

History of Yamhill County Fair "Oregon's Oldest Fair"

(This history was originally researched by Louis Gross, who became the County Extension agent in 1948. The following is an excerpt from his original report written in 1961 with updates identifying current names and locations.)

The first Fair in Yamhill County was held October 7, 1854 in Lafayette, Oregon. This first Fair was sponsored by the County Agricultural Society of Yamhill County. The Agricultural Society was organized in 1853. Their first meeting to discuss such a society was September 17, 1853.

Notes from the Oregon Historical Quarterly quote the following "Exhibition commenced at the Courthouse at 1:30pm." Articles exhibited included bed quilts, butter, cheese and other household productions. The jury, known as judges now, consisted of W. Breyman, G.H. Stewart and A.R. Burbank. At 2 o'clock pm at Markham's Corral were to be judged cattle, sheep, hogs, farm implements, certification of crops; at 3 o'clock the judging for horses and mules.

A specimen of corn on the ear was exhibited as well as a spool of wheat supposed to be production of one grain of blue stem variety, numbered 96 full large heads.

Apparently fairs in Yamhill County came and went with the times. A check through the Telephone Register, (now the News Register paper), files from 1890 to '95 omit the news of there being any county fairs during that period. We find a record of the fair in 1909 which continued for several years. A report of the committee of the Yamhill County Fair Association as of December 10, 1910 shows a budget of \$2,046. The exhibits for that particular fair held earlier in the fall showed prizes for booths put in by communities, canned fruit, flowers such as sweet peas and others, jelly sweet corn, pop corn, bread, mechanical toys, aprons, machine made dresses, pieces of furniture, bird houses, china paintings, tating, dogs, hogs, sheep and other livestock.

There was a fair building in the McMinnville Park at the corner entrance on Third Street. This fair apparently turned into a round-up as we find an advertisement for a round-up on October 4, 5, and 6 in 1916.

It is very probable that the World War I put a damper on the activity of the fair and may have been the cause for it being stopped at the time. The present fair, active in Yamhill County in 1959, has had some continuous activity since 1937.

The 1937 Fair was held in the Armory, McMinnville (currently the McMinnville Community Center.) Livestock were penned and tied in the street between the County Courthouse and the Armory. The exhibits at the 1937 Fair were varied, included were booths of the farm organizations, the livestock and poultry were exhibited by the youth organizations, the 4-H clubs and FFA. The effort of an all County Fair in 1937 soon

turned to a youth fair and during the years 1939 and 1949 the total exhibits were by the youth of the county through their 4-H and FFA projects.

Through the interest of the McMinnville Grange, plans were developed in 1941 to provide an exhibit building for 4-H and FFA and other activities. The need for exhibit buildings was pointed up by such activities as the Yamhill County Jersey Cattle Club show, the Pacific Coast Turkey Exhibit and the Junior Fair activities.

A committee was appointed by the Grange to investigate the building possibilities. A meeting was called at which time a representative of all farm organizations, Chamber of Commerce, civic clubs and community organizations were invited to attend. The group voted in the meeting in favor of the project and requested that a county-wide committee be selected to assist with the details. The committee visited other county fairs to view their buildings and finally selected the type of building that they saw in Toledo, OR as the one they wanted.

This committee requested \$6,000 from the budget committee of Yamhill County and it was granted and used to build what is now known as the Kadell barn on the County Fairgrounds. One of the things that helped to push the building of this initial livestock show pavilion was the need to house horses at the beginning of World War II. There was a cavalry unit located in McMinnville for a short time and their animals were housed in the new fair building. For a short time afterwards the Yamhill County Sheriff's Posse members housed some of their horses in the barn and paid rental to the county for such use.

During the years 1940 and 1946 the home economics portion of the 4-H club fair had been held in various locations each year throughout the city of McMinnville. There was a need for a place to exhibit these items and a county-wide meeting place. During the winter of 1946 the government started to disperse most of the buildings at Camp Adair. These were sold to sealed bidders. The county was successful in its bid for one of the theaters at Camp Adair. The building was torn down and reconstructed on the Yamhill County Fairgrounds which was part of the County Shop area (it currently houses the OSU Extension and the YC Public Works offices.) This was completed during the summer of 1947. The cost of this building was \$29,000 which included tear down and set up. In 1948 they hired a caretaker to live upstairs; they were paid \$49 a month and provided housing, water, lights and heat.

In 1954 plans started for the construction of additional fair buildings. This resulted in the construction of two buildings in cooperation with the county which would be used for county road purposes 51 weeks out of the year and the fair for one week (these building currently house the beef and dairy during fair.) Two steel structures were constructed one 184'x28' and the other 140' x 28'. The fair fund furnished the money to purchase the buildings and the county constructed the buildings from its road fund.

The new buildings cost \$12,000 and the cost of erecting them was \$5,000. That same year outside restrooms were constructed at a cost of \$2,500.

This really started the building projects for the Yamhill County Fair. More of the surrounding acreage was purchased to give us a total of 30 acres of land. In 1957 the sheep shed (Harding barn) was built for \$3,356 and in 1958 and 1960 there was an addition added to that building for a total additional cost of \$1,926. In 1962 the October 12th, Columbus Day storm damaged the fairgrounds. Repair costs were \$5,914 most of which was covered by insurance. In 1963 Delashmutt Arena was built for a total cost of \$84,000. This is an indoor riding arena of 100'x200', the building itself is 148'x248' with seating for 1,000 and is extensively used today.

We currently have five horse barns, one of which is used partly for permanent boarders. We have three arenas; the indoor Delashmutt Arena, the covered warm up Drader Arena, and the Cascade Steel Rodeo Arena. We also currently have a poultry barn, rabbit barn, sheep/goat barn, beef barn and swine barn as well as a livestock weight station managed by the Yamhill County Livestock Association's Youth Livestock Auction Committee.

In addition our grounds include a gazebo garden area and demonstration garden maintained by the Yamhill County Master Gardeners, the Leslie Lewis Pavilion exhibit hall, a maintenance shop and 37 electrical camp-sites with a shower room. We also lease eight acres to the Portland Karting Association for use 48 weeks out of the year for kart and motorcycle races.

We are governed by a five member Fair Board, plus a liaison County Commissioner. The board oversees a part-time manager, a full-time office manager and an on-site security person. We also utilize the help of the Yamhill County Corrections crews for maintenance.

The fairgrounds is a busy place year round with many different horse shows, rodeos, team penning, trade shows, meetings, banquets, receptions for groups and individuals. Our facilities are rented year round and we have about 45,000 interim use visitors, excluding Fair. In January of 2006 we added a web site, which is www.co.yamhill.or.us/fair/index.asp. This has given the community the opportunity to stay on top of what is happening at the Yamhill County Fairgrounds.

We are proud to provide a place for the youth of our county which includes 4-H, FFA and Oregon High School Equestrian Teams. Currently we are the Yamhill County Fair and Rodeo since we added the rodeo some years back. We currently charge a daily gate fee for the Fair or you have the option to purchase a season pass. With your paid admission you can enjoy the Fair, the Rodeo and the Entertainment. Not included in the admission would be food, drink, vendor purchases and the carnival rides and games. We provide three nights of big name entertainment, three nights of rodeo and

one night of demolition derby. Our Fair attendance has reached over 45,000 and is growing each year. Our goal is to provide something for everyone, including wholesome entertainment and activities. If you are in the area plan to attend the next Yamhill County Fair and Rodeo which always opens the Wednesday before the first Saturday of August and runs four full days.