

IT'S FAIR TIME!

Submitted by Village of Richfield Springs Historian Harriett Geywits

Almost every village and township in the county had, at one time, an agricultural fair, very similar to the county fair now held yearly. The history of the Richfield Springs Fair began with the organization of the Richfield Springs Agricultural, Horticultural and Mechanical Arts Society in 1881. Membership at that time was \$1.00 with a lifetime membership of \$10.00. Officers included a president; twelve vice-presidents; secretary; treasurer; and six directors. The areas included in Otsego County were Richfield Springs, Springfield, Otsego, Exeter, Plainfield, Cherry Valley, and Burlington; Warren, Columbia, Winfield and Stark in Herkimer County; and Bridgewater in Oneida County.

They held their annual fair on twenty-one acres leased for fifteen years with the option to then purchased some of the property which was located on the west side of Lake Street (across from Cemetery Road). Their main purpose was to provide an organized space where participants could show their animals, wares, handicraft abilities and agricultural prowess to the thousands who attended. Of course, there was always the thrill (and bragging rights) if your entry won a prize! There were special displays that brought attention to new inventions and improvements to items used in daily life. Various forms of entertainment were given in front of the grand stand. One of the biggest draws was the variety of horse shows and races as they were of great interest to the many visitors to this area.

While county fairs are now held in July and August so that those who placed in the various categories will have opportunity to enter the State Fair, the Richfield Fair was usually held in September or October. The weather, as with most outside events, was an important factor but overall, blue skies prevailed. The later date for the fair was for the benefit of the local farmers and gardeners whose crops wouldn't be at their best until later in the season, not to mention that the farmers had a little more free time after their main crops were harvested.

The classes for judging in 1881 have stayed pretty much the same throughout the years: Horses - included stallions, mares, colts, geldings, farm teams and trotting; Neat Cattle - included working oxen, trained steers, calves, short horn, Ayrshires, Jerseys, Holsteins and Dutch and general dairy; Sheep and Swine - included Cotswold, South Downs, long wool, lambs and large and small breeds of swine; Poultry - judging included Asiatic, Dorkings, Hamburgs, Spanish, French, Polish, American and Bantams, while turkeys included bronze, black, buff and white slate.

Of course, judging was done for grain and seeds, vegetables, fruits and dairy products including cheese and butter. The items entered for display in Floral Hall were numerous and varied, showing the ability of the entrant with their painting, flowers, needlework, embroidery and fancy articles. Premiums were also offered for agricultural implements, the mechanical arts and the best displays by businesses. There was also a parade of prize winners.

The 22nd annual fair of 1902 was of special interest because it was the first year that trolley service would be offered to this area for those who wished to attend. "The management has been liberal in providing attractions and in their premiums and race purses. For many year the horse show at the Richfield Fair has been a feature of the exhibition and this year, special effort has been made to make it the best ever seen in this or neighboring counties. The premiums have been increased and, as in the years past, the exhibitor may rest assured that the stock will be judge on its merits - THERE WILL BE NO FAVORITES AT THE RICHFIELD FAIR!

The special attractions at the fair this fall will be of superior order. The management has experienced much disappointment in the past because of the engagement of special attractions that failed to attract anything but criticism, and profiting by their failures, have secured as a special free entertainment the



celebrated Kramer family, the trick and fancy bicyclists who will daily perform on the race track in full view of the hundreds that will gather to watch them, and the Bradshaw Bros. in their thrilling aerial balancing act. Both acts are clean and interesting and will afford genuine pleasure. With the races, this will make a continuous performance during the entire afternoon of each day.

The race program is the best ever arranged by the society and the splendid purses offered will be an inducement for a fast lot of horses to gather at Richfield.. The meeting concludes the racing season and will be a roundup that will certainly furnish excellent sport. Nearly everyone is fond of horse racing and the public may rest assured that the races at the fair will be notable in the history of the society.

The order of arrangement is the same as in previous years. The first day is devoted to the taking of entries and as the indications point to an unusually large entrance list in all departments, it is earnestly urged that the entries be made and tags received on that day, although the books are not closed until the second day at eleven o'clock.

On the second day, the military band will give a grand concert in the morning and a special entertainment by the special attractions will be given. In the afternoon, races will be trotted, each for a purse of \$250. Between each heat, free exhibitions will be given in front of the grand stand.

On the third day at 11 o'clock, the horse show begins and will be of unusual interest. Included will be a race for horses never started over a dirt track. As on the previous day, enjoyable band concerts will be given during the entire day.

There will be the usual side-shows, menageries, picture tents, a steam merry-go-round and a thousand and one things to make things merry and the Richfield Fair a memorable one.

Supt. Jennings of the Oneonta, Cooperstown and Richfield Springs electric railway has given assurances that the trolley will be up by fair time and the management expects a generous patronage from the southern tier of towns, knowing well the loyalty and interest shown by those nearby.

With the warm, dry weather holding, the 22nd annual fair of the Richfield Springs Agricultural Society will go into the community's annals as one well worth attending."

Unfortunately, the Agricultural Society was to be liquidated and abandoned in 1926 due to fiscal indebtedness with only a memory left of the good times had at the fair.