

# The WINNEBAGO COUNTY FAIR

## 150 Years Old in 2005

1855 to 2005

HISTORY OF FAIRS - IAFE  
WINNEBAGO COUNTY FAIR HISTORY  
(AS COLLECTED FROM NEWSPAPER ARTICLES)

FAIR MANAGERS

FAIR THEMES

FAIR CARNIVALS

Compiled and put together by Harlan Hirschy

# "454 YEARS OF TRADITION"



1840

Winnebago County  
(159 Years)

**1840**



State of Wisconsin  
(151 Years)

**1848**



Winnebago County Fair  
(144 Years)

**1855**

**Winnebago County Fair Association**  
**"Conducting The Fair Since 1910"**

## HISTORY OF FAIRS

The history of fairs is clouded and the record is less than complete. Nonetheless the story of mankind is replete with references to fairs, not in an institutional context, but as a part of everyday social intercourse.

A casual observer might conclude that American fairs and expositions came fresh out of 18<sup>th</sup> century western Europe, delivered to the colonial docks of Boston and Halifax with a predisposed mission to serve agriculture and animal husbandry.

This observation fits with our collective sense of tradition, but fails to recognize centuries of historical linkage to the eastern Mediterranean before the birth of Christ. Old and New testament reference to fairs are mixed with allusions to commerce, trade, the marketplace, festivals, religious feast and holy days.

Where and when the first fair was held is not known, however, evidence points to the existence of fairs early as 500BC. Scripture records in the book of Ezekiel: "Tarshish was thy merchant by reason of the multitude of the kinds of riches with silver, iron, tin, and lead, they traded in thy fairs." Ezekiel account of the destruction of Tyre, Supposedly written about 588BC, describes Tyre as an important market and fair center

Fairs were commercial in character from the beginning. Merchants from distant countries would come together, bringing native wares to trade with one another, and even though it is not clearly explained in Ezekiel or in other biblical references, it is reasonable to assume that "fair" was the name given to the place at which early trading between foreign merchants was conducted.

It is equally clear that religious activity was companion to the commerce. The Latin word "Feria" meaning holy day, would appear the logical root of the word "fair". Each feria was a day when large numbers of people would assemble for worship. Worship in those early days was centered around temples in great cities including Nineveh, Athens, Rome, and Mecca. These cities were also respected as the great commercial centers of the world.

Fields adjacent to these temples were stacked out for traders. Religious figures were placed about the fields in order to protect the traders and merchants.

During the early Christen era, the church took an active part in sponsoring fairs or feast days and as a result, fairs came to be a source of revenue for the church. Possibly, our modern church bazaars possess some rudiments of these religious fairs.

This evolution which blended religion and commerce continued over time and moved into western Europe. Periodic gatherings brought together the producers of all types of commodities for the purpose of barter exchange and, finally, outright sale. To this marketplace were added entertainment and other forms of activity thus, these primitive market took on the aspect of fairs as we know them today.

In 1765, less than 300 years after Columbus finished his work in the New World, the first American fair was presented in Windsor, Nova Scotia. The same fair continues to operate today. In upper Canada, as Ontario was known in early Confederation, a fair was held in 1792, sponsored by the Niagara Agricultural Society. As with Windsor, the Niagara Fair remains in operation today. In addition, many small fairs were held during the early 1700's in French Canada while under French rule.

Meanwhile, Elkanah Watson, a New England patriot and farmer, earned the title, "Father of US agricultural fairs" by producing (the first) a small exhibit of sheep under an old elm tree in the town of Pittsfield, Massachusetts. The year was 1807. He believed that the fine textured fleece of the exhibited sheep when manufactured into cloth would successfully compete with the best wool imported from England. He wrote "Many farmers, and even women, were excited by curiosity to attend this first novel and humble exhibition".

Comment:

In 1810 Watson staged a larger and more ambitious project, a Berkshire cattle show. The event was successful beyond all his expectations; entries included 386 sheep, 109 oxen, 9 cows, 7 folds, 3 heifers, 2 calves and 1 boar.

Early American fairs in both Canada and the US shifted quietly, but decisively away from the European festival model into the systematic development of agriculture and animal husbandry while offering education, local resource and local industry promotion and entertainment. Competition became the cornerstone of fair programming; youth development provided a social theme.

The nineteenth century closed with almost every state and province having one or more agricultural fairs or exhibitions.

Today, over 3,200 fairs are held in North America each year. They provide industrial exhibits, demonstrations and competition aimed at the advancement of livestock, horticulture and agriculture with special emphasis placed on educational activities such as 4-H, FFA and other similar youth development programs. While enjoying these high-minded pursuits, fair visitors are also able to see, hear, smell, and taste the richness and variety of what the world has to offer.

Copied off the IAFE web site

# HISTORY OF THE WINNEBAGO COUNTY FAIR

The first Winnebago fair was held back on October 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> in 1855.

It was sponsored by the Winnebago Agricultural Society.

It was reported in the Oshkosh Courier, the newspaper of that time, that the "exhibition of stock, agricultural products and manufactured articles is much greater than anticipated and is in the highest degree creditable to the farmers of the county."

The fair at that time was said to have been held in the downtown area of Oshkosh and was reported to even been held in different cities or villages within the county. The fair of 1868 is reported to have been held at the site of the old Mercy Hospital near the lake.

In 1870 the fair was conducted by the Northern State Agricultural and Mechanical Association. By 1872 the fair was conducted by the Northern State Fair Association and was held on the 60 acres at the north end of Jackson Drive. In the following years, buildings were erected, some burned down and some were torn away by the devastating tornado of 1885. Large tents were erected so they could conduct the fair until new buildings could be erected.

Sometime in the early 1890's, the name of the sponsoring organization was changed from the Northern state fair association to the Oshkosh Fair Association. In 1910, the name of the sponsoring organization was again changed, this time to the Winnebago County Fair Association. It was chartered in 1910, and remains as the presenting organization today.

In 1990 the fair moved from the Jackson Street, Murdock Street area to its present location on County Hwy Y. The fair used to be in the months of October and September, but because of the cold was moved into August, partly to get the kids to come to the fair, since they were in school in September.

Yes, the fair was for family fun and still is today.

## FAIR HISTORY #2

1855-OCTOBER 10-11 the first fair was sponsored by the Winnebago Agricultural Society. It was reported in the Oshkosh Courier that the exhibition of livestock, agricultural products and many manufactured articles is much greater than anticipated and is in the highest degree creditable to the farmers of the county. J.H.Osborn was the fair secretary. This fair was held at the public square by Main Street and Merit Street. The fair was held on October 10 and 11.

1868- The fair was believed to have been in the area where the Mercy hospital was located, down by the lake. It included a  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile race track, since horse and sulky racing was very popular at that time. It is also believed that sometime between 1855 and 1868 that adjoining counties were also included in the fair.

1870- The fair was conducted by the Northern State Agricultural and Mechanical Association. At this time it was located on land diagonally across from Fair Acres shopping center is now located, at the intersection of Jackson Street and Murdock Street. Bad weather at this fair.

1871 - The fairgrounds were being used by the military so the Winnebago County Agricultural Society and the Omro Agricultural and Mechanical Society in a joint venture held the fair in Omro. This also prompted the Omro residents to build a fairgrounds in Omro which were not ever used for a county fair

1872 - Fair was on 60 acres at the north end of Jackson Drive. It was put on by the Northern State Fair Association.

1879 - Attendance record was set for a single day with 12,000 in attendance, which made the fair the largest in the state. A large two story building was erected in six weeks and two days, costing \$6000.00. The construction was overseen by E. P. Sawyer.

1880 - The large building erected in 1879 burned to the ground shortly after the fair was held, but the residents of Winnebago County rebuilt it.

Ticket prices were .40 for adults

.20 For children  
.10 babies  
\$1.00 for season tickets or passes.

1882 - This fair was known as one of prominence and tremendous success. The fair attendance was down the first day but the following days The attendance estimate was 15,000 to 18,000 attending per day.

1885 - August 7<sup>th</sup> - A devastating tornado struck Oshkosh with the fair grounds being in its way, also swept the fair buildings with it. Damage estimates were at about \$16,000.00

1886 - Determined to have a fair, a large tent was erected and exhibits were lined up in it. Livestock were tied along fences. Determined that the show must go on, \$4000.00 was paid in premiums and \$2100.00 for race winners.

1888 - Had outstanding bills owing \$2600.00. The fair still was held but not all entrants received premium moneys, leaving a bad taste with the participants. K. M. Hutchinson was the secretary

1895 - The biggest attraction at this fair was the bike and horse races. A special art show from the Chicago Art Institute was brought in for display along with many local artists.

1897 - Fair was held Sept. 27 to Oct. 2<sup>nd</sup>. With a drop in admission prices it was hoped to bring people back. Adults .25 cents

Child under 12 yrs. 15 cents

\$1.00 for a season pass

.25 cents was charged for grandstand

The name of the fairs sponsoring organization was changed from the Northern States Fair Assoc. to the Oshkosh Fair Association sometime between 1890 and 1897. According to articles of the local newspapers, bicycle races and horse racing were the most popular events.



1910 - Sponsoring organization was changed to the Winnebago County Fair Association. This is also the time the fair started where the Fair Acres Shopping center is now located.

1911 - Was the 2<sup>nd</sup> fair under the sponsoring organization, Winnebago county Fair Association. Fair was held Sept 26 - 29. Secretary was A.R. (Dick) Maxwell.

1914 - A tornado hit the fair grounds damaging buildings on the grounds.

1918 - Taylor Brown became the fair secretary and manager

1919 - Junior exhibits started to be shown at the fair.

1921 - The grandstand was built.

1924 - Exposition building built on the southwest corner of the fairgrounds and an addition to the grandstand was also made. The construction work was done by Flour Bros. and was completed in time for the Sept 23-26 fair. The 4 day event had an estimated record attendance of over 100,000 people.

1926 - Education building built on the southeast corner of the grounds.

1930's The Chicago Cubs and St. Louis Cardinals played an exhibition game in front of the grandstand

1941 - The 4-H dormitory was built.

1948 - Fair had 82,000 attendance with Oshkosh day being the largest and Neenah-Menasha day the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest.

1951 - The new race track was dedicated on June 13<sup>th</sup>.

1952 - Had insurance problems, but got the liability issues resolved. The fair went from a 4 day event to a 6 day event. Attendance was at 100,000. The Joe Chittwood Thrill Show was the most successful day.

1953 - Reported that all display space had been sold out, and that the harness racing was the best ever. After this fair was over the board voted to go back to a \$ day fair.

1954 - Winnebago County became the owners of the fair grounds with a lease agreement with the Fair Association. There was an addition to the cattle barn completed in time for the fair. There was also 4 days of horse racing.

1955 - Fair held Aug 29-Sept 1. The big attraction at this fair was the Ice Show. The fair was plagued by the polio epidemic with children under 16 advised not to attend. The fair ended up \$40,000. in the red. The County Board came to the rescue and appropriated \$20,000. so the bills could be paid which were created by the deficit caused by the polio epidemic.

1956 - All children were admitted free to the fair if with a parent

1957 - Taylor Brown passed away He had been the fair sec. and manager since 1918. The fair was cancelled except for the Junior fair end of it.

1963 - Referendum was voted on with 66% of the voters saying not to spend tax dollars for a new fair site.

1964 - A all purpose building was built at the south east end of the fairgrounds. This building became known as the Maxwell Building.

1965 - The exposition building burned to the ground a day after the fair on 9/9/65. Arson was the suspect.

1966 - Griesse and Ross Inc. completed the new 96 ft. by 144 ft exhibition building just in time for the August 17<sup>th</sup> fair opening.

1972 - All purpose building named the Maxwell Bldg. in honor of A, R. (Dick) Maxwell.

1973 - Bill Jones elected to the fair board.

1978 - Leo Galica quit as the manager of Leo's Speedway but will stay on as co-manager with Barb as fair managers. Jim Barthel became the 4 - H and Youth agent. Fair lease was extended for another  $2\frac{1}{2}$  years. Fair had a 3 million dollar insurance policy.

1979 - Racetrack was leveled by a County Highway crew. Grandstand came under criticism for being unsafe. County board voted in favor of moving the fairgrounds. Petitions were circulated to keep the fair grounds in its present location. Tom Egan was elected to the fair board.

1980 - The stock pavilion was damaged in a wind storm. Funding for repair of \$20,000. was approved by the County Board since the Association had to do some major repairs in the grandstand. A free gate was tried at this fair. Admittance was free till 5:00pm. Kids from Wisconsin were a hit in the grandstand.

1981 - A new stock pavilion was built. City of Oshkosh found major electrical problems in the grandstand. A new 3 year lease was given to the assoc. for the running of the fair.

1982 - The Association reorganizes and set up new bylaws. It was at this time that they shed the sale of association stock purchase. A new carnival was hired for the fair. There were 90 tractors entered in the tractor pull, with Glen Barthels winning his class with a pull of  $201' 9\frac{1}{2}"$  6500# class. There was a 30% increase in exhibits.

1983 - Millhouse tabbed as obsolete. Jim Selle was elected to the fair board.

1984 - Renovation of the fair grounds. Heating system repaired in the Maxwell Building. A new entrance constructed off of Main St. A new horse ring was also built.

1986 - Education building was replaced with a new building to be used for year around events. Fair ends with \$20,000. surplus.

1987 - All youth judging was done face to face. County closes grandstand, saying it doesn't meet code. After much investigating it was found to be repairable. Barb and Leo Galica quit as fair managers. Attendance at this years fair was very bad because of all the bad publicity about the grandstand. John Hoeft was named manager at the annual meeting in Dec.

1988 - County repaired the grandstand. Tip Top Shows became the new carnival. County Board voted Sunnyview as new fair site.

1989 - County sold the fair grounds to Dial Companies for development of a retail mall. The new fair site was at the sunnyview complex. Total fair entries were up for this years fair by 239.. A new lease agreement was made for five years for the new grounds.

1990 - Fair moves to the sunnyview site on cty road Y.

1992 - Food Court was built. This was the year that Lorrie Morgan Cancelled the grandstand performance days before the fair. B. J. Thomas replaced her at the last moment.

1993 Had the 15<sup>th</sup> best attendance in the state, out of 76 county and district fairs. 53,032 people were estimated to have attended the fair.

1998 - Fair celebrated the State of Wisconsin Sesquicentennial. A large parade was held on the grounds. Fair ran from Aug 12 thru 16<sup>th</sup>.

1999 - Winnebago County Fair manager investigated for embezzlement. A certified letter was sent to him, stating that he would not be needed as fair manager and that he should not do any managerial or fair related promotional activities.

2000 - Tom Egan becomes president- manager of the Winnebago County Fair.

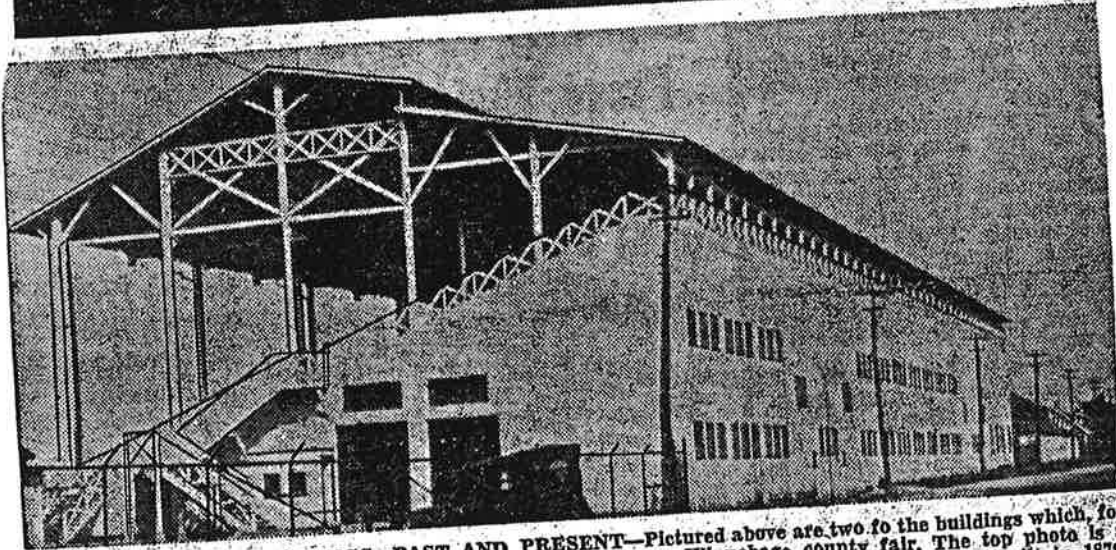
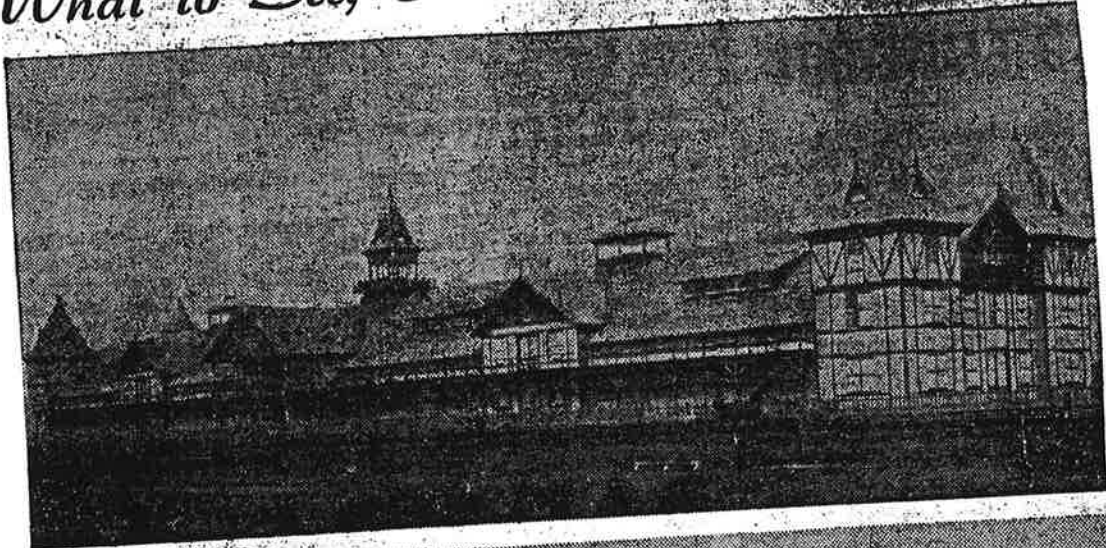
2001 - Calkins Midways double books dates with the Winnebago County Fair dates, leaving Winnebago County with no carnival.

2002 - Murphy Bros. carnival becomes the new midway. Fair hires a new promoter to help in increasing fair attendance and sponsorships.

2004- After two years of not very good production results, the promoter was relieved of his contract because of not backing up what he said he would do. Tip Top becomes the new fair carnival.

Information listed comes from researching the Winnebago County Fair at the Oshkosh Public Library and the archives at the Oshkosh Public Museum. The majority of the information in this article comes or was taken after reading newspaper articles of the times.

## What to See, Do in Oshkosh - - -



**FAIRGROUNDS BUILDINGS—PAST AND PRESENT**—Pictured above are two of the buildings which, for different reasons, are closely associated with the history of the Winnebago county fair. The top photo is a view of a block-long building noted for both its elaborate appearance and for its short life. Built in 1879, it was destroyed by fire in October, 1880. Although there is some controversy as to its exact location, the building is believed to have stood about where Speedway is now situated. The lower picture is, of course, that of the present grandstand at the Murdock street fairgrounds. The latter structure, which has served countless thousands of fair-goers for many years, will see service once again as the 1949 edition of the Winnebago county fair gets under way next Tuesday. (Top photo by courtesy of the Oshkosh public museum; lower picture by the Northwestern staff)

# History of Fairs in Oshkosh Dates Back to First in 1855

**Expositions Have Always  
Ranked High in This City's  
Annual List of "Things to  
See and Do."**

—1-14-57

The Winnebago county fair has always ranked high in this city's list of summer or autumn "things to and do," local residents are reminded with the advent of the 1949 version of the popular exposition.

That this was true to a greater extent, perhaps, in the days before the automobile, radio and movies, is revealed by the historical files of the Oshkosh public museum from which the following information is taken.

So far is known, the first fair held here was sponsored by the Winnebago Agricultural society on Oct. 10 and 11, 1855.

"The exhibition of stock, agricultural products and manufactured articles," the Oshkosh Courier commented, "is much greater than anticipated and is in the highest degree creditable to the farmers of the county."

The exhibits referred to by the contemporary newspaper included many similar to ones which may be seen next week. More unusual, however, were displays of sulkies, harnesses, daguerreotypes and, finally, of artificial teeth. Prizes ranged from diplomas to cash awards no higher than \$5.

The fair of 1868, on the other hand, was a flop, or, as the Oshkosh Journal put it:

"... rather 'small potatoes and few in a hill'... owing to the disagreeable weather. The show of farm products, and machinery was very poor. The exercises on the program... were carried out, but on the whole it was considered as sort of a failure."

## On Hospital Site

The 1868 fair is believed to have been held on the site of Mercy hospital. Included in its attractions was a one-half mile race track.

The fair of 1870 was conducted by the Northern State Agricultural and Mechanical association and that of 1872, held on 60 acres at the north end of Jackson drive, by the Northern State Fair association.

Beginning with the fair of 1879, the event redeemed itself in Oshkosh, despite an unusual amount of bad luck. The 1879 fair, which chalked up a new single day attendance record of 12,000, was the most successful ever held in the state up to that time.

A large, two-story building, was erected in six weeks and two days for the occasion. The structure, the \$6,000 cost of which was borne by solicited subscriptions, was built under the direction of a committee headed by E. P. Sawyer.

The year of 1880 was another successful one for the Winnebago county fair, said to have been as impressive as any ever held in the northwest. At the end of the season, the exhibition had cleared about \$8,550. Tickets cost 40 cents for adults; children, 20 cents; little children, 10 cents; and season tickets, \$1.50.

The building, erected in 1879, burned shortly after the 1880 fair had concluded but was rebuilt through the enterprise of county residents in time for the next event.

Hard luck continued for fair officials, exhibitors and the public when, on Aug. 7, 1885, a devastating tornado struck the town, sweeping the fair buildings with it to total destruction. Damage was estimated at about \$16,000.

## Held in Large Tent

Undaunted, the fair was held in 1886 although a large tent took the place of the vanished buildings. Determined to put on a good show despite handicaps, the fair association paid \$4,000 in premiums and \$2,100 for race winners,

in addition to numerous special prizes offered by business firms and individuals.

Sometime in the early 1890's, the name of the sponsoring organization was changed from the Northern State Fair association to the Oshkosh Fair association.

Under the latter group, the fair of September, 1895, is recalled as a particularly gala occasion.

The bicycle races are said to have been a bigger attraction that year than the horse races, half of the people leaving the grandstand at the conclusion of the first events. Diamond pins and rings were awarded to the speediest cyclists.

Other events at the '95 exhibition included the appearance of Marion Mills, the Oshkosh "wonder" horse, and a special art show imported from the Chicago Art institute.

Little is recorded of the 1897 fair except that it was held from Sept. 27 to Oct. 2 and was marked by a drop in admission prices. Tickets for adults cost 25 cents, 15 cents for children under 12, and \$1 for season passes. Grandstand seats were priced at 25 cents.

In 1910, the name of the sponsoring organization was again changed, this time to the Winnebago County Fair association, the name under which the exhibitions have been presented since.

# Tells History Of Local Fair

Interest in and support of the Winnebago county fair has lessened considerably during the past several generations, according to Elizabeth Fiss, who spoke Sunday at a meeting of the Winnebago County Historical Society at the Oshkosh Public Museum.

Elizabeth, a member of the Oshkosh High School Historical Society which has intensely studied the history of the event for the past year, gave a detailed account of its history.

Prior to 1870, Oshkosh was the home of the Northern State Fair. The fairgrounds were located diagonally across the intersection of Jackson Drive and Murdock Street from the present fair site. A tornado destroyed the huge exposition building in the 1880's and the fair was discontinued. Around the turn of the century, she said, the county fair took its place and has been in operation ever since.

In those early days, she added, the fair was one of the biggest attractions of the year for farmers from all parts of Wisconsin. That one session each year gave the farmers their only opportunity to learn of new agricultural methods and machinery as communications at that time were inadequate.

Also stressed in Elizabeth's talk was the history of the horse races connected with the activity. J. Hiram Glass, who heads this department at the Winnebago County Fair, was on hand to give additional information on the subject.

Following the regular session, a meeting was held by the planning committee of the Junior Historical Society. Preparations were begun for a district convention to be staged in Oshkosh sometime in May, with members of 12 counties in this area to attend.



# 60 years of memories

## Fair still

By DOUG ZELLMER  
Northwestern Staff Writer

George Ryf says a county fair is still a fun time — even after 60 years.

Ryf, of rural Oshkosh, started as an errand boy for the fairgrounds secretary in 1920 and has literally worked his way up the ladder to fair secretary and Winnebago County Fair Association director.

Once again this year, Ryf has a hand in planning the fair, to be held Aug. 13-17 in Oshkosh.

"I like meeting people the best," said Ryf, an affable and alert man at age 77. "I meet people now who are grandchildren of the kids I helped fill out 4-H registration forms back in the '20s. I never expected to be with the fair this long, but the fair kind of gets in your blood."

There are a lot of memories packed behind Ryf's fair days — like Oshkosh and Neenah-Menasha Day at the fair, horse harness racing that was held every day, high wire walker Karl Wolenda and the Ringling Brothers Barnum Bailey Circus.

They're all memories, but good memories to Ryf. "Neenah-Menasha day used to be a pretty good time. We used to have the St. Mary's High School band perform."



Northwestern photo

George Ryf scans old secretary books

ODN August 9-10, 1970 P. 4  
'fun time'

Now that area has only a couple of booths and that's about it."

But Ryf has learned to change, just as the fair has.

"The county fair used to really attract families for entertainment, but television has changed all that. There used to be a greater interest in the fair. Attractions have become much higher priced," he said. "Before TV came in the fair had a lot of vaudeville entertainment. I used to scout at other fairs to see if we could sign any acts."

Four-H activities, says Ryf, have stayed about the same since he graduated from high school in 1920 — when he showed animals at the fair.

"There used to be a lot of open class exhibiting years ago, but the 4-H projects were handled pretty much the same as now," he notes. "The 4-H kids used to live in the dorm near the cattle barns."

"They stayw the whole fair and ate and slept right in the dorms, but that was stopped in the mid-'60s. Today, the fair has to compete with too many other things."

Ryf knows no other fairgrounds but the current location — Murdock Avenue and Jackson Street. He was around when the cattle barn and stock pavilions were built in the late '20s and '30s.

"The fairgrounds used to be on Bent Avenue, but I don't remember that," he said. "The fair used to be held in September and it was a weekend fair. They changed it the '50s because it just got too cold at night. The fair was moved to August during the week, partly to get the kids at the fair, otherwise they were in school."

Ryf was a farmer until 1949 when he broke his leg. He operated his father's service station and retired in 1969.

"My father, John, was one of the original stockholders in the fair back in 1909 or 1910," he said. "I bought my stock myself when I worked under Taylor Brown. He was the cornerstone of the fair. He was a pretty good manager."

Brown was also mayor of Oshkosh during the '30s. That's when Ryf put down his shovel and was named assistant fair secretary. He quit working at the fairgrounds in the '40s to concentrate on farming, but still held his directorship. The fair was again a fixture in his life in the '50s.

In 1971, Ryf took over duties as fair secretary and manager of the fair's financial records. He keeps "plugging along" with the fair each year, even though he's thought of quitting.

"I've been pretty low key," Ryf admits. "I've always been a part of fairgrounds operations. The Galicas (Leo and Barb, current fair managers) do a lot of hard work, but it's difficult getting the finances together today. We lost the stock car races and they helped us financially a long time."

Ryf still looks forward to the fair and feels it's a good place for family fun. He likes the carnival rides and plays a game of chance once in a while.

"The fair still has a purpose. Like Taylor Brown says, fairs started in Egypt long before Christ was born. There'll always be a county fair."



# 'New Look' Ready

Not only is the Winnebago County grandstand in the fairgrounds on Murdock Street more attractive in its new dress of charcoal and ivory siding, it is much safer.

Visitors to the 59th annual Winnebago County Fair, Aug. 14-18, will find the grandstand safer and serviceable for many years to come. Safety was enhanced when workmen recently replaced wooden girders with steel supporting beams, where it was found necessary. The old

wooden siding was removed when the steel siding was installed. A new switchboard and electric service line leading into the building were also installed.

All new doors have been installed in the grandstand and fire doors were put in the building. Last year the grandstand interior ceilings on the first floor were replaced with galvanized steel ceilings. This year the cooking stove in the restaurant was replaced.

Another safety feature, part of the recently completed remodeling project in the grandstand, was replacement of

electrical wiring with new heavy duty wiring enclosed in conduits. A new switchboard and electric service line leading into the building were also installed.

Total cost of the grandstand "face lifting" will be in the neighborhood of \$35,000, estimates Robert Misky, secretary and manager of the fair. Cost of the project will be shared by the Winnebago County Fair Association and the County Board.

## New Barn Set Winnebago Aug. 19-23

will be exhibiting and horses in a new foot steel building at Winnebago County Fair,

half of the building pens of sheep and in the east half of the there will be room for horses overflow from the barn.

dition, a section on the side of the building will be moved from the

door remains to in the building and protecting the interior height of several feet be installed.

the building, a bump protecting the walls red cars will be

Steel Building System, erected the

the barn is a joint moved in by the Extension and Education Committee, the Winnebago Fair Association County Board.

## FAIR LOCATIONS

1855 - Oshkosh Main Street, Church Street, Meritt Street square

1866 - Fair held in Omro The military had taken the grounds over for a Military Camp.

1868 - Oshkosh Mercy Hospital area by Menomonee Park- Had a  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile track.

1870 - Oshkosh the S.W. corner of Jackson Street and Murdock Street  
Was 60 acres with a mile race track.

1880's - Sometime in this period fair held on Jackson Street near the Alexian

Bros. home. Possibly by or near the athletic field east of Jackson St.

1910 - North East side of Jackson Street and Murdock Street.

1990 - Moved to County Road Y by the old Sunnyview building. Across from County Park.

### FAIR MANAGERS

1855 - J.H. Osborn - sec.

- R.D. Torrey - sec.

1888 - K.M. Hutchinson - sec.

1918 - 1957 - Taylor Brown

- Robert Misky -

1973 - 1987 - Leo and Barb Galica

1987 - 1999 - John Hoeft

2000 - - Tom Egan

Questionable, but it is believed that in the 1800's the person actually running the fair in a managerial way, was the secretary. The secretary was always a local person, while the rest of the board were from other counties in N. E. Wisconsin.

## FAIR THEMES

1986 - Fair Days

1987

1988

1989 - Fair Days

1990 - 1990 Year of the New County Fair

1991 - The 90's Decade of the County Fair

1992 - The 90's Decade of the County Fair

1993 - The 90's Decade of the County Fair

1994 - Fairs are First

1995 - Celebrating 140 Years

1996 -

1997 - A Family Tradition

1998 - Wisconsin Sesquicentennial 1848 - 1998

1999 - A Family Affair

2000 - A Family Affair

2001 - Something's Cookin at the Fair

2002 - 4 - H Centennial Celebration

2003 - Have Fun - Play Fair

2004 - A Rockin Good Time

2005 -

# **FACTS ABOUT THE WINNEBAGO COUNTY FAIR**

**2004 FAIR DATES – AUGUST 10 THRU 15**

**2005 FAIR DATES – AUGUST 9 THRU 14**

**LOCATION** – Between Oshkosh and Neenah. Going North on Hwy 41 take the Hwy 76 exit, go right 1 mile and turn left onto Cty road Y to the fairgrounds. Going south from Appleton exit Hwy 76, turn left 1 mile to Cty road Y, and turn left to the fairgrounds.

**HOURS OF OPERATION** – Ticket gates open at 10:00 am and close at 10:00 pm. All buildings open and close at those times, with the midway and beer gardens open till 12:00 midnight.

**FACILITIES** – The fairgrounds consist of approximately 90 acres. There is a main exposition hall with 19,500 sq. ft. with a kitchen area and bathrooms at both ends of the building. The grandstand seat 4,800 people who face a 1/3 mile oval race track. There are 2 sets of bathrooms located under the grandstand. There are 5 barns with a total of 44,000 sq. ft. A toilet/ shower building is located behind the barns. A large enclosed show ring arena is located behind the barns which also has toilet facilities. All roadways and main walkways are paved. All buildings are handicap accessible. Camping is also available at a couple different areas.

**PARKING** – Parking area consist of some that is paved and is used for handicap parking. A large area has a gravel base. While a larger area has grass. Parking attendants are always on duty to assist with parking.

**HISTORY** – In 1855 the Winnebago County Fair was born. It was at that time that the fair began to evolve into more than just a market place for selling farm products and livestock or sharing ideas and experiences.

Regular features were established, entertainment was introduced to attract a Larger and more diverse audience. Magicians and clowns started to grace the scene as the first entertainers, and horse drawn merry-go-rounds were the forefathers to the exciting rides that still thrill children of all ages today.

It didn't take local marketing entrepreneurs long to realize the many opportunities to be found at the fair. It was an opportunity to be found for merchants to display and demonstrate their wares to large groups of prospective customers

Soon the fair became the place to go, to see what was new. It became and still remains an excellent location to test consumer interest in new products and inventions.

For years the Winnebago County Fair has consistently created the best in educational experiences and family entertainment. Each year events are updated To match the needs and interest of the fairgoer.

**ADMISSION PRICES** – The fair operates under the PAY – ONE – PRICE system. Using this concept the \$9.00 admission at the gate gives the patron free unlimited carnival rides; daily and nightly live music stages, track and grandstand events, exhibits and spectator viewing at contest as well as shows that may be available at certain times on certain days. Children under the age of one are admitted free but must purchase a ride ticket if they wish to ride carnival rides. Senior citizen day is a tradition, being held on Fridays at a reduced rate with a special grandstand show featuring a horse pull and a band in the beer gardens entertainment stage.

**COMPETITION** – Many classes of competition are open to area residents at our fair. Exhibitors come from all over Winnebago County to participate in the annual premier event.

**EDUCATIONAL** – Most exhibits of the youth are goals that they have set out to complete, and the fair is a place to show the results off. It shows the learning involved in completing a project. It allows youth to feel good about the experience through the experience of self – evaluation and judging. It helps strengthen the skill of goal setting and see other avenues of life for using goal setting skills, such as record keeping. By doing, it helps youth develop positive self concepts and become more effective as communicators, decision makers, citizens and leaders.

**SOCIAL ASPECTS** – The fair is a source of civic pride. People gain special social benefits by making new friends and business contacts. The fair is a good clean fun. They may see the latest fashions, the latest cars, and many other new and exciting things. They even learn about services they did not know existed. Many civic organizations help out at the fair which in turn, they earn substantial sums for their respective causes.

**ECONOMIC ADVANTAGES** – The fair attracts visitors to the community and they purchase food, accommodations, retail products, auto services, medicines, health care, and innumerable other products and services. Merchants who set up at the fair enjoy special sales opportunities and the fair itself is a big customer for a variety of services and products from within the county.

**QUALITY OF PATRONAGE** – The Winnebago County Fair is a non-profit corporation with its purpose being to promote and encourage youth education and development, agriculture, commerce, industry, science, art and other interest in Winnebago County and the surrounding areas.

Part of the attendance at the Winnebago County Fair is made up of 4-H, FFA, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Boys and Girls Brigades, Boys and Girls Clubs, Homemakers, county schools, handicapped exhibitors and participants. along with those involved with the production and selling of their products.

Attendance is supported by clubs and families.....those who exhibit the prize livestock, arts and crafts, farm crops, and so on. Those who take part in tractor and truck pulls, horse pulls horse and cattle shows as well as many other contest that are available allowing them to take home awards of ribbons and certificates, and in some cases cash awards.

The major portion of attendance comes from urban and suburban individuals. They are awed by the animals, the arts and crafts, the harvesting of food products as well as the many other variety of exhibits. They also come to be entertained by the professional groups that are there everyday, the carnival, track events, to socialize, and for the many other activities that are scheduled to take place every day.

The opportunity for sponsorship all come together at the Winnebago County Fair.....once a year.....and the amount of activity along with business that takes place in those 6 days are enormace. It has tremendous appeal and is an opportunity for one-on one awareness that cannot be equaled for the dollar spent.

**DEMOGRAPHICS** – Our established target audience of over 1 million people is based on demographic figures from radio stations and newspaper circulation and the State of Wisconsin Department of Tourism.

The Winnebago county Fair concentrates on the youth market, families with children and the senior citizens. These groups look to the fair for wholesome family entertainment at a very economical price.