

# FRYEBURG FAIR



1851 - Western Maine, Hiram, Brownfield, Fryeburg

Local farmers and businessmen established the West Oxford Agricultural Society, to be known later as Fryeburg Fair. Their original constitution read, "The object of the Society shall be the improvement of agriculture and horticulture, practical and scientific, and also of the mechanical arts." Despite financial challenges getting Fryeburg Fair started, historical records clearly show a rock-solid commitment to their stated mission - agricultural education and history. The original founders' loyalty to the society appears unshakeable. The first fair would include a display of cattle and other farm animals with prizes for the best of breeds, a general celebration of the harvest, and the end of the season. Peleg Wadsworth of Hiram, Maine, was elected the first President of the Society. Descendants of Peleg Wadsworth remain involved with Fryeburg Fair to this day.

The 1851 fair ran for one day only with cattle being walked to the fairgrounds to be exhibited. The Fair's schedule increased to 3 days in the mid-1800's; 4 days in 1945, 5 days in 1950; 7 days in 1967 and to the current 8 day schedule in 1978.



1949-The first radio broadcast from Fryeburg Fair  
Harry Eastman & Jake Brofee's show, "Maine Farm Topics" on WCSH

## *The Finances Then & Now*

### THE BRIDGTON NEWS.

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#### Oxford County

- FAIR -

#### FRYEBURG, MAINE,

Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday,

Sept. 30, Oct. 1 and 2, 1902.

On Wednesday, Oct. 1st,

The Bridgton and Saco River R. R. will run a Special  
Excursion Train, making close connections  
at Bridgton Junction with M. C. train for  
Fryeburg.

Leave Harrison, 8.30 a. m., North Bridgton, 8.35.  
Leave Bridgton, 8.55, arrive Fryeburg, 10.29 a.m.  
Returning, leave Fryeburg, 6.22 p. m.; arrive at  
Bridgton, 8.27, Harrison, 8.53.

#### FARES.

Harrison and No. Bridgton to Fryeburg and Return,

**\$1.50.**

Bridgton and Sandy Creek to Fryeburg and Return,

**\$1.25.**

On Sept. 30 and Oct. 2, regular trains only.

J. A. BENNETT, General Manager.

*1902-Special trains brought fairgoers to the main gate*

The earliest record of admission price at the Fair was in 1859 - 6 tickets for 50 cents. In 1924 adult tickets were 50 cents each and children 10 cents. During the Depression year of 1933, the Fair reduced admission to 35 cents and men in uniform received free admittance. In 1973, tickets were \$1 Sunday thru Wednesday, \$1.50 on Thursday and \$2 Friday & Saturday. In 2003, it was \$6 per day except for Saturday at \$8. In 2010-2016 tickets were \$10. 2017-2022 tickets were \$12. At their April 2023 meeting, the trustees of Fryeburg Fair, based on ever-increasing expenses, voted



*1970-One of many improvements over the years at Fryeburg Fair - the underpass. Fryeburg Fair leadership shown George Weston, Asa O. Pike IV, Henry McIntyre (builder), David Hastings II, Ralph McKeen, Earl Osgood, John Weston, Buck Williams, Charles Trumbull, Lawrence Boynton & Phil Andrews*

to increase the daily ticket price to \$15.

Fryeburg Fair's expansion and growth has continued since 1851 thanks in great part to generational leadership, careful and conservative financial management and maintaining annual agricultural and entertainment traditions that fairgoers expect and love. There are 107 buildings and almost 200 acres of land to maintain. Annual average attendance in the last decade is estimated to be around 225,000 from fairgoers, exhibitors, vendors and employees. That number also includes children under 12 who get in free and 65+ aged seniors on Tuesdays - also free.

Fryeburg Fair is a 501(c)(3) non-profit. Norman Huntress of Harrison, ME, is the Treasurer. He has been with the Fair for three years, replacing Terry Adams of Fryeburg after his retirement. Huntress reports, "In 2022, operational expenses of the Fair were \$4.6M. Our biggest expense is payroll

at \$1.8M. In 2022 we sent out 693 year-end W-2's. We just gave everyone a \$1 per hour increase in 2022."

Expenses for 2022 include \$580,000 in department expenses. There are over 45 departments of the Fair, one for each area of livestock, exhibitions, museums and programs, \$560,000 in building maintenance, \$350,000 in prize premiums paid to exhibitors, \$300,000 for insurance, \$178,000 in entertainment, \$160,000 in water, electric and waste removal and \$145,000 in technology developments. The Fair maintains its buildings with vigor and invested

\$385,000 in capitol improvements in 2022 with \$545,000 planned for 2023. 2023 planned capitol improvements include a new water main, fencing repairs, electrical upgrades, blacktop repairs, technology, sound and various equipment needs. The Fair's water main project will be funded by a matching grant.



*Circa late 70's -Watching the horseracing. Photo by Arthur Furst*



*Norman Huntress, Fryeburg Fair Treasurer  
with his daughter, Kristen Huntress*

*“We’re trying to bring young people in. My daughter worked here during Fair week 2022. We absolutely welcome anyone to apply and get involved. I love working here. The Fair life gets in your blood.”*

The good news is that income has generally stayed ahead of expenses thanks to well run departments managed by long time loyal employees. That same loyalty by farmers and farm families has been a key to Fryeburg Fair’s success as well as sharp fiscal management. In 2022 the Fair took in \$5.5M mostly from admissions, camping, horseracing, rentals and midway income.

Reinvestment in the Fair’s agricultural mission along with improvements in buildings and grounds continues to be the top priority.

A relatively unknown financial fact is that Fryeburg Fair has made a good will and appreciation donation to the Town of Fryeburg annually for over 30 years as a sort of “in lieu of taxes” gift. The donation has been \$100,000 annually for the last ten years except for 2021 - the year after the Fair was cancelled due to COVID. Total donations have exceeded \$2.5M.

The Fair has donated over \$775,000 to Fryeburg Academy toward building projects in the past. In general, other than the town donation, the Fair determined in 2015 to cease donations to outside entities, instead investing in employee salaries, general improvements and contingency funds.

Anecdotally the Trustees of the Fair made \$2 per day in 1866. Today trustees are unpaid for that role. Most all trustees, however, are department heads and employees and, as such, get paid moderately for their work.

Fryeburg Fair welcomes all who are interested in becoming part of this long-standing ag operation to contact the Fair Office at (207) 935-3268, [info@fryeburgfair.org](mailto:info@fryeburgfair.org).

For more general information about Fryeburg Fair, go to [www.fryeburgfair.org](http://www.fryeburgfair.org) and our Facebook & Instagram pages.

*Written by Rachel Andrews Damon*



*2023-Fryeburg Fair’s Finance Committee oversees the long range planning of the Fair’s financial future - Glenn “Bear” Zaidman of Bridgton, Vincent Osgood of Fryeburg & Steve Goldsmith of Lovell*