

INCORPORATION SEEN KEY FACTOR IN FUTURE PROGRESS OF BELMONT

The Village of Belmont entered a new era on Jan. 1, 1961.

It was the day an incorporation order granted by the Ontario Municipal Board took effect-giving Belmont a promise of bigger and better things to come under the new administration of a reeve and four councilors. Until this year, the community had been part of South Dorchester Township, its affairs administered by a board of trustees.

The people of Belmont feel incorporation should help pave the way toward expansion in many phases of community life. And events of 1960 indicate that a boom may be on the way-particularly in housing and commercial fields.

Plans for a 75-home subdivision for Belmont are well underway. The subdivision, being developed by Roberts Brothers Contractors, of London, is located near the Belmont arena.

Arthur W. Roberts, partner in the contracting firm, said construction of the first homes should start this spring, once the details of storm sewer installations are ironed out.

The same company constructed several of the dozen new homes built in various sections of the village in 1960, and last December finished work on a Belmont branch for the Marlett Fuel and Supply Company, St. Thomas.

The new outlet, located on Glanworth road, features about 4,000 square feet of office, storage and sales area in two separate buildings.

At the northern approach to Belmont, Duncan Transport completed construction of a large building last December.

Belmont's industrial growth is steady. Last year saw establishment of a new company manufacturing mobile homes and further developments in the continuing expansion program at the big Borden Company, Limited plant.

The new firm, Globe Trotter Limited, turned out its first mobile home last April and is now manufacturing units at a two-a-day pace. About a dozen men are employed in the company's 40 x 130 foot concrete block building on the main street.

Borden's extended \$650,000 expansion program in their Belmont ice cream plant was completed last June, making the building one of the largest ice cream plants in Canada.

A one-room school on the outskirts of the village was completed in time for the 1960 fall term. The \$31,500 St. Kevin's Separate School was constructed by Economy Construction Company, Tillsonburg.

" C E N T E N N I A L "

THE AGRICULTURAL SOCIETIES AND FAIRS

The year 1854 was a long time ago - 103 years were to pass before the Yarmouth and Belmont Agricultural Society was to celebrate its Centennial. The Yarmouth Society and Belmont Fair were for many years separate organizations before official merger in 1921. Our present claim to antiquity is not necessarily based on the age of our local fair but on the age of the older member of our organization.

The YARMOUTH AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY

There is Departmental Record that in the year 1854 the Yarmouth Township Agricultural Society existed and may have been functioning prior to that time. The society had 134 members but appeared to be more interested in maintaining pure bred sires than in holding an exhibition or fair. In those days each county had a Society, then Township Societies were formed. Government grants were paid to the county who distributed the money to the townships. Their original purpose was the improvement of livestock-cattle, sheep and pigs. Success attended them and by about 1860 many societies began to hold Fairs to exhibit this fine stock they had produced. Fair day was Achievement Day-a public demonstration and competition. The exhibits told their story and trade was stimulated. Ideas were exchanged. The fair goers derived much practical benefit as well as having an opportunity to enjoy themselves and meet their friends. Through the years this has been true and people hold fast to this old institution which links the Present with the Past.

The Canadian Home Journal of Thursday, October 5, 1865, relates that the "Fall Exhibition of the Township of Yarmouth was held at Sparta. The day was delightfully favourable and never before had been seen so large a gathering of people in this Township. They had come to see for themselves such evidence of the prosperity and agricultural enterprise of the farmers of this rich Township as the Exhibition could afford." It was a wonderful fair and not the first to be held. The prize list was amazing in its many classes for horses, cattle, sheep, hogs, poultry, grain, roots and vegetables. The Dairy and Domestic gave prizes for butter, cheese, maple sugar, linen yarn, horse blankets, carpet, sewing, knitting, wax fruit and feather flowers. Even in the prize results in this class the men were given all the credit! while in the Mechanical Class entries were made for machinery, harness, corn brooms and ox yokes.

We wonder how the prize winners felt when they read this notice on the next page of the Journal. "We are requested by the Secretary of the Yarmouth Agricultural Society to state, that owing to not having received the Government grant yet, he is not able to appoint the day for the distribution of prize money, but notice will be given at an early day through the columns of this paper".

The Yarmouth Fair is heard of next at Yarmouth Centre. Mrs. Neva Pearce recalls her mother telling her that she won first prize on two loaves of bread at this fair in 1867 when she was 17.

Mr. Andrew Mills, St. Thomas, and Mr. Alfred Buck, Yarmouth, recall vividly the Yarmouth Centre Fairs and Mr. Mills estimates they were held here for maybe 25 years. The Fair was held about September 1. The grounds were 20 to 30 rods north of Talbot St. on the west side of the road, and behind the present Yarmouth Centre Church. The Crystal Palace was a frame building where the exhibits were displayed-fine needlework, knitting quilts, mats, butter, homemade cheese, "lovely apples", also cattle, sheep and hogs. Mr. Buck recalls vividly "a side show fellow" and the candy man from Port Stanley who made pull taffy on the spot. He recalls how the McIntyre girls, Isabelle (later Mrs. Buck) and her sister, when about 16 and 15 in 1876, used to walk from their home west of St. James' Church to the Fair, resting midway at their sister's near the Glen School.

Mr. Mill says it was quite a Fair for those days. Recalling the race track, he says the main attraction for years was the famous Russ twins, Orrin and Warren, who hailed from Russ's Corners. They were identical. They drove a spanking outfit, a team of dapple greys as alike as they were, hitched to a white geared buggy with a black box. The twins, full bearded at 25, wore white shirts, white pants, white plug hats and black Prince Albert coats and always "stole the show". They went to all the fairs (including Belmont) and always won first prize for fancy carriage turnout. Whether the men or the horses actually won no one knew. This was in the 1870's and 80's.

Mrs. Pearce recalls the father-in-law of Dr. George Martlatt (Belmont doctor), showing apples at Yarmouth Centre Fair and being unable to give her one because he had to take them to Belmont Fair (1879).

The Yarmouth Centre event was a one-day fair. Mr. Buck described the fairs as an encouragement to farmers to do better farming. The prizes were not large and at last it petered out, due also to its nearness to St. Thomas, which had had fairs since the middle of the century.

The ST. THOMAS FAIR was first called the East Elgin Riding Society Fair and then the East Elgin Show. We are told they had a "real show" in 1866 but by 1872 it was losing in attendance and entries while the West Elgin Fair at Wallacetown was attracting thousands to its horse show. Later it was the "Southern Counties Fair", and in 1881 was "more successful than usual". The Fair ran a week; 10,000 came and "the stables were soon packed full of teams". The Lieut. Governor was there too, having come in on the new Credit Valley Railway which he described as "a band of iron between Toronto and St. Thomas".

This was an annual Fair but we are told that it gave up due to bad weather and small attendance and could not pay the prize money. It was revived and is recalled by William Mathews and Archie Coulter (about 1897), the latter describing it as "a carnival type of fair". It also petered out on account of wet weather and lack of interest by St. Thomas people. It is believed by some that St. Thomas and Yarmouth joined in this fair and it might be, for Mr. Wm. Wickett, a bachelor lawyer, was secretary of both groups about 1895. The fairs were held on the site of the Elmdale Memorial Park Cemetery.

From here on we know nothing of the activities of the Yarmouth Agricultural Society. They had been included in the Departmental Annual Reports (Toronto) from 1854 until 1906 and Mr. W. G. Sanders was secretary from 1897 to 1906. He lived south of Yarmouth Centre on a farm now owned by his grandson, Dr. Penhale, and was a good farmer, and later Reeve of Yarmouth. He was well known locally and showed cattle at Belmont Fair. His daughter, Mrs. Neva Pearce, recalls the two Agricultural Society books but can tell us nothing of its later activities prior to 1906. It disappeared from the Department Records September 1, 1906 with 176 members and a grant of \$64.

THE BELMONT FAIRS

Prior to 1921 no report of Belmont Fair ever had appeared in Departmental Records nor had it qualified for grants. Perhaps this was because it was not a township society but was sponsored locally, drawing its support from the village and the townships which surrounded it. However we know that its Fair dates back well over 80 years.

The first fairs were held in the creek flats just east of the Waterworks on the property of Lewis Simpson, who came to Belmont in 1863 and lived where Beatrice Harkness lives. He too is one of Belmont's founders. Fred Yorke recalls attending the fair here as a boy with his father, where he was impressed by the plows. He tells us the "Crystal Palace" was the Masonic Hall which then sat north of his present home.

Hector Stewart vividly recalls these fairs and tells how Mr. Simpson used to bring his pet deer to show the children. The "greasy poles" also provided entertainment. Exhibits included pigs, horses, cattle and sheep, some horses coming from St. Thomas and London. The race track was small, four times around for a half mile, but the races were good and Randall Learn (lived where Tom Knott did) taught his horse "Gold Ring" to go around the track alone. But the grounds were too small and the fairs were given up. For a few years Belmont was without a fair and then the fairs began again on property owned by Merritt Willsie, formerly owned by another of Belmont's founders, Tom Nugent. It was held in the field south and east of where Alvin Willsie lives to-day. This was probably in the early eighties. It was started by Richard Tooley who was its first President and it was called "Tooley's Fair". Mr. Tooley, a prosperous farmer and landowner, settled on Concession 6, N.D. in 1855 and lived where Ed. Birchmore is now. He was Warden in 1870 and represented the Riding of East Middlesex as Conservative Member in the Ontario Assembly from 1871 to 1892.

There were good exhibits of livestock tied outside. There were no tents, and no special amusements recalled. The other exhibits were displayed on shelves in the round roofed roller skating rink, on Union Street, built by Robert and John McPherson. Fair dances were also held here. Hector Stewart helped to build the race track. The fence was moved out 6 feet toward the road to make more room and is still there. Mr. Kilbourne rode horses and Charles Kennedy and John Charles were leaders. Several recall attending fairs here until about 1892.

But one must not forget the Cattle Fairs which contributed so largely to the community prosperity. These were Spring Fairs but records also tell us they were held every Wednesday during April, June, September and November. Drovers of livestock were brought in by the farmers of the district and farmers, drovers and butchers came to buy. They were sold in the street and in the hotel yards of Cramer and Charles. Many head of cattle, sheep and horses changed hands.

H. G. Taylor also recalls when the cattle were exhibited before being sold and this was around the Bank corner where the beasts were confined by rail fences. John Ferguson, as a small boy, helped to drive cattle to these fairs and they are also remembered by Fred Yorke and Wm. Falls.

But to return to the Fall Fairs where the accent was on horses rather than cattle. It was time for the fair to move again and this time it went over to the Cline property, lot 1, concession 7, Westminster, which was once owned by Belmont's original founder, Joshua Odell. (The grounds were just west of Alex. Armstrong's house and ran back nearly to Leo Coventry's). The horse entrance was off the 7th and the walking entrance by Marsh Collard's house and for years he tended the gate. There was a good track and a judges' stand and small grandstand in the southwest corner. Exhibits were housed in tents with the animals outside. The horses were the big attraction and people, including women and children, would spend hours looking at them, for this was also "Improvement Day". The big aim was still to improve the horses and cattle and folks were interested and came to compare. Other exhibits were not so important.

One year someone opened the fair who said "Too many people take a fair as a day of entertainment.....A day at the fair shouldn't be classed as a day at an exhibition (that was the wrong word) but a fair is a demonstration of the progress of the community in which it is held". It is still a symbol of community life.

It is difficult to get a progressive picture of the fairs at this location but always were we reminded of the horses - - with classes for them all. In fact for many years the fair was referred to as the Belmont Horse Show with Adam Harkness, Wm. Falls, Marsh Collard, Levi Welch, Wm. Taylor, Ed. Legg and Mac Taylor to the fore. Bert Taylor says that in 1912 the races were good and lady drivers were popular as far back as 1900 with Mrs. Wm. Taylor, Ethel Harkness (Mrs. Bert Taylor) and Ethel Allan (Mrs. Wm. Campbell) prominent, and in very recent years Beatrice Harkness and Mrs. George Bennett.