

FRYEBURG FAIR HISTORY

Fryeburg Fair is officially the West Oxford Agricultural Society, sometimes known as Maine's Blue Ribbon Classic. It was incorporated on June 3, 1851 with ten Maine member towns. Five New Hampshire border towns were added in 1888 and a sixth in 1906. Now it has sixteen towns in Maine (Baldwin, Bridgton, Brownfield, Cornish, Denmark, Fryeburg, Harrison, Hiram, Lovell, Otisfield, Porter, Standish, Stoneham, Stow, Sweden, Waterford) and six in New Hampshire (Bartlett, Chatham, Conway, Eaton, Freedom, Jackson).

The first few years the fair moved from town to town until the Society voted to make Fryeburg its permanent location. In 1858 it held its first fair under its own roof, but it outgrew that location and moved to its present site in 1885. The Society is now fortunate to have more than 180 acres with approximately 100 buildings. Over 40 departments and 600 employees help the fair run smoothly for eight days during the first week of October. It has been and always will be our goal to promote agriculture and educate the public.

FRYEBURG FAIR TODAY - We have more than 3000 large animals on the grounds during fair week. We have six breeds of dairy cattle and usually more than eight breeds of beef competing. There are about 450 horses on the grounds. A little less than half are pulling horses, and the rest are show animals with fancy harnesses and wagons. You will also find about 600 oxen about evenly divided between pulling and show. We believe that during the fair we have the largest concentration of oxen in the world. Some people come just to watch the 32 horse and ox pulling events that are spread out over the eight days. We have some 19 breeds of sheep shown at the fair as well as seven breeds of goats and many swine. Also, there are hundreds of different rabbits and poultry. A fairly recent and very popular addition is the llama family.

There are four pig scrambles for boys and girls ages 8-10 and a 4-H calf scramble. The ten calves won in the calf scramble will be raised in the 4-H baby beef program and shown during the fair the following year. It is gratifying to watch the growth of the youngsters who come here and compete with their animals. Learning to care for animals helps make them good citizens, and they become an important part of our fair, present and future. You will also find numerous club exhibits in their own 4-H Exhibition Hall with everything from artwork to veterinary science.

We have sheep dog trials on the first Sunday. The announcer explains what is happening, and the people are always amazed at the things these hardworking dogs are capable of doing. Also on Sunday is the Firemen's Muster, another fun event. Area fire departments compete in bucket brigade, wet hose, dry hose, and ball squirt contests.

Monday is Woodsmen's Day, and our competition is one of the largest east of the Mississippi. We have international champions in events such as buck-sawing, chain-sawing, tree-sawing, and springboard chop, and it is especially fun to watch the large equipment contests where skidders maneuver a tight course, and hydraulic loaders see who can pick up a pail of water without spilling it, or load and unload logs the fastest. Monday is also the ever-popular skillet throw contest for the gals and our anvil toss for men.

Tuesday is Senior Citizens Day when young folks 65 and over get in free. If you are a kid, or a kid at heart, you will certainly want to spend time on the Midway where Smokey's Greatest Shows features about 50 rides and probably twice as many games and places to eat. And what is a fair without food! Everything from sausage with peppers and onions to fried dough - and there are several full service restaurants as well.

We have six days of harness racing on a half-mile oval track, and the judges' stand, although no longer used by the racing judges, is the oldest building on the grounds. Horse racing with pari-mutuel betting has been one of the principal features of agricultural fairs in the State of Maine since 1935. Since Fryeburg Fair is held the first week in October, it is fortunate in getting many of the better horses in New England because of lack of competition from other tracks at that time.

Over in the Farm Museum there is a vast array of historical artifacts from the area, and you can watch any number of demonstrations throughout the week: blacksmithing, shingle and furniture making, timber hewing, and meat smoking, to name a few. You can sample home made ice cream, bean hole beans, or food cooked on a wood stove in Loretta's Kitchen while you watch a pair of oxen do a tilling demonstration. In contrast to the old time exhibits we have a modern sugar house in operation with an education center and a sales area.

We also have an authentic 19th century little red schoolhouse next to the focal point of the children's area, Old McDonald's Farm, a petting zoo where children can intermingle with barnyard animals or try milking the bionic cow.

In the Natural Resource Center nearby you will see displays that best represent the many forestry-related activities in the States of Maine and New Hampshire. Fish and game clubs and trapper associations are here, along with maple syrup producers, small woodland owners associations, and the Forest Service. There are many exhibits and products made from wood. Adjacent is a manned forest fire tower 10 feet off the ground looking off towards a real fire tower in the distance. South of the Center is "Energy Row" featuring alternative energy resources such as wind power, solar, geothermal, wood pellets, etc.

The Agricultural Exhibition Center, a twin in size to the Natural Resource Center, is right next-door. Individuals and small farms display their produce or handiwork. This building also houses the Grange and Extension displays, and exhibits put together by garden clubs, senior centers and the mentally challenged. Several baking and cooking contests are held throughout the week for both adults and children. Just across the way from the Aggie Expo is the Milking Parlor.

There is a Commercial Agricultural Expo that promotes both Maine and New Hampshire agricultural products, and an outside Commercial Area that features everything from log homes to swimming pools. Many people like to watch the flower arranging demonstrations which are held several times each day in the old expo building across from the main gate.

Our big Craft Center was created to promote local work and allow fair-goers to purchase quality crafts right from the artisans. Juried craftsmen offer an amazing array of items for sale.

Outside the 4-H Exhibition Hall, the Maine Christmas Tree Growers Association displays the finest Christmas trees grown in New England. Award winning wreaths are also on display, and you are taught how to make your own.

For entertainment, we have five permanent covered stages that are used all week from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily with more than 115 different acts. Also you may be surprised at any turn by strolling entertainers. These stages all have plenty of benches to rest on, and they are located at the Waterwheel Park near the main gate, Hayseed Theater at Old McDonald's Farm Park, Christmas Tree Park near the Pulling Pavilion, the Gazebo near the end of the racetrack at the rear gate, and the Draft Horse Park. In addition, there is a portable stage that is brought out on the racetrack in front of the racing grandstand where the night shows are held.

If you like it loud, and after all, that is part of the atmosphere, try the tractor and 4x4 pulls. They always fill the grandstand, even on the coldest nights. If you like it a little quieter, there is the antique tractor show on Tuesday.

A Grand Parade is held Saturday morning at 10 a.m., and what a parade it is. Pre-parade entertainment starts early while the grandstand fills. Almost every animal on the grounds is lead or driven around the track, intermingled with draft horses, bands, clowns, floats, antique automobiles, big trucks, and politicians.

For those who don't want to miss a thing, they can bring their camper and stay in one of our three camping areas for visitors. However, early reservations are a must. The Camping Department handles about 4500 reservations a year.

Come and see us and visit our website at www.fryeburgfair.org.