

The Pelham Township Agricultural Society Fair

By Jessica Linzel

The Pelham Township Agricultural Society Fair, later known as the Fenwick Fair, was held annually, beginning in 1856 in small farming communities like Riceville and Fenwick. Annual fairs were held throughout Niagara's different townships, organized by the local agricultural groups. The first agricultural society in the province was organized in Niagara in 1792, its members paying dues which were used to buy books on farming that could be shared amongst one another. It became known as the Niagara District Agricultural Society which organized fairs in the region throughout the 19th century, eventually branching into smaller township fairs like this one in Pelham.

These fairs provided opportunities for farmers in Niagara to gather and show off the fruits of their labour (literally), while including the community and helping them appreciate what it meant to be a Niagara farmer. The goal of agricultural societies was to stimulate agricultural improvement within the community. Niagara's farm population benefited from these educational groups, learning how to use certain tools and implement certain scientific practices, and being provided with new seed varieties and animal breeds along with information on how to care for them. In Niagara, the presence of older farms meant it was more common for family farmers or long-standing neighbours to be able pass down knowledge. Multi-generational farms could reach greater success as they learned crop rotation strategies, weather patterns, and how to ward off persistent issues with local insects. Much of this information was learned at these community gatherings.

At this 1856 Pelham Fair, prizes were awarded to top quality horses, heifers, sheep, swine, wagons, grain, and more. The price to enter was one dollar. The fair also showcased manufactured goods and items that were produced by many of the women in society. This included linens, satinet (a satin-like fabric), butter, cheese, and calf hides. Through the years, exhibits grew to include canned goods, baked goods, rugs, quilts, and other fine handiwork.

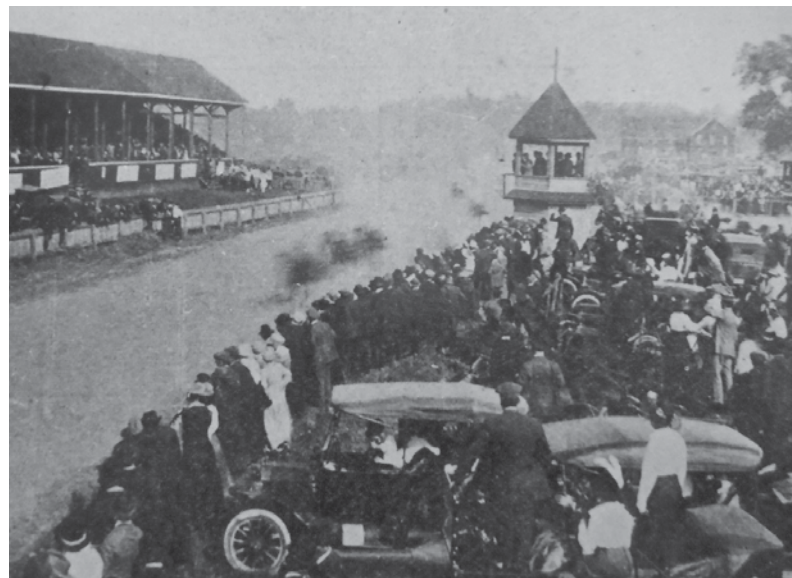
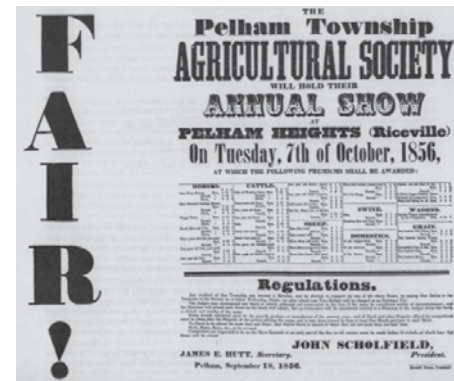
When the railroad was built through town in 1890, the fair that year offered special excursions to Fenwick directly from Hamilton, Welland, and Buffalo. By 1906, the fair included horse racing, saw thousands of attendees, and boasted products for which Niagara became well known, including tender fruits and decorative florals.

The Fenwick Fair closed in 1933, reportedly due to weather—rain had shut it down for three years in a row.

References

Niagara Region, *Niagara Region Archaeological Management Plan: APPENDIX A—Indigenous Archaeological Site Potential Model*. 2021. <https://bit.ly/3VhzhAT>

Pelham Historical Society Calendar, 1979.



Both photos courtesy of the Pelham Historical Society