

## The History of Our Boulder County Fair

The Boulder County Fair, with its deep historic roots, is the oldest fair in the state of Colorado. Started by a group of prominent ranchers and farmers, the first fair in the Colorado Territory was held on October 12, 1869. The vision of these early pioneers was to create a community event which would celebrate the rich diversity of the area, and reflect the activities of its citizens through exhibits encouraging the county's basic economy.

In order to fulfill this dream, the Colorado Agriculture Society was organized, and 40 acres of land was purchased between 28<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> Street, south of Valmont Road, for \$600. Plans were immediately made for the fair to be held in mid-October. A pavilion was erected, and there were refreshment stands and stalls.

This first fair ran for four days with displays of flowers, vegetables, cereals and hand-made articles. There were also five classes of exhibits: Class A - Farming: Livestock and farm machinery; Class B – Articles manufactured in Colorado: from dairy churns to cabinetry and jewelry; Class C – Minerology: displays of gold and silver bullion from mines in Boulder County, and minerals and geological specimens found in Colorado; Class D – Agriculture and Vegetables: all types of crops, included competitions for best acre or half-acre of grains; and Class E – Household and Pantry Goods. There were horse races daily, and the fair concluded with a mule race, for a premium of \$5, and a walking race around the track, the slowest taking the premium. The cost to put on the first fair was \$5,000 (approximately \$165,000 in today's dollars).

In 1870 a round house was built for the mineral and agricultural displays along with a small judge's stand, additional stalls, saloons and corrals. In 1875 a grandstand, with seating capacity of 1000 was erected at the site, and horseracing increasingly became an attraction. By 1877, farm machinery attracted the greatest interest, particularly steam powered machines. This has continued to be a draw throughout the years.

Longmont had always been interested in hosting the fair, and by 1885, as the event in Boulder continued to deviate further from the original agricultural focus, the essential elements of the Boulder County Fair were moved to Longmont and named "Pumpkin Pie Day," while the horseracing and gambling attractions remained in Boulder, along with a smaller exhibition. Finally, on October 5, 1899, the Boulder County Fair was officially moved to Roosevelt Park in Longmont (then called Driving Park). That year the fair lasted only one day, but featured such events as traditional horse racing, as well as livestock and home economics exhibits. The women of Boulder County honored Pumpkin Pie Day by making enough homemade pies to feed the entire fair crowd, free of charge!

The early 1900s brought slow and steady growth to the Boulder County Fair as permanent buildings replaced the tents at Roosevelt Park one by one, with some costs being born by the city of Longmont. In 1921 a record breaking crowd of 2500 attended the opening day. The fair prospered, quickly becoming a source of county pride, and the largest county fair in the state.

Only one break in the continuity of the fair occurred when it had to be cancelled in 1946 because of the polio out break. But ultimately, with the continued success of this great community event, more room and better facilities were needed. In 1976 the county commissioners purchased the Affolter Corner Farm, 130 acres of land at the northeast corner of Nelson and Hover Road. In the fall of 1978, the fair opened in its present location in the first building at the new complex, which would be completed over the next 15 years.

142 years from its first historic step, the Boulder County Fair is still going strong, still focusing on family-oriented activities and events, our agricultural heritage and tradition, and showcasing the outstanding work and projects of its 4-H and FFA youth and the community at large. The fair remains one of just four non-profit county fairs in the State of Colorado, and with record attendance of over 100,000 in the last few years!

The spirit of the original pioneers continues on with a current board, staff and volunteers dedicated to positioning the Boulder County Fair for the next 140 years!