

The Shelby County Fair

The story of the first century of Shelbina should not be written without mention of the Shelby County Fair, an institution which has flourished for seventy-seven years, and for most of that period has served as a high point of community interest and entertainment.

The first meeting to organize the Shelbina Fair Association, as it was then called, was held on March 18, 1881. At this meeting the following officers were elected: J. H. Fox president; Daniel Taylor vice-president; R. C. Dickerson secretary; C. H. Lasley treasurer. The other directors were George W. Greenwell, J. R. Ridge, C. W. Hanger, John T. Frederick, J. H. Gough, J. H. Ford, S. G. Parsons, I. W. Bonta and J. M. Ennis.

The present fairgrounds of forty acres was bought soon thereafter from J. H. Ford for \$3,500, and work began at once on the race track and the necessary buildings, which were completed in time for the first fair on August 30-Sept. 2, 1881. Shortly after the first fair, the amphitheatre was blown down in a severe storm, but was rebuilt in 1882, and extensive improvements to it were completed the next year.

For many years the officers and directors were elected on the last day of the fair to serve the following year, those elected for the second fair were C. H. Lasley president, John T. Frederick vice-president, F. M. Hanger secretary and J. Wm. Towson treasurer. The other directors were C. W. Hanger, A. G. Chapman, Lewis Hale, B. F. Frye, J. J. Ellis, J. H. Fox, J. M. Ennis, J. B. Settle and W. T. Dobyns. During the year 1884, with S. G. Parsons as president, and with most of the old directors still serving, all of the indebtedness was retired and the new fair was on its way with all bills paid.

The younger generation of today, whose interest has largely been transferred from horses to automobiles and tractors and from cake recipes to cake mixes, could not be expected to understand the importance of the old county fair. There were no automobiles or good roads in those days, and farm families often met their scattered friends and relatives annually at the county fair. Moreover, the mud roads or the snow drifts and the heavy work schedules of those early days made it most unlikely that many of them would be back to town again until after the roads settled following the next spring rains. Fair week was accordingly a good time to lay in a supply of flour and a barrel of sugar and such clothing as would carry them through the winter.

The usual premiums were offered annually for hogs, sheep, beef cattle, dairy cattle, jacks, jennets, mules, draft horses, and poultry, and many blue ribbon winners went on to the state fair to collect additional ribbons. Agricultural exhibits from field and garden were of exceptional merit and attracted much attention. Exhibits for women included pies, cakes, bread, jellies, preserves, needlework and various products of the home. In those days women baked their own bread and sliced it themselves with no thought of being oppressed. The competition in all departments was much more spirited in the early days than later, and the woman who could bake the best bread or the best cake was a sort of uncrowned queen of the kitchen for at least a year, while the man who raised the best mule colt or owned the fastest horse was a rather superior person, no credit being given for the contribution of nature.

Fair programs usually began at 10 o'clock in the morning, when some of the livestock was exhibited in front of the grandstand, and in the afternoon the program consisted of saddle horse shows, the best livestock classes, the racing program and such entertainment as available.

The entertainment, of course, varied from fair to fair. At the 16th annual fair, held Sept. 8-11, 1896, Prof. Bozarth made a spectacular balloon ascension and parachute jump. On Wed-



Youth Boosters For The Centennial—Back row, Linda Purdy, Deena Bradshaw, Dawn Joy Day and Brenda White. Front row, Pat Bradshaw and Connie Purdy.

nesday, after a previous shower, the weather was threatening and the parachute was wet. The balloon ascended and the parachute descended, but it failed to open at the proper time and hit the ground with such force Professor Bozarth's leg was fractured and Dr. C. E. Vandiver had to be called to patch up the injured professor. That was also the day that Billy C won the 2:25 pace, and needless to say a grand time was had by one and all.

The next year, on Tuesday, Aug. 24, 1897, it is reported that watermelons were in abundance, no mention being made of the abandoned rinds which littered the ground, attended by the usual swarms of flies migrating from the eating stands. The Gardner Band from Quincy provided the music that year and George Cooper was in charge of the Dining Hall, where a full meal could be had, after waiting your turn in line, for the sum of twenty-five cents. Night fairs did not come along until later, and after the fairs further entertainment was provided at the opera house. On Thursday night, the 26th, the opera house "was so packed that a number could not be seated and were turned away."

The feature of the 1908 fair, held August 25-28, was "Hurricane," the trotting ostrich, advertised as being direct from Boston and scheduled to return immediately after the fair to New York. The ostrich pulled a cart weighing 200 lbs. with a driver who weighed 150 lbs., and raced against a harness race horse. Hurricane is remembered, not so much for pulling the man and cart or for winning the race, but for pulling through the gates the largest crowd ever to attend a fair up to that time.