

Milford Moments in Time

By Joyce M. Clark

Carnival rides, baseball tournaments, livestock shows, and wagon pulling contests are just a few activities many of us might enjoy when attending a summer fair. But over 120 years ago, 1880 to be exact, residents from around the area came to Milford to attend the first Milford Fair sponsored by the Milford Union Agricultural Society. For almost 70 years, children and adults from miles around flocked to Milford to participate in and enjoy this great event.

The epicenter of activity was 20 acres of land at the southeast corner of Mont Eagle and East Huron streets. Farmers proudly showcased their prime livestock while women entered their favorite canned fruits and vegetables for various judging contests. According to a Milford Times article dated October 16, 1880, the first fair had over 1000 entries in the various competitions. And much to everyone's excitement, the Milford Boys won the baseball tournament!

During that first fair, non-agricultural activities were also enjoyed. For example, music lovers listened to fine organ music from Whitney and Peninsular Organs while others wandered through the "domestics" section of the fair where sewing machines were on display.

As the years passed, the fair grew bigger and became known as the Oakland County Fair. A midway of carnival rides joined the festivities, and an Exhibition Hall was built to better house the competitions. A 1936 program from the Fair features a Horse Pulling Contest that included two classes of horses (teams over 3000 pounds and those under 3000 pounds). The first place prize was \$20.

Besides the spirit of good competition, the Agricultural Society held the contest to gather scientific data. From the winners, they studied various types of breeding selection as well as the proper methods for training and conditioning horses and mules for long, severe draft work.

Milford hosted the Oakland County Fair until 1949. At that point, Mel and Dorothy Moore purchased the fairgrounds property and hosted local events. According to Jerry Osborn, who lived near the property, midget car races were a big hit at the track behind Exhibition Hall. The Huron Valley Saddle Club also enjoyed using the track for their events.

Years after a fire burned down a local bowling alley on Main Street, Mel and Dorothy Moore decided to convert Exhibition Hall to a bowling alley. Fairground Bowling Alley soon became the place for many locals to once again enjoy bowling leagues.

In the late 1970s, Fairground Bowling Alley was sold to Mott Media. Mott Media used the Exhibition Hall/Fairgrounds Bowling Alley until 2000 to warehouse their books once they were printed. The building also had an office

section where Mott Media would work with their authors editing material and preparing books for print.

Long ago the Beam family donated property on East Huron street across from the original Fairgrounds. A portion of the property was designated for a park and in 1991 the Village of Milford's Parks and Recreation Commission held a contest to name it. The winning entry called the park: Fairgrounds Park. The sign for this park proudly states: *Commemorating Oakland County Fair 1880 through 1949.*



Caption: A letter envelope advertises the upcoming Milford Fair of 1915.



Caption: 1928 Oakland County Fair Ticket.



Caption: Exhibition Hall at Milford's Oakland County Fairgrounds. The grandstand for the track appears behind Exhibition Hall. Photo courtesy of the Milford Historical Society.

