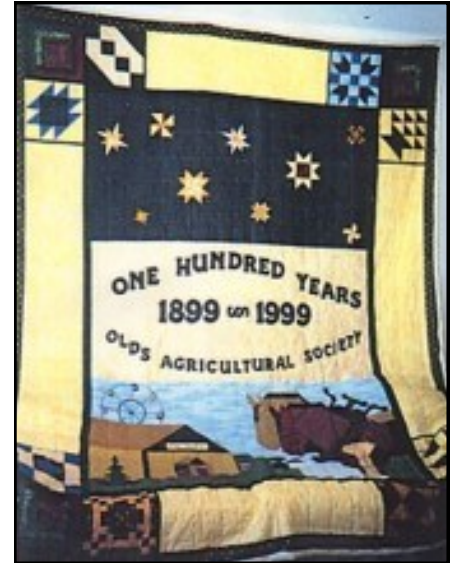


History of the Olds Agricultural Society

It is well known that town and country activities are intertwined; that city folk and country folk are involved in many of the same organizations and enjoy many of the same entertainments. For over 100 years, Olds Agricultural Society has been one of those organizations that town and country folk both participate in.

The residents of Olds held their first Bench Show in the summer of 1894, arranging their products on and about the platform of the CPR railway station. They secured samples of wheat, oats and barley, potatoes and Indian corn. Growth in the district led to an amalgamation with the Trotting Horse Association (known as the "Turf Society") and Olds Agricultural Society was finally incorporated in 1899. This was a time when the rich farming lands were undeveloped, and before Alberta became a province. The local settlers were exuberant and challenged by the new life ahead of them.



From the very beginnings of settlement, the local fair supplied stimulating competition, healthy exchanges of ideas, and simple fun. Fair time was fun time, and provided an opportunity to enjoy community spirit and initiative.

The first Bench Shows were held in October, after haying and harvesting were done. Products displayed consisted of fruits, vegetables, butter, seeds and sheaves of grain, home canning and handicrafts, and home building materials hewn from nearby forests. There was a popular class for the Best Set of Horseshoes, as there were several blacksmiths in the area. Holding the exhibits on the CPR Station Platform was a master stroke, for travellers on the newly built rail line were very interested in the variety and hardiness of area products.



The first secretary of Olds Agricultural Society was O.S. Moore, owner of the weekly newspaper, The Oracle. He was followed by Fred Shackleton, A.J. Samis, and J.P. Strong. Land was purchased for fairgrounds, and Society members removed trees and stumps, did the plowing, discing, and harrowing, and planted grasses and grain crops themselves. This land, just north of Olds where the Silverthorn development is now, was often used as experimental plots for oat and wheat varieties. Members also donated a granary shed and willow posts for fencing five of the 60 acres owned by the Agricultural Society.

In the early 1900s, the fair site was moved to a new location just slightly northwest of the present high school. Although the grandstand at that time had just been built, it was cut into two sections and moved to the new location. About 1917, the Agricultural Society acquired the acreage where the present fairgrounds are situated. A new grandstand was built that lasted until the early 1960s.

Olds Agricultural Society donated some land to the town for an ice arena (which burned down in 1978 and has been replaced with the present Olds Sports Complex). The present Curling Rink is erected on Agricultural Society property, as is the Olds Evergreen Centre and the Olds Municipal Library.

The rebuilt Cow Palace was erected in 1980 after that same devastating fire destroyed the first Cow Palace. The Olds Kiwanis Club donated profits from their Light Horse Show to build more stabling on the fairgrounds, and the Kiwanis Barn soon followed. It was moved to its present location on the south side of the fairgrounds in 1991. The Livestock Pavilion was built in 1990 to enhance the stabling requirements for the many horse shows in the area, and was renamed the Caluori Pavilion in 1999, in honour of long-time supporters, Dixie and Archie Caluori. Continuing the facilities growth and development through the 1990s, the 2000-seat covered metal Grandstand was officially opened in 1993. In answer to an ever-increasing demand for more livestock facilities, the Agricultural Society built the Stables in 1995.

The Olds Fair took on "B" fair status in 1964, and through the hard work of its members and volunteers, was accepted for "A" status in 1984. The Olds Fair & Rodeo is now known as one of only nine "Major Fairs" in Alberta, along with Calgary, Camrose, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, Lloydminster, Medicine Hat, and Red Deer.

Entertainment packages have changed through the years. The first Plowing Match was held in 1903. At that

time, the gate admission was 25 cents, with half of that going to the local Sports Committee. In 1952, the fair featured a Tractor Rodeo and Welding School, and Stock Car Racing ran for one year in 1959. Subsequent entertainers include a Gymkhana Square Dance outfit, pet shows, tractor pulls, a Motorcycle Drill Team, a parachuting club, pie eating contests, beard growing contests, and most recently, the Great Canadian Mule Races. In the 1950s, the Mayor of Olds even declared that the Friday of Fair Week would be a public holiday!

OAS has been successful in various poster, scrapbook and volunteer competitions within the Fair industry, including receiving awards at the Alberta Association of Agriculture Societies conference and the Western Canada Fairs convention. OAS retains membership in AAAS, as well as the Olds Institute for Community & Regional Development, a partnership with the four major players in our community: the Olds & District Chamber of Commerce, Olds College, Town of Olds, and OAS.

Olds Agricultural Society owns the land the Town's ball diamonds and soccer fields are on at the south end of OAS property, and donated the land the Olds Sports Complex sits on to the Town. Acknowledging our contribution to the community, the Ag Society is able to utilize various Town facilities throughout the year. We are proud to have a strong working relationship with the Town of Olds.

Olds Agricultural Society continues to strive for a balance between the educational and the entertainment features, pursuing excellence in livestock, culture and industry.

For 110 years, the foremost activity sponsored by Olds Agricultural Society was the Olds Fair & Rodeo, considered to be the primary social event of the year for the entire community. In 2010, we separated the many events traditionally held as "the fair", and introduced several new special events, creating more activities at the Exhibition Grounds throughout the year.

We host an equivalent of about 1,000 days of activity each year, including livestock shows and sales, horsemanship clinics and workshops in our riding and stabling arenas, meeting space, lots of 4-H activities, Farmers Markets, music concerts, and various events on the racetrack and infield. We are proud to offer facilities for the communities in south-central Alberta to celebrate the agriculture industry in our region.

We are very proud of the efforts of members from the past, and trust the volunteers of the present, as they plan for a very bright future in the town of Olds and Mountain View County.