
ECHOES FROM THE PAST - FAIR HISTORY

EARLY HISTORY - 1800's THROUGH 1990's

Long before the towns of Winston and Salem merged, there was a Fair in the area. What is now known as the Dixie Classic Fair began as a wheat exhibition in Salem in 1882. The Piedmont Tobacco Fair started 15 years later, and the two Fairs joined to become the Winston-Salem Fair.

The first Fairs were great attractions. Families traveled by wagons, buggies, bicycles, horseback and by foot. Families took picnic dinners with them, stayed all day and into the night.

The first Fair, which was a Wheat Fair, was held at Pace Warehouse, Saturday, August 26th in 1882. Mr. F. Fries, Mr. H. Fries, Mr. Hinshaw and Mr. Bynum were known to have been the ones who were actually thanked for inaugurating the Wheat Fair. The Fair consisted of 28 Wheat Exhibitors (which received paid premiums), a band, speakers, decorations and agricultural displays.

The second Fair was known as The Wheat and Cattle Fair. It took place on August 30, 1883, at the Pace Warehouse. This was all of the information that was found in reference to the second Fair in Forsyth County.

The Wheat and Cattle Fair was held again in August 1884, this time at the Farmers Warehouse and a second day was added. This year the Fair not only consisted of wheat and cattle exhibitors, it also included horses, hogs, sheep, hay, fruits, farm products, and tobacco. Another change that was made, was that the fair officers, exhibitors and visitors were all charged an entry fee to enter the Fair and any display that was intended to advertise for a business was also charged for their display.

Nothing else was reported about a Fair in Forsyth County until October 21, 1887. It was known as the Fair of the Bashavia Farmers' Club of Vienna Township held at the District School House at Oak Grove. Inside the District School House were displays of tobacco and outside were rows of tables lined with exhibits that were competing for premiums. These exhibits included vegetables, fruits, jellies, bread, cakes, needlework, grain, wheat and oats. The Fair was considered one of the most successful county Fairs of the period.

In August, 1889, the State Fruit Fair was held for two days at the Brown's Warehouse, at the corner of Main and Fifth Streets, where the Reynolds Plaza is now located. Exhibits, which were competing for premiums, consisted of fruits, vegetables, canned fruits and preserves, flowers, wine and cider. Music was provided by the Salem Cornet Band and the Salem Orchestra. The admission fee was 25 cents, which was used to assist in paying the premiums.

The first Forsyth County Fair was held on October 15, 1896, at Oak Grove School House, Vienna Township. This location served the Fair for two years.

In 1897, the Fair in Winston was known as the Winston Tobacco Fair. It was held November 3-5 and it was mentioned that the Farmers' warehouse would be decorated and the county officers decorated the Court House. There was also a flower show held in the new auditorium at the YMCA with prizes offered.

In 1898 the second Tobacco Fair was held November 2-4, this year it was called the Piedmont Tobacco Fair. Brown's warehouse was set apart for the grand exhibits, Farmers and Piedmont for tobacco and Star for the entertainment. The Midway was located on the square between Fourth and Fifth and Church and Railroad Streets. The Fair consisted of numerous attractions and amusements for everyone, they included music, a balloon ascension, bicycle parades and races, horse and livestock parade, horse running and trotting, football from the local University, free concerts, fireworks, and a Tobacco premium sale.

On April 6, 1899, Piedmont Park Company was chartered by the State of North Carolina. The Piedmont Park Company Directors appointed committees for the County Fair, which was held at Piedmont Park.

On October 24-28, 1899, the Winston-Salem Horse Show, Carnival and County Fair was held. There was an admission fee of 25 cents charged to enter the grounds. The entertainment included free wild west exhibitions, war picture shows, wild west museum, merry-go-round, ferris wheel, and a lot more. There were numerous parades, races and exhibits.

The Piedmont Horse Show and Cattle Fair, The County Fair, The Street Fair and Winston's Semi-Centennial Celebration was held October 30 – November 3, 1900 at Piedmont Park, and surrounding areas. Festivities included Horse racing, a Horse Show, Piedmont Live Stock and Poultry Exhibits, trapeze performer, bicycle trick riders, International Shooting tournament and bicycle races. At the Court-House square the band concerts and around the square were business booths. The Fair was labeled as another great success.

The next location of the Fair was on Patterson Avenue near where Woodland Cemetery is now located. Each year the Fair grew bigger and it became necessary to build a new fairground. On May 8, 1908, 28.53 acres of land was purchased. Piedmont Park traded its property, plus 1500 shares of stock for the property. The Fair remained at this location for almost half a century. In late fall of 1908, the Winston-Salem Forsyth County Fair was held at the new Piedmont Park location on Liberty Street.

William N. Reynolds helped the Fair expand rapidly in the '20's and '30's. He loved racing, particularly harness racing and he chose the Fair to close out the season every year. His dedication and promotion developed agriculture and his services to the Fair were invaluable and unexcelled. (His death occurred in 1951 prior to the first Winston-Salem Fair being held on the present Fairgrounds.)

On August 28, 1942, the Board of Directors approved a resolution that gave the net proceeds from the '42 Fair to the American Legion for the benefit of the Army and Navy Emergency Relief Fund, and other war relief purposes.

The Winston-Salem (Fair) Foundation was established by W. N. Reynolds on November 7, 1944 with Wachovia Bank & Trust Company as the Trustee.

Charles H. Babcock appeared before the Fair Board of Directors on November 7, 1949 to offer without cost, land for a new fairgrounds on the property adjoining Cherry Street Extension and facing partly on 30th Street. The very generous offer was accepted. Plans began immediately for construction of buildings and improving the new grounds.

In 1994 Journal reporter Ron Jordan wrote the following:

From as early as the late 1930s until intergration took effect in 1963, blacks and whites in Winston-Salem attended separate fairs. When the World of Mirth midway show came to the Winston-Salem Fair for a five day run each October, it played to all-white crowds. The few blacks at the fair were a part of the traveling show. "The following week, Lawrence's Greater Shows rolled into and set up on the same grounds, where they provided entertainment for blacks at

at the Western Carolina Colored Fair, the forerunner of the Carolina Colored Fair. In later years, the white fair came to be known as the Dixie Classic Fair. The Carolina Colored Fair, which later became just the Carolina Fair, was formed in 1953 after the Western Carolina Fair dissolved. John H. Marks Shows of Roanoke, VA., provided the midway attractions." While the Western Carolina Fair had promoted agricultural exhibits, the Carolina Fair tried to attract more patrons "by increasing prize money and adding a better carnival to the midway and new features like a Hula-Hoop contest. The Carolina Fair had a successful run from its inception, drawing thousands of patrons from in and around Forsyth County. Promoted as both 'educational and agricultural', it featured prize livestock from several of the surrounding counties as well as arts, crafts and food." In the early years, Jordan wrote, both the white and black fairs were held north of town, and later moved to the Dixie Classic's current location off University Parkway. "Attendance at the (Carolina Fair) stated slowing down after 1963, when the Dixie Classic Fair was integrated and blacks began attending it," he wrote. The decline of the fair came rather quickly after that. Blacks now had a choice and favored the bigger and better Dixie Classic Fair, and that is where they spent their money. Some remained loyal to the black fair, but also attended the Dixie Classic." Since the Dixie Classic was held first, people often had less money left to spend by the time the Carolina Fair came along. "In 1968, E.E. Hill, the president of the fair corporation, announced the Carolina Fair was closing," Jordan wrote.

In 1950, the name of the Fair was changed to the Fair of Winston-Salem. Then, in 1956, the name was changed to, and remains, Dixie Classic Fair for Northwest North Carolina. The Fair has been in its present location since 1951. James A. (Jim) Graham was Fair Manager from 1952 until 1955. He was elected and served as Commissioner of Agriculture, NC, from 1964 until 2000. Neil Bolton was Manager of the Fair from 1956 until his death in 1972 (and Manager of Winston-Salem Memorial Coliseum until 1969). W. B. "Bill" Austin, Jr. was Manager from 1972 until retirement in 1993. David L. Sparks began his career at the Fair in 1988 as Assistant to Fair Director and became Fair Director in 1993. Della Stephens joined the Fair family in 1962 and was promoted to Assistant to Fair Director in 1994 after 32 years of service to the Fair (and Memorial Coliseum from 1962-1969). Della retired on December 31, 2002. Dona Martin was promoted to Assistant to Fair Director in February 2003. David Sparks retired as Fair Director in 2018. Cheryle Hartley was promoted to Fair Director in December 2018. Cary Hester was promoted to Assistant to Fair Director in 2019.

On December 1, 1969, the Winston-Salem Foundation gave the Fairgrounds, Memorial Coliseum and \$75,000 to the City of Winston-Salem. Since then, the Fairgrounds continues to operate under an "enterprise system". The Fair generates sufficient cash to cover all operating expenditures and debt service payments. The mission of the Fairgrounds is to plan, promote and produce the annual Dixie Classic Fair to enhance the quality of life for our citizens by providing year-round facilities for agricultural, fraternal, education, social and entertainment activities and events. The Fair continues to develop a long-range capital improvement program that will enhance the quality of service and appearance of the Fairgrounds complex.

The Dixie Classic Fair is the second largest Fair in North Carolina and one of the largest in North America. Recent improvements include a new pedestrian entrance gate off Shorefair Drive (East Gate), a new connector into the midway area, new midway restrooms and a gazebo in the Plaza area of the Fairgrounds. Landscaping efforts continue to enhance the appearance of the Fairgrounds for the enjoyment of Fairgoers as well as the many thousands of people utilizing the facilities during off-season.

Midway

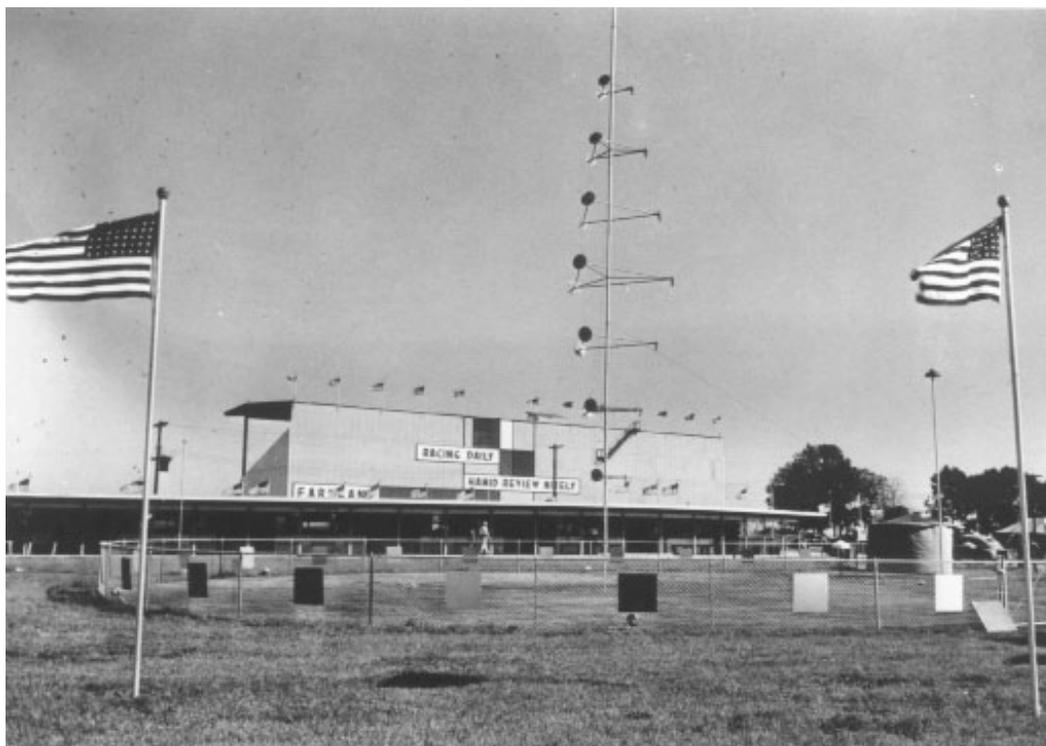
Strates Shows, Inc., owned and operated by the E. James Strates family, has provided the midway, shows, rides and games since October 1964. Prior to this, the World of Mirth, Frank Bergen, provided the midway, until bankruptcy closed the business in October, 1963.

Education Building

The Education Building was built in 1992, heated and air conditioned to accommodate events off season - circus, boat shows, dog shows, company picnics, auctions, training, trade shows, gem shows, antique shows, craft shows, computer shows, and many, many more. During the Fair, the Education Building houses competitive exhibits - arts and crafts, hobbycrafts, photography, collections, clothing, baked goods, food preservation, home furnishings, educational exhibit booths for youth and adults, senior adult exhibits, school art, special children's exhibits, and other educational and cultural exhibits and attractions.

Neil Bolton Home and Garden Building

The beautiful Flower Shows are staged in the Home and Garden Building during the Fair, two standard shows that involve talented Garden Club members and other individual exhibitors. The Home and Garden Building was built in 1997 for the purpose of accommodating events of a smaller scale, i.e., meetings, training by Winston-Salem Police Department, seminars and workshops conducted by Winston-Salem/Forsyth County School System, Garden Council, Winston-Salem Rose Society meetings and workshops, Fair Department meetings and more. The building was named in recognition of Neil Bolton, the Fair Manager from 1956 until his untimely death in 1972. Mr. Bolton is credited with changing the name of the Fair in 1956 to The Dixie Classic Fair of Northwest North Carolina from its previous name of The Winston-Salem Fair. During his tenure, the Fair grew from a local event to a regional Fair. Mr. Bolton oversaw the transition of the Fair from The Winston-Salem Foundation to the City of Winston-Salem in 1969.



Yesterday Village

Yesterday Village is growing in popularity. The village consists of nineteen log structures that were built in the 1800's and includes a one-room church that was reconstructed from logs from East Bend; general store/post office, reconstructed from Easley Road (Stokes County); two story log home from Colonel Joseph Williams, Panther Creek Plantation, Lewisville; one-room school house, first public building in Winston Township (1847), donated by James and Lynne Finney, moved from North Green Street and reconstructed in 1989; a barn and smokehouse (1870), donated by the family of Albert Atwood - Odell and Emily Atwood Cheek of Winston-Salem (also donated a beautiful renovated Carriage that is on display during the Fair in Yesterday Village). Odell Cheek served the Dixie Classic Fair Commission from 1995 until 2000, as Chairman from 1997-2000. Other log structures include a granary (1870) and corn crib (1867) donated by Shugart Enterprises, Grover and Bryan Shugart; another barn that was moved from Hauser Road, Lewisville; the Ed Spaugh Farm Old Store, donated by Sides Mobile Home, Pete, Ralph and Bill Sides, Winston-Salem. Robert and Paul Nickell of Westfield, NC are responsible for restoring and reconstructing many of the log structures in Yesterday Village. Other log structures in the Village include:

Dog Trot Museum (1997)

The Dog Trot Cabin was found in Shelby, NC. The pioneers usually built a one room cabin, then when the family expanded, built another separate one for sleeping and cooking. Large families were the norm, so sleeping space was a prime concern. This style cabin dates from the 1860's in this country. This Museum is dedicated in honor of Della Stephens, Assistant to the Fair Director, for her dedication and the promotion and growth of the Dixie Classic Fair. Restoration by: Distinctive Builders, Inc., and Bill Flynt. Rock Work by: Joey Henson.

Mechum Cabin (1998)

A 180 year old Mechum Cabin was moved from Advance, NC and reconstructed in the Village behind the Church in 1998. The cabin originally had no wooden floor, carpets were woven from old clothes to cover the smoothed dirt. The cabin was contributed by Camilla Vogler of Sanford, NC in memory of John & Mary Mechum, John, Macey, Nancy, Annie, Elmer and in honor of Ruth.

Shropshire Cabin (2003)

The Shropshire Cabin was built in the late 1700's. It was originally used as a country medical clinic by Dr. Shore three to four days per week. Originally, the structure was composed of one room with a loft, or upstairs. The structure was located on an 85 acre tract of land on Shore Road in the Tobaccoville community. This parcel of land was purchased in the 1930's by John Lee Shropshire from two former landowners, Mr. Dula and R. R. Jones. After acquiring the house and land, Mr. Shropshire made a kitchen addition on the back of the house where the two "logged" window openings are located. Later, a two room addition was made on the left of the house. The house was occupied by renters in the 1950's and remained occupied until the 1970's. The building was restored in 2003 and is being used as a village bakery in Yesterday Village. The building is contributed in the memory of John Lee and Bess S. Shropshire by sons, Donald G., John D., and Kent S. Shropshire.

2007 Fair Milestone

The Dixie Classic Fair celebrated its 125th anniversary in 2007 with perfect weather and a new record attendance of 371,219. The new attendance figure elevated the Dixie Classic to the 50th largest Fair in North America.

A PART OF HISTORY

