

Fairgrounds: A Mecca Since 1850

By John Landon

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Early fall is fair time and for the last 114 years Dover has served as the show place for Tuscarawas Countians' wares, exhibits, livestock and annual "jawing session."

Since 1850, hundreds of thousands of fair-goers have poured into Dover to see and have fun.

The County Fairgrounds, in later years, also served as a circus and carnival grounds, an auto speedway, a picnic grounds and for numerous other activities.

Horse shows, cattle sales, football games, racing, concerts and more also are recorded in the Fairgrounds' colorful history.

That first fair in 1850 was held at Hayden's Grove, site of the present Dover High building, and attracted some 5,000



COUNTY FAIR TRADITION. Sulky-racing at county fairs is a tradition which goes back many years, and is still continued at the annual event today, after having been temporarily abandoned. The half-mile track has also been the scene of motorcycle races, auto thrill shows, with the enclosed oval serving as the county's circus grounds.

persons.
The fair was organized by the Tuscarawas County Agriculture Society and boasted a fine display of horses, cattle, sheep and hogs. Exhibits of flowers, needlework, fruits and grain were staged in a small school building located at the site.

Because of the enthusiasm, the need for a fairground became urgent and it was proposed to purchase a permanent site between New Philadelphia and Dover.

A proposal was submitted to the citizens of both cities that each purchase grounds on which to alternate the fair. However New Philadelphia did not accept and Dover became the fair host.

Six years later Mrs. Margaret Deardorff, widow of Christian, one of the founders of Dover, deeded 3.20 acres of the present fairgrounds to the Agriculture Society.

Soon after, the grounds were permanently located in Dover and 8 more acres were purchased by the society from the Deardorff heirs. Still later, additional acreage, purchased by the city of Dover, was donated to the society.

The present Fairgrounds covers a total of 28.95 acres, controlled by County Commissioners. The Agricultural Society turned the grounds over to the county in 1931.

A floral hall and other display buildings were constructed early in its history. In 1859 a one-third of a mile race track was constructed. The track was lengthened to a half mile in 1872. That same year a secretary's and treasurer's office was erected.

In 1874 a dining hall was

erected, but 3 years later it damaged several other buildings which had to be rebuilt. The storm also

The present grandstand also was rebuilt when fire destroyed the original one several years ago.
An interesting aspect of the fairgrounds is that it was used as a recruiting camp during the early part of the Civil War. It was called Camp Migs, named after a governor of the state.

Growth of the fair has been something on the fantastic side. Records of the 1853 fair show that expenses were \$42.21, with a total of \$53.13 being paid out as premiums. Grandstand admissions alone last year totaled \$16,645.

Progress of agriculture, in-

dustry and culture is annually reflected at the fair and it is one of the few remaining institutions which draw attendance from all sections and all walks of life in the county.

For this reason the Fairgrounds fill a still vital need as well as provide a show-place and fun place for Tuscarawas Countians.

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THE OLD SWIMMING HOLE. The old Sugar Creek Roadside Park, near the Route 39 entrance to Dover, provided the opportunity for a cooling dip for Dover youngsters for many years. The park, with picnic facilities in a quiet setting, was the site of many family and organizational outings.

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