

CHAPTER XVII

THE NORTHERN MAINE FAIR

The society's vote: the grounds and property of the Northern Maine Fair Association; the Northern Maine Fair.

When the society voted to accept and adopt the report of the trustees and members without a dissenting vote for the purchase of this property and the permanent location of the Fair in Presque Isle, it was the most important action in the progress of the Society which had ever been consummated.

This was not the act of Presque Isle's citizens, nor of the leaders, as I recall it. There was but one opinion expressed; Fort Fairfield led, Easton, Mars Hill and Westfield were for it. Castle Hill, Kepleton, Ashland, Washburn and Caribou were for it.

There was no controversy or division. It should be at the most central place, which would accommodate all. Presque Isle was the most central place and had the best railroad facilities at the time and prospectively.

That it may be plain to the future, we give the outstanding reasons:

1. It gave the Society a permanent home in a central location about equal distance from adjoining towns, which were to be its best and most loyal supporters, as it has since been proved, and most accessible by railroad.

2. It also saved this land and park from being laid out in house lots and sold.

3. This was also the commencement of better and greater work and enlargement in all departments and exhibits of the fair.

These conditions, with the coming of the B. & A. Railroad which immediately followed, plus new buildings built on the grounds began at once to give greater success and money returns than even the most optimistic friends of the Society had dared to hope.

I have written of the first thirty years of the Society's life and history with which the pioneer fathers and mothers had to contend in the establishment of the Northern Aroostook Agricultural Society. Notwithstanding all the difficulties of pioneer life, they never missed a year without a Fair even in the dark days of the Civil War, but once.

From 1890 on through the years of this decade the prosperity of the Northern Maine Fair kept pace with the growth and increased wealth of the county. New and enlarged buildings were made, more and larger premiums were offered, larger attendance and patronage

came as the great prosperity, which has made all Aroostook noted for its production and wealth, have all combined in making the Northern Maine Fair one of the best in the State...

Having given this hasty sketch and running outline of the early history, we will now give the readers some of the special features of the Fair.

First, let me say that the new exhibition building and hall which was written up and a cut of which served in the chapter proved a source of great value, and received many words of commentation, satisfaction, and of heartfelt appreciation by exhibitors, friends and visitors.

...Men and women are annually, and more and more coming to Aroostook at the time of the Northern Maine Fair.

The new hall containing 12,000 feet of floor space was packed with all kinds of farm products, fruits, dairy exhibits, pickles, preserves, canned fruit, berries, plums, vegetables, and nameless field and garden crops. There were so many exhibits it is useless to name them; them included ladies' fancy work, ranges, musical instruments, etc. But if one supposes for a moment that the Aroostook ladies are lacking in skill, taste and versatility, they have only to visit their homes or the Exhibition Hall of the Northern Maine Fair to convince them of their mistaken ideas.

THE GROUNDS AND PROPERTY OF THE NORTHERN MAINE FAIR

At the time of the purchase of the North Aroostook Agricultural Horticultural Society from Johnson and Phair in 1842, the Society came into possession of 25 acres of land and a few buildings including a sixty foot exhibition hall used also for official headquarters; a few pens for stock, and a few horse stalls with a track for racing which was in rather poor condition. In this condition the Society labored on with somewhat more hope and satisfaction as in the early eighties the Canadian Pacific Railroad pushed further into the county and made its way up the Aroostook River to Caribou and Presque Isle. This brought increased advantages for transportation and made Aroostook easier to reach, a new way to send its products to the markets and for people to get in and out of the county. Everything felt the quickening touch which the coming of this railroad brought and farms brought higher prices and were more sought.

The Northern Maine Fair also shows the result in a small way in the county's uplift and progress. Excursions to the county became more frequent. The power and influence of the Press became more general - all this helped the Fair, and encouraged the management to make improvements and an increase of premiums.

The Bangor and Aroostook Railroad was chartered, bonds issued, money raised, and the road built. It came up through the wilderness to the "Garden of Maine."

The coming of the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad touched all; new blocks sprang to accommodate trade, new banks to furnish money for new enterprise which flourished, new churches and schools were built to house the people and educate their children.

The old Aroostook passed and was left, and the new and greater Aroostook came and has continued to grow until now it ranks first among New England counties; the only county in the East to surpass it is Lancaster County, Penn. The first county is Los Angeles County, California, with its crops the value at the farm was \$14,720,900.00 a few years ago. Then came Lancaster County in Penn., one in Washington, four in Illinois ahead of Aroostook, which produced crops worth \$10,161,000.00 to the growers. But this does not tell the story by all means. In value of the crops per acre, Aroostook rendered third, \$23 per acre.

THE NORTHERN MAINE FAIR

The first of these was the Incorporation on July 16, 1850 of the North Aroostook Agricultural and Horticultural Society. Its first meeting was held in Presque Isle on February 22, 1850. Its first president was J. Windgate Haines of Fort Fairfield; first secretary was Joseph B. Hall of Presque Isle. Its incorporation consisted of 23 of the leading citizens of a circle of towns and plantations of growing Aroostook. Its first fair was held in Presque Isle in 1851.

But as the history of this society is to be given in a chapter by itself, we hear sayings such as, "It was one of the Institutions started and maintained by the pioneers without an omission since its incorporation in 1850."

It may not be out of place in this connection to allow briefly a word of the man who was chosen as the first president of what is now "The Northern Maine Fair", J. Windgate Haines, and his coming to Aroostook.

"In 1844, Mr. Haines obtained a grant of 1000 acres of land on which he was to build a saw mill on the Weeks (later called the Johnson) Brook. Twenty years before, Mr. Weeks had come and had settled at the mouth of this brook. He held a land patent from New Brunswick and claimed all the land where the village of Fort Fairfield now stands."

Mr. Haines was what would be termed a "hustler". He came to Aroostook from Hallowell, Kennebec County. He came through the woods with a long string of oxen which he drove from his native town, hauling by these ox-teams all his household goods, provisions, machinery for his mill and his family. He brought with him the first blooded cattle and hogs that no doubt ever came into the town or county. He was a lover of good stock and his influence was far-reaching in this direction and was seen and felt through all the years of his life and was handed down to his children, who kept up the family interests through all the years of the 18th

century; and for over half a century the Hereford White Falls were seen annually at the Northern Maine Fair, as long as his son Albert lived on the well-known and historic farm at Maplegrove, Fort Fairfield...and for nearly 150 years the people of Presque Isle stood upon the streets to see the string of Hereford Cattle, usually thirty in number, as they passed on their way to the fairgrounds.

The influence of Windgate Haines and his family did more than will ever be realized or written.

This was the beginning of the blooded cattle industry of Aroostook; and up to years of the nineties, and for nearly half a century the old drivers or cattle-men took large droves of cattle and sheep from Aroostook to the Brighton, Massachusetts markets. Raising stock including horses and colts was one of the chief industries of the farmers. In fact, they largely depended upon their stock as one of the main supports of the family.

Mr. Haines was a sample of the pioneer man who made and maintained the Northern Maine Fair for its forty years of existence.

NORTHERN MAINE FAIR REACHES 90TH ANNIVERSARY IN 1940

This year the Northern Maine Fair will celebrate its 90th birthday. This show started so many years ago has grown from an obscure beginning into a movement that affects the lives of thousands of people in Aroostook. Its exhibitions have created an outlet for presenting to thousands of its patrons an inside picture of the vastness and possibilities of the greatest agricultural county east of the Mississippi. Its founders planned well for the future, though their efforts at first must have been discouraging. Its activities are county-wide and the fair has come to be recognized as one of the best of its kind in New England.

For many years this fair was known as the North Aroostook Agricultural and Horticultural Society. This society was formed in 1850 but the first year's records of its existence are missing and it is impossible to state its first president.

The first meeting of which there was a record kept was held on February 27, 1856. This was the annual meeting and it might be interesting to give here the secretary's report.

"Meeting called to order by the president. On motion of E. C. Blake voted that a committee of five be nominated by the chair to nominate officers of the Society for the ensuing year; E. C. Blake, John Allen, Hiram Stevens, J. D. Pike and Sumner Whitney was that committee. Adjourned to one o'clock p.m.

"Met according to adjournment, the president in the chair. The committee to nominate a list of officers made their report as follows:
For President - - David Foster of Presque Isle
For Vice-president - - I. Hardison of Letter E
For Vice-president - - Henry Rolfe of Letter G

For Vice-president -- E. S. Fowler, Maple Grove
Recording and corresponding Secretary -- B. Cummings, Maple Grove
Treasurer and Collector -- Joel Bean, Letter G
Agent -- J. W. Haines, Maple Grove

"Members of the executive committee for the State Agricultural Society Joseph D. Pike of Presque Isle, on motion of Hiram Stevens the trustees made their report after which the treasurer made a partial report but owing to some outstanding orders was not able to report fully.

"On motion of B. Cummings voted that the trustees and treasurer do not have pay for the future of their services.

"The Society then took up the report of the committee to nominate a list of officers and accepted the report by electing each officer recommended separately."

The above was taken from the city edition of the Star Herald. It continues giving a brief sketch of a period of time until the period of today. Today Presque Isle and Arcostook is proud of the annual fair. The buildings are well-taken care of, and many improvements have been made. The Star Herald continues: "The Northern Maine Fair is a gigantic proposition and in 1922 its assets were listed at more than 75,000."

It was during the period that films of the Fair were made and shown here and they are something that will be of even more value in the years to come, in showing just what the great exhibition and in entertainment and facilities.

It was in 1925, I believe, that the Northern Maine Fair Association voted to sell all of its property to the Northern Maine Fair, a stockholder's organization.

The first meeting of the stockholders of the Northern Maine Fair was held at the local municipal hall on January 18, 1926.

The officers chosen at that time were as follows:

Secretary -- Clayton Steele
Treasurer -- M. S. W. Dingwall
President -- Herbert Kitchen
Directors:

Dennis Getchell, Limestone
George Reed, Fort Fairfield
Stetson Hessey, Mars Hill
T. E. Houghton, Fort Fairfield
Boyd Flewelling, Easton
Hugh Jameson, Presque Isle
A. E. Hoyt, Presque Isle

V. E. Wilder, Washburn
H. F. Griffin, Caribou
N. F. Perry, Presque Isle
Edwin Parkhurst, Presque Isle
George Washburn, Presque Isle
H. W. Kitchen, Presque Isle
G. W. English, Presque Isle

It was also voted that year to have an executive committee within the board of directors. The following were appointed on the committee.

In a May meeting of that year the organization voted to change the dates of its annual meeting to the first Monday in January; it also voted to build a two-story officers' building on the grounds.

In 1829, John H. Wilson served as the efficient publicity director of the Fair, that gentleman having served very capably too in the same capacity for the local Merchants Association.

It is interesting to know that from 1924-31 the revenue from ground rent at the fair more than doubled under the efficient direction of C. Fred Grant, Supt. of Grounds.

In 1931 the Fair purchased some share of the Presque Isle Hotel Company.

Another move to further promote the cause of the racing game in this section was made in 1939 when the organization set up a \$500 purse known as the Northern Maine Fair Colt Futurity Open to Maine and the Maritime Provinces to be raced in 1942.

The Northern Maine Fair through the years has managed to keep going, though like many others it has had years when it lost money in running the annual show, but it has had more profitable years than losing ones, and is deserving of the wholehearted support of all true Aroostookians.

In recent years especially many improvements have been made to the buildings and grounds, so that today it compares very favorably with much larger fairs in New England. It is mainly an agricultural show and its exhibit of potatoes especially is worth going many miles to see; but it has kept pace in other departments essential to a progressive and modern fair.

It has a splendid list of officers and directors, and an earnest and hard-working body of various superintendents taking a genuine interest in making the Fair bigger and better each year.

1940 OFFICERS OF THE NORTHERN MAINE FAIR

President - Herbert W. Kitchen	Vice-president - C. Fred Grant
Secretary - Clayton Steele	Treasurer - W. S. Dingwall
Directors: George Reed, Fort Fairfield; Fred Simonson, Limestone;	
T. R. York, Mars Hill; P. R. Winslow, Fred Urquhart, G. W. English,	
H. W. Kitchen, A. E. Hoyt, George Washburn, R. W. Cary, Howard Kier-	
stead, C. Fred Grant, Harold Clark, and E. L. Williams, Presque Isle;	
B. A. Flewelling, Easton; Roy Libby, Caribou; Ralph Bearce, Ashland;	
Fred Putnam, Houlton; Clifton Higgins, Mapleton; Wallace Sawyer,	
Easton.	

Supt. Agriculture - Howard Keirstead
Supt. Horses - Luman Mahaney
Supt. 4-H Clubs - Deborah Stevens
Supt. Grounds and Buildings - C. Fred Grant
Supt. Tickets - G. F. Washburn
Supt. Poultry - Johnson Watts
Supt. Baseball - E. L. Williams
Supt. Lower Hall - Frank Parr
Supt. Upper Hall - Bessie Urquhart
Supt. Cattle - Harry Good
Supt. Horse Pulling - Oren Beckwith
Supt. Racing Committee - George Reed, Fred Simonson and Ralph Cary,
Stanley English and Stanley Wathen.