

The 1971 Orleans County 4-H Junior Fair was a pioneer event



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The following information is largely taken from a fair supplement of The Journal-Register published in 1971. The Orleans County Junior Fair was one of the pioneer exhibitions of this nature in New York state.

The Orleans Agricultural Society, which for years conducted its annual exhibitions at the "Fair Grounds" in Albion, was one of the first county fairs, as such, to succumb to financial woes. Following its demise, the agricultural interests in Orleans were for a number of years without an opportunity for showing their products from the fields, orchards and the handicraft.

Started primarily as a money-raising venture to provide funds for the

establishment of a Farm and Home Center, the agricultural interest of the county under the leadership of Arthur West (1906-1981), then agricultural agent, organized and held a field day on the East Avenue grounds of the Albion Central School in 1948.

It proved to be a success and the next year the scene of activity was transferred to the old Fair Grounds on West State Street in Albion, where its endeavors were aided by Albion service and veterans groups.

Outgrowing its space there — and with a desire to make the event more in the nature of a county-wide affair — by attempting to divorce it from being considered a purely localized institution, the fair was transferred to the Bokman Farm on Route 31 at the Long Bridges Road intersection where it was conducted for several

years. The Farm and Home Center became a reality with the purchase of the Extension Service Building at 20 S. Main St., Albion. In 1963, a group of workers in the interest of agriculture, and particularly those identified with 4-H Clubs, Future Farmers of America and Future Homemakers, raised sufficient funds to purchase the property on Route 31 at Knowlesville Station.

The cause of junior fairs was given a boost in 1952 when Assemblyman Alonzo L. Waters, appreciating the hard work that was needed to develop Orleans County Junior Fair, introduced a bill in the state Legislature that was designed to make Junior Fairs eligible for state funds for the payment of awards for produce and other farm products. This had been accorded to the major agricultural

fairs for many years.

Because the Junior Fair was practically an innovation in the state, with Orleans and only one or two other counties conducting them as such, and reading into granting funds to Junior Fairs as an encroachment of their long-vested rights, both the operators of the major fairs and the state Department of Agriculture and Markets opposed such a grant the first year the measure was presented.

Funds for premium grants were taken from income provided from harness racing and the amount allocated to each fair association depended upon the amount received in income from this source.

With the greatly stepped-up income from harness tracks and with more major fairs succumbing to financial woes such as nearby Genesee and Niagara,

counties, plus the increased emphasis on Junior Fairs, the following year the measure was re-introduced and the Department of Agriculture and Markets agreed to approval of the measure. It passed without opposition and was enthusiastically endorsed by Gov. Thomas Dewey who signed the measure.

Since that time Junior Fairs have become the only agricultural exhibits in many counties, and have grown to be well-established, well-funded and highly regarded institutions, as indicated now by the extensive grounds and buildings as the 4-H Fair now in progress.

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