

# BLOOMSBURG'S SECOND FAIR IN 1917

By George A. Turner

One of the newspaper headlines that the readers of *The Morning Press* read on October 24, 1917, announced: "Bloomsburg To Have Its Second County Fair Soon." The article reported that a second big annual county fair would be held at the "Midway" on the Bloomsburg Fair Grounds. It would run for three nights, opening on November 10, Saturday, and concluding on the following Monday and Tuesday evenings.

The fair represented a community effort during World War I to raise funds for the War Camp Community Recreation Fund. This was a project to provide community club houses, a social environment, for soldiers and sailors in communities adjacent to the military camps and naval bases. The vast influx of servicemen into these communities put a severe strain on their limited social services. There was an urgent need to provide facilities to offer recreation and entertainment activities such as athletic events, dances, films, theatrical productions, and sight seeing tours. The purpose of this second Bloomsburg fair was to raise money to help communities in developing social programs for servicemen. Indirectly, this kind of endeavor would benefit the young men from Columbia County that had gone into the service.

The Bloomsburg Business Men's Association and numerous civic minded citizens took the leadership in getting the fair organized. A general committee was established with Frank P. Zarr as its president, Louis W. Buckalew as secretary, and Mrs. Willie Law the treasurer. Harry C. Rulon, president of Bloomsburg Town Council, wrote an open letter to the community urging the public to support the fair. He endorsed the fund drive as a worthwhile project to provide the needed resources for establishing ". . . healthy, happy contact between soldiers in camps and posts and the neighboring communities. It will make the men of the New National Army 'at home' in every city and town. Provide normal social entertainment and recreation for the soldiers and sailors." He concluded his appeal by saying: "It will support the spirit of America in the men wearing her uniform. I urge every citizen as a duty of pure patriotism to contribute liberally to this most urgent need. Let those of us who are not going across, 'come across.'"

There was a strong response in the community; numerous organizations sponsored a variety of booths with the money they earned going to the War Camp Community Recreation Fund. "County Fair Off To Big Success" was *The Morning Press* headline after the first evening. The fair opened with more than 1,000 paid admissions. "Outside the Bloomsburg Band played away for dear life; inside attractive girls sold balloons and blew squawkers for dear life. In front of each booth megaphoned armed barkers barked for dear life. Every noise producing instrument that ever was invented was in use. The

money came gaily across for a good cause. Down in one corner Ralph Phillips was taking your picture while you waited; in another corner Ira Roberts was popping corn and roasting peanuts, and selling all he could roast."

Odd Fellows and Rebekah lodges ran food stands, Knights of the Golden Eagle operated a cider mill, and the Patriotic Order Sons of America ran a game called "Kill-the-Kaiser." The James and Alexander orchestras contributed their time to provide music for the people. In addition, there was free vaudeville entertainment. On the last evening, a large number of farmers each contributed a chicken which was then sold. Two ladies, Miss Bess Quick and Mrs. George Phillips, and their assistants had charge of the "fancy work booth" which raised nearly \$260. The Elks earned the largest amount for any one organization, \$344.85.

The organizers of the fair exceeded their goal to raise \$640. The three day event in which countless number of citizens gave of their time and talent for a very worthwhile cause of helping servicemen away from their homes, earned nearly \$1,600. The local newspaper described the fair as the "most successful affair of the kind every held in Bloomsburg."