



Solomon Valley History

To Read More about
Solomon Valley History
visit our website at

www.hwy24.org

COUNTY FAIR MEMORIES

by Carolyn Williams

[Carolyn Williams is a member of the SV24 board from Alton. The Alliance supports the county fairs and welcomes articles about them.]

I remember my very first 4-H fair when I was nine years old. The fair was held at the Memorial Hall in Phillipsburg. I was the newest member of the Fort Kirwin 4-H club in Phillips county. I had learned to sew a hem in a tea towel and make an apron that year. It was not without its angst, however! My mother had been sewing on a treadle machine, so naturally that's what I learned on. Can you imagine a little cross-eyed, can't chew gum and walk at the same time, nine-year-old trying to manipulate a machine bigger than she? I know if I could have ripped more than I sewed, that was the case. The tea towel has long ago hit the rag bag, but I just washed up and displayed the apron at our recent PRIDE-sponsored Ladies Nite Out. The little white square cloth which at one time identified the apron as mine is still there (I blackened my name, name of the 4-H club, and age this time for the record).

It's funny, isn't it, how we can remember how terribly hot those days were? We drove the 32 miles to Phillipsburg with all windows open, hoping to keep from melting before we got to the style show held in the old Memorial Hall that was every bit as hot and sweltering as the car ride had been. But we styled with all the gusto we could muster! Later the apron and tea towel were judged for workmanship. I'm not sure what I received on them, but I was thrilled with the ribbons I took home four days later.

The ribbons weren't the only rewards we had at the county fair. We got to enjoy the rides that were set up in the wide intersection of the streets that ran by Memorial Hall. It was there I took my very first Ferris Wheel ride and had cotton candy to boot! We were really fresh off the farm, but we believed ourselves to be "walking in tall cotton" that week.

Since I had an aunt and uncle who lived in Phillipsburg, I was privileged to stay the night during the fair two years later when I took Nellie Belle, my Holstein heifer, to the fair. She had to be tended to, brushed, fed, watered, and generally "babied," we even combed her tail after we shampooed it! She wasn't registered or anything, but Dad had taught me how to show her every day when we fed and watered. Since we had her stalled in the barn, I learned how to keep that area clean too! When I took her to the fair, again at Phillipsburg, I found out just how important those skills were. Nellie Belle and I got a nice blue ribbon for the showmanship portion. Since she wasn't registered "with papers" she couldn't go on to the State Fair, but I was happy with her. She turned out to be a good milker, too, when I began helping with the dairy chores later.

Getting to be on my own for those few days of the fair was a real treat. I was expected to check in with my aunt and uncle and be there after the last feeding and bedding down chores were completed, but for the most part I was able to take in all of the activities at the fair. The sewing competition, style show, food tasting, carnival, later the rodeo, and the friends we made, even the boys and the water fights we got caught up in as we were tending to our animals, were all part of growing up.

The county fairs then were the opportunities life gave us for learning a measure of independence and pride in our accomplishments. When I went to high school in Kensington in Smith County, I transferred to the Busy Bee 4-H club there. High school 4-H county fairs were really competitive. We had endured endless project meetings, both cooking and sewing, as well as the livestock judging contests, keeping the record books necessary for the 4-H banquet, etc.; but we were often rewarded with a trip to the Kansas State Fair in Hutchinson with our prizewinners and for more judging contests. It was there in the grandstand I first tasted a malt. I think it cost all of 50 cents! And I bought a two-piece heart necklace, half of which went to my heartthrob of the moment.

Sometimes I resented the fact that so much was expected of me, (doesn't every teenager?), but those experiences were what Dad said "kept us out of trouble." I suspect that he knew from his own experience that after doing all we were required to do for the fairs, we were just too tired to get into any kind of trouble!

I hope for all the young people who participate in the county fairs today that same measure of accomplishment and rewards that comes from doing a job as well as they are able. Being too tired for trouble isn't all bad, either!