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# Old County Fairs Held in Florence, Kentucky

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Mrs. Elizabeth Goodridge Nestor

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Boone County

OLD COUNTY FAIRS HELD IN FLORENCE, KENTUCKY

By Mrs. Elizabeth Goodridge Nestor, Florence, Kentucky

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100 WEST BROADWAY  
FRANKFORT, KY 40601-1931

The exact date of the Florence Fair known as "old" Florence Fair is unknown but I know it existed in 1845 because my father's sister Catherine Goodridge was dressed to go to this Fair and her escort, Mr. Gaines Robinson was at her home to take her when she fell dead. Our family Bible states she died in 1845.

This Fair was located on the farm of Captain Jack Barton. The original house of this farm is still standing and is occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Louis Braun. The original farm comprised what is now Kenta-500. The Fair mentioned was located on the ridge just behind the house. There were two entrances to the Fair, one through Capt. Barton's farm yard and one opening on the "creek" road, which is now next to Mrs. Chipman's home just beyond Hagedorn's Appliance Store. The land was leased from Capt. Barton for the Fair which lasted a week. The Amphitheatre was round with elevated seats and a promenade around the top. The refreshment stands were octagon shape and served beer, whiskey, cider and lemonade. There were booths under the amphitheatre where families would eat. For days before the Fair men would whitewash everything and by Fair time all the buildings would be snow white.

Mr. and Mrs. Gaines Robinson lived in the Fair Cottage. Mr. Robinson was a brother of Mrs. Lucy Barton (Mrs. Jack) and during the Fair took care of wash rooms, etc.,

The only directors, <sup>whose names</sup> I am certain of were Milton F. Goodridge, Butler Carpenter and Mike Rouse. Two of the best known riders and judges were Alec and Hub Buckner.

The first day was always ladies' day. Quilts, cakes, <sup>and</sup> candies, ~~etc.~~ were shown in the center of the ring, and taken home that night. Mrs. Kate Perry brought potted flowers from Ft. Mitchell; Mrs. Milton Goodridge always showed her fig tree; Mrs. Sally Fulton took a miniature church made of shells under a glass globe. (Which I have seen).

People came by horse back, horse and buggy; hacks, and a stage coach came from Covington. Some money premiums were given, but most premiums were solid silver cups, spoons, knife and fork sets.

The story was told to me that a Miss Lizzie Nichols from the Blue Grass region near Lexington had just won the blue ribbon for riding when someone threw an empty candy box into the ring, striking the horse which bolted, throwing Miss. Nichols. She was taken out for dead but was only stunned and later recovered.

Displays were shown of buggies, surreys, hacks. The buggies had storm fronts, with isinglass windows to see through and holes through which the lines went. Horses wore handsome fly nets and horse blankets and whip concessions were greatly in demand as these were good sellers

The Fair closed in 1880. The reason for closing was that each director had free admission for himself, his family and friends. I have talked with people who attended this fast Fair and they stated that when the Fair closed the buildings showed great age and were falling down which certainly attests to the fact that the Fair had been going over a long period.

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The North Kentucky Agricultural Association was organized December 20, 1895 at the Odd Fellows Hall, Florence, Kentucky. First Officers elected were B.F. McClasson, President. E.H. Blankenkemper, Vice President. G.J. Allen, Secretary, William Perry Carpenter, Treasurer. Directors were F.A. Utz, Orin Percival, W.C. Harris, J.J. Rucker, <sup>and</sup> J.M. Lassing.

The first seven Board meetings were held at the Odd Fellows Hall which they rented for <sup>fifty cents</sup> per meeting. At the first meeting plans were made to build an Amphitheatre on ground rented from William Perry Carpenter at \$102.00 per year and located at the corner of the Union and Lexington Pikes. The show ring inside the amphitheatre was to be 160 feet in diameter with the amphitheatre and ring round, to be 10 seats high and to be covered with a roof. A promenade



to go round the entire top and four entrances to the amphitheatre 14 feet wide and the entrance to the show ring to be 12 feet wide and 10 feet high. the Secretary's and Treasurer's office to be located over the stable entrance.

All stockholders to pay their entrance fee at gate and no complimentary tickets were given. The capital stock was \$8,000.00 divided into 480 shares. 25 benches were purchased from the old Fair Company for \$5.00

The ground was covered by a heavy woods and a saw mill was set up. Mr. Carpenter was paid \$2.25 for every 1000 feet of beech lumber cut. Tom Corbin supplied 500 9-1/2 foot black locust posts at <sup>25¢</sup> each and 60 posts 17 feet long at <sup>75¢</sup> each. The grounds were cleared of bushes trees, logs and buck bushes. The lumber that went into the amphitheatre and music stand was saved on the grounds. The music stand was built in the center of the ring and was octagon shaped. The amphitheatre was located 107 feet from the outside property line. Cisterns were built. I might add here that large barrels were placed at intervals for drinking water with a spout at the bottom. As a child attending the Fair, I remember we were all supplied with collapsible tin drinking cups, which we saved from year to year for Fair use only and I well remember that the water barrels were covered with a green moss collected over the year and filled at random from any source of water that was available. ~~As~~ The water ran into our cups and was full of tadpoles and wiggle worms. This did not bother us in the least, we just stuck in our finger and took them out and drank the water. Now we would be certain we would die if this occurred.

<sup>Eighty</sup> stalls for stableling animals were built for <sup>seventy-five cents</sup> each, the lumber was on the grounds, also 14 box stalls. Those of us who remember these stalls know they were located to the right of the amphitheatre in a straight line running from the road to the back of the property. The stock gate entrance was located just in front of these stalls, across from where Mr. Sam Denham, Jr. now lives. The main gate was located across from the present Catholic Church and the pedestrian gate was located across from the Christian Church on the corner of the Union and Lexington Pikes. The first annual Fair was held September 3, 4 and 5, 1896. For this Fair Mr. J. J. Rucker was instructed to buy 9 wash pans, 3 dozen towels, 6 combs, 6 hair brushes, 6 buckets and one flag. The washpans, etc., were used in the cottage and everyone dipped the water to wash their hands and the combs and brushes were a community affair. The flag was raised over the music band stand.

Plans had been made to build a cottage and at the first Fair, both amphitheatre and cottage were unfinished but were able to be used and were finished before the coming winter.

The first day of the Fair there was a ladies' bicycle race with premiums of \$10.00 and \$5.00. the second day was a mens' bicycle race with the same size premiums. These were in addition to the regular showing of stock, floral hall, etc., Mr. Milton Goodridge who was then living in Oldham County came up each year from La Grange, Kentucky to judge the fruits and vegetable: This he continued to do each year until his death in 1929. Sometimes others would assist him. In 1914 Mrs. Rector, Mrs. Perry Allen and Mrs. Cowen had a hard time trying to decide to whom to award the blue and red ribbons. The floral Hall was built under the amphitheatre.

Admission the first year was <sup>Twenty-five cents</sup> 25¢ for adults and all over 10 years old. Under 10 years were free. 21,000 tickets were printed. Gate receipts on the first day were \$413.90, second day were \$1,187.19 and third day were \$856.10 with total receipts for the Fair \$2,457.10. Booths were built. The privilege of renting booths was auctioned to the highest bidder. R. H. (Hank) Tanner was hired as ringmaster at \$1.50 per day. How thrilling to remember Mr. Hank Tanner, tall and rawboned, announcing each entry, he stood with a large whip in his hand. He was my hero and if, as a child, I could get any recognition from him or a pat on the head, my day was complete. This sometimes occurred as he was a friend of my father who was a stockholder in the Fair. Mr. Hank Tanner continued as ringmaster until the Fair was discontinued.

Also who does not remember Albert Cleek and his mother, Ellen? These were fine colored people.

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Ellen was the matron at the cottage and received \$5.00 for 4 days work. Albert, her son was commonly called "Biscuit" and was a tall well built colored man who was everybody's friend. He stayed in the ring and held all the wild animals, When everyone else was afraid (including men) he was brave. This was before the mechanical age, everything was done with horses and mules and the type of animals that were shown at the Fair were the best and very spirited. These, "Biscuit" somehow managed to subdue. He also restored lost children to their mothers and all such sundry things.

Minutes-October 12, 1896. Permission was given to rent grounds for \$100.00 for a barbecue and political speaking. The speaker was William Jennings Bryan, known as the Silver Tongued Orator, who was running for President of the United States.

Minutes- October 30, 1896. Cottage completed and rented to Joseph Lail. At this time R.J.Perr became Secretary and J.M.Lassing became Treasurer. Mr.Tank Tanner's salary was raised to \$2.00 per day. Gatekeepers received \$1.25 and \$1.50 per day according to importance of gate. Publicity for the Fair was published in the Cincinnati Enquirer, Ohio Farmer, Commercial Tribune, Times-Star, Post, Covington Commonwealth, Cincinnati Volksblatt, Boone County Recorder Williamstown Courier, and Warsaw Independent. Fair privileges were rented out for basket room, feed room, barber shop and melon room. Also for minstrel and vaudeville shows, doll rack, African dodger. Mr.W.C.Harris came before the Fair Board and said he was due a \$4.00 gasoline stove for first prize on a quilt. Total receipts for the Fair September, 1898 were \$4,689.30. Often 10,000 people came in one day.

May 1, 1897- Premiums to be given at the Fair were- one case wine for best display of fruit, gold spectacles for display preserves, 5 pounds of gumpowder tea for display of flowers and a wood churn for display of 5 pounds of butter.

Minutes- July 31, 1897, 10 experienced policemen were hired for \$2.00 each per day, during Fair

April 2, 1898, at this <sup>time</sup> Fair was growing, 18 more sheep pens and a checkroom were built.

Minutes-August 13, 1898, Germana Medicine Company received privilege of selling medicine and running a minstrel show, Bicycle privileges were granted to Ben Osborn.

Sept. 17, 1898, The Fair Board declared a 25% dividend on stock.

April 1, 1899, Some of the premiums to be given at Fair were gold spectacles, 1 case communion wine, mahogany rocker, 1 hat or bonnet, 1 bull calf, 1 folding bed.

Aug 12, 1899-Hank Tanner's salary as ringmaster raised to \$2.50 per day. Also the Southern Railroad said they would give reduced rates for all points north of Junction City to Cincinnati for those attending Fair, and half rate on all cattle shipped which would enter the show ring at Florence.

Minutes, November 6, 1899. A suit for damages was filed by Mr.Crow of Walton for alleged false arrest made during Fair by police officers to prevent persons from gaining entrance to grounds by climbing fences. J.M.Lassing was employed to defend the suit. As this is not again mentioned in the minutes I assume it was settled out of court.

June 2, 1900. Dining Hall and Kitchen were built by Dave Brown.

July 6, 1901. At the death of R.J.Perry. Secy., Alvin Perry was elected as Secretary. The Treasurer at this time being A.M.Rouse. Mr.McGlason continued to be President. This year the Fancy Turnout was won by Mr.John Feagan, with his lady companion being Miss ~~Finch~~ Virginia Finch, now Mrs. Virginia Goodridge. Miss ~~Finch~~ Finch wore a pale blue lace and pique dress made by Mrs. Nannie Rouse, this was floor length and in Gibson girl style. She also wore a leghorn hat covered with pink roses and carried an imported lace parasol.

August 2, 1902. Tintype privileges were sold for \$10.00. Extra dividends of 10, 15 and 14% were declared on stock during these years. Again Mr.John Feagan won the Fancy Turnout with his companion again Miss ~~Finch~~ Finch. At this time she wore a white muslin dress with Valenciennes entredeux lace, a leghorn hat lined with black velvet and covered with pink ostrich plumes.

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1905 Premiums for the Roadster ring were \$100.00, \$50.00 and \$25.00 respectively.

April 7, 1906, Time was marching on. Things were changing. What had originally been called the Flying Dutchman with privileges rented for \$25.00 was now called the Merry-Go-Round and the privilege rented for \$75.00. During these years horse drawn "buses" had plied between the strain stop at Erlanger and the Fair at Florence.

In 1906 Moving pictures in tents made their appearance at the Fair. N.E. Riddell became <sup>Secretary</sup> Secy.

1908 the admission was raised to \$35¢ for adults and children 8-12 was \$25¢.

June 4, 1909. Meeting to discuss the proposed building of a street railway to be built to Florence. The Board decided to subscribe \$200.00 for this to be paid when the first car was on the line in regular schedule.

In 1911 the admission fee went back to \$30¢ for adults and children 8-12 was \$20¢

Sept. 3, 1913 <sup>U</sup> Hubert Conner became Secretary and continued in that position until the Fair was discontinued. This year they first gave recognition and premiums to the sum of \$50.00 for school exhibitions.

In 1914 Mr. W.P. Carpenter was killed with a hay fork. Mr. McGlasson had remained as President during this entire time. Plans to buy the grounds were discussed.

Sept. 1915. The Fair was reorganized and incorporated with J.E. Williams, President and Hubert Conner, Secy., and the ground on location previously rented was bought from the Carpenter Heirs. The cottage was rented to John Conner.

In 1918 Coca Cola made its appearance and paid \$550.00 for all refreshment privileges and the next year paid \$1,050.00 and also sold dinners at \$40¢ per meal.

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In 1922. S.C. Hicks became President.

June 1923. Plans were made to hold first night fair for 3 nights. H.R. Leidy wired the grounds for lights. Admission- \$50¢ for adults and \$25¢ for children.

On June 28, 1924, The Ku Klux Klan had a large meeting at the Fair Grounds. A dance hall was built, costing \$4,708.00 and the date for the opening dance was Saturday May 30, 1925, 2:30 P.M. to 11 P.M. Previously an open dance floor had been built near the Dixie Highway or Lexington Pike. Charles Carpenter was in charge of this for a time for the Fair Board and later the concession was rented to Dan Young of Erlanger.

Upon the death of S.C. Hicks. C.F. Blankenkemper was elected President.

In June 1931, J.B. Respass bought the corner lot 175 feet square on the corner of Union and Lexington Pikes for \$10,050.00.

The last Fair was held in 1932. In July 1935 the Fair Ground was <sup>sold</sup> for \$15,000.00. \$5,000.00 to be paid down and \$5,000.00 each to be paid in 1936 and 1937. After paying the first \$5,000. the buyers could not pay the balance and the Fair grounds were sold at the Court House door. The Fair Company buying back a strip of lots on the Dixie Highway. These were later sold at auction by the Fair Company, On Sept 30, 1944. With these transactions concluded, one of the most successful, interesting, educational and uplifting enterprises ever to be held in Boone County passed out of existence, but surely never out of the hearts and minds of the many who had attended during the years.

Romance blossomed at this Fair. Children got lost and also got sick from stuffing with too much popcorn, "pop", etc., At the early time of the Fair, transportation was slow, being horse drawn, but at "Fair Time", the men shined their shoes, pressed their clothes, the ladies had new dresses made that swept the ground. (I was paid \$50¢ each year by my father to shine his shoes and get his suit pressed which I, of course, did at home with an old hand iron set on the coal range in the kitchen) and I can still remember the smell of his good cigars

which he smoked only when he went to the Fair or to Bank meetings at the Erlanger Deposit Bank of which he was a Director.)

Out of the goodness of God's great abundance, people far and wide brought the best of their crops and livestock to vie with each other for those coveted blue ribbons. The ladies were up at dawn filling huge clothes baskets with fried chicken and fried apple pies, and no modern pedometer could estimate the many thousands of miles that were walked around the promenade by young and old. People of this day never see the beautiful type of horses shown then. The haughty Percherons, many of dapole gray, whose silken manes were intertwined with gorgeous ribbons, who threw their heads in disdain at mere men who came to see them, whose backs were so broad that if one were to try to ride, one's legs would have stood straight out. With the advent of the mechanical age and tractors, the horses have almost passed out of existence. Women competed in Domestic Arts, both of cookery and needlework and the beautiful satinwork embroidery of yesteryear is scarcely seen today. One of the grandest sights was when farmers would bring in their entire herds of cattle for competing. The Holstein herd of Mr. Theodore Carpenter was indeed a sight never to be forgotten. Mr. Carpenter would be assisted in the ring by his sons, Charles, John and Earl and his herd would often comprise 15 to 18 cows, together with a beautiful bull. Baby shows won great interest and in August 1914 the child of James Allen of Walton won first prize.

The Times-Star of 1914 states: "The automobile has brought the county fair within reach of hundreds of persons, who in years gone by were unable to visit the fair because the distance from home was too great. The day of the little gathering from the nearby countryside has passed, because modern progress has devised a means to overcome the difficulties of transportation. The hands across the boundaries of city and rural districts were all the firmer clasped when Mr. Cityman, surnamed Consumer, and Mr. Farmer, Also Called Producer, met at the Boone County Fair at Florence, Ky., The Florence Fair has always been the meeting ground for these two, to strengthen the bonds of friendship."

Tractors now, where once a team  
Pulled the walking plow's curved beam  
Giant power, where the strain  
Of tired muscles reaped the grain.

Motors razingg down the field  
Wrest from earth and ancient yield  
Once the fruit of sweat and toil  
Far more intimate with soil

Tractors now, slow muscles then,  
Eut the hearts of farming men.  
And their women cherish still  
Kinship with the soil they till,  
Seeing past the bright machine  
To God's gift of growing green.

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