

THE BLOOMSBURG FAIR, 1892 – 1941

James D. Goss

EDITOR'S NOTE: In 1941 after half a century of service as an employee of the Bloomsburg Fair Board, Mr. Goss composed this history of the Bloomsburg Fair as viewed through the eyes of a loyal employee proud of his service. It contains a record of officers, growth, achievements, and many vivid reminiscences. This account comes from a Society pamphlet publication prepared by Edwin M. Barton. The date of the publication is unknown.

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I came to Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania, in 1891 and worked my first fair in 1892. I started as utility man and my uncle, W. W. Barratt, Sr., was caretaker of the fair ground at that time.

There was only twelve acres of ground and there was only one exhibition building – a wood one at that. A wooden grandstand; four old buildings; a chicken house; a half mile race track around the old exhibition building; and a ticket gate was on the Scott Alley side.



A large, well dressed crowd at the Bloomsburg Fairgrounds, circa early 1900s

Now we come to Leonard Street. There was an old office; a ticket gate office; and a pair of wood wagon gates for vehicles of all kinds. Then, along from Leonard Street Avenue, leading up to Barton Street, there were some wooden cattle sheds; pig pens; sheep pens; and some

race horse stables. Down about Barton Street gate was two wooden horse barns; and apple tree; a pump; and another wooden horse barn. Along the fence was some more cattle sheds. That was the end of the fair ground.

There was a wooden fence all around the fair ground with watch-boxes. Then, at different times, they bought ground and now they have one hundred and thirteen acres. Then, they built a cement driveway from Leonard Street down to the new, brick, exhibition building. Then they built the flower show, brick building and the new brick office building for the board to hold their meetings. We have built a cement grandstand where the old, wooden grand stand used to be and this grandstand will seat six thousand people. We built a new, half mile, race track and I helped to build it. And there are only three living that I can remember that worked on that track. One was George Trump, one was Henry Dieffenbauch, and myself, James Goss.

I remember on Christmas Day, December 25, 1891, it was like a summer day. We played quoits in the extreme end of the ground to the left. I dug down and found the clay that they built the new race track with and George Trump got the other clay from his lots at the back of the carpet mill. Just look beside the new, brick buildings. They have built a new startiers [*sic*] stand; a new stage and dressing rooms for the stage artists of the big shows. They have built a news asphalt road all around the ground. They have built a new brick, ticket office at Fifth Street; a new brick office at Leonard Street; and a beautiful, new brick auto driveway and office at West Main Street. New toilet buildings; new cattle barns; lots and lots of race-horse stables; a new paddock, horse-barns; and a wonderful iron fence all around the fair ground and race track. They have built an agricultural building and a cattle judging area or coliseum, starting the construction of these buildings in May 1941.

Buildings of all kind, I sure have seen this fair grow. This is all writing from memory. I planted most of the tie-post to the tie the horses to - that used to be in the center field. I used to bed all the horse stables, cattle pens and sheep pens down before the fair and cleaned them out after the fair. I cleaned up the ground after the fair at one time. I took tickets at the different ticket gates for thirty-eight years and worked down in the new, brick exhibition building for twelve years as watchman. I remember one fair; it rained from Sunday up until Wednesday morning. We did not hold fair on Saturdays those days, but we did that year, and we did not draw any salaries that year. We gave it to the fair to help the fair along.

Another year, 1906, we had snow Thursday morning - early - one inch and half of snow. It looked like winter on the fair ground. At ten o'clock, the sun came out and we had a fine fair. We did not have any carnivals those days; nor night fair. We only had a few shows. I remember one year, September 17, 1896, we had a hail storm and it broke all the sky-lights in the old exhibition buildings. The, again the same month and year, we had a tornado - September 30, 1896 - and it blew half of the old exhibition building and tower down only three weeks before the fair. They hire all the carpenters and all the help that

could be had. We work night and day to get it ready for the 1896 fair – and we did! And it moved the old grandstand three feet from its foundation; that was the old grandstand that was on the site where the new concrete grandstand is now.

Then, again, in 1904, we had the big flood which left the ground in bad shape. I rowed in a boat through the Leonard Street gate and all over the fair ground. We sure have a wonderful Fair Board and they have worked very hard to give us one of the finest fairs and fair grounds in the state of Pennsylvania.

We also have a wonderful caretaker. He is a grand and a handy man who can build anything. He has saved a lot for the members of the Fair Association – just look at the fine up-to-date paddock horse barn and the other barns and stables that he has built. His name is Mr. Cleese Girton.

I have worked on the Bloomsburg Fair Ground and for all the different fairs from 1892 until 1941 – fifty years, half of a century – and I have been treated very kindly by all the Fair Boards, especially the present Fair Board, and I am very proud of my record.

I have served under fifty different Fair Boards since 1891. The first president was Rider Smith; Treasurer, J. C. Brown; and Secretary A. N. Yost.

The Superintendents of the Concessions at that time were Thomas Webb, William B. Allen, Harry S. Barton, Samuel Johnson, Freas Quick.

The present Board is: Secretary, Harry B. Correll; Treasurer, Jacob H. Maus; Superintendent of Concessions, Carl H. Fleckenstine.

The Directors are as follows: M. J. Grimes, President; Paul D. Jacobs, Vice-President; Harry K. Gilmore; C.R. Kressler, Jr., Albert G. Naunas; E. Myron Sands; George M. Hock; and Bruce Sneiderman. The Auditors are: Warner D. Werkheiser; Franklin Drum; and Howard Daily.

Good luck to the present Fair Board and every one of its supporters. May the Stars and Stripes float over the Bloomsburg Fair Ground for many, many years to come.

GOD BLESS AMERICA!

J. D. Goss

This article appeared in the Columbia County Historical & Genealogical Society's *Newsletter* for June, 2005.