

THE QUARTERLY

Official Publication of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association

July 1987

THE GREAT ST. LAWRENCE COUNTY FAIR AT CANTON, N. Y. COMMENCING 4 DAYS TUESDAY, SEPT. 15 1909



FINEST ATTRACTIONS. LARGEST PREMIUMS. BEST RACING.

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Cover: Poster advertising the 1903 St. Lawrence County fair.
(*Courtesy of William Appleby*)



The Oswegatchie Agricultural Society held its fairs in Ogdensburg. Drawing by W.A. Rogers from the September 23, 1899, Harper's Weekly. (Courtesy St. Lawrence County Historical Association archives)

And Then There Was One: The Fairs of St. Lawrence County

by Judith Becker Ranlett

This special expanded issue of The Quarterly is intended to accompany "The Wonderful Days: St. Lawrence County's Fairs," an exhibit of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association at the Silas Wright House Museum opening on August 2, 1987.

The future of the Ogdensburg fair was a prevailing subject of discussion in that community in the spring of 1910. In taxpayers' meetings, in editorials and in letters to the editor, its fate was debated. Should needed but costly improvements, including a new grandstand, be made? How much money, if any, should be spent, and who really benefited from the annual fairs of the Oswegatchie Agricultural Society?¹ When an initial vote of taxpayers rejected both a \$20,000 bond proposal for a new grandstand and a \$15,000 bond issue for general improvements, the closeness of the vote on the latter — the margin was a mere 14 — resulted in a call for a new vote on general improvements. Toilets, it was pointed out, were badly needed, for "The Board of Health has repeatedly complained of present conditions."² Other needs were equally urgent; exhibitors of valuable animals would no longer risk them to the dangerous sheds provided at the fair-

grounds.³ The man who conducted the milk test at the 1909 fair was quoted as saying the "conditions for such a test were the worst he had ever seen."⁴ But the city and town had other needs, too, such as an expensive new water filtration plant.⁵

The debate made it clear that some residents of Ogdensburg and vicinity were convinced that the fair benefited only a few, and that farmers especially had lost enthusiasm for the local fair. According to one opponent of the bond issue, who spoke to the question frequently, ". . . the list of signers [of the petition for a new vote] contained only one name of a taxpayer who is a farmer living outside of the city . . . [I]f the business men were so anxious to have the fair they might be induced to assume the risk of holding it."⁶ "[Merchants] are not beggars and ought not to ask the taxpayers for money just because it is to benefit them."⁷ He denied the fair was truly an agricul-

tural show; instead it had become "a horse show, and nothing more."⁸ Another argued the fair did not represent rural districts and that ". . . rural taxpayers did not feel like backing up a 'Madison Square Garden' show here."⁹ Others were indignant at the prospect of a re-vote and pointed out that voters had already addressed the bond issue and had turned it down.¹⁰

Fair advocates ultimately prevailed. An effort to scale down a new general improvements request from \$13,500 to \$10,000 lost.¹¹ Claims that the fair brought \$60,000 a year to the city, and speakers who urged "people to be boosters and not knockers" carried the day.¹² Before the 1910 fair was held, over \$8,000 was spent on toilets, cattle sheds, sewers and grading.¹³ Nevertheless, the 1910 fair was not a success: it incurred a deficit of over \$2,000, and the guarantors, as they had so often before, dipped into their own pockets to make up the losses.¹⁴ The deficit was

blamed on competition from the Franklin County Fair in Malone, on the large sums that were spent to counteract the impression that there would be no fair in 1910, and on the continuing inadequacies of the grandstand.¹⁵ In the aftermath, the long-time president of the organization, Major William H. Daniels, resigned, claiming the task he had done for many years was "hard, long and thankless."¹⁶ The grandstand continued for many years to be a source of contention ("I need not call your attention to the grand stand; it is there for every one to see and is no credit to the Fair or the city.") until it burned in 1926, the final year of the Ogdensburg Fair.¹⁷

The issues raised in the 1910 debate indicate that well before the fair's final collapse, it was in deep trouble. It was perceived by some as an institution catering to Ogdensburg businessmen and even exploiting farmers rather than serving their needs. It was regarded as the creature of an elite, eager to welcome Alfred G. Vanderbilt and his

horses while denying access to the fairgrounds to a Sunday baseball game or to unions' Labor Day festivities.¹⁸ In fact, labor apparently bargained for guaranteed use of the grounds on Labor Day as the price of its support for the bond issue in 1910.¹⁹

* * *

The Ogdensburg Fair was not alone. By 1910 serious questions had been raised about the future of all the fairs in St. Lawrence County, some of which were, by then, venerable institutions. After fleeting efforts to form agricultural societies that would sponsor fairs in the 1820s, 1830s and 1840s, the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society held its first fair in Canton on grounds near the Grasse River on September 15 and 16, 1852.²⁰ To win the fair, Canton had promised to "furnish the grounds free of charge" and to provide "suitable enclosures and buildings."²¹ Almost immediately a group from Ogdensburg began to urge Ogdensburg over Canton as a better permanent site for a county fair. Ogdensburg, they argued, had rail

or water connections to more places in St. Lawrence County than did Canton, and it was also more accessible to residents of Franklin and Jefferson Counties as well as to Canadians. Besides, they claimed, stock travelled better by water than by rail, which would mean better competition if Ogdensburg were the fair site, for Ogdensburg could be reached by water and would, therefore, attract more entries.²² The dispute led to a new organization, the St. Lawrence International Agricultural and Mechanical Society, being formed in Ogdensburg, and a legal tussle between that group and the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society over which was entitled to the state appropriation.²³ The Canton society won that battle, but the St. Lawrence International Agricultural and Mechanical Society held its first fair in Ogdensburg in September, 1856.²⁴

Within a few years, the Ogdensburg group was having second thoughts about independence and negotiating for reunion. The one-time secessionists re-



Elizabeth Campbell Miner (1805-1891) painted this picture of the St. Lawrence County fair in 1871. Her husband, Ebenezer, was a founder and officer of the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society. The original is owned by St. Lawrence University. (Photograph courtesy of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association archives)

heard their rationale for separation and concluded, ". . . whether the minority of the Society were right or not in withdrawing and forming a new organization, we consider that a minority has rights as well as a majority and that the rights of the minority, their interests and their feelings were not respected by the majority. . . ." ²⁵ Interesting views for the eve of the Civil War! The Ogdensburg Society went on to propose that fairs and annual meetings alternate between Canton and Ogdensburg and that the name of the combined group should be the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society. ²⁶ Union was declined on these terms as too costly and inefficient, principally as it would have necessitated maintaining two fairgrounds. ²⁷ The St. Lawrence International Agricultural and Mechanical Society soon perished. ²⁹

Meanwhile, residents of Hammond, perhaps reflecting as the Ogdensburg secessionists had in part, the problems the immense size of St. Lawrence County presented to would-be fair goers and exhibitors, had formed their own organization in 1857, the Hammond Agricultural and Mechanical Society. The first fair was held that year at Chippewa Bay with a canvas tent made from the sails of local vessels as an exhibition hall. This organization lasted until 1860 when it was succeeded by the Hammond Union Agricultural and Mechanical Society. ²⁹ The latter ended in 1873. ³⁰

Like the Hammond Union Agricultural and Mechanical Society, the Gouverneur Agricultural and Mechanical Society was incorporated under the New York State law of April 13, 1855. ³¹ It was the last of the pre-Civil War fairs organized in St. Lawrence County, and it was the only one to have even a tenuous link to Elkanah Watson, founder in 1811 of the Berkshire Society and originator of the modern American agricultural fair. ³² The idea for a Gouverneur fair germinated in discussions held at George Parker's store, a local gathering place. Both George Parker's father and grandfather were charter members of the Jefferson County Agricultural Society, which Elkanah Watson had helped found. ³³ The first fair to be held in Gouverneur began on September 13, 1859. ³⁴ The tent which housed some exhibits that day was rented from the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society. ³⁵ For the first seven years, the fair grounds were located at the northwest corner of Main Street and Rock Island Road. ³⁶ Conditions were not ideal; the track was not sprinkled; there were no seats; livestock pens had no roofs, and it was not possible to buy a meal on the grounds. ³⁷ In 1866 permanent grounds were acquired on the northern edge of town;



The entrance to the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society fairground at Canton, about the turn of the century. (Photograph courtesy of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association archives)



The St. Lawrence County fairground at Canton about 1898. (Photograph courtesy of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association archives)

General Albert W. Barney and a group of associates bought twenty acres, which were divided into ten shares and purchased one by one as the Gouverneur Agricultural and Mechanical Society prospered. It owned all the shares by 1872. ³⁸

The next and final wave of fair foundings in St. Lawrence County came in the years after the Civil War, at the very end of what has been denominated the "golden age" of the agricultural fair, 1850 to 1870. ³⁹ The Waddington Agricultural Society held its first fair in 1869, with over 600 entries. ⁴⁰ By 1879, when the Waddington Fair was proclaimed a "failure financially," ser-

ious thought was given to abandoning it, and the next year witnessed the last Waddington Fair. ⁴¹ A committee disposed of the grounds the following spring. ⁴² One observer maintained that the Waddington Fair was fatally hampered by difficulty of access; "... the means of communication are not such as enable exhibitors from the interior towns of the county to reach it . . ." ⁴³

The last two fairs, those at Potsdam and Ogdensburg, met with greater success. The Raquette Valley and St. Regis Valley Agricultural and Horticultural Society was organized in the summer of 1870 to improve, according to its constitution, "Agricultural Horti-



Part of the Gouverneur Agricultural and Mechanical Society fairground in the early twentieth century. (Photograph courtesy of the Gouverneur and St. Lawrence County Fair)

cultural and Mechanical knowledge and practice.”⁴⁴ Grounds in Potsdam were purchased almost at once, eighteen acres on LeRoy Street, for \$6400, and the initial Potsdam fair was held in October, 1870.⁴⁵

Ogdensburg was not to be left out for long. Virtually simultaneously with the first Potsdam fair, an Ogdensburg newspaper was asking, “Shall We Have a Town Fair[?]”⁴⁶ “Fairs . . . confer benefits that it would be almost impossible to estimate.”⁴⁷ Twenty miles or more the paper considered simply too far to expect people to travel to a fair; consequently, there was “a necessity for multiplicity and diffusion.”⁴⁸ By the spring of 1871 an Oswegatchie Agricultural Society had been founded, and the enabling legislation which permitted the town to sell \$15,000 worth of twenty-year bonds to acquire grounds had been passed by the state legislature.⁴⁹ Within a month, thirty-six acres reached by the city water mains were purchased on the southern edge of Ogdensburg.⁵⁰ By early September, 1000 feet of cattle pens had been constructed as well as a couple of open “halls.” Mechanics Hall was near completion as was Floral Hall, a two-story octagon, 75 feet in diameter, which was intended to be permanent. The track was graded and the judges’ stand about to be started.⁵¹ The first fair was held in early October; opening day had to be postponed from Tuesday the 3rd to

Wednesday the 4th because of heavy rain — not a very favorable portent for the future!⁵²

The end of the “golden age” of agricultural fairs found, therefore, six fairs in St. Lawrence County. Two — Hammond and Waddington — would not survive long into the subsequent epoch. The remaining four would all-too-rapidly come to dispute the “necessity for multiplicity” *The St. Lawrence Republican* had heralded in 1870.

The fair-forming era of 1852-1871 in St. Lawrence County also saw the region take giant steps into the world of modern farming, steps the fairs would reflect and encourage as the county found its niche in a rapidly changing agricultural scene. The industrialization of the northeast and Europe’s increasing dependency on American food created a huge demand for American agricultural produce. The vast fertile regions of the American west, where new labor-saving machinery could be most efficiently employed, especially in grain production, best met the demand. Soon it made sense for even the traditional, self-sufficient farmers of St. Lawrence County to purchase western grain. “The high latitude of the county, & its immediate water communication with the grain producing districts of the great West, render the production of grains a secondary interest to our farmers, and

it may well be doubted whether its production is even remunerative . . .”⁵³ A crucial element in the development of modern agriculture, improved technology, therefore initially brought problems to farmers of St. Lawrence County.⁵⁴

A second decisive factor, however, was improved transportation, which opened markets hitherto inaccessible to St. Lawrence County farmers and created new opportunities. Now farms could become more specialized, with enhanced productivity rather than independent self-sufficiency their chief goal.⁵⁵ By mid-century, railroads had begun to penetrate the county. The Northern Railroad, which opened the doors to New England, reached Ogdensburg on September 30, 1850.⁵⁶ “Until recently,” wrote St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society President Henry Van Rensselaer in his 1853 report to the New York State Agricultural Society, “no proper outlet has been afforded our produce, but the railroad has now brought the market to our doors; and the effect is manifest, not merely in the greater prices for produce but in the quicker return; in the value of land, & in the general prosperity of our farmers.”⁵⁷ The previous year he had reported, “Potatoes since the opening of the Ogdensburg Rail Road have become an article of export . . .”⁵⁸ Potatoes would continue to be produced, but the real path

to specialization lay elsewhere. As Van Rensselaer put it in his 1853 report, "The great & leading production of this County . . . is grass. The soil is wonderfully adapted to pasturage . . . The number of cattle in the county exceeds that of any other county in the state . . ."59 While he would not even guess at total dairy production for 1853, he did point out that shipments of butter from the Madrid depot alone had increased by 91,397 pounds in one year as area farmers responded to their new market access. The Northern Railroad, which made this possible, boasted the nation's first refrigerator cars. Starting in July of 1851, every Monday the "butter train" carried tons of butter to Boston. "At all the principal butter stations, the buyers attended, sampled the product, agreed on prices, and paid cash," with the result that, within two years, "the value of dairy farms along the Northern Railroad had almost exactly doubled."⁶⁰

The final hallmark of a truly modern agriculture was the attitude of farmers themselves.⁶¹ Many St. Lawrence County farmers were clearly ready for a modern agricultural world:

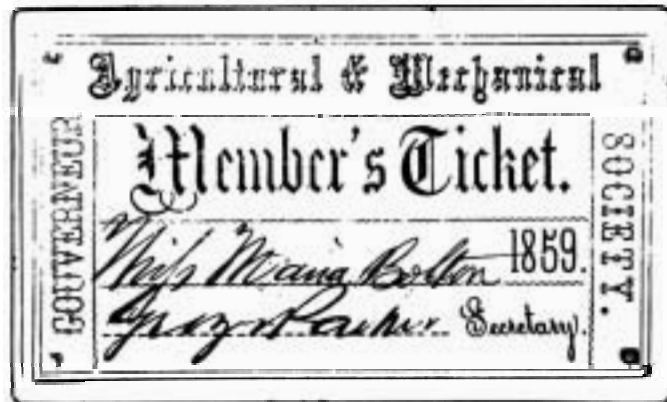
There is manifestly a desire on the part of many to make greater improvements, become better farmers, raise larger crops, drive nicer horses, and keep better stock. It is evident this desire to excel belongs to the spirit of the age and is greatly stimulated by the various agricultural Societies of the County.⁶²

The agricultural fairs sponsored by those societies were ideally suited to assist in the pursuit of progress, for they were first and foremost educational ventures. The first agricultural associations in England and in the United States were, in fact, learned societies that gave prizes for papers on agricultural problems.⁶³ In its early days, the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society, true to an educational mission, gave subscriptions to such journals as *The Rural New Yorker* and *The Country Gentleman* as prizes, and, in 1852, recommended that farmers form town clubs for "taking and reading Agricultural papers."⁶⁴ Several years later it appropriated \$100 to distribute agricultural publications.⁶⁵ As late as 1901, the Oswegatchie Agricultural Society continued to give subscriptions to *The Country Gentleman* as special prizes.⁶⁶ Evening meetings to discuss agricultural questions were also regular parts of early fairs.⁶⁷

If agriculture were to be improved through education, the competitive display of agricultural products was deemed essential. Competition was central to Elkanah Watson's original

idea for an agricultural fair. Prizes were awarded to superior exhibits, and losers were expected to examine carefully the animal or variety of vegetable or grain which had bested them and then emulate the victors by improving their stock or trying new types of seeds. Emulation of superior results would lead to agricultural progress. It was all very practical and all depended on the desire of the average working farmer to improve productivity, to have, in other words, a modern attitude toward his efforts. To attract working farmers, dues were kept low in Watson's society, a tradition which was followed in all the St. Lawrence County organizations. Yearly membership in the Union Agricultural Society of Hammond was fifty cents.⁶⁸ In 1871, \$1 bought an annual membership in the other agricultural societies.⁶⁹ Life membership in the County Agricultural Society remained at \$10 for many years.⁷⁰ Gouverneur increased its rate to \$10 only in 1901.⁷¹ Single admissions to fairs were likewise kept low, beginning at 12½ cents for the first Canton fair in 1852.⁷²

Agricultural Society, Henry Van Rensselaer listed, in order of prevalence, Durhams, Devons, and Ayrshires as the most commonly found "foreign breeds."⁷³ A few years later, the first Gouverneur fair could boast "not a single specimen of thoroughbred cattle on the grounds . . ."⁷⁴ It sought rapidly to remedy that shortcoming, ". . . as it was one of the early objects to offer opportunity for the purchase of blooded stock."⁷⁵ It held its first sales day in 1864.⁷⁶ Ayrshires quickly became local favorites, probably because of their hardiness.⁷⁷ The 1875 County fair witnessed the first exhibition of Holsteins; "they attracted more attention than any other class on exhibition."⁷⁸ The following year, the Holstein made a similar stir at Gouverneur.⁷⁹ Within a decade, an observer of the Oswegatchie Fair referred to the Holstein as "the coming cattle; although only recent arrivals to the area, they "overshadowed . . . all other breeds."⁸⁰ One might have thought the Holstein had "arrived" by 1882, when a fireworks display at the Ogdensburg Fair took the shape of a Holstein yearling!⁸¹ Soon after their



Maria Bolton's ticket to the first Gouverneur Agricultural and Mechanical Society fair in 1859. (Courtesy of the Gouverneur and St. Lawrence County Fair)

Competition was summarized in each year's premium lists, and through them one can trace agricultural and domestic production from diverse, subsistence farming to highly specialized kinds of farming. One sees whole categories disappear from competition and the appearance of, for example, new breeds on the local scene. Similar phenomena are observable in domestic manufactures. One century's necessity (such as quilts) became another's fancy work; the big variety of homespun textiles of the early days withered away and vanished from premium lists.

A brief look at livestock, especially cattle, will illustrate the relationship between competition, education, and modernization. In his December 30, 1852, report to the New York State

initial appearance, outstanding examples of the breed, such as Hemming, "the best cow in the world today," were routinely on display at area fairs.⁸² By 1896, it was observed of the county fair,

A few years ago, the only cattle for which prizes were offered were Jerseys, Ayrshires, Holsteins and Durhams, aside from natives and grades, which were all lumped in one class. Now there are separate classes for thoroughbred Durhams, Jerseys, Ayrshires, Holsteins, Guernseys, Red and Black Polled and Brown Swiss; also grade Holsteins, Ayrshires and Jerseys, and for native and grade cattle.⁸³

The cattle classes had tripled in the four years prior to 1896.⁸⁴



The Raquette Valley and St. Regis Valley Agricultural and Horticultural Society's fairground at Potsdam. (Photograph courtesy of the Potsdam Public Museum)

Education and competition were having the desired effect, as had been predicted when the County fair in the mid-1850s had offered prizes for the "best stock without regard to blood" so that all cattle could compete on equal terms. Then "... small farmers would have no cause to complain of wealth and partiality; would bring their cattle to the grounds, compare, and be beaten, and would learn shortly to their own mortification, that they must improve their breeds."⁸⁵

Improving breeds was certainly one way to increase productivity, to become modern farmers. Adoption of new technology developed for dairy farming was another. Once again, the fairs assisted. A centrifugal cream separator was on display at the 1884 County fair.⁸⁶ Milking machines were a major feature in 1906. Cows were milked in the open, two or three times a day. At least one observer was impressed that the cows did not seem frightened; he could also see how a successful milking machine would "revolutionize" the dairy business.⁸⁷ Technology made possible larger herds. Larger herds required more feed, some of which the dairy farmer certainly expected to grow himself. Consequently, the tractor had a great fascination, and an exhibit drew many farmers at the 1918 County fair in Canton, for "... a tractor could do the work of several horses and men and ... when it was idle it was not eating and ... it never got tired."⁸⁸

Another measure of modernity as well as plain good business sense was the requirement that only tuberculin-tested cattle be allowed to compete. Fairs were unfortunately superb places

to transmit diseases. Owners of valuable animals did not want to take unnecessary risks. In 1915, the Potsdam fair was promising, "The cattle sheds will be disinfected ... and all stock will be examined by a licensed Veterinarian."⁸⁹ Gouverneur began considering the exhibition of only tuberculin-tested cattle in 1921.⁹⁰ At a spring meeting of the society in 1923, the tie-breaking vote of the president established a new rule: all cattle shown at the Gouverneur fair had to be tuberculin-tested by a licensed veterinarian, and health cer-

tificates had to be filed before cattle were judged.⁹¹ Later that summer, fair officials were contacting the State Department of Agriculture to learn how to disinfect their buildings and grounds.⁹² Otherwise, it was feared cattle owners would not exhibit. Potsdam and Canton followed suit in 1925.⁹³

With the increasing emphasis on dairying as the premier agricultural industry of St. Lawrence County, it is somewhat surprising to find in fair records and other reports the repeated plaint that butter and cheese producers would not exhibit or compete in significant numbers. In 1881, "The cheese factories declined generally to exhibit their cheese as well as the Butter Factories," at the Potsdam fair.⁹⁴ In 1902 the Gouverneur Agricultural and Mechanical Society appointed a special committee to contact cheesemakers to attract exhibitors to that fair; several weeks later the committee gave a banquet for cheesemakers.⁹⁵ To be sure, local producers, especially of butter, had often been criticized for an inferior product. "I trust that the time is not far distant when it will be unnecessary to brand 'Orange Co.' or 'Herkimer Co.' on packages of butter and cheese sent to markets in order to command the highest prices," wrote the Secretary of the Gouverneur Agricultural and Mechanical Society in 1870.⁹⁶ Two years later, the Secretary of the Oswegatchie Agricultural Society claimed the local butter required "neater and more tasty packages to compete successfully with the celebrated 'Orange County' make ..."⁹⁷



Fairs were vital to the modernization process. Here a group of men assemble, probably at the Potsdam fairground, to see a demonstration of a crosscut saw. (Photograph courtesy of the Potsdam Public Museum)

Perhaps some of the fault resided in the fairs themselves. A commentator on the 1900 County fair observed, "The dairy is the largest industry in the county, and still the only space at the fair devoted to this industry is a low narrow table, and no sooner are the boxes of butter and cheese placed upon it than tired humanity perches itself upon the butter and cheese to rest and cool itself off."⁹⁸ Proper display cases and refrigeration were badly needed.⁹⁹

Clearly the dairy farm ruled supreme in St. Lawrence County, but that did not mean a total lack of interest in other kinds of livestock. While, as has been noted, Gouverneur held its first fair with no blooded stock, by 1874, "Even the pigs came with pedigrees, Berkshires and Chester Whites being the breeds exhibited."¹⁰⁰ However, there could not have been many, for the previous year the secretary had speculated whether it "was best to attempt to make the premium list conform to the swine — or the latter to the premium list."¹⁰¹

Sheep were of special interest, for they had played such a large role internationally in the modernization process. The industrial revolution, it will be recalled, began in the textile industry. The exotic Merino received some early attention, but, proclaimed Henry Van Rensselaer in 1852, "It is doubtful whether the finest quality of wool can be raised in this climate . . ."¹⁰² His opinion was upheld by a subsequent president:

Less attention is paid to sheep than formerly, & especially to the merinos. The largest, coarse wool sheep are growing more in favor, not only as more hardy & better able to resist our climate, but as better for the table, as more prolific, & as yielding a fleece well-adapted to the farmers' own domestic purposes. The raising of wool for exportation or as the leading object of sheep husbandry, may be considered as practically abandoned in this County.¹⁰³

Nevertheless, over the years, Cotswolds, Southdowns, Merinos, and Leicesters, among others, were frequently exhibited, with the Leicester often singled out for special mention.¹⁰⁴ Poultry, too, was always displayed, as were horses, though the latter figured most prominently in the context of races, a subject for later consideration.

For the exhibition/competition/emulation process to work effectively, standards had to be developed and then conscientiously applied. Fairs were major agencies for the development of standards of excellence for breeds of livestock and farm crops, and judging



From the days of Elkanah Watson, who originated the modern agricultural fair, competition was a concept central to fairs. Here is the display of the Richville Grange, probably in 1924, at the Gouverneur Fair. (Photograph courtesy of the Gouverneur and St. Lawrence County Fair)

constituted the public application and interpretation of those standards.¹⁰⁵ Consequently, hand-in-hand with improvements in the livestock and crops had to come similar increases in the quality of the judging. Over the years, judging of entries in all categories became increasingly professional. The evolution from amateur to professional judge, with all that implied, was an integral part of the modernization process.

Agricultural societies often had difficulty persuading people to serve as judges, and judges once appointed did not infallibly show up to perform their duties. Over half the judges, for example, were not present when called for at the Gouverneur fair in 1865.¹⁰⁶ Last minute vacancies were "supplied on the grounds," according to the Secretary of the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society in 1894. This practice was not desirable, "as persons are often pressed forward for appointment who have some improper motive for desiring to act."¹⁰⁷ The societies all tried to locate judges of "undoubted integrity" who were "thoroughly conversant with the articles submitted for their decision, and without interest in the matters brought before them"¹⁰⁸ Gouverneur sought judges who were "unbiased & worthy" and came from

"outside of Gouverneur and vicinity."¹⁰⁹ Seeking judges from a distance even though equally knowledgeable home-grown varieties were available was an obvious way to quell unease about favoritism. As an alternative, for a time the Ogdensburg fair did not have exhibitors' names on the exhibits as a way to keep from influencing judges.¹¹⁰

Nevertheless it was one thing to tell judges from whatever distance to judge according to the "recognized standards" of various breeders' associations; it was another to make certain a particular judge was knowledgeable enough to do so.¹¹¹ The Secretary of the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society urged in 1894 that eight or ten paid expert judges should replace the approximately one hundred amateurs then needed annually.¹¹² Before the turn of the century, faculty members from the School of Agriculture at Cornell began to serve as judges, as did those from the School of Agriculture at Canton after its founding in 1906.¹¹³

Education did, of course, occur without the element of competition. Formal educational displays were planned by fair organizers from the earliest days. "[W]ord of mouth and visual demonstration" were regarded as "the most effective method of in-

struction for those who [were] not students by training or habit."¹¹⁴ The emphasis did change over time, however, for, while early fairs were "forerunners of popular agricultural education, modern fairs . . . portray[ed] the results of agricultural education."¹¹⁵ Eventually many of the purely educational exhibits were provided by the State School of Agriculture or even the United States Department of Agriculture, exhibits ranging from trap nests for poultry to modern poultry houses to methods for stamping out devil's paintbrush or dealing with oat smut.¹¹⁶ Nor were women neglected in the exhibits. A model kitchen presented by the Home Bureau as well as "Child Welfare Exhibits" were designed for them.¹¹⁷ A commercial exhibit in 1917 of Maytag washers was also presumably geared to the feminine fair goer as was an earlier exhibit of electrical appliances presented by the Potsdam Electric Light Company.¹¹⁸

Sometimes instruction came in less overt forms. Many fair visitors had their first exposure to modern technological wonders at the region's fairs. A phonograph at the 1878 County fair in Canton proved "a centre of attraction."¹¹⁹ A bioscope show of part of a championship boxing match was a special feature in Ogdensburg in 1905.¹²⁰ Night lighting, beginning in 1903 in Ogdensburg, opened new vistas, including, eventually, outdoor night movies.¹²¹ At its final fair in 1927, Potsdam had a radio with an amplifier installed in front of the bleachers to broadcast the Tunney-Dempsey championship fight.¹²² Amplification systems

for the grandstand and judges' stand were introduced in Gouverneur and Canton in 1929, not without opposition.¹²³

Beyond all doubt, many fair goers rode their first trolley or street railway ever to the Ogdensburg fair in 1886. The huge attendance at the fair that year was attributed to the new street railway. Every fifteen minutes a car deposited visitors at the gate of, according to an advertisement, "the only Fair within 100 miles with Street Car facilities for reaching the Grounds."¹²⁴ After 1895 an electrified system continued to serve the fair grounds and to be a "tourist attraction."¹²⁵

Probably very few people saw their first automobiles at a fair, but surely some had their first chance at a close inspection of one there. The impact of the automobile within a short span of years also provided a ready yardstick for all to measure modernization: "Mechanics Hall marked the passing of the old and the arrival of the present. Instead of walls draped with harnesses and floor spaces filled with showings by our old wagon dealers . . . were rows of automotibles."¹²⁶ While the full-fledged automobile show was a while in coming, races began early. At Potsdam in 1904, the auto races were not considered successful. One of the two contestants "spoiled a tire . . . and did not succeed in getting a new one in time." On that occasion a mile was clocked at the breathtaking speed of three minutes and ten seconds.¹²⁷ The first real automobile show at a fair as distinguished from mere displays was

probably the one in Ogdensburg in 1914.¹²⁸ The next year Potsdam's auto show boasted Overlands, Oaklands, Studebakers, Hayneses, Allens, Hudsons, Cadillacs and Reos.¹²⁹ As a later visitor to an auto show at the County fair observed, "It didn't make any difference which make of car you paused before[;] you soon learned that it was the acme of perfection, that its motor was the sweetest thing running, and that it embodied all the latest perfections that scientific mind and imagination could produce."¹³⁰

But nothing was so endlessly fascinating to fair goers as things that flew, from balloons in the early days to airplanes in the twentieth century. Many certainly saw their first "flying machines" at a fair.¹³¹ Perhaps one of the oddest was the "aeronaut" on a cycle at the Gouverneur fair in 1895; "by means of pedals he worked the wings of the machine and guided it by a wheel with his hands."¹³² Balloons, however, came first, soon coupled with parachutists and even trapeze artists. A dog parachuting from a balloon in 1912 prompted a rare comment on cruelty to animals, in itself evincing another kind of modern sensibility: "He trembled all over . . . I am judge enough of a dog to know that the poor brute was terribly frightened. The dog landed on the roof of the Wilmarth barn nearly two miles away . . ." ¹³³ The affronted dog-lover, Josiah L. Brown, was a long-time observer of the Potsdam scene, including its fairs. His comments alone nicely trace public reactions to "flying machines" of various kinds, beginning with the failed attempt of Professor C.F. Ritchel's machine (perhaps a kind of dirigible?) at the Potsdam fair in 1878. "It was a great disappointment to the crowd and a great disappointment to the officers of the Society . . . We shall probably never hear the last of the flying machine."¹³⁴ A more satisfying flight, albeit of a conventional balloon, occurred in 1887: "It is hard to describe the expressions on thousands of upturned faces. It was one of mingled awe, admiration and joy, if such a combination could be obtained."¹³⁵ Brown was initially skeptical of airplanes, for so many of them seemed unable to perform. "I am inclined to think that these flying machines are a good deal of a humbug . . . I would not go across the street to see one."¹³⁶ But a Curtis biplane did eventually fly at the Potsdam fair in 1911, and Brown's sarcastic ". . . every day the aviator gives out word that he will fly and we have got a kink in the neck watching the sky" had to be changed. Several days later, he wrote, "The first question I was asked this morning was, 'Did you see the flying



Prizewinners: silver-plated cups won, left, for poultry at the Ogdensburg fair, and, right, for the best Holstein herd at the Canton fair. (Courtesy of Marion McIntosh and Mrs. Tim Opdyke, respectively)

machine? Yes, we all saw the flying machine, and such flights are becoming so common that they do not attract much more attention than an automobile."¹³⁷ Quite a conversion for a little over a week! Flights at fairs became routine and soon included taking up passengers for short flights.¹³⁸ Potsdam fair's aviatational experiments were generally replicated at other area fairs.

Clearly, fairs were, formally and informally, successful vehicles for educating people to the modern world on a broad variety of fronts. While formal education was perhaps most important in the early decades, it never totally vanished as a fair purpose. Similarly, fairs always filled a socializing function, although perhaps this, too, was more successful and necessary in the early days when physical and psychosocial isolation had to be combatted.¹³⁹

However people came — "It was a hard ride in a lumber wagon over the corduroy roads for eight or ten miles," said one who attended the first fair [at Gouverneur]. 'Yes,' said another, 'I well remember coming to town to see the fair. My older brother mounted one of the horses of the farm team and I was put up behind him. My father mounted the other.' — they came to see people, to visit, to have a break in normal routine.¹⁴⁰ As Potsdam resident Henry Sweet Allen said of the County fair in 1864, "People seem to attend the fair for diversion to have a holly day — to have a ride & see folks."¹⁴¹ Henry Allen was one of presumably countless young men who courted his sweetheart with a trip to the fair.¹⁴² Intended in part as harvest festivals, fairs were scheduled to occur when the heaviest work of the farmer's year was ended, when he could afford the time for "holly days" and courting.

Ideals central to the conception of the modern agricultural fair were unquestionably fulfilled, most markedly in the early decades — the golden age — of American agricultural fairs. They did foster modernization through education and competition and emulation. They did bring people together and fight the isolation of rural life. And, in some measure, these aspects of agricultural fairs continued to succeed in subsequent decades. However, the fact that by the early 1930s, St. Lawrence County possessed not six or four or even two fairs, but a single fair indicates that there was more to the story than unalloyed success.

Each of the four fairs that survived the earliest days faced numerous occasions when it contemplated abandonment of a once bravely declared mission. The first time the County fair

at Canton considered giving up, it was barely a decade old, and the Civil War was raging. According to the Secretary, "... the state of the country was such that many Agricultural Societies had determined to suspend operations, and the same course was spoken of as perhaps best for this Society; while the question was also seriously debated whether the financial condition of the Society was not such that it's [sic] dissolution was inevitable."¹⁴³ Premiums for 1862 could be paid only in part (forty cents on the dollar).¹⁴⁴ Interestingly, the Secretary did not blame the war for the plight of the Society, but he attributed its difficulties "entirely to the neglect, the remissness and the lack of interest of the farmers of the county."¹⁴⁵ Henry Sweet Allen agreed that the 1862 fair was not as good as some previous fairs; in spite of the delay caused by a carriage accident on the way, he and his companion "had plenty of time to see all that we cared to see & there was not much to be seen except people."¹⁴⁶ Somehow, the Society refused to quit. Only in 1908 was a County fair not held in Canton.¹⁴⁷ In 1928, the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society was improperly dissolved by Governor Alfred E. Smith, but that mistake was soon remedied to give the fair a few more years at Canton.¹⁴⁸

The Raquette Valley and St. Regis Valley Agricultural and Horticultural Society's Potsdam fair also repeatedly faced hard times. The depressions of the 1880s and 1890s took their toll.

Although fairs continued to be held annually, officers considered selling all or part of the grounds or even donating them to the Clarkson family for the school it proposed to build to memorialize Thomas Clarkson.¹⁴⁹ Again in 1905 the directors tried to sell the grounds, this time to the Normal School.¹⁵⁰ The subject arose again in 1912, 1916 and 1917, though on these occasions the intended purchaser was the public school district.¹⁵¹ Nevertheless, when the fair management announced it did not intend to have a fair in 1917, there was not only a public outcry but financial support was forthcoming, and the Potsdam fair continued.¹⁵² In fact, the 1917 fair was sufficiently successful for *The Courier and Freeman* to predict there would be "an end to talk of disposal of the Fair grounds for the present . . ."¹⁵³ Three years later, calamity again threatened and, once again, a prosperous fair enabled the Society to struggle on a bit longer.¹⁵⁴ When the grandstand and other buildings were burned in 1924, it seemed as if the long-drawn-out demise of the Potsdam fair was about over.¹⁵⁵ The officers voted to abandon the fair for 1924.¹⁵⁶ But it was not to be. Phoenix-like, the fair rose again, though under new management. Two thousand bleacher seats replaced the grandstand.¹⁵⁷ Fairs were also held in 1925, 1926, and 1927. The next year the grounds were sold as the site of a high school and athletic fields.¹⁵⁸

The Ogdensburg fair, sponsored by the Oswegatchie Agricultural Society,



Even babies could be entered into competition! Better baby contests were a way for public health officials to educate mothers in proper child care. (Photograph courtesy of the Gouverneur and St. Lawrence County Fair)

is the most poorly documented of the four major fairs in St. Lawrence County. It was also in 1871 the last to be created, technically beginning one year beyond the "golden age." Although except for a period of at least one year in the mid-1890s, it managed to hold fairs, the consensus seemed to be that it was in constant trouble.¹⁵⁹ According to Josiah L. Brown, who commented in 1912, "The Ogdensburg Fair has never been a success financially . . . the more they try the worse they get."¹⁶⁰ Making allowance for Brown's Potsdam residence and loyalties, he was not far off the mark. Decades earlier, reacting to the hard times of the 1880s, an Ogdensburg newspaper had made a similar observation: ". . . hardly a fair . . . ever . . . held in the town of Oswegatchie . . . has . . . from its receipts proper, paid expenses."¹⁶¹ Furthermore, it maintained, unless the debts were paid, "it will be useless to attempt to continue the holding of fairs in Ogdensburg."¹⁶² The depression of the 1890s saw fair officers once again battling, this time unsuccessfully, ". . . to extend the Fair Association and place it upon a solid financial basis."¹⁶³ Similar efforts had to be made a decade later and, again, in 1910.¹⁶⁴ By the middle of the 1920s, nearby communities were speculating on the impending death of the Ogdensburg fair.¹⁶⁵ The final fair was held in 1926, and the grounds were eventually sold to the local schools.¹⁶⁶

Even the fair at Gouverneur did not escape its share of troubles. Although Gouverneur Agricultural and Mechanical Society records indicate that the depressions of the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s did not wound the Gouverneur fair so severely as they did the others, later problems were traced to a debt which began to increase about 1895.¹⁶⁷ In the Fall of 1912, facing a debt of almost \$6000, fair officials asked life members and local businessmen whether the fair should be discontinued and the grounds

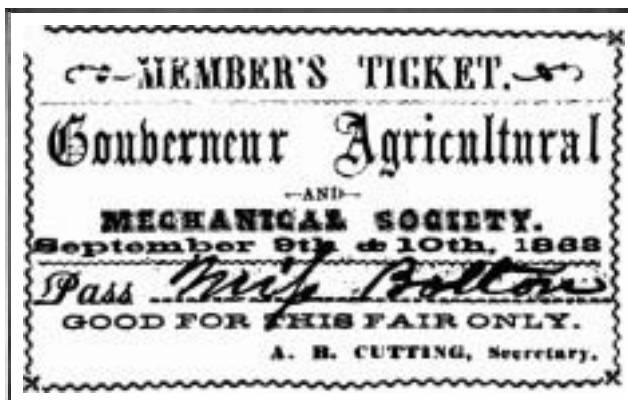
sold to the school board. A mass meeting followed to consider the sale, which was rejected.¹⁶⁹ In 1928, A north country newspaper pronounced both Potsdam and Ogdensburg fairs dead and said the Canton fair was scraping by. The Gouverneur fair alone was thought to be "thriving."¹⁷⁰

Keeping a fair's financial head above water year after year was no easy task. The fact that not all did so is not so surprising as that all four major fairs lasted as long as they did. Money came from various sources, each of which seemed to present a host of related problems. People became annual or life members in the sponsoring agricultural society. At first blush, that seems a simple enough proposition, but *people*, in fact, meant *men*, for life members, at least, often needed to be qualified voters at a time when women could not vote in general elections.¹⁷¹ Never abundant, life members were especially crucial to a fair's early success, for their dues often provided start-up funds. The first annual report of the Raquette Valley and St. Regis Valley Agricultural and Horticultural Society, for example, revealed \$1560 in sales of life memberships.¹⁷² When the Gouverneur fair was moving to its new grounds in 1866, the Agricultural and Mechanical Society had a special drive to obtain 250 additional life members. This effort smacked of professional fund raising, for a person seeking these members was eligible to receive \$2 a day for his efforts.¹⁷³

And to what did annual or life membership entitle one? This question consumed countless hours of discussion at meetings. Clearly, the holder of the membership was normally entitled to a free pass onto the grounds, but this did not necessarily extend to special events.¹⁷⁴ What about the member's family? Should married members have

advantages denied to bachelors? The Potsdam fair solved that problem by issuing in 1872 to each life member two tickets, "on one of which shall be written the name of the Member and on the other, the name of *some Lady*."¹⁷⁵ Did life membership bring with it access to the grandstand and, if so, on what occasions?¹⁷⁶ Did life members have the right to dispose freely of their own passes to other people?¹⁷⁷ And what about widows? Could they continue to use their husband's passes? Yes, decided the Potsdam fair, if they applied.¹⁷⁸ Yes, declared Gouverneur, as long as a woman remained the widow of a life member. Remarriage apparently cost the privilege.¹⁷⁹ Such quibbles were unfortunately necessary, for anyone admitted to the grounds or grandstand without paying represented lost revenue. Since the shoestring on which the fairs operated was often such a frayed one, any abuse of a member's privileges had to be guarded against and those privileges could be augmented only with great care to avoid incurring losses. If privileges could not be readily extended, recognition and honors could be. Medals and buttons were devised for life members to wear proudly, especially during fair week.¹⁸⁰

A major source of money came from the actual operation of the fair itself. Fees were paid for daily admission to the grounds, to the grandstand, to special fair-sponsored events, such as the ten-cent charge for grandstand seats to hear Governor Charles E. Hughes in 1908, and for parking, initially for horses and carriages, later on for automobiles.¹⁸¹ Daily admission fees crept up slowly. At the County fair, they were raised to fifteen cents in 1862 and to twenty cents two years later with a special rate of six tickets for a dollar.¹⁸² By 1911 all northern New York fairs had raised their admissions to thirty-five cents. Two years later, the County fair charged



Membership in an agricultural society was sometimes a prerequisite for competing in its fair. Here are early examples of Gouverneur Agricultural and Mechanical Society membership tickets. (Courtesy of the Gouverneur and St. Lawrence County Fair)

adults fifty cents and children, twenty-five cents.¹⁸⁴ Children's rates had always been lower than those of adults; in 1866 Gouverneur charged only ten cents for children twelve and under while adults paid twenty-five cents.¹⁸⁵ All the fairs followed the same pattern, with only minor variations. At Ogdensburg in 1915, for example, \$1 purchased entry for five days, a special "season ticket."¹⁸⁶

Although daily fees were moderate, once again the shoestring factor came into play. Anyone with a free pass cost the fair organization money. As the Secretary of the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society put it in 1883, the Society could not afford to fill the grounds "with persons whose presence adds nothing to their treasury."¹⁸⁷ Ticket sales were crucial to raising money for premiums. Who possessed the authority to issue passes and the extent of the practice was never clear, but clergymen were sometimes singled out as recipients.¹⁸⁸ In 1898, the Raquette Valley and St. Regis Valley Agricultural and Horticultural Society limited complimentary tickets to the Potsdam fair to the principals of the "State" and "Tech" schools, to town clergymen and to officers of the Gouverneur, Canton, Ogdensburg, and Malone fairs.¹⁸⁹ Officers of the Gouverneur Agricultural and Mechanical Society in 1905 were allotted five passes for two people each.¹⁹⁰ Limiting or eliminating free passes was a perennial issue for fair societies.¹⁹¹

One might suspect little controversy over parking fees. Even here, however, hard-pressed societies had to police carefully to prevent losses. For free entry to the grounds for their horses, some fair goers apparently claimed to be entering the animals into competition, but were actually trying "to avoid paying the small amount asked for a 'carriage card'."¹⁹² To prevent this practice, Ogdensburg required all teams to have carriage cards, with refunds given those that won prizes or were certified by judges as worthy to compete.¹⁹³ At the time, carriage cards cost twenty-five cents.¹⁹⁴ By 1931 it cost thirty-five cents a day or \$1 for a season ticket to park a car at the Gouverneur fair grounds.¹⁹⁵

An entry fee to enable an exhibitor to compete was an additional source of revenue, especially from horse-racing. In 1895, for example, Gouverneur made \$1191.50 from race entries and \$164 from exhibit entries.¹⁹⁶ In general, especially in the early days, membership brought with it the right to compete, or, to put it another way, only members could compete, as was the case at the Union Agricultural Society of Hammond.¹⁹⁷ Where women were not entitled to membership in their

own right, that requirement could present a problem. To resolve this, Gouverneur decided "That females belonging to the family of Males [members] can enter articles in their own name free — all others by paying twenty-five cents."¹⁹⁸ Ideally, of course, the most widespread competition possible should have been sought, a contest in no way contingent upon membership. If raising standards were an ultimate goal of fair societies, then the best possible contender for prizes from any place should have been encouraged to exhibit. However, if local people became convinced they could never compete successfully with a large-scale exhibitor, their interest in and patronage of their fair might decline. An entry fee enabled anyone to compete. Gouverneur began requiring such a fee for cattle, horses, sheep and swine in 1904. It was ten per cent of the first prize premium in the category.¹⁹⁹ Compromises were made; the Potsdam fair limited entries to Floral Hall (the "Ladies Department") to St. Lawrence County residents in 1913.²⁰⁰

Rental or sale of concessions brought in additional sums, \$802.50 to the County fair in 1890, for example.²⁰¹ In the early days, women's groups from various churches ran dining halls, paying the fair society for the privilege and raising money for their projects. Gouverneur's Baptist women bought a church bell from their proceeds.²⁰² Perhaps Potsdam was particularly unlucky, but its denominational dining halls seemed to provoke frequent controversy. In 1875 the Society had to warn the Presbyterians and Methodists to repair their dining halls, for the halls "in their present condition, greatly impair the good looks of the grounds."²⁰³ Ten years later, the Society purchased the two dining halls for \$490 and combined them.²⁰⁴ It also had trouble getting the proprietors of the Catholic Dining Hall to pay the rent.²⁰⁵ Every imaginable concession from popcorn to merry-go-rounds through dance halls and lager beer to stallion service facilities were rented or sold.²⁰⁶ In mid-summer 1912 Potsdam fair officials were inviting sealed bids to wholesale or retail such items as ice, soft drinks, ice cream, popcorn, and taffy.²⁰⁷ With the fair still weeks away, the County fair in 1928 boasted that \$1800 worth of concessions had already been sold.²⁰⁸

When the fairs were not underway, the grounds themselves could be rented out to produce additional income. The "Normal Base Ball Club" used the Potsdam grounds for many years, initially paying \$25 a season.²⁰⁹ In 1922, when the Normal School was \$100 or, at that time, two years in arrears, "Normal" students were barred.²¹⁰ Clarkson students also used the facil-

ities, but their institution apparently paid its bills.²¹¹ Tracks and stables were rented, as were the grounds to, for example, circuses and Chautauqua meetings.²¹² Not all groups won access, and officers tried to maintain close control over rentals. In 1868 Gouverneur required the written consent of three-quarters of the officers before the grounds could be rented.²¹³ How long that stringent rule was followed is unclear. In 1927, the Ku Klux Klan, then at the peak of its local popularity, sought to rent the Potsdam fair grounds for a gathering. The asking price of \$300 was too high, and the Klan went elsewhere. One wonders if the price were inflated in order to avoid an outright rejection to the organization.²¹⁴



The St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society life membership silver medallion of Truman Barnes. (Courtesy of the Gouverneur and St. Lawrence County Fair)

Individuals, some of whom would benefit from a successful fair held in their community, put money in various ways into the fairs, constituting another considerable financial source. Drives to pay for specific construction or repair projects or even for general expenses were frequent.²¹⁵ The sums netted in this way varied greatly. In 1906, the people of Potsdam collected \$1600 to pay the mortgage.²¹⁶ In 1886, the superintendent of the County fair in Canton raised \$365 for improvements after the Executive Committee said it could not afford them.²¹⁷ Labor was also contributed.²¹⁸ Special prizes were sponsored and merchandise donated for prizes. Scores of examples of the practice could be cited; let several suffice. Algie Brothers of Ogdensburg offered at the Ogdensburg fair in 1883 a \$40 sewing machine for the largest and best assortment of vegetables.²¹⁹ In 1888, the St. Lawrence Manufacturing Company of Gouverneur offered at the Gouverneur fair Corbin's Rotary Steel Tooth Harrow for the best herd of cattle.²²⁰ At the County fair in 1912, the Canton Clothing Company offered a \$25 suit for the best pair of road or coach horses exhibited from Waddington or Lisbon.²²¹ The variety was

substantial: tea services, eight-day clocks, picture frames, photo albums — almost anything conceivable.²²² Such prizes presumably brought favorable publicity to the donor while they simultaneously helped the fairs' coffers.

Guarantee funds were another frequently utilized device by which local people backed their fairs. These insured fairs that any losses would be covered. Sixty guarantors pledged \$1500 to back the Ogdensburg fair for three successive years beginning in 1898.²²³ Assessments on such funds were made. When Ogdensburg ran a \$600 deficit in 1907, each guarantor had to pay \$6 a share.²²⁴ A more substantial deficit of \$2,125.11 from the 1910 Ogdensburg fair cost the guarantors \$17 per \$25 share.²²⁵ Other communities had similar experiences.

Another way in which private money went into fairs was more indirect.

When fairs borrowed money from banks or from individuals, often members — all-too-frequent occurrences — notes were often endorsed by officers or members of the board of the fair organization.²²⁶ They were personally liable for the debts "... without Security or even the Moral Support of the people ..."²²⁷ Whether or not individuals lost money in this manner, willingness and financial ability to assume such risks in addition to the general thanklessness of the tasks involved probably helped account for the difficulty agricultural societies often encountered procuring officers.²²⁸

Why, beyond civic spirit, were such contributions and guarantees made? Clearly, many were convinced that fairs brought money into the community, money spent not exclusively at the fairgrounds. When Canton did not have a County fair in 1908, a \$22,000

loss in local business was estimated.²²⁹ Merchants advertised directly to fair goers: "You have not completed a visit to the Potsdam Fair unless you include the big Lockwood Store."²³⁰ Canton's J.B. Ellsworth and Son made an almost irresistible appeal in 1897: "Nearly everyone will attend the Great County Fair, and many will need New Shoes. The fast horses will all be there and will be well shod. They have to be in order to win. It is just as necessary in your case."²³¹ Buying everything from clothing to a "GOOD TIME PIECE" was urged in fair-related advertising.²³² The Surprise Store of Ogdensburg had an especially imaginative gimmick in 1913; it offered car or boat fare to any out-of-town customer who purchased at least \$10 worth of goods. Fair goers could also leave "wraps and parcels" at the store free, and telephones were available.²³³ A

Local businessmen, concessionaires who followed fairs, and local organizations all sought to earn money from feeding hungry fair goers.



An ice cream stand at the Potsdam fair. (Photograph courtesy of the Potsdam Public Museum)



Charles Bresee's Dining Hall at the Potsdam fair. (Photograph courtesy of the Potsdam Public Museum)



The bell ringer at the Women's Christian Temperance Union dining booth at the St. Lawrence County fair at Canton, about 1900. (Photograph courtesy of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association archives)

Upkeep on fairgrounds was a constant expense to sponsoring societies. Grandstands were especially difficult to maintain.



Entrance to the grandstand at the St. Lawrence County fair at Canton about 1930. (Photograph courtesy of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association archives)



The old wooden grandstand in Gouverneur in 1931. (Photograph courtesy of the Gouverneur and St. Lawrence County Fair)

special four-page supplement to *The St. Lawrence Republican* in 1887 asserted that one fair purpose was "to call the attention of everyone . . . to the many and beautiful stores there are in our city."²³⁴ Merchants and other businessmen in fair-holding communities clearly thought they could make money from fair goers. If this were not clear enough from the advertisements and the subscription and guarantee lists, it became clear in the way local newspapers reported stories: "A guarantee list was circulated among the local merchants . . ." ²³⁵ A meeting to discuss the future of the Potsdam fair was held under the auspices of the Business Men's Association, who decided to back the fair.²³⁶ The "business men of the town" of Oswegatchie unanimously decided to have a fair in 1884.²³⁷ Sixty merchants, again unanimously, wanted an Ogdensburg fair in 1898.²³⁸ The next year the President of the Oswegatchie Agricultural Society proclaimed, ". . . a fair in this city is of inestimable benefit to the business community."²³⁹ No wonder he wailed in almost the next breath, "We must get the farmers interested in our fair."²⁴⁰ And no wonder that, when the Ogdensburg fair was in even greater distress than usual in 1910, it seemed to have scant support from farmers. It had become a merchants' fair in many ways, albeit one sponsored by an agricultural society.

Not all the money that financed fairs was private. Some came from local and state taxpayers. The town bond issue that helped create the Ogdensburg fair has already been mentioned, as has the dispute between the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society and the St.

Lawrence International Agricultural and Mechanical Society over state funds in the 1850s.

The Town of Oswegatchie repeatedly increased its indebtedness to finance its fair. ". . . [A]s the title of all the property is in the town, it was thought just [by fair society officials!] that the town should assume the debt" for various "permanent improvements" in 1876.²⁴¹ Several months later the town meeting sought legislation from the state to enable it to borrow an extra \$5000 on bonds of the Town of Oswegatchie.²⁴² The town made routine repairs, spending \$400 in 1887 and a similar sum in 1912.²⁴³ On the latter occasion, reflecting the increasingly testy relationship between fair officials and town legislators, the President invited the Town Board to view the grounds to see what repairs were required, ". . . so that when the bills for the work came before it . . . the members will know just what has been done."²⁴⁴ The taxpayers of the Town of Oswegatchie were regarded as close kin to a money tree at times. In 1908, fair officers built twenty-five stalls with money raised by a guarantee fund, but guarantors expected to be "reimbursed later on by the town." The guarantee fund was resorted to on this occasion because ". . . it was decided not to borrow any further money on the town's credit at present as the commissioners have already spent a considerable sum which the people will be asked to vote at the next town meeting."²⁴⁵ The next year an effort to sell more town bonds to finance the fair was made, for "The burden of expense would then be so light as to be practically unnoticed and in no single

year would exceed \$2800."²⁴⁶ No wonder a local revolt against the fair boiled to the surface in 1910! There had been more than a little high-handedness in its operations.

Initially, only the County fair at Canton was entitled to state funds, a fact which at times irked its successful early competitor at Gouverneur. In fact, for many years the attitude of fair officials at Gouverneur was an interesting blend of pride in their ability to stand on their own two feet without a subsidy and pique that they should have to do so. In 1873, the Secretary of the Gouverneur Agricultural and Mechanical Society wrote,

Now if these state donations are made because of the good accomplished by County Societies, & that good is measured by the annual receipts & expenditures at their respective annual Fairs, then I think the public funds are very injudiciously appropriated, for according to the last published reports of the New York Agricultural Society, but ten (10) out of the fifty-one (51) Societies therein reported exceed ours in this particular — & most of those only by the skin of their teeth — while a large majority of the balance fall very far short. Of fifty-eight (58) Fair Societies only three exceed ours in receipts, & those in much more populous localities.²⁴⁷

Several years later, the same Secretary again observed, "That this society without extraneous aid has lived and prospered thus far through so long a period of general financial depression, is cause for self-congratulation."²⁴⁸ At

this time, and until 1889, the munificent sum awarded to the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society was a little over \$400.²⁴⁹

Eventually, all the fairs received state money. Premium payments were subsidized, “. . . but it is first necessary to pay the premiums and turn over the cancelled checks to the state.”²⁵⁰ This practice encouraged fair officials to borrow money to pay the premiums; debts would be paid once the state money arrived. In 1922, when the maximum subsidy the state paid was \$4000, Ogdensburg and Gouverneur received that amount, while Potsdam collected \$3,269.52 and Canton \$3,190.20.²⁵¹

With state assistance came some state regulation, for example, limitation of entries to residents of New York.²⁵² In 1908, Josiah L. Brown reported the State Department of Agriculture was sending inspectors to fairs “with the view of preventing gambling and immoral shows and violations of the excise law.”²⁵³ Violations endangered the state subsidy.²⁵⁴ Such inspection tours recurred.²⁵⁵

As has been demonstrated, the sources of revenue were varied. Although creative bookkeeping seemed to be widely practiced — there is good reason to distrust²⁵⁶ most figures associated with these fairs — a sampling of total receipts is in order. For 1863, the County fair reported receipts of \$2369.77.²⁵⁷ In 1881, receipts were \$5617.62, of which all but \$2.16 had been spent.²⁵⁸ A decade later, receipts were \$7990.38.²⁵⁹ Gouverneur’s receipts were \$820 in 1863, and a tidy \$5235 for 1882.²⁶⁰ The figures from Potsdam and Ogdensburg showed a similar trend. Potsdam fair took in \$6384.30 for the year ending February 1, 1873, and \$13,325.42 in 1900.²⁶¹ The Oswegatchie Agricultural Society’s first fair in 1871 earned \$5500, while its third accrued a whopping \$9000.²⁶² It did not earn that much again until 1880.²⁶³ Demonstrating the problem of taking fair figures at face value, the annual meeting of the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society in 1912, which reported on 1911, found receipts of \$13,287.42, but those “receipts,” in fact, included a borrowed \$3000, while receipts for 1924 totalling \$22,516.86 included a borrowed \$8650.²⁶⁴ Total Gouverneur fair receipts for the year ending November 30, 1925 were \$22,668.76, but that included \$5800 borrowed from the Bank of Gouverneur.²⁶⁵ Similarly, it is not always clear whether money reported as “taken in at a fair,” or some similar wording, constituted total revenue or was really only fair receipts.

Even when receipts were good, they did not always cover expenses, and

when they were poor, they could approach disaster. In 1862, the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society, with \$4500 in debt, took in only \$1698.49.²⁶⁶ Obviously, that could not go on for long! Even a decent year in terms of annual income might not be enough to cover immediate expenses plus pay off debts. It was a proud day when an agricultural society could announce, as the Oswegatchie organization did in 1878, that it was out of debt and had some money (\$236.19) in its treasury.²⁶⁷

If income did not often seem to hard-pressed fair officials all that it should be, expenses probably appeared endless. While some expenses seem obvious — payment of cash premiums or their substitutes in the form of diplomas, ribbons, medals or silver cups, acquisition of grounds and construction of buildings — others did not. Consider the obvious first.

Construction costs never ceased. Original buildings needed additions, repairs, and replacement. Gouverneur’s original buildings had, in fact, been constructed “in a manner suitable to last 3 or 4 years” and its cattle pens could be dismantled and stored.²⁶⁸ They were not intended for permanence. Each year the harsh winters took their toll on flimsy buildings. “Floral Hall is expensive . . . The Sky-light is built in such a way that our Winters seem to break all the glass out of it . . .”²⁶⁹ Grandstands needed tending with special care. They were routinely checked over and equally routinely found dangerous, “rotten and unsafe, and . . . their immediate and thorough repair is imperatively necessary.”²⁷⁰ In 1904, the Gouverneur Agricultural and Mechanical Society paid \$300 to a woman injured in their grandstand.²⁷¹ With all the care and concern expended on grandstands, imagine the chagrin of Gouverneur Agricultural and Mechanical Society officers when they learned in 1884 that they had built their grandstand ten feet onto a neighbor’s property!²⁷² Operating experiences sometimes dictated that remedies for initial errors were mandatory: the hog pens at the County fair “were taken down and put up again [in 1881] at a good, healthy distance from the ‘Dining Hall’ . . .” at a cost of almost \$1000.²⁷³ The next year a new bandstand was built “on the opposite side of the track from the old one,” an “. . . improvement . . . that will be appreciated by all who have ever been so unfortunate as to be seated *too near* a Brass Band . . .”²⁷⁴ Animal pens and barns needed frequent attention. In 1888, the County fair spent almost \$500 on cattle sheds

and estimated in 1899 that in the previous eight years it had spent over \$5000 on repairs of fair buildings and fences.²⁷⁵ The absence of adequate facilities also, it should be pointed out, cost the societies money. Gouverneur rented stalls in local barns when its own filled, and Potsdam fair officials in 1885 paid recompense to the owner of a hog killed at the fair, “owing to the condition of the pens at the time . . .”²⁷⁶ Gouverneur spent \$649.27 on a new barn in 1909.²⁷⁷ In 1922, “modern sanitary closets” cost Gouverneur over \$1000.²⁷⁸ And these are just a sampling of construction and repair expenses.

Payment of premiums was central to the original purpose of agricultural society fairs. Although ultimately at least partially subsidized by New York State, for many years, except for the County fair, this expense was borne exclusively by the societies. In 1860, Hammond allotted \$75 “or such sum as can be divided conveniently” for premiums.²⁷⁹ At its first fair in 1869, Waddington advertised \$800 in premiums, with a munificent \$1500 for 1871.²⁸⁰ While most of the sums for individual prizes remained quite small — or were not monetary at all — the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society set aside \$165 in 1853 for the six best-conducted farms of the County. The prizes were \$30 and \$25 in each of three categories: a farm of 200 or more acres, a farm of 100 to 200 acres, and a farm of 50 to 100 acres, not counting woodland. Starting on March 1, competing farms had to keep exact records of the labor devoted to each field and crop and of profits and expenses. An inspection committee had to visit each competing farm twice during the year and view “all tools, storehouses, conveniences &c.” At the same time, prizes of \$25, \$20 and \$15 were earmarked for the best-run dairies of at least twenty cows. They, too, were to be inspected and owners required to show the committee how they made butter and cheese.²⁸¹ These were prizes truly designed to foster agricultural excellence, though of course they favored highly literate farmers comfortable with keeping records. By the twentieth century, fairs in St. Lawrence County offered combined purses and premiums of about \$7500.²⁸² Not all premiums were awarded, either due to lack of entries or insufficient quality.²⁸³ When economizing was especially needed, the premiums were cut back either by reducing the amounts, shifting to ribbons, diplomas, or medals, or by eliminating categories of competition, often affecting women’s categories most drastically.²⁸⁴ This practice, however, also reduced entries, which was not desirable.²⁸⁵

If cutting back on premiums seemed



Fair societies could cut costs by tapping volunteer workers. Here a group of Potsdam citizens paused from their labors in painting Floral Hall at the fairground to be immortalized about 1912. (Photograph courtesy of the Potsdam Public Museum)

a self-defeating way to control expenses so did slashing advertising costs. Plastering the area with posters was the traditional advertising technique. In 1887, the Potsdam fair engaged in especially heavy advertising, having 2000 supplements to newspapers printed plus handbills, showbills, and posters.²⁸⁷ In spite of the hard times, the campaign helped turn out people at the Potsdam fair that year. Yet several years later, advertising was called an "expensive luxury."²⁸⁸ Gouverneur limited its 1888 and 1890 advertising costs to \$300.²⁸⁹ The County fair expended \$751 on advertising and printing in 1905.²⁹⁰ The cost of Ogdensburg's advertising in 1913 is not known, but it included the manufacture of 10,000 sanitary paper drinking cups advertising the Ogdensburg fair to be distributed at area fairs preceding that at Ogdensburg.²⁹¹ Newspapers ultimately became the chief conventional means of advertising the fairs. In 1922, Gouverneur fair officers placed ads in the newspapers of Canton, Philadelphia, Hammond, Ogdensburg, Theresa, Antwerp, Norwood and Potsdam.²⁹²

While one might like to think of these fairs as community ventures supported by ardent volunteers, in fact, the number of people who were employed — and, therefore, paid — by the various fairs was large. In 1925, the County fair paid over \$800 in salaries to its Secretary, Treasurer, office help, police, judges, superintendent and others.²⁹³ That same year, Gouverneur paid \$52 to ticket sellers, \$114 to ticket takers and gatemen, \$398 to 26 police

and watchmen, and over \$1000 in labor costs on grounds and buildings. It also paid a racing secretary's salary and expenses of \$150.²⁹⁴ Obviously, salaries and wages began more modestly in the nineteenth century. In 1860, the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society decided to pay its Secretary \$50 a year.²⁹⁵ Within a decade, the Secretary's salary had doubled and the Treasurer was being paid \$50.²⁹⁶ By 1915, the County fair was paying \$300 in salaries to officers.²⁹⁷ By 1864, Gouverneur paid its Secretary \$40.²⁹⁸ The next year it decided to make its Treasurer a life member rather than pay him.²⁹⁹ By the end of the century, the Secretary received \$100, the Treasurer and Superintendent \$50 each, and it was soon to begin paying a racing secretary.³⁰⁰ By 1920, the Gouverneur Secretary was negotiating for a salary of \$500 but settled for \$450.³⁰¹ This rise in the Secretary's salary reflects the centrality of the position. The Secretary ran the fair, and the position became increasingly demanding, became, in fact, that of a professional fair administrator. Perhaps Gouverneur's survival might in part be attributed to its early professionalization of this position. When the officers were amateurs, being paid a nominal sum for the headaches their jobs entailed, they were even expected to forgo salaries in hard times.³⁰² Furthermore, paying fees or at least the expenses of speakers and judges was also normal. The infant Gouverneur Agricultural and Mechanical Society paid Edward Everett \$100 to speak in

1862.³⁰³ The amateur judges of the early days generally received free meals, no small sum when their numbers are recalled! The professionals of a later era received expenses, \$111 in Potsdam in 1920.³⁰⁴

With their propensity for borrowing, the agricultural societies all had to make, if not payments on the principal, at least regular interest payments on their borrowed sums. In 1892, Gouverneur paid \$583 on principal and interest.³⁰⁵ Interest on a mortgage was \$150.55 in 1903.³⁰⁶ In 1899, the Canton fair paid \$1700 on old notes, \$727.37 of "floating debt" (whatever that was!), and \$600 in interest payments to life members.³⁰⁷ In 1914, it paid debts and interest of \$5161.97!³⁰⁸ By contrast, that year it paid only \$2902.50 in premiums.³⁰⁹ Potsdam in 1921 reported interest payments of \$360 on a mortgage.³¹⁰

Gouverneur may have been the only fair to pay local taxes, \$45.88 in 1864, but all the fairs had to wrestle with the question of insurance protection.³¹¹ The St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society was almost certainly the first to insure any of its buildings; a decision to insure Floral Hall was made at an Executive Committee meeting in 1869.³¹² Although records are not complete, it seems safe to assume this practice was not continued, for the possibility of insuring buildings came up as a new idea in 1906.³¹³ Ten years later, insurance costs were \$43.³¹⁴ Apparently in connection with a mortgage on the property, Gouverneur insured its buildings in 1900: \$750 on the

grandstand, \$250 on the sheds, \$300 on Floral Hall, \$200 on the barns, and \$400 on the office and Vegetable Hall.³¹⁵ On July 25, 1923, officers decided to take out \$7000 in fire insurance on the buildings.³¹⁶ This action appears less foresighted when one reads in the annual report covering 1923 of a special donation of \$25 to the Gouverneur firemen for their efforts to save Mechanic's Hall on July 23, 1923!³¹⁷ Two years later, they took out liability insurance.³¹⁸ That cost \$100.³¹⁹ Being underinsured was almost as bad as not being insured at all. When Potsdam fair lost about \$20,000 worth of property in a spectacular conflagration on June 2, 1924, insurance covered only \$3450.³²⁰

Whether or not to insure against rain was a major decision when such insurance became available. It was very expensive, and only a society in reasonably good financial shape could afford it. However, one way to get into bad shape expeditiously was to have heavy rain on even one day of a fair. Rain insurance cost the County fair \$900 in 1921.³²¹ Potsdam's experience is especially instructive. In 1920, rain insurance cost the Raquette Valley and St. Regis Valley Agricultural and Horticultural Society \$650. Coverage began at 7:30 a.m. The first day was insured for \$1000, the second and third for \$3250, and the last day for \$1500.³²² The next year, its total insurance bill — rain, fire, and liability — was \$763.03.³²⁵ By 1923, the Potsdam fair was insured for \$9000 against rain. Payments were to be made if at least two-tenths of an inch of rain fell between 7:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.³²⁴ And

then came the devastating fire of 1924, attributed to a cigarette carelessly discarded during a Clarkson versus St. Lawrence baseball game.³²⁵ Rain insurance could apparently no longer be afforded, and, of course, the rains came in 1924, in 1925, and again in 1926.³²⁶

Entertainment — a whole range of special attractions — had to be paid for year after year. Gouverneur allotted \$1750 for "amusements in 1882, and then added another \$100.³²⁷ Even when money for attractions was limited, the sums — \$600 in 1906 and \$500 in 1909 for Gouverneur — were still substantial.³²⁸ Furthermore, these amounts did not cover music, baseball games, or even certain rides, such as a Ferris wheel.³²⁹ In 1925, the Gouverneur Agricultural and Mechanical Society spent \$1100 on amusements, \$363 on music, and \$709 on baseball.³³⁰

The years when income surpassed expenses must have seemed few and far between at times. The Secretary of the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society reported at the annual meeting in 1884 that only thirteen of the thirty-three fairs held by the Society up to that time had paid their way.³³¹ A fair could not be successful unless people came, and so many things could keep them away! Slogging about at a fair in a downpour was not a particularly attractive prospect. Bad economic times gave people little income to spend. If a fair was scheduled too early, not only were some products not ready for exhibition, but it was likely to conflict with harvesting others. At harvest

time, farmers had no time for fairs; besides, if their products had not yet been sold, they had no money to spend.³³² In 1916, a polio epidemic banned all children sixteen or under from fairs and other public places.³³³ With improved transportation — railroads and, later, automobiles — people could choose which fair to attend; they were not so restricted to the local fair as they had once been. And there were so many fairs to choose from, including the New York State Fair, which permanently located in Syracuse in 1891, something which the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society had first recommended in 1856!³³⁴ In addition to the four fairs in the county, there were fairs in Malone, Antwerp, and Lowville in New York and in Kingston, Brockville, and Prescott, in Ontario, all near enough to be attractive to some County residents.

Efforts were made to rationalize some of the chaos which resulted from an excess of fairs, efforts which, of course, reduced competition and permitted some fairs to survive longer than they might have in a more purely Darwinian environment. A State Association of County Agricultural Societies was created in 1889, to serve as a "... clearing house for the discussion of common problems, the formulation of policies, the adoption of common standards and rules of conduct, and the settlement of such immediate problems as the setting of non-conflicting dates and the utilization of certain popular exhibits."³³⁵ The County fair's representative to the State Association saw its purposes less grandly as a way "to apportion attractions among the county fairs."³³⁶ Local coordinating efforts had begun long before the State Association entered the scene. As early as 1871, the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society had called for a meeting of all local agricultural societies to establish uniform practices on members' tickets, gate checks, and admission prices.³³⁷ The Northern New York Fairs and Racing Association, created in 1908, was especially helpful in coordinating price increases.³³⁸ However, all along it had been primarily horse-racing that had dictated local cooperation. In 1876, the Gouverneur Agricultural and Mechanical Society appointed a committee to approach the other county societies "so that horses competing at our fair need not be ineligible in other races."³³⁹ In other words, a racing circuit was desired to permit horses to go from fair to fair competing with each other. Many such circuits were created in subsequent years, including the Northern New York Trotting Circuit, but none seemed capable of resolving all differences.³⁴⁰ Any coordinating body could function only so

CARRIAGE CARD.

FIFTEENTH ANNUAL FAIR

OF THE

GOUVERNEUR

AGRICULTURAL AND MECHANICAL SOCIETY.

September 9th, 10th and 11th, 1873.

Good for Third Day Only.

Fairs tried to produce income in every imaginable way. A carriage card cost about twenty-five cents in 1873. Apparently some fair goers tried to avoid payment by claiming their horses were being entered into competition at the fair. (Courtesy of the Gouverneur and St. Lawrence County Fair)

long as it suited members to adhere to its guidance.³⁴¹

The goal each year was to maximize receipts, or, to put it another way, to bring onto the grounds as many people with money to spend as possible. Since foul weather was so devastating to a fair's chances of success, fairs were lengthened to increase the likelihood of having some good days. The first big step came with the adoption of the four-day fair. Oswegatchie apparently experimented in the late 1880s with a four-day fair before a final conversion in 1890.³⁴² The St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society switched permanently to four days in 1890, followed by Gouverneur and Potsdam in 1891.³⁴³ After that, night fairs and longer fairs came more easily. The final Potsdam fair lasted six days.³⁴⁴ The odds of encountering good weather were also thought to be somewhat enhanced by an earlier fair, although, as has been seen, early fairs presented problems, too. Gouverneur held its first August fair in 1877.³⁴⁵ As fairs compromised with their original agricultural purposes, it became progressively easier to move toward summer weather and away from the rainy fall.

Furthermore, a fair society could not afford to write off even one day as a regular and expected losing proposition. The first day had customarily been devoted to administrative matters — taking entries — and setting up. Major revenue was similarly not usually expected from the final day of a fair. Neither day could be so cavalierly dismissed for long. It was a relatively easy matter to schedule events for those days and even to create audiences.³⁴⁶ The first or last day (it varied over time and from fair to fair) became Children's Day, with free admission for grade and high school students.³⁴⁷ Since Gouverneur's fair often occurred during summer vacation from school, the Children's Day expedient was denied there. Gouverneur did, however, experiment with free admission on the first day to boost attendance.³⁴⁸ Children's events increased over the years, probably reflecting the conviction that, where children go, dotting parents follow. What parent could resist seeing a child's work on display or watching that child compete for prizes? And parents presumably had more money to spend than did their offspring. There were penmanship prizes, spelling contests, Boys' Calf Clubs, domestic competition for girls under sixteen, and school exhibits long before 4-H Club members became major fair participants.³⁴⁹

But nothing could so greatly enhance attendance as entertainment in all its myriad forms. Entertainment was always part of a fair; judging had its

entertaining aspects, including the victors' parade, as did plowing matches and even the speeches of orators on agricultural questions. When the young Irving Bacheller went with his parents to the Canton fair in 1869, they took him "to see the fruits and vegetables, the pigs and cattle, the reapers, mowers, churns and washing machines It was to me time thrown away. I had no interest in such things, with guns to be shot off and sword swallowers and living skeletons and wild men of Australia to be seen" ³⁵⁰ He was not alone! With the end of the golden age of fairs in 1870 when American agriculture began three decades of hard times, and with the strong competition faced by local fairs, they simply had no alternative but to try to outbid each other for patronage. The fair with the fastest horses, most famous speakers, most professional baseball, and most daring acrobats drew the crowds. (Of course, if the weather proved inhospitable, that fair probably lost the most money instead!) But none of this happened without substantial debate.

The agricultural and mechanical purposes for which fairs were created were, it was claimed, drowning in a sea of racing programs, trained dogs, jugglers and the like. A fair must be run "in the interest of the street with no other object in view but to get a crowd in town to spend their money . . . in which case large sums of money must be paid for special attractions and advertising them . . . or it must be run in the interests of the farmer" ³⁵¹ Such was the choice as it appeared to the Secretary of the Gouverneur Agricultural and Mechanical Society in 1890. The previous year, he had insisted that only the purely agricultural fairs made money.

. . . [T]he policy of some is to secure, at an extravagant outlay of money, a line of cheap circus acts which cannot be said to add to the moral tone of any organization. To advertise a tight rope performance by some Madam from Paris in short dresses in front of the grandstand makes a demand for seats! but does it pay in the end? Are such things any profit to the community? ³⁵²

A more temperate Secretary of the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society understood the problem better: "We often hear it said that fairs are going by and that people do not take the interest in them that they used to We must attract the crowd in order to keep the fair alive; and to do that we may have to resort to methods that do not please the believers in the old fashioned exhibition." ³⁵³ Most fair offi-

cial came to recognize the inevitability of special attractions:

A large number of people in this section attend only one fair, and the society offering the most diversified program of amusements gets the crowd. A liberal policy should be adopted and more first class attractions secured long enough in advance to permit them to be thoroughly advertised The uselessness of so conducting a fair that even under the most favorable conditions of weather the society can barely pay expenses . . . is very apparent. ³⁵⁴

In the final analysis, people had to come through the gates for there to be any economic support for the agricultural features of a fair. This lesson was learned, however, only after numerous efforts to prune fairs of "fringes, ornamental appendages, or spectacular performances" in favor of "a purely agricultural exhibition" proved impractical. ³⁵⁵ Nevertheless, every time a fair faced hard times, cutting costs by reducing entertainment was an attractive option to some.

No issue more completely captured the debate over the purpose of a fair than did that over horse racing. In the early days of fairs, horses had been judged one at a time for their driving qualities and their speed, but that was tedious to many spectators. ³⁵⁶ Races added drama. They also added moral questions, for, nation-wide, "What ensued was probably the most corrupt period in the history of state fairs." ³⁵⁷ Corruption at the top probably filtered to local levels as well. In spite of the moral dangers, fairs and horse racing were synonymous to many. In St. Lawrence County, only the Hammond Agricultural and Mechanical Society had no trotting course, "it being strictly a farmer's and mechanic's fair." ³⁵⁸ All the others had half-mile tracks, with the temporary exception of Gouverneur, whose first track was twelve rods short of a half mile. ³⁵⁹ In fact, constructing the track was often the first task at a new fair ground. ³⁶⁰ Joining a professional racing association might come soon after. The Raquette Valley and St. Regis Valley Agricultural and Horticultural Society, for example, joined the National Association for the Promotion of the Interests of the American Trotting Turf in 1876. ³⁶¹

Most fair supporters wanted racing, if a vote at the 1859 annual meeting of the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society was any clue: "A resolution declaring it inexpedient to offer premiums for speed of horses was negated by a nearly unanimous vote, six persons voting in affirmative." ³⁶² How-



Off-season, fairgrounds were rented to produce income. Here horses work out on the track in winter at the Potsdam fair. (Photograph courtesy of the Potsdam Public Museum)

ever, even some who in general favored racing, wanted it kept in perspective:

It has been objected that the whole time of the fair was taken up with horses and racing to the exclusion of everything else The officers . . . feeling that there was some ground for this complaint resolved that no racing should be allowed on the grounds on the second or business day of the fair and on the other days only at hours so arranged as not to interfere with the business of the Society.³⁶³

This resolution was not kept for long, and it is impossible to escape the impression from fair records and newspaper accounts that racing was the dominant concern of the men who ran the local organizations. Nothing else came close. Many of the leading figures of late nineteenth century St. Lawrence County fairs, such as Amasa Corbin, Jr., of Gouverneur, and Henry E. Seaver, Secretary of the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society, were also prominent in the St. Lawrence Valley Horse Breeders' Association, an organization dedicated to trotting horses.³⁶⁴

A constant struggle — or a convincing appearance of one, for it is impossible to tell the difference with the inadequate records that survive — was waged to keep racing honest and respectable. In 1860, the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society banned a driver: ". . . [T]his Society is determined to discountenance and prevent as far as possible it can the jockeying and ungentlemanly conduct which constituted the chief objection to trials of speed."³⁶⁵ Some races were reserved for locally owned horses, probably in part a way to insure their integrity.³⁶⁶ Nevertheless, complaints of improper

races constituted a litany in the records. "Trotting races in which the slowest horse invariably comes out ahead have ceased to amuse or deceive the public," declared the Secretary of the Gouverneur Agricultural and Mechanical Society in 1880.³⁶⁷ Many years later, Josiah L. Brown of Potsdam was making the same claim: "There is not much honesty in horse-racing. The fastest horse is not always allowed to win. It is policy sometimes to keep him back."³⁶⁸ The years between saw similar complaints.³⁶⁹ Spectators were often fully aware of what was happening before their eyes. In 1904 at Ogdensburg, the crowd thought the driver of Crackerjack Joe was "laying up. There were loud cries from the stand to take him off and in the next heat the judges put [another driver] up behind the Crackerjack."³⁷⁰ This was not the first time crowds had taken matters into their own hands at a fair. At an early Gouverneur fair, "several . . . young men," unhappy that their favorite driver had been disqualified by the judges, "ran to the rail fence to the north side of the grounds and seized each a rail," which they used to tip over the judges' stand!³⁷¹

Eventually, serious questions began to be raised about the financial wisdom of horse races. They began, it was argued, to cost the societies far more than the money racing enthusiasts brought to the grounds. Tracks were expensive to maintain. Purses had to be substantial to attract good horses. About 1918, the president of the Gouverneur society urged that facts be faced: ". . . the day of horse racing is on the decline Race horses have diminished in number, and there are left only a few trainers who eke out a precarious existence." He suggested fewer races and smaller purses.³⁷² And H.L. Ives, a charter member of the

Raquette Valley and St. Regis Valley Agricultural and Horticultural Society argued for the elimination of racing in 1924: ". . . we have only the culls chasing each other round the track, coming in at the home stretch under the whip, making an exhibit of cruelty to animals."³⁷³

If horse racing added drama to the fair scene, so did politicians. Most speakers in the early days, though there were some exceptions, were people with agricultural expertise, such as the editor of *The Rural New Yorker* who spoke at Hammond in 1858.³⁷⁴ For the most part, agricultural experts went the way of the plowing match, and politicians took their places as featured speakers. Not everyone, of course, was happy with this change; at the 1890 annual meeting of the Gouverneur Agricultural and Mechanical Society, an unsuccessful effort was made to ban political speeches from the fair.³⁷⁵ Meanwhile, an impressive array of political figures found their way to St. Lawrence County, many protesting, as did James G. Blaine at Ogdensburg in 1878 that "there was not a person present who did not know more about [agriculture] than himself." He then spoke for over an hour against greenbacks.³⁷⁶ Blaine's opponent for the presidency in 1884, Grover Cleveland, appeared at the Ogdensburg fair in 1883, while he was Governor of New York. He, too, disavowed any knowledge of farming.³⁷⁷ Other major political figures to appear at area fairs were, in roughly chronological order, Horatio Seymour, Civil War Governor of New York and soon to be presidential nominee; former Vice-President of the United States Schuyler Colfax; Vice-President of the United States William A. Wheeler of Malone; United States Senator William M. Evarts; Governors Roswell Flower and Theodore Roosevelt; United States Secretary of Agriculture James Wilson of Iowa; Governor Charles E. Hughes, a future presidential candidate and Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court; Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., and Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt.³⁷⁸ The first woman to be a principal speaker at any St. Lawrence County fair was New York Secretary of State Florence E. Knapp, who spoke at Gouverneur in 1925.³⁷⁹ That nominal advance for women was somewhat undercut by the simultaneous appearance of Miss Watertown!³⁸⁰ Women had made their political presence known at area fairs dramatically in 1915 when a referendum vote on woman suffrage was before the voters. Pro and anti - suffragists had displays and distributed literature.³⁸¹ Furthermore, the Political Equality Club took second prize that year in the parade of decorated cars at

the Potsdam fair.³⁸² New York's women did not win the right to vote in 1915, but they did two years later in a second referendum.

If fast horses and politicians brought excitement to a fair, baseball did also. If there was any unhappiness with its introduction, it does not appear in fair records. The first fair of the Oswegatchie Agricultural Society featured daily baseball, and Gouverneur introduced the game in 1872.³⁸³ The others probably did so about the same time. It is easy to understand why. Baseball was relatively inexpensive, and the rivalries of local community teams could be expected to produce paid admissions to the grounds.³⁸⁴ Eventually, fair societies went farther afield for attractive "draws" to the baseball diamond.³⁸⁵ For example, three International League teams —Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo — were to be major attractions at the Ogdensburg fair in 1889. In addition, the Pastimes, Ogdensburg's home team, were to play the Oneidas, the champions of the New York State League. Alas, none of this ambitious schedule was played for rain devastated the fair that year.³⁸⁶ In other years, one suspects a generally high quality of baseball occurred when barnstorming teams of black players, such as the Havana Red Sox, the Cuban Stars, or the Brooklyn Royal Giants took the field, whether against each other or against local teams.³⁸⁷ Banned by the racial restrictions of major league organized baseball, some black teams resorted to fair circuits to earn money. Unfortunately, their local reception was not always free of racism, and a modern reader winces at some of the press coverage of their appearances.³⁸⁸ In any event, fair officials seemed generally enthusiastic about baseball, calling it "one of the best drawing cards" they possessed.³⁸⁹

The variety of attractions designed to lure people from their homes and farms to the fairgrounds almost defy enumeration. Horse races and trials, with musical interludes between heats, were supplemented by bicycle races, motorcycle races, automobile races, and, most incredibly, ostrich races. Of course, the balloon ascensions and "aeroplane" displays were also entertainment, as were the trained dogs, dancing bears, acrobats, slack wire artists, singers, dancers, and the like. A new level of "amusement" was attained at the County fair of 1889: the wedding of John A. Howe and Maggie Parks before a crowded grandstand.³⁹⁰ A certain lack of precision over exactly what kind of entertainment was desired is suggested when the Gouverneur Agricultural and Mechanical Society in 1931 decided to "... engage [the] ElRay Sisters . . . if a Battery of Field

Artillery was not available from Madison Barracks."³⁹¹ And one is taken aback to discover an enactment of trench warfare and a machinegun display treated as an amusement during World War I.³⁹² Variety — something for everyone — appears to have been a major consideration in signing up "attractions."

Variety also extended to what came to be called the Midway, a collection of game booths, rides, and side shows whose presence raised periodic questions about morality, especially related to gambling and alcohol. As Potsdam resident Josiah Brown noted in 1882, fairs "are followed by a gang of disreputable people whose influence is bad over everyone they come in contact

with. The managers of the fairs are not to blame. They cannot prevent it, but they can prohibit any gambling on the ground and they should do it."³⁹³ Actually, fairs did try to prevent overt gambling, but what looked like gambling to some appeared harmless to others.³⁹⁴ *The St. Lawrence Republican* in 1884 noted, "The number of games by which the proprietors of new, novel contrivances to tap the conceit of those who are always ready to pay, was legion and they were worked skillfully."³⁹⁵ Two years later, again pointing out that "fakirs and gambling contrivances" abounded at the Ogdensburg fair, the paper concluded that opinions varied "upon what is required to make a first-class Fair."³⁹⁶ In 1888,



Midways were often controversial, but they attracted patrons. These are both scenes from the St. Lawrence County fair at Canton about 1900. (Photographs courtesy of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association archives)





Baseball was a favorite of fair goers. This game was played in 1928 in Gouverneur. (Photograph courtesy of the Gouverneur and St. Lawrence County Fairs)

acknowledging complaints of “skin games,” the paper suggested the fair without them was “spiritless,” and reminded readers “. . . some sheep enjoy the shearing.”³⁹⁷ Within a few years, the same paper was declaring proudly, “There is not a game of chance on the

Fair officials took a less lenient view of alcohol, for drunken behavior could lead to violence and make the fair grounds unfit for the families they sought to attract. For example, in 1892 in Ogdensburg, an intoxicated man, unable to win at a game, demolished the “machine and stand” and badly injured their owner. When the disturbance spread, special police proved ineffective to quell it.³⁹⁹ In fact, the primary duty of the special police hired annually by the fairs was to prevent the sale or consumption of alcoholic drinks.⁴⁰⁰ *The St. Lawrence Plaindealer* of Canton observed of the County fair in 1896, “They have always tried to shut out drunks and drinking, but until this year have been only partially successful.”⁴⁰¹

Nevertheless, it was important that fairs not become too tame. In 1881, the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society tabled a motion to “discard” all “Hose & Foot Races Shooting Matches and similar Amusements.”⁴⁰² Gouverneur Agricultural and Mechanical Society officials meted out a similar fate in 1893 to a “petition from the ladies, not to allow dancing on the ground[s].”⁴⁰³ Furthermore, rides such as Ferris wheels and ocean waves provided a kind of physical excitement. While still “wholesome,” they provided too a kind of “sensory appeal and emotional re-

lease.”⁴⁰⁴ They represented a more “uninhibited,” less edifying form of amusement than had been encountered at early fairs.⁴⁰⁵

But it was not enough. No matter how herculean the efforts of fair officials to provide “up-to-date” amusements “straight from the cities” or, even better, straight from fabled Coney Island, local fairs could no longer deliver sufficient novelty and excitement — not to mention education or information — to bring large numbers through their gates.⁴⁰⁶ To be sure, fairs did offer excitement, both planned and unplanned, over the years. In the memory of one fair goer, the spark of momentous events was in the air even before the fair opened: “Cattle were herded through Canton’s streets . . . Cows broke loose and hooped across lawns and flower beds, banging into fences and knocking them loose.”⁴⁰⁷ What delightful disorder for a small boy, a break from the routine akin to Christmas and the Fourth of July! Anything might happen when the norms of everyday life were suspended. Undoubtedly few fair goers admitted the feeling, but Josiah L. Brown was probably not too inaccurate when he observed that people “will go a long way to see somebody break his neck.”⁴⁰⁸ Risk was titillating. So was disaster, especially if it happened to someone else. Steeplechases were dangerous. The Oswegatchie Fair had its first one in 1873:

Everybody had a curiosity to see a steeple chase, for it was something new . . . but before the end their curiosity had received a surfeit

and gave place to horror and blanched faces. Falling horses rolling over riders and frantic crowds trying to get out of the road of running horses, was too suggestive of terrible results. We presume it was a grand and magnificent steeple chase, for horses were destroyed and riders injured, but the effect upon the people was about the same as caused by the execution of a fellow creature. One will be sufficient for a lifetime.⁴⁰⁹

Not so. Within a few years, the same paper queried “. . . what is a steeple chase when nothing is broken[?]”⁴¹⁰ Balloons caught fire and made crash landings; parachutes failed to open properly; planes crashed; rides tipped over; animals attacked spectators, and horses ran away.⁴¹¹ Who wanted to miss such spectacles? But they could not be guaranteed, and the regular offerings lost their savor.

Even the entries became predictable: “The same old pillow shams and quilts are on exhibition that have been here for the last 45 years,” grumbled Josiah Brown in 1915.⁴¹² Brown was not alone in his assessment. In 1898 a revision of the premium list for the Potsdam fair had eliminated cash prizes for oil paintings, on the basis that some had been “on exhibition so many years that money paid to their owners for premiums had exceeded many times their value.”⁴¹³ And County fair officials were pleased with the results of their thorough revision of the premium list in 1892: “. . . many of the old standbys that have been shown year after year . . . were not there.”⁴¹⁴ A poem, “The

District Fair," in *The Courier and Freeman* for 1911 went to the heart of the matter:

It's the same old fair
 In the same old place,
 The same grey horse
 In the same scrub race.
 The same old rooster
 The same old hen. . . .
 The same old peanuts
 At the same old stand,
 The same old clown
 And the same old band. . . .
 The same old dirt,
 The same old dust
 The same fancy work
 Been showing since the flood.⁴¹⁵

Efforts to connect local fairs to World's Fairs and Expositions — advertising, for example, the "GREAT COLUMBIAN FAIR at OGDENSBURG" or "The White City" at Canton — were apparently unconvincing.⁴¹⁶ Clearly, however, such distant events did have local impact; the Midway Plaisance of the Columbian Exposition made midways elsewhere more acceptable at the same time that it spawned ". . . a new industry of traveling carnival shows . . ." ⁴¹⁷ It also introduced the Ferris wheel.⁴¹⁸ Exhibits that could boast the influence of a World's Fair had a special cachet for years thereafter.⁴¹⁹ And a genuine Columbian Exposition memento — the counter of Dr. Hervey Thatcher's baking powder booth — was used by Methodist women for many years to serve dinners at the Potsdam fair.⁴²⁰

Thrills and excitement were not all the fairs ceased to deliver in adequate amounts. "If the individual grange

exhibits were eliminated, the [County] fair could be considered a failure as an agricultural exhibit."⁴²¹ The next year was the same: "As an exhibition of the products of the garden and field, or of farm livestock it [the County fair] was far below the old time fair."⁴²² At the Gouverneur fair of 1926, twelve Granges, the County Home Bureau, the County Farm Bureau, the New York State Department of Health, the New York State College of Agriculture, and the United States Department of Forestry all had exhibits.⁴²³ Therein resided both success and failure. Farming had modernized; a whole bureaucracy

had developed to serve the farmer and his wife, who had access to this bureaucracy without the mediating influence of a fair or agricultural society. A myriad of institutions had arisen to serve purposes once served almost exclusively by fairs. Farmers simply did not need fairs for information and education as they once had. If they went to a local fair at all, they went for many of the same reasons town dwellers did. And they were very likely to go by car, the same car that might equally well carry them to the State Fair at Syracuse!

"When the average farmer gets a



For many, fairs meant horses and racing. Above, George Evans, long a leader of the Gouverneur Agricultural and Mechanical Society, drives on an empty track at Gouverneur. Below, racing in 1928 in Gouverneur. (Photographs courtesy of the Gouverneur and St. Lawrence County Fair)



telephone into his home, when his paper is delivered at his house each day and he can read of larger events going on all around; when the railroads are offering special rates to the State fair and the cities, the farmer begins to think of something big."⁴²⁴ The local fair inevitably diminished in consequence. Soon movies and the radio could be added to the list of modern wonders that reduced the lure of local fairs as sources of entertainment or information or even social contact. However large the impact of all these developments, they pale by comparison to that of the automobile on local fairs.

At first the number of cars at a fair was a source of pride, hinting at prosperity and modernity. "The large number of automobiles was noticeable."⁴²⁵ They soon "came near pushing man's best friend and ally into obscurity."⁴²⁶ Next they presented a parking problem.⁴²⁷ The real problem, however, was not parking; it was mobility. Automobiles removed restrictions imposed by the horse or even the railroad. They simplified travel. Above all, they made for easier socializing. A family could hop in a car and go for an afternoon or evening visit. Artificial occasions such as fairs were not needed to furnish excuses to bring people together.

Minimally, to St. Lawrence County, the automobile meant consolidation of fairs. In the days of inadequate transportation, the enormous size of the County had supported four and even six fairs. But soon the laments began; there were "too many Agricultural Societies in this region," proclaimed the Gouverneur Agricultural and Mechanical Society in 1876.⁴²⁸ Even though the numbers would soon decrease when Waddington closed its gates, the refrain continued.⁴²⁹ "... [T]he time is surely coming when the public will become aware that one county will support but one fair . . ."⁴³⁰ "There are too many fairs in this county. Four fairs are three too many for any county."⁴³¹

With such universal recognition that some fairs would have to die, how did four fairs survive so long in St. Lawrence County? Strangely, the same factors cut both ways. Excessive competition both sustained and destroyed. None of the fairs was really financially strong, but local boosterism — appeals to community pride — kept them struggling along. Every community thought itself unique in its lack of local support. In 1882, the Raquette Valley and St. Regis Valley Agricultural and Horticultural Society instructed its Secretary "to correspond with other societies & learn their methods of keeping up

interest in their fairs."⁴³² In other words, while Potsdam might be having problems, the assumption was that other places were not. When the Oswegatchie Fair had difficulty, it was because it "did not receive the sympathy and co-operation of the community which such an institution receives in other places . . ."⁴³³ There was no County fair at Canton in 1908; *The St. Lawrence Plaindealer* insisted that Potsdam, Gouverneur and Ogdensburg had all faced similar difficulties, but in those places, unlike Canton, there had never been "any question about letting the fair die out."⁴³⁴ The message was clear; community spirit equal to that of the other three had to be revived. It was there; it could be appealed to, but it was temporarily dormant. One community could simply not permit itself to be outdone by any of its rivals. And so fairs limped along, till Ogdensburg and Potsdam, done in by fire and water, held their last fairs in 1926 and 1927.

The St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society and the Gouverneur Agricultural and Mechanical Society survive to the present day, but have only one fair. At the Gouverneur fairgrounds in 1986 occurred the 128th Gouverneur fair and the 135th anniversary of the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society. The last County fair was held in Canton in 1932, leaving each director with a \$238 debt to erase the deficit.⁴³⁵ Fearing massive cuts in state appropriations to fairs for the depression year of 1933, officials hesitated to schedule another fair.⁴³⁶ Reassured that cuts would not be implemented until 1934, they announced there would be a fair.⁴³⁷ A few months later, on May 7, 1933, they met again, agreed to abandon plans for a fair, and decided to submit to a friendly foreclosure.⁴³⁸ They were unwilling to guarantee personally the society's debt any longer.⁴³⁹ There was a fair on the Canton grounds in 1933, but it was run by the American Legion, which was no more successful than the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society had been at making a profit.⁴⁴⁰ Days after the Legion fair was over, the directors met again — on September 22, 1933 — and agreed to wreck all the buildings except for the horse barn, which still stands, and the toilets. Every scrap of lumber and anything else that could be sold was sold to pay debts.⁴⁴¹ The St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society itself, however, lived on.

At this point, the Gouverneur Agricultural and Mechanical Society saw an opportunity. On November 10, 1933, its president and secretary were authorized to spend up to \$100 to procure the charter of the St. Lawrence County



Politicians found the crowds assembled at fairs irresistible. Here, Governor Theodore Roosevelt of New York Addresses the fair at Ogdensburg in 1899. His unconventional stance was explained by the eye-witness, W.A. Rogers, who drew the scene for the September 23, 1899, Harper's Weekly: "... finding that the dust from the race track was likely to be annoying ... [Roosevelt] picked up a chair, set it in one corner, and with his left arm around a post, one foot on the chair, and the other on the railing, began his speech." (Courtesy of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association archives)

Agricultural Society; at the very least, it was argued, consolidation would garner favorable publicity.⁴⁴² On June 19, 1934, all the officers of the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society resigned after swearing they left no unpaid promissory notes.⁴⁴³ When all the needed legal papers had been filed to permit the principal office and place of the annual meeting to be switched from Canton to Gouverneur, the Gouverneur Agricultural and Mechanical Society paid \$45 for the charter of the St. Lawrence County Agricultural

At the end of June, a meeting of the Gouverneur society

Resolved: That the Gouverneur Agricultural and Mechanical Society hereby invites the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society to hold its 1934 Fair and exhibition on the grounds of the Gouverneur Society on August 14, 15, 16 and 17, 1934, it being understood that the scope of such fair and exhibition shall be such as may be agreed upon between the Directors of the two Corporations.⁴⁴⁵

Since the directors by then were virtually identical, agreement was not impossible to procure. Several weeks later, a leasehold permitted the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society "to hold their 83rd annual fair and succeeding fairs thereafter on the grounds of the Gouverneur Agricultural and Mechanical Society, and in conjunction with the Gouverneur Fair

...⁴⁴⁶
The first joint fair offered \$6500 in premiums.⁴⁴⁷ Only the last two days were insured against rain, and the money to pay for that had to be borrowed.⁴⁴⁸ The Travers Chautauqua Show, scheduled to provide major entertainment, backed out of its agreement days before the fair was to open, and a substitute carnival show was hastily lined up.⁴⁴⁹ In mid-November, over \$4000 was borrowed to pay the premiums.⁴⁵⁰ In other words, in the short run little had changed.

Over the years, lucky breaks with weather and dedicated and innovative managers had combined to insure that the Gouverneur fair outlived its rivals. As a result, to this day, an enduring reminder of St. Lawrence County's heritage from the nineteenth century, from the time when it was an agricultural power in the land, lives on. Each year, the tunes of the merry-go-round, the lowing of cattle, the honking of geese, and the shouts of the concessionaires continue to be heard at one fair ground. And each year, children's eyes sparkle with excitement or with pride in newly-won blue ribbons, just

as other eyes once did a century and more ago. Adults feel it too, for, when all is said and done, what child of any age from 4 to 104 can resist a fair?



FOOTNOTES

¹ Throughout this study, fairs are referred to both by their commonly used names and by their official titles.

² "Can Ogdensburg Afford to Lose the Fair?," *St. Lawrence Republican* [hereafter, *SLR*], April 20, 1910, 2.

³ "Public Meeting Calls for \$13,500 for the Fair Ground," *SLR*, May 4, 1910, 8.

⁴ "Public Meeting," *SLR*, May 4, 1910, 8.

⁵ "Voters Frowned on Bonding Project," *SLR*, April 13, 1910, 5.

⁶ "Discussion on the Fair Ground Proposition," *SLR*, April 27, 1910, 3.

⁷ "Public Meeting," *SLR*, May 4, 1910, 8.

⁸ "Discussion on the Fair Ground Proposition," *SLR*, April 27, 1910, 3.

⁹ "Public Meeting," *SLR*, May 4, 1910, 8.

¹⁰ "Public Meeting," *SLR*, May 4, 1910, 8.

¹¹ "Public Meeting," *SLR*, May 4, 1910, 8.

¹² "Public Meeting," *SLR*, May 4, 1910, 8.

¹³ "Fair Ground Bids Opened," *SLR*, July 13, 1910, 9.

¹⁴ "Major Daniels Announces His Final Withdrawal from Fair," *SLR*, March 22, 1911, 8.

¹⁵ "Major Daniels," *SLR*, March 22, 1911, 8.

¹⁶ "Major Daniels," *SLR*, March 22, 1911, 8.

¹⁷ "Messrs. Irving and Nash Re-Elected by Ogdensburg Fair," *SLR*, Jan. 20, 1915, 5; "The Fair Opens Today," *The Republican-Journal*, Aug. 31, 1926, 4.

¹⁸ "Vanderbilt's Horses Are Coming to the Fair," *SLR*, Sept. 15, 1909, 1; "Against Fair Ground Improvement," *SLR*, April 13, 1910, 2.

¹⁹ "Public Meeting," *SLR*, May 4, 1910, 8.

²⁰ S.W. Durant and H.B. Pierce, *History of St. Lawrence Co., New York* (Philadelphia, 1878; reprint 1982), 103. Under the act of April 7, 1819, the cumbersome named "St. Lawrence Society for promoting agriculture and domestic manufacture" was formed in 1822. It lasted about two years. This society was part of the great wave of Berkshire societies, a movement which collapsed in New York when state funds were withdrawn. Then in 1834 in Ogdensburg, the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society was founded with the ambitious intention of holding two fairs a year. This also lasted about two years. A third society was founded after legislation of May 5, 1841 gave the county \$170 a year for five years. It also lasted only about two years. Durant, *St. Lawrence Co.*, 102-103; Franklin B. Hough, *A History of St. Lawrence and Franklin Counties, New York* (1853; reprint 1970), 527-528; Gates Curtis, *Our County and Its People: A Memorial Record of St. Lawrence County, N.Y.* (Syracuse, N.Y. 1894), 214-215; Wayne Caldwell Neely, *The Agricultural Fair* (New York, 1935), 71.

²¹ Record of the Organization and Proceedings of the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society [hereafter, Record, SLCAS], June 8, 1952, St. Lawrence County Historical Association

Archives, Canton, N.Y. Footnotes will provide as much information as possible to permit locating citations in fair records; however, record books for all fairs, and even newspapers, were sometimes not paginated and dates were often incomplete or missing.

²² Record, SLCAS, May 31, 1853.

²³ Record, SLCAS, 1856.

²⁴ *St. Lawrence American*, Sept. 11, 1856, 3; Sept. 18, 1856, 3; Persis Boyesen, correspondence with author, Feb. 25, 1985.

²⁵ Record, SLCAS, Feb. 22, 1860.

²⁶ Record, SLCAS, Feb. 22, 1860.

²⁷ Record, Executive Committee, SLCAS, June 20, 1862.

²⁸ Curtis, *Our County*, 216-217

²⁹ Alexander Allen, "History of Hammond," typescript, Hammond Town Historian's collection, 68-69.

³⁰ Hammond Fair Association (Union Agricultural Society), Records and Minutes, St. Lawrence County Historical Association Archives, Canton, N.Y.

³¹ The ungrammatical name of the Gouverneur organization was the Gouverneur Agriculture and Mechanical Society; unofficially and over time, *Agriculture* quietly became *Agricultural*. Beulah C. Appleby, "History of the Gouverneur Agricultural and Mechanical Society: The Fair in 1877." This unpaginated series was adapted from a 1922 manuscript by an unknown author. The manuscript is no longer in existence. To aid in tracing citations, reference is given to the appropriate segment of the series. Gouverneur and St. Lawrence County Fair Society Offices, Gouverneur, N.Y.

³² Neely, *Agricultural Fair*, 59-64.

³³ Appleby, "History: Formation."

³⁴ Appleby, "History: The First Fair."

³⁵ Appleby, "History: The First Fair."

³⁶ Durant, *St. Lawrence Co.*, 348

³⁷ Appleby, "History: The Fairs from 1861 to 1865."

³⁸ Appleby, "History: The Officers (1861-1865)."

³⁹ Neely, *Agricultural Fair*, 81.

⁴⁰ "The Waddington Fair," *SLR*, Aug. 3, 1869, 2; "The Waddington Fair," *SLR*, Oct. 5, 1869, 2.

⁴¹ Minutes, Waddington Agricultural Society, Jan. 6, 1879, Waddington-Hepburn Library, Waddington, N.Y.; "Waddington," *SLR*, Sept. 17, 1879, 2; "Waddington Fair," *SLR*, Sept. 8, 1880, 2.

⁴² Minutes, Waddington Agricultural Society, March 19, 1881.

⁴³ "The Waddington Fair," *SLR*, Sept. 5, 1877, 2.

⁴⁴ The Raquette Valley and St. Regis Valley Agricultural and Horticultural Society [hereafter RV], Records, Potsdam Public Museum, Potsdam, N.Y., 1, 24.

⁴⁵ RV, 2, 7-8.

⁴⁶ *SLR*, Oct. 4, 1870, 2.

⁴⁷ "Shall We Have a Town Fair[?]," *SLR*, Oct. 4, 1870, 2.

⁴⁸ "Shall We Have a Town Fair[?]," *SLR*, Oct. 4, 1870, 2.

⁴⁹ "Oswegatchie Town Fair," *SLR*, April 25, 1871, 2.

⁵⁰ "Fair Grounds," *SLR*, May 23, 1871, 2.

⁵¹ "What Has Been Done at the Fair Grounds," *SLR*, Sept. 5, 1871, 2.

⁵² "First Annual Fair of the Oswegatchie Agricultural Society," *SLR*, Oct. 10, 1871, 2.

- ⁵³ H. Van Rensselaer, Record, SLCAS, Annual Report for 1853.
- ⁵⁴ Richard D. Brown, *Modernization: The Transformation of American Life* (New York, 1976), 124.
- ⁵⁵ Brown, *Modernization*, 125-6.
- ⁵⁶ Jim Shaughnessy, *The Rutland Road* (Berkeley, Calif., 1964), 55.
- ⁵⁷ Record, SLCAS.
- ⁵⁸ Record, SLCAS, Dec. 30, 1852.
- ⁵⁹ Record, SLCAS.
- ⁶⁰ Shaughnessy, *Rutland Road*, 58-59.
- ⁶¹ Brown, *Modernization*, 124.
- ⁶² Gouverneur Agricultural and Mechanical Society [hereafter, Gov. A&M], Secretary's Record, June 27, 1868, Gouverneur Museum, Gouverneur, N.Y. The Secretary's Record books covered the years 1859-1875, 1876-1892, 1893-1915, 1916-1934. Since the records are in chronological order, only the date or date and page (where available) of an entry will be provided in footnotes.
- ⁶³ Neely, *Agricultural Fair*, 38, 43.
- ⁶⁴ Record, Jan. 28, 1852.
- ⁶⁵ Record, SLCAS, June 12, 1855.
- ⁶⁶ "The Special Prizes," *SLR*, July 31, 1901, 5.
- ⁶⁷ "Evening Discussion," *SLR*, Sept. 30, 1873, 2.
- ⁶⁸ Union Agricultural Society of Hammond, 2.
- ⁶⁹ "County Agricultural Societies," *SLR*, June 27, 1871, 2.
- ⁷⁰ Record, SLCAS, Executive Committee, May 17, 1861.
- ⁷¹ Gov. A&M, 1890-1915, 63.
- ⁷² Record, SLCAS, Aug. 19, 1852.
- ⁷³ Record, SLCAS.
- ⁷⁴ Appleby, "History: The First Fair."
- ⁷⁵ Appleby, "History: First Business Meeting."
- ⁷⁶ Appleby, "History: 1861-1865 Cattle and Dairy Exhibits."
- ⁷⁷ Elmer O. Fippin, *Rural New York* (New York, 1921), 218; Minutes, 1863-1892, St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society [hereafter, Minutes, SLCAS], Jan. 11, 1870, St. Lawrence County Historical Association Archives, Canton, N.Y.
- ⁷⁸ Minutes, SLCAS, Jan. 11, 1876.
- ⁷⁹ Appleby, "History: 'Centennial Class' in 1876."
- ⁸⁰ "The Oswegatchie Fair," *SLR*, Sept. 16, 1885, 2.
- ⁸¹ "The Ogdensburg Fair," *SLR*, Sept. 3, 1882, 2.
- ⁸² *SLR*, Sept. 5, 1883, 3.
- ⁸³ "The County Fair," *St. Lawrence Plaindealer* [hereafter, *SLP*], Aug. 26, 1896, 1.
- ⁸⁴ "The County Fair," *SLP*, Aug. 26, 1896, 1.
- ⁸⁵ Record, SLCAS, Sept. 2, 1856, Sept. 5, 1856.
- ⁸⁶ Minutes, SLCAS, 1885 Annual Meeting.
- ⁸⁷ "Last of the Fall Fairs Ends," *SLR*, Oct. 3, 1906, 8.
- ⁸⁸ "County Fair," *SLP*, Sept. 3, 1918, 1.
- ⁸⁹ "Big Chorus for the Fair," *Courier and Freeman* [hereafter *C&F*], Aug. 25, 1915.
- ⁹⁰ Gov. A&M, April 12, 1921, 43.
- ⁹¹ Gov. A&M, April 21, 1923, 63.
- ⁹² Gov. A&M, July, 1923, 65.
- ⁹³ "Perfecting Plans for the Potsdam Fair," *C&F*, Aug. 26, 1925, 1; "Great Program for County Fair," *SLP*, Aug. 18, 1925, 1.
- ⁹⁴ RV, 213.
- ⁹⁵ Gov. A&M, March 4, 1902, 70; March 22, 1902, 71.
- ⁹⁶ Gov. A&M, Jan. 9, 1870.
- ⁹⁷ "Report of the Secretary of the Oswegatchie Agricultural Society," *SLR*, April 9, 1872, 2.
- ⁹⁸ "Wins Out," *SLP*, Sept. 19, 1900, 1.
- ⁹⁹ "County Fair," *SLP*, Sept. 20, 1905, 1.
- ¹⁰⁰ Appleby, "History: The First Balloon Ascension in 1874."
- ¹⁰¹ Gov. A&M, Jan. 25, 1873.
- ¹⁰² Record, SLCAS, Annual Report, Dec. 30, 1852.
- ¹⁰³ H. G. Foote, Record, SLCAS, Annual Report, 1859.
- ¹⁰⁴ "The Waddington Fair," *SLR*, Sept. 12, 1871, 2; Appleby, "History: Continued Growth in 1871;" "St. Lawrence County Fair," *SLP*, Aug. 20, 1890, 2.
- ¹⁰⁵ Neely, *Agricultural Fair*, 167-8, 170.
- ¹⁰⁶ Gov. A&M, Sept. 15, 1865, 79.
- ¹⁰⁷ "Agricultural Society," *SLP*, Jan. 10, 1894, 2.
- ¹⁰⁸ "Ogdensburg Fair," *SLR*, Aug. 25, 1880, 3.
- ¹⁰⁹ Gov. A&M, July 1, 1909, 203.
- ¹¹⁰ "The Names of Exhibitors and Articles Shown at Fair," *SLR*, Aug. 31, 1875, 4.
- ¹¹¹ Gov. A&M, Aug. 3, 1906, 169.
- ¹¹² "Agricultural Society," *SLP*, Jan. 10, 1894, 2.
- ¹¹³ Gov. A&M, July 20, 1899, 50; Aug. 28, 1912, 236; Aug. 6, 1921, 48.
- ¹¹⁴ Neely, *Agricultural Fair*, 182-3.
- ¹¹⁵ Neely, *Agricultural Fair*, 181; emphasis added.
- ¹¹⁶ "The County Fair," *SLP*, Sept. 24, 1912, 1; "Potsdam Fair Is All-Round Success," *C&F*, Sept. 29, 1920, 1; "The County Fair," *SLP*, Sept. 5, 1922, 1; "The County Fair," *SLP*, Sept. 5, 1916, 1.
- ¹¹⁷ Gov. A&M, Dec. 4, 1915, 275; "Big Crowd for the Fair," *C&F*, Aug. 25, 1915, 1.
- ¹¹⁸ "The Fair," *SLP*, Sept. 4, 1917, 1; "Fair Is a Success," *C&F*, Sept. 13, 1911.
- ¹¹⁹ Minutes, SLCAS, Jan. 7, 1879.
- ¹²⁰ "The Conclusion of a Great Fair," *SLR*, Oct. 4, 1905, 4.
- ¹²¹ "Ogdensburg Races," *SLP*, Sept. 9, 1903, 1; "Stage Set for Potsdam Fair," *C&F*, Sept. 14, 1927, 1.
- ¹²² "Potsdam Fair Opens Auspiciously," *C&F*, Sept. 21, 1927, 1.
- ¹²³ Gov. A&M, Aug. 1929, 138; "The County Fair Completes Preparations," *SLP*, Aug. 20, 1921, 1.
- ¹²⁴ *SLP*, Sept. 1, 1886, 3; "The Oswegatchie Fair," *SLR*, Sept. 15, 1886.
- ¹²⁵ "Ogdensburg Fair," *SLR*, Sept. 12, 1900, 6.
- ¹²⁶ "The County Fair," *SLP*, Sept. 6, 1921, 1.
- ¹²⁷ "Fair a Great Success!" *C&F*, Sept. 14, 1904.
- ¹²⁸ "Unusually Successful Show Is In Prospect Here in September," *SLR*, Aug. 19, 1914, 5.
- ¹²⁹ "The Fair Opened Tuesday," *C&F*, Sept. 8, 1915.
- ¹³⁰ "The County Fair," *SLP*, Sept. 4, 1923, 1.
- ¹³¹ Lawrence Patrie, "It Seems Only Yesterday," St. Lawrence Adirondack AACA [Antique Automobile Club of America] *Poop Sheet*, Jan. 1962; Mary Barnett Burke, *A Random Scoot* (Smithtown, N.Y., 1983), 68.
- ¹³² "A Flying Machine Appears in 1895," *Tribune-Press*, July 9, 1975, 3.
- ¹³³ Josiah L. Brown, "Happenings of a Week," *C&F*, Sept. 11, 1912.
- ¹³⁴ Josiah Brown, *Reminiscences, 1855-1893*, Diaries, Potsdam Public Museum, Potsdam, N.Y. #15, Sept. 19, 1878; see also "Happenings of a Week," *C&F*, Sept. 21, 1910.
- ¹³⁵ Brown, #31, Sept. 24, 1887.
- ¹³⁶ "Happenings of a Week," *C&F*, Sept. 13, 1911.
- ¹³⁷ "Happenings of a Week," *C&F*, Sept. 20, 1911.
- ¹³⁸ "Two Planes and Flyers for Fair," *C&F*, Sept. 24, 1919, 1.
- ¹³⁹ Neely, *Agricultural Fair*, 220.
- ¹⁴⁰ Appleby, "History: The First Fair, con't."
- ¹⁴¹ Diary, Sept. 23, 1864, St. Lawrence County Historical Association Archives, Canton, N.Y.
- ¹⁴² Sept. 25, 1862; see also Lillie Herrick, "My Yesterdays," Chapter III, *Thousand Islands Sun*, July 16, 1986, 18.
- ¹⁴³ T.L. Harison, Minutes, SLCAS, Jan. 13, 1863.
- ¹⁴⁴ Minutes, SLCAS, Jan. 13, 1863.
- ¹⁴⁵ Minutes, SLCAS, Jan. 13, 1863.
- ¹⁴⁶ Sept. 25, 1862.
- ¹⁴⁷ "A Losing Proposition," *SLP*, Sept. 8, 1908, 4.
- ¹⁴⁸ "County Fair Was Dissolved by Error," *SLP*, Aug. 7, 1928, 1; Very Important Papers, folder, Gouverneur and St. Lawrence County Fair Society offices, Gouverneur, N.Y.
- ¹⁴⁹ RV, Annual Report for 1887, 301; Dec. 6, 1894, 437; Jan. 8, 1895, 443.
- ¹⁵⁰ "An Option Given at the Fair Grounds," *C&F*, Jan. 11, 1905.
- ¹⁵¹ "Annual Meeting," *C&F*, Dec. 11, 1912; "Fair Faces a Net Loss of \$400," *C&F*, Dec. 20, 1916, 1; "May Sell Fair Grounds," *C&F*, May 16, 1917, 1; "Shall We Buy the Fair Grounds?," *Herald-Recorder* [hereafter *H-R*], Aug. 10, 1917, 1; RV, loose sheets, June 26, 1917.
- ¹⁵² "Potsdam Fair Will Be Held," *C&F*, Aug. 15, 1917, 1.
- ¹⁵³ Oct. 3, 1917, 1.
- ¹⁵⁴ "Meet Tomorrow To Discuss Fair," *C&F*, July 14, 1920, 1; "Local Fair Will Show Nice Profit," *C&F*, Sept. 14, 1921, 1.
- ¹⁵⁵ "Grand Stand and Barns Burned," *H-R*, June 6, 1924, 1.
- ¹⁵⁶ "The Fair Situation," *H-R*, Aug. 1, 1924, 4.
- ¹⁵⁷ "Potsdam Fair Will Be Held," *C&F*, Aug. 13, 1924, 1; "The Fair Likely," *C&F*, Aug. 6, 1924, 1.
- ¹⁵⁸ "High School Carries by 200," *C&F*, May 30, 1928, 1; "Seek Order To Sell Fair Ground," *C&F*, July 11, 1928, 1.
- ¹⁵⁹ "It Will Be a Wonder," *SLP*, Sept. 11, 1895, 4.
- ¹⁶⁰ "Happenings of a Week," *C&F*, Sept. 25, 1912.
- ¹⁶¹ "Reports of the Officers of the Oswegatchie Fair," *SLR*, Dec. 19, 1888, 2.
- ¹⁶² "Reports," *SLR*, Dec. 19, 1888, 2.
- ¹⁶³ "The Ogdensburg Fair," *SLR*, April 11, 1894, 5.
- ¹⁶⁴ "Will Continue Fair," *SLR*, Jan. 18, 1905, 5.
- ¹⁶⁵ "No More Fairs at the 'Burg?," *C&F*, May 2, 1923, 1.
- ¹⁶⁶ "Old Fairgrounds May Be Purchased As Site for Athletic Field," *Ogdensburg Republican-Journal*, Nov. 15, 1929, 5.
- ¹⁶⁷ Gov. A&M, Nov. 16, 1912, 242.
- ¹⁶⁸ Gov. A&M, Oct. 25, 1912, 239.

- ¹⁶⁶ Gouv. A&M, Oct. 31, 1912, 240; Nov. 13, 1912, 241; Nov. 16, 1912, 242.
- ¹⁷⁰ "Canton Sees Chances for Fair," *C&F*, July 25, 1928, 6.
- ¹⁷¹ Minutes, SLCAS, Jan. 14, 1868; *RV*, 24.
- ¹⁷² *RV*, 33. Accurate counts of life and annual members are difficult to ascertain. In 1866, Gouverneur reported forty life members and 400 annual members, but whether those forty represented a total or those added to life membership lists for the year is unclear. (Gouv. A&M, 1859-75, 89.) In 1874, the Secretary reported 100 life members and 929 annual members. (Jan. 31, 1874) The \$1560 reported by the Raquette Valley and St. Regis Valley organization translated into 156 life members at \$10 each. One could go on listing such numbers, but their meaning and comparability from year to year and from organization to organization is problematical.
- ¹⁷³ Gouv. A&M, Feb. 10, 1866, 84.
- ¹⁷⁴ Gouv. A&M, Aug. 17, 1916, 5.
- ¹⁷⁵ *RV*, July 20, 1872, 46; emphasis added.
- ¹⁷⁶ Gouv. A&M, Dec. 6, 1902, 80.
- ¹⁷⁷ Gouv. A&M, Dec. 5, 1903, 92.
- ¹⁷⁸ *RV*, Aug. 4, 1900, 547.
- ¹⁷⁹ Gouv. A&M, Nov. 21, 1896, 35.
- ¹⁸⁰ Gouv. A&M, July 24, 1925, 93; T. Barnes's medal, SLCAS, now in files of Gouverneur and St. Lawrence County Fair Society offices, Gouverneur, N.Y.
- ¹⁸¹ Gouv. A&M, Aug. 24, 1908, 195.
- ¹⁸² Minutes, Executive Committee, SLCAS, June 20, 1862; April 24, 1864.
- ¹⁸³ "The County Fair," *SLP*, Sept. 5, 1911, 5.
- ¹⁸⁴ "Agricultural Society Meeting," *SLP*, Jan. 15, 1918, 1.
- ¹⁸⁵ Gouv. A&M, Feb. 10, 1866, 84.
- ¹⁸⁶ "Successful Fair Indicated This Autumn in Maple City," *SLR*, Aug. 18, 1915, 8.
- ¹⁸⁷ Minutes, Jan. 2, 1883.
- ¹⁸⁸ Record, SLCAS, Sept. 14, 1852; Gouv. A&M, Aug. 24, 1908, 195.
- ¹⁸⁹ Sept. 10, 1898, 514.
- ¹⁹⁰ Gouv. A&M, Aug. 22, 1905, 154.
- ¹⁹¹ "Agricultural Society," *SLP*, Jan. 10, 1894, 2; "Annual Meeting," *SLP*, Jan. 18, 1905, 1.
- ¹⁹² Gouv. A&M, Jan. 29, 1870.
- ¹⁹³ "County Agricultural Societies," *SLR*, June 17, 1871, 2.
- ¹⁹⁴ "County Agricultural Societies," *SLR*, June 17, 1871, 2.
- ¹⁹⁵ Gouv. A&M, June 25, 1931, 151.
- ¹⁹⁶ Gouv. A&M, Treasurer's Cash Book, 1895-1925, [hereafter, Gouv. A&M, Treas.], 7, Gouverneur Museum, Gouverneur, N.Y.
- ¹⁹⁷ Hammond Fair Association, July 7, 1860, 1.
- ¹⁹⁸ Gouv. A&M, April 16, 1859, 13.
- ¹⁹⁹ Gouv. A&M, 133.
- ²⁰⁰ "The Big Fair Is Coming," *C&F*, Aug. 27, 1913.
- ²⁰¹ Minutes, SLCAS, Jan. 6, 1891.
- ²⁰² Appleby, "History: [no title; segment on 1868 fair]."
- ²⁰³ *RV*, March 31, 1875, 75; Aug. 6, 1872, 51.
- ²⁰⁴ *RV*, Oct. 2, 1885, 277.
- ²⁰⁵ *RV*, Sept. 15, 1876, 122.
- ²⁰⁶ Gouv. A&M, Treas., Sept. 1895, 1; Sept. 27, 1873; Aug. 8, 1885, 169; March 13, 1884, 148.
- ²⁰⁷ "Potsdam Fair Privileges," *C&F*, July 31, 1912.
- ²⁰⁸ "County Fair Notes," *SLP*, Aug. 14, 1928, 2.
- ²⁰⁹ *RV*, May 14, 1888, 308.
- ²¹⁰ "Potsdam Fair Short on State Aid," *C&F*, June 14, 1922, 1.
- ²¹¹ "Potsdam Fair," *C&F*, June 14, 1922, 1.
- ²¹² Minutes, Executive Committee, SLCAS, Aug. 6, 1887; *RV*, Jan. 30, 1895, 449; July 6, 1895, 460; Gouv. A&M, May 11, 1916, 2.
- ²¹³ Gouv. A&M, June 27, 1868.
- ²¹⁴ "Big Crowd at Klan Gathering," *C&F*, July 27, 1927, 1.
- ²¹⁵ For example, see "Do Your Best for the Local Fair," *C&F*, Aug. 9, 1916; Minutes, SLCAS, Feb. 3, 1865; Jan. 3, 1882; Jan. 4, 1887; "Agricultural Society Meets," *SLP*, Jan. 11, 1890, 1; "Annual Meeting," *SLP*, Jan. 16, 1912, 1.
- ²¹⁶ "The Potsdam Fair," *C&F*, Aug. 29, 1906.
- ²¹⁷ Minutes, SLCAS, Jan. 4, 1887.
- ²¹⁸ "A Four Days' Fair," *SLP*, Feb. 26, 1890, 1; Gouv. A&M, Jan. 29, 1876, 5; "Perkins Will Speak at Fair," *C&F*, Sept. 19, 1917, 1.
- ²¹⁹ Ad, *SLR*, Sept. 5, 1883, 3.
- ²²⁰ Gouv. A&M, June 30, 1888, 211.
- ²²¹ "The County Fair," *SLP*, Sept. 24, 1912, 1.
- ²²² "Special Premiums at the Oswegatchie Fair," *SLR*, Aug. 11, 1886, 2; Gouv. A&M, June 30, 1888, 211; Ad, *SLR*, Sept. 5, 1883, 3.
- ²²³ "The Ogdensburg Fair," *SLR*, July 20, 1898, 4.
- ²²⁴ "The Fair's Finances," *SLR*, Dec. 4, 1907, 7.
- ²²⁵ "Major Daniels Announces His Final Withdrawal from Fair," *SLR*, March 22, 1911, 8.
- ²²⁶ Dipping into the Gouverneur Agricultural and Mechanical Society records at almost any point affords documentation for this assertion, but see, e.g., Sept. 16, 1912, 237 and Oct. 3, 1912, 238. Gouverneur was undoubtedly not alone in this practice, but its records are most complete and, therefore, revealing.
- ²²⁷ Gouv. A&M, Nov. 16, 1912, 242.
- ²²⁸ See, e.g., Gouv. A&M, Dec. 10, 1881, 117; Feb. 14, 1882, 118.
- ²²⁹ "A Losing Proposition," *SLP*, Sept. 8, 1908, 4.
- ²³⁰ Ad, *C&F*, Sept. 9, 1908.
- ²³¹ Ad, *SLP*, Sept. 8, 1897, 4.
- ²³² Ad, *SLP*, Sept. 16, 1903, 8.
- ²³³ Ad, *SLR*, Sept. 17, 1913, 6.
- ²³⁴ "The Ogdensburg Fair," *SLR*, Aug. 17, 1887, 3.
- ²³⁵ "Fair Society Officers," *C&F*, Dec. 10, 1913.
- ²³⁶ "Meet Tomorrow To Discuss Fair," *C&F*, July 14, 1920, 1; "Business Men Will Back Fair," *C&F*, July 21, 1920, 2.
- ²³⁷ "The Oswegatchie Agricultural Society," *SLR*, Jan. 23, 1884, 2.
- ²³⁸ "The Ogdensburg Fair," *SLR*, July 20, 1898, 4.
- ²³⁹ "The Ogdensburg Fair," *SLR*, Dec. 13, 1899, 5.
- ²⁴⁰ "The Ogdensburg Fair," *SLR*, Dec. 13, 1899, 5.
- ²⁴¹ "Oswegatchie Agricultural Society," *SLR*, Dec. 20, 1876, 2.
- ²⁴² "Town Meeting," *SLR*, Feb. 14, 1877, 2.
- ²⁴³ "Oswegatchie Agricultural Society's Annual Meeting," *SLR*, Dec. 21, 1887, 2; "Getting Ready for the Big Fair," *SLR*, Sept. 4, 1912, 8.
- ²⁴⁴ "Getting Ready," *SLR*, Sept. 4, 1912, 8.
- ²⁴⁵ "Many Horses Coming," *SLR*, Sept. 2, 1908, 5.
- ²⁴⁶ "Fair Ground Improvements," *SLR*, March 9, 1901, 7.
- ²⁴⁷ Gouv. A&M, Jan. 25, 1873.
- ²⁴⁸ Gouv. A&M, Jan. 25, 1878, 45.
- ²⁴⁹ Minutes, SLCAS, Jan. 12, 1875; Jan. 7, 1890.
- ²⁵⁰ "Fair Meeting," *SLP*, Jan. 13, 1914, 1.
- ²⁵¹ "Local Fair Gets \$3269.52," *C&F*, April 26, 1922, 1.
- ²⁵² Gouv. A&M, Aug. 1, 1905, 149.
- ²⁵³ "Happenings of the Week," *C&F*, Sept. 8, 1908.
- ²⁵⁴ "Happenings," *C&F*, Sept. 8, 1908.
- ²⁵⁵ Gouv. A&M, Dec. 4, 1915, 275; May 27, 1924, 75.
- ²⁵⁶ One sympathizes with the accountant called on to restore order to Potsdam fair's financial records. "It is nearly impossible to make head or tail of the so-called books as now written up by the various officers . . . It is fully as important that your society should have a proper set of books, as that any other business enterprise should have such a set." *RV*, Jan. 7, 1894, 444.
- ²⁵⁷ Minutes, SLCAS, Jan. 12, 1864.
- ²⁵⁸ Minutes, SLCAS, Jan. 3, 1882.
- ²⁵⁹ "Annual Meeting of the Agricultural Society," *SLP*, Jan. 20, 1892, 1.
- ²⁶⁰ Gouv. A&M, Jan. 1, 1864, 55; Nov. 18, 1882, 128.
- ²⁶¹ *RV*, 65; Dec. 4, 1900, 561.
- ²⁶² "First Annual Fair of the Oswegatchie Agricultural Society," *SLR*, Oct. 10, 1871, 2; "The Oswegatchie Fair," *SLR*, Oct. 7, 1873, 2.
- ²⁶³ "The Fair," *SLR*, Oct. 6, 1874, 3; "Oswegatchie Agricultural Society," *SLR*, Dec. 15, 1874, 2; "The Oswegatchie Agricultural Society," *SLR*, Dec. 11, 1878, 2; "Oswegatchie Agricultural Society," *SLR*, Dec. 10, 1879, 2; "Annual Meeting of the Oswegatchie Agricultural Society," *SLR*, Dec. 15, 1880, 2.
- ²⁶⁴ "Annual Meeting," *SLP*, Jan. 16, 1912, 1; "Annual Fair Society Meeting," *SLP*, Jan. 13, 1925, 5.
- ²⁶⁵ Gouv. A&M, Treas., 1925.
- ²⁶⁶ Minutes, SLCAS, Jan. 16, 1863.
- ²⁶⁷ "The Oswegatchie Agricultural Society," *SLR*, Dec. 11, 1878, 2.
- ²⁶⁸ Gouv. A&M, Aug. 17, 1860, 35.
- ²⁶⁹ Minutes, SLCAS, Jan. 6, 1885; Executive Committee, May 3, 1890.
- ²⁷⁰ Minutes, Executive Committee, SLCAS, July 26, 1882; "Annual Meeting of the Oswegatchie Agricultural Society," *SLR*, Dec. 1, 1880, 3.
- ²⁷¹ Gouv. A&M, April 30, 1904, 106; May 25, 1904, 108.
- ²⁷² Gouv. A&M, Oct. 3, 1884, 155.
- ²⁷³ Minutes, SLCAS, Jan. 3, 1882.
- ²⁷⁴ Minutes, SLCAS, Jan. 2, 1883.
- ²⁷⁵ Minutes, SLCAS, Jan. 1, 1889; "Changes Made," *SLP*, Jan. 11, 1899, 1.
- ²⁷⁶ Gouv. A&M, May 25, 1904, 109; *RV*, Dec. 16, 1885, 283.
- ²⁷⁷ Gouv. A&M, Dec. 3, 1910, 222.
- ²⁷⁸ Gouv. A&M, Nov. 30, 1922, 59.
- ²⁷⁹ Union Agricultural Society, Oct. 22, 1860.
- ²⁸⁰ "Waddington Agricultural Society Fair, 1869," *SLR*, Aug. 24, 1869, 1; "Waddington Agricultural Society Fair," *SLR*, July 25, 1871, 1.
- ²⁸¹ Record, SLCAS, Jan. 22, 1853.
- ²⁸² Ad, *C&F*, Aug. 16, 1911.

- ²⁸³ RV, Aug. 2, 1873, 82.
- ²⁸⁴ See, e.g., RV, May 21, 1898, 510; May 28, 1898, 511; Gov. A&M, June 14, 1899, 49; Dec. 19, 1926, 110.
- ²⁸⁵ Gov. A&M, Dec. 2, 1905, 161; "The County Fair," *SLP*, Sept. 1, 1925, 5.
- ²⁸⁶ Gov. A&M, clipping, c1918, between pages 24 and 25.
- ²⁸⁷ RV, Dec. 6, 1887, 302.
- ²⁸⁸ RV, clipping, c1893, 417.
- ²⁸⁹ Gov. A&M, Nov. 19, 1889 [*sic*; should read 1888], 216; Nov. 16, 1889, 229.
- ²⁹⁰ "Annual Meeting," *SLP* Jan. 24, 1906, 1.
- ²⁹¹ "Near Approach of Fair Time Finds Everything Ready for Biggest and Best," *SLR*, Aug. 27, 1913, 9.
- ²⁹² Gov. A&M, Nov. 30, 1922, 59.
- ²⁹³ "Good Year for County Fair," *SLP*, Jan. 12, 1926, 5.
- ²⁹⁴ Gov. A&M, Treas., 1925.
- ²⁹⁵ Record, Jan. 10, 1860.
- ²⁹⁶ Minutes, SLCAS, Jan. 14, 1868.
- ²⁹⁷ "Agricultural Society," *SLP*, Jan. 12, 1915, 1.
- ²⁹⁸ Gov. A&M, Jan. 1, 1864, 55.
- ²⁹⁹ Gov. A&M, Jan. 28, 1865, 70.
- ³⁰⁰ Gov. A&M, March 18, 1899, 48; Jan. 18, 1902, 64.
- ³⁰¹ Gov. A&M, Jan. 8, 1920, 35; May 14, 1920, 36.
- ³⁰² "The Fair Management," *SLP*, Oct. 7, 1903, 4.
- ³⁰³ Appleby, "History: The Officers (1861-1865)."
- ³⁰⁴ "Fair Society Re-Elects Officers," *C&F*, Dec. 8, 1920, 2.
- ³⁰⁵ Gov. A&M, Nov. 19, 1892, 274.
- ³⁰⁶ Gov. A&M, Dec. 5, 1903, 93.
- ³⁰⁷ "It Makes Money," *SLP*, Sept. 20, 1899, 1.
- ³⁰⁸ "Agricultural Society," *SLP*, Jan. 12, 1915, 1.
- ³⁰⁹ "Agricultural Society," *SLP*, Jan. 12, 1915, 1.
- ³¹⁰ "May Sell Part of Fair Ground," *C&F*, Dec. 14, 1921, 1.
- ³¹¹ Gov. A&M, 1864, 68.
- ³¹² Minutes, Executive Committee, Feb. 2, 1869.
- ³¹³ "Annual Meeting," *SLP*, Jan. 24, 1906, 1.
- ³¹⁴ "Agricultural Society," *SLP*, Jan. 11, 1916, 1.
- ³¹⁵ Gov. A&M, Sept. 22, 1900, 58.
- ³¹⁶ Gov. A&M, 67.
- ³¹⁷ Gov. A&M, Jan. 12, 1924, 70.
- ³¹⁸ Gov. A&M, Aug. 15, 1925, 97.
- ³¹⁹ Gov. A&M, Treas., 1925.
- ³²⁰ "Grand Stand and Barn Burned," *H-R*, June 6, 1924, 1.
- ³²¹ "The County Fair," *SLP*, Sept. 6, 1921, 1.
- ³²² "Judge Miller to Speak Here Sept. 23," *C&F*, Sept. 15, 1920, 1.
- ³²³ "May Sell Part of Fair Grounds," *C&F*, Dec. 14, 1921, 1.
- ³²⁴ "Rain Insurance for Local Fair," *C&F*, Sept. 5, 1923, 1.
- ³²⁵ "Grand Stand and Barn Burned," *H-R*, June 6, 1924, 1.
- ³²⁶ "Rain Causes Loss to Fair," *C&F*, Sept. 17, 1924, 1; "Local Fair Is Hard Hit by Rain," *C&F*, Sept. 23, 1925, 1; "Fair Battles With Rain Again," *C&F*, Sept. 29, 1926, 1.
- ³²⁷ Gov. A&M, July 1, 1882, 120; Aug. 12, 1882, 122.
- ³²⁸ Gov. A&M, July 9, 1906, 167; April 10, 1909, 202.
- ³²⁹ Gov. A&M, July 13, 1905, 144.
- ³³⁰ Gov. A&M, Treas., 1925.
- ³³¹ Minutes, SLCAS, Jan. 7 (?), 1884.
- ³³² Gov. A&M, Jan. 27, 1872.
- ³³³ "The County Fair," *SLP*, Sept. 5, 1916, 1.
- ³³⁴ Fippin, *Rural New York*, 83; Record, Jan. 26, 1856.
- ³³⁵ Minutes, SLCAS, Jan. 7, 1890; Neely, *Agricultural Fair*, 108-9.
- ³³⁶ Minutes, SLCAS, May 1, 1889.
- ³³⁷ Minutes, Executive Committee, May 22, 1871; "County Agricultural Societies," *SLR*, June 27, 1871, 2.
- ³³⁸ See Gov. A&M, Dec. 6, 1916, 8; July 3, 1917, 11; Dec. 15, 1917, 16.
- ³³⁹ Gov. A&M, Jan. 29, 1876, 9.
- ³⁴⁰ RV, c April 8, 1890, 339.
- ³⁴¹ "Northern Fair Association May Give Up Ghost," *SLR*, March 6, 1912, 9.
- ³⁴² Ad, *SLR*, Aug. 3, 1887, 3; Ad, *SLR*, Sept. 25, 1889, 3; Ad, *SLR*, Aug. 6, 1890, 2.
- ³⁴³ "The Agricultural Society for the Past and Coming Years," *SLP*, Jan. 14, 1891, 1; "Four Day Fair in 1891," *Tribune-Press*, May 28, 1975, 3; RV, clipping, 351.
- ³⁴⁴ "Fair Plans Taking Form," *C&F*, Aug. 24, 1927, 1.
- ³⁴⁵ Appleby, "History: The Fair in 1877."
- ³⁴⁶ See, e.g., Gov. A&M, Aug. 15, 1905, 152.
- ³⁴⁷ "The County Fair Completes Preparation," *SLP*, Aug. 20, 1929, 1; "It Will Be a Big Fair This Year," *C&F*, Aug. 28, 1912; RV, Sept. 6, 1902, 586; "The Ogdensburg Fair," *SLR*, Sept. 10, 1902, 6.
- ³⁴⁸ Gov. A&M, Dec. 5, 1903, 93; Aug. 15, 1904, 120.
- ³⁴⁹ "Oswegatchie Agricultural Society Premium List," *SLR*, Sept. 12, 1883, 3; Ad, *SLR*, Aug. 14, 1917, 3; "The Fair," *SLP*, Sept. 4, 1917, 1; "The County Fair," *SLP*, Sept. 5, 1922, 1; Gov. A&M, Nov. 21, 1885, 174; Feb. 3, 1914, 256; "More Fair Prizes for 4-H Club Workers," *SLP*, Aug. 9, 1932, 5.
- ³⁵⁰ Varick Chittenden, "The Canton Fair in 1869," *The Quarterly*, XXI (July 1976), 19-20; reprinted from Irving Bacheller, *Coming Up the Road* (1928).
- ³⁵¹ Gov. A&M, Nov. 15, 1890, 245.
- ³⁵² Gov. A&M, Nov. 16, 1889, 232.
- ³⁵³ "Our Agricultural Society," *SLP*, Jan. 12, 1898, 1.
- ³⁵⁴ RV, annual report for 1897, 501.
- ³⁵⁵ RV, c1893, 410; annual report for 1893, 412.
- ³⁵⁶ Earle D. Ross, "The Evolution of the Agricultural Fair in the Northwest," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, 24 (July 1926), 456.
- ³⁵⁷ Noel Perrin, "The Old State Fair, Still What It Used to Be — Even More," *Smithsonian*, Sept. 1985, 105.
- ³⁵⁸ Maxine Rutherford Mitchell, "Agricultural Fair in Hammond," typed manuscript, courtesy of Valera Bickelhaupt.
- ³⁵⁹ Appleby, "History: The First Fair."
- ³⁶⁰ "The Waddington Fair," *SLR*, Aug. 3, 1869, 2; RV, 28-31.
- ³⁶¹ April 1, 1876, 117.
- ³⁶² Record, SLCAS, 1859 annual meeting.
- ³⁶³ Minutes, SLCAS, Jan. 1863.
- ³⁶⁴ "St. Lawrence Valley Horse Breeders' Association," *SLP*, June 4, 1890, 1.
- ³⁶⁵ Record, Jan. 10, 1860.
- ³⁶⁶ See Gov. A&M, June 11, 1881, 101; Jan. 21, 1895, 23.
- ³⁶⁷ Nov. 20, 1880, 92.
- ³⁶⁸ "Happenings of a Week," *C&F*, Sept. 22, 1909.
- ³⁶⁹ "The Gates Are Open," *SLR*, Sept. 5, 1900, 1; "Big Crowd Enthuses Over Fair and Horse Show," *SLR*, Oct. 7, 1907, 4.
- ³⁷⁰ "Large Crowd at Fair," *SLR*, Sept. 14, 1904, 3.
- ³⁷¹ Appleby, "History: The Fairs from 1861 to 1865."
- ³⁷² Gov. A&M, 1916-34, 24-25.
- ³⁷³ "Mr. Ives on the Fair," *C&F*, July 30, 1924, 4.
- ³⁷⁴ Maxine B. Rutherford, "Hammond Fairs," *The Quarterly*, XI (April 1966), 19.
- ³⁷⁵ Nov. 15, 1890, 243.
- ³⁷⁶ "The Oswegatchie Fair," *SLR*, Sept. 18, 1878, 4.
- ³⁷⁷ "The Great Fair," *SLR*, Oct. 10, 1883, 2.
- ³⁷⁸ Gov. A&M, 1867, 100; RV, Feb. 1, 1874, 89; "Address of Vice-President Wheeler," *SLR*, Sept. 25, 1878, 1; RV, 1885, 280; RV, clipping, 1892(?), 399; "Gov. Roosevelt Here," *SLR*, Sept. 6, 1899, 4; "The Secretary of Agriculture Will Deliver an Address at the Great Potsdam Fair," *C&F*, Aug. 24, 1904; Gov. A&M, Aug. 17, 1908, 194; "Hear 'Young Teddy' at Fair," *SLP*, Aug. 17, 1920, 5; "Governor Roosevelt Here on Friday," *SLP*, Aug. 4, 1931, 1.
- ³⁷⁹ Gov. A&M, Scrapbook, 1924-1927, "Record Breaking Crowd Hears Secretary," *The Watertown Daily Standard*, Aug. 21, 1925, 11, Gouverneur Museum, Gouverneur, N.Y.
- ³⁸⁰ Gov. A&M, Scrapbook, 1924-1927, "Gate-Grandstand Receipts Total Sum of \$4916.50," *The Watertown Daily Standard*, Aug. 21, 1925, 11.
- ³⁸¹ "A Fair Without a Blemish," *SLP*, Sept. 7, 1915, 1; "Mrs. Bjorkman To Speak Fair Week on Votes," *SLR*, Sept. 15, 1915, 6; "The Fair Comes Next Week," *C&F*, Sept. 1, 1915.
- ³⁸² "Fine Weather Aids Fair," *C&F*, Sept. 15, 1915.
- ³⁸³ "First Annual Fair of the Oswegatchie Agricultural Society," *SLR*, Oct. 10, 1871, 2; Appleby, "History: Continued Growth in 1871."
- ³⁸⁴ \$200 was allotted for baseball by the County Fair in 1885. (Minutes, SLCAS, Jan. 6, 1885). Gouverneur in 1897 spent \$300 for three games over three days involving six communities, Gouverneur, Copenhagen, Carthage, Harrisville, Canton and Ogdensburg. (Gov. A&M, Aug. 21, 1897, 41).
- ³⁸⁵ "Newark-Providence," *SLR*, Sept. 20, 1905, 5; "Everything Ready for the Fair," *SLP*, Aug. 21, 1923, 1.
- ³⁸⁶ "The Ogdensburg Fair," *SLR*, Oct. 9, 1889, 2.
- ³⁸⁷ Gov. A&M, July 30, 1914, 260; "Entries Filling for the Fair," *SLP*, Aug. 12, 1930, 1.
- ³⁸⁸ "The Fairs," *SLP*, Sept. 1, 1914, 1.
- ³⁸⁹ Gov. A&M, Dec. 5, 1914, 264.
- ³⁹⁰ Minutes, SLCAS, Jan. 7, 1890; Ad, *SLP*, Sept. 11, 1889, 2.
- ³⁹¹ Gov. A&M, Aug. 3, 1931, 152.
- ³⁹² Gov. A&M, Dec. 14, 1918, 24; Oct. 7, 1918, 23.

³⁹³ Diaries, #21, Sept. 16, 1882.

³⁹⁴ RV, July 20, 1872, 46; "The Ogdensburg Fair," *SLR*, Sept. 26, 1894, 3; *Gouv. A&M*, Nov. 18, 1882, 129; June 21, 1873.

³⁹⁵ "The Fair," Sept. 17, 1884, 2.

³⁹⁶ "The Oswegatchie Fair," *SLR*, Sept. 15, 1886.

³⁹⁷ "The Great Fair," *SLR*, Sept. 12, 1888, 2.

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⁴⁴⁵ June 30, 1934, 181.

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A Note on Sources

Of the major fairs in St. Lawrence County, the Gouverneur Agricultural and Mechanical Society has the most complete surviving records. Those prior to the merger with the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society are housed in the Gouverneur Museum; later records are at the fair offices. (Unfortunately, a superb photograph collection of the Gouverneur fair available at the Gouverneur Museum in 1985 could not be located in 1987 when the Silas Wright House Museum exhibit and this issue of *The Quarterly* were being assembled.) There are partial records for both the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society and the Raquette Valley and St. Regis Valley Agricultural and Horticultural Society; the former are maintained by the St. Lawrence County Historical Association, the latter by the Potsdam Public Museum. So far, no records of any of the Ogdensburg societies have been located. The Hammond Fair Association records survive at the St. Lawrence County Historical Association archives, and the records of the Waddington Agricultural Society are located in the Waddington-Hepburn

Library. Where fair records are lacking, local newspapers such as the *St. Lawrence Republican* (Ogdensburg), *Courier and Freeman* (Potsdam), and *St. Lawrence Plaindealer* (Canton) fill in the gaps. Both kinds of sources leave much to be desired. Seldom does anything but the most formal reporting creep into the official records, and local boosterism thoroughly colored newspaper accounts. A reader is startled to encounter a fair heralded as superb and well-attended for several years suddenly facing bankruptcy. Judicious reading between the lines is essential. A number of diaries and autobiographies provide first-hand testimony from fair-goers.

Recent secondary literature on fairs is not abundant, but there is some, such as Patrice Avon Marvin and Nicholas Curchin Vrooman's *Till the Cows Come Home* (1985), an account of a Minnesota County fair. Warren J. Gates, "Modernization as a Function of an Agricultural Fair: The Great Grangers' Picnic Exhibition at Williams Grove, Pennsylvania, 1873-1916," *Agricultural History* (1984) and Fred Kniffen, "The American Agricultural Fair: Time and Place," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* (1951) were both helpful. John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (1978), helped define the conflict between genteel and mass, commercial culture. Classic works such as Wayne Caldwell Neely's *The Agricultural Fair* (1935) provided indispensable background information, as did a wide array of local histories and journal articles.

Last, but certainly not least, were "sources" that greatly simplified the research for this history: those local historians — official and unofficial — who were so willing to share their knowledge and to assist in the hunt for records and artifacts pertaining to the local fairs. Elizabeth Baxter, Valera Bickelhaupt, Persis Boyesen, Doris Parker, Pauline Tedford, and Kay Wyant deserve special thanks, as does Anita Turner, Secretary-Treasurer of the Gouverneur and St. Lawrence County Fair, who opened fair records and files to me. My hope is that collectively we have clarified and enlivened another segment of the rich past of St. Lawrence County.



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