

The Seneca County Fair Before 1920

The first Seneca County fair was held at Ovid on October 21-22, 1841. Until 1870 the county fair was held at various places in the county, including Ovid, Waterloo, Seneca Falls, and Farmerville (Interlaken). Since 1870 the fair has always been held in Waterloo. The fair society rented from the property owner of the race track and nearby property. On October 27, 1882, the agricultural society purchased the fairgrounds property from William H. Burton for \$6,000. To raise the purchase price, the society sold 600 shares at \$10 a share.

In 1883, the Seneca County Agricultural Society erected a new permanent exhibition building and named it Floral Hall. Over 6,000 people attend the fair that first year and \$1,900 was taken in from admissions at 15 cents a person and 25 cents per vehicle. On Friday during fair week, there were several trotting races.

The popularity of the fair induced the society in 1887 to schedule two fairs, one in the summer and one in late September. In 1895, special events included donkey rides, Aztec mummies on display, one mile bicycle races. School children were allowed a half-day holiday to go to the fair. Local stores had exhibits.

Given the immense popularity of the fair, it is not surprising that the agricultural society by 1899 had paid off its original purchase price plus \$7,500 for buildings, plus having spent over \$20,000 on property improvements.

The county fair was the biggest event of the year. Top class acts appeared that each year. In 1908 the star attraction was the Wild West Indian Congress and American Hippodrome which included 70 people of which 30 were Sioux Indians. In 1910, the society scheduled free band concerts and open air vaudeville during fair days.

On May 17, 1916, the grandstand, horse sheds and a portion of the cattle pens were totally destroyed by fire. William Youngs had started a fire under the grandstand to dry his clothing and to keep warm. The loss to the society was between three and four thousand dollars. By July 25, a new grandstand was built. It was east of the former grandstand and could seat 1,500 people. Horse stables were built under the grandstand.

These were the good years for the Seneca County fair.