

About the Stanley Fair and the Stanley Agricultural Society #35

The Stanley Fair was first held in Logan's field in October 1851. Every year since then the people of Stanley and surrounding areas have held an annual fair. Through droughts, wars and depressions people have come together to celebrate the rural way of life.

In recent years it has become more and more difficult to put on a Fair that will attract visitors but not put the Society deep in debt. In 2000 we celebrated our 150th Stanley Fair and the momentum from that carried us through the 2001 Fair. At that time improvements to the canteen facilities and some of the other buildings that were more than 100 years old, made our job as volunteers easier and brought many positive comments from Fair goers. An Agricultural Awareness display that included "A Mountain of Food" was just one of the educational aspects of the Fair experienced by students on organized school tours and by the general public.

As the Society met after the 2001 Fair we were excited and enthusiastic about the future of the Stanley Fair. This enthusiasm and plans for future Fairs were crushed on October 31, 2001 by an act of vandalism. Fire destroyed the canteen, electrical building and the over 100 year old Root House. As great a loss as this was to the community we were so grateful that only property was lost. The Stanley Volunteer Fire Department was very quick to respond to the fire call however as they arrived on the scene a live power line came down, barely missing some of the fire fighters. This live power line prevented them from actively fighting the fire. All they could do was wait and watch as a propane tank flared and the fire spread to the Root House. The danger of an explosion of ammonia in the nearby ice making plant forced the evacuation of 200 village residents. In the end there was no loss of life, no injury and no one lost their home. We were all so thankful for that.

On the morning of November 1, 2001 it was with great sadness, disbelief and a tremendous sense of loss that Society members gathered on the Fair Grounds to survey the damage. The hot water tank that had made running the canteen so much easier for the past two Fairs was gone. The tables, deck and other improvements carried out by summer student workers were all gone. The huge mural that depicted a prosperous New Brunswick farm was gone. All of the Agricultural Awareness information that had been so carefully stored in plastic totes to keep the mice out was gone. The antique butter churn and hot dog steamer, the beginnings of a historical display were gone.

At an emergency meeting a week after the fire there was much discussion about the future of the Stanley Fair. We had received many offers of assistance from our community and our neighbours who felt our loss. In the end the decision was made that if the essentials could be replaced without incurring a great debt, in fact the Society was not willing to take on any debt, (The risk involved in putting on an annual Fair is all the risk of debt this group of volunteers are able to accept.) then plans would be drawn up for new facilities.

We were fortunate to receive funding from the provincial government as a special project and so early in 2002 plans were drawn up for a new multipurpose building. It was exciting to plan new buildings that would stand proudly beside the 100 year old Dance Hall and will hopefully be the source of memories that can compare to those held by our grandparents *the boy that grandmother was so thrilled to dance with at the Fair dance and the memories they made as they married and now their great grandchildren are making Fair memories of their own!*

Now as we look ahead to the 2010 Stanley Fair we can look back with pride over the past ten years and all the changes and improvements that have been made. Since the building of the replacement "Root House" the Fair Grounds have become a popular venue for community events and family celebrations. The new complex is indeed a multi use community facility and has been used for a wide variety of events including weddings, graduation banquets, a book launch, children's summer camps, high school dances, community Canada Day Celebrations, family reunions, community fundraising events and it was the hub of the provincial New Brunswick Day Celebrations hosted by the Village of Stanley in 2005.

This year the Stanley Fair will mark a significant milestone, the 160th Stanley Fair! That's 160 fairs without a break! Planning for this special year started last September as the 159th Fair came to a close. Although the specific details are still being sorted out the plans include: a revised Exhibitor's Guide and Official Prize List available now, special prizes for entries celebrating the 160th Fair, the Opening Dinner featuring New Brunswick products, a silent auction of fine local crafts, historical displays, variety of musical entertainment, horse pull, Sunday afternoon gospel show, all ages scavenger hunt, woodsman's competition, "Good Time Saturday Night", new exhibit spaces, commemorative Stanley Fair postcard and yard display competition.

As plans for events, exhibits, activities and displays become finalized the details will be available on the website and advertised in The Newsletter.