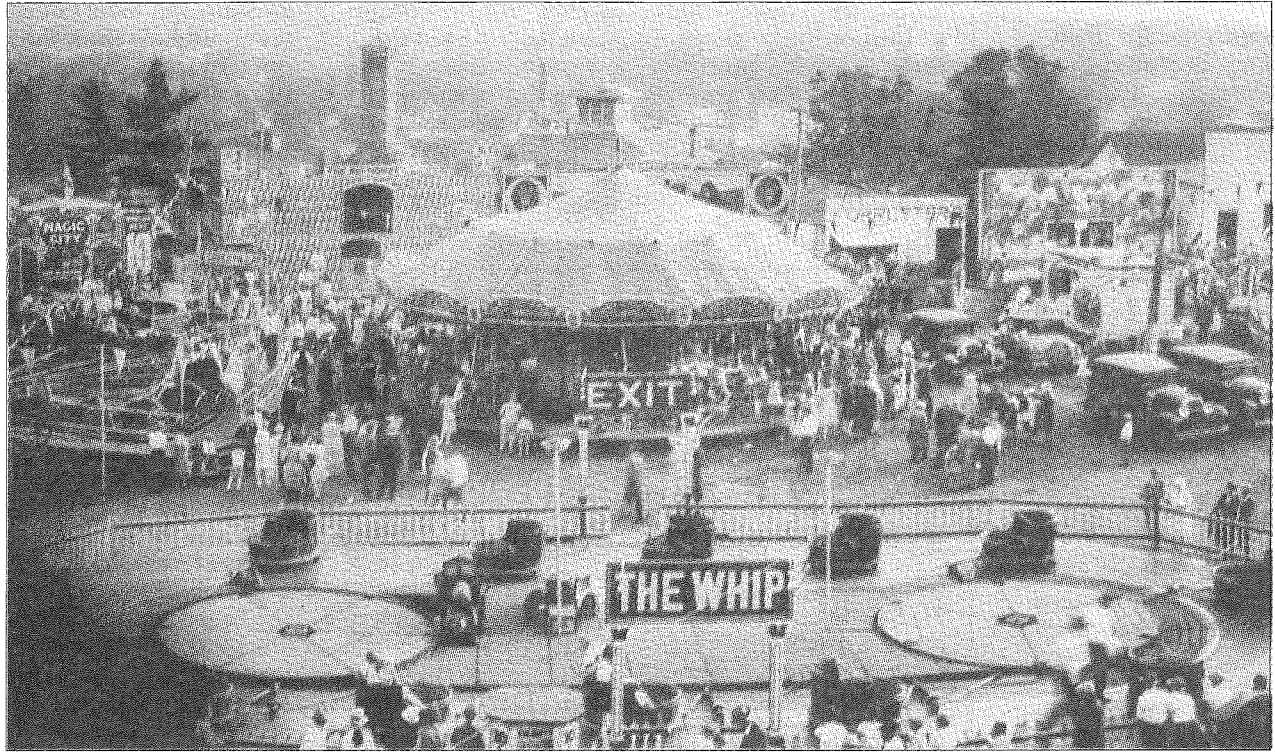


July 8, 2015

Fair bit of history



Chippewa County Historical Society photo

This photo of some of the amusement rides at the Northern Wisconsin State Fair in Chippewa Falls is thought to have been taken sometime in the 1920s.

Some county festivities predate even the venerable event that opens today

CHIPPEWA FALLS — As cows are herded and sheep shepherded to the animal barns, and 4-H'ers bearing handmade quilts and homemade jams prepare for judging, and the Tilt-A-Whirl whirls and popcorn pops at today's opening of the Northern Wisconsin State Fair, it's fair to consider a debt we owe for 118 years of effort.

Actually, we need to look further back yet, since there's been a Chippewa County fair around longer than the 118-year run credited as the beginning of the North-

VIEWPOINT THIN ICE



DAN LYKSETT

dan.lyksett@ecpc.com

ern Wisconsin State Fair. A cursory check of records in the Chippewa County Historical Society archives revealed a Chippewa

County fair schedule from 1881, with events listed including "base ball," "glass ball shooting" and a "trotting race."

And anyone who thinks grandstand daredevil acts like this year's ATV Big Air Tour are a new trend certainly wasn't at the September 1929 fair when Jean DuRand, known as the Parachute Lady, "was injured while landing her parachute after a jump from a speeding plane. (Because of strong winds) as she neared the ground she had a choice

See FESTIVITIES Page 4A

Records show fair has endured despite financial challenges

»Festivities

From Page 1A

of alighting in a tree or on a woodpile close by. She choose the woodpile.”

A local focus

A story from the Sept. 30, 1887, Chippewa Herald Telegram offers an extensive — and somewhat critical — recap of that year's fair.

It notes the fair “was a financial success, having paid all premiums in full and it is thought after paying all expenses a small balance will be left in the treasury.”

The article details the variety of agricultural exhibits, noting the vegetable and cereal line was “magnificent,” and adds, “it would be a good thing if those who think Chippewa is solely a lumbering county could have been present.”

And after singing the praises of the local crops, cattle and handicrafts, the paper couldn't help but opine that more than \$750 of the fair's income should find itself being tucked in pockets closer to home, indicating in particular the premiums paid to the champions on the trotting track.

“... Hundreds of dollars are paid out to see ‘Sorrel Bill,’ ‘Black Jack,’ and other spavined plugs with classical names from outside places that trot around the track.”

There was no record in the file of a change in premium policy.

Past meets recent past

There are, however, several articles from the paper detailing a significant time in the fair's history



Chippewa County Historical Society photo

This photo of women attending the Northern Wisconsin State Fair is contained in the collection of the Chippewa County Historical Society.

when the long shadow of the Great Depression darkened the fairgrounds.

“Local Fair is Facing Bankruptcy” cried a banner headline in the Nov. 11, 1931 Herald Telegram. “Future Rests with People of County and County Board,” read the subhead.

The article noted the fair committee had taken over the property in 1887 “by an act of legislation.” But by the early 1930s there was already a lawsuit over the mortgage making its way through the courts.

The final blow, according to the article, was “poor attendance at the 1931 fair due to the general economic conditions plus a long record of underfunding.”

A Dec. 9, 1931 article noted the fair association voted to turn the grounds over to its creditors, who pledged to work with the group on the future of the fair. After that date there was no record in the historical society file of how the 1931 crisis played out, so I headed over to the Chippewa Falls Public Library, where director Joe Niese hooked me up with microfilm records from 1932.

I couldn't find any followup stories on the bankruptcy. But in looking over stories from that following September I found reports of a “Chippewa County 4-H Club Fair under the auspices of the Northern Wisconsin State Fair.” Held on Sept. 9-10, the fair proudly

touted an all-local lineup, including 4-H exhibits from county residents and noting “the Stanley Band will play afternoons and evenings and Les Mohr will play the part of the clown.”

There was a baseball game scheduled (with baseball now spelled as one word), with the boys from the town of Anson playing the boys from the town of Lafayette. And there was an “old-time buggy race” planned involving local farmers racing their own horses and buggies.

And so it seems the fair association and the creditors did work together. The fair survived and eventually thrived. I couldn't help but think back to 2007, when the owners and operators of the fairgrounds were nearing retirement and considering a sale. A developer who made an offer to buy the property had no interest in continuing a fair. It would have vanished from our summer landscape. But the nonprofit Chippewa Foundation stepped in to buy the grounds, and a nonprofit group operates it today. It appears to be thriving.

So in tribute to them, let the pony rides begin.

Contact: 715-830-5926, dan.lyksett@ecpc.com, @ECPC_DanL on Twitter

\$45 1 HR

MASSAGE

715.552.2754

my FRIENDS place

With coupon • Expires 8-31-15

TIME CAPSULE

Chippewa Herald 10-14-17

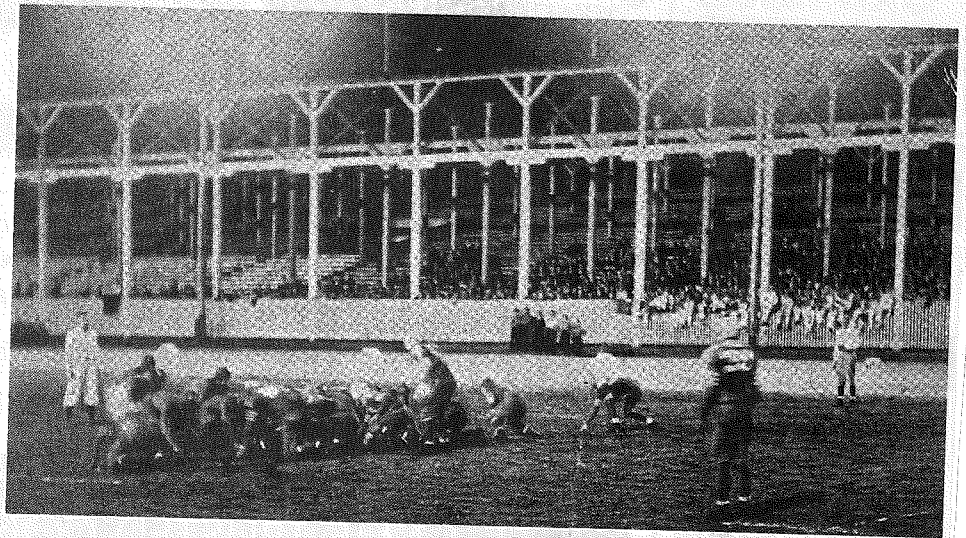
New Friday night lights

CHIPPEWA AREA HISTORY CENTER

In 1936, the Northern Wisconsin Fairgrounds had lights at their football stadium for the first time, allowing local high schools to play under the lights at night.

The 1936 Chippewa Falls Yearbook, The Monocle writes about the historic new way for the high schools to play local ball in the following excerpt:

"This year the Chippewa Falls High School experimented with something entirely new, namely, by



CONTRIBUTED, CHIPPEWA AREA HISTORY CENTER

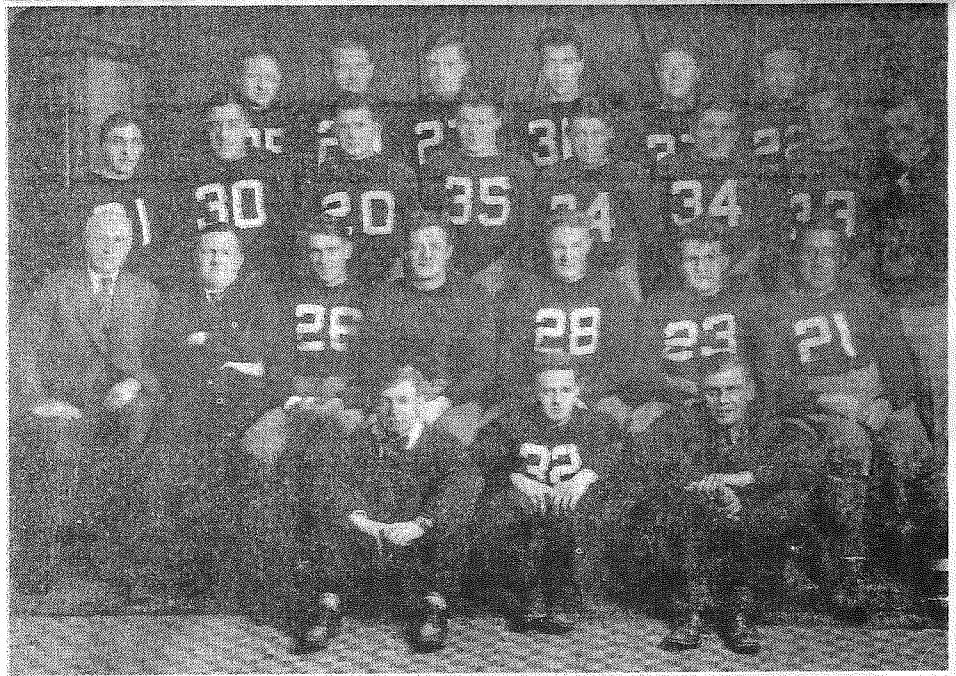
playing their home football games at night. Of the eight games on the Cardinal schedule, five of the contests were played at home under the newly installed lights. These lights were placed so that they illuminated the entire field of play, thus making it possible for the spectators to follow the game as closely as if it were

played in the daytime.

Staging the high school games on Friday night instead of on Saturday afternoon served a twofold purpose. It enabled businessmen whose time was taken on Saturdays to attend the games and also drew the sports fans who either attended college games or listened to them

over the radio on Saturday afternoons. The plan proved very successful from both an attendance and a financial standpoint."

Each Saturday, the Chippewa Area History Center showcases a photo about local history. For more information, visit www.ChippewaAreaHistoryCenter.org.



CHIPPEWA AREA HISTORY CENTER

The Chippewa Marines football team is pictured in an undated photograph.

Packers versus Chippewa Marines

CHIPPEWA AREA HISTORY CENTER

John Nicolai recently donated a Johnny "Blood" McNally football card to the Chippewa County Historical Society and told us an interesting story of how this player had not only played for the Green Bay Packers but had also played for the Chippewa Marines against the Packers in a game held at the fairgrounds in Chippewa Falls, on Labor Day, September 2, 1935.

Johnny Blood had played for the Packers but had a falling out with Curly Lambeau after the 1933 season. So, when the Chippewa Marines were scheduled to play the Packers in 1935, Johnny joined the Marines to play against his former teammates. The game was anticipated to be quite the event, with the Marines even setting up a training camp at Sam Melville's cottages near where the



Johnny
"Blood"
McNally

CHIPPEWA
AREA
HISTORY
CENTER

number 5 fairway is now at the Ojibwa Golf Club in Chippewa Falls. Sadly, even with the addition of Johnny Blood to their team the Marines lost 22 to 0.

After the 1935 season the Marines disbanded until after World War II. Johnny Blood rejoined the Packers before their regular season started and helped

the Packers win the 1936 Championship. After his 14 year career in the NFL, Johnny Blood went on to serve in WWII as a cryptographer in India and China.

John Nicolai added that he believed that Johnny "Blood" McNally was the last player in the NFL who did not wear a helmet.

SAVE BIG STAND AS FLAMES RAGE ON THREE SIDES

Apr 13, 1931
**Volunteers Aid Firemen as
Dense Smoke Clouds Sweep
Over Large Structure.**

Heroic work by volunteers, aided at times by the hard-pressed firemen, saved the grandstand at the fair ground Sunday while buildings on three sides of it were burning fiercely.

Most of the work around the grandstand was done while heavy smoke clouds poured over it, obscuring from sight both structure and workers for minutes at a time.

When it became apparent that the Agricultural building and the Merchants building were doomed, Secretary Putnam and John Wolf, the caretaker, brought out a supply of shovels from a room under the grandstand and passed them around to willing volunteers.

As the flames swept out of the two big buildings and set the church dining hall and the executive building afire, it seemed as if the grandstand was also doomed. Both these smaller buildings are just across the mid-way street from the big structure. The dining hall burned to the ground but the executive building was saved by the firemen who threw a head of water into it, soaking it thoroughly.

Battery Boys Arrive.

As bits of burning embers rolled and tumbled under the grandstand, Putnam and Wolf and their helpers followed them under the structure and beat them out. One unidentified man, stripped to the waist, fought for several minutes smothering one vicious blaze under shovelfuls of sand.

In the meantime, the boys of Battery C turned out when the fire siren sounded so long, arrived, to lend a hand. Equipped with hand extinguishers from the armory a number of the Battery boys patrolled the roof and upper side of the seating rows, and helped under the stands, snuffing out each tiny blaze as it sprang up. The firemen threw water against the side of the big structure from time to time as they found time and between them, the volunteers and the Battery men, the grandstand was saved.

Save Stock Barns.

In the meantime, another fight was being waged under the pines near the Edwards street entrance to the fair grounds. The fire swept through the grass dangerously near the northern end of the stock barns, the 4-H calf

barn being nearest its path. Equipped with shovels handed out by Mr. Putnam, a detachment of volunteers led by Frank Hughes, Earl Barker and Manly Sharp stamped out the fire before it could reach the calf barn. Had it ever eaten into this structure, it is probable that nothing could have saved the other barns and it would have been a menace to all the scattered homes along Edwards street and west of the cemeteries.