

Carroll Yesteryears  
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## Dating to 1869, Carroll County Fairs Have Been Big Draws in Various Locales By Mary Ann Ashcraft

Since 1869, Carroll County residents have enjoyed local agricultural fairs although the names and locations have changed over the years. Why shouldn't an area which sent flour ground from homegrown wheat to feed Washington's troops during the American Revolution celebrate its rich agricultural heritage.

From September 28 to October 1, 1869, the Carroll County Agricultural Society held its First Annual Exhibition at 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 race course. 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-established 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.

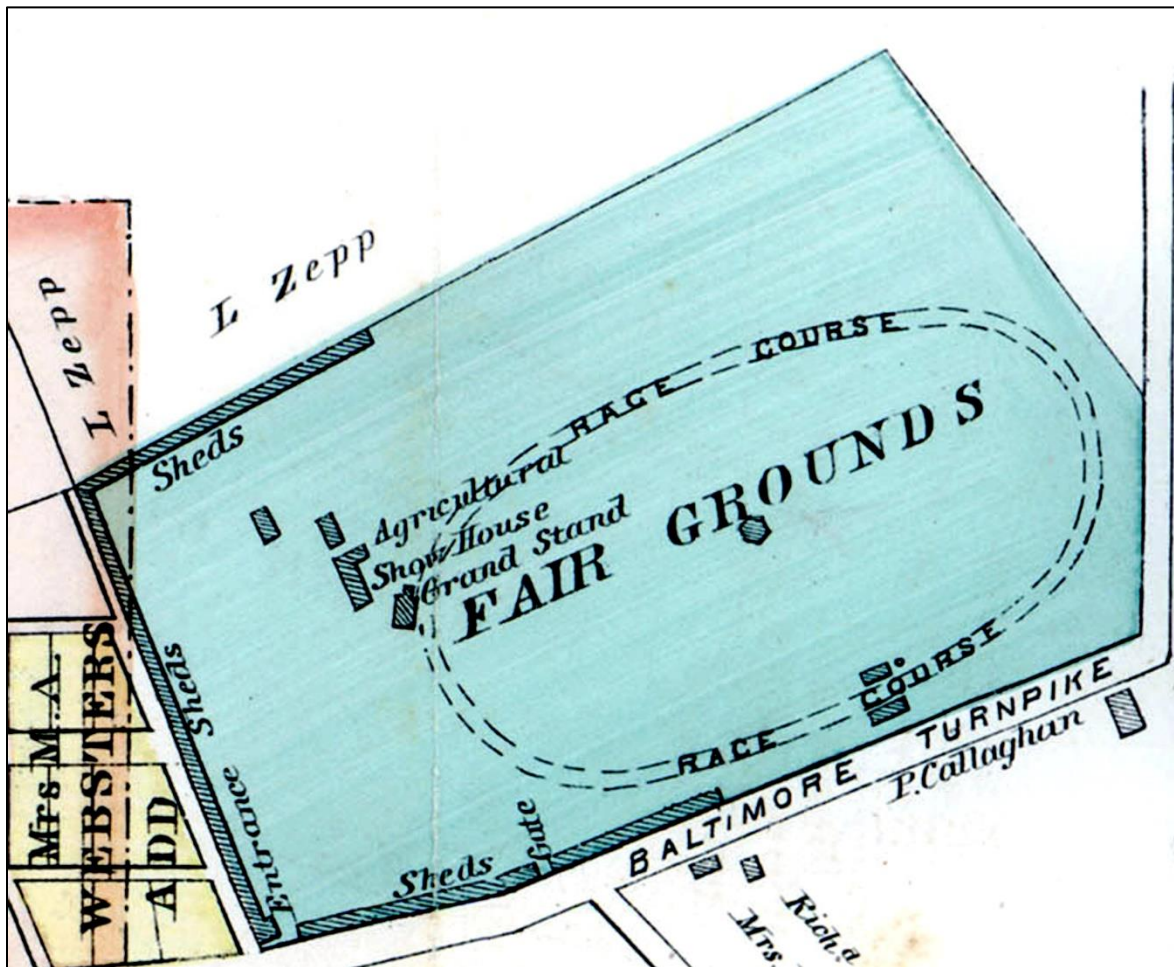
According to *The Carroll County Fair 1897-1997: Celebrating 100 Years*, published by the Carroll County 4-H & FFA Fair Board in 1997, the next major attempt at a local agricultural fair began with efforts by the Copperville Farmers Club and Taneytown Grange #184 to hold a picnic, other festivities, and an "educational day for farmers" at Goulden's Grove outside Taneytown between 1897 and 1903. 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. Dealers in large agricultural machinery could bring their goods by rail. Between 1904 and 1922, the fair expanded in that location from one day to four and the organizers erected permanent buildings. By 1911 the event was billed as the Maryland State Grange Fair, promising not only educational lectures for farmers but also entertainment, food, political speeches, and opportunities to win prizes for what was exhibited. Attendance one day in 1914 reached 14,000.

Apparently 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. 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 fairgrounds in Westminster, the Taneytown site included exhibition buildings, livestock barns, and a racetrack. Fairgoers also enjoyed plenty of elaborate entertainment.

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.

*Mary Ann Ashcraft is a library volunteer at the Historical Society of Carroll County.*



*Image credit: Illustrated Atlas of Carroll County, Maryland, 1877 published by Lake, Griffing & Stevenson.*

*Image caption: 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.*