

## WEST VIRGINIA CENTRAL AGRICULTURAL AND MECHANICAL FAIR

by Dorothy Davis

Clarksburg in the first half of the nineteenth century was a magnet for bright young lawyers probably because in 1819 the first United States Court west of the mountains was established in Clarksburg. By the middle of the century business thrived because Clarksburg was the "drain" for seven or eight inland counties. In the 1850's surveyors capped the good fortune of Clarksburg when they sent the mainline of the B&O Railroad through the town. In 1861 the U. S. Army chose Clarksburg as its supply depot and staging area for the forces who during the War Between the States would thrust forth into the mountains of Northwest Virginia.

When the war ended in 1865 some of the enterprising young men of the town decided that a move should be made to continue the bustle of the war years and to develop the land of Northcentral West Virginia. They called together a group consisting of two lawyers, three farmers, two merchants, a banker, a clerk of the U.S. Court and a machinist whose names were Caleb Boggess, Jasper Y. Moore, Washington G. Reynolds, John B. Denham, Benjamin B. Stout, Burton Despard, Luther Haymond, Richard T. Lowndes, Joseph Osborn and Thomas S. Spates. On June 29, 1867, these men decided to form a corporation by the name of West Virginia Central Agricultural and Mechanical Fair "for the purpose of promoting the agricultural and mechanical interests of said state and encouraging the growth and improvement of the stock therein, and for the purpose of acquiring real estate for Fairgrounds and buildings. The State of West Virginia granted these men a charter of incorporation on July 1, 1867. Capital stock was fixed at \$10,000 divided into shares of \$10.00 each. Each of the charter members subscribed 10 shares.<sup>1</sup>

On July 26, 1867, stockholders met at the Harrison County Courthouse, where Truman Elliott acted as temporary chairman and Richard T. Lowndes, as secretary. Incorporators announced that much of the stock had been sold and that the stockholders were present. The group listened to speeches by Nathan Goff, R. S. Northcott, Judge C. D. Camden, A. W. Woodford, Dr. William M. Late, Burton Despard, John J. Davis, Adam Bumgardner, Luther Haymond, Ira Hart and C. S. Lewis. Dr. William M. Late moved that Benjamin B. Stout, R. T. Lowndes, H. W. Woodford, James Lynch, Adam Bumgardner, Parker B. Cookman, Joseph Osborn, Truman Elliott, Elias Slocum, J. H. Woodford and Alva Teter be named to a board of directors to conduct the business of the society. The board of directors in turn elected R. T. Lowndes as president; John Bassel, secretary; Luther Haymond, treasurer and T. S. Spates, marshal. John J. Davis made a motion that T. S. Spates, Adam Bumgardner and B. B. Stout be authorized to purchase or lease property for the use of the society.<sup>2</sup>

The prime mover of the fair was Richard T. Lowndes who at the time of the first fair was twenty-four years old. He had been wise enough to call into the meeting forming the plans the older men who were the "powers" in the community so that the Agricultural and Mechanical Society would be as fail safe as possible. R. T. Lowndes, described by a speaker in 1962 as "the man who perhaps did the most to develop the business of the county."<sup>3</sup> knew that a fair, which drew in Clarksburg people from all over Central West Virginia, was an early step in building the business empire he wanted to develop.

First of all, the stockholders needed to purchase land for a fairground. The site needed to be a large tract preferably on the edge of town. The committee the stockholders elected to purchase a site for the fair decided on acreage surrounded by the bend of the West Fork River just before the stream reached the mouth of Elk Creek. The land on the east side of the Milford Road was accessible and easily reached from Clarksburg by crossing the "long" covered bridge which spanned the West Fork River near the tract. On September 18, 1867, the association purchased from George Hoffman and his wife a tract of 20 3/4 acres. The cost was \$4000, \$1500 in hand.<sup>4</sup>

Lowndes as president hit the ground running. He ordered posters 21" by 44" advertising the two-day event to be held October 21, 22, 1867, to be printed in color by the job shop of *The Baltimore Sun*, mounted on cardboard and distributed in the counties of Barbour, Doddridge, Harrison, Lewis and Upshur. For the second fair in addition to the posters Lowndes had printed a thirty-page booklet of "Regulations and List of Premiums (Schedule of Premiums Amounting to Sixteen Hundred Dollars)" carrying the By Laws of the Agricultural and Mechanical Society, general information and the classes of entries and the cost (usually \$1.00) for entering each item. Classes were: Household Goods; Grain; Vegetables; Butter, Cheese, Honey, Bread; Preserves, Canned Fruits, Pickles, etc.; Fruits; Flowers; Fine Arts; Factory Goods; Household Manufactures; Mechanical Products; Vehicles; Woodenwork; Cabinetware; Mechani-

**STOCK EXHIBITION**

The West Virginia Central Agricultural and Mechanical Society at Clarksburg

**A STOCK EXHIBITION**  
AT ITS GROUNDS  
**AT CLARKSBURG**  
MONDAY & TUESDAY  
OCTOBER 21st and 22nd 1867

SUITABLE ARRANGEMENTS FOR STOCK WILL BE MADE.

**BOOKS OF ENTRY ARE NOW OPEN**  
At the Office of the Corresponding Secretary at the Bank by Clarksburg.

**LIBERAL PREMIUMS ARE OFFERED**  
OF ALL CLASSES OF HORSES AND GREAT SPECIES OF LIVE STOCK.

Round Trip Tickets will be issued from all points on the B. & O. and N. W. Va. Rail Roads.

PREMIUM LISTS CAN BE PROCURED BY ADDRESSING THE SECRETARY.

LUTHER HAYMOND Secy. R. T. LOWNDES Pres.

Poster for the 1867 fair.<sup>5</sup>

cal Products; Animals: Swine; Poultry; Sheep (Fine Wool, Native and Middle Wool, Long-Wool, Fat); Cashmere Goats; Cattle (Durham, Devon, Ayrshire, Alderneys, Native Work Oxen, Fat); Jacks and Mules: Horses (thorough Breds, Roadsters, Draft, General Purpose, Colts; Trotters, Racers and Rackers; Walkers.)

Prices for admission were:

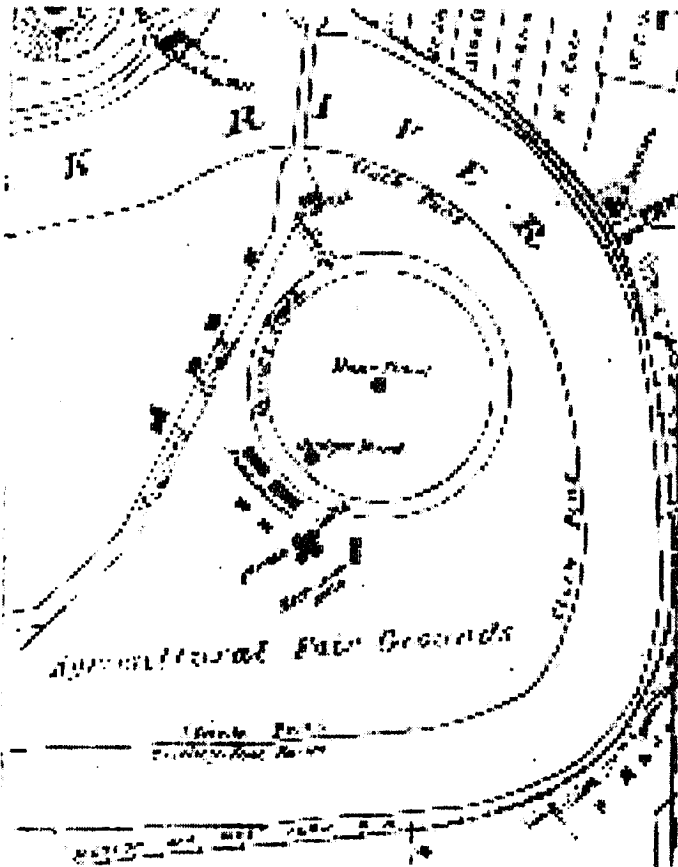
- Each person in carriage or on foot .....25 cents
- Children under 16 years of age .....15 cents
- Single horse carriage ..... 50 cents
- Two horse carriage ..... one dollar

The program for the second fair carried this:

**NOTICE TO THE PUBLIC**

Clarksburg is the county seat of Harrison County, the first grazing and stock raising county of the state. It is central in location and easy of access from all points east and west by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and its branch from Grafton to Parkersburg. The fair ground contains 20 acres of fine rolling land of great natural beauty situated on the West Fork River near the mouth of the Elk, which was many years ago the site of an Indian Fort and has on it a great natural curiosity known as the "Turkey-foot Rocks". The directors will use every effort with the means at their disposal to have the ground in the best possible condition. The grand object of the society is to spread useful information among the people, and with this object in view everyone is solicited to bring to the exhibition stock, agricultural, horticultural and mechanical products, vegetables, flowers, manufactured goods and fancy articles, anything that is interesting, curious, or worth seeing. Stockholders are entitled to many privileges not enjoyed by others and the shares of stock were placed at a very small sum (\$10 per share) so that every farmer and mechanic without inconvenience could become personally interested in its success. The subscription books are still open at the bank in Clarksburg and everyone who desires the welfare and improvement of this grazing, agricultural, and mechanical interest of the State is requested without further solicitation to become a stockholder. Remember the day, attend the fair, bring your families and we will do you good. °

Attend they did, thousands of them. After the first fair, which occurred in October, the fairs were scheduled during three days in September. The first day people brought what they wanted to enter for judges to pick the best for a blue-ribbon and a monetary award. The one exception was butter and cheese which must be on display by 9:00 a.m.



on the second day, when judges did the judging. In the program for the Third Annual fair is the statement: "A fine large exhibition hall is being erected on the grounds at a heavy cost and a Grandstand capable of accommodating 500 persons. There is ample stabling for horses and pens for cattle, sheep and hogs....Bring your wives and little ones;...Let everybody turn out and let us have a grand reunion and gala day. one of pleasure and profit to all."7 The exhibition hall "erected at a heavy cost" and called "Floral Hall" was built in the form of a cross with four ends and an entrance at each end. The shape gave adequate space for tables around the walls to display entries to be judged. Potted plants and cut flowers filled a table in the center of the building. A second exhibition building, labeled "Mechanics' Hall" contained an entry of a mechanical nature. From the start of the fairs horseracing was of importance. A race track measuring 1/3 mile could be viewed from a grandstand where an attendant collected 10 cents as each person entered. Stables and pens for animals stood along the West Fork River easily reached so that owners could parade on the race track their animals to be judged. Under the grandstand was the space, divided into booths, where vendors offered for sale many things including food and drink.

Diagram of fairgrounds showing location of buildings. 8

The programs each year told fair attendees how to know the officers:

DESIGNATION OF OFFICERS

The President .....	White Rosette or Ribbon
The Vice President .....	White Rosette or Ribbon
Treasurer .....	Yellow Rosette or Ribbon
Secretaries .....	Green Rosette or Ribbon
Chief Marshal .....	Red Rosette or Ribbon
Assistant Marshals .....	Pink Sash
Directors .....	Dark Blue Rosette
Police .....	White leather hat band with "Police" printed or written thereon.

The marshals had the responsibility of registering and handling the entries. For many years T. S. Spates served as Chief Marshal and had as help many Assistant Marshals. After four fairs R. T. Lowndes must have wanted a change for Samuel Steel took over as president of the society and R. T. Lowndes became Chief Marshal. This arrangement must not have worked well for in 1879 Lowndes again was president for two more years. By then Lowndes' way of operating must have been custom for the programs as late as 1886 followed the same form as earlier programs.

A speaker gave a rousing oration on the second afternoon. For the Third Annual Fair Alexander Martin, D.D. and president of West Virginia University gave the address. For the Fourth Fair in 1870, when the B&O Railroad agreed to carry animal entries and people bound for the fair at one-half the usual cost of a ticket, the directors took a financial plunge. They brought "Hon. Horace Greeley, editor of the *New York Tribune*, well known in the agricultural and literary works, to address the people on the second day (Thursday, September 29 of the Fair). Mr. Greeley has devoted much time and study to the agricultural interests of the United States. His address will prove highly interesting to everyone."<sup>9</sup>

Ever the businessman, Lowndes in the program for the Seventh Annual Fair gave over the page following the title page to a financial report of the fairs:

In 1873 when the fairs were fast becoming an institution and as usual the railroad sold half-price tickets at all stops between Martinsburg and Parkersburg, a Clarksburg newspaper reported: "People came from everywhere by railroad, in wagons and carriages, on horseback and on mule back and numbers came on foot. The farms and homes were deserted. Everyone in the surrounding country came."<sup>11</sup> Many people

brought picnic baskets and at noon carried the baskets to a knoll on the fairground where they spread a tablecloth on the ground under the trees and feasted on the contents of the baskets. They invited the people wandering around the picnic ground to partake of the food and if they refused to join the family from whom the invitation came, heard, "Well, then join us for dessert", whereupon the visitor feasted on the pies and cakes spread on the tablecloth.<sup>12</sup>

*West Virginia Central Agricultural and Mechanical Society, at Clarksburg.*

*An Exhibit of the Receipts and Expenditures for the Year 1872.*

Cash on hand January 1, 1872.			\$ 157 53	
Received for 9 Shares of Stock sold.			90 00	
" from Gates during Fair.	\$2,500 40			
" for Entry Fees.	125 50			
" from Eating Stands, &c.,	412 50			
" " Grand Stand.	138 50			
" " Rents of Ground during the year.	127 70			
" for Hay sold.	27 65			3,302 05
				<hr/>
				\$3,639 58
Paid Land Debt in full.	\$ 900 00			
" Improvements on Dwelling House.	185 38			
" Premiums.	\$1,209 30			
" Expenses of Fair.	815 57			
" Interest on Debt.	52 80	2,107 67		3,251 05
				<hr/>
Cash on hand January 1, 1873.				\$ 388 53

*An Exhibit of the Total Receipts and Expenditures since the organization of the Society, in 1867.*

Received for 568 Shares of Stock sold.			\$ 5,680 00
" from Gates during Fairs.	\$11,646 20		
" for Entry Fees.	800 75		
" from Eating Stands, &c.,	1,164 00		
" " Grand Stand.	636 40		
" " Rent of Grounds.	485 65		
" for Hay, &c. sold.	196 62		
			<hr/>
			\$20,909 32
Paid for Ground and Improvements.	\$10,365 09		
" Premiums.	\$ 5,422 64		
" Expenses of Fair.	4,152 69		
" Interest on Debt.	579 47	10,154 80	
			<hr/>
			20,520 79
Cash on hand January 1, 1873.			\$ 388 53
The Society is free from debt.			

Spectators in the grandstand enjoyed the humor displayed on the race track. Each year a "Mr. Mule Race" brought laughs when Mr. Mule as he reached the home stretch turned a hand spring and landed on his back in the middle of the track. One year "The Great Indian and Horse Race" was advertised in the newspaper. B. B. Stout was sent to the West to bring Indians for the race. The time for the feature arrived. The Indians marched around the racetrack led by a brass band: "Their whoops and yells were musically given and loud enough to awaken all the natives. It was both an interesting and amusing sight."<sup>13</sup> Another year spectators watched in fascination as a girl ascended skyward in a balloon, then opened a parachute and floated back to earth. Many couples who had been married during the year donned their wedding clothes and paraded around the fairground to show off their finery. Harmer reports that in 1892 the newspaper advertised that a gift of \$50 would be made to any couple who would be married on the second day of the fair. George M. Hurst and Cora B. Green of Katy Lick appeared on the second day and were united in the bonds of holy matrimony as thousands of witnesses applauded. Officials awarded the bride fifty dollars. Harry C. Morrison, Sr., told the writer of this sketch that when he was an infant, he won the prize at the fair in a contest to choose the prettiest baby.<sup>14</sup>

Criers standing on elevated platforms outside tents scattered around the fairground lured people in the throng milling around to the wonderful things inside. One tent contained an Indian woman, or someone robed in a many-colored beaded gown, who would tell one's fortune; another held a picture gallery that turned out "tintype" photographs; always there was the Punch and Judy show. Beginning in the 1890's crowds consisting of children and adults with children in their arms waited to ride the horses on the merry-go-round. Brave souls beginning in the 1890's boarded the Ferris wheel for the thrill of viewing the fairground from the heights.<sup>15</sup>

From the start of the fairs, horse racing was one of the main attractions and many people entered the grandstand at the start and never saw anything but racing at the fair. Some of the men who played a leading role in horse racing were Judge George Bennett of Weston; Col. Tom Davis of Keyser, French Hayes of Glenville, John McGraw of Grafton and A. D. Parr, William Nixon, Ross F. Stout, Elmore Willis, Abe Lowther, Charley Kimber, John Davisson, Wirt Cooper, John Ross and Wib Hursey of Harrison County. "Jim Fisk", a good pacing horse, was owned by Elmore Willis; "Mimmick", a pacing horse owned Col. Tom Davis later won a world record; "Bob Henderson" owned by William J. Nixon, was a trotting horse; "Shafer", a pacing horse, belonged to Wib Hursey; and Judge George Bennett owned and entered both trotting and running horses. When Lafe Blake announced a race from the judges' stand, he was heard above the noise and excitement. In the day before amplification of the human voice, Blake needed no boost for his voice to be heard throughout the fairground.<sup>16</sup>

According to its charter, West Virginia Central Agricultural and Mechanical Society formed to promote agriculture and the improvement of livestock. Or as stated in a newspaper in 1890: "Fairs are among the farmers' greatest educators and the exhibits found there are the object lessons that are indelibly stamped upon the minds of those who inspect them."<sup>17</sup> Perhaps it was interest created by the fairs that caused Parker B. Cookman, one of the first directors of the society, to import a Spanish Mareno ram. Other farmers imported pure-bred bulls and horses. By 1881 there were 29,000 sheep in the county; 5,238 horses; and 18,571 cattle. In 1945 Harrison County citizens owned only a total of 4,692 sheep.<sup>18</sup>

In the 1890's dissension developed between those interested in fairs with agricultural and mechanical emphasis, known as the "pumpkin growers" and those interested in racing, known as "Horse racers". On July 7, 1904, the State of West Virginia issued a certificate of incorporation to the Fairground Improvement Association in Clarksburg.<sup>19</sup> The association purchased 59 lots in what is now Nutter Fort.<sup>20</sup> Since many sources say fairs on the new fairground started in 1902 and the deed for the 59 lots refer to the land purchased as land known as "Fair Ground Addition", the association controlled by the horse racers may have rented the ground for a time before the first purchase. The association continued to purchase land at the site of the first purchase until 1918. For a few years Clarksburg hosted two fairs. 1909 is the year of the last fair on "the old fairground".

Highland interests purchased the site of "the old fair", divided it into lots and sold them off for residential property. The land now is in Stealey and is known as "Highland Park". Park Boulevard is circular because it once was the site of the race track. Fairview Avenue cuts through the center of the site of "the old fair."

#### Footnotes

1. Harvey W. Harmer, "Papers Presented at Meetings of the Fifty-Year Club, Clarksburg, WV", Vol. 1.
2. IBID.
3. Dorothy Davis, *History of Harrison County*, p. 674.
4. Harrison County, WV *Deed Book 50*, p. 261. The land, once the property of Nicholas Carpenter, was purchased in the 1850's by Edwin S. Duncan and willed at the death of Duncan to his granddaughter Flors, wife of George Hoffman.
5. Poster printed in the job shop of *The Baltimore Sun*.
6. Second Annual Fair of the West Virginia Central Agricultural and Mechanical Society.
7. Third Annual Fair.
8. Diagram of fairground showing race track and buildings, *Gray's New Map of Clarksburg*, 1879.
9. Fourth Annual Fair
10. Seventh Annual Fair.
11. *National Telegraph*, Clarksburg, WV, Sept. 23, 1873.
12. Harmer.
13. IBID.
14. Harry C. Morrison in a conversation with Dorothy Davis circa 1970.
15. Harmer.
16. IBID.
17. *Clarksburg Telegram*, August 30, 1890.
18. Harmer.
19. Harrison County, *Articles of Incorporation 3*, p. 11.
20. \_\_\_\_\_, *Deed Book 147*, p. 456.

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#### Interview

Harry C. Morrison, circa 1970.



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