

THE KALAMAZOO COUNTY AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY

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I. Introduction

Kalamazoo County has had throughout the years the fine reputation of being a leader in agricultural affairs in Michigan. This reputation has been achieved because of two reasons: a rich and productive soil and outstanding leadership, either in the form of individual efforts or those of groups and organizations. This paper deals with one such organization, The Kalamazoo County Agricultural Society. Being organized on January 10, 1846, it is the oldest organization in the state established on the county level for the promotion of county fairs.

The benefits of such exhibits can be expressed as follows:

... "They not only incite a spirit of emulation but great encouragement is given to all matters concerning the soil. They stimulate the inventive genius of the county--the full interchange of opinions and methods in farming at such a time are highly beneficial. The public addresses are often times of incalculable value in the point of statistics, information, suggestions therein. No one pursuit is as intimately connected with our prosperity as agriculture and these annual exhibits richly deserve encouragement and patronage, by all who have the true interest of the community at heart."¹

The annual exhibits demanded much time and effort on the society's part and hence no other activities were promoted by the society.

The emphasis of this paper/^{is} primarily upon the background materials concerning the fairs, i. e. the organizational problems rather than the exhibits themselves. Realizing the importance of these exhibits I do deal with them briefly under the section of Chronology

¹ Minutes of Annual Meeting in Kalamazoo Gazette, October 14, 1859. (Hereafter Kalamazoo Gazette will be abbreviated Gaz. and Minutes of Annual Meeting will be abbreviated Ann. Mt.)

and Displays. This emphasis is upon organization purposely, due to the fact that while doing research I came upon a Mrs. Willo Neeson who had completed a history of county fairs up to the year of 1900. She had done this while working toward her master's degree at Western Michigan University. This came as a surprise to both Dr. Ivor Spencer and myself. Since the basic purpose of the course is to do original research I emphasized the aspects which I felt she avoided in the main, as indicated above. Her work has been edited and printed (in part) in The Farm Bureau Broadcast.²

² Farm Bureau Broadcast, Vicksburg, Vicksburg Commercial Printers, August, September, and October Issues, 1957.

Number of Displays in the Fair of 1875

Horses.....	141
Cattle.....	42
Sheep.....	38
Swine.....	25
Poultry.....	30
Grain and Vegetables.....	134
Flowers and Fruits.....	378
Dairy and Household.....	108
Needlework and Painting.....	124
Furniture and Stoves.....	32
Carriages and Implements.....	<u>109</u>
Total.....	1,161

Premium List of the Fair of 1875

Horses: general.....	\$180.00
speed.....	520.00
Cattle: general.....	108.00
specific.....	17.50
Swine.....	69.00
Sheep.....	22.00
Poultry.....	25.50
Grains and Vegetables.....	42.00
Fruits and Flowers.....	102.00
Merchandise, Paintings, and Needlework.....	85.00
Dairy and Household.....	61.00
Manufactured Products.....	<u>101.00</u>
Total.....	\$1,333.50

Receipts and Expenditures of the Year 1875

Receipts:

Advertising in Pamphlets.....	\$ 268.00
Rent of Booths.....	154.00
Contributions (Citizens' Subscriptions).....	508.39
Extra Fees (of races).....	175.00
Membership Tickets.....	312.00
Gate Tickets.....	2,073.40
Grand Stand.....	80.98
Sold Hay, Brooms, etc.....	<u>.80</u>
Total.....	\$3,573.87

Expenditures:

Paid Premium Checks.....	\$1,319.50
Paid Cont ⁿ igent Expenses.....	1,226.91
Paid D. C. Reed (rent).....	506.73
Balance of Cash Left Over.....	<u>520.73</u>
Total.....	\$3,573.87

II. Finances

Before getting too involved in the paper, a brief word about the finances of the Society is proper. First of all, it was a non-profit organization. In fact, through the years a successful fair year was one in which the society "broke even." If a profit was made it would go toward increasing the premiums for the next year. The society had three areas of income, theoretically. The first was that received while putting on the exhibits, and would include such things as gate receipts, grand stand entrance fee, etc. A second was that of membership dues (which amounted to \$1.00 per person per year) and private donations from "interested persons." The latter, however, were normally used for a specific purpose--horse racing. The donations would supplement the purse which the society offered. The illustrations of the receipts and premium list show that out of a total of \$520.00 given to speed for horses \$508.00 was donated by the "interested citizens." This added greatly not only to attracting interest in fairs but to the society's treasury as well. The third area of income was only potential and that was the County Board of Supervisors who had it within their option to levy a tax of not less than one fortieth, and not exceeding one tenth of a mil upon the aggregated assessed valuation of the county.³ This income was potential in the fact that the County Board of Supervisors rarely gave money to the society, despite its needs. The only record which has been found was that of the year 1889 in which the county donated \$250.00

³ Ann. Mt., Gaz., January 16, 1878.

to the society.⁴

Make-up

The society was organized on the order of any society, with its president, Board of Supervisors, Executive Committee, and other officers. It met as a group once a year, usually in January or early February with the Executive Committee and Board of Supervisors meeting in the spring and fall. It should be noticed that the society was local in nature, that is, it did not belong to the State Agricultural Society, which was in charge of the State Fairs. The society was limited to the county fairs, although it would co-operate with the State Society when the State Fairs came to Kalamazoo.

⁴ Ann. Mt., Gaz., January 27, 1889.

III. Chronology and Displays

The first meeting of the society was held on January 10, 1845, in the village of Schoolcraft.⁵ Here, with E. H. Lothrop as acting chairman, for the first time in Michigan history a society of this type was formed. The following preamble was adopted:

We the undersigned, citizens of the county of Kalamazoo to promote the more general dissemination of the true principles of agriculture throughout the county; to encourage the introduction of superior stock and improved modes of culture, and by a generous rivalry, to foster and advance that interest which is paramount to all others in this county--The Farming Interest--do hereby by our mutual agreement form and constitute an Agricultural Society and adopt a constitution....⁶

Also at this meeting the following men were chosen for office:

President--C. Y. Moore

Treasurer--Samuel Cobb

Secretary--William H. Edgar.

The first exhibit was located on the County Courthouse grounds.⁷

Domestic displays were held inside the courthouse and cattle were exhibited on the adjacent land. Premiums amounted to \$10.00 for cattle (a liberal sum) and other awards ranged from \$2.00 to \$5.00 for horses, sheep, and pigs. Lesser amounts were given to domestic products such as a pair of wool gloves and a knitted pair of wool socks. A main attraction was a "Plow Match" which one Jesse Karl won. The Gazette reviewed the fair as "not outstanding in displays" and went on to say that some very fine animals in the area were not

Exhibit

⁵ Samuel Durant, History of Kalamazoo County, Philadelphia, Everts and Abbott, 1880, p. 129.

⁶ Ibid., p. 129.

⁷ Gaz., October 2, 1846.

brought in for exhibit.⁸ It was a start, however.

In 1847 and 1848 fairs were held in Kalamazoo. In 1849 land adjoining the Axtell Race Course on Axtell Street, west of West Street was leased from a Dr. Starkweather and fairs would be held on these grounds up to and including the year 1861.⁹ During these years a lean prosperity was experienced. In 1856 the books showed a deficit of \$.07 and in 1857 a profit of \$14.35.¹⁰ However in the year 1861 the society went into debt \$200.00. This was no doubt due in part to the Civil War and its effect upon business in general. Another aspect was the establishment of the National Horse Association, a well-to-do racing outfit. It seems to have been competing with the society for crowds, for the best the society could do at this time was to offer "Plow Matches" which were dull in comparison to horse racing.

The displays did not differ greatly during this period from the first fair. They did, however, grow in number and better quality. A marked improvement was especially noticed in the livestock, mostly cattle. Purebred Devon and Durham steers were outstanding.¹¹ Also a few merchants began to display their wares, as a straw cutter, wheat cutter, opening plow, and a single covered buggy were exhibited during these years.¹² The Honorable Charles E. Stuart gave an address in the fair of '53.

No fair was held in 1862 because the land lease had run out,

⁸ Ibid., October 2, 1846.

⁹ Durant, op. cit., p. 131.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 130.

¹¹ Mrs. Willo Neeson, Farm Bureau Broadcast, op. cit., August 5, 1957.

¹² Ibid., August 5, 1957.

and no available grounds could be procured. Also the Civil War interfered.

In 1863 and 1864 the State Agricultural Society came to Kalamazoo with its State Fair, as grounds were obtained from the National Horse Association, grounds called the National Park. After agreement to let the County Society sponsor later fairs in these grounds, the County Society sold its equipment on the old grounds of Dr. Starkweather and, after debts, had enough to build the large display building called Floral Hall on National Park grounds. The State Fair was a decided success financially and so in 1865 the County Society again promoted a fair. Perhaps it was not as impressive as the State Fair and for that reason it lost money. The same pattern of loss followed in 1866 and 1867. At the annual meeting in January of 1868, a plan was devised by the incoming president, Honorable Charles E. Stuart and Secretary Frank Little, It was to sell tickets in advance, to have some ready cash on hand for the fair of 1868. A thousand tickets were printed and distributed throughout the polling areas during the April elections. The end result was that only thirty tickets were sold.¹³ And so with an "empty treasury, a broken credit and a constituency more hostile than friendly" the society disbanded. Only a few men would keep alive the idea of having a county fair in Kalamazoo. Meanwhile, in 1868, 1869, and 1870 minor fairs were held in Galesburg by these few interested persons.

¹³ Durant, op. cit., p. 131.

Rebirth

In the year 1870 one Mr. D. C. Reed purchased the National Park grounds and in 1871 and 1872 the State Fair came to Kalamazoo and again fairs were held on these grounds. These exhibitions were again a success. In January 1873 a mass meeting was held in Corporation Hall of all persons interested in the success of the disbanded Agricultural Society.¹⁴ A substantial crowd turned out and as a result a premium list and a circular were distributed throughout the county emphasizing the needed co-operation of all the people in the county for the coming fair. The fair was held on September 30, October 1, and October 2 of 1873. It proved to be a decided success as it profited \$539.12. The society was on the road to success, for by the end of the year of 1881 the society would have accumulated a total profit of \$1,142.39, having a total income of \$23,633.39 and a total expense of \$22,491.00. This was surplus, free from all debts of any kind.¹⁵

Looking at the displays during these years, horse racing entered the picture and took a leading position. The number of displays increased rapidly, each year breaking the record of the year before. An example would be in the year of 1877 when there were sixty different classifications of stallions, brood mares, Durham cattle, Alderney cattle, working oxen, sheep, Poland, China and Berkshire swine, grains and field crops, vegetables, fruits, flowers, furniture, implements, etc.¹⁶ A rather pleasing attraction of the fair

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 133.

¹⁵ Ann. Mt., Gaz., January 2, 1882.

¹⁶ Neeson, Farm Bureau Broadcast, op. cit., August 5, 1957.

in 1874 was a "Baby Show" for the handsomest babies in the county. First prize was \$20.00. Farm implements of all sorts were displayed such as Wood's reaper and self binder, an Oliver chilled plow, a Gail plow cultivator, a broadcast seeder, a buckwheat mower, and a McCormick harvester with a wire binder attachment.¹⁷ This binder appealed to the farmers, for the McCormick Harvester salesman said that over one hundred had been sold in the three days of the fair.¹⁸

On October 27, 1879, at the Board of Supervisor's meeting, a striking blow came to the society in that Mr. Reed would not renew the land lease for National Park.¹⁹ The grounds were in terrible shape, fences were down, buildings needed repairs and Mr. Reed had no desire to repair them. This created the problem of where to find adequate grounds for a fair. This will be dealt with more fully in the land problems section of this paper. After the fair of '80 the society procured grounds in Schoolcraft for the fairs of 1881 and 1882. In 1883 no fair was held by the society. In 1884 and 1885 with the old National Park grounds under new ownership, the State Fair was held in Kalamazoo.²⁰ It proved to be a loss, but the amount of loss was questionable. It seems that the State Society claimed losses of \$20,000.00 while representatives of Kalamazoo say the loss amounted to \$2,700.00 in total.²¹ The amount questionable was \$15,000 in building materials and increased premium rates. These latter the Kalamazoo men were contending could not be classified in the

17 Ibid., August 5, 1957.

18 Ibid., August 5, 1957.

19 Ann. Mt., Gaz., January 10, 1880.

20 See "Land Problems," p. of this paper.

21 "State Fair Loss," Gaz., January 15, 1886.

lost column. However, they did agree that these were bad years all over the country for fairs. In 1886 the County Society again decided to promote fairs in Kalamazoo. These proved to be financial successes and for the next six years the society would enjoy debt-free fairs. However in 1892 the picture would change rapidly and because of that I have dealt with it separately. During this six-year prosperity period, a strong rise of merchant interest was shown. Before this time merchants were content only to display their wares, but now they began to take an active part by offering special prizes, such as the following list in 1890: a barrel of Optuna flour, given for the best home baked bread, a cutter by the Michigan Buggy Company for the best collection of apples, wheat, potatoes, and corn, and a ton of coal given for the best bushel of red wheat, best peck of red beans and best bushel of late potatoes. These were just a few. All in all in the year 1890, thirty-three prizes were given.²²

Wild West shows seemed to be popular beginning with the days of "Buffalo Bill and Annie Oakley" at the State Fair of 1885.²³ Another interesting "crowd pleaser" was the offering of a \$5.00 prize for the blackest African Baby under two years of age in 1887. Also at this same fair a marriage ceremony was held offering forty-five dollars to the bride and groom.²⁴

This period of 1886 to 1891 was one of considerable success and as Mr. H. Dunn, the secretary said, "a full representation of the industries is a guarantee of its success."²⁵ Business had truly come to realize the advantages and possibilities in county fairs both to the community and to itself.

²² Gaz., September 27, 1890

²³ Farm Bureau Broadcast, op. cit., September 2, 1957.

²⁴ Ibid., September 2, 1957.

²⁵ Ann. Mt., Gaz., February 1, 1891.

IV. Fair of 1892

The Fair of 1892 was not so fortunate as those of preceeding years. The South and West of the country were on the verge of depression and when the panic of 1893 occurred it was the breaking point for a depression lasting several years.²⁶ The county fair no doubt felt the impact of troubled times, for in 1892 there were only two-thirds as many exhibits as in 1891.²⁷ Not only this but the quality was poor in comparison to previous years and there was a lack of industrial enthusiasm towards the fair, as fewer "special prizes" were given away. The Gazette did not sympathize with the society, saying: "Many people were there and many wondered why after they arrived."²⁸ According also to the Gazette the fair premium list was not in order as it showed a lack of judgement and insight toward the prizes. Not only this but premiums were not as high as previous years. If the tone of an article printed sometime later in the Gazette can be used to voice the opinion of the people it can be seen that the county was in disfavor with the society:

...To sum it up Barry County people seemed to be blessed with the facility to hold successful fairs. They all turn out for a good old fashioned time upon these occasions. The premium list seems to be prepared with discretion, the awards are numerous and visitors go home at a late date on Friday night with perfect satisfaction and pleasant thoughts concerning their county fair.²⁹

At the annual meeting of the society on January 21, 1893 trouble was apparent. When the election for officers came up,

²⁶ Hicks and Mowrey, A Short History of American Democracy, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1956, p. 524.

²⁷ Ann. Mt., Gaz., January 22, 1893.

²⁸ Gaz., September 30, 1892.

²⁹ Gaz., September 30, 1893.

everyone nominated declined the position, except the vice-president who was re-elected. A quarrel followed and finally it was moved that the officers of 1892 be re-installed, and, as to having a fair in 1893, it would be up to the discretion of the Executive Committee in the spring.³⁰ The Executive Committee decided not to have a fair. They probably reasoned that hard times were on hand (as the panic of 1893 had broken out that spring). Also the Chicago World's Fair was to be held in Chicago that year and the Gazette had frequent articles concerning this fair. To have a county fair in the light of a World's Fair only 150 miles away did not insure a feeling of success which the society would need to again win favor with the people. All of these plus the lack of unity within the society itself was probably the reason for no fair. At any rate time proved that the fair of 1892 was to be the last fair promoted by the original Agricultural Society.

³⁰ Gaz., January 22, 1893.

V. Later Fairs

The next fair held in Kalamazoo was in 1897 and was not sponsored by the Agricultural Society but by a group of men backed by the Chamber of Commerce. This fair and the following fairs in 1898 and 1899 were called "street fairs" and were literally that--fairs held on the streets of Kalamazoo. It went so far as having a tight rope walk high above Burdick Avenue. The whole of the business district participated in the fair by setting up displays and giving prizes. Even the lodges and churches opened their doors to the weary but enthusiastic crowds. The fairs were a decided success, so much so, that officials had to make pleas to private homes for spare rooms to accommodate the people left over from the overcrowded hotels.³¹ As to the Fair of 1900 it is not known as those issues of the Gazette are missing.

The next record of a fair which Kalamazoo had was in 1909 and was held in the now standing Recreation Park. Recreation Park was opened on September 5, 1901 and was owned and operated by a group of stockholders of which Charles Hays was the leading figure. Lorenzo Engleston, the previous owner of National Park, was chosen by the stockholders to promote a fair in 1909.³² This fair and the four following were successful enough to pay slight dividends to the stockholders. At these fairs "sensationalism" prevailed. Such things as having a collision, head-on, of trains, and a balloon stunt man who would parachute out of the balloon as it rose above

³¹ Neeson, op. cit., October 6, 1957.

³² The papers for the fall of 1900 are not available. No further records of fairs could be found until 1909.

³³ Gaz., September 30, 1909.

the fair grounds were popular. Horse racing had now, in Kalamazoo, become linked with a national circuit, and was very popular at the fairs.³⁴

The First World War interfered with further fairs and the next fair would be held in Kalamazoo in 1923. In this year a group of citizens backed again by the Chamber of Commerce established the Kalamazoo Agricultural Society with the preamble: "to promote the interests of Agriculture, Horticulture, livestock and Education for Boys and Girls."³⁵

This was to be successful for several years, but it too died out in 1928. Another attempt was made in 1935 but again failed. Finally in 1941 under the direction of Clynton Buelle the Kalamazoo Free Fair was established and is still operating today. The grounds of Recreation Park are owned by the County Road Commission after they were bought for the price of the mortgage upon them in 1939.³⁶

³⁴ Ibid., September 30, 1909.

³⁵ Premium Book of Fair of 1923, located in the Kalamazoo Public Library, Kalamazoo, Michigan.

³⁶ Gaz., September 25, 1949.

VI. Land Problems

Mr. Little, the very efficient secretary of the society for more than thirty years (1858-1885) said in the annual meeting of 1884: "The society unfortunately and most emphatically made the mistake of its life when it failed at the outset of its career to secure ample and eligible grounds on which to have fairs when land all about the city was comparatively cheap."³⁷ This can be substantiated in the fact that the society would have to move several times during its existence. The first fairs were held on the County Court House grounds and would give way to the more permanent position on the land of Dr. Starkweather on Axtell Street near West Street. Here all would be well until 1861 when the land lease ran out and no new land could be found. No fair was held in 1862, in 1863, and in 1864, and when the State Society came to Kalamazoo, lands were procured from the National Horse Association, National Park, and the society was given the right to lease the lands for their fairs following. In 1873 with National Park under new ownership the society received a new lease.

In 1879, when the owner Mr. D. C. Reed announced that he no longer would offer land for lease to the society, the society was in serious trouble. For during this period horse racing had become popular and was one of the main crowd attractions. To find new grounds meant, in order for a financial success, to find ground which would support horse racing. Few if any areas were available.

³⁷ Ann. Mt., Gaz., February 8, 1884.

It was with this problem that the Board of Supervisors of the society sent, in late 1879, a recommendation to the County Board of Supervisors. In it was the idea that the county levy a tax for the raising of funds to buy and build ample fair ground. The County Board would supervise the grounds and use it for whatever purpose it willed--as long as it did not interfere with the annual fairs. The county accepted the proposal and after receiving permission from the state put the proposal before the people of the county in the April election of 1880. The result of that election was that the townspeople were in slight favor of it, 641 to 459, but the rural areas were "unanimously opposed."³⁸ According to Mr. Little the farmers considered the fairs to be too much of a social nature to pay a tax for. Hence no land. In 1881 land was secured in Schoolcraft to hold the fairs of 1881 and 1882.

On March 5, 1882, the Executive Committee called a mass meeting of citizens interested in promoting a means of purchasing a fair grounds in Kalamazoo. At the well-attended meeting the end result was to raise money by subscription. The price of each subscription would be \$10.00 or more and no one had to pay until \$8,000 had been accounted for. Each subscriber would be given the right to one vote at the annual meeting.³⁹ On March 17, 1882 the Executive Committee was presented with the problem of whether to solicit the farmers or the townsfolk most. The project proved to be more in the farm interest as set up by the constitution rather than "the interest of

³⁸ Ann. Mt., Gaz., January 14, 1881.

³⁹ Gaz., March 6, 1882.

commerce, the hotels and saloons and omnibus men of the village."⁴⁰

The end result of the soliciting amounted to only a little over \$3,000. The reason for not securing more was due to the fact that two men, a Mr. Lorenzo Engleston and a Mr. Frank Stockbridge publicly announced their purchase of the old National Park grounds from Mr. D. O. Reed and turning it into a first class racing park and fair grounds.⁴¹

After the grounds were altered an attempt was made to get the State Fair in 1883 but it failed.⁴² However, in 1884 and 1885 the State Fair would come to Kalamazoo on the renewed grounds. Up until 1892, the closing of the society, the fairs would be held on these grounds.

It is interesting to speculate that if the society had owned its own grounds it not only would have been ahead financially but would have given to the society a degree of moral incentive and permanence which it lacked at times, especially in 1867 and 1892. Otherwise it depended upon the ideals and leadership of a few outstanding men such as Frank Little, the secretary for thirty years, and Samuel Cobb, the president of the society from 1873-1880. When the leadership failed, as it apparently did in 1892, the society had nothing to fall back on and the result was disunion. If it had owned land it may have been different.

⁴⁰ Gaz., March 18, 1882.

⁴¹ Ann. Mt., Gaz., January 24, 1883.

⁴² Gaz., March 25, 1883.

VII. Association of Agricultural Societies

On December 9, 1875 a convention was held at Corporation Hall of Agricultural Societies from western Michigan.⁴³ Societies from Van Buren, Berrian, Branch, and Ingham counties, and the Plainwell Union Agricultural and Industrial Society of Allegan County were represented. At this meeting an association was formed called "The Agricultural Societies of Michigan."⁴⁴ It had as its final outcome the establishment of a uniform system of conducting county fairs. Kalamazoo was well represented and had as a result its own Frank Little, one of the founders of the new organization, elected to the office of secretary. The Kalamazoo Society was one of the more active societies in the association, due in large part to Frank Little.

At the annual meetings such things were discussed as having our National Congress establish a National Bureau of Agriculture of which the head should be in the President's cabinet.⁴⁴ Also mentioned was extending the State Board of the Agriculture College to include circulating a "concise annual report of all important facts bearing upon the agricultural resources, aspects and results in the state."⁴⁵ But probably the most significant or at least the greatest amount of discussion centered upon the moral aspects of county fairs--things which were not in the Farm Interest. A speech by Mr. Little gave counseling advice towards this subject. It started by saying: "no marvelous attractions, side shows or catch

⁴³ Gaz., December 10, 1875.

⁴⁴ Gaz., February 8, 1882.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

penny allurements should be needed theoretically...But the societies must have these to meet financial ends..."

The danger, however, is demoralizing. Agriculture should not answer to the side corners and byways to get out of the way of the hurdy gurdys, wheels of fortune, chariot and other races, pool sellers and gamblers, and all the vast army of hucksters that settle down upon the fair grounds like a cloud of ravenous grasshoppers....We are not a religious organization, we may properly allow what is outside the fair grounds, there is a difference, however, in the two conditions where a wrong exists, one has official sanction and the other not.⁴⁶

This attitude prevailed throughout these meetings. In part it was the graft and corruption, attacked on the local level, of the Grant Administration. It was through this influence in the main, that the Kalamazoo Society limited the entry of horses in the annual horse races to the county.⁴⁷ This would cut down on the "hucksters and pool sellers" wandering in. It did not dampen the spirit for horse racing, however, if anything it heightened the spirit. The Kalamazoo Society also talked of having the first horse in not being declared the winner--"the winner should be upon all the qualities of a horse." Not only this; a few men wanted the "citizens' premiums" or private donations for the horse race purse abolished. These they felt would be in the Farm Interest:

...ought we to offer prizes much larger in proportion than any other department for a class of horses possessed of no other earthly merit save the mere quality of speed upon the race track, and that no intelligent breeders ever desire to probigate or perpetuate. While the race horses are the capital stock of pool sellers and gamblers the farmer has little use for them.⁴⁸

These were never passed for it would have cut horse racing

⁴⁶ Gaz., February 4, 1883.

⁴⁷ Ann. Mt., Gaz., January 15, 1877.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

out completely and hence the society would lack a drawing card for the crowds. The best the society could do was to limit horse-racing to county horses. These ideas do throw light on how a few men such as Frank Little were devoted to the Farm Interest and county fairs.

VIII. State Fairs

Before summarizing, I think it proper to say a few words about the State Fairs and their coming to Kalamazoo. The city of Kalamazoo had been host to the State Fair of three occasions: in 1863 and 1864, 1871 and 1872, and 1884 and 1885. They were gotten here after some soliciting, both on the part of the owner of the land and the Agricultural Society. For the State Fair had the habit of rotating about the various cities of the state, and as a result some fierce competition arose; especially between Jackson, Kalamazoo and Detroit. For example, when in 1883 the old National Park was rebuilt by Mr. Engleston and Mr. Stockbridge and Kalamazoo was turned down as the city for the next fair, there were some angry people. The following attitude prevailed:

...Kalamazoo has by far the best grounds and finest accommodations for a State Fair, and is located in one of the richest agricultural areas in the State--yet those old grey bald heads from Detroit who control the State Fair organization think Detroit is the place to have it. It has come to Kalamazoo twice and each time it left with thousands in its treasury....⁴⁹

It is interesting to note the advantages of having a State Fair both to the landowner and to the local society. To the local society it not only created interest in the fairs but would be of great value in stimulating new ideas of fair promotion. Just one example; in 1885 "Buffalo Bill and Annie Oakley" were billed at the State Fair. This was so popular that the next year the County Society decided to have a wild west show of its own. In 1886 they

⁴⁹ Gaz., March 25, 1883.

brought in "Bronce John" who no doubt was no second "Buffalo Bill" but it attracted crowds that year and for several years following. The landowner would benefit also, for the State Fair normally would be held on the same grounds for two years. Since the State Fairs were of a greater capacity than the county fairs, buildings and fixtures would be needed and although some of the buildings and fixtures would be taken by the State Society no doubt many of the buildings and stands were left. Hence, at the end of a State Fair land would be in better shape than at the beginning at no extra cost. This was observed for two reasons. One was that in 1871 and 1872 and 1884 and 1885, the fair lands were recently purchased and the owner no doubt would like his land built up at no cost to him, so a great amount of soliciting would be involved during these years. And it seemed to pay off. A second reason was the State Fair claimed a loss of \$20,000 during 1884 and 1885 in Kalamazoo.⁵⁰ The local men protested by saying that \$17,000 was for buildings, repairs, and increased premiums, and could not be counted as a loss, for the state could take back the buildings and equipment. This excess building and equipment in all probability remained, for to move buildings and materials in those days seems doubtful. It was little wonder then that competition arose between the cities for holding State Fairs.

⁵⁰ Gaz., January 15, 1886.

IX. Summary

In summary, the fair was in lean prosperity during the years of 1846 to 1861. In 1866 to 1873 there were troubled times in the society. And with rebirth in 1873, the following years up to 1891 were relatively successful but land seemed to be a major problem. In 1892 due both to lack of strong leadership and outside problems the original society would have its downfall. The nature of the fairs were changing during 1873 to 1892 and came to include the interest of the merchants as well as those of the farmer. Perhaps the old adherents of the Farming Interest did not tolerate this change and when outside pressures called for support and strong desire, they had no real enthusiasm and withdrew. At any rate the society died out. But although it died out, the idea carried on later to have county fairs. These would deviate from solely the Farm Interest to include such areas as "the education for boys and girls."

The original society did add to the betterment of the Farming Interest in Kalamazoo County. Although no one specific improvement can be named, it added to the farming community in the same manner as a school tax levied upon bachelors and childless couples. Neither receives the benefit directly, but indirectly through the common improvement of all. It was too bad more people did not see the benefits of the annual exhibits and support them especially in regards to the land problems.

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