

1906 - The Vermilion Agricultural Society was formed.

First Committees

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| Grounds: | A.W. Roseborough, James Common, P.G. Pilkie |
| Livestock: | D.B. Winters, W.A. Reid, George Powell |
| Other Exhibits: | H.N. Stephens, Thos. H. Brown, W.E. Sutton, Mrs. P.G. Pilkie, Mrs. Bowtell, Mrs. S. Roseborough |
| Printing: | P.G. Pilkie, H.N. Stephens |

To these men do we owe a debt of gratitude and appreciation for their foresight in realizing the importance of gathering people together in a community exercise to share ideas, and compare and show their achievements in agriculture and home management.

The first fair was held in the East end of town on what was then prairie. People came by horseback, horse and wagon or buggies; many bringing their picnic lunch box packed for the day so neighbor families would enjoy eating together. Others used the town facilities.

There were horses, cattle, pigs and chickens – many shown in their own crates, and a good day was passed.

Later on, the Agricultural Society entered into an agreement with the town and leased land in the West end, where the Fair carried on to this day. Early on, the Fair Parade was instituted for the first day, and at that time, our Parade was made up with a few clowns, the Town horse-drawn fire engine.

My first recollection of the Fair as a child was attending with my Grandfather, R.L. Craig, President of the Society in 1913, wandering around the tents.

Horse racing in some form or another has continually been a major attraction. Sulky race carts were used early as well as horseback. My Dad had the misfortune to have his horse, Jim, crash into a fragile fence and the cart, etc. were quite smashed; thus ended Dad's career as a driver.

Eventually, horse racing gave way to chuckwagon or chariot races. The participants in these races are loud in their praise of the present Society for maintaining such a fine track and having it well fenced.

Early on, the ladies exhibited their finest culinary arts in a two-storey dark building (which is long gone). Famous cooks guarded their recipes with pride.

A baby show was tried as an added attraction, but Fairs are for keeping everyone happy and making friends. This came to a quick end.

The grounds were fenced with a high board fence on the South, West and North ends of the land, and horses and cattle were sheltered there. Cages were used for fowl and temporary stalls for pigs along the south side.

The Midway consisted of a few pony rides, small Merry-GO-Round and a few sideshows and fortune tellers.

The Grandstand on opening night had speeches from the visiting dignitaries and others, and then the clowns and any available local talent. The closing night featured a parade of all the prize-winning animals of the Fair, as well as the other competitors.

Later, we joined the Western Fair Association and through this organization, by banding together, we bought Midways and grandstand attractions.

Early on, before T.V., crowds were happy and content with a few clowns, some high-stepping dancing girls, a high wire act, a magician or some trained dogs, but now, they ask for more and we have the great attraction of the Chuckwagon and Chariot races for everyone to cheer and have friendly bets.

Now the Midway has graduated to terrifying Ferris Wheels, fast-action bumper cars, skill ball games, candy floss, corn on the cob, etc.

The Society has played a leading role in helping Vermilion grow. Early on, their grounds were used for the popular Vermilion Sports Days, when we had as many as five ball diamonds in action at one time, one diamond being in front of the Grandstand.

The grounds were used for a temporary golf course after the first golf course behind the old hospital was sold. One ardent golfer, Art Wiebe, was hit by a golf ball rebounding from the Grandstand. The golf course moved south of town.

The covered Grandstand with little rooms underneath for performers to dress, the secretary's office and executive's office, and the hot and cold booths, gave way in 1979 to our fine new steel Grandstand; all done by local volunteers serving 6400 man hours – the largest project undertaken to date. Here I say, all Directors pay a membership fee of \$1.00 per year for the privilege of serving their community, working many hours at work bees and bull sales, fencing, painting and repairing to keep the grounds in such fine shape.

The Society proved a great help in hosting the Seniors Games in 1998, in being available for use for Vermilion's first big school homecoming in 1976 and also the Anniversary homecoming in 1980. Rodeos and Chuckwagon races for the district, circuses, auction sales, 4-H, cattle, horse and sheep sales are all events the Society has assisted with. They've co-operated with the College in making their grounds available for some of their exercises and providing ice in the Stadium for their hockey and formerly for their Rodeos.

Many great Sports Days were held on these grounds with ball teams from far and near.

All of these activities have required better housing and so, cattle, horse, pig and sheep barns in the West have been replaced by fine new buildings in the East, making space for the popular Chuckwagon people in the Northwest.

A fine Old Timers cabin with pioneer brands was built in 1956/57; a tribute to the early settlers, which is much enjoyed and used today.

E.M. Stewart, Jack Cross and Bill Sutherland headed a committee to build the Stadium (now called the Agriplex), which was completed in 1961. This building was to be used at the Fair to house and wash cattle, etc. and to provide a much-needed concession. The hope of the builders and planners was that this building would serve our town for summer and winter activities, and their hopes have been realized. The curling rink also was built under the auspices of the Society, which instituted and arranged for all of the planning and construction in 1972. That committee

was Bob Barr, John Stewart, Jack Cross, Aldous Kent, Gordon Park and Bill Pettigrew. This is now the Ladies Exhibit Hall and School Fair Hall. When this building was completed, the Society had a fine office space. The Butler Building (renamed the Heritage Pavilion) is used for many purposes – horticultural shows, cattle shows, 4-H shows and sales, and auctions.

Moving the College Barn, resettling and painting it was a great job well done, and the building is a continued attraction for old and young. It is now used as a petting barn.

In 1987, the Town demolished the arena that had served well since 1926; then they called for help from the Society. Fortunately, we were able to rise to the occasion with friends and much help. The committee supervising this project was Allen Forbes, Robert Snelgrove, Dave Hughes, and Arnold Olsen. This building is used constantly through the winter, and during the Fair Days, is used for the Beer Gardens.

Through all these projects, the Lady directors have been ready and happy serving the men lunches for their work bees, etc.

The addition of the new dining hall in 1989 was very welcome. The day of the old Jitney dances, 3/25¢ or 10¢ each, in the old building along the south fence, is long gone. (no more wet feet standing in the grass, waiting for the next dance). Night revellers now use the recently built arena, which the Society subsidized, to replace the old arena that was demolished.

My life have been woven around the Society, beginning with the School Fairs, then operating a Kids' concession of ice cream and candy built against the south fence. Later, I was active with my husband, Elmore M. Stewart, Carl Heckbert, Secretary-Manager for 32 years, and my son, John A. Stewart, who in 1979, worked tirelessly with the Society members and his sons in the construction of our present Grandstand, the rink and also the Butler building.

It has been my pleasure thinking back through many Fairs—the excitement of our great Parades, the Openings, meeting friends from near and far, the final Grand Parade of the livestock that was held earlier, etc. Those great days when town and country gathered together to live, relax and enjoy. It is my hope that with the fine young people you have in this Society that you will continue to “serve others beyond self “. God bless!

I am giving Fair books dating back to 1955, ribbons, and a memorial plaque; also a cup, which is in the museum and was won by Col. W.C. Craig.

Helen K. Stewart (nee Craig)
April, 1991

Note:

Kae Stewart was born in Vermilion, Alberta, Aug 2 / 1909