

History of Wallacetown Fair

The first 100 years

Although fairs have been held ever since making established settled communities, there is only one fair as far as residents, and former residents, of West Elgin are concerned. It is the Wallacetown Fair, now marking its official 150th anniversary.

Like other great institutions its early beginnings are veiled in mystery. It is a bit startling for those of us who thought Wallacetown Fair went back to time immemorial to learn that it was originally held in New Glasgow, core of the first Scottish section of the Talbot Settlement.

Some records indicate that an Elgin County Fair was held there as early as 1853 – the year Elgin separated from Middlesex and began its separate existence as a county. Later East and West Elgin branches were established and it appears that the first West Elgin Fair was held at New Glasgow on October 19, 1860 under the sponsorship of the newly formed West Elgin Agricultural Society. James McKinley was president.

The three townships of Southwold, Dunwich and Aldborough formed the West Elgin Agricultural Society. It soon became obvious that New Glasgow was too far west for convenience. After a heated controversy, not unaccompanied by physical violence, it was decided to move the fair to the more central location of Wallacetown.

Sometime in the 1860s the Canadian militia was reorganized to meet the threat of the Fenian Raids. A company was centered at Wallacetown, where a drill shed was built and a parade-ground established on the farm of John Leslie Pearce.

Although there were still a few stumps in the field it was a comparatively clear and level area. The owner of the land and the commander of the company permitted the fair to use these facilities. In 1869, after the peril of the Fenian Raids had passed, the five-acre plot was purchased from Mr. Pearce. Not until 1900 did a payment of \$5.00 bring formal title to the drill shed from the federal government. In 1875, 1904 and 1937 subsequent purchases brought the size of the fair grounds to the present 20.34 acres.

From the beginning and throughout its history the Wallacetown Fair has reflected the activities of the community and combined entertainment with exhibitions of the best currently available in live stock and farm produces as well as the baking and handicrafts of women of the community.

It is interesting in this age of automation to learn that a century ago the introduction of farm machinery was inaugurating an agricultural revolution. The 1860 report says: "The great disparity heretofore existing between the price of manual labor and agricultural produce has been a great drawback to all farming operations and improvements; but the introduction, lately, of reaping and mowing machines, and in fact, of all the improved manual labor-saving machines of the present age, on a large scale in this section of the country, has so reduced farm laborers' and mechanics' wages as to render farming an agreeable and profitable undertaking nowadays; and improved farms have consequently increased much in value. Some two years ago, when a good farm hand would, during harvest time command from one dollar and a half to two dollars per diem, a 200-acre lot with house, barn and driving sheds, and say 80 acres of clearance, could have

been purchased in a good locality, convenient to markets, in this county for about \$28 an acre; whereas now, when farm hands can be hired for one-half the amount, the same farm would bring at least \$40 an acre."

Early exhibitions featured displays of working oxen and for many years prizes were given for the fastest walking teams. It was not until the 1875 addition to the fairgrounds that a quarter-mile track was established and the trotting races, so soon to become an important feature of the fair, started. The 1937 addition made possible a half-mile track, and in 1947 modernization was completed with the introduction of starting gates.

Finances have been a continuing problem. John L. Pearce was long treasurer and as banking facilities were lacking he used to keep the fair money at home. Friends would escort him to and from the fairgrounds.

Admittance and entry fees were never enough to meet expenses. They were supplemented by subscriptions, government grants, and payments from township and county councils and donation from firms and individuals. Occasionally, individuals in the neighborhood would advance money and the names of David Bobier and John McFarland were connected with various loans. Later the banks took over this part of the fundraising.

Rain has been a recurrent problem. In 1909 the Ontario Government established a rain insurance policy for local fairs and this saved the Wallacetown show in the particularly bad year of 1912. However, the weather exhausted the fund shortly afterwards.

Once Wallacetown nearly lost its fair for reasons similar to those which brought it from New Glasgow. Building of the Canada Southern Railway in 1873 made Dutton a strong competitor. From that time until 1913 periodic efforts were made to move the fair to Dutton. But the arrival of the motor-car soon shifted the balance back to Wallacetown.

Although Wallacetown Fair has been primarily an agricultural exhibition, aimed at improvement of livestock and farming methods, entertainment has always been a feature. At the first fair there was a piper and music has been a constant accompaniment.

As early as 1883 there was a bicycle race. Horse races have been increasingly important. Punch and Judy shows and a merry-go-round were the forerunners of the current midways. The year after World War One ended an airplane appeared and took up those who were sufficiently daring and affluent.

Among the special attractions at various times were a tug-o'-war in 1901, an auto demonstration in 1912, a plowing match in 1924, a potato race, Shetland pony race, musical chair race, greyhound races and chariot races in later years. One of the most hilarious features was a milking contest.

No mention of Wallacetown Fair would be complete without a reference to John R. Gow, one of the early presidents and long the superintendent of the grounds. As late as 1932, five people attended the fair who had been there in 1860. Storey Backus and his sister, Mrs. Thomas L. Pearce, had never missed a fair in that period. John R. Gown, Mrs. Dama Lumley and a Mr. Clark had missed only one.

Others have a shorter record, but few who have attended Wallacetown Fair ever wish to miss a subsequent show. And the Centennial will be bigger and better than ever.

Considerable work has been done to improve the appearance of the buildings that have stood for many years. In 1952, D. Peter McPherson, former Secretary donated the brick for the Secretary's office and financial help was given by Coyne's Farmers' Club. In 1958 a new judges' stand was erected and in 1960 a new ticket office and Centennial Gates were built at the entrance of the fair grounds in honour of all past presidents and directors of the fair. A Dedication Service was held on Friday, September 30th, 1960 with Prime Minister John Diefenbaker in attendance.

The Last 50 Years

Many improvements have been made to the fair grounds in the last 50 years. Iron gates were added to the front entrance as an addition to the Centennial gates. In 1975 the hydro to the grounds was upgraded and the washrooms painted with a fence between the Harrison's property bordering the west side of the fairground erected and the building roofs painted the following year.

The next four years saw four new structures added to the grounds – a new 48' by 120' exhibit building in 1977, which now houses the homecraft and general exhibits; 1978 - a 40' by 72' by 10' building (now the Roots and Grains building) was erected to replace the original structure that was lost in a strong wind storm. The cement floor was poured the following year. Two 24' by 100' cattle shelters were built in 1980.

While the property is solely owned by the Wallacetown Agricultural Society, community use of the grounds has been encouraged for many years. Soccer fields were created in the infield in 1977 with two additional soccer fields and a baseball diamond set up in the north east corner of the grounds behind the fair office in 1981 with another soccer field added in 1990.

The sheep shelter was added adjacent to the cattle shed in 1985 and in 1989, the existing grandstand was torn down in 1989 and a new 96' by 24' built on the east side of the track. Horses have been part of the fair and harness horses have used the grounds as a training facility for many years. Upgrades to the track were undertaken in the late 1980s with gravel and bedding sand applied. In infield corral, used by the local saddle club, was rebuilt in 1995.

Many changes and upgrades to the grounds have taken place in the last 15 years. A large 4-H building was constructed as well as a new, significantly larger Junior Fair building. The perimeter of the fairgrounds is now entirely fenced, as is the infield circling the track. Waterlines, hydro upgrades and drainage have been major undertakings to make the facilities and the grounds more user friendly, most notably recently converting the old sheep shed into accessible washroom and storage facilities. The project was also designed to allow an indoor cattle show ring to be accessed in case of rain.

The small stage and race tower were torn down and a new, portable stage built which has been used by many other groups. A dedicated tractor pull track was a major undertaking but all those that pull on it praise the board for the quality of the construction. With the support of the local horticultural society, both entrances to the grounds have been landscaped. The society still constantly works at maintaining and upgrading the grounds with additional lighting and building repairs undertaken to make the fair more attractive both during the day and under the stars.

1860 – James McKinley
1886 – Stephen Backus
1887 – A. D. McGugan
1888 – D. McAlpine
1889 – L. W. McIntyre
1890 – A. McColl
1891 – D. McColl
1892 – Joseph Pearce
1893 – A. McKillop
1894 – M. McNabb
1895 – John R. Gow
1896 – Thos. Havens
1897 – D. Brown
1898 – Alex Crane
1899 – Arch. McKillop
1900 – E. Silcox
1901 – R. J. Hine
1902 – A. D. McGugan
1903 – L. J. Else
1904 – Ed. McKellar
1905 – A. J. Gillies
1906 – D. Brown
1907 – John R. Gow
1908 – Arch. McKillop
1909 – M. McNabb
1910 – J. Dromgole
1911 – R. Kerr
1912 – Edgar Silcox
1913 – P. Jm. McCallum
1914 – Peter Stalker
1915 – Sam Pearce
1916 – John R. Gow
1917 – Flem. Shipley
1918 – D. Brown
1919 – W. A. Galbraith
1920 – Archie McKillop
1921 – M. McNabb
1922 – H. Dromgole
1923 – R. A. Kerr
1924 – S. A. Brown
1925 – M. N. McNeil
1926 – H. C. McKillop

1927 – S. M. Pearce
1928 – F. Silcox
1929 – M. A. McAlpine
1930 – Geo. Silcox
1931 – D. E. Carroll
1932 – C. C. Small
1933 – Dave McPherson
1934 – J. H. Miller
1935 – A. Crawford
1936 – A. A. Crawford
1937 – John E. Pearce
1938 – D. J. McKillop
1939 – Clarence Blue
1940 – M. W. Small
1941 – John A. McCallum
1942 – Robert Campbell
1943 – Morley Page
1944 – Peter Love
1945 – Edward Shipley
1946 – Ernest Ford
1947 – Stewart Duncanson
1948 – Stewart Duncanson
1949 – Wm. S. McKillop
1950 – John W. Bobier
1951 – Neil A. McKellar
1952 – Humphrey Campbell,
Roy Jewell
1953 – Walter Robson
1954 – Grant Cameron
1955 – Norman McWilliam
1956 – Earl Shipley
1958 – Hugh Carroll
1959 – Finlay McPherson
1960 – Colin Morrison
1961 – Archie McTavish
1962 – John S. Cameron
1963 – Stewart West
1964 – Donald Cameron
1965 – Donald Cameron
1966 – Donald Leitch
1967 – Donald McWilliam
1968 – Jack Campbell

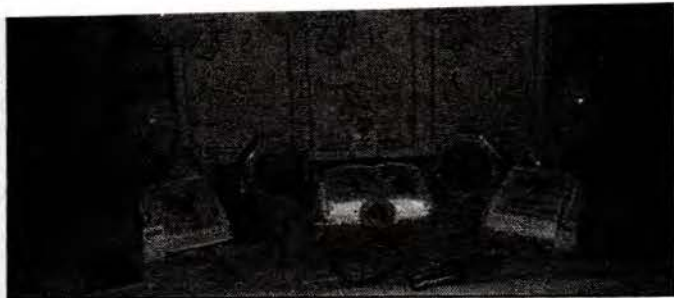
1969 – Stanley Duncanson
1970 – Archie T. Campbell
1971 – Archie T. Campbell
1972 – Melvin Gowan
1973 – Melvin Gowan
1974 – J. Donald Campbell
1975 – Donald Graham
1976 – Donald Graham
1977 – Bruce McMillan
1978 – Bruce McMillan
1979 – Robert Bobier
1980 – Robert Bobier
1981 – James West
1982 – James West
1983 – Gerald Boyd
1984 – Gerald Boyd
1985 – William McAlister
1986 – Roger Campbell
1987 – Lorne Milton
1988 – Lorne Milton
1989 – Michael Campbell
1991 – David Campbell
1991 – Lorne Milton
1992 – Melvin Gowan
1993 – Ken Gowan
1994 – Nancy Carroll
1995 – Wallace Tokarz
1996 – Wallace Tokarz
1997 – Diane Brown
1998 – Diane Brown
1999 – Kim Carder
2000 – Kim Carder
2001 – Tracy Trudell
2002 – Tracy Trudell
2003 – Kelly Lackey
2004 – Kelly Lackey
2005 – John Lilley
2006 – Joe Mylrea
2007 – Joe Mylrea
2008 – Sheri Lackey
2009 – Sheri Lackey

1950 – Mrs. David McPherson	1969 – Mrs. Russell Campbell	1990 - Mrs. Bruce McCann
1951 – Mrs. William McKillop	1970 – Mrs. Russell Campbell	1991 – Mrs. Rena Campbell
1952 – Mrs. William McKillop	1971 – Mrs. James McKillop	1992 – Mrs. Rena Campbell
1953 – Mrs. H. Campbell	1972 – Mrs. James McKillop	1993 – Mrs. Melvin Gowan
1954 – Mrs. A. D. McTavish	1973 – Mrs. Melvin Gowan	1994 – Lin McCann
1955 – Mrs. Finlay McPherson	1974 – Mrs. Melvin Gowan	1995 - Lin McCann
1956 – Mrs. Roy Jewell	1975 – Mrs. Jack Campbell	1996 - Lin McCann
1957 – Mrs. Peter Love	1976 – Mrs. Jack Campbell	1997 - Lin McCann
1958 - Mrs. Colin Morrison	1977 – Mrs. Gertrude Page	1998 - Lin McCann
1959 – Mrs. Walter Robson	1978 – Mrs. Gertrude Page	1999 - Lin McCann
1960 – Mrs. Earl Shipley	1979 – Mrs. Bruce McMillan	2000 - Lin McCann
1961 – Mrs. Norman McWilliam	1980 – Mrs. Bruce McMillan	2001 - Lin McCann
1962 – Mrs. Roy McNeil	1981 – Mrs. Krin Dieleman	2002 - Lin McCann
1963 – Mrs. Jack Campbell	1982 – Mrs. Krin Dieleman	2003 - Lin McCann
1964 – Mrs. Donald Leitch	1983 – Mrs. Steve Lilley	2004 - Lin McCann
1965 – Mrs. John S. Cameron	1984 – Mrs. Steve Lilley	2005 - Lin McCann
1966 – Mrs. Alton Reid	1985 – Miss Helen Duncanson	2006 - Lin McCann
1967 – Mrs. William Weston	1986 – Miss Helen Duncanson	2007 - Lin McCann
1968 – Mrs. Harold Smith	1987 – Mrs. John McNeil	2008 - Lin McCann
	1988 – Mrs. Bruce McCann	2009 - Lin McCann
	1989 - Mrs. Bruce McCann	

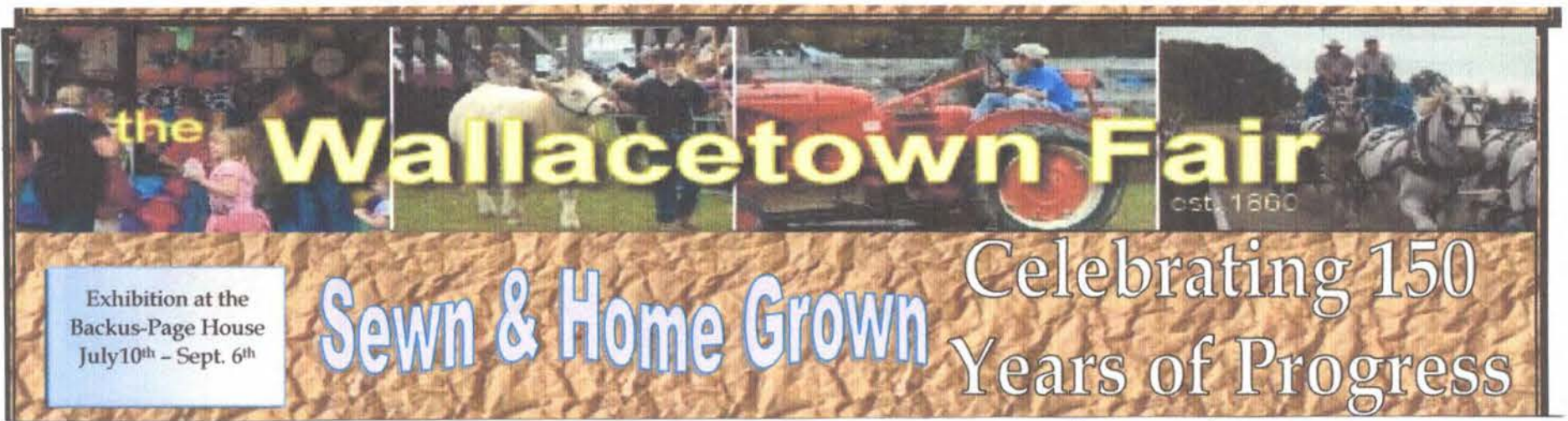
Past Queens and Ambassadors

1960 – Sharon Campbell	1984 – Lee Ann McGaffery	1998 – Kristen Beattie
1971 – Joanne Van Nuland	1985 – Tammy McDonald	1999 – Simone Moreau
1972 – Nancy Hull	1986 – Jackie McMillan	2000 – Tina Boyd
1973 – Carol Campbell	1987 – Colleen West	2001 – Ryan McLandress
1974 – Vera Unich	1988 – Brenda Ford	2002 – Chris Enns *
1975 – Irene Sadowski	1989 – Erin Robertson	2003 – Adam McKillop
1976 – Nancy Kuranyi	1990 – Karen Dielman	2004 – Maryjo McWilliam
1977 – Pat Sabjan	1991 – Tammy Dumont	2005 – Brittany Jewell
1978 – Connie Kirschner	1992 – Toni Merks	2006 – Brittney Eichenberger
1979 – Louise Milton	1993 – Lisa Phillips	2007 – Kate Campigotto
1980 – Melissa Mezenberg	1994 – Tanya Brown	2008 – Jacob Rowe
1981 – Marcie McNeil	1995 – Melanie Brown	2009 – Colin Wood
1982 – Joanne Barnett	1996 – Colleen Bobier	
1983 – Lorie Van Bree	1997 – Monica Murray	

*Our 2002 Ambassador Chris Enns was chosen as the 2003 CNE Ambassador of the Fairs – the first male ever awarded the title in the 125 year history of the CNE







Aug 12th 2010.





TRACY TRUDELL & KIM CARDER.

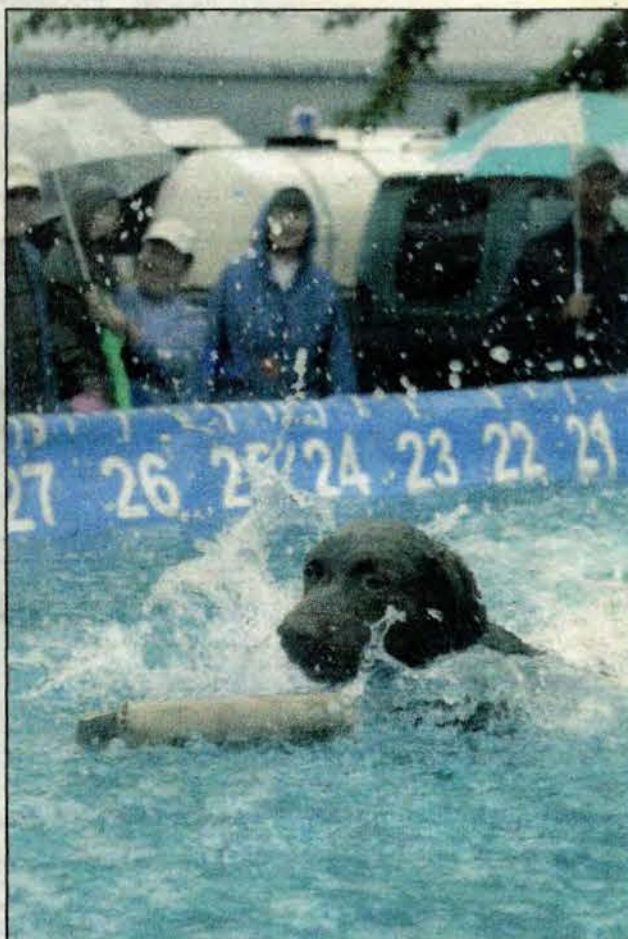


Oct 2010

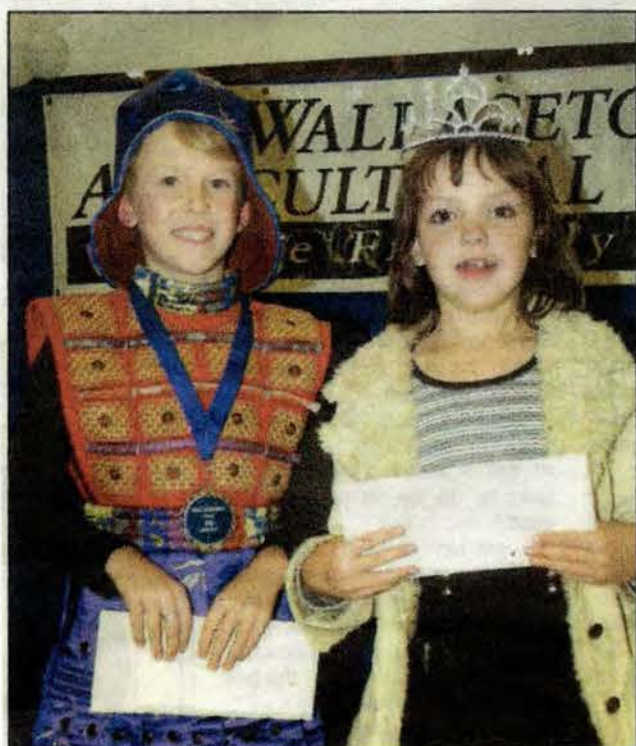


Thomas Rowe, 17, is the Wallacetown Fair ambassador for the 150th edition of the popular event held last weekend. With him is contestant Carol McMillan, 18. Rowe succeeds Colin Wood as fair ambassador.

Photos by JESSE CNOCKAERT QMI Agency



New this year at the Wallacetown Fair was the Dock Dogs event. Owners brought their dogs and competed for fastest time retrieving an object thrown in the water, highest and farthest jump, and other categories. Gillon, owned by Steve Thompson of London, is shown in the big air wave competition.

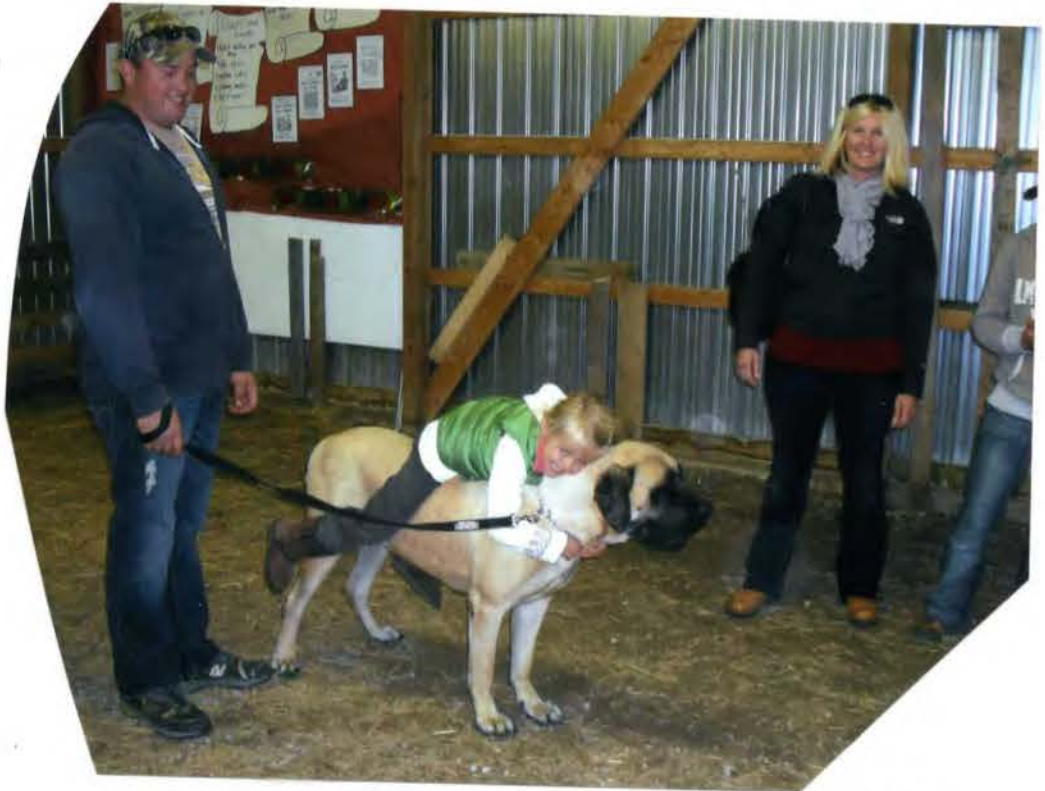


Jacob Wilcox and Kendra Berg are this year's prince and princess of the Wallacetown Fair. The 150th edition of the popular attraction was held last weekend.



Fruit & Vegetable Building

Oct 3rd 2010.



MIKE & KAYSEE & KATRINA ^{Kalita} AT THE
PET SHOW.



Oct 2010 Jesse Cnockaert

Wallacetown Tractor Pull

Rain during the weekend of the Wallacetown Fair caused the postponement of the Tractor Pull and Demolition Derby. The Tractor Pull was held October 9. Matt Marsh, who drove in the Four-Wheel Class, was the first driver of the day, who pulled over 281 feet using his 1979 Chevey. The Demolition Deby took place at the Wallacetown Fairgrounds the following day.



Lyn McCann.

Wallacetown Fair 2010

