

- **SECOND Location of the County Fair – Central Longmont, CO**

Meanwhile in the north end of the county, the new Longmont Colony had a bold vision and plan for future growth. In addition to platted lots for homes and businesses within a one square mile area on the bluff above the St. Vrain River, they also set aside lots for churches, schools, a county government center, and a University. Boulder, an older settlement, was aghast at the drive of the upstart newcomers and immediately went to work to secure land and facilities for a University in their town. Longmont lost the bid for the University of Colorado campus but eventually won out to host the Boulder County Fair event well into the 1970's.

**1871** - In 1871, the Northern Agricultural Society purchased acreage destined to be used as an event gathering place in Longmont. Shown as 'Lake Park' on the original 1871 town plat, it contained a shallow lake and was one of three parks set aside by the town founders. Many of the members of the Chicago-Colorado Colony were from the Chicago area and were familiar with numerous lakes including Lake Michigan. The Colony plan was to feature the local lake within the borders of the new town to help the settlers feel a little more at home.

A new group, the Farmers' Institute, was formed in the late 1870's under the auspices of the Northern Agricultural Society and the Farmers Alliance. They met annually every spring in the Dickens Opera House in downtown Longmont and shared experiences with growing crops on the new land, both from heritage seeds and new crop varieties. With their advocacy of agriculture in the St. Vrain Valley, they became a natural partner in "fair-like" events to take place at Lake Park despite the official county fair still remaining at the fairgrounds in Boulder for another 20+ years.

**1891** – In 1891 a proposal was advanced to fill in the lake and make a race track within the approximately 12-acre park. Longmont Ledger editor Henry Hayward felt anything was better than "that unsightly, filthy, stinking frog pond". Soon a half-mile race track was laid out encircling the lake. Initially developed as a track for horse races between neighbors, the "Longmont Driving Association" was soon organized among the town's elite as horse racing became a more popular activity and spectator sport. For a number of years, the Association held an annual "Fair" at the park. With the track, horse barns, and daily work-outs for the harness racers, the "Longmont Driving Park" continued to be a major attraction throughout the 1890's and the name for the site stuck.

Bicycle riding and racing also became popular throughout the U.S. in the "gay nineties." Not to miss out on the new fad, the "Driving Park" became a hot spot for bicycle club racing in 1892. The Driving Park property, to later be named Roosevelt Park, was donated to the City in 1892.

**1895** – The “Longmont Fair”, sponsored by the Longmont Driving Association, was held October 9-11 at the Driving Park. Activities included every day races, BBQ, ‘Sham Battle’, and a grand display of agricultural products.

**1899** – In 1899, the Driving Association’s annual fair was succeeded by the “Pumpkin Pie Day” celebration. Sponsored by businessmen and local organizations, the first event was held in Thompson Park. The Empson and Daughter Cannery supplied canned pumpkin to hundreds of Longmont’s housewives and 5,000 pies were baked for a crowd of thousands coming from all across the Front Range. Pumpkin pies, free cider, coffee, and BBQ beef sandwiches were served before the crowds headed over to the Driving Park for the afternoon horse races.

At the first Pumpkin Pie Day event, a morning parade of decorated horse-drawn floats started from the railroad depot, was led up Main Street by the Longmont Coronet Band and the Volunteer Fire Department, and completed their route at Thompson Park for the remainder of the festivities.

By October 5, 1899, the official move of the county fair was completed from Boulder to the Driving Park in Longmont. That year the fair lasted only one day, but featured traditional horse racing, a livestock show, and home economics exhibits at the Park.

Researchers discovered adults in the farming community did not readily accept new agricultural developments on university campuses – practices like using hybrid seed corn, milk sanitation, and better home canning procedures. However, they found that young people were open to new thinking and would experiment with new ideas and share their experiences with their parents. Thus, the start of rural youth programs to introduce new agriculture technology to their communities.

**1900** – Because of the widespread reputation Pumpkin Pie Day was gaining, the railroads coming through Longmont began to add extra cars to bring in visitors. There continued to be free food, music, balloons, dancing dogs, a parade, horses, carriages, war veterans, sports teams, horseless carriages, visiting dignitaries, and political candidates.

Thompson Park remained one of the venues and participants would hear the sounds of local bands such as the Pumpkin Hayseed Band and the Longmont Pumpkin Husker Band. The celebration always brought out hungry crowds to the point where the pumpkin pie baking became too burdensome for the housewives and was turned over to local bakeries.

On September 28, 1900, Theodore Roosevelt made a campaign stop in Longmont for his Presidential office run. That visit gave life to the Roosevelt Park name to eventually replace the long-standing Driving Park name.

**1902** – A.B. Graham, a school principal in Clark County, Ohio, formed an official club of boys and girls with officers, projects, meetings, and record requirements. This was considered the birth of 4-H in the U.S. Many of the early clubs were project oriented and called “Tomato Clubs”, “Corn Clubs”, “Pig Clubs”, or “Canning Clubs”. T.A. Erickson of Douglas County, MN started local after-school clubs and fairs that same year.

**1905** - One state over, E.C. Bishop was encouraging work in corn growing, sewing, and baking projects in York County, NB. From 1905 to 1914, 4-H clubs were started in nearly all states. Young people responded well to organized clubs that introduced them to agricultural science and technology.

By 1905, there was steady growth of the county fair with permanent buildings replacing tents at the fairgrounds, one by one, by 1925.

**1913** – The Executive Committee of the Longmont Playground Assn., Parks Board, and Community Assn. undertook sponsorship of the St. Vrain Valley Fair. Proceeds went to providing swings and other playground equipment for Collyer and Thompson Parks.

**1914** – The two-day “St Vrain Valley Celebration” opened August 27-28 at Driving Park in place of Pumpkin Pie Day that many felt was getting stale and had served its time and purpose. Estimated cost was \$2,975. With a shortage of buildings, large tents were raised to contain exhibits of agriculture and business, a dog and chicken show, carnival, the first airplane flight over the town, harness races, and Roman chariot races. Another unique event during this fair was a baby show. It was not a competitive beauty show but rather an event that included a scientific exam of babies up to 6 months of age brought to the fair by their parents. Using the babies as props, local doctors explained ways for parents to ensure better baby health.

The passage of the Smith-Lever Act of 1914 created the Cooperative Extension System at USDA and nationalized the 4-H program. Cooperative Extension is associated with more than 100 land-grant universities and over 3,000 county offices across the nation. It combines the expertise and resources of federal, state, and local governments and is designed to meet the need for research, knowledge, and educational programs for the public.

**1915** – The Fair Committee and Parks Board unveiled an improvement plan for Driving Park that included a main exhibit building and assembly hall, stock pens, stock judging stadium, horse stalls, new ¼ mile cinder track, baseball diamond, children’s playground, and a sunken garden.

**1919** – One of the most important meetings in the history of the 4-H movement was held in Kansas City. The general structure of local clubs was firmly established, and expansion of projects was encouraged, relationships between club work and vocational education in the schools were defined, and the general principle of local initiative for the program was ratified.

**1920** – Charles Hover and four local investors purchase the Empson Canning Factory from J.H. Empson. Hover serves as President and General Manager until it merges with the Kuner Pickle Company in 1927. Always interested in agriculture technology, Hover was an active promoter of the county fair.

**1921** - The largest Northern CO fair (“The Fair Beautiful”) opens in September, 1921 and attracted a record-breaking crowd of 2,500 people. Jack Murphy remembered it as the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. Later expansion of the fair was financed by sale of ‘shares’ to local businesses.

The first-ever state high school football championship game was played on the county fairgrounds site in Roosevelt Park between Longmont High and Colorado Springs.

**1922** – In addition to the fast-paced sulky racing at the county fair, a new ‘Flying Trapeze’ act was introduced.

**1925** - In August 1925, a new grandstand in Roosevelt Park was completed with funds that bachelor farmer Fred Sigley had willed to the City. It was finished just in time for the first of many auto races in the park. Eventually the track area was converted to a rodeo arena.

**1927** – 5,000 people attended the county fair September 5-8. The County Fair Assn., Volunteer Firemen’s Assn., and Elks Club sponsored and offered \$6,390 in cash prizes. Pioneer Charles Hover was named as Superintendent. There were fire-fighting displays, a stock parade daily before the grandstands, harness races that featured 52 entrants, and a high jumping horse valued at \$10,000 that would jump over high hurdles as well as an automobile. Another unique event was titled, “Auto Polo” and included Ford automobiles with running boards and roll bars. Each of the 2-4 cars in the game would have a player standing on a running board and while holding on while moving try to strike a ball with a long-handle mallet. The objective would be to

try to get the ball to a goal post before the opposing side would. After the fair was over local businesses urged the addition of more entertainment to build on that success.

**1928** – Horse racing was the main event and generated the best fair attendance of the past eight years.

News reports noted that the Boulder County Fair is primarily an agricultural fair. It is a place to promote agricultural and educational interests, exhibit the best of what is grown, exchange ideas, and have fun.

**1930** - In the 1930's many area farms were lost to foreclosure due to the Great Depression.

To somewhat counter the mood of the community going through tough economic times, the opening day of the fair on September 2<sup>nd</sup> was a temporary revival of Pumpkin Pie Day. KE Packing Company furnished Longmont Bakery with enough pumpkins to make 600 pies. The Lions Club volunteered to serve the free pie, sandwiches, pickles, and coffee. Following the meal there are horse races, a rodeo, circus acts in front of the grandstands, farm products and floral exhibits in the auditorium, automobile races with a \$25 purse, and moving pictures shown in the evening. The fair organizers advertised the event along the entire Front Range to attract visitors.

**1931** – A newly named Boulder County “Junior Fair” begins and runs in late August – early September.

**1937** – Robert Montgomery named the Manager of the County Fair. The Premium cover listed the 1937 event as the Northern Colorado Livestock Show and Boulder County Junior Fair.

**1942** - In 1942, the fair buildings consisted of three wooden structures in the northeast corner of Roosevelt Park. The largest was the horse barn left over from the horse track days. There were divided areas for cattle, sheep and pigs in the barns.

The Fair program for August was enlarged and it was considered the most complete livestock show ever held at the fairgrounds. By popular demand, Pumpkin Pie Day had a one-day revival.

**1945** – Reorganization of the governing Fair Association is complete. The livestock barns have been filled to capacity with entries.

**1946** - In 1946, The Gibson Manufacturing Co. opened a tractor factory in Longmont, the first new heavy industry to locate here since the turn of the century. Many farmers were looking forward to a display of the new equipment at the county fair.

But an announcement on August 19<sup>th</sup> cancelled the county fair for the first and only time in its history due to community-wide fears of a polio outbreak.

Ironically, the City of Longmont held the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of its founding at Roosevelt Park a month earlier on July 3-4 of 1946.

**Mid- 1940's** - In the years of WWII, a small fair was held. On display were draft horses, mules, Jersey, Guernsey, Holstein, Brown Swiss and Ayrshire dairy cattle mixed in with Hereford and Shorthorn cattle, Duroc and Berkshire hogs, and Suffolk and Hampshire sheep.

**1947** – In August the fair was rejuvenated with 750 entries in the Jr. Division. The rodeo parade, led by Governor Wm. Lee Knous, was attended by 12,000 people.

**1948** – The local American Legion chapter built the rodeo arena. There were a record number of exhibits in all Departments for the fair with the hog exhibit the largest ever. 4,000 people came to see the rodeo.

Additional temporary facilities had to be built to accommodate all the entries. Exhibitors of cattle, hogs, sheep and rabbits were using the Boulder County Fair as a jumping off point for the State Fair. The older wooden barns at the fairgrounds were falling into disrepair so the County Commissioners, with city approval, had them torn down and replaced with three large steel sheds and an adjacent brick building for an office and storage space. With the assistance of numerous 4-H and FFA volunteers, Jim Henry and Art Stromquist provided strong leadership of the fair board.

At the fairgrounds, the Memorial Building and a frame community building housed the competition in 4-H and open classes of crops, cooking, sewing, and all the things farm families do all year long. In the parking area north of the Memorial Building farm equipment was displayed and demonstrated. The Murphy Brothers showed John Deere tractors and equipment and Bill Williams showed Minneapolis Moline tractors. Occasionally, Case, Allis-Chalmers, and International Harvester equipment was also in the mix.

A story noted by Bill Harrison in the *Lafayette News* of this year, a non-franchised dealer who undersold others in the area, asked for a space in the parking lot to display his products. The

pressure was on the fair board to accommodate him or get sued. The other dealers threatened to boycott if space was allowed for the outlier. The fair board could not deny the space so the established implement dealers took the year off. The new kid on the block had to rent the whole parking lot that year in order to preserve the fair board's revenue.

**1949** – The flower show was featured during the fair.

**1950's** - In the 1950's and 1960's, the county fair started to bloom into the premier county fair of Colorado, leading to the State Fair on Labor Day. In 1951, the Boulder County Fair was the largest such event in CO, except the State Fair. People around the state would bring their show animals to Longmont for a trial run prior to taking them to Pueblo for the State Fair. At times the dairy cattle show in Longmont would be larger than the show at the State Fair.

In 1952, the rodeo expanded to a 3-night event. Within two years, the purse was up to \$8,000.

In 1953, there was no fair queen due to economic reasons. John Cushman was the top rodeo prize winner.

With the 1954 rodeo, there was \$8,000 worth of prizes.

1957 was the second year for the Little Wranglers show. The main rodeo profits were expected to top \$10,000 and were earmarked for the Longmont Community Hospital Fund.

The 1958 county fair of August 13 – 16 surpasses the State Fair in number of entries in several departments.

Because of the growth of the livestock exhibits at the fair, a full-time veterinarian was hired for the fair run. Bill Harrison was hired at a salary of \$25 for the entire fair. He continued in that position for the next 25 years. Longmont's population was 8,099 in 1950 and 11,489 in 1960.

**1961** – There was a proposal advanced in September to move parts of the state fair from Pueblo to Longmont to join the Boulder County Fair. The idea was to snag the agricultural, livestock, and home economics exhibits for Longmont in the tradition and spirit of old-fashioned fair celebrations. A Mr. Mackie maintained that "Pueblo could retain the industrial fair, sideshows and girlie shows. Longmont is, after all, the agricultural heart of the state."

**1963** – The American Legion announced they were going to stop sponsoring the fair rodeo. The Jr. Chamber of Commerce stepped in with their sponsorship for the 1965 rodeo and earmarked one-half of the proceeds for the Tiny Tim Center.

**1967** – There were at times acrimonious discussions between the Longmont City Council and County Commissioner Jack Murphy about the value to the community and expense of the county fair. Murphy took exception to the views of the Council and their suggestions that rodeo events be cancelled from all future county fairs. Parking issues with the surrounding neighborhood surfaced in the discussion as well.

After the fair, some exhibitors requested permanent livestock holding pens and upgraded facilities for the rodeo. Others suggested that the fair events had outgrown Roosevelt Park and it was past time to find a new location. A decision was made that there would be no new investments in livestock facilities at Roosevelt Park.

**1969** – In 1969, the St. Vrain Historical Society revived Pumpkin Pie Day in conjunction with its antique show and flea market to raise funds for purchase of the Old Townley Home. While no longer the size of the great era of community festivals, the annual event continues to be celebrated the second weekend of October as a fundraiser for the St. Vrain Historical Society.

**1970** - In 1970 a roundhouse was built at the fairgrounds for additional educational displays.

The controlling interest in the Kuner-Empson company moved out-of-state so the cannery closed after 83 years of operation in the Longmont community.

A St. Vrain Recreation Committee identifies several sites up to 170 acres south and west of Longmont as potentials for a new fairgrounds and all-purpose park.

Dog obedience shows become popular fair attractions.

Fair Board members jump into the fray writing editorials concerning the fair as a tremendous asset to the Longmont community.

**1971** – A new breed of poultry, a turken (cross of a turkey and chicken) was entered in the fair.

There was much talk about the county fair outgrowing the Roosevelt Park site. Some tensions also with sharing the site with the Longmont High School football team and the continuing need for a playing field in good condition by football season.

**1973** – The new fairgrounds site project may happen sooner than later because of a possible eviction from Roosevelt Park of the county fair event. Longmont City officials announced that City Park (aka Roosevelt Park) would not be available for the 1974 fair. The 4-H Clubs that make



up the Horse Leaders Association were the first to step forward and donate \$500 towards a new fairgrounds.

In August a committee of county fair and pow wow members was formed to study relocation of the County Fair and the Boulder Pow Wow events to an uncongested, common facility. The Fair and the Pow Wow suffer from the same problems of urban congestion and lack of space.

**1974** – The first horse pulling contest was to be held at the August County Fair. Teams from Thayer, KS have dominated the regional contests.

Carrol Hamon and his family were honored as the County Fair family of the year. In addition to his long career with the Federal Soil Conservation Service and induction into the Colorado State Conservation Hall of Fame, he was a 4-H leader for 15 years and managed the 4-H dairy bar during the county fair for many years.

**1975** - In 1975, 750 young 4-H members sent hand written letters, mostly in pencil, telling the name of their Club and asking County Commissioner Jack Murphy to build them a new fairgrounds. He listened to their requests and set out to convince the other two County Commissioners that it was an idea whose time had come. The momentum resulted in a new site being purchased a year later at the southwestern edge of Longmont. To honor his advocacy for the new fairgrounds site and his strong interest in promoting 4-H youth programs, the outdoor arena was later named the Jack Murphy Arena.

The Fair and rodeo begins August 6<sup>th</sup> this year and highlighted Professional Rodeo star Larry Mahan for the rodeo competition.