now, fine, fat animal he is. Well worth putting him in the show. That pony might do well in the horse show, let's get him curried and exercised.

On the eve of the great day, the Markham Economist & Sun would whip enthusiasm to a new pitch. Great black all-capital headlines in the October 4 issue proclaimed "Markham's 79th Fair In Full Swing Friday Morning; Preparation Day Reveals Many Very Important Innovations."

A smaller headline assured readers, "Big Show Off To Good Start To-day", and promised that the Fair would be the best yet. "Many new features that have been introduced this year," would be seen, the story predicted, and event habitues of the event would find something new. "...they can no longer say 'It's the same old thing over again'."

For all that, the story lamented the changes and said that the Fair is in "an entirely new age now", and regretted the good old days: "Those who knew it even twenty years ago will see many changes and think of the good old times when the people came by wagon loads and train loads and for miles on foot and stayed for two or three days while the old town gave itself up to a real good holiday and everybody was happy."

In these soft modern days, the Economist & Sun said, people have it easier. "People step into their luxurious cars and in a few minutes arrive at the grounds where they spend a few hours instead of days and thus the pleasure becomes short-lived and is soon forgotten."

This article concluded with a ringing exhortation to "Do your best to boost the Fair!"

Another story promised untold delights to be found in the Junior Farmers annual grain show. Guests of honor was to be Colonel Deacon, president of the C.N.E.

The Fair had to compete with other forms of entertainment even then. The Stanley Theatre was showing

"Death Takes a Holiday" with Frederic March and Evelyn Venable.

To us, perhaps the food prices advertised in this issue are the most poignant of all. C. Leadbetter & Son offered round steak at 17 cents a pound; Porter House roast was the same price, while shoulder veal went for 13 cents a pound and blade roast for twelve.

By the time that issue was on the streets, people would already be pouring into town. The Model-T's and Chevrolets would be parked along Main Street. Families from outlying farms would be staying with friends or relatives, or finding accommodation in a hotel or boarding-house. Those who came late, or were reluctant to pay for lodging, might spend a night in the car or find a bed on the straw in the grounds.

The great day, alas, did not dawn sunny and clear. Rather, the skies were dark and heavy clouds threatened rain all morning. "The weatherman was not in the best of humor" was the way the Economist & Sun put it. Soon, though, the clouds rolled away; or, as the florid journalism of those days said, "Old Sol came to the rescue in all the brightness of his smiling countenance."

The weatherman was apparently not the only one who wouldn't cooperate. A firm of concessionaires had been granted privileges to run the Midway that year, but they backed out on short notice. The Fair Board members had to scramble to find a substitute, but in the end everything came off well.

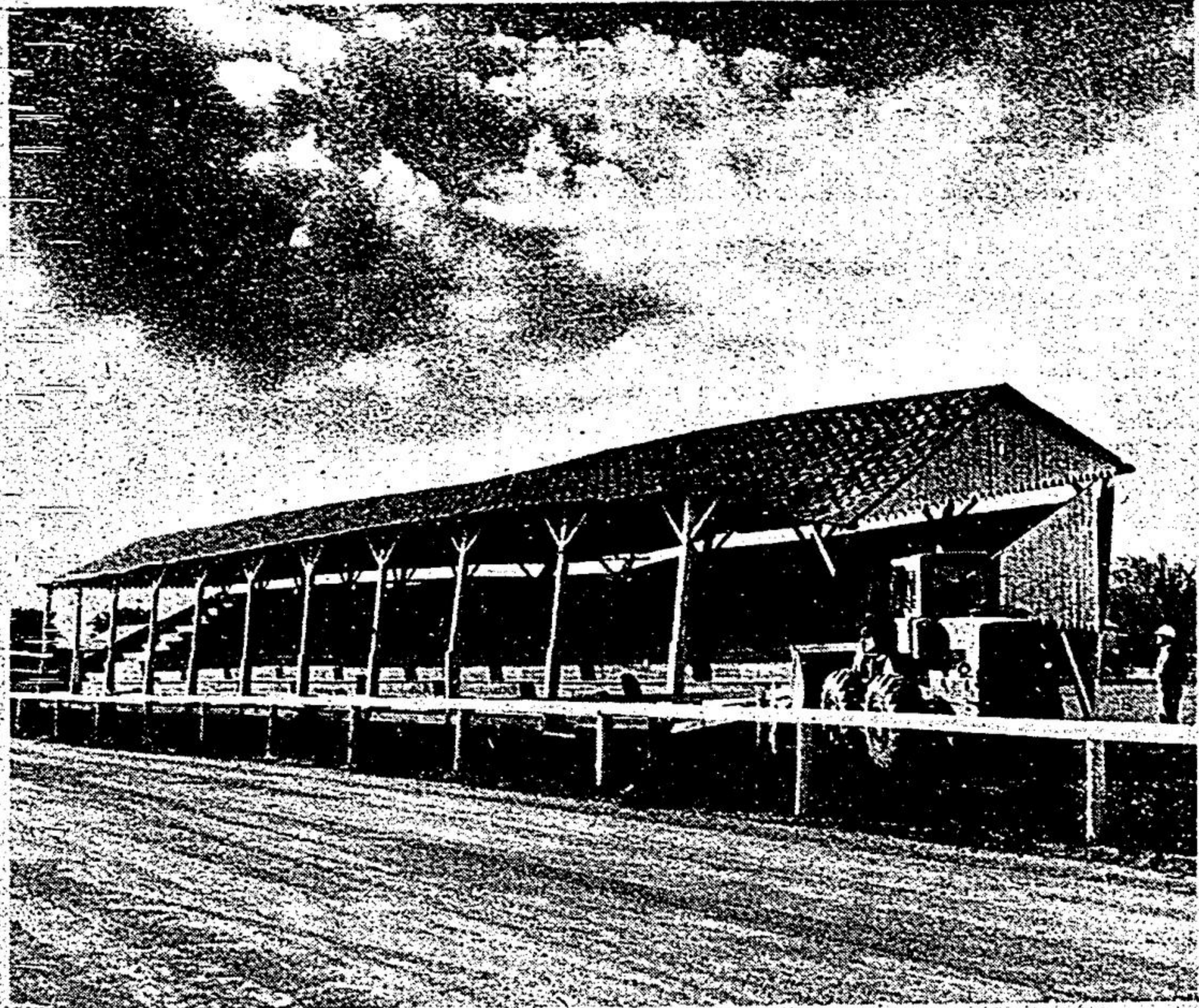
In what might represent a deep-seated distrust of certain food, the newspaper report stated that "there was no lack of hot dogs or other games of chance."

The expected crowds of people showed up at the Fair, in such numbers that the parking lot and grounds overflowed onto the surrounding streets. Some things, it appears, never change.

Judging by the report, the visitors were in a jolly mood as well. Certainly there were enough events to keep them amused. Judging of the various exhibits must have been a popular — if nerve-wrecking — event. The judges would examine, test, confer, and award the ribbon; then, one presumes, beat a hasty retreat.

On Saturday alone there were 19 different horse events, ranging from a pony race to a competition for draft horses.

The Junior Farmers must have put on a good show, as the chronicler notes "The exhibits in



Remember the grandstand at Markham Fair? It was condemned and demolished several years ago.

most classes were quite up to the average while the Junior Farmers' display of grains etc. surpassed anything heretofore undertaken by the club."

Saturday night must have seen a mass exodus of visitors as the Fair closed its doors. The issue of the Economist & Sun for October 11 carries a full column long concerning traffic accidents that evening; whether or not there is any connection between the traffic and the Fair is not stated. Under a headline reading "Motor Accidents Numerous Here on Saturday Last", an anonymous reporter, "The Scribe", detailed the disasters.

"Two men seriously injured, four more battered, gashed, scratched, and bruised; three cars and a truck wrecked beyond redemption and another car and truck damaged was the sum total in the accident arena Saturday evening."

Continuing in a style which would get him fired instantly from any newspaper in the world today, "The Scribe" went on to detail the accidents. His prose is studded with unlikely comparatives: "The car looked as if someone had planted a stick of dynamite in each corner and set them all off at once, if you get the idea."

That one, though, escaped relatively unscathed compared to a couple of other unfortunate individuals: "Two more cars looked as if they had been dropped off the Empire State Building and then struck by a locomotive, while the occupants — at least two of them looked as if they had come off second best in a brawl with a buzz-saw."

By car and train, the weary Fairgoers wended

their way home, already making plans for next year's Markham Fair. Now, it's time for the

120th Markham Fair; and the event has lost none of its popularity. Anything that can draw en-

thusiastic crowds year after year, in good times or bad, should have little to fear in the future.

Welcome To The

FAIR

AND WHILE YOU ARE IN MARKHAM,  
DON'T FORGET TO DROP INTO . . .

CROTHERS  
PHARMACY

Where  
Big Discounts  
are a Daily  
Happening!

MARKHAM SHOPPING CENTRE  
HWY. 7 WEST OF HWY. 48.