

GOING TO THE BLOOMSBURG FAIR IN THE 1870s

Editor's Introduction: The author of this letter, Viator, undoubtedly a pseudonym, wrote to the editor of the *Columbian* describing his observations of the people who attended the Bloomsburg Fair in 1871. He felt there was "no place where you can study human nature to more advantage than at a county fair." His commentary ranged from recounting the conduct of young people, to the practice of smoking, President of the United States, dental hygiene, religious sects, and the Republican Party. The missive appeared in the *Columbian* on October 20, 1871, and is reprinted verbatim.



Mr. Editor: Of all the sights at the Fair, the Fair itself, is the greatest sight to see. There were lots of fair women, and doubtless also, of brave men. There were cakes and candies, apples and cider, ice cold lemonade and raspberry syrup. There were chickens and pigs, horses and cattle, sheep and mules. There were wild men from Africa, sword swallows, thimble riggers or something of the sort, and all kinds of devices, good, bad, and indifferent, to make money.

I know of no place where you can study human nature to more advantage than at a county fair. The sharper, the business man, the mechanic, and the farmer congregate there. The young fellow who has a sweetheart goes and takes her, and the one who has none goes to find one. Girls who have lovers promenade quietly in a state of bliss, and those who have none are to the fore, as the scotch say, to secure one. The younger girls keep their eyes upon the older ones to learn, but the boys are staring round for the purpose of chaffing older ones who are for the first time, looking sheepishly at calico.

You see there young fellows who think themselves gentlemen, puffing a cigar, and gallanting a lady. It was not so in the olden times – gentlemen did not smoke even in the presence of ladies – and indeed, *gentlemen* do not now. But what else can you expect, when the man who should be the first gentleman in the republic [President Ulysses], is a horse racing, cigar smoking, whiskey drinking moss trooper! It is a bad example for our young men to have, and still worse to follow.

You see there beautiful girls, dressed in the highest art of the milliner and mantua maker, whose under-skirts, as they pass through the crowd, turn up and prove that they have not seen the washtub for months. You can also observe, as they smile sweetly at the compliments of their gallants, that their teeth have seldom, if ever, been brought in contact with a tooth brush. Nothing is more utterly disgusting than a foul mouth, and nothing is more positively unjustifiable and inexcusable. For a young lady, faugh! When a brush and a tumbler of salt water to cleanse the mouth after every meal and before retiring, would preserve the teeth, purify the mouth, and sweeten the breath!

There were also on the ground a sleek scalawag, run I was told by the Young Men's Christian Association, making a speech in favor of republicanism and the sects. That, Mr. Editor, though it grieved, did not surprise me. It only proved what I have long foreseen, that the friends of religious liberty, will sooner or later, be called upon to combine and defend themselves against the encroachment of the sects; which are inaugurating their campaign in tirades against priests, and bishops, and popes, confounding in their harangues Anglican and Roman, either through ignorance or malice

TOURNAMENT CONTEST AT THE BLOOMSBURG FAIR

Editor's Introduction: The Bloomsburg newspaper, *Columbian*, carried an interesting story in its October 18, 1878, issue about a new event at the Bloomsburg Fair. The article hailed it as the "leading feature of the exhibition." It involved a throw back to the middle ages of Europe with knights and their lances riding horses as well as a queen and "maids of Honor." The following article is a verbatim copy.



The Exhibition of the Columbia County Agricultural Society began on Wednesday, October 9th and continued until Saturday, the 12th. Heretofore the fair has been held three days, but the success of the present year will probably inaugurate the custom of having it one day longer. There was the usual crowd of people in attendance, and the display was not much different from that of other years. It is estimated that over 10,000 tickets were sold.

The leading feature of the exhibition was the Tournament on Thursday. Fifteen men gaily dressed in theatrical and fancy dress costumes with lances in hand and mounted on fine horses, paraded through the principal streets of the town in the morning, headed by the Bloomsburg Band. In the afternoon at three o'clock, the procession made its appearance on the grounds, and shortly afterwards the tilt began. There were three wires strung across the track at the Grand stand, about twenty feet apart, and from each of these an iron ring two inches in diameter was suspended. The knight who could remove the largest number of rings in four trials and carry them off on his lance, with his horse on a keen run, was the victor, and had the privilege of crowning the Queen of Love and Beauty. Much interest was manifested in the contest, and one knight who carried off the three rings on two occasions met with loud applause. The largest number captured out of four trials was seven, by two different knights. In two more trials to settle the tie, three more rings were taken by one, making ten rings out of eighteen, which was very good. After the announcement of the result, Miss Grace Harman was crowned Queen of Love and Beauty by the victorious knight, and Miss Minnie Eyerly and Miss Sadie Bates were crowned Maids of Honor by the two taking the next highest number of rings. The young ladies were becomingly dressed in white and wore gilt crowns. After all the knights had done honor to the fair ones, Col. J. G. Freeze made a few remarks explaining the Tournaments of the middle ages. The Queen and her maids were then escorted home by the Cavalcade, and the Tournament was over