

THE WILSON COUNTY FAIR, 1920-1931

The first Wilson County Fair was initiated in 1920. A group of Wilson County citizens organized the Wilson County Fair Association, which had its headquarters in Floresville, Texas. The association sold shares of capital stock at \$30.00 each to create a fair grounds area approximately where the Floresville High School is located today. The fair complex included a horse race track with a grandstand, exhibit buildings, show buildings and other related structures. The purpose of the fair was to create a county wide effort to encourage diversification and development. To achieve this goal, it was intended to stress educational features, social events and entertaining programs.

In 1920 a fair was scheduled for three days in September. It began on a Thursday and ended on the following Saturday. The opening event featured a parade through the downtown streets of Floresville on the first morning of the fair. After the parade, the fair was formally opened at the fair grounds with addresses by local dignitaries and political candidates. Visitors and participants in the fair's events came from all parts of Wilson County and from neighboring counties. The fair management established a practice of admitting all kinds of agriculture or livestock exhibits without an entry fee. Cash prizes were awarded to all of the winners. This policy encouraged widespread participation.

The social features of the fair helped to insure the fair's continued success. The fair itself was larger than camp meetings, a roundup or a big horse race. Old friends had an opportunity to meet and reminisce about the days past. Conversations and observations with fellow citizens encouraged them to compare economic situations and to see how their personal industry could be improved.

Women were encouraged to select fresh and canned vegetables and fruits as well as dried fruits for exhibit. Flowers, fancy needle work, old curios, and relics were called for. Baked goods such as breads, pies and cakes were displayed. Poultry was also placed in the exhibits. School girls were asked to present their favorite candy recipes. All of the presentations were to be entered in the women's department of the fair, which was managed by the county home demonstration agent.

Goat roping contests were well attended events at the fair. These contests were held each afternoon and became a major feature. Participants in the competition were individuals from Wilson County and surrounding counties.

Football each day was another entertaining event. On opening day of the 1920 fair, Floresville High defeated Beeville High 13 – 0. On the second day a group of all star players from Floresville won over a picked team from Nixon and Stockdale by a score of 32 - 0. In the football game on Saturday Floresville high defeated the Lutheran College of Seguin by a score of 13 – 6. This gave Floresville High an undefeated fair record.

During this first fair, amusement was furnished each day and night by the De Kreko Bros. Amusement Company. Included were six big shows, a Ferris- wheel, a merry-go-round and other attractions. There was dancing each night at the new Floresville Amusement Company Hall. Some of the music included a fine jazz band. Daily horse racing at the fairgrounds was another major entertainment event. An airplane stunt exhibition was presented over the fairgrounds in front of the grandstand about fifteen minutes before the beginning of the horse races. During other parts of the day the planes were available to give individuals a demonstration flight over the Floresville area.

The first Wilson County fair in 1920 was a gala celebration and it went down in history as a memorable event. Thousands of people attended the fair which had ideal weather. The livestock and poultry shows were better than anticipated. The Women's Department in the main exhibit building, the agriculture displays and associated booths were a great credit to what Wilson County had to offer. The first fair in 1920 was a great overall success from the beginning of the parade on Thursday morning to the last piece played by the orchestra at the grand ball on Saturday night.

The fairs were held annually until 1931 with the exception of 1925. With the early successes, the fair directors increased the event from three to four days. It began on Wednesday morning with the opening parade. The fair directors decided not to have a fair in 1931. However, they were hopeful that a fair would be held in 1932. This decision was reached after the pros and cons were discussed with the various citizens from all parts of the county. The collapse of the cotton market had created unfavorable economic conditions. It was generally pointed out that it would be almost impossible to present a fair equal in kind to fairs of the previous years.

Compiled by Gene Maeckel from the files of the Floresville Chronicle Journal and the archives of the Wilson County Historical Society. 01/29/07