

Clark County Fairgrounds

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The Illinois State Fair is an important part in the history of Illinois. The 1997 fair was an exciting adventure for most families. Most teenagers were entertained by the carnival rides and the great shows performed there on a daily basis. The state fair provides shows and games that cover a wide variety of interests. Traditional acts at the fair range from the husband and hog-calling contests to the many different types of musical acts that performed at last year's fair. Some of the bands at last year's fair were The Wallflowers, Dishwalla, Alabama, Vince Gill, and ZZ Top.

While in the small town of Marshall, the Clark County Fair is a scaled down version of the state fair. The Clark County Fair does not have the glitz and glamour of the state fair, yet it still holds an important part of the history in Marshall, Illinois.

Before the land was purchased by the fair, it was known as Mark's Grove. The land was first leased from Molly F. Rhoads on December 29, 1936, at the charge of 120\$ per year over a five-year period. After this lease ran out, another lease was signed on January 31, 1942. This lease was signed from Elizabeth Rhoads Humphries to the fair for another five-year period for the fee of \$175 per year. The main 16 acres of the fairground was deeded from M.L. Behner to the fair on May 19, 1945. Then on April 19, 1945, the fair purchased five acres from the Finkbiners. The fair purchased an additional three acres from the Spittlers on December 29, 1948. An additional 1.41 acres was purchased from the Rayhels on December 29, 1951. On March 29, 1954, one acre was purchased from Edith Wright. This acre is now where the 4-H building lot is. Spittler sold an undisclosed amount of land to the fair on December 23, 1955. This brings us close to the total area that the fair occupies today.



Over the years several buildings have been constructed at the fairgrounds. The White Horse Barn was constructed in 1949. The



Dairy Barn was then built two years later in 1951. The Beef Barn came into existence the next year in 1952. The Running Horse Barn was constructed in 1954, the same year that the 4-H Barn was constructed. Two years later the hog barn was built in 1956. The Sheep Barn construction started in 1963 and was finished two years later. The West Dairy Barn was built in 1966, but due to a fire, it had to be rebuilt in 1975. Another barn that was constructed was the U-horse barn in 1948. The Ticket Office located at the main gate was built in 1972 to accommodate the increasing number of people coming to the fair. An additional building that was constructed was the tool shed in 1972, which has grown in size over the years as more tools were needed for the upkeep of the growing fair.

As years passed improvements were made on some of these structures, too. The West Horse Barn had a south section added to it in 1959 and then a north section added to it in 1964. In 1970, a roof was put onto the arts building to keep projects out of the weather. In 1975, the arts building was completely enclosed to even better protect 4-H projects. A few years before, this concrete was first laid for the floor of the Arts Building.

It is not known when the old wooden grandstand was built, but it is known that it was slightly moved from the location of the current grandstands. The existing grandstands were built in 1954. However, on August 4, 1973, the Photo Finish and Sound Boxes, in the grandstands, were burnt by a fire. Then later that year the grandstands were rebuilt to appear the same as they do today. An addition to the grandstands was the judges stand located in the upstairs portion. This was built into the grandstands in 1960.



The completion of the track at the fair occurred on June 18, 1879, even though fair was still leasing the land at this time. The half-mile track was completed by grubbing three hundred large trees. The original track is believed to have been located in the same location as the current track. The lights located around the track were installed in 1949. The Metal Hub Rail located all around the track was constructed in 1969. It is believed that the first racing ever at the track occurred at the 1934 fair.

The first official night of competitive horse racing occurred on August 8-12 in 1949. The first race meet however occurred a few weeks later on the 12-15 of September in 1949. After all this racing had occurred over the years, the fair committee felt that the track would need to be resurfaced, so in 1968 the entire track was redone.

In the beginning, the Marshall Community Fair was sponsored by the agriculture department that was located in the Marshall High School. Bill Hayworth was the agriculture teacher, and Harry Bamesbargar was the president of the Marshall Community Club. The charter for the Marshall Community Fair was issued on March 16, 1934. The board of directors at this time were Harry Reynolds, Charles Blundell Jr., Walker Spotts Jr., Heber Nash, Harry Bamesburger, Joe Gehab, Fred Kiefer, Dick Davidson, L. Unnewere, Charles Curran, and C.C. Pack. Then in 1934, the Marshall Community Fair was changed to the Clark County Fair. This meant that the county fair would no longer rotate between being held in Marshall and Martinsville.

As you attend this year's 103rd fair, look for some of the things mentioned above. You may be able to see some of the changes that have occurred through the years, and who knows, maybe some new things will be added to this year's fair that become traditional events at upcoming fairs. Then you will be able to tell when something began, or when an additional building was constructed. Who knows? You may be in on a small part of history yourself.