

History of the Yakima Valley Fair and Rodeo

*this section is from History of Festival-Fair, a Community Success Story by Don Fortune

Cal Coolidge was president – Roland Hartley governor in Olympia and C.A. (Charley) Miller was mayor of Grandview. The year was 1927. It saw the coming out of Henry Ford's sensational new Model "A" and of Grandview's very first harvest Festival, which enjoyed a two day run on September 7 and 8. According to "The History of Grandview", "This event included needlework, advertising booths and local midway attractions. A queen contest resulted in Miss Esther Bohlke being chosen Queen of the Harvest Festival. The best of the exhibits were sent to the Yakima State Fair and a number of premiums were won by them."

One founding feature of the fair was the "Team Pull", which event was continued under the direction of Howard Jackson through 1986. It was a real crowd pleaser. Howard described that original event to me this way, "We obtained 4,000 pounds of sand for that first pull, and we had to pinch-hit by adding a number of 150 pound men when the teams continued past the two tons of sand. The contest was finally won by Frank Lyall at 5,500 to 6,000 pounds" Howard used a Rudy Vallee type megaphone to call the scores, but didn't croon any, as I remember. That first pull was held where John Sullivan's TV Emporium now stands. (Which is where Northwest Wine Country Real Estate is in 2017). Later they were held in the business district wherever there was a vacant lot or two to provide space.

In early years, and up until 1948, canvas – covered booths were set solid down Division Street between Main and Second Streets. As the festival was held as late as the "Ides of September", there was much more fruit and farm produce to display. Vacant buildings were pressed into service for various exhibits.

During the second festival Otto Ragsdale won the team pull, hauling 6,00 pounds. Miss Audry Blechschmidt was chosen queen of the event.

The fourth fair in 1931 featured a baby clinic. No festival took place in 1934 due to a severe polio epidemic in the valley. The famous Bagpiper's Band from Vancouver, B.C. marched and skirled and wailed and flaunted their "mini-kilts" during the parade of the celebration. (this band is still in existence in 2017) Governor Arthur Langlie address the crowd in 1941.

The fair was again cancelled during 1943 and '44 due to other press business in WWII. But in 1945 a new feature was added by Byron Vance and Col. Evan Jenkins, who managed and auctioned a combined 4-H and FFA Fat Stock Sale. Thirty-three head of steers, hogs and lambs were sold for a total of \$2640. The Grand Champion Steer was sold for 30 cents per pound and the top hog for 31 cents toth to Grandview Packing Company.

Upon interview bob Hamilton, who personally ran the last Harvest Festival up Division Street in 1947, and got rained out to boot, I learned how seriously the managers took their responsibilities. He said, "I set my water on every other row of corn at home and couldn't get

loose to change it for a week. People told me that it would be ruined, but the ears got so big that the picker couldn't handle them." He further indicated to me that he had more corn off an acre and a half than he could get into two heaps, and that's pure corn!

Festival Moves

In 1948 stock sheds were built and a concrete floor was poured for a display building in Grandview's city-owned park. The harvest Festival left its "home" and a lot of fond memories down Division Street as it moved to its present location in that year. (Historical note: the location was where the YVC Grandview Campus is now). A "golden" Packard was given away at the same event.

In 1950 a Truck Rodeo was held. It included backing and jockeying trucks and semis around a certain fixed course – sort of like pole bending – only with a six-legged horse.

The revered harvest Festival name was changed to Yakima Valley Junior Fair in 1951 as more and more 4-H and FFA youth participated.

The senior Home Economics Building was added to the Ball park – Fairgrounds in 1954, and in '55 a 125 head capacity cattle building was constructed at a materials cost of \$5,000 (Note: this building now stands on the new fair grounds as the Dybdahl Building. Labor was donated. In 1956 Grandview's Golden Anniversary was celebrated at the fair.

The highlight of 1959 was the construction of the new Quonset Home Economics building. (Note during the fair move it was sold, disassembled and re-assembled just off the Gibbons exit on I-82). More buildings were added in '64 and the barns were re-roofed by FFA boys in early 1971.

This section was written by Ray Vining

In order to make room for the YVC Grandview Campus, the City of Grandview made room for the fair on its present site at the Country Park. In 1987 preparation of the new site began, irrigation was installed, grass planted, phone lines installed. After the 1988 fair the fair board sold at the assets it could. The Dybdahl building was moved to the new site. The cyclone fence was removed from the old site and re-built on the new. Kieth Jones became the fair's benefactor by donating the funds to build our first exhibit building. He then came out and worked to help erect the building. During all the construction at the new grounds the Lower Valley community came together as a wonderful volunteer work force. The names of many of the volunteers are on display in the Jones building.

When the gates to the 1989 fair opened there was a livestock office, livestock scales, new dairy barn, beef barn and sheep barn. The impossible job of moving the fair was accomplished.

In 1990 from funds donated by the former Valley Trade Fair, the Bevans building was built. Again all the work was donated. The Drollinger family (Valley Readymix) has donated most of the concrete on the fair grounds. A swine barn was constructed and ready for the fair. It is now the Bos building.

When the Fair President, Ray Vining, was asked what had been accomplished, he said "The fair board has been the conduit for communities love and efforts to build a monument to it's self and it's youth. The Fair Board re-built a bigger and better facility and did it with funds donated by community members, it was built with the most powerful of all things, love!

TimeLine

- 1927 The First fair was canvas covered booths lined the streets of Grandview became known as the Grandview Harvest Festival.
Newhouse Brothers showed Dairy animals. Calvin Coolidge was President. A founding feature of the Harvest Festival was
The team pull organized by Howard Jackson. Frank Lyall was the first winner on the streets of Grandview with 4000 lbs. of sand being pulled by beautiful teams of horses.
- 1931 A baby clinic was featured, where men participated in diaper changing contest. Along with pie baking contest and food preparation demonstrations.
- 1934 Fair was canceled because of the polio epidemic.
- 1939 Governor Clarence Martin attended the celebration.
- 1941 Governor Arthur Langley joined in celebrating the Harvest Festival.
- 1943-1944 Fair was canceled because of World War II.
- 1945 First Livestock Auction took place with 33 head of steers, swine & lambs bringing in \$2640.00. Bryon Vance, Col. Evan Jenkins and the Grandview Pack were the main contributors
- 1946 Keith and Peggy Jones started a 4-H club named the Grandview Livestock 4-H. Bob Fay 1st year of showing.
- 1947 Ray Vining's 1st year attending the fair. Bob Hamilton was in charge of the Harvest Festival.
- 1948 The fair was built on what is now the Yakima Valley College property. Paul Creighton Sr. was Fair Manager. Keith, Gordon, Forest, Robert, Florence & Dale Jones were instrumental in the move, to the new site.
- 1950 A truck rodeo was added.
- 1951 Named was changed to Yakima Valley Junior Fair.
- 1952 Green Valley 4-H Livestock was started. Irving Newhouse & Simon Martinez leaders. The Waneta 4-H livestock was headed up by Don McArthur, Stitch & Stir 4-H. Leaders was Karma Richards Frank, Also the Grandview Electric club, headed by Irl Grove was organized and had a display at the fair.
- 1954 The Home Economics building built Quonset Hut, with Clarice Grove and Marijean Kluth in charge of Home Economics Division.
- 1955 The beef barn was added for the livestock all by volunteer labor.
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- 1956 Peggy Jones started the Horse show at the Yakima Valley Junior Fair. Peggy's 4-H club was the Rope & Rein club. Two members that we remember were Judy Borchardt & Heidi Howard.
Marie Combelic was Assistant Superintendent of horticulture bldg and Gladys Wolf was Superintendent. These ladies were followed by Don Olmstead and Willard Mears.
Roger Grove exhibited from 1956-1967, Neil Combelic showed livestock as well as along with Dolores and Mike Martinez. Cathy Combelic showed swine. Cathy also went to Chicago for her knowledge of horticulture and was on the state judging team. She won a National Horticulture Scholarship.
- 1960 Barbara Mandrel country western singer, performed two nights to sold out crowds. Courtesy of Dr. Jim Long, President of the fair board.
Teenage 4-H builders club was organized by Karma Richards Frank and Gordan & Laura Jones.

- 1970 The Wenatchee Youth Circus performed. The Columbia Drum and Bugle Corps performed. Joanne Partch 4-H leader lead Outlook Pork Producers to numerous awards, during the fair. Joe and Linda Mehrer were sheep superintendents, Dale and Barbara Miller were livestock superintendents. Elmer and Henry Anderson, Orrin Dybdahl, Alex, John and Hubert Benjert, Ed Williams and Danny Jones were all involved.
- 1976-1979 Gail Boose was the Director of Open Classes Home Ec. Department, Karma Frank was chair of the Sewing Department
- 1981-1982 Colleen Russell was the sheep judge
- 1986 Howard Jackson retired from the Team Pull
- 1987-1990 Ray Vining President
- 1987 Ray Vining Leases the entire future site of the Country Park and National Guard armory, so that the option to build the fairground was not delayed. Jesse Placios, John Alba, and Cliff Vining laid the irrigation pipe for the new grounds. Cliff Vining and Ray removed the cyclone fencing from the old fairgrounds and with the help of volunteers erected it on the new site. Cliff Vining and Ray remove the corrals from the former Grandview Packing Company for use in building the new riding arena. According to Mayor Carl Stevens these 3x12 cedar planks had been used in constructing the original Yellowstone road through Grandview.
- 1988 Decision was made to move the fair to 20 acres on Wallace Way. The City of Grandview provide the infra structure improvements so that power and water was available to each building. Simplot Soil Builders donated funds to build the livestock office. Keith Jones donated the funds to build the Jones building in honor of his wife, Peggy. Bleyhl Farm Service donated numerous trophy's and awards through the years. The first fair on Grandview Country Park Grounds. Henry Charvet donated a crew to erect new cyclone fencing to finish enclosing the grounds. The "Beef Barn", the steel Butler building is the only building moved from the old to the new fairgrounds. The move was engineered by Wayne Sylling. Wayne and Ray Vining poured the footings and set the bolts to lower the building onto. The scales from the old grounds were moved and installed.
- 1989 Board Members called in every favor that was owed them to prepare the fairgrounds for the August fair. Henry and Hal Charvet, John Alba, Gary Christianson, Phil & Alice Grant, Ann & Don Bentley, Gaye and Peggy Brewer, Mike Carpenter, Sharon & Ben Fisher, Volunteered to get the grounds ready. Phil & Brenda Freepons black topped north of the livestock barns.
- 1990 As a Boy Scout Eagle Project, John Davidson designed and built the large animal wash rack. Kelly Coursey spearheaded the construction of the riding arena. Cliff Vining headed up the maintenance of the Lions Building. A Scout Service project was to lay sod in the amphitheater and plant trees on the grounds. The Pomona Grange donated all the trees for the grounds. Ray Vining furnished cages that he refurbished for the small animal building.

The small animal building was funded by valley 4-H clubs.

- 1991-1992 Pat Stegeman took over as president.
- 1993-1994 Vernon Bos President
- 1995- Pat Stegeman President

- 2001 The Pro West Rodeo was added to the fair and name changed to Yakima Valley Fair and Rodeo. Ben and Sharon Fisher headed up this endeavor. The wild cow milking contest added to the rodeo in memory of Vernon Bos. Renovations to the swing building wer completed.
- 2003-2010 Mike Bradshaw president of fair board.
- 2003? The Car show as added to the fair.
- 2007 The Yakima Valley Fair and Rodeo foundation was formed as a 501 3c. The founding members were Martina Martinez Charvet, Cathy Combelic Mears, Willard Mears, and Karma Richards Frank. Later joined by Carol Box, Gail Boose, Barb merz, Joanne Vining, Jake Van Pelt, Dustin Tobin, Jessica Hansen, Elizabeth Osborn. In 2014 Junior members were added Erik Van Dyke, Hannah Bos, Quinn Yates, Amariah Osborn and Amarisa Osborn. Mike Everett was instrumental in the administration of the 501 3c. The first foundation project was the purchase of American swath flags for the buildings.
- 2009 Pathway construction started with financial help from Pacific Steel, The City of Grandview and the YVFR Foundation.. The completed pathway went all the way to the rodeo arena in 2010.
- 2010 Foundation started the Decorated Animal contest as a means to advertise the fair. It was well received. The contest won the State Award fofrom the Washington State Fair Association. New Scales for livestock were purchased and installed.
- 2011 Paul Greighton writes "Fairs Are Fun" and donates his earnings to the Foundation from the sale of his book. The Foundation started replacing bleachers for the rodeo arena. 2 sections in 2012, 3 sections courtesy of the Employees of J.M. Smucker Company. 2 sections completed in 2014
- 2011-2013 Becky Loyd was fir Board President
- 2013 Yvonne Graham became fair board president.
- 2014 Grandview FFA made metal signs for livestock buildings. Mazy the Clown started entertaining the children
- 2015 Small Animal Barn was refurbished by Elizabeth Emery Osborn and volunteers.

- 2016 Mathew Humphries as an Eagle Scout Project build a display to honor Team Pull organizer Howard Jackson.
Fair board purchased property north of the fairgrounds,, and covered the open ditch.
Fireworks were added tot he Saturday night at the fair, after the rodeo. They were provided by Milt Brown.
Exhibitors enjoyed an evening in the Mud after the fireworks.
The fair had 543 exhibitors.
- 2017 Lucy Desserault was the FFA Round Robin Winner and recipient of the Vernon Bos Award.
The Bleacher project was completed . Volunteers included: Ray Vining, Gary Rhode, Henry and Martina Charvet, Eddie McMahon, Joanne Vining, Carol Bos, Rose Tayon, Randy Tayon, Cliff Vining, Bob Fay, Ruben Carrera, Willard Mears, Grandview FFA students.
Remodeled bathroom in the Horticulture building.
- 2020 The show building; A few 4-H members wanted a second show arena to speed things up when it was hot so they wouldn't have to wait their turn in the heat. To show how much it was needed they donated their livestock returns toward cost of new building. After due consideration The board decided to raise enough money to build a large building to house and show large animals. The new building emphasizes safety for both kids and animals. With 12 year old kids showing 1200 pound steers there was too much room for error and accidents moving animals to show and sales arena. With the help of Senator Honeyford and Representative DuFault we received grant from the Department of Commerce for \$200,000. We raised over \$50,000 locally to got with that to get the initial 84 X 110 ft. building constructed. Now (2021) we are raising funds for all the amenities needed. This is an all steel structure with no inside posts. It is modular so can be added onto as needed