

*Many thanks, to Panhandle Tidbits for putting both of these stories together about the Tri-State Fair.*



## **TRI STATE FAIR---The Little Fair That Could**

### **Part One**

The Tri-State Fair is always an exciting event for our area. When I was a child living in Lakeview, I remember attending the Fair with several family members, my mom & dad, sister, aunts & uncles. I'm sure we went to the exhibits buildings, but what I remember most is the midway with all its lights and rides and food. I also remember the Barkers. One in particular who attempted to guess your age. You paid him a quarter and he attempted to guess your age within so many years (I don't remember how many). If he missed you got some kind of rinky dink prize.

My Uncle Ervin, who was in his fifties at the time, had a cute cherub like face and looked very youthful. After prodding by my Dad and Uncle Troy he walked up to the barker and handed him a quarter. The carnival man guessed him to be twenty years younger and Uncle Ervin, amidst applause, came away with the prize, which he gave to me.

I remember, after moving to Tulia, that school always let out on the Monday the Fair began. School kids from all over the area were given free admission tickets, a very good marketing tool. We always

went to the parade and then to the fairgrounds. It was a very exciting event and looked forward to by the kids in the Tri-State area, like Christmas and summer vacation.

Many years of hard work and planning went into the development of the Tri-State Fair. Once billed as "The Second Largest Annual Exposition in Texas" it was chartered on June 23, 1923 but had its beginnings much earlier.

On June 13, 1899, as desire grew for a Panhandle Fair Association, an announcement was made in The Amarillo Evening News. It stated that "All interested citizens of Potter County, and others anywhere desiring a Fair were to meet at the courthouse in Amarillo on Tuesday June 27. A report of the 'Ex-Committee' of the Fair and Racing Association would be presented at the meeting held in Amarillo on the 2, 3, 4 and 5 of May to effect a permanent organization for a fair in the fall."

The racing, it stated, would be subordinate to the vast livestock interests of the Panhandle. The first livestock show had been held in 1897.

On August 25, 1899, the Amarillo-Panhandle Fair and Livestock Association was organized with a capital stock of \$10,000. Officers elected were; Rufus L. Stringfellow, mayor of the recently incorporated city of Amarillo, president; James L. Smith, vice-president; W.S. Maddrey, second vice-president; James D. Hamlin, secretary and P.H. Seewald, treasurer. A charter was applied for and the greatest fair and livestock show in the west was expected to be held later that year. Unfortunately, the fair association did not last.

In 1903, a fair was held on grounds that are now a part of Llano Cemetery. Race tracks were built at Glenwood Park and on land just south of the Wolflin area where the track encircled the Sam Morris Lake. The discussion of a fair was then tabled for a few years.

In 1907, a small fair was held in the two hundred block of East 4th Street. Exhibits of farm products, canned fruits and vegetables were displayed from as far away as Farwell.

No action was taken on the fair again until January 9, 1912 when a meeting was held in the courthouse to consider ways and means of furthering an All-Panhandle Fair. A committee of three was appointed from three commercial organizations, the Chamber of Commerce, the Real Estate Exchange and the Young Men's Service League. Again, plans were made for a fair in the fall. Citizens from all over the Panhandle endorsed the plan. The Panhandle Auto Fair Association also wanted to be a part of the exposition.

It was decided the fair would be held at Glenwood Park, directly east of Llano Cemetery, because it had streetcar service. Glenwood Park was an amusement center for the entire area. It had a carousel, a scenic railway and an opera house that seated 1600. Again plans were delayed and 1912 came and went without a fair.

But the plans were not in vain. On October 6, 1913, under a crisp blue sky with Old Glory blowing in the wind, the Panhandle State Fair flung open its gates. And it was a huge success, in every way but one...financially.

The Honorable E.R. Kone, Texas Commissioner of Agriculture was keynote speaker for the inaugural event. He was introduced by W.E. Gee, Amarillo mayor. Other speakers that morning included; A.W. Read of Memphis; W.D. Fisher of Canadian; W.L. McGehee of Wayside and E.H. Perry of Plainview.

The livestock exhibits included some of the best breeds of cattle and hogs ever seen in the Panhandle. It took one whole building to house the poultry exhibit. Nunn Electric and the City Light and Water Company occupied a beautifully lighted building and had on display all of their electrical wares.

One of the highlights of the fair was an automobile parade on opening day led by the Plainview Band. First, second, third and fourth prizes were awarded to the most beautiful cars. First place went to Miss Fannie Fern Masterson. She drove a Hupmobile adorned like a coach in lavender chrysanthemums while the occupants held lavender parasols.

Second place was Mr. & Mrs. Sam Vaughn who drove a Studebaker in a pink and white color scheme. Mr. & Mrs. Frank A. White claimed third place in a Case draped in the patriotic colors of red, white and blue. The fourth place prize went to Mrs. John A. Veale whose Buick was decorated in a vibrant green design. On the third day of the Fair, the Lowery-Phillips School football team defeated the Seth Ward team from Plainview.

October 9 was South Plains Day and began with an aero plane flight over the city at 8:30 a.m. The day was full of other activities including; livestock parade, buggy race for trotters, band concert and tight rope walker and trapeze artist among other events. The aviator, a man named Fowler, performed throughout the day with daredevil maneuvers above the crowds. In addition to all the happenings going on at Glenwood Park, noted soprano, Mabel Riegelman gave a marvelous performance in "La Boheme" at the Grand Opera House on Polk Street.

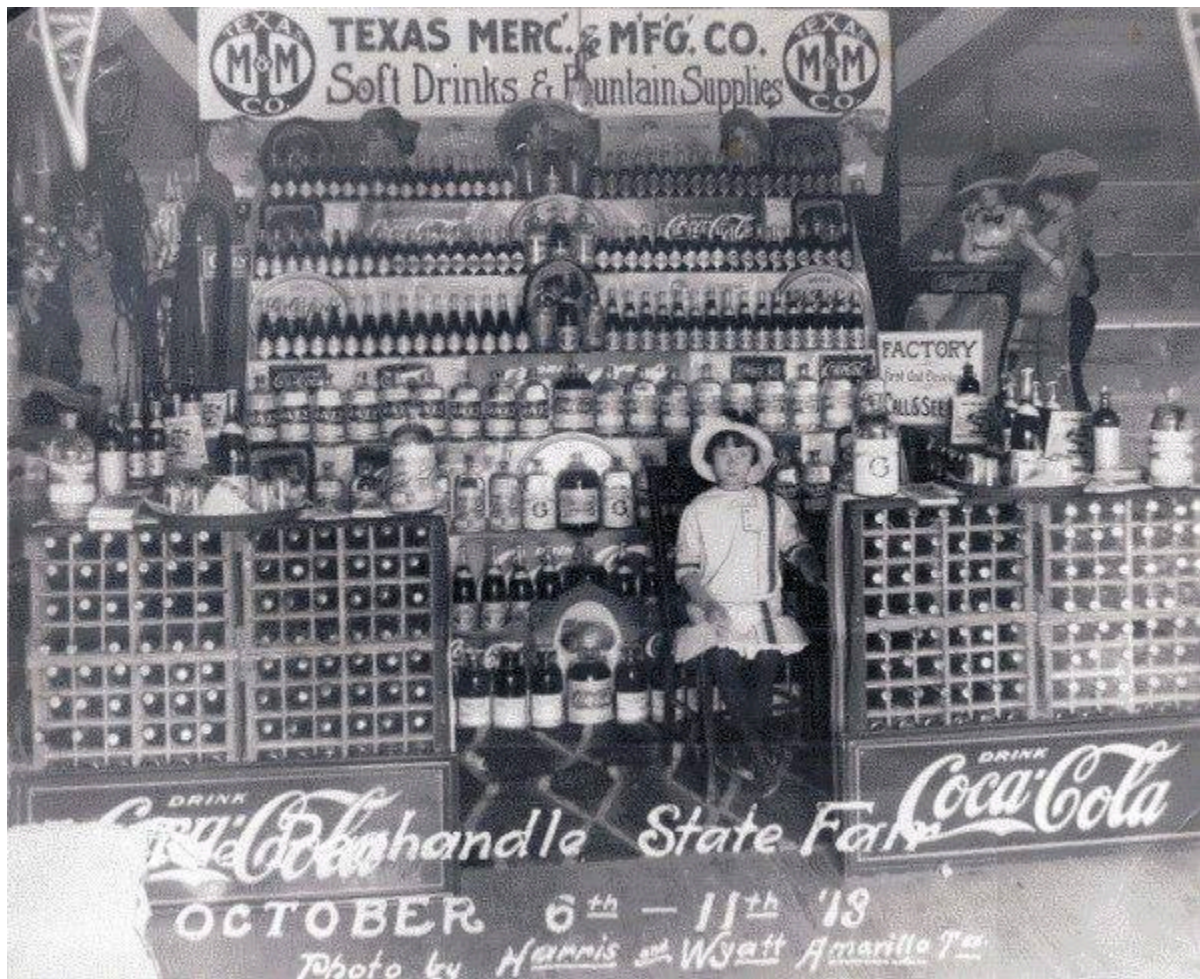
The largest day was on October 11, the last day of the Fair. It was designated as Mother's Day, Traveling Men's Day and Education Day. At the fairgrounds the daylong program began with the Panhandle Male Quartet followed by speeches from Amarillo school superintendent, S.M. Boyd and Dr. B.G. Lowery of Lowery-Phillips School.

The "Knights of the Grip" (traveling men) paraded 150 strong in downtown Amarillo followed by a speech at the fairgrounds by Hilton R. Green entitled "The Traveling Man, A Factor in Developing the Panhandle. Many vocal groups and pianist performed throughout the day. The piano for the entertainment was provided by the Leyhe Piano Company of Amarillo, J.L. Henderson, manager.

Panhandle citizens declared the Fair a complete success and looked forward with great anticipation to an even greater Fair for next year. In the entertainment department the Fair was even better than expected, but in the financial department? The Panhandle State Fair netted a profit of \$421.29.

Next: The Beginnings of the Tri-State Fair.





## The Tri-State Fair

Photo: Panhandle State Fair October 6-11, 1913

## Part Two

With the Panhandle State Fair of 1913 being such a roaring success, the Panhandle State Fair Association immediately set about planning the next year's events. The Fair opened in late September of 1914 with excellent attendance. People crowded the fairgrounds from all over the Panhandle, from distant points in Texas and from other states.

The Amarillo Street Railway Company was kept busy carrying an estimated two thirds of the attendees. At peak periods, generally during the races, five to six streetcars were waiting to carry the crowds. Fair goers were given a panoramic view of the Panhandle with twice as many exhibits as the 1913 exposition.

In the agricultural division, exhibits were on display from the counties of Armstrong, Hall, Carson, Donley, Hemphill, Crosby, Deaf Smith, Randall, Ochiltree, Lubbock, Oldham and Potter. Others were from the towns of Lockney, Shamrock, Minerva and Higgins. Many Hereford and Aberdeen Angus cattle were shown.

The Amarillo Mill and Elevator Company had a display booth to advertise their 'White Lilac' and 'Our Home' flours. Karo Syrup had a booth and served pancakes throughout each day. There were booths that catered to the ladies, Singer Sewing Machine Company, J.E. Bryant's Fine Candies and Confections, Mrs. Baker's Hand Painted China and Mrs. Clark's Spirella Corsetiere. There was also the Holland Furniture Company and Schillings Best Coffee, who kept the coffee brewing as the aroma drifted out to fairgoers.

One of the most beautiful exhibits at the fair was in the needlecraft division. It was a tatted bed set made by a Mrs. Elliott who beamed as admirers said it had to be the most gorgeous piece of needlework ever displayed in the state of Texas.

Wednesday was declared "Old Panhandle Settlers Day" and "Women's Day." That morning approximately two hundred and seventy five old settlers convened in the fairgrounds opera house. Attendees included the Charles Goodnights, Captain Harry Ingerton, Miss Laura V. Hamner, Judge Thomas F. Turner, Judge J.N. Browning, Judge Frank Willis (of Canadian) and Billy Dixon's widow, Olive.

Judge Turner addressed the crowd and called for Molly Goodnight to come forward. He then presented her with a bouquet of beautiful flowers from the Ladies of Amarillo as a token of their love and appreciation for her as a pioneer woman in the Panhandle. Mrs. W.A. Warner of Claude was also recognized.

Plans were made for a permanent organization of the old settlers and officers were elected. They included Judge Browning, president, Newt F. Locke of Miami, vice president and Miss Hamner, secretary. Plans were made to hold the next annual meeting at the Panhandle State Fair in 1915.

Molly Goodnight was again the center of attraction at the Women's Day meeting held in the afternoon. Mrs. Tom Currie was in charge of the meeting and Judge Willis was the main speaker. The Amarillo Military Band provided music for the occasion playing "Dixie" and many other southern songs.

By 1915, however, things in the world had changed and plans for a fair were scaled down. The Great World War was raging in Europe and with the sinking of the Lusitania killing 120 Americans on board, the possibility of the United States entering the war was likely. President Woodrow Wilson asked congress for a declaration of war and it was officially declared on April 6, 1917.

Citizens of the Panhandle forgot about fairs and old settler's reunions and turned their attention to Red Cross work, Liberty Loan drives (revenue generated to support war efforts) and other things associated with the war movement.

At 5 am on the morning of November 11, 1918 an armistice was signed in a railroad car parked in a

French forest and the citizens of the Panhandle breathed a sigh of relief. Several more years passed before the Fair Association was revived.

Finally, with interests renewed and promoted by Colonel C.T. Herring, John B. Gilvin, R.B. Masterson and others, plans for a new fair began to take shape. In 1921 the Fair Association located its headquarters on the second floor of City Hall and elected officers. Panhandle Plains, Inc., an organization formed for the purpose of promoting the fair, called for a meeting to be held in 1922 at Tulia to discuss and decide on a location for an exposition.

Amarillo and Lubbock were both competing for the Fair to be held in their respective cities. John B. Gilvin enlisted a group of sixty five Amarillo men to attend the meeting. However, the meeting in Tulia addressed numerous details, but none of which determined a site for the event. A later meeting was held in Hereford and a decision was made that Amarillo would be the permanent home of the Panhandle Fair Association.

In March 1922 the Board of City Development sent notices to members of the fair board and various business people asking them to meet with the BCD on the afternoon of the 16th to discuss a revised proposition for the regional fair. A large delegation attended including Ross Rogers, Rev. Roy Rutherford and the Blackburn Brothers.

It was reported that numerous meetings had been held to discuss ways of handling a regional fair. F.M. Ryburn declared "A fair was of extremely important nature to Amarillo, owing to the city's geographic location and the fact that the people of the western part of Oklahoma, the Panhandle of Texas and eastern part of New Mexico looked to Amarillo to establish the fair."

He also informed the gathering that a bond issue of no less than \$100,000 was needed in order to have a successful event. This, he said, would allow them the capital to acquire a plot of land on which to erect permanent buildings. The fair committee recommended that they take the funds from a \$300,000 account that had already been voted on and set aside for a new Municipal Auditorium. No action was taken on that suggestion.

A delegation, headed by Colonel Herring, appeared before the city commission on May 23, 1923 and requested use for the fair of the streets around the newly constructed Municipal Auditorium. Permission was granted.

On June 23, 1923, the Tri-State Fair, with a capital stock of \$10,000, received its charter. It was guaranteed by Colonel C.T. Herring, president, John W. Crudgington, vice president, John B. Gilvin, secretary, J.C. Fain, treasurer and by Colonel E.O. Thompson and Ross D. Rogers.

Finally, after many years of plans, preparations and setbacks, the Tri-State Fair opened its gates on September 25, 1923. The six day event played host to thirty five counties that displayed exhibits in the foyer of the new Municipal Auditorium at 505 Buchanan. There was a large tent on the street south of the building and another one extending 300 feet along Buchanan. The fair was declared a great success.

On January 2, 1924, Potter County acquired 129.1 acres located between East Tenth and East third

Streets. The tract was purchased from J.W. Crudginton for \$25,820. This site, purchased decades ago, has played host to countless numbers over the years and continues to draw fair-goers each September.

For ninety one years the Tri-State Fair has played host to thousands of exhibitors, carnival rides, food booths, rodeos, and entertainers. It was, and continues to be a very exciting place to go.

