

From the October 2013 Beacon

The coming of fall brings back memories of past community fairs

With files submitted by Allan Anderson

October is a big fair month here in St. Clair Township. This year, the 163rd Brigden Fair will once again carry on a tradition that has fascinated and thrilled area residents since agriculture first became a driving force here.

Allan Anderson, a member of the Heritage St. Clair Committee, writes that, although the Brigden Fair is the biggest and oldest small town fair in the province, the former Sombra Township also boasted a pretty spiffy fair of its own once upon a time.

The annual fair was held each September for 51 years until 1943 and it was often the first fair of the season. It was such a popular local event that the Sombra Township council of 1918 passed a motion to make Fair Day a township holiday.

Records indicate that the Second World War and the ensuing war effort throughout the first half of the 1940s greatly affected the volunteer commitment of the Fair Board and it was eventually forced to shut down operation. But while it ran, the Sombra Fair, hosted by the Sombra Agricultural Society, provided a place for people to meet, compete, show off, and share their wares, farming achievements, and crafts, just as the Brigden Fair continues to do today. Horse racing was always a feature attraction.

Unlike fairs of the modern era, old time fall fairs also gave everyone a chance to show off their finest outfits. Men's work clothes were replaced with suits and well-blocked hats, and women's house dresses were left in the closet in favour of their Sunday best dresses and fetching hats of all descriptions. A fall fair was a grand occasion, a place to socialize before the Winter snows made travel difficult.

The Brigden fairgrounds have continued to expand and grow, while the Wilkesport fairgrounds, once the site of annual fall excitement, now accommodates the St. Clair Township public works yards.

An Old-Fashioned Christmas

A Holiday tradition at the Moore Museum

The Moore Museum's most popular school program is *An Old-Fashioned Christmas*. Approximately 1,000 children attend this program each year, experiencing the traditions and the spirit of Christmases long past.

The log cabin is decorated for a homespun pioneer family Christmas. Trees and toys in the main building bring the traditions and elegance of the Victorian Era to life. Students taste history when they participate in a taffy pull and sample the results. They are able to create a pioneer or Victorian-style decoration, giving each student a souvenir to take home to add to their own family's Christmas traditions.

These decorations often become treasured heirlooms to be enjoyed by generations yet to be. Adults who visit during this Christmas celebration often recall when they came to the museum as children and made the decoration that still hangs on their family tree each year.

An Old-Fashioned Christmas is available for school groups from Nov. 25 to Dec. 19 this year. Morning and afternoon bookings are offered, and evenings for children's groups can be arranged. Programs must be booked in advance. Program dates fill up quickly so teachers are encouraged to call soon to ensure the best time slots. The cost of the program is \$4.05 per student.

Further details are available by calling the Moore Museum at 519-867-2020 or visiting the museum Website at www.mooremuseum.ca.