

# FRYEBURG FAIR TIME-LINE

There are so many facets of the West Oxford Agricultural Society (better known as "The Fryeburg Fair") that this Time-Line only touches on "the firsts" - when such-and-such was introduced or expanded. A whole chapter could be written on each of the 40+ departments, and has been in the fair's 378-page history book. The history book was dedicated to the many people who make the fair possible, and we can't even begin to touch on that here.

It can be safely said that almost every organization in the Fryeburg area has used the fairgrounds at one time or another. Spring starts off with the Harvest Hill's Rabies Clinic and the Home Garden Flower Show; summer events include camporees and a weekend flea market; fall is of course "fair season", and the only quiet time is winter. But even then, some of the fair is accessible.

In addition to providing space, the fair association tries to help monetarily, too. It pays taxes to the Town, even though it is not required, and contributes to other organizations, such as Fryeburg Academy. It also donates money to other fairs in times of need.

A time-line has been gleaned from old meeting minutes and premium books, but there are gaps where we can only make assumptions. Over the years the Fryeburg Fair has become the largest agricultural fair in the State of Maine, and second only to the Eastern States Expo in Springfield, Mass. However, now it can't get any bigger, so it strives to get better.

In 1818 the Agricultural Society of Maine was incorporated by the general court of Massachusetts. Their goal was, and still is, to educate the public about agriculture.

From 1832-1856 26 local Societies were established in Maine who held yearly agricultural fairs. (The earliest fairs in Maine were one-day events, serving as get-togethers for farm people where they could exchange problems and show off their best vegetables, fruits and grains. Usually there were pulling events to see whose team was best.)

In this time period the Fryeburg Fair was organized. On March 27, 1851 several influential businessmen from the towns of Hiram, Brownfield, and Fryeburg held a meeting at Sam Stickney's Inn in Brownfield to discuss forming an agricultural society. Peleg Wadsworth of Hiram was chosen president. Wadsworth, Col. E. L. Osgood and Thomas Souther were assigned to draw up a Constitution and ByLaws.

An Act of Incorporation was approved and granted on June 3<sup>rd</sup>. It included the towns of Fryeburg, Brownfield, Hiram, Porter, Denmark, Lovell, Sweden, Stow, Waterford and Stoneham, Maine under the name of the West Oxford Agricultural Society.

Their first fair was held in Hiram on October 23, 1851.

The second fair was held in Fryeburg at the South Meeting House in 1852, and they chose a representative to the Maine Board of Agriculture, Isaac Spring. The fair apparently went to 2 days until 1861.

In 1853 the third fair was held in Lovell at the Methodist Church, and they formed a committee to find a permanent location. The fourth fair, in 1854, was held in Denmark at the Schoolhouse. In 1855 the fifth fair was held in Porter at the Methodist Church.

The sixth fair in 1856 was held in Brownfield at the Congregational Church, and after two years of searching, they voted to permanently locate in Fryeburg.

The seventh fair, in 1857, was held in Fryeburg at the Fryeburg Vestry.

On October 20, 1858 the West Oxford Agricultural Society held its eighth fair in Fryeburg with a two-story Agricultural Exhibition Hall, a Market Building, and a one-third mile Trotting Course. The whole area was about the size of today's Midway.

They purchased the adjoining lot to the new grounds in 1859, making the area approximately 10 acres, and for the first time ladies could become associate members of the Society. Regular members had an annual dues payment of fifty cents that included six tickets of admission to the Fair.

The fair went to 3 days in 1861 until 1867 when it went back to 2 days. However, in 1868 the fair went back to 3 days where it stayed for 77 years.

In 1869 the fair gave the Portland & Ogdensburg Railroad title to their land lying southwest of their grounds and a right-of-way through the grounds, and in 1871 John Smith gave a portion of his land in Fryeburg for a street to get to the Society's grounds from the railroad station. It became known as "Smith Street", and at the beginning of Smith Street today is the granite marker, placed by John Smith, which reads, "1871. This St. Open'd by John Smith to the Station".

June 6, 1871 - The first train pulled into Fryeburg Village at about 10 a.m. with eight passenger cars, about 1000 people on board, and 3000 waiting.

In anticipation of bigger attendance they built a one-story dining hall 26' wide by 40' long which they enlarged by 20' in 1872. Most of the grounds were now enclosed, and members of the Society were given permission to build stalls there to accommodate their stock.

In 1873 Society member annual dues increased to \$1.00.

By 1874 the value of the Society's property had increased a great deal due to improvements and favorable business, so by 1878 They were ready to look for another location with larger grounds to accommodate a half-mile track.

In 1884 they purchased a 26-acre lot from William H. Abbott for \$133, and proceeded to put the grounds in condition for the next fair.

Note: On page 38 of the history book, this purchase is attributed to Harrison McNeil with W. H. Abbott on the committee. That was the information handed down from report to report. But at the Registry of Deeds (page 53) it says William H. Abbott.

October 4, 1885, the first fair was held at its new (and present) location with a large exhibition hall, comfortable sheds, a half-mile track and 800-seat grandstand. Perhaps the judge's stand was built at the same time, but we don't know for sure.

In 1887 the Fryeburg Horse Railroad was incorporated. It carried passengers from the train station to the fairgrounds.

In 1888 the Society voted to admit the towns of Conway, Bartlett, Jackson, Chatham, and Eaton, New Hampshire.

Several improvements were made to the track and grounds in 1892. Also, successful steps were taken to prevent the sale of intoxicating liquors and prevent cruelty to animals, which were implemented in 1893 by officers selected to enforce the laws.

In 1894 the Racing Grandstand was built.

In 1899 the Society purchased two one-rod strips of land from Samuel Evans along the sides of the fairgrounds.

However, by 1901 the financial condition was shaky, so it was decided to allow outside parties to build buildings for rent in the midway under the approval and supervision of the Society's Agent. (Some of these shanties were still in existence in the mid-1900s. By then they were becoming pretty run-down and were gradually replaced.)

In 1902 they were able to purchase two more one-rod strips of land, one from Hiram K. Hobbs, and one from Tobias L. Eastman, thus completing a one-rod wide "frame" around the grounds.

In 1894 the Racing Grandstand was built.

In 1909 they held their first parade, which they called a Grand Cavalcade.

In 1914 records mention that a Fair Ball was held the last night of the fair with the Hosmer Family Dance Orchestra, but we don't know if this was a yearly tradition or how long it took place.

1914 was also the year that 4-H adopted its present emblem, the 4-leaf clover. It originally had 3 leaves, which stood for "Head", "Heart", and "Hands", but someone suggested that they needed a fourth H called "Hustle", meaning to render service. However, the fourth H was approved signifying "Health". (At Fryeburg, four men were largely responsible for nurturing the Fair tradition of 4-H to full bloom: Francis Buzzell, a longtime employee of the Maine Dept. of Agriculture, and dairy farmers John Weston and Phil Andrews. Today, George Weston, son of John, and George's son John, are very much involved in the 4-H events, especially the baby beef auction that John (the grandfather) was instrumental in starting.)

1915 was the year when it was voted to exclude all beer tents! (Apparently their declarations from 1892 & 1893 hadn't worked.)

By 1917 cars were becoming the chosen method of transportation between the railroad and the fairgrounds, and the Fryeburg Horse Railroad ended.

In 1918 the fair didn't do too well due to the War, an impending influenza epidemic, and the weather.

The day of the automobile had really arrived by 1924. 2000 cars paid 50 cents each to park on the grounds. Admission receipts numbered 6964 adults at 50 cents each, and 729 children at 10 cents each. That totals \$4554.90, compared with the \$213.41 earned 19 years earlier.

Children's Day was instituted about this time, and free health exams were offered. They were discontinued in 1930 when schools made them a regular practice.

Due to the Depression, the fair officials held a special meeting in 1933 and voted to reduce the general admission to 35 cents.

In 1935 pari-mutuel betting was first introduced. In 1937 the track was repaired and stalls for the trotting horses were built. There was interest in purchasing some more land and building a grandstand at the pulling ring.

In 1938 they held their first 4-H Baby Beef Auction.

In 1942 they made their first purchase in 40 years - a 4-acre parcel across the street owned by Lelia Ballard. It was cleared and used for parking cars. The Fryeburg New Church had charge of it and paid a percentage back to the Society.

During WWII there was so much concern about gasoline rationing, that the advisability of any fair at all was discussed in 1944. However, the trustees unanimously voted to hold it as usual, and men in uniform were admitted free.

In 1945 the fair went to 4 days.

In 1946 they purchased land from Lawrence Gray on the village side of the fairgrounds, which nearly doubled the size, allowing entrance from Swans Falls Road.

In 1947 they held the first calf scramble in New England. It was for boys aged 14 to 17.

In 1949 the first radio broadcast was made from the fairgrounds called "Maine Farm Topics" with Jake Brofee, aired each morning from 9:15 to 9:30 on WCSH.

In 1950 the fair went to 5 days.

Sometime in the early 50s they built their first livestock building, Number 1, the Jersey barn.

And, Billy Burr's Fun-O-Rama midway joined the fair.

The largest building to date was opened in 1958, called the Woodward Pavilion, dedicated to Howard Woodward, who was president from 1928-1958. It provided a show ring for livestock and seating for onlookers.

In 1960 they had the first covered pulling ring in the state. The Society installed a canvas cover over the ring to help make it an all-weather fair. The canvas cover was replaced in 1965, and the grandstand was moved.

Between 1964 and 1969 several separate parcels were purchased from the Richard D. Krasker family for future expansion. Eventually they would house the Museum complex, the Kiddie Land areas, the Little Red Schoolhouse, the large Expo buildings, more barns, paddocks, and park areas.

In 1967 the fair went to 7 days.

The first Woodsmen's Field Day was held in 1968. (John Weston initiated the idea of the Woodsmen's field day. Don Quigley, a competitor there for 25 years, maintains that there are more people watching the woodsmen's contest at the Fryeburg Fair than any other woodsmen's contest in the world.)

Also in 1968 two blind musicians, Oliver Nicholas and Norm Decoteau, now known as The Fryeburg Fair Boys, started entertaining in Waterwheel Park.

In 1970 an underpass was built to eliminate autos crossing the track at the Lovell entrance.

In 1971 a New Department – the Farm Museum – opened in a small exhibit area near the pulling grandstand.

In 1974 a parcel of land across the street was purchased from the Asa Pike III family in the first of two separate transactions (the second one in 1995) and is now the Trackside Camping Area.

From 1974-1983 the remaining seven parcels of Richard Krasker land were purchased, mainly on the north and northwest sides of the fairgrounds. They are filled with cars and campers during Fair Week.

By 1975 the fairgrounds totaled 100 acres.

An old-fashioned barn raising was held, and that barn now houses the major display of the Farm Museum. It was a rustic old 1832 New England post and beam barn reconstructed from the Island Road Merrill/Walker farm.

In 1976 the main part of the museum was moved from several miles away. It was restored, and Loretta's Kitchen added. (Superintendent Roy Andrews said, "We have moved Loretta's Kitchen so many times that it would probably follow me if I just went out and whistled!")

The first official Camping Report found was given by Seth Buchanan in 1977. (Camping isn't mentioned in the fair records before that because it was "just done". Now the department handled over 4500 reservations, not counting the spaces needed by livestock people, concession people, security and others who have to stay there all week.)

The fair went to its present 8 days in 1978 .

The first Fireman's Muster was held in 1978, which was started by Corliss Watson with six fire department teams competing, and became so popular that they had to set a limit of 24 teams.

The Racing Grandstand doubled in size in 1982 when the pari-mutuel windows were recessed into the structure.

Two New Departments started in 1982, Hogs and Rabbits. (Former president Phil Andrews was approached during the Fair several years ago by a couple asking where the rabbits were kept. He apologized and told them he was sorry but there weren't any. An hour later another couple came along looking for pigs, and the story was the same. Then, wouldn't you know, someone came looking for goats. "By Gosh," he says, "next year we'll have rabbits AND pigs AND goats!"

Well, the Goat Department came the next year in 1983, along with a Poultry Department. In the beginning, the goats shared a building with the hogs.

1983 was also the first year without Girlie Shows! We don't know exactly when they started. As Phil Andrews liked to say, "Anyone old enough to remember, won't remember anyway."

In 1984 Smokey's Greater Shows came to the Fryeburg Fair. (They put up about 50 rides, depending on the size, and of the 185 or so food concessions at the fair, 100 of them are on Smokey's midway.)

In 1985 the Agricultural Exposition building was added, and in 1986 the first livestock office was replaced with the present two-story building. (Approximately half of the old building was moved over to the Farm Museum and attached there for use as the Blacksmith Shop.)

In 1986 Eva Ward was the first woman elected to serve on the Board of Trustees.

In 1987 a 24-stall double wide enclosed barn was built. \$36,000.

Vice President George Bush came to that fair on Parade Day. (As you can imagine, security was pretty tight, but not as bad as it would be today.)

In 1990 they added a Forestry Resource Center to display and promote the forest industry and its products.

Also a very popular New Department began for Llamas.

The first information booth was added in 1991 near the back gate. (Now we have one near the front gate, too.) And they added a new hay barn and maintenance building.

A one-room schoolhouse was given to the Society and moved to the grounds thanks to the generosity of Mrs. Marion Hobbs. (It had been located on a knoll at Toll Bridge and was in use from 1835-1938. After its restoration, it was dedicated on the first Sunday of the 1991 Fair to be used as an annex to the farm museum, over beside McDonald's Farm.)

McDonald's Farm was then provided with a new building, complete with a petting area. In 1992 a "Bionic" cow was added to it.

A new name was given to the Building & Grounds position, called "Superintendent". (This is a better description of what Roy Andrews does. He is always striving to improve things, to motivate, to recruit, and to educate. No department or corner of the fair escapes his keen eye.)

In 1993 a large building was added for the 4-H animals (including special pens to showcase the Grand Champion animals).

And a stage was placed in McDonald's Farm Park.

The one-sided shed row for horses was replaced in 1995 with a new two-sided barn with stalls backed up to each other for \$78,000.

In 1996 Fryeburg Fair was selected as a "Blue Ribbon Fair" by the readers of Hoof Beats Magazine, and they have adopted that title in much of their promotional material.

A 2000 square foot addition was put on the Museum barn in 1997, a new covered stage was built at Christmas Tree Park, and the front offices were renovated.

The plank hub rail on the inside of the racetrack was replaced by pylon flexible posts that will bend over if a horse is forced out over them in a race.

About that time they added a Milking Parlor demonstration area.

In 1998 they added on to the 4-H barn, built a new covered stage in McDonald's Farm Park called The Hayseed Theater, and a structure for small performing groups in the park at the end of the racetrack called The Gazebo.

Also they built a new stage out near the draft horse barns called Draft Horse Park, which became the home of The Fryeburg Fair Boys who started in 1968.

Stone dust was added to the racetrack, and an addition was added to Paddock Barn #2 to handle horses that have been given Lasix by the state veterinarian to help with their breathing.

In 1999 they built a duplicate racehorse barn behind the 1995 barn for \$85,000. (If you remember, the 1995 barn cost \$78,000.)

1999 was a momentous year because the Grand Champion Baby Beef AND The Grand Champion Market Lamb were raised by the same 4-H'er, Hannah Holmquist from Kingfield, Maine.

Many other additions were made during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Office buildings were built for each of the three major camping areas and for the racing department, besides the new barns for llamas, draft horses, draft ponies, racehorses, sheep, poultry, and cattle. Numerous new and improved toilet areas were installed; baby-changing areas, nursing areas, showers, a small coin-operated laundry. Expo 4 was enlarged and became the Craft Center. Expo 5 was added in 1991 to the north side of the pulling ring and became part of the Commercial Exhibit. The first-aid station near the front gate was enlarged, and an area added for storage of rental strollers, wheelchairs, and supplies in general. A second first-aid station was added near the rear gate. A room for public telephones was added to the side of Expo 1, with an ATM and a Post Office nearby. The ticket offices were enlarged and improved. Park areas with bench seating were established near the stages where entertainers perform throughout Fair Week. And acres and acres of blacktop. (Roy Andrews says, "People will follow blacktop. We put blacktop where we want the people, and they'll follow it!")

2000 was the 150th Anniversary of the Fryeburg Fair. A special summer weekend fair was held with free admission. Some of the highlights were the old wagon display by Sutton Marshall, women's carriage demonstrations, log rolling in a tank, and many other activities not held during the regular fair. A 368-page history of the fair was published, as well as a cookbook of contest winners.

For that year a new sawdust barn was added, a new map of the fairgrounds was made, a new information tower was built in the back parking lot, and another people mover was added.

In 2001 the Main Office was enlarged and improved again, additions were built on to the Livestock Office and the Sawdust House, and the flower garden program was expanded which had begun in earnest the year before.

With concerns about the 9/11 terrorist attack, and foot & mouth disease, the fair still managed to have a record year.

They built a new Sugar House in 2002, renovated the Museum Tool Shed, added a second ATM machine, and built new sheep pens.

A New Department called History Hall was created to recognize the many people who helped the fair grow over the years. It is housed in Expo 1 and focuses specifically on the history of the Fryeburg Fair rather than the history of agriculture, which is showcased in the Farm Museum.

In 2003 they built an information booth onto Expo 1, widened the porch of the front office, and upgraded the 4-H hall showcases.

In January 2004, at the annual meeting of the Maine State Fair Association, Fryeburg Fair's Secretary June Hammond was elected president, and we are very proud of her.

The Fair set new records in many areas due to perfect weather - attendance (199,276), midway and camping.

Major improvements for 2004 included a fiber barn to showcase the Llama Department, and a carriage barn to house part of Sut Marshall's fine collection.

In 2005 they made their biggest capital improvement ever, their first steel building, a 15,000 square foot Livestock Show arena, complete with bleachers, costing about \$500,000. When Fryeburg Academy's gym burned shortly thereafter, it was immediately converted into a makeshift gym while the Academy rebuilt.

Also in 2005 they set a new record for premiums paid in the amount of \$353,137. A tack area was added to Oxen Barns 14 & 15, and the Fryeburg Fire Department headquarters was replaced by a permanent facility. The grand parade was rained out for the second time in memory (the first time was in 1998).

In 2006 they decided to provide their own ATM building with four new machines because the old ones were constantly running out of money or malfunctioning.

A walk-through underpass was built between the parks at the Blue Tower, going under the racetrack, which is a big safety improvement, and a walk-in cooler was added to Emily's Restaurant. 45 waterless hand-cleaning stations added in the livestock areas were very well received.

Big items for 2007 included the replacement of the main stage, a new park in the Fiber Center area, and an addition to the poultry barn.

The largest project for 2008 was the purchase and improvement of the five-acre lot on the corner of Swan's Falls Road and Route 5 adjacent to the fairgrounds (currently referred to as Eastman Corner). A forest fire tower was built to replicate a real fire tower that will be manned by experienced people. Also family & mother's bathrooms were built and additions made to Horse Barn 5 and to the rabbit building.

In 2009 a new section featuring alternative energy resources was created called "Energy Row". Also a major dining facility was built to accommodate staff and employees; wood floors were added in the draft horse area to conserve sawdust; and more educational material was added to all areas of the livestock department.

The old waterwheel at the front gate was replaced in 2010 with a new stonework design, and a Garden Center was built to interest all those home gardeners.

Remodels and additions to Barns 14 and 15 in 2011 -

created separate barns for swine, oxen and goats.

In 2012 the “Specialty Foods Pavilion” was built to provide a place for people to sell their local specialty products derived from local agriculture.

2013 - A new building was constructed to replace Expo Buildings 1 and 2 – the Expo Center.

2014 - Major electrical and technology upgrades were made to the Fairgrounds and Fairground buildings.

2015 brought the removal of Dairy Barns 1, 2, and 3 and a new combined Dairy Barn was constructed on the same site. Cost of the building was \$650,000.

2016 – A new restroom facility was built by the Blue gate. Cost of the building was \$185,000. The land near the Swan’s Falls Road was cleared and developed for livestock camping. (Dairy) Barn 6 was replaced. Cost - \$70,000.

2017 – a new WIFI building was constructed in Fairview Camping, 2 new people movers were purchased, miles of hot top were resurgaced and electric and sound systems upgrades were made.

2018 – A new WIFI building was constructed in Trackside camping, Barn 1 was replaced with a barn twice as large, a security bunkhouse was added and a larger ticket booth was made at the Blue Gate.

A huge fire destroyed the sheep and beef cattle barns on July 10, 2018. New barns will be designed and will be rebuilt in 2019.

The previous timeline doesn’t include the yearly upgrades of service such as electrical and drainage, adding or replacing trash barrels and picnic tables, signage, blacktop, upgrades to technology and wi-fi and painting.

So, in conclusion, we hope to see you in October at the FRYEBURG FAIR!

Time-Line by Barbara Hill, Superintendent Fryeburg Fair’s History Hall

With writing credits to Penny Hathaway, Past Assistant Superintendent Fryeburg Fair’s History Hall