

# COMING HOME TO CELEBRATE 150 Years of the Lansdowne Fair

By Lorraine Payette



In January of 1864, when a brave soul suggested that Lansdowne get an agricultural society and fair going, folks probably leaped at the chance. What better way to get everyone together to think about warm weather and all the good things to come?

William Beatty was a diarist, and the Society's first president. His diaries contain the only known information still in existence concerning the origins of the Fair.

"We know he (Beatty) attended the first meeting of the Society in Johnston's School (Rapid Valley) in January 1864, and was elected president," said William Boulton, historian and editor of the Newsletter for the Leeds and 1000 Islands Historical Society. "At this time the fair had no property of its own. The fair was held at the end of Grand Trunk Avenue, on the triangle between the railway and King Street. This was probably a busy site as it also contained Weston's Hotel, William Vanorman's store and the post office with William H. McNeil as postmaster. Cattle were tied to the railway fence (while) displays were housed in the drill shed on King Street."

This was a time when fairs were usually held in the fall to show off the harvest and all the wonderful accomplishments of the summer. However, dates could vary widely, and swung from July 11 in 1866 through September 8, 1869, going up to October 12 in 1871. Being the greatest show in town, families would save up their money in 1875 to be sure they had the admission to get in – 10 cents for all, children under 12 free of charge.

"The Agricultural Society was very proactive in promoting the improvement of agriculture," said Boulton.

It took several years and a lot of careful planning and negotiation to acquire property for permanent fairgrounds. Starting with a lease in 1874, the Society gradually purchased a few acres here, a few more there, until they finally were up to the current holdings. Buildings were designed and erected, and the track, developed.

Various groups and associations began to take an interest in the Fair. The Women's Institute and 4-H are only two among those who contributed exhibits and entries. In 1985, the Junior Fair Board came into being. Made up of members aged 11-18, they are the future of the Fair administration, participating in many important activities, including fund raising, maintenance, helping with booths and parades – almost anything involved in keeping the fair alive and vibrant.

The Lansdowne Fair has always been a chance for neighbours to get together for fun and friendly competition.

This year's theme is "150 Years – Coming Home to Celebrate". Old favourites and brand new activities are in store, including the Mini King & Queen Contest, Senior Sovereignty, Youth Ambassador Competition, Rabbit Hopping Contest, Country Costume Contest, Parade, Pancake Breakfast, Chainsaw Challenge, Antique Car Show, Horse Shoes, Pig Scramble, Milking Competition and Cow Chip Bingo. Vendors will be on hand to fulfill any need you may have, whether food, drink, or something to bring home. Old and new groups and organizations are participating, and there will be plenty of entertainment for everyone, from live shows to rides and games on the midway.

"Many well known names have played at the fair over the years, including The Carleton Show Band, Gordie Tapp, Ann Banks, Wayne Rostad, Ronnie Prophet, Gail Gavin, and many more," said Boulton. "For the past few years, Saturday evening has hosted the demolition derby."

Competition includes Commercial, Vegetable and Farm Produce, Floral, Poultry, Handicrafts, Community Service Projects, Culinary Arts, Organization/Community Group Displays, Hobby Crafts, Visual Arts, Photography, and Antiques & Collectibles. New for this year is the Lansdowne Association for Revitalization Garden Theme and Contest.

"We have a colour theme for our hanging baskets and planter boxes in the Lansdowne community," says Donna



Dempsey of LAFR. "This theme is 'Canada, Eh?' using red and white flowers. We have a summer garden contest with winners to be announced at the 150th Lansdowne Fair, July 18-20. There are also red and white themed categories in the Floral Section of the Lansdowne Fair Prize Book."

Perhaps one of the biggest attractions at the Lansdowne Fair is the horse element. There are heavy horse shows, horse pulling, horse racing, and Western horse shows, almost anything you can think of concerning horses. Local families like the Griens have been showing in Lansdowne for generations, while others come in from all over.

Last year in the Junior "Under 18" Handler division of the heavy horses, an amazing young man named Jacob Bourbonnais of Metcalfe, Ontario participated. At the ripe old age of seven years, he had been showing Percherons and competing for three years.

"Jacob is fourth generation showing Percheron horses," said Greg Bourbonnais, Jacob's father. "He was born doing it, and so was I."

Horses and handlers come in from many

Above: Jacob Bourbonnais of Metcalfe, Ontario, Junior Handler

areas, including Potsdam and other towns in New York, as well as Metcalfe and many other places in Ontario, and all were pleased with what Lansdowne had to offer. Some of the competitions available here have been said to be fuller and more varied than could be expected in many larger fairs, and may have rivalled the Ontario Winter Fair itself.

While the Fair has grown over the past century and a half, its richness and character have remained the same with new friends and neighbours coming out every year to compete and enjoy each others company. William Beatty would be proud. LH

Come out to celebrate the 150th Lansdowne Fair, July 18-20, 2014. For more information, please go to [www.lansdownefair.ca](http://www.lansdownefair.ca) or contact them at 613-659-2124 or [lasinfo@1000island.net](mailto:lasinfo@1000island.net).