

The Fair That Started it All

Platte County can be defined by many things, from tobacco to railroads to the Missouri River and riverboats. All these things could be Platte County's legacy for many reasons, but none define Platte County like the Platte County Fair does. The legacy of Platte County was shaped by the Platte County Fair because it has been around for 150 years being a major social and recreational event, standing through problems like the Civil War and bringing children and adults from all over for an enjoyable time.

According to William Paxton in his "Annals of Platte County" he states that the first fair organization was an "impromptu meeting of citizens at the drug store of Burge and Hogue in Platte City." During that meeting they determined to hold a county fair on the 21st, 22nd and 23rd days of October. The grounds purchased near Tracy were going to be the place. "Hasty preparations were made, a liberal subscription raised and general interest was manifested."

Fairs became popular in 1858. There were at least 30 fairs running in Missouri at that time. Practically all fairs were agricultural and sponsored by local agricultural societies. Fairs had exhibits for farming and awards and prizes for the best farm produce. There were also horse and livestock showings (McCandless 188). The first Platte County Fair was held on October 21, 1858. At the first fair, the bleachers collapsed and 150 women from Professor Todd's Female Academy were on them; luckily no one was hurt! The first fair had remarkable attendance, 400 people were there each of the three days! Two more fairs were held after the first one before the Civil War. The Civil War in 1861 caused Platte City to suffer and go through tremendous destruction. Platte City was burned to the ground in December and many men were murdered. The fair started back up again in 1863, 22 months after Platte City was burned to the ground

(Platte County Fair). This event shows great strength of the people in Platte County. This shows that people can work together and make something happen! Having the fair just 22 months after the whole city was burned to the ground, I think that is amazing. It really shows how much of an impact the fair had on people and how much the people really wanted the fair to happen.

By 1870, the fair had a track for showing horses and livestock and for racing horses. They had the grandstand similar to what it is now. Also, large barns were built to hold the animals. Many settlers were from Kentucky, Virginia and Tennessee. This is an example of people coming from all over to be at the fair. By this time the fairs were five days long and included a county wide picnic. The only times the fair was shorter was during the Great Grasshopper Plague in 1875, the drought of 1834 and the Great Depression (Platte County Fair). Through all of these problems, the fair continued to go on each year, which again shows great strength and commitment by the people of Platte County and the people involved with the fair.

Many of the fairs were memorable. The 50th annual fair in 1913 was notable because an airplane landed on the fairground. A Platte County resident at the times said this was memorable because "nobody ever sees airplanes in these days." The 60th annual fair was unforgettable because 57 men and women who attended the first fair in 1858 were there and they had their picture taken in front of the grandstand. The 75th annual fair was held in 1938 and the 100th annual fair was held in 1963 and this was the Centennial Pageant, the Centennial pageant was the 100 year pageant (Platte County Fair).

As of today, the Platte County Fair is the oldest continually running fair west of the Mississippi. Today the Platte County Fair has more events then it did when it started in 1858. Today it has 4-H exhibits, a floral hall, motocross, a carnival, musical entertainment, a

missy/master contest, a demolition derby, a queen contest, a mule show, a mud marathon, a truck and tractor pull and a horse show. Not to mention all the great food like burgers, fries, funnel cakes and snow cones!

To think that this fair has been running for 150 years is crazy! To learn about how it evolved from a small agricultural fair to having all the events it has now is amazing. The Platte County Fair definitely defines Platte County's legacy because it brings everyone together, it has been through difficult times but with the help of the people it has always persevered and continued on. It also gives people a chance to show off their talents and what they have to offer to the world. Once again it is an example of how if people work together they can accomplish great things.

Works Cited

"History." Platte County Fair. 2014. Web. 5 Oct. 2014

McCandless, Perry. *A History of Missouri, Volume 2: 1820 to 1860*. Columbia, Mo. University of Missouri Press, 1972. Print.