

Carroll Yesteryears

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Carroll County 4-H Fair has Deep Roots in Taneytown

By David Buie

With the recent conclusion of the Carroll County 4-H and FFA Fair, memories are still fresh with both attendees and participants. However, few remember the years when the fair was held outside of Westminster, and even fewer have written about Taneytown's long-standing association with the event.

From September 28 to October 1, 1869, the Carroll County Agricultural Society held its First Annual Exhibition at the newly erected fairgrounds on the eastern edge of Westminster. The 30-acre site included sheds to house animals, an exhibition building, a grandstand, and a half-mile racecourse. The Agricultural Society invited "the exhibition of any and everything that may be useful or convenient in the business of Agriculture or Horticulture." One newspaper reported, "In the Miscellaneous Department, nearly everything known is represented, such as canned fruit, soap, cigars, and tobacco, grease for wheels, stump pullers, robes, window curtains, bonnets and hats, phosphates, guanos, &c." Just as today, the items on display were judged and prizes awarded.

The newly arrived Western Maryland Railroad helped bring in thousands of visitors each day to enjoy concerts, exhibits, and especially horse racing. The latter was always a big money-maker for the Agricultural Society, which had purchased the land and erected the buildings. Admission was fifty cents a day or \$1.00 for a four-day pass.

According to *The Carroll County Fair 1897-1997: Celebrating 100 Years*, published by the Carroll County 4-H & FFA Fair Board in 1997, the next major attempt at a local agricultural fair began with efforts by the Copperville Farmers Club and Taneytown Grange #184 to hold a picnic, other festivities, and an "educational day for farmers" at Goulden's Grove outside Taneytown between 1897 and 1903. During these years, the fair began as an annual picnic at the Otterdale Schoolhouse, which had been traditional. Around the turn of the century, a morning parade led by the Taneytown Band kicked off the Goulden's Grove event followed by prayer and music before lunch.

In the afternoon, Maryland Agriculture Institute speakers were invited to address the crowd and update the farmers on their new organization. A committee decided the event would continue annually. On July 29, 1899, about 2,000 attended, and a "WELCOME" arch was erected at the approach, which remained a tradition at the fair entrance for years to come. The single-day event once attracted 4,000 people.

In 1904, the fair was moved to Ohler's Grove immediately south of Taneytown between Route 194 and Crouse Mill Road. This site allowed visitors to come by train, car, buggy, or on foot. In addition, dealers in large agricultural machinery could bring their goods by rail. Between 1904 and 1922, the fair expanded from one day to four, and the organizers erected permanent buildings. By 1911 the event was billed as the Maryland State Grange Fair, promising

educational lectures for farmers as well as entertainment, food, political speeches, and opportunities to win prizes for what was exhibited. Attendance one day in 1914 reached 14,000.

Other agricultural fairs were held around the county during the summer months in the early 1900s, but the one at Ohler's Grove was likely the largest. However, by 1922, that location proved too small, so a 141-acre tract on the eastern edge of Taneytown near the present-day traffic circle became the next home of the Carroll County Fair. Like the 1869 fairground in Westminster, the Taneytown site included exhibition buildings, livestock barns, and a racetrack.

During the "Taneytown" years, much emphasis was put on growth from facilities and exhibits to entertainment and horse racing, but 1923-1946 proved difficult years for many, and extra money to attend was scarce. Even with the admission price lowered and generous allocations from the Maryland State Fair Board, saving the fair was tough. There was no fair during 1943-1945 when America was in the middle of World War II. In 1946, the Taneytown property was sold, and the Carroll County Fair Association held its last fair.

In 1954, the fair moved to its present Carroll County Agriculture Center location in Westminster. As more and more young people involved with 4-H and FFA [Future Farmers of America] began participating, the multi-day event has become known as the Carroll County 4-H and FFA Fair.

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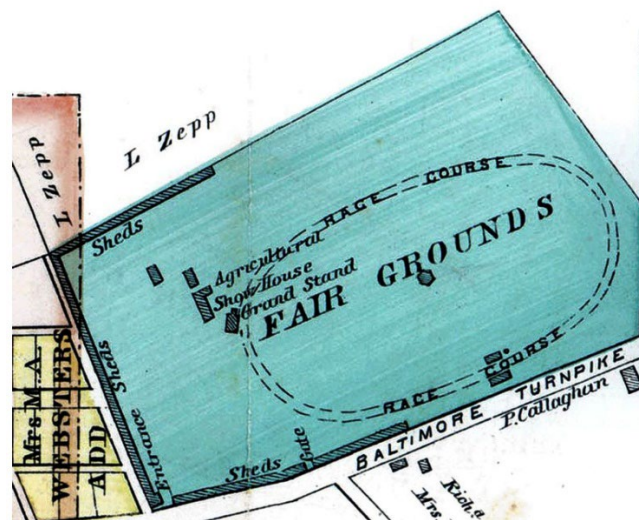


Photo Caption #1: This detail from an 1877 map of Westminster shows the fairgrounds built in 1869 for Carroll County's first agricultural fair. Today the site is home to businesses near the intersection of Routes 140 and 97 including those in the Fairground Village Shopping Center. (Source: Illustrated Atlas of Carroll County, Maryland, 1877 published by Lake, Griffing & Stevenson).



Photo Caption #2: Photo taken in the mid-20th century. The building once served as the entrance to the County Fair when it was held in Taneytown. (Source: Carroll County Times)