



Big Fresno Fair Museum

Get a Glimpse into the Biggest Fresno Fair Moments in History!

First debuted in 2013, The Big Fresno Fair Museum showcases a cross-section of the Fair's history since its founding in 1884 - taking visitors on a trip down memory lane and providing younger generations a glimpse of what Fair life was like far before they were born, as well as historical events that happened at the Fresno Fairgrounds. Located in the O'Neill Hall, The Big Fresno Fair Museum features more than 4,600 items on display including the first known moving film of the Fair by Claude "Pop" Laval in 1930 and the first ever built cotton candy machine dating back to 1921. Here's some of the featured exhibits:

Heritage Talks Documentary - Telling the Stories of the Past

In 2014, Heritage Talks, a documentary-style video was added to the Museum. It features stories from past building superintendents, board members, staff members, concessionaires, and horse racing supporters - some who are no longer with us - all recalling their memories of The Big Fresno Fair and the role it played in their lives.

California Chrome - The Valley's Race Horse

The Museum features a section dedicated to the 2014 Kentucky Derby and Preakness Stakes Race winner, California Chrome - a horse that not only won these races, but also stole the hearts of fans. California Chrome is the only California-bred and fed horse to have ever won the first two legs of the Triple Crown and was foaled and trained right here in the San Joaquin Valley at Harris Farms.

The Historic Wooden Speedway

In June of 1920, the City Chamber of Commerce and the Fresno County Board of Supervisors signed a \$250,000 contract to build a Wooden Speedway that would host the 200-mile San Joaquin Valley Classic on the last day of that year's Fair. Prince Speedways Co. was awarded the contract and construction of the Speedway began using 2" x 4" pine lumber.

History of Horse Racing at The Big Fresno Fair

Since the beginning, horse racing has held center stage at the Fair and it still does! The first Fresno Fair opened in 1883, featuring a five-day horse race meet, some simple produce displays and a livestock exhibit. Early horse racing pitted horses of farm owners from throughout the Valley against one another; their proud owners would wager with neighbors and friends at the predominately agricultural show each fall.

History of the Brian I. Tatarian Grandstand

The Big Fresno Fair Grandstand, known today as the Brian I. Tatarian Grandstand, was originally built in 1888 and contained a separate clubhouse. Beyond horse racing, the Grandstand would become a place where spectators would enjoy a wide variety of entertainment from daredevil stunts to air races!



The Life of J.E. O'Neill

From 1943 until his death in 1961, J.E. O'Neill served as President or Director of the Fresno District Fair. He saw the Fair as a perfect vehicle to promote and honor the agriculture and livestock industries. As a director, he worked tirelessly to plan and promote both. His leadership was based on his belief the Fair belonged to everyone and everyone was integral to its success.

History of the Paul Paul Theater

The Paul Paul Theater has served as the main stage for a wide array of headlining entertainment at The Big Fresno Fair for much of its long and storied history. Dating back to 1938, more than \$12,000 was spent on improvements to the Fairgrounds in preparation for that year's Fair, including the construction of a new bandstand, the Apollitorium, which provided the foundation for today's Paul Paul Theater. In 1979, the stage would be named in honor of long-time Board Member Paul Paul after his passing.

Assembly Center Memorial

Just inside the Chance Avenue Gate Entrance stands the Fresno Assembly Center Memorial in remembrance of the 120,000 loyal Americans and permanent residents, all of Japanese ancestry living primarily on the West Coast in 1942, who were forcibly uprooted from their homes and imprisoned in one of America's ten Assembly Centers during World War II on the false charge of being a "national security risk" following the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Tragically, the Fresno Fairgrounds served as one of those Assembly Centers. This exhibit honors those individuals who were interned at the Fairgrounds and helps educate future generations.