

Are you going to Orono Fair?

by Charles Taws

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It's Fair time again! What better way to end the hot summer and begin the colourful fall season. The Fair is 159 years old this year, but its origins stretch even further back than that. The Clarke Agricultural Society Fair was first organized in 1852, but it wasn't the first Fair in this area. Agricultural Societies were set up to promote modern and safe farming practices. Annual fairs were held to introduce farmers to new products, better seeds and livestock and learn new farming techniques.

The first meeting of an Agricultural Society for the County of Durham was held in January 1831 in Port Hope (Hope Township was part of Durham County until 1974). In May of 1839 this society held a meeting to exhibit and judge horses, bulls and cows in Millbrook. The next show took place in October of the same year and it was held closer to home in Newtonville (then known as the Village of Newton). Although records are scarce it is likely they began holding fall fairs at this time. By 1847 the "usual Autumnal Exhibition of the Durham Agricultural Society was held in the Village of Newcastle."

From these grass roots beginnings the fair we know today emerged. In 1850 an act was passed to establish a Board of Agriculture in Upper Canada. This promoted the formation of agricultural societies and Clarke Township duly organized their Clarke Agricultural Society



You will always find something new and interesting at the Orono Fair. Mark your calendar for September 8-11.

Fair in 1852. It is presumed that all the early fairs were held in Newcastle as no early records have been found to the contrary. From 1873 to 1895 Newcastle and Orono took turns in hosting the fair. Newcastle had the fair in even years and Orono in odd years.

The last quarter of the 19th Century was an uneven time for the fair. When it was in Orono it made money, but it lost money when held in Newcastle. In 1890 the fair directors were forced to borrow money to pay expenses and cover prize money from the fair held in Newcastle. Orono merchant, C.G. Armstrong, commented, "Newcastle beats the world for gall and cheek. They get our township fair every second year, which they have no more right to than Je-

rusalem has, but they can't get enough people to make expenses and Orono has to make it up." In 1894 the fair in Newcastle was a financial failure and the fair was in serious trouble. The following year the fair moved permanently to Orono. It has been known officially as the "Orono Fair" since 1907. The fair grounds were established in 1875 on land purchased from Robert Ruddock. Further additions in 1935, 1937, 1952 and 1954 have created the fair grounds that we are familiar with today.

Over the years the Orono Fair become very popular and has featured many unique and different things. A fat man's race, mouth organ contest (won by Ross Metcalf in 1944), baby show, horse races, tractor pulls, theatrical plays, rooster rac-

es, baseball games and band concerts have all been held at the fair over the years. In 1912 the Seymour Light and Power Company set up an exhibit on the uses of electricity. People were amazed at the toasting, cooking, ironing and heating demonstrations. Whoever did the advertisement for the Fair in 1921 obviously had a sense of humour. It reads: "Come meet your sisters and your cousins and your aunts. Old friends-New friends-No friends. There are 2 great Fairs in Ontario, one at Orono! Where's the other? It don't matter, it's past now anyway. Meet all the best people at Orono."

A big part of the fair is exhibiting animals, plants, flowers, vegetables, various arts and crafts, and baking. This story will show how far

Come Experience The Fair

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some people would go to win a prize. "Some years ago a farmer of the district who had an unusually fine crop of roots saw a neighbour with a

put on by the Clarke Agricultural Society, but in 1932 the West Durham Agricultural Society, who put the fair on in Bowmanville, disbanded but put their support with the Clarke group. At a joint



To review 5 years of photos at the Orono Fair visit www.ClaringtonPromoter.ca

lighted lantern going carefully up and down his rows, occasionally stopping to pull one out. At the fair, the following day, the neighbour, who had taken second prize, said to the farmer, 'Well, you beat me.' "Yes" replied the farmer, 'but I had the advantage of you, I gathered mine by daylight, while you made your selection at night.'

meeting of directors held on Jan. 16th 1932 the name was changed to the "Durham Central Agricultural Society." In 2011 the name changed again- this time to the "Orono Agricultural Society." This not only reflects Orono's pre-eminent involvement with the fair but avoids confusion with another fair held in Durham, Ontario (located south of Owen Sound).

Much of the information used in this article is gleaned

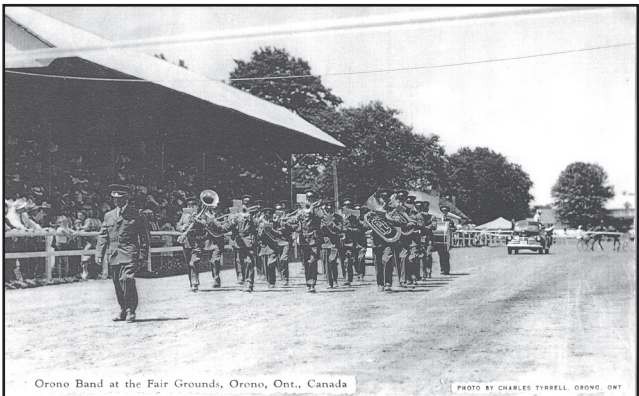


Up until the mid 1990's horse racing was an important event at the Orono Fair

from the book "Out of the Mists: A History of Clarke Township" by Helen Schmid and Sid Rutherford. If you are interested in the history of Orono or Clarke Township then this is the best book you can buy! Pick your copy up at the Fair. They are available at the Country General Store in the Agricultural Building. If you have a

question about local history or are doing family research call Clarington Museums at 905-623-2734 or contact the archivist, Charles Taws, at claringtonmuseums.archives@rogers.com.

This year the Fair begins on Thursday September 8th at 5:00pm and closes on Sunday September 11th. See you at the Fair!



Orono Band at the Fair Grounds, Orono, Ont., Canada PHOTO BY CHARLES THRELL, ORONO, ONT.



Samples of promotional posters and prize lists that have been produced over the years.

The Orono Fair parade has always been a tradition.