

# A taste of record-setting Markham Fair

Many superlatives would be appropriate to describe the 168th annual Markham Fair — amazing, fantastic, exhilarating, incredible. All suit this semi-rural, semi-urban exhibition that's long been accurately recognized as Canada's country centrepiece.

Enhanced by an obliging weatherman, the big show attracted crowds that, when all heads are counted, should break existing records.

While watching an outstanding display of fireworks during a pause in the tractor-pull, I attempted to envision scenes from the first Markham Fair 168 years ago.

Admittedly, to properly document activity dating back to 1844, one should call on the expertise of Markham's Rogers Gardham, whose patience and skill allows him to seek out facts and figures from media files of yesteryears.

But I'll try.

William Armstrong, the initial pioneering president, would surely have awakened early on that all-important Saturday morning. For he was both a farmer and a hotel proprietor, two very different vocations that undoubtedly took up much of his time. However, being an enterprising gentleman, he obviously enjoyed the challenge. So much so he was willing to go where no man had gone before — take the lead in organizing a local fall fair.

But transportation to and from the site must surely have posed a problem, particularly if Mrs. Armstrong chose to do the week's grocery shopping at Locust Hill's general store.

Since this was 70 years before Henry Ford would introduce his revolutionary Model T, Mr. Armstrong would need travel the three-miles by horse and buggy, dropping his wife off en route and hopefully picking her up on his return. Perhaps he walked.

While one can only estimate the fair's attendance in 1844, Mr. Gardham recounts that in 1912, more than 16,000 patrons trekked past the pay station, resulting in gate receipts exceeding \$2,000. "All records broken" read a headline in the Markham Economist and Sun.

In tribute to Mr. Armstrong and subsequent presidents who've faithfully maintained this enviable tradition, I trust a silent acknowledgment will be accorded each at the volunteers' banquet next month. At the same time, I'll shed a tear for those fair highlights that Mr. Armstrong would never

live to enjoy. Like: tasting Merna Burkholder's coconut cream pie; Joyce Lapp's lemon cake; Jeanette Sokol's cranberry loaf; Kate-lyn Russell's banana cake; Wanda Knight's traditional pretzels; Phil Redshaw's white bread or Andrew Wannop's chocolate cookies; shaking hands with fair ambassadors Alana Tufford, Victoria Osadchuk-Hammond, both of Markham and Jennifer Lee of Stouffville; admiring beautiful quilts perfected by Stouffville's Ruth Wagg and a group of ladies from Stouffville's Christ Church Anglican; meeting Hannah St. Louis of Markham and Reni, her pet show champion cat; sizing up Don Miller's 2,000-pound Clydesdale; Jared Simpson's 3.92-

pound potato; Hanna Marsig's enormous pumpkin; Kelly Carrick's huge squash and Jean Painter's vegetable platter; inhaling the sweet smells of Paul Reesor's hay and Lori Hulshof's sheaves; appreciating the skill of 18 and under high point champion Elizabeth Jessop of Stouffville or enjoying the creative paintings by Markham's Murray Pipher.

All these things and more Mr. Armstrong would never see or could never have imagined. This was Markham Fair 2012.

Jim Thomas is a Stouffville resident who has written for area newspapers for more than 60 years.



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with Jim Thomas

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The flu clinics will be held at our **Church Street office ONLY.**

### CLINIC HOURS

Monday	Oct 15, 22, & 29	5:30 p.m. – 7:45 p.m.
Tuesday	Oct 16, 23 & 30	5:30 p.m. – 7:45 p.m.
Wednesday	Oct 17, 24 & 31	9:00 a.m. – 11:45 a.m. 1:00 p.m. – 3:45 p.m.
Thursday	Oct 18, 25 & Nov 1	5:30 p.m. – 7:45 p.m.

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