Food, Flowers, and Fancywork: Fashioning, Negotiating, and Expanding the Roles of Women in Ontario Agricultural Societies and Fairs, 1846-1980

by

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Abstract

Food, Flowers, and Fancywork:
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University of Guelph, 2016

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Dr. Catharine Anne Wilson

This dissertation examines women’s experiences in Ontario agricultural societies and fairs in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and provides further confirmation for the complexity of rural women’s lives. It contributes to the historiographical debates that surround rural feminism, rural reform, and fairs as tools of hegemony. Most studies focus on provincial, national, and international exhibitions where bourgeois cultural hierarchies were reinforced; this thesis examines fairs at the county and township level where local residents organized these events and ensured their interests were represented. It is argued that women used the fair’s manifold nature to present a variety of identities, some which supported socially constructed notions of feminine behaviour and womanhood, and others that worked to dismantle them. How women presented themselves depended on the things they exhibited, the activities they took part in, and the service they provided. This study relies on traditional documentary material, such as newspapers, government publications, agricultural society minutes, membership records, published prize lists, and photographs. Surviving artifacts that women exhibited at fairs were also used to demonstrate how rural women created objects that represented their values, commemorated their achievements, and assisted in forming their identities. To capture women’s opinions in their own words, diaries and oral history were also employed.
Most women participated at fairs to showcase their loyalty to elements of traditional rural womanhood: familial and communal cooperation, hard work, and thrift. Some sought to display middle-class respectability and taste. Yet others sought to move outside of prescribed boundaries of femininity and display their strength, courage, leadership, and individuality. Women could push the boundaries of social convention and empower and improve their circumstances. They did so in a variety of ways, including displaying their work and abilities as worthy of attention and enlarging their sphere of influence by increasing their mobility and visibility in spaces that had previously been limited to men. Women took advantage of opportunities caused by war, depression, and social change to achieve more authority and further negotiate and expand their interests in and outside of the fairgrounds.
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impassioned my pursuits in history. Thank you also to Randall Keast, the first teacher to encourage me to study history.

My interest in agricultural societies and fairs was first initiated when I began exhibiting dairy cattle as a child. My parents met showing dairy cattle at the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto, so I suppose I owe my very existence to the agricultural fair. I want to thank all of the women and men who work so hard throughout the year to organize their local fairs across Ontario, and I wish extend a special thank you to the Georgetown Agricultural Society of which I was a part for so many years. I also owe a deep debt of gratitude to the women who participated in this study. Eleanor Wood, Gail Bartlett, Glenda Benton, Jeanette Jameson, Jessie Milton, June Switzer, Margaret Lovering, Martha Cranston, Myrtle Reid, Phyllis MacMaster, and Ruth Gunby shared their knowledge and allowed me to recount their experiences at fairs, which contributed tremendously to this study. Many archival and museum staff and volunteers provided critical assistance in locating sources for this project.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In 1898, according to an article in the Toronto Globe, Ontario families’ favourite fall pastime was attending “a Country Fair.” The author told of a family, whose eldest son drove one wagon loaded up with livestock, while the father, mother, daughters, and younger sons took the “democrat waggon,”1 filled with “cheese-cloth-covered boxes of chickens, besides home-made bread and butter and fancy work.” The family’s drive along the country road was “full of silence and expectation of the day’s pleasure,” and the author commented, “Only those who are familiar with the country fair know its delights.”2 He went on to explain that the fair was an institution onto itself, as “necessary to the farmer for a fall holiday as turkey is to the celebration of Christmas,” that it was “a source of inspiration in the improvement of farm stock and produce,” and “the gathering-place of many thousands of people in every township and county in the country.”3 This description evokes an image of the egalitarian household, traveling together to an event that represented opportunity for all members. The husband, wife, sons, and daughters assembled to showcase their individual talents and contributions to the family and community. The livestock they transported epitomized the progressive farmer who had adopted improved animal husbandry, which resulted in superior stock that would serve him, his male heirs, and future generations of livestock breeders in the province. The women’s domestic products and handiwork showcased their skill and commitment to creating goods that supplemented the household income, sustained the family, and gave evidence of their respectability and taste. The silent contentment and hopeful expectation expressed by family members while traveling to the

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1 A democrat wagon is a light farm wagon with two or more seats and drawn by two horses.
3 Ibid.
community’s most significant social gathering emphasized a farm family’s delight in the prosperity and potential triumph their hard work might achieve.

Many families and individuals across the province travelled down country roads and gathered together to enjoy agricultural fairs, but the image of egalitarianism presented by the united farm family in this story does not reflect the very real differences experienced by the women and men who attended. Fairs were social institutions and, as such, they represented a host of cultural values and beliefs that insisted on divergence between the sexes. Certainly common experiences existed at fairs, and rural people had elements of shared consciousness, including a coherent rurality that evolved over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but important assumptions about gender also shaped family members’ experiences in different ways. The very categorization of women’s versus men’s work in rural households created a hierarchy of abilities – and thus relationships of power – not represented by the “separate but equal” mantra of the more progressive-minded people in the countryside.

Agricultural societies were voluntary associations that organized fairs in Ontario and elsewhere in an effort to promote scientific and agricultural progress. Fairs have often been associated with the evolution of the rugged yeoman farmer and innovations made in the fields of livestock and machinery, but they also promoted improvement in domestic and garden products. Otherwise known as “women’s work,” these exhibits were a vital part of fairs and allowed women important opportunities to assert their significance in the household economy and to display their skill and innovation in a public arena. The first part of the dissertation’s title, “Food, Flowers, and Fancywork,” highlights important features of women’s contributions to fairs that form central chapters of the thesis. The focus placed on these topics is meant to combat the

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4 For a useful consideration of the term “rural” and what experiences defined rural life and created a coherent rural identity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Ruth Sandwell, *Canada’s Majority: Households, Environments, and Economies, 1870-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 9-25.
stereotyping of such work as ephemeral and unworthy of serious attention. Women’s household provisioning, recreational pursuits, and homecrafts are worthy of recognition and analysis. They reveal how women understood concepts of mutuality, hard work, thrift, and ideas of middle-class respectability and taste, and how women valued individual expression and sought empowerment through their work.

Women did more, however, than just exhibit these traditional forms of “women’s work” at fairs. I argue that these organizations and events also gave women the opportunity to display new roles and behaviours for public consideration, such as showing livestock, participating in athletic events, and realizing new positions of authority and leadership within an agricultural organization. This dissertation analyzes a range of experiences women had in agricultural societies and fairs in Ontario in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and illustrates that women used the fairs’ manifold nature to present different versions of themselves, some which supported socially constructed notions of feminine behaviour and womanhood, and others that worked to dismantle them. By entering fair exhibits, women were not simply presenting an item of work; they were presenting an object that served as a visual representation of their interests, values, and beliefs. This included a commitment to familial and communal cooperation, pride in the ability to provide for one’s family, dedication to skill development, a belief that material things could embody respectability and refinement, and an enthusiasm for individual expression and artistry. Often these objects remained long after the women themselves were gone as testaments to those associations. By performing in a concert hall, in front of a grandstand, or in a show ring, women also conveyed self through action. Whether women were directing exhibits, serving up pie, showing cattle, exhibiting fancywork, or executing a trick riding act, what women did also enhanced or reshaped societal understandings of who they were, how they lived, and what they
were capable of. Some women participated at fairs to showcase their loyalty to elements of traditional womanhood such as domesticity, while others increasingly sought to move outside of prescribed boundaries of femininity and display their strength, fearlessness, leadership, and knowledge.

Women in general have had rigid expectations placed on their behaviour. Societal ideas about appropriate conduct and opinions helped shape their identities, so it is unsurprising that many conformed to socially acceptable standards of behavior on the fairgrounds. Women’s identities were strongly tied to the household, including traditional domestic tasks, such as fashioning household clothing and goods, growing and producing foodstuffs, and cultivating respectable and moral environments in which their families could flourish. Rural men and women believed that women had an inherent ability to provide care, support, cooperation, and service to their families and communities. They also associated the ideal femininity with beauty, taste, and refinement. And yet, because fairs were also places “so amenable to disorder,” they allowed women the ability to subvert gender roles and expectations.5 The element of subversion at county and township fairs was not nearly as strong as it was at larger urban exhibitions, and local fairs did not provide the same opportunity to experiment with alternate identities and behaviours because of their more intimate nature, but women still found opportunities to challenge the status quo. They used fairs to develop roles and responsibilities beyond the domestic realm by performing publicly in traditionally non-feminine ways, including carrying out feats of athleticism, entering the livestock show ring, and holding the highest office in an agricultural society – the position of president. Therefore, while hegemonic forces helped shape

5 Keith Walden, Becoming Modern in Toronto: The Industrial Exhibition and the Shaping of a Late Victorian Culture (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 59. For an analysis of the order and disorder displayed at the Toronto Industrial Exhibition, see Walden, “Chapter 1: Order,” in Becoming Modern in Toronto, 32-79.
women’s experiences on and off the fairgrounds, women could move outside these larger societal powers.

Ultimately, the thousands of women who chose to participate in agricultural societies and exhibit, perform, and be present at fairs did so because to some extent they accepted the principles espoused by these groups and decided their participation was worthwhile, either for themselves, their families, or their community. These women created life-long friendships, supported community causes, developed valued skills in both their private and public lives, attained a measure of social authority, and simply enjoyed themselves. The joy, pride, and achievement they experienced motivated most of them to return annually. Of course, agricultural societies also benefited from women’s participation. Some men were initially wary of female members, but most came to accept and eventually celebrate the work women did to sustain the organization and its events. Women had moved increasingly into positions of authority, and their ability to promote the fair to both urban and rural audiences became especially important in the 1970s when rural populations were noticeably in decline. Women’s involvement in agricultural societies was necessary for fairs’ success, and by the end of this study, most male members knew it.

This work is very much a women’s history. Women’s lives are important, and there remains a breadth of historical topics about women’s experiences that need further evaluation. This research is focused specifically on women’s involvement in local Ontario agricultural societies and fairs in an attempt to illuminate a subject that has received inadequate attention. Of course, women’s roles and behaviours cannot be studied in isolation and must be understood in

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6 Sandwell, *Canada’s Rural Majority*, 4, 73. In 1976, the rural population in Canada fell for the first time. In Ontario, the rural population grew over the course of the early twentieth century, then remained relatively stable between 1921 and 1951.
the larger context of gender relations and sexual difference. Uncovering why and how women participated in agricultural societies and at fairs is reason enough for conducting this research, but this study also contributes to the historiographical discussion and debate surrounding rural feminism(s), rural and agricultural reform and volunteerism, and fairs as sites of social and cultural creation and representation.

Part of the motivation behind this study was the realization that much of the literature on agricultural societies ignores women’s experiences or provides only a cursory analysis. Scholarly attention on these groups has focused primarily on their activities during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when women were rarely members. Therefore, it is understandable that Canadian historians such as Graeme Wynn, Ross D. Fair, and Daniel Samson have produced excellent studies of agricultural societies, but found few records that promote a sustained investigation of women’s experiences in these organizations. It is convincingly argued that agricultural societies in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were dominated by men more intent on creating middle-class masculine identity and authority than reaching a broad base of rural community involvement.8 Squarely focused on agricultural progress through the improved breeding of livestock, the widespread adoption of better-quality crops, and the

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“scientific” management of farm land, agricultural societies likely had little desire to consider women’s work in any serious and comprehensive fashion. By the twentieth century, however, women’s relationship with agricultural societies had been established through their significant participation as exhibitors in fairs across Ontario during the second half of the nineteenth century, and in the first decades of the twentieth century women were formally invited to join these organizations and assist in the management of township and county fairs. This study emphasizes how women seized opportunities for greater authority in agricultural societies during this period, which in turn strengthened their ability to shape the nature of fairs in the province. Although women continued to be viewed as subordinate to men in these organizations, their roles were never fixed and continued to transform over the course of this investigation.

Fairs and exhibitions have been popularly studied as instruments of cultural hegemony. In the Canadian context, Keith Walden employs this analytical framework to highlight how the Toronto Industrial Exhibition fostered and reinforced bourgeois cultural hierarchies of taste, gender, and race, and shaped “class identities, social spaces, and public policies.” Walden finds that the exhibition served as a relatively successful mechanism in engineering support for “white, male, middle-class values... increasingly organized around capitalist production and the possibilities of consumption thus provided.” Elsbeth Heaman also adopts this approach for her study of exhibitions. Heaman finds exhibitions were less successful as hegemonic tools than Walden does, but she agrees that, although they could accommodate diversity and serve the interest of subaltern groups, they did so only “within an explicitly capitalistic framework,” in

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10 Walden, Becoming Modern in Toronto, xiv.
11 Ibid.
which “certain principles were not open to debate.”

Similar to other gendered studies of fairs and exhibitions, both Walden and Heaman highlight how women used these events to subvert gender roles and create spaces for public expression. Walden highlights numerous instances when the middle-class fair organizers’ agendas were undermined by public resistance, including cases where women used fairs to achieve increased mobility, destabilize notions of gender, and appropriate public spaces. Walden maintains that the fair upheld gender distinctions through the official program of the Ladies’ Department which emphasized women’s roles in the “most-traditional, preindustrial terms,” but he also illustrates that women had significant economic and cultural power as consumers and moved as freely around the fair as men, suggesting that distinctions between the sexes were social constructs rather than biological inevitabilities.

Furthermore, female exhibitors and performers, such as the lady fencers and bicycle racers who performed at the fair, challenged traditional female roles and capabilities.

Heaman’s work provides more attention to women as a subaltern group at these events, and she argues that they used exhibitions to their advantage by demanding a broader public role for their sex, “including the right to speak, to labour, and even to vote.” A great deal of Heaman’s analysis is based on her study of large international exhibitions in which Canadian women took part, but she does consider women at Central-Canadian fairs as well. She highlights

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14 Ibid., 187.
how women’s participation in domestic exhibits amounted to only “a modicum of gain and glory,” and that beyond the work of farm and leisured women, these exhibits failed to consider the other types of work women did in the nineteenth century, including the secretarial, clerical, service, factory, and teaching work that existed.16

Walden and Heaman provide valuable analyses of women’s participation at fairs and exhibitions, but more needs to be said about the township and county fairs in which women’s exhibits tell us a great deal more than simply what “farm wives or leisured ladies” were making, or how women were provided with “a back door into the public sphere.”17 Also, unlike the provincial, national, and international exhibitions where women’s exhibits were strategically selected and typically displayed by elite upper and middle-class urban men and women, county and township fairs involved rural women directly, and therefore these fairs provide a closer understanding of who these women were, what skills and characteristics they sought to showcase, and how they wanted to be remembered.18 Both Walden’s and Heaman’s studies are confined to the nineteenth century and provide a snapshot of the significance of fairs and exhibitions for women; my study expands beyond the nineteenth century into the twentieth in an effort to highlight the significant change that resulted for women and their fair activities, such as the expansion of women’s domain beyond the confines of the agricultural hall and the midway booth and into the show ring and fair board room.19

17 Ibid., 259, 269-70.
18 American scholars who provide a strong analysis of women’s fair experiences include Catherine Kelly, “‘The Consummation of Rural Prosperity and Happiness: New England Agricultural Fairs and the Construction of Class and Gender, 1810-1860,’” *American Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (September 1997), 574-602; Linda J Borish, “‘A Fair, Without the Fair, is No Fair at All’: Women at the New England Agricultural Fair in the Mid-Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Sport History* 24, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 155-176.
19 David Mizener’s PhD dissertation on Ontario fairs in the twentieth century argues that agricultural fairs and ploughing matches were platforms used to articulate and confirm ideas about rural identity. See David Mizener, “Furrows and Fairgrounds: Agriculture, Identity, and Authority in Twentieth-Century Rural Ontario,” (PhD diss., York University, 2009).
Rural identity and community are at the heart of this study, and therefore the term rural should be clarified before discussing the rural voluntary associations and movements in which women took part. The word “rural” is a contested one. Historians studying rural society have had to decide how to define it, usually in terms of geography, often relating to population density and distance from urban centres, or as a cultural classification based on a particular way of life.20 Ruth Sandwell provides a useful discussion of the considerable debate that surrounds definitions of the term rural. When presenting statistical data, she uses the categorization of rural as defined by the Dominion Bureau of Statistics from 1871 to 1941, which distinguished rural people as those individuals not living in incorporated cities, towns, and villages. She also defines rural people as living in communities of fewer than five thousand people, but whatever categorization one uses, she finds that “Canada was a rural country, and Canadians were a rural people, until at least the Second World War.”21 One of the purposes of Sandwell’s work, however, is to provide a fuller description and definition of rural, and she argues that three distinct characteristics distinguished rural life: “the dominance of the outdoors, the enormous amount of physical labour, and the centrality of the household.”22

Many of the fairs that I investigate took place in or just outside of small towns, and, indeed, village and small-town residents also took part in fairs along with individuals living in the countryside. Of course, such a group of people included farmers, labourers, lumbermen, ministers, merchants, seamstresses, teachers, etc. These individuals likely considered themselves different from one another in a variety of respects. Farm families, for example, were themselves

21 Ibid., 9-10.
22 Ibid., 25.
different according to their class, ethnicity, race, and religion. I use the term rural to define all of these individuals, however, because they were dependent on the rural hinterland in some form, and understood their reliance on the land and the importance of family labour. I also accept the more expansive definition of rural that includes all those people living outside major urban areas.\textsuperscript{23} I recognize that rural people were not homogenous and that socio-economic differences should not be ignored, but I believe that some meaningful generalizations can be made, particularly for residents from the agrarian-based communities which were traditionally most involved with agricultural societies and fairs. Farming and farm life were central concerns of agricultural societies, and while such interests were enlarged over time, members generally remained dedicated to maintaining the fair’s connection with agriculture. What I discover among the rural women studied is that those who participated at fairs illustrated a broader rural tradition that scholars have argued valued conformity to community standards and cooperation, yet also believed in independence and self-reliance.

This dissertation also contributes to the literature on women’s participation in rural reform movements, voluntary work, and associations. Rural reformers understood that women were the foundation of rural family life, and they hoped to persuade women to adopt the use of technology, science, business efficiency, and professional expertise in order to improve domestic tasks and help manage the home and the family.\textsuperscript{24} Scholars have argued that reformers met with


\textsuperscript{24} Scholars studying Women’s Institutes in Ontario provide useful analyses of women’s roles in rural reform. See Margaret C. Kechnie, \textit{Organizing Rural Women: The Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario, 1897-1919} (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003); Monda Halpern, \textit{And on That Farm He Had a Wife: Ontario Farm Women and Feminism, 1900-1970} (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001); Linda Ambrose, \textit{For Home and Country: The Centennial History of the Women’s Institutes in Ontario} (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1996); Linda Ambrose and Margaret Kechnie, “Social Control or Social Feminism? Two Views of the Ontario Women’s Institutes,” \textit{Agricultural History} 73, no. 2 (Spring, 1999): 222-237; Terry Crowley, “The Origins of Continuing Education for Women: The Ontario Women’s Institutes,” \textit{Canadian Woman Studies} 7, no. (Fall 1986): 78-81. For other important scholarly research on Women’s Institutes, see Linda M. Ambrose, \textit{A Great Rural Sisterhood: Madge Robertson Watt & the ACWW} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015); and
varying degrees of success in persuading women to adopt reforms. At times women promoted change, and at other times they resisted it, typically based on their individual economic and social circumstances. What is clear, however, is that women were active participants in the changes taking place.

A focused analysis of women’s involvement in agricultural societies, the organizations that were first tasked with improving rural life, illustrates how agricultural societies sought to influence women to retain conventional forms of femininity and improve their domestic work. Unfortunately, it is difficult to know if what fair organizers promoted in terms of agricultural and domestic practices was actually implemented in daily life. Furthermore, did their emphasis on the appearance of items, such as uniform, unblemished garden vegetables or attractively decorated cakes, actually make for a better product? Like others who have studied the influence of exhibitions, this study is limited in the extent to which it can claim a causal relationship between organizers’ stated ambitions and the evidence of those goals being practiced in rural households. For example, though fairs promoted classes for the manufacture of homemade canned goods, we cannot know if women actually canned more for their families because of the fair’s efforts to encourage this.\(^{25}\) What we do know, however, is that the practices promoted at

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\(^{25}\) Andrea Gal, “Grassroots Consumption: Ontario Farm Families’ Consumption Practices, 1900-45,” (PhD diss., Wilfrid Laurier University, 2016), 149-51. Rural women devoted a significant amount of time to the canning of fruits and vegetables and the manufacture of a variety of preserves in the first part of the twentieth century. But whether canning was already popular and fair classes simply reflected this, or agricultural societies’ promotion of the work encouraged more women to can, one cannot know.
fairs were ones that rural women generally supported, and, as this dissertation will show, provided women with opportunities to initiate, develop, and/or expand their skillset in a variety of pursuits, both domestic and nondomestic. Women determined their involvement at fairs, including whether or not they used fairs to support traditional boundaries of participation or to take on new forms of participation and identities.

Voluntary associations are popular research subjects among historians studying agrarian communities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Some of the groups in Ontario that have been investigated include the Farmers’ Institutes, the Women’s Institutes, the Dominion Grange, the United Farmers of Ontario, the United Farm Women of Ontario, and agricultural societies. Women had varying degrees of influence in these agrarian organizations, and scholars have similarly paid them varying degrees of attention. Historian Darren Ferry posits that women’s growing participation in agricultural associations reflected their increasing involvement in the public life of agrarian communities as a whole, but women remained constrained by male members who confined them to the domestic sphere. Even groups such as the Grange that incorporated women into their rituals and meetings reinforced a domestic ideology that saw women’s place in the home and the garden and their identities defined by feminine delicacy, loveliness, and sentimentality. This study argues that rural women’s

27 Ferry, Uniting in Measure of Common Good, 199.
28 Ibid., 224.
volunteerism in agricultural societies and fairs was shaped by similar societal perceptions of gender roles and responsibilities, and definitions of agriculture as a profession undertaken by men, but that over time women and their male allies expanded definitions of agriculture to include women’s work, thus allowing women claims to authority within these organizations.29

This study also contributes to our understanding of rural feminism(s) and agrarian patriarchy. Rural feminism or –isms is a debated topic among scholars who study rural and farm women in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Some argue rural society was a hotbed for conservative and patriarchal discourse, while others contend it was a place where necessity promoted egalitarian forces that gave women social and economic power unequalled in urban settings. Historians Nancy Grey Osterud and Mary Neth argue that American farm women and men in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries forged bonds of interdependence in the household and the community. In contrast to urban women’s historians who argue that middle-class women developed a distinctly female sphere, these rural historians argue for a greater degree of cross-gender mutuality and integration between women and men.30 For instance, Osterud recognizes that “conjunction and disjunction” existed in women’s and men’s relationships, but that women still “sought mutuality in cross-gender relationships rather than retreating into a separate women’s culture.” They worked to create “mutuality in their marriages,


reciprocity in their performance of labour, and integration in their modes of sociability,” thereby enlarging the “dimensions of sharing in their relationships with men.”31 Neth acknowledges that the structure of agriculture favoured men, but she also agrees that farm families’ practices encouraged cooperative relations that “undercut the traditional and legal definitions of patriarchal power.”32 Neth does not ignore power imbalances based on sex and age, but she does argue that the reality of farming allowed women to shape their work and encourage all farm household members to see their lives and interests as relational.33 For the twentieth century, however, Neth points to changes in farming practices that fostered more division between the genders and decreased women’s ability to build mutuality on the farm.34

The ideas shared by Osterud and Neth accentuate a “common culture of reciprocity and respect among women and men,”35 however some scholars challenge this. The American historian Deborah Fink disagrees with the assumption that it was easier for women to achieve equality with men on the farm because of the close proximity of their work and instead posits that agrarian idealism was male-oriented and women were placed in the subordinate roles of mother and wife. Fink argues that cultural assumptions about women’s domestic roles remained unchanged in the countryside, and women were never perceived as equal with their husbands, but were rather viewed as subordinate and peripheral.36 This conclusion has been supported by others writing about Canadian farm women who argue that agrarian communities were

33 Ibid., 39.
34 Ibid., 243.
35 Osterud, Bonds of Community, 276.
fundamentally conservative ones where rural women had limited opportunities for property ownership, decision-making, and leadership.\(^{37}\)

The debate about the degree to which feminism existed in the countryside has been especially contentious among scholars studying Ontario Women’s Institutes (WI). Historian Monda Halpern supports the idea that many “farm women were indeed feminist, and that this feminism was more progressive than most of us would presume.”\(^{38}\) Halpern argues that WI women had ample opportunity to work towards their own interests and challenge the privileges and priorities of men. Margaret Kechnie, however, contends that the WIs did not satisfy the needs of farm women, but served to “satisfy the goals of state-sponsored male farm leadership” and “elite and middle-class town women.”\(^{39}\) Kechnie argues that these groups simply reinforced the idea that women were domestic helpmates rather than agricultural partners.\(^{40}\) Other scholars have recognized that the leadership of Ontario WIs may have wanted to impose an ideal of domesticity, but that WI members had different aims. Linda Ambrose contends that the WIs

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\(^{38}\) Halpern, *And On That Farm He Had a Wife*, 3.

\(^{39}\) Kechnie, *Organizing Rural Women*, 3, 60.

\(^{40}\) Ibid., 81.
allowed rural women to enlarge their public sphere through valuable opportunities to develop leadership skills and political acumen, influence community projects, seek education on various topics of interest, and socialize.\textsuperscript{41} In her study of the politics of Ontario farm women, Louise Carbert also finds that the WI did not ignore the full range of responsibilities and labour farm women undertook in the home and sought to encourage both domestic and market-oriented projects.\textsuperscript{42} Beyond Ontario, Women’s Institutes also played a critical role in defining and meeting the needs of rural women, creating a female cultural space, and challenging the boundaries of acceptable femininity.\textsuperscript{43}

These discussions led me to question what agricultural societies and fairs can reveal about rural women’s experiences. Was women’s involvement representative of other patriarchal institutions where they were regulated or ignored, or did these groups and events allow women space for greater mutuality and equality between the sexes, and the ability to achieve greater authority than was otherwise possible in the wider society? Did women consciously use agricultural societies and fairs to seek out sisterhood and empowerment? Or did they simply participate to fill a void in these organizations and events that, purposefully or not, enabled them to have more power over time as a result of their talents and organizational skills? Can we use agricultural societies and fairs to judge women’s broader experiences in the countryside? I argue that, yes, women’s involvement in agricultural societies’ was constrained by a patriarchal system, but that a degree of cooperation and mutuality was achieved among the sexes that characterized similar relations in rural households and allowed for an appreciation of women’s contributions. Furthermore, agricultural societies benefited from women’s organizational skills.

\textsuperscript{41} See Ambrose, \textit{A Great Rural Sisterhood} and \textit{For Home and Country}; and Ambrose and Kechnie, “Social Control or Social Feminism?” 234-237.
\textsuperscript{42} Carbert, \textit{Agrarian Feminism}, 10.
\textsuperscript{43} Andrews, \textit{The Acceptable Face of Feminism}, xiii, 166-69.
and hard work, but women also benefitted from the opportunities available at fairs to increase their economic, social, and cultural authority. Whether or not they sought it, women often did find sisterhood and empowerment in agricultural societies and fairs. They did not attain equality with men (equality had not been realized outside the fairgrounds either, of course), but by the 1970s at least some women had realized the position of agricultural society president, a significant achievement in the history of these organizations.

This dissertation focuses on the period between 1846, when the provincial association for agricultural societies was first created and women’s exhibits were expanded, and 1980, the end of a decade that experienced a significant growth in the number of women serving on fair board executives and managing fair exhibits and displays. In terms of geography, I have selected examples of fairs from various locations around the province. The majority of sources are focused on the Central and Western regions of Ontario, especially the regions of Peel and York, and the counties of Bruce, Elgin, Grey, Norfolk, Wellington, and Hamilton and Wentworth. Archival information found in Middlesex, Peterborough, and Simcoe Counties was also useful. I focused on areas that allowed for an abundance of primary source possibilities and that were easily accessible from the University of Guelph. Other counties and regions of Ontario are also included in this analysis, but the reports on their fairs and the depth of archival research are generally not as deep. At one point, 354 agricultural societies operated in the province; today 220 remain, each with its own rich and vibrant history.

I do not profess to have completed an exhaustive study. The regions that are most prominent in this dissertation were also regions in Ontario that exhibited a high degree of ethnic homogeneity, especially in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Over the course of the twentieth century, rural communities became more diverse after increased immigration, mainly
European, brought newcomers who were not of British descent. The historical records surveyed for this study did not provide for a sufficient analysis of the different ethnic and racial groups, such as First Nations, Franco-Ontarians, and Eastern-European immigrants, that also experienced fairs and participated in agricultural societies. I believe that additional research on this topic will reveal a great deal more than what has been discussed within the parameters of this thesis, and I look forward to seeing additional work on this.

This study uses a variety of sources, including more traditional documentary sources such as newspapers and journals; government publications and annual reports, including the annual reports of the Ontario Association of Agricultural Societies (OAAS); township and county agricultural society minutes, membership and account books; general correspondence; and published fair prize lists found in public archival and private collections. Other useful sources included published and unpublished diaries and photographs. Diaries provide a rich source of evidence for historians studying rural life, and although they are not a large part of my primary source base, they do provide some important insight, including the relationship between what women did at fairs and their daily chores, rituals, and pastimes. Photographs are especially useful for providing evidence of and illustrating some of women’s late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries’ fair exhibits and activities.

Another key feature of this work is the incorporation of a material cultural analysis in Chapter 5. Artifacts are a defining feature of this chapter on women’s domestic manufactures, fancywork, and fine art because these types of items have been preserved and can be used to provide exceptional insight into their creators’ lives. Artifacts as sources can be intimidating for historians, who may question their own ability to detect and appreciate the minute details of
The inherent complexity of objects, their ability to serve as tools as well as “signals, signs, symbols,” and the fact that “much of their meaning is subliminal and unconscious” are also challenging. A range of approaches to material culture exist, but historians bring their own set of special skills to the task. By situating objects in their historical context, historians find deeper stories that allow us to better understand the social, cultural, and economic environments in which they existed. Objects are especially useful when studying rural women. I had difficulty finding the voices of female fair exhibitors, so when I uncovered items women had shown at fairs or made from materials awarded at fairs, these objects allowed me to consider new questions for my work. Often we consider objects for their utility or aesthetic qualities, but we forget that objects can also act as “companions to our emotional lives or as provocations to thought.” The power of objects to connect people to ideas and to other people was especially evident for the artifacts used for this study. Interaction with objects as historical sources forces one to value what things reveal about “meaning making, identity formation, and commemoration.”

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44 Jules David Prown, Art as Evidence: Writings on Art and Material Culture (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). Prown emphasizes object-centred approaches to material culture. His method of analysis requires researchers to engage in the precise description of objects, which requires a certain level of detailed knowledge about the material features of the object.
49 Ibid.
The use of oral history was also important for this research. I interviewed eleven women who exhibited or were involved with agricultural societies during the period of this study.51 These women were involved at fairs in the Regional Municipalities of Halton and Hamilton-Wentworth, and Dundas and Wellington Counties. When I began this project, I did not intend to conduct interviews or incorporate oral history into my methodology. When I extended my study into the postwar period, however, the opportunity to use oral history was exciting. These interviews provided rich information about women’s experiences at fairs that could not have been garnered from other sources. For example, much of the material I use for earlier periods of the study necessarily relies on others’ assessments of rural women and their work rather than women’s own valuations. Oral history allows for a shift in focus where women tell their own stories. In the same way that material culture provides a crucial tool for studying rural women, oral history can also be transformative because it provides historians with another way to access rural women’s everyday experiences, including relationships with neighbours and kin, and the special moments of their lives, such as winning a baking competition or a dairy calf showmanship class.52 Oral history brings recognition to groups of people who have been largely unnoticed in the historical record.

Oral history also has its challenges, including a required closeness between researcher and subject that can be intimidating. The relationship between interviewer and interviewee, however, can also be richly rewarding for scholars who are open to learning and collaborating in the reconstruction of history and appreciating how the use of a human voice can “breathe life

51 The University of Guelph Research Ethics Board approved the interview component of this research; REB#13JL009.
into history.” Of course, oral history faces the challenges surrounding memory, and the fact that

...we do not have memory as much as remembrances, or even performances of remembering, where what is remembered is shaped fundamentally both by the meaning of the initial experience to the individual in question, and by the psychological – and inextricably social – circumstances of recall.

The present inevitably shapes what is recalled, and historians who engage in oral history recognize that “there remain many contested and unresolved questions about how memory can meaningfully be interrogated by historians.” As historians, however, it is important to try to understand how people defined themselves, including what words they used and with whom they did or did not identify. Despite its challenges, oral history provides the opportunity for rural women to comment on their experiences and the meaning they held and continue to hold. Admittedly, the stories told in this study, including the stories of the women interviewed, were mostly told from the perspective of the dedicated female agricultural society member, exhibitor, entertainer, or long-time attendee. The negative experience of a woman who joined an agricultural society for one year and did not return or a woman who vowed never to exhibit again after a demoralizing loss are absent from the historical record. Future researchers studying agricultural societies and similar groups should be encouraged to reach beyond a “self-selected group” for a fuller representation of what these organizations offered and what they did not.

The chapters of the dissertation are thematically organized, but internally they demonstrate chronological development. Chapter 2 examines women’s involvement in the organizational aspects of agricultural societies, what roles and responsibilities they held, and how

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53 Ibid., 21.
55 Ibid.
57 Thompson, The Voice of the Past, 22.
their participation was shaped by societal forces, male leadership, and their own initiatives. An assessment of the reasons why women volunteered in these organizations is given. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 focus on traditional women’s exhibits. Chapter 3 focuses on food exhibits, chapter 4 on flowers, and chapter 5 on domestic manufactures, fancywork, and fine art. All three chapters demonstrate how the items women exhibited at fairs conveyed societal values and assumptions about women’s work and character, as well as broader social, cultural, economic, and technological change during the period. Chapter 3 provides an extended discussion of women’s contribution to the overall fair display, but chapters 4 and 5 also address how women helped enhance the presentation made on the fairgrounds. Chapter 6 departs from the previous three chapters and considers women exhibiting in what were traditionally defined as men’s exhibits, specifically horse and cattle competitions. The reasons for women’s involvement in these competitions, and the reactions to this involvement are considered. Chapter 7 provides an analysis of some of the other ways women were involved on the fairgrounds. This includes how women used the fair to fundraise, earn a living, entertain and be entertained, win accolades or meet new friends. Chapter 8 provides some concluding thoughts on the arguments presented.
Chapter 2:  
Joining the Board: Women and Agricultural Societies

In 1965, Mrs. Velda Dickenson, past-president of the Women’s Section of the Ontario Association of Agricultural Societies (OAAS), was awarded a special plaque for her years of valuable service to the organization. On the plaque, a lengthy poem was inscribed about Dickenson’s time with the association and her broader community service. The poem began by addressing the society members gathered before thanking Dickenson for her dedication to the organization:

To you, Velda, we do honor,
For all the work you have done,
Your time, talent, and unselfish devotion,
You have given, and many friends won.

The poem continued by describing elements of Dickenson’s childhood, her participation in Junior Farmers and 4-H, and her “love of horses,” which lured her to the fair each fall. It was noted that she began with the Ancaster Agricultural Society before becoming a district representative and eventually the president of the Women’s Section of the OAAS. Throughout her many years of service to the OAAS, she also judged at fairs across the province, and was especially fond of junior competitions because she hoped to inspire the next generation of fair exhibitors. The poem closed with the final stanza:

And now this story comes to an end
Memories have been brought back it is true;
We ask you to accept this parting gift,
A token of our love and devotion to you.

Dickenson and thousands of women like her provided their time, talent, and devotion to help organize and manage local fairs across Ontario. In return, they sought acknowledgement
for their work. In Dickenson’s case, this recognition came in the form of a plaque, presented to her at the OAAS Annual Convention in Toronto in front of hundreds of her peers.¹

Agricultural societies in the nineteenth century generally did not include women. Although some women paid a membership, no records survive of women serving on agricultural society executive committees or directorships during this period. The women who assisted men on fair boards acted as “helpmates” by arranging fair banquets or aiding with women’s exhibits, and they were not recognized for their service in any official capacity. In the twentieth century, this began to change. In the first three decades of the century some women began to assist fair boards, and, by the 1930s, women gained new opportunities when “lady director” positions became common and a separate Women’s Section of the OAAS was established. Women had advocated for more authority, and agricultural societies responded by creating more opportunities for female members. They did so over growing concerns about decreased membership, but also because perceptions of women were changing. Women had made valuable contributions and gained new rights during the First World War. They were eager to expand their authority and create new roles, including leadership positions within agricultural societies.

Still, the power hierarchy that existed between men and women persisted because of long-held assumptions of women’s roles and capabilities. Despite this, female agricultural society members remained dedicated to serving their communities, sustaining public spirit and sociability in the community, and advancing the work of women generally. Historians and sociologists studying rural women have often found that women worked together for mutual benefit, and that their volunteering activity fit into the broader context of their working lives and

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their understanding of rural identity and community as dependent on cooperation. Scholars have also noted that early rural women often acted in ways that can be characterized as “social feminism,” in which women prized female values and competencies that they believed necessitated their influence in social matters, but did not necessarily have the same experiences as men. These women highlighted their experiential differences, unlike equity feminists who made a claim to equality by virtue of their similarity to men. Some scholars have defended rural women in the past as feminist because many of them were committed to improving women’s lives and breaking down patriarchal structures and values by asserting their right to participation in the public sphere. Dickenson represents one of thousands of women who used agricultural societies to create a larger public role for themselves and create a better life for themselves, their families, and their communities.

Setting the Stage: 1792-1846

When the first agricultural society was established in 1792, men did not consider including women. The Niagara Agricultural Society began under the patronage of John Graves Simcoe, Upper Canada’s first Lieutenant-Governor, in an effort to improve agricultural practices

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3 Halpern, *And On That Farm He Had a Wife*, 8-9.

in the province. In the late eighteenth century, agriculture was broadly defined as “Tillage; husbandry,” however the word held a much deeper meaning for agricultural improvers. Agriculture was not simply a practice – the tilling of soil or animal husbandry with a view to harvesting crops or livestock – it was a science and a profession, one that was specifically understood to be undertaken by men. Late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century agricultural improvers in Canada argued that agriculture was central to the advancement of human society and that scientific agricultural practices were central to the creation of improved “husbandmen.”

Late nineteenth-century agricultural improvers also insisted agriculture was one of the most ancient and honorable occupations known; it takes the lead in the world; it is the back-bone and sinew of every country; it had made nations, caused them to become mighty, and when neglected they have collapsed; it must take the lead in all employments; it is the impetus that sets everything in motion.

Agricultural societies promoted agriculture as a profession to which all others were “subservient,” in part because it was perceived as men’s work. Of course, many women performed agricultural labour, and some were singled out for their successful farming pursuits.

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5 Fair, “Gentlemen, farmers, and gentlemen half-farmers,” 49. Fair notes that the official name of the first society is unclear. It was referred to in an official letter sent by Simcoe’s secretary as the “Agricultural Society of Upper Canada,” and has been referred to as such in some of Ontario’s fair history, but it was also addressed as the Agricultural Society of Niagara, and the name “Niagara Agricultural Society” was used often in colony newspapers and it is the name inscribed on the 1966 historical plaque that commemorated its establishment, therefore, I have selected to use this name in my study.
6 Samuel Johnson, *Dictionary of the English Language in which the Words are deduced from their Originals, Explained in the Different Meanings, and Authorized by the Name of the Writers in whole Works they are found*, vol. 1, ed. 7 (London: n.p., 1783).
8 “What is Agriculture,” *Farmer’s Advocate* 3 (November 1868): 164.
9 When the Ontario School of Agriculture and Experimental Fair first opened its doors in 1875, it defined its purpose in very clear gendered terms, which was to give “a thorough mastery of the practice and theory of husbandry to young men of the Province engaged in Agricultural and Horticultural pursuits.” *Annual Report of the Ontario School of Agriculture and Experimental Farm, for the Year Ending 30th September, 1875. Printed by Order of the Legislative Assembly* (Toronto: Hunter, Rose & Co., 1875), 24.
10 “Trades for Women,” *Farmer’s Advocate* 12 (June 1877): 140.
but the idea that “Agriculture, from Adam down” had been the noble pursuit of men was common.\textsuperscript{11}

Simcoe had wanted to transplant a model of agricultural societies that existed in Britain to Upper Canada to help facilitate the agricultural improvement he believed was necessary for the colony’s success.\textsuperscript{12} Agricultural improvement encompassed a range of technological, cultural, and institutional changes that were meant to encourage farmers to accept modern capitalist modes of farming.\textsuperscript{13} Agricultural societies were the voluntary associations aimed at improving farming by disseminating relevant information and advice on progressive agricultural practices for land use and animal husbandry, thereby stimulating further agricultural settlement and production. Beyond better farming techniques, some improvers also espoused self-improvement in terms of “conduct, propriety, and respectability.”\textsuperscript{14} Agricultural improvers who believed that the material and spiritual were inseparable, however, also opened the door for women to have a greater role in agricultural reform because they were recognized as the moral guardians of the family. For some improvers, the home underpinned the political economy of improvement, and a wife’s moral fortitude and thrifty economy and management within the home were as important as her husband’s labours outside of it.\textsuperscript{15}

Still, the early membership of agricultural societies was almost exclusively male, so it is not surprising that historians studying these groups have not considered women in any great detail. Male agricultural society members focused on strengthening middle-class masculine authority, and women were often beyond their purview.\textsuperscript{16} The public sphere was considered a

\textsuperscript{11}“Go to the Fairs – Why?” Brampton Conservator, September 7, 1877.
\textsuperscript{12}Scott, A Fair Share, 17-18.
\textsuperscript{13}Samson, Spirit of Industry and Improvement, 12.
\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., 55.
\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., 75-6.
\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., 251. Fair, “Gentlemen, Farmers, and Gentlemen Half-Farmers,” also identifies women, but determines they were largely excluded. Older works that exclude any discussion of women include Jones, History of Agriculture in
masculine one, and while some women were able to step into the civic spotlight and develop public womanhood, generally men wished to exclude women from civic responsibility. In the 1800s, rural women established a public presence by serving in voluntary associations such as temperance societies and church groups, but they were unable to attain leadership positions in agricultural institutions. Farm journals published articles supporting ideas about the inherent differences between the sexes and women’s inability to perform public and professional roles. Any attempt women made to deviate from their domestic responsibilities was considered a revolt against nature and an abuse of energy that would result in social upheaval. Despite a small number of women who were registered as members of agricultural societies (mainly widows and those unmarried), no women served on the executive or directorship of these organizations throughout the nineteenth century.

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17 Samson, Spirit of Industry and Improvement, 272-3.


Agricultural societies focused on hosting competitions associated with the most obvious pursuits of farm men. Exhibitors won premiums for showing livestock and field crops and for essays on progressive methods of clearing land, crop rotation, fertilization, and general cultivation. Agricultural implement classes were later added to emphasize the tools men needed to do their best work, while male livestock was privileged over female livestock because sires were believed to have a greater influence on progeny than dams.\(^{21}\) Dairy product and textile exhibits were added later, but they did not garner nearly as much attention as classes meant for masculine pursuits.\(^{22}\) Yet, even though agricultural societies perceived women’s work as subordinate to men’s and believed agriculture was a masculine profession, they recognized women could be important helpmates who, under proper supervision, were fully capable of contributing to some forms of farm production. They believed women excelled at dairying, for example, because the work was associated with their feminine skillset. Rural women took advantage of these competitions and others added later on to showcase their abilities and contributions to the household and broader community.

**Behind the Scenes: 1846-1910s**

During the first half of the nineteenth century agricultural societies’ existence had been precarious at best. Often newly formed groups were defunct mere years after they began. By the

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\(^{22}\) “Premiums Awarded at the Frontenac Cattle Show,” *British Whig* [Kingston], October 14, 1835. One class for cheese and another for butter were offered, as well as three “Domestic Industry” classes for flannel, cloth, and socks. The vast majority of classes were for livestock or field crops. Interestingly, the Frontenac Fair premium list is also one of the few during this period that identified married women as competitors, not just widowed or single women.
1850s, however, more than 40 county societies and at least 150 township societies existed throughout the province,\textsuperscript{23} and by the twentieth century more than 350 county and township agricultural societies operated in Ontario.\textsuperscript{24} The growth of these groups was aided by governmental funding, which began in 1830,\textsuperscript{25} but, more importantly, agricultural societies realized that their long-term success depended on hosting robust annual fairs.

The first provincial association of agricultural societies, the Agricultural Association of Upper Canada, was established in 1846 to circulate information about advanced agricultural practices and technology through publications, experimental work, and public meetings, but the association’s most important function was its management of the Provincial Exhibition. The first Provincial Exhibition in 1846 stimulated interest across the province and set a standard for what fairs should display, including home manufactures, dairy products, and vegetables and fruits; all goods typically produced through women’s work.\textsuperscript{26} The importance of women in the household economy, and therefore in the material success of a farm family, made agricultural improvers realize the need to incorporate “women’s work” into fairs if they were to achieve their goal of improving “every branch of Rural and Domestic Economy.”\textsuperscript{27} Agricultural societies had pragmatic reasons for including women, such as swelling gate receipts, but they also believed they had a commitment to see all rural people adopt progressive ways. Beyond the benefit women’s work had for the family economy, nineteenth-century women bore responsibility for

\textsuperscript{23} Ontario Association of Agricultural Societies, \textit{The Story of Ontario Agricultural Fairs and Exhibitions}, 24.  
\textsuperscript{24} Scott, \textit{A Fair Share}, 68.  
\textsuperscript{25} “County and Township Agricultural Societies,” in \textit{Journal and Transactions of the Board of Agriculture of Upper Canada}, vol. 1 (Toronto: Board of Agriculture, 1856), 5. The terms of these grants changed throughout the period of this study.  
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 24. The Provincial Agricultural Association’s constitution that was read and approved on August 17, 1846, declared that “the objects of the Association shall be improvement of Farm Stock and Produce; the improvement of Tillage, Agricultural Implements, &c.; and the encouragement of Domestic Manufactures, of Useful Inventions, and, generally, of every branch of Rural and Domestic Economy.”
the moral welfare of their families, and if they developed a “spirit of intelligence, order, neatness, and taste” through their honest industry and hard work, the agricultural class in general would be advanced.  

Fair supporters believed that individual pride aroused by competition was central to encouraging exceptional performance.  

Although a show of public pride was considered unwomanly because self-display was associated with sexual immorality and disorder, women who organized and spoke at temperance, anti-slavery, and women’s suffrage assemblies had established precedents for women in the public eye. Women exhibited at fairs in the nineteenth century because agricultural societies wanted their patronage, their work was important to the domestic economy, and a strong belief prevailed that women’s presence had a refining influence. There is no evidence that agricultural society members were against including women; rather, the ideas that women had a “refining and subduing influence” on men and that social institutions should reflect “real life” and “conform to the laws of human nature governing the intercourse of rational beings in a refined and cultivated society” were encouraged. Women were already attending fairs across the province, and reformers believed the benefits of including women outweighed any costs of having them compete in public.

Another reason that fair organizers encouraged women’s exhibits was their belief that women needed more education in the domestic realm. As early as 1849, an article in the Canadian Agriculturalist advocated for educating women on how to conduct their domestic tasks.

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32 Ibid., 261-6. Heaman provides an excellent initial survey of women and exhibitions in Central Canada, and the discourse that surrounded their early involvement at fairs in her chapter “Women and the Political Economy of Exhibitions.”

in accordance with the “scientific principles” of the day. The author, identified as Amanda, argued that women were obligated to educate themselves about advances in domestic affairs. She explained that

knowledge of chemistry and dietetics, in a cook, is invaluable to a family. Information regarding the laws of health, and life, and mental philosophy, is absolutely necessary to the proper rearing of children. The suffering I have seen and experienced for want of knowledge, and the almost incredible advantage gained by the application of a few practical ideas, makes me very desirous for others, as well as myself, that we should have “more light.”

Similar to other moral reformers, rural reformers wanted to cleanse and enlighten society. Reformers shed “more light” on women’s work because they believed knowledge strengthened communities. In the 1870s and 1880s, the idea that improving women’s work was necessary for improving rural communities moved beyond farming journals and became entrenched in rural organizations such as the Dominion Grange, and, later still, in rural women’s organizations such as the Women’s Institutes of Ontario and the United Farm Women’s associations.

Despite some groups’ exclusionary policies, by the late nineteenth century most rural organizations recognized that men and women were central to the foundation of rural life. Women’s participation in the Grange and the Patrons of Industry was a significant reason for the groups’ rise in the late nineteenth century, and although agricultural societies did not include women in their meetings, the atmosphere of increased gender inclusion in the countryside likely contributed to the expansion of women’s exhibits in the 1880s. Fair advocates argued that, although chiefly for the farmer, fairs also provided useful instruction for women:

34 Amanda, “Domestic Education,” Canadian Agriculturalist, August 1, 1849.
36 See Ferry, Uniting in Measures of Common Good; Taylor, Fashioning Farmers; Kechnie, Organizing Rural Women; Ambrose, For Home and Country; and Halpern, And On That Farm He Had a Wife.
37 Ferry, Uniting in Measures of Common Good, 223-24, 233-34.
the wife and the girls may find a great deal among the fancy work to interest and instruct them. They will see patterns of fancy work that they can look at and copy when they get home, or they can see some nice way of putting up fruit; or perhaps in a chat with some exhibitor of butter they may learn of a better way of treating their cream to make good butter.  

Women’s exhibits highlighted their enterprise, skill, and refinement and showcased their home, garden, and farm work. The steady increase in classes for women’s work encouraged more women to compete, further stimulating interest. Local newspapers noted how women did their part to make fairs a success. At the 1871 Peel County Fair, the Brampton Times reported that “in the ladies’ department the fair sex contributed rather more than their share to the general effect of the exhibition, proving that their commitment for its success increases with each recurring year.”

By the 1880s, however, women remained excluded from fair boards. Fairs were managed by men who served their local agricultural society as elected officers or directors. Each fair board had an executive committee with an elected president, vice-president (some boards had first and second vice-presidents), a secretary and treasurer (or a secretary-treasurer – both were paid positions), and roughly a dozen directors (this number also increased over time). Typically, directors were also selected as superintendents of various committees of management (cattle, horse, field crops, etc.), which had two or three members serving in each committee. Some fairs also recognized honorary presidents or directors, who were usually past-presidents or wealthy patrons of the society [Appendix A, Chart 2.1]. The main difference between township and county societies in the nineteenth-century was that county societies were usually required to elect at least one director from each township in the district, while township societies simply selected

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39 “Peel Fall Fair! Another Grand Success!” Brampton Times, October 6, 1871.
from their local membership. Altogether, these male officers and directors directed fair programing.

The membership of individual agricultural societies fluctuated over time, and some societies were more successful in gaining and sustaining membership than others, but rarely did agricultural societies have more than a few female members.40 For example, between 1868 and 1896, the Brant Agricultural Society reported only nine female members, with never more than one woman listed in any given year. Of the nine reported women, five had never been married. The fact that only one female member was reported in any given year in an organization that often had upwards of one hundred members annually illustrates the limited acceptance they had as active members of these groups.41 Fair prize lists also illustrate this absence. Nineteenth-century Erin Agricultural Society prize lists recorded all-male fair executives and directorships.42 Even after the First World War, only men served on the fair board and the directors in charge of

40 Larger district or country societies existed alongside smaller township societies for much of this period. In the 1868 Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture and Arts of the Province of Ontario, county agricultural society memberships varied; as many as 408 registered members belonged to the South Ontario Agricultural Society (246 members reported for the North Ontario Agricultural Society), while as few as 37 paid members were reported for the West York Agricultural Society (although the East York Agricultural Society had 147 members and the North York Agricultural Society reported 288 members). Larger counties such as Ontario and York often split the county into geographical districts. Township societies were popular in every county. Although these societies typically had smaller memberships, this was not always the case. The same Commissioners’ report revealed that the Darlington Township Agricultural Society in Durham West had 331 members, more members than many county organizations, while the Lochiel and Kenyon Township Agricultural Society in Glengarry County reported only 22 members. Part of the difference in membership numbers reflected the fact that some counties had more township agricultural societies than others, while certain areas of the province also had larger agricultural communities and a larger population in general from which to draw members. “Analysis of reports of Agricultural Societies for the Year 1867,” in Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture and Arts of the Province of Ontario for the Year 1868 (Toronto: Hunter, Rose & Co., 1869), 48-129. Although there had been longstanding arguments against having both county and township societies – some reformers believed that fewer township societies should exist in order to allow for more robust county societies, while others felt that township societies were more beneficial to local farmers and fostered more equality among members – generally township societies were popular, a trend that continued in the twentieth century. “Agricultural Shows,” Farmer’s Advocate 2 (December 1867): 100; “Agricultural Exhibitions,” Farmer’s Advocate 3 (January 1868): 1; “Township Agricultural Societies,” Brampton Times, January 24, 1868.

41 “Brant Agricultural Society Membership Book, 1868-1896,” A960.066.002, Brant Agricultural Society fonds, Bruce County Archives.

all departments, including “Ladies’ Woollen” and “Fancy Work,” were men.\textsuperscript{43} When women were members, they were not allowed to hold positions on the fair board. Instead, women helped male directors organize women’s exhibits without any official recognition for their service.

The topics discussed at agricultural society meetings reflected men’s interests. Meeting minutes and published reports show that these groups normally conversed about livestock and field crops, the state of current farming practices and the need for change, and developments in agricultural markets and trade. Men sometimes discussed the significance of industrial manufactures but rarely mentioned domestic work. Beyond discussions that advocated for increased and improved dairy production in the province – specifically improved butter and increased cheese production – or the desire for more homemade and commercially-made cloth, any reference to items women made was absent.\textsuperscript{44}

Nevertheless, agricultural societies encouraged women to participate at fairs.\textsuperscript{45} In 1887, an international convention for fairs and exhibitions was held in Toronto and one of the topics discussed was how agricultural societies could get women to take a greater interest in fair

\textsuperscript{43}“Prize List of the Erin Fall Exhibition, 1916,” “Prize List of the Erin Fall Exhibition, 1917,” [Microfilm] Roll 2 A19889.97, Erin Agricultural Society Records, Wellington County Museum and Archives.


\textsuperscript{45}“Agricultural Exhibitions,” Farmer’s Advocate 3 (January 1868): 2. The Farmer’s Advocate promoted the idea of female exhibitors as well, arguing that agricultural societies should encourage “lady exhibitors, whether it should be in art, fancy or useful department.”
work.\textsuperscript{46} Three women formed the committee reporting on this question, Mrs. Noe, Miss Mary R. Heron, and Miss Kate Connelly, and they recommended that agricultural societies secure the cooperation of women interested in fair work and women’s work in general; allow women full authority to revise prize lists, purchase supplies, arrange exhibits, make entries, issue premiums, select judges, and allot exhibit space; give women’s exhibits healthy premiums, equal to other fair departments; and compensate women for their labour and expertise.\textsuperscript{47} The recommendations made it clear that women wanted more autonomy to manage their affairs, more space for their exhibits, more money for their work, and more respect and authority. It appears, however, that few agricultural societies acted on these recommendations. Although women wanted to have a greater role and had a clear vision of what was needed, they remained stifled.

In 1902, Mr. G. C. Creelman was appointed to the position of Superintendent of Agricultural Societies. Already serving as the Superintendent of Farmers’ Institutes and Secretary of the Fruit Growers’ Association, Creelman’s new position represented an effort to “unite in some measure the work of the institutes and the fairs, and to develop the latter along educational lines rather than in circus features.”\textsuperscript{48} Creelman was critical of agricultural societies that focused mainly on managing fairs rather than thinking about additional ways to improve rural communities, and he disapproved of fairs that employed “special attractions” that were unrelated to agricultural exhibits. Creelman proposed a number of reforms, including cooperating with Farmers’ and Women’s Institutes to “furnish lectures on agricultural topics, and give demonstrations in domestic science and butter making.”\textsuperscript{49} In 1904, he emphasized fairs

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{46} “Fairs and Expositions: Second Day’s Meeting of the Fifth International Convention,” \textit{Globe} [Toronto], July 29, 1887.
\item \textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{48} “Fall Fairs’ Revival: New and Important Changes Planned,” \textit{Globe} [Toronto], April 22, 1902.
\item \textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
should secure “a women’s building or tent on each fair ground for demonstrations and lectures on domestic science,”\textsuperscript{50} and in 1908 he encouraged fair programming that educated both sexes.\textsuperscript{51}

Creeelman believed strongly in the need to reform the countryside and he saw rural women as useful allies. Margaret Kechnie argues in her history of the Women’s Institutes of Ontario that Creeelman aggressively promoted the expansion of the WI as a way to help facilitate rural change.\textsuperscript{52} Reformers were concerned about rural depopulation, and they argued that discontented rural women led to discontented rural families. They sought to ease women’s toil by convincing them to make domestic improvements such as adopting “scientific” methods in the home that would elevate their standard of life.\textsuperscript{53} This included new time- and labour-saving technology, prudent and efficient business practices in the home, and professional expertise.\textsuperscript{54}

Agricultural societies understood that they had a role to play in facilitating these changes, but male members were hesitant to give women too much authority. Even though rural reformers urged women, like men, to accept the family farm and home as an interconnected business enterprise and apply the rules of capitalist and scientific efficiency to its management,\textsuperscript{55} agricultural societies clearly did not feel that women were capable of or deserving of leading agricultural institutions, despite their being considered “the glue that held the rural world together.”\textsuperscript{56}

Women’s own opinions of agricultural societies in the period before the First World War are hard to find. During fair time, the occasional female judge, exhibitor, or visitor was interviewed, but such reports were rare and provided limited detail. For instance, in 1909, Mrs.

\textsuperscript{50}“New Style Fall Fair: Many Promoters Advocate Educational Features,” \textit{Globe} [Toronto], February 18, 1904.
\textsuperscript{51}“Men and Women From the Farm: They Were in Evidence at the Exhibition,” \textit{Globe} [Toronto], September 10, 1908.
\textsuperscript{52}Kechnie, \textit{Organizing Rural Women}, 37-60.
\textsuperscript{53}Danbom, \textit{The Resisted Revolution}, 62; and Fink, \textit{Agrarian Women}, 26.
\textsuperscript{54}See Taylor, \textit{Fashioning Farmers}, and Halpern, \textit{And On That Farm He Had a Wife}.
\textsuperscript{55}Taylor, \textit{Fashioning Farmers}, 56.
\textsuperscript{56}Holt, \textit{Linoleum, Better Babies and the Modern Farm Woman}, 5.
Campbell, a Wallacetown Fair judge, was quoted in a local newspaper simply to state that the display that year was “the best yet, and amongst the finest she has seen at the smaller fairs.”\footnote{\textit{The Great Fair, Another Success Scored by the People’s Favorite}, \textit{Advance} [Dutton], October 7, 1909.} Usually male newspaper reporters summarized their own opinion of women’s exhibits or quoted from male agricultural society officers and directors. It was also common for reporters to limit their discussion of women’s exhibits because they proudly professed ignorance about such “feminine arts.” Any women who aided men in organizing domestic displays were never mentioned. The idea that fairs meant the “annual reunion of the old boys”\footnote{\textit{The Great Fair, Outlook Bright For a Bigger Fair Than Ever}, \textit{Advance} [Dutton], September 23, 1909.} was common despite the reality that women attended and participated in great numbers. Women’s silence reflected their limited power. Even though subsequent chapters will show that women’s exhibits attracted exhibitors and fairgoers and improved the overall fair display,\footnote{See Chapters 3, 4, and 5 for a discussion of women’s exhibits and display.} the prevailing attitude was that men were public figures and rural leaders and women should remain behind the scenes.

**Moving Beyond Membership: 1910s-1940s**

The first half of the twentieth century signaled a change for women in agricultural societies. Although this period did not see a full expansion of women’s rights, assumptions of women’s roles were shifting. In Ontario, most women won the right to vote in 1917 and they subsequently expanded their social, economic, and political opportunities in the interwar years. By the Second World War, the OAAS had created a Women’s Section of the organization, where female delegates and district representatives met annually to discuss how to advance their interests on the fairgrounds. The Women’s Section had its own president and executive committee, and by the 1940s many agricultural societies in Ontario allowed women to serve on the fair board, usually as “lady directors” who managed traditional women’s exhibits and
growing children’s departments. Overall, women’s activities in agricultural societies during this period remained subordinate to those of their male counterparts, but women achieved more authority in areas considered to be of interest to women and made use of new opportunities to promote their work and serve their communities.

The first decades of the twentieth century saw the expansion of rural reformers’ efforts to further modernize farmsteads and agricultural and domestic practices. The Progressive Era in the early twentieth century saw the proliferation of ideas about rural women’s need to embrace modern conveniences, and rural reformers advocated science, technology, and professional expertise as the solutions needed for reducing rural women’s drudgery, elevating their standard of living, and maintaining their devotion to rural life. Some of the reasons for these measures were declining rural populations, labour shortages, and growing urban dominance, which stimulated farmers and rural populations to take political and social action. Rural women were also in a position to facilitate change. When most women won the vote in Ontario in 1917, they were part of a new electorate that had the power to influence politics. The Globe placed advertisements in farm journals such as the Farmer’s Advocate to “appeal for progressive, right thinking” farm women who would take advantage of the vote by buying a newspaper subscription that kept them “informed on the questions of the hour.” The Globe had an urban and rural readership, and it published articles that encouraged rural women to assert themselves for their fair share. In 1919, one article argued that previously women had not received their fair

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60 For Canadian works on rural reform see Kechnie, Organizing Rural Women; Mona Halpern, And On That Farm He Had a Wife; Carbert, Agrarian Feminism; and Taylor, Fashioning Farmers. American scholarship on this topic includes Kline, Consumers in the Country; Holt, Linoleum, Better Babies and the Modern Farm Woman; Neth, Preserving the Family Farm; Jellison, Entitled to Power; Fink, Agrarian Women; Danbom, The Resisted Revolution; and Bowers, The Country Life Movement in America.


share of improvements on the farm, but “a new era” had emerged where they had begun to assert themselves:

Woman...now makes bold to demand for the home share and share with the barn and silo. And man, with the consciousness in him of the past errors of his sex, is willing that in future expenditure for domestic improvement shall be a more equitable basis. Nowhere is the new order of affairs more patent to the observer than in the homes of the older agricultural portions of Ontario.63

During the first decade of the twentieth century, agricultural societies began to broaden the opportunities women received in their organizations. The first action many societies took was to include women by inviting the participation of Women’s Institutes (WI). The growth of WIs in Ontario in the early twentieth century was impressive. The first branch of the WI formed in Stoney Creek in 1897.64 By 1904, 150 branches with approximately 25,000 members existed,65 and in 1914 the WI grew to 888 branches with almost 30,000 members.66 These groups made significant contributions to fairs around the province. For example, in Elgin County in 1909, the Rodney Women’s Institute organized a committee of women who planned and managed the ladies’ exhibits.67 These women had the authority to determine the amount of the prize money awarded for the individual classes, although the department budgets were likely determined by male fair board members.68 In 1913, the Southwold and Dunwich Agricultural Society asked WI members to convene a committee to arrange for the Shedden Fair dinner.69 By 1915, the members of the Shedden WI were also in charge of the flower committee, and the group sold

64 Kechnie, Organizing Rural Women, 3.
65 Ibid., 55.
66 Halpern, And On That Farm He Had a Wife, 79.
67 Rodney W.I. Minute Book, June 1906 – May 1911, Rodney Women’s Institute fonds, R7 S5 Sh1 B2, Elgin County Archives.
69 “August 27, 2013,” Shedden Women’s Institute – Minute Book, 1913-1919, C9 Sh4 B1 F1, Elgin County Archives.
candy and ice cream at the fair. Other agricultural societies soon sought the aid of local WIs to organize women’s exhibits, arrange dinners, and supply food on the fairgrounds. Although women likely helped most agricultural societies with these tasks previously, the official recognition of their help and the authority awarded them – however limited – suggests men welcomed women’s assistance in carefully defined areas. Church groups and other voluntary organizations in rural communities had relied heavily on women’s volunteer work for their practical day-to-day operations and fundraising events, and agricultural societies recognized this. Often women’s volunteer work coincided with their domestic roles, perceived nurturing natures, and responsibility for socialization, and agricultural societies were no different in harnessing women’s talents and contributions.

Women’s role in fostering rural sociability was important, and during the First World War many women volunteered for various community groups that sought to fundraise for the war effort and foster patriotic sentiment and sociability among the community on the fairgrounds. Even during the war, fairs were considered a special “holiday and a social time” for rural communities, and while agricultural improvement was touted as their primary function, most people accepted that “there is no reason why the county fall fair should not be educational as well as a promoter of sociability and a good place to visit.” Women’s position in agricultural societies did not change substantially during these years, but they were credited with nurturing a “spirit of neighbouring” and acting as “a great civilian army” that routinely took on

70 “September 17, 1915,” Shedden Women’s Institute – Minute Book, 1913-1919, C9 Sh4 B1 F1, Eglin County Archives.
71 For more examples, see Chapter 7.
73 For specific examples, see Chapter 7.
75 “Put New Life Into Fall Fairs,” Farmer’s Advocate and Home Magazine 51 (October 5, 1916): 1645.
activities that benefited their communities. Male agricultural society members continued to be congratulated for their commitment to advancing the agricultural interests of their community, nation, and empire, but women’s service was associated with more traditional social reform, in which they worked towards advancing the social interests of the community and nurtured future citizens.

Women also exerted agency by dictating the terms of their participation. For example, the Shedden WI had provided meals at the local fair for many years, but on September 17, 1921, their secretary reported that “after finding that the booth privileges were not satisfactory, they decided they would neither serve meals nor run a booth that day.” The details of this incident were not given, and the next year the WI resumed its meal service after securing the ground privileges it requested. The WI’s return to the fairgrounds demonstrates its ability to negotiate with the agricultural society and have its needs met. WI members could leverage their close relationship and long-standing service to agricultural societies, along with their experience and organizational ability in providing food services, as a way to ensure they received fair, if not preferential, treatment. WI members also often helped male fair board members (some of whom were their husbands) organize women’s exhibits, so maintaining a good relationship between the organizations was important to agricultural society members.

78 Samson, The Spirit of Industry and Improvement, 12.
80 “September 17, 1915,” Shedden Women’s Institute – Minute Book, 1913-1919, C9 Sh4 B1 F1, Eglin County Archives.
81 “August, 23, 1922,” Shedden Women’s Institute – Minute Book, 1913-1919, C9 Sh4 B1 F1, Eglin County Archives.
The Shedden WI and the fair board met throughout the years to make sure that both sides were clear about their roles and responsibilities.\textsuperscript{82} In 1925, the WI again made it known that its participation depended on its ability to secure space “free of charge” for its booth.\textsuperscript{83} The agricultural society agreed to this, and in return the WI served food and sponsored an Institute Special Prize, worth $5, to be “divided equally between the Elgin Girls and Junior Farmers entries.”\textsuperscript{84} Participating at the fair allowed the Shedden WI an opportunity to raise funds and awareness for its causes. In 1925, it raised a profit of $48.10 by serving meals at the fair, which was used to buy batten and lining for a quilt being prepared for a needy family.\textsuperscript{85} The relationship between these two groups illustrated their symbiotic nature.

In the 1920s, some agricultural societies demonstrated a greater commitment to include women by creating “lady director” positions on fair boards to advise specifically on women’s exhibits, usually under the supervision of a male superintendent [\textit{Appendix A, Chart 2.2}]. Women’s new voter rights and the public service they provided during wartime likely influenced this shift, along with agricultural societies’ recognition of the improvements WI members and other women had already made to the management of fairs. At the Ontario Association of Fairs and Exhibitions (later renamed the Ontario Association of Agricultural Societies) Convention in 1920, Mrs. Laura Rose Stephen of Huntingdon, Quebec, spoke about female directors on fair boards. She was of the “strong opinion” that “no Fall Fair Board is complete without women representatives,” and that the events of the war and its aftermath had enabled women to showcase their ability to participate in every sphere of society.

\textsuperscript{82} “August, 29, 1924,” Shedden Women’s Institute – Minute Book, 1913-1919, C9 Sh4 B1 F1, Eglin County Archives; and “September, 24, 1924,” Shedden Women’s Institute – Minute Book, 1913-1919, C9 Sh4 B1 F1, Eglin County Archives.
\textsuperscript{83} “July 22, 1924,” Shedden Women’s Institute – Minute Book, 1913-1919, C9 Sh4 B1 F1, Eglin County Archives.
\textsuperscript{84} “August 26, 1925,” Shedden Women’s Institute – Minute Book, 1913-1919, C9 Sh4 B1 F1, Eglin County Archives.
\textsuperscript{85} “September 30, 1925,” Shedden Women’s Institute – Minute Book, 1913-1919, C9 Sh4 B1 F1, Eglin County Archives.
It seems unnecessary for one to expatiate even briefly on the advisability of women acting with men for the furtherance of fair work. Women have made such advances into preserves held sacred for men, it would seem that no position is really now secure to men alone… We have women lawyers, doctors, judges, ministers, and members of parliament. No door seems now closed fast to women. The unusual civic conditions of the past six years have placed women side by side with men in workshop, office and laboratory. Men have had, through circumstances, to see women from a different viewpoint and, I will be pardoned when I say the vision of man has broadened and his conception of woman’s worth and possibilities has vastly increased. Women have demonstrated that they have education, brains, nerve power and physical endurance sufficient to make them useful and needed in almost every sphere of world activity.86

Stephen contended that a close, mutual relationship existed between men and women on the farm, and that women were intimately linked with the business and knowledgeable about every branch of agriculture. Therefore, she argued, “to place woman on an agricultural fair board is not lifting her to a new and bewildering position, but to one into which she fits and can immediately do good work.”87 Stephen foresaw objections from some men about the inclusion of women, but she dismissed these objections as short-sighted and “dragging on the neck of progress.”88 Stephen went on to describe how women would improve fairs, including by creating more attractively displayed exhibits, enlisting qualified judges, arranging better food and meal services, and bringing about new and improved ideas more generally. The overall impression of her speech was that women had proven their usefulness to agricultural societies, and fair boards needed to accept female fair organizers if these events were to flourish.

The 1920s signaled a shifting and sometimes volatile landscape in Ontario’s rural communities. Farm prices had risen steadily after 1896 until they peaked in 1920, after which post-WWI European recovery ushered in a rapid decline in prices from 1920 to 1923. In 1920,

86 Mrs. Laura Rose Stephen, “Lady Directors on Fall Fair Boards,” in Ontario Department of Agriculture Twentieth Annual Report of the Agricultural Societies and of the Convention of the Association of Fairs and Exhibitions for the Year 1920... (Toronto: A. T. Wilgress, Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1920), 29.
87 Ibid., 30.
88 Ibid., 31-32.
the number of agricultural societies also peaked at 354 and then began to decline. This period witnessed the amalgamation of some county societies with township societies, and several townships societies merged together as well during these years.\textsuperscript{89} Agricultural society membership records were inconsistently recorded and do not reveal a complete picture of membership numbers for an extended period of time, but generally agricultural societies expressed worries over stagnation and decline as the number of societies decreased.\textsuperscript{90} Agricultural commodity prices peaked again in 1925 and held until 1929,\textsuperscript{91} but throughout the 1920s fair organizers maintained a keen desire to improve fairs and create greater interest among farmers and to attend to “the many things that make home attractive and prepare our men and women of the future for the more serious problems of life.”\textsuperscript{92} At the same time, women expressed desires for new leadership roles on fair boards. These factors likely influenced the noticeable increase in societies with female directors. For example, the Beeton Agricultural Society in Simcoe County accepted its first “Lady Directors” at the general annual meeting in 1925, and the women accepted the responsibility of revising the prize list for women’s exhibits. The list was supervised by the fair board secretary and two male directors.\textsuperscript{93} In 1928, the Harriston Agricultural Society in Wellington County first allowed female directors by naming each of the local WI Presidents to the fair board to represent women’s interests.\textsuperscript{94} This was also

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{89} Scott, \textit{A Fair Share}, 95.
\textsuperscript{90} Scott, \textit{A Fair Share}, 95; 105.
\textsuperscript{93} “January 21, 1925,” and “March 21, 1925,” Beeton Agricultural Society Minute Book, 1868-1949, Electoral Division of Cardwell Agricultural Society…Minute Book, accession 988-3, R2B S5 Sh4, Simcoe County Archives.
\textsuperscript{94} Ruth Ann Westover, ed. \textit{Fair Days and Fair People: 130 Years of Fall Fairs} (Durham, Ont.: Harriston-Minto Agricultural Society, 1989), 12.
\end{flushleft}
the first year that the Normanby Agricultural Society in Grey County reported a “Ladies’ Committee,” consisting of three women.95

Fairs often represented changes in the rural landscape and they typically adjusted the types of competitions they offered accordingly, but there were times when the male organizers of these events believed they knew what was best, even if their ideas contrasted with what women told them. In 1928, Miss E. A. Slicter of the Women’s Institute and Mrs. Mark Senn of Caledonia addressed the mostly male delegates at the annual OAAS Convention and argued that women’s exhibits needed more attention. Mrs. Senn noted how fairs failed to update prize lists for women’s competitions. For example, she insisted that bread and butter classes, “two of the former standbys,” were no longer needed.96 Senn noted that women welcomed the change whereby “creameries and bakeries were doing the work as well or better and relieving the farm household of much drudgery,” but society member George Robertson of Ottawa disagreed, arguing that “if the women gave up baking and dairy work entirely, the men were in for a bad time.”97 The exchange between Senn and Robertson illustrates how women and men did not always agree. Of course, Mrs. Senn did not represent the interests of all female competitors (homemade bread remained a popular class item for years to come), but her remarks and the response they received are worth consideration. By engaging women in these discussions, agricultural society officers and directors recognized a need for women’s expertise in creating a more modern, inclusive fair. At the same time, however, they limited women’s ability to make change. Although they asked for women’s advice, they did not necessarily take it.

95 “First Hundred Years for Neustadt’s Fall Fair: History and Prize List for 1970,” A971.020.001, Bruce County Archives.
96 “Report Serious Weed Spread at Fairs’ Association Meeting,” Globe [Toronto], February 3, 1928.
97 Ibid.
The continued decline in the number of agricultural societies in the 1930s and the economic difficulties that resulted from the Great Depression suggest that including both women and men was more critical than ever.\(^9^8\) Most fairs had reduced admission prices in an effort to stave off decreased attendance during the 1930s, but the lost revenues, as well as the debt some agricultural societies had incurred to improve their fairgrounds, meant that many groups were struggling.\(^9^9\) At the same time that agricultural societies struggled, women’s political and social authority was increasing, and their contributions to the household economy were more important than ever. One reporter credited women’s support for fairs as the reason they survived during difficult years:

…more active participation by the womenfolk was what the fall fair needed to put it on its feet again as an important and interesting annual event. Anyway, though for a few years inclined to languish, it has “come back” in vigorous fashion, and to the wives and daughters of the farm must be given a great deal of the credit.\(^1^0^0\)

The perception that at least some fairs could prosper, despite the difficult economic times, was credited to women’s efforts. Agricultural societies across the province remained inconsistent in providing women with greater responsibilities, but it became difficult for them to ignore the benefits women brought to the organizations and slowly more and more groups increased the number of women involved. For example, by 1930 the Collingwood Township Agricultural Society’s fair board had an equal number of men and women serving as directors, and the next year women outnumbered men 11 to 9.\(^1^0^1\) By 1931, the Elgin County Fair had 12 women serving on the board as “Lady Directors.”\(^1^0^2\)

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\(^9^9\) Ibid.

\(^1^0^0\) “Fall Fairs Prospering,” *Globe* [Toronto], October 5, 1933.

\(^1^0^1\) “Prize List, 1931, Collingwood Township Agricultural Society Fall Fair,” Ontario Fall Fair Catalogues, XA1 MS A073, University of Guelph Archival & Special Collections.

\(^1^0^2\) “Splendid Exhibits at Elgin County Fair and Dairy Cattle Show,” *Aylmer Express*, September 10, 1931.
Agricultural societies needed women, and women knew it. Female members were increasingly in a position to ask for more from agricultural society leaders. At the 1930 Ontario Association of Fairs and Exhibitions Convention, Miss K. Goodfellow of Long Branch addressed the delegates and argued that women’s participation at fairs was important because “women are the back-bone of our country! What would our Fairs be like without their handiwork? Where would our men be if our cooks ceased their work, thinking it not worth the effort?” She advised agricultural societies that female members should receive “every encouragement in their work,” and that qualified female judges and networking opportunities for women should be promoted.103 Goodfellow pointed out that there was a double standard at play, and only when women were given equal opportunities to men would fairs really be advancing the interests of all rural residents.104

Women reacted against what they understood was a second-class membership. Even societies that allowed female members to serve as associate directors or “lady directors” excluded them from being individually recognized in prize lists. For example, the 1934 West Elgin Agricultural Society had female associate directors, but none were listed in official prize lists as members of any committees of management, even for women’s exhibits. In the 1935 Erin Agricultural Society’s prize list, the category of “Lady Directors” was recognized, but instead of listing these women by name, as the male directors were, they simply identified them as the “wives of the Officers and Directors.”105 When women were included, they almost always served

104 Ibid., 49.
105 “Eighty-Fifth Anniversary, Erin Fall Fair, Prize List, 1935,” [Microfilm], Roll 2, A19889.97, Wellington County Museum and Archives.
with men who were singled out as the superintendent or director in charge.\textsuperscript{106} Other agricultural societies continued to exclude women altogether. In 1938, J.A. Carroll, the Superintendent of the OAAS, reported that “There is at least one Society which boasts of the fact that they have no women around them at all.”\textsuperscript{107} The fact that some groups had significantly increased their female participation was heartening, but their continued failure to recognize women by name or allow them more control over women’s exhibits demonstrates women’s limited power in these organizations.

Women’s roles in agricultural societies varied in the 1930s, but by the end of the decade a transformative change occurred when the Women’s Section of the OAAS was created. In 1937, female agricultural society members took action and met to organize the first “Women’s Meeting” at the OAAS annual Convention in Toronto, and in 1938 an official “Women’s Section” of the OAAS was created. The creation of the Women’s Section was credited to Ethel Brant Monture, who was the first President of the Women’s Section and a woman considered “synonymous with movements for community betterment.”\textsuperscript{108} She complained she had been tired of being the only woman attending the Convention and “of going home with her clothes smelling of tobacco smoke.”\textsuperscript{109} Monture had felt earlier Conventions had “nothing of interest for [women],” and that there was “no thought by the men that their section was important.” But

\textsuperscript{106} “Prize List: The Lucknow Agricultural Society’s Seventieth Annual Fall Exhibition, 1935,” Ontario Fall Fair Catalogues, XA1 MS A073, University of Guelph Archival & Special Collections.


Monture also knew “when men took visitors to the fair, they always went first to the women’s section,” so she believed that interest in women’s exhibits existed.\footnote{Mrs. Ethel Brant Monture, quoted in The Story of Ontario Agricultural Fairs and Exhibitions, 1972-1967, And Their Contribution to the Advancement of Agriculture and Betterment of Community Life (Picton, ON: The Picton Gazette Publishing Co. Ltd., 1967), 206.} When Monture approached J. A. Carroll about hosting a women’s meeting, he challenged her to find enough women to attend. Monture recalled how she travelled the province to discuss the creation of a women’s section and found support. In 1937, 17 women met to set up a tentative committee. She explained that they were “good women, and capable. But the men did not take kindly to the idea of a separate women’s section, or even to the idea of lady delegates, and I was not popular at the time.” Still, Monture persevered, and in 1938, two hundred female delegates attended the first official Women’s Meeting. Monture commented that “Enthusiasm has never waned. Five years after organization of the section, the Farmer’s Advocate had an article on the renaissance of fairs. They said they did not know why, but we women could guess.”\footnote{Ibid.}

Monture was the President and Chairman of the first official meeting in 1938, and she commented on the historic significance of the event:

> For the first time in the history of this Association women are meeting today to carry out a programme provided by a small Convention Committee which met for the purpose in Toronto last November. This is, therefore, quite an historical occasion and we believe that on the foundation being built today a mighty structure will grow which will do much to foster not only the welfare of women in Agricultural Societies but all work of Societies, and indeed of agriculture in country life.\footnote{Mrs. W. H. Monture, “Women’s Meeting – February 3rd, 1938,” in Ontario Department of Agriculture, Thirty-Eighth Annual Report of the Agricultural Societies and the Convention of the Association of Agricultural Societies for 1938... (Toronto: T. E. Bowman, Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1938), 84.}

J. A. Carroll spoke to the women assembled and expressed his gratification for their attendance, but he also cautioned them about the challenges ahead. He admitted that he was “not very clear” on the best way to promote women’s interests.
Many Societies, as you know, will soon be celebrating hundredth birthdays. During a century some of them have become quite confirmed in their habits, and therefore, we cannot expect too radical changes. Anyone may become a member of an Agricultural Society by paying $1.00 membership fee. In the case of married couples it will be a matter of battling it out as to whether the one dollar entitles the husband or wife to membership. If two dollars are paid, you will have two votes at Agricultural Societies meetings. I may be criticized for saying so, but I believe in the interests of the work that women should be more aggressive and should take more part in members’ meetings. If a group of women show that they are sufficiently interested to come to the annual meeting, with power to vote, I feel more attention will be paid to them than otherwise.  

Carroll recognized that many women were interested in society work, but allowed their husbands to be the public face of the family on the fair board, while others were members but did not attend meetings regularly, likely because of men’s disinterest in discussing women’s activities. Carroll went on to explain that agricultural societies were inconsistent in providing an official title for women serving on the fair board, and often male members refused to allow women to become full-fledged directors because only a limited number of directorships were given and they wanted to reserve them for men. He noted that women were “usually” permitted to attend board meetings and “say all they wish to about the management of their particular department” [italics added]. Carroll expressed his desire to see women interested in all fair departments, but he pointed out that women had a special responsibility with regard to domestic departments.  

He made it clear where women belonged and their true responsibilities.

Still, Carroll believed it was important to create a mechanism in agricultural societies whereby women’s voices could be heard. He regretted that some agricultural societies had “no recognized channel of getting information or suggestions from women,” preferring instead to rely on unelected officers’ and directors’ wives for their input, or simply forgo consulting

113 J. A. Carroll, “Organization to Promote Women’s Interests,” in Ontario Department of Agriculture, Thirty-Eighth Annual Report of the Agricultural Societies and the Convention of the Association of Agricultural Societies for 1938... (Toronto: T. E. Bowman, Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1938), 84-5.

114 Ibid.
women at all, which he believed resulted in inferior domestic exhibits. Carroll advised all 
societies to create a recognized women’s committee to manage women’s exhibits. Despite his 
own limited understanding of how women could contribute, Carroll was an import ally for 
female members, and he assured them that “With respect to the provincial organization, be 
as assured you are welcome here at all times to participate in convention.”

Of course, women advocated strongly for their own participation in agricultural societies 
as well. Mrs. J. K. Kelly, a future President of the Women’s Section, spoke in 1938 and assured 
women that they had “a very definite place in fairs.” Kelly was critical of what she perceived as 
a general shortage of entertainment geared towards women’s interests, the small amount of prize 
money they received, and the lack of co-operation between the sexes, which she attributed to 
men’s disinterest with the women’s department. Kelly believed that “the men feel they are 
much more important than women,” and thus did not provide women’s work the same 
appreciation as their own.

Ideas such as these likely prompted women’s creation of a separate Women’s Section in 
1938. Women recognized that men had little interest in the details of their affairs, and likely felt 
that a separate division, where women met together to discuss ideas specific to the work they 
engaged in, was the most suitable solution. A separate section of the OAAS allowed women to 
continue to be a part of the organization and develop a female subculture that combatted male 
dominance. The Women’s Section gave female members a comfortable space where they 
could enjoy the camaraderie of other women without fear of male judgement, and build

115 Ibid., 85-6.
116 Mrs. J. K. Kelly, “What Women Workers Are Thinking About Fall Fairs,” in Ontario Department of Agriculture, 
Thirty-Eighth Annual Report of the Agricultural Societies and the Convention of the Association of Agricultural 
Societies for 1938… (Toronto: T. E. Bowman, Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1938), 44-45.
117 Ibid., 45.
confident in their skills. 119 Whether they were identified as “Patronesses, Honorary Directors, Women’s Committee, Associate Directors and Lady Directors,” Kelly and women like her felt that women should hold their own meetings to discuss matters specifically related to women’s exhibits. 120 Kelly advocated for fairs to have a female convener of women’s work because women understood this work best and could make efficient decisions. She also outlined the duties of female directors, including their responsibility to understand what was made and grown in their communities and how to showcase those items, how to organize and display entries submitted for evaluation, and how to encourage more women to participate. 121

Kelly was particularly pleased by the development of female district representatives in 1938 who attended the OAAS Convention and reported on fairs in their region. District representatives were selected at annual district meetings, which were held by the agricultural societies. District meetings developed as a way to bring together neighbouring agricultural society members to learn from one another about shared challenges and opportunities. Once women’s divisions were created, women designated their own representatives who met to discuss concerns specific to women’s work and “to advance the best ideas in each district.” 122

Similar to agricultural improvers from the nineteenth century who believed the home was fundamental to the political economy of improvement, women involved in agricultural societies believed they had an important role to play in improving country life. In 1938, Miss Bess McDermand, the first female Superintendent of the Ontario Women’s Institutes after George Putnam’s retirement in 1934, explained that WIs remained useful allies for agricultural societies

119 Ibid., 66.
121 Ibid., 92-94.
122 Ibid.
because their members were rural women who were committed to the betterment of the countryside:

As you know, the Women’s Institute Branch is concerned with…making women better home-makers and so it does have a relationship to Agricultural Societies…The home affects the business of farming more than the home affects business of any other kind and so we have this close association of bettering agriculture and of bettering homes. They march together.123

McDermand’s definition of agriculture embraced all members of the farm family. She had grown up on an Ontario farm before leaving to receive post-secondary education, and she believed that the home and farm were united.124 For her, advancements in farming were a “means to an end.” Farmers made more money so that their families “may have a better living, but before a better living is possible the money must be turned into healthful food, useful clothing and comfortable shelter.”125

The significance of the 1938 OAAS Women’s Meeting did not go unnoticed. The Globe reported in an article entitled “Rural Ontario Women Make Entry Into Field Hitherto Held by Men” that

History was made for rural women of Ontario, Thursday afternoon, when representatives of many parts of the Province – members of the Women’s Committee of the Ontario Agricultural Association of Agricultural Societies…[gathered] for their first sessions, and discussed, with enthusiasm, rural matters pertaining particularly to women’s interests. Women’s status in the societies; duties and obligations of women directors, fall fairs, Women’s Institute exhibits,

124 Federated Women’s Institutes of Ontario, Ontario Women’s Institute Story: In Commemoration of the 175th Anniversary of the Founding of the Women’s Institutes of Ontario (Federated Women’s Institutes of Ontario, 1972), 74. McDermand graduated from Moulton Ladies’ College and the MacDonald Institute before being hired to do extension work in Ontario and Alberta. She served as the Assistant Superintendent of the Alberta Institutes before attending Columbia University to complete a degree in Household Science. She then worked at Cornell University before she was appointed to the position of Superintendent of the Ontario Women’s Institutes Branch. She resigned in 1938 before marrying Mr. Guy Skinner.
125 McDermand, “Co-operation – Women’s Institutes Branch,” 89.
judging and judges, all of vital concern to rural women, were subjects presented by able speakers, and discussed with animation by the delegates.  

OAAS President W. J. Hill admitted that in the past they had always elected male delegates, noting that fewer than a dozen women attended the Annual Convention of 300 or 400 people, yet he acknowledged that fairs “would not be much of a success were it not for the assistance of the women.” Mrs. Monture argued women wanted “to work along with the men for the betterment of the community.” She recognized that “in some quarters we are not very welcome,” but asserted “we are going to be there just the same!”

The *Farmer’s Advocate* also published an article about the first Women’s Meeting, entitled “Rural Women Invade Man’s Realm in Fair Work.” The article described that women met to assess their status in agricultural societies and how their contributions to fairs should be recognized. “News of the uprising must have got abroad,” the article went on, surprised that more than 65 women had assembled. The reporter covering the event told how, before the meeting, Mrs. Monture had been advised by an “elderly delegate…perhaps from Bruce or Glengarry” and of Scottish background, that “they would be juist as weel off at hame washing the dushes.” The *Farmer’s Advocate* also published another article, however, that insisted the “Women stole the show” that year, and that “women members of the various boards can be of great assistance in year-round activities of any live Society.” Female members were not deterred by the criticism they received. Unlike research that suggests female volunteers tended to belittle or minimize their efforts, the rural women assembled at the OAAS Convention were

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126 “Rural Ontario Women Make Entry Into Field Hitherto Held by Men,” *Globe* [Toronto], February 4, 1938.
127 W. J. Hill, quoted in “Rural Ontario Women Make Entry Into Field Hitherto Held by Men,” *Globe* [Toronto], February 4, 1938.
128 Mrs. Monture, quoted in “Rural Ontario Women Make Entry Into Field Hitherto Held by Men,” *Globe* [Toronto], February 4, 1938.
129 “Rural Women Invade Man’s Realm in Fair Work,” *Farmer’s Advocate and Home Magazine* 73 (February 10, 1938): 75.
130 Ibid.
131 “Women and the Local Fair,” *Farmer’s Advocate and Home Magazine* 73 (February 24, 1938): 100.
confident that their contributions were vital to fairs’ success. Similar to other rural women volunteers, those in agricultural societies were proud of their work. Despite some negativity about the meeting, the women at the Convention had established a “new order” where at least one woman was expected to attend agricultural society district and annual meetings every year.

Despite women’s passion, however, they continued to struggle for respect. In 1938, Mrs. O’Leary of Lindsay recalled how she had asked a man “knowledgeable about judging” what he would expect in a female judge, and he had replied that “she would be good-looking and have red hair!” O’Leary told the story to highlight his very gendered and condescending perspective. Men also failed to recognize women’s individual contributions. Even by 1941, the West Elgin Agricultural Society simply identified their “Lady Associate Directors” serving in the “Home Department” as “M.W. Page and Associate Lady Directors” in the prize list. The department supervisor, M. W. Page, was singled out for recognition, but the female committee members were not.

The 1938 OAAS Women’s Meeting did not cause all agricultural societies to immediately change established practices, but the creation of the Women’s Section was an important result of previous changes that allowed female members the confidence to organize in the first place. Many female members took advantage of changes in the OAAS constitution and sent at least one female delegate from each of the local societies to the Convention in Toronto. In

132 Peggy Petzelka and Susan E. Mannon, “Keepin This Little Town Going”: Gender and Volunteerism in Rural America,” Gender and Society 20, no. 2 (April, 2006): 236-258. In their study on rural American women’s volunteerism, Petzelka and Mannon found that, unlike suburban or urban women, rural women did not minimize the importance of their volunteer work.
133 “Women and the Local Fair,” Farmer’s Advocate and Home Magazine 73 (February 24, 1938): 100.
134 Mrs. O’Leary, “Duties of Judges,” in Ontario Department of Agriculture, Thirty-Eighth Annual Report of the Agricultural Societies and the Convention of the Association of Agricultural Societies for 1938... (Toronto: T. E. Bowman, Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1938), 106.
135 “Eighty-First Annual Exhibition, West Elgin Fair, Beef and Horse Show, Bacon Hog Fair, Prize List, 1941,” ECVF Box 12, File 13, Elgin County Archives.
1939, *The Globe* reported that a “group of smartly attired, alert rural women from many parts of the province” met at the King Edward Hotel to discuss how they might aid in making agricultural fairs more representative and valuable for their communities.\(^{136}\) The description of rural women as “smartly attired” and “alert,” illustrates the centrality of women’s appearance as representative of their character, but the reporter also identified one of the speakers, Miss Ina Hodgins of Carp, as a “farmer, stockbreeder and judge at Ottawa Valley Fairs;” descriptors typically reserved for men. By acknowledging Hodgins’ skill and authority in these positions, the reporter admitted women’s abilities went beyond their appearance.

Hodgins herself made a point of describing the interconnectedness of farm men and women. She asserted that “Behind the man who is exhibiting something of good quality you will generally find a woman of ambition and determination encouraging him.”\(^{137}\) She also explained that women wanted to exhibit because they liked “to do something on our own account. Most of us can do some one thing just a bit better than another can. Naturally we, too, like to do little tricks in public and walk off with a pretty colored ribbon.” Hodgins described fairs as “places which give us one grand chance of bringing our light from under a bushel and setting it up on the hill…It may be a cake, jelly, butter, the best embroidery or the most artistic rug.”\(^{138}\) Hodgins’ examples of women’s work were confined to traditionally female activities. Although she was involved in animal breeding and farming, and was clearly committed to extending women’s influence, her list of women’s contributions remained squarely within the domestic realm.\(^{139}\)

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\(^{136}\) “Rural Women Make Bid For Share in Exhibitions,” *Globe and Mail*, February 24, 1939.

\(^{137}\) Miss Ina Hodgins, quoted in “Rural Women Make Bid For Share in Exhibitions,” *Globe and Mail*, February 24, 1939.

\(^{138}\) Miss Ina Hodgins, quoted in “Rural Women Make Bid For Share in Exhibitions,” *Globe and Mail*, February 24, 1939.

\(^{139}\) “Rural Women Make Bid For Share in Exhibitions,” *Globe and Mail*, February 24, 1939.
During the Second World War, women had another opportunity to demand more authority in agricultural societies. Women acted as a reserve force in many facets of rural life during the war, especially in harvesting crops, and agricultural societies also required their help. Although male organizers continued to dominate fair boards, women were enlarging their sphere of authority. In 1940, the OAAS granted women equal voting status. Dr. J. J. Wilson of Burks Falls noted that “previously women were without status on the board or in the association,” but they now had equality with men. In 1941, the President of the OAAS, William Walker, asked Convention delegates, “What would our Fairs of to-day be without [women’s] valuable help?” revealing the necessary role women played in keeping agricultural societies and fairs afloat.

Similar to the period of First World War, members of agricultural societies acknowledged women for their wartime efforts during the Second World War. Walker congratulated them for creating special classes for war work, and although he noted that some general fair exhibits suffered fewer entries because women “were hard at work in the war effort,” he acknowledged that “That is as it should be. We are proud of them.” Mrs. Kelly noted in her 1941 OAAS Women’s President’s Address that women had a responsibility to uplift community morale, and she believed “a progressive, aggressive Agricultural Society” was a vital part of the

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141 “New Power Vested in Farm Women as Executives of O.A.A.S.: Women From Rural Ontario Granted Equal Voting Status In Agricultural Association,” Globe and Mail, February 16, 1940. Unfortunately, only a list of the proceedings instead of a complete report was provided for the women’s division meeting at the OAAS Annual Convention in 1940, but newspaper reports highlight some of the key discussions.
142 Wilfred Walker, “President’s Address,” in Ontario Department of Agriculture, Forty-First Annual Report of the Agricultural Societies and the Convention of the Association of Agricultural Societies for 1941 ... (Toronto: T. E. Bowman, Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1941), 12.
143 Ibid.
task and a “necessity in any community.” The women who spoke at OAAS Conventions during the war emphasized women’s ability to care for their families, assist in agricultural production, and co-operate to ensure that the social and economic issues in their rural communities were met. Women also encouraged fair organizers to create prize lists that included war work and discouraged the use of rationed commodities or employed women in superfluous tasks.

In 1943, J. A. Carroll praised women at the OAAS Convention for their productive agricultural work during the nation’s time of need, and he encouraged agricultural societies to work harder to have their fairs represent women’s changing roles:

Are women proud of the fact that more cows are being milked by them now? We think they ought to be. Could this not be reflected at the fair by a competition of milk maids? Women are using horses much more now. How about hitching and driving competitions? What we have in mind is that while it may be necessary to cut down on some of the classes for fancy work and other exhibits that women worked at formerly, should we not add classes emphasizing the productive war work on which women and girls are now engaged? Would it be possible to have classes for them, to demonstrate what they have been doing on farms?

Carroll wanted fair programs to represent what women were doing in the countryside so that those activities were recognized, encouraged, and improved.

Similar to the past, Carroll continued to advocate for more leadership opportunities for women, but he remained careful to describe how they might “appropriately” achieve this goal.

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144 Mrs. J. K. Kelly, “President’s Address,” in Ontario Department of Agriculture, Forty-First Annual Report of the Agricultural Societies and the Convention of the Association of Agricultural Societies for 1941… (Toronto: T. E. Bowman, Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1941), 34-5.
145 Miss Mary A. Clarke, “Objectives of Agricultural Societies with Special Reference to the Women’s Division,” in Ontario Department of Agriculture, Forty-First Annual Report of the Agricultural Societies and the Convention of the Association of Agricultural Societies for 1941… (Toronto: T. E. Bowman, Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1941), 37; and Mrs. J. K. Kelly, quoted in “Farm Women Face Future Confident That Agriculture Will Not Fail in Its Duty,” Globe and Mail, February 13, 1942.
146 Ibid.
He mentioned that some societies still limited women’s influence, and he tried to advise women on how to best change that:

…it would be useless or unwise to scold them [men], and a much better plan would be to become more aggressive without being arrogant. There is room for improvement in the annual meetings of many Societies and this offers an opportunity for women to serve. Why should the annual meeting not be conducted on a plan similar to this convention? That is to have a separate session for women, and for men and women to meet together for the election of officers and programme features in which both are mutually interested.148

Carroll valued women’s service, but he believed women had to conform to the rules set before them. In a telling piece of advice to female OAAS delegates, Carroll suggested that

If conditions should favour such a move [to attend the annual meeting], we think the men would not object, in fact would be very pleased, if the ladies were to say: “Now we would like to help you to improve attendance and interest at the annual meeting, and we are prepared to serve refreshments if there are no objections. Women in the home and in the community have a direct responsibility and usually assume it for social activities. Why not apply this principle to Agricultural Societies? [Italics added].”149

Carroll knew changes were needed, but he was unwilling to consider that the system itself needed changing. He suggested women had to take initiative and prove their usefulness to male fair board members in a way that did not challenge their traditional roles. Although supportive of women, Carroll’s recommendations illustrated his own ideological struggles surrounding women’s involvement.

Ultimately, women’s view of their roles exceeded that of Carroll’s. They believed that they were capable of more than managing women’s exhibits, and they understood their broader worth to these organizations. The importance of women’s involvement during wartime also gave them the leverage they needed to make change. At the 1945 OAAS Convention, Mrs. Kelly argued that there were “a number of Fairs which would have been cancelled had not the women

148 Ibid.
149 Ibid., 23-4.
encouraged and given extra assistance,” and she felt that women deserved the opportunity of reaching their “proper place in the set-up of Fair management.” During the war, many agricultural societies created women’s divisions that were modeled after the Women’s Section of the OAAS. Kelly advised women to attend their agricultural society’s annual meeting so that they could report on their departments and elect officers, before adjourning to their own meeting to discuss their division and select a Convention delegate and district representative. Fair board executive committees continued to be dominated by men, but with the creation of separate women’s committees, women could elect their own honorary presidents, president, vice-president, secretary, and directors without the interference of men. The number of women on fair boards generally increased during the war as well. At the 1945 Burford Fair, the South Brant Agricultural Society had 12 male directors on the main fair board, but 19 female directors to take care of the women’s division. Men continued to hold the balance of power in agricultural societies by holding executive committee offices and supervisory roles, but women’s sphere within these organizations was expanding.

Despite women’s increasing authority on fair boards, their power was typically limited to areas associated with their traditional work on the fairgrounds. Some new opportunities were presented to women who served as paid fair board secretaries and treasurers, but generally women’s involvement beyond managing their own exhibits was limited.

150 Mrs. J. K. Kelly, “Fair Management,” in Ontario Department of Agriculture, 91st Annual Report of Ontario Agricultural Societies... (Toronto: T. E. Bowman, Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1945), 48.
151 Ibid.
152 “Burford Fair Prize List, 1945,” Ontario Fall Fair Catalogues, XA1 MS A073, University of Guelph Archival & Special Collections. Men served on the horse, dairy cattle, beef cattle, sheep, swine, poultry, fruit, grain, roots and vegetables, tobacco, pet and hobby show, buildings and grounds, gate, and announcer committees, while women served exclusively on the arts and crafts committee. Most committee members for dairy and provisions, ladies’ work, victory garden, and children’s work, were women, but at least one male also served on these committees. The horticultural committee had equal representation.
Ladies on Board: The Postwar Period

The postwar period was an era when women finally broke through the “glass ceiling” of fair board management. Although still uncommon, women began to be elected to the highest office in agricultural societies – President. Tremendous change was occurring in rural communities: the number of farm families was decreasing significantly, and more rural women were finding work outside of the farm. Those women who remained were committed to maintaining the family farming business, and they increasingly supported agricultural societies who were also responding to the demographic shifts. Agricultural societies looked for ways to raise the status of farming in the minds of urban people and stimulate more interest and a greater appreciation for farming among the expanding urban population. They wanted to educate urban visitors about the value of rural life. Women’s domestic work and handicrafts had often brought rural and urban women together at the fair, so it is unsurprising that agricultural societies increasingly relied on women to manage exhibits that interested all sorts of fairgoers. Women took advantage of this fact to expand their influence, and while traditional women’s work continued to be their focus, more women were transcending boundaries that had previously seemed impassable.

The “Home Department” had always been women’s domain, but many agricultural societies had had male superintendents and supervisors as liaisons between female committee members and male fair boards. In the postwar period, women were finally recognized as the ones in charge of these departments. In 1950, the OAAS Women’s President, Miss Ina Hodgins of Carp, reminded female OAAS delegates that they needed to “keep in mind the objectives of the

women’s section of the fair.”\textsuperscript{154} Hodgins believed women should be focused on the task of raising and teaching new and improved practices and standards for handicrafts and other women’s work, while also encouraging a “love for the beautiful,” introducing “new classes related to the special needs of the times.”\textsuperscript{155} Although Hodgins encouraged women to “not be afraid to make a change. What was impossible last year may be possible now,”\textsuperscript{156} she herself was committed to maintaining women’s focus on their traditional roles as organizers of the domestic, garden, art, craft, and children’s work.\textsuperscript{157} Mrs. A. L. Dickson, the secretary-treasurer of the Perth and District Agricultural Society, argued that it was “high time that women on fair boards have a voice equal with men,” but she also acknowledged that “We women do not want to run the fairs; we just want to feel that we are a necessary part of the fair programs and that we should be allowed to run our part of it without reservations.”\textsuperscript{158} During this period, it was common for women to limit their participation to more traditional domains of fair competition. Women wanted greater control over the exhibits under their purview, but they never attempted to supplant men’s control of traditionally masculine departments, such as the horse or livestock shows.

Women were reluctant to manage departments that were unconnected with their domestic realm, but they did seek more representation on executive committees and more say in the general fair administration. In some agricultural societies, it was not until the 1960s that female

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\textsuperscript{154} Miss Ina Hodgins, “President’s Address,” in \textit{Ontario Department of Agriculture, 97th Annual Report of Ontario Agricultural Societies, 1950, Also Report of Ontario Association of Agricultural Societies} (Toronto: Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1951), 66.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 67.
\textsuperscript{157} Mrs. S. W. Rathwell, “How We Put Across the Small Fair,” in \textit{Ontario Department of Agriculture, 97th Annual Report of Ontario Agricultural Societies, 1950, Also Report of Ontario Association of Agricultural Societies} (Toronto: Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1951), 78. Rathwell spoke about how the recently formed Cumberland Township Agricultural Society had open nominations for the election of officers and directors, but specific rules had been made to ensure eight of the twelve directors were men. Furthermore, female directors were confined to the Homecraft, Domestic Science, Horticulture, W.I. and Junior Work.
\textsuperscript{158} Mrs. A. L. Dickson, quoted in “Woman Asks For Equality In Rural Fairs,” \textit{Globe and Mail}, February 9, 1956.
directors were able to vote on fair business at the annual general meeting. Before then, women were asked to wait in the hallway while the executive officers were elected and other matters of business were attended to, only being called to join the men for the social program that followed afterwards, usually to serve male members refreshments.\textsuperscript{159}

Women continued to feel that the best way to serve their interests was by separate women’s divisions in which they elected their own executive officers and generated a level of authority for themselves that was not otherwise possible. Women’s involvement remained secondary to men’s, but the creation of separate women’s divisions (later renamed homecrafts divisions) allowed women to elect their own executive officers, directors, and committee members, and run their departments as they saw fit [Appendix A, Chart 2.3]. For example, in 1951, female members of the Paisley Agricultural Society organized a separate women’s division. Although the agricultural society had allowed for female directors in 1944 to help manage the school and women’s exhibits, the creation of a formal women’s section of the society gave women the ability to hold separate meetings that focused on their concerns. Both men and women met together to discuss the general preparations of the fair, but “the ladies retired to the kitchen or another room” partway through meetings to discuss their matters, while the men continued with their business in the boardroom.\textsuperscript{160} In the same way that the Women’s Section of the OAAS met separately, women in local agricultural societies believed that their work was better served (and their time better spent), when they met on their own and focused on improving the departments under their control.

Nevertheless, women continued to be dissatisfied with the limits placed on their ability to manage their own affairs. Some women believed that holding office on the main fair board

\textsuperscript{159} Aberfoyle Agricultural Society, \textit{The Agricultural Society in Puslinch, 1840-1990} (Brantford, Ont.: Beck’s Printing Services, 1990), 32.

executive committee would enable greater control over their departments, create more transparency, and offer women a chance to voice their opinions. Women’s initial foray on executive committees usually involved secretary or treasurer positions. Mrs. Koelher of Dundalk explained how she had been the first female secretary of the Dundalk Agricultural Society in 1948; “a rare bird indeed.” By 1956, however, 52 agricultural societies had female secretaries. By 1959, 65 of the 260 existing agricultural societies had either a female secretary or treasurer, and some societies, such as the Teeswater Agricultural Society, had women serving as first or second vice-presidents.

The election of female agricultural society presidents was especially significant. In 1959, the Smithville Agricultural Society elected its first female president. In 1960, 72 agricultural societies had female secretaries and another female president, Mrs. O. R. Sproule, had been elected to the Wyoming Agricultural Society’s fair board. F. A. Lashley reported that Sproule was chosen for the position because of “her capabilities and keen interest in the general programme of the fair.” Although female secretaries and treasurers became common, they were not equal in status to the leadership roles of president or vice president because they were paid positions. Rather than volunteers, they were employees, and thus their work was directed by the leaders of the organization. Presidents, however, were elected based on their ability to represent the entire agricultural society. The women who held these positions had convinced all members – men included – that they had the leadership skills, public speaking ability,

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162 “Prize List, Teeswater Fall Fair, 1959,” Ontario Fall Fair Catalogues, XA1 MS A073, University of Guelph Archival & Special Collections.
165 Ibid.
knowledge, and confidence to excel in the position, and, perhaps most importantly, the respect, not just of their fellow agricultural society members, but also of the community.

Jeanette Jameson became the first female president of the Rockton Agricultural Society in 1975, and she remembered her election was still unusual for the time. Jameson had grown up on a farm, one of three daughters, and she was used to doing whatever work needed to be done, regardless of the task. “I was a boy, I had no choice [laughs],” she explained. “I don’t think I got out of anything on the farm.” Jeanette completed 18 4-H clubs in her youth, which included homemaking clubs, but also calf and sheep clubs. Jeanette’s broader interests in agriculture, coupled with the fact that she “married into a fair family,” helped facilitate her involvement in the Rockton Agricultural Society as a director in 1959. Jeanette was a teacher at the time, and so she was first appointed to the school fair committee and later became the chairman of the department. In 1975, Jeanette was elected president of the society. She explained that “There were no women on the board when I became president. I was sitting there because I was the head of the school fair department and somebody said…Jeanette should be president.” She felt the men on the board sometimes looked “suspiciously at the things [she] was doing,” but noted her response was “you just sort of turn your head and go on.” Despite this, Jeanette believed that she never felt “condemned in any way,” and she believed her fellow officers never “looked down on [her] or anything,” but she did recognize that “it was a big change for Rockton, for sure.”

Fellow Rockton Agricultural Society member and past president Eleanor Wood believed that part of Jeannette’s acceptance was due to the fact that her husband had previously served in the position. She reasoned that members viewed the Jamesons as a couple, and because Neal was “bedrock” in the association, it was likely safe to “venture out into Jeanette.”

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166 Interview with author, Jeanette Jameson, July 22, 2014.
that, though friends, it was not uncommon for male board members to question “a woman’s point of view.”\textsuperscript{168} Jeanette, however, had “fire in her belly,” as well as a “practical” view to how things should be done, one reason she believed male members were quick to support her direction.\textsuperscript{169} Despite Jeanette’s recognition that she experienced some of the gendered assumptions of the time, she asserted that she never thought of herself in those terms:

I never considered myself female or male, like, you know, because I didn’t grow up that way. There was no division in my house. When I was teaching I became a principal of a school in the early 60s, so you know, that was not normal for that time either, so it was not ground breaking at all, if there’s a job to be done, you do it.\textsuperscript{170}

Not all women wanted to move beyond their traditional roles. Eleanor Wood explained that when she got involved in the Rockton Agricultural Society in the 1960s, and before Jeannette was elected President, “Ladies kept to themselves, they didn’t aspire to be on the board.” Eleanor explained that they had no problem letting the men run “those other things,” and they focused on looking after their own affairs. In time, however, women’s committees felt that they needed greater control, especially in terms of finances:

…you needed a new stapler and they [the main fair board] wouldn’t give you any money for that, and you’d have to go, sort of on bended knee for that, and you began to think, maybe we should have our own representative on there, and it took a while before anybody wanted to step into that den of iniquity [laughs], where the men were because men will handle a meeting, they will go at each other’s throats and be done with it when it’s over, but let them take a woman apart at a meeting and she’s never going to get over it, and that, I think, was a fear… Women didn’t speak up like they might have… I think eventually we found women strong enough to do that, and that’s when it happened.\textsuperscript{171}

Eleanor suggested that women felt ill-prepared to deal with aggressive debates and disagreements that could occur at fair board meetings. She understood men to have a “thicker

\textsuperscript{168} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{169} Interview with author, Jeanette Jameson, July 22, 2014.
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{171} Interview with author, Eleanor Wood, July 22, 2014.
skin” than women, and she believed the heated discussions that often took place when fair board members disagreed intimidated and alienated some women. Eleanor suggested it took time before women were willing to speak up and stand out.

One might conclude that because women had difficulty attaining positions of power in agricultural societies that considerable tension existed between the sexes, but the women I interviewed never expressed any significant concern over this imbalance. Most women emphasized how men and women worked together to organize successful fairs. Often women served in agricultural societies alongside their husbands, male friends and neighbours, and they believed these men had their best interests at heart. When Glenda Benton, past-president of the Homecrafts Division and long-time member of the Georgetown Agricultural Society, described the relationship of the men and women on the fair board during this period, she explained that it was one based on friendship, where both sexes worked well together and where the “men were always there when we needed them.”

On the other hand, women may not have wanted to be seen as troublemakers. As sociologists Peggy Petrzalka and Susan E. Mannon have argued, social cohesion was often more important to rural women than individual profit or advancement, and many women were willing to limit their ambitions if they believed it was for the common good.

Another reason women shied away from taking on additional tasks was the amount of responsibility they already had at home. Many rural women did not have the time needed for attending meetings, especially if their husbands were also members and they had young children to attend. Margaret Lovering of the Ancaster Agricultural Society had gone to the fair since she was a child, but it was not until later in life that she was able to get involved in the agricultural

\[172 \text{ Interview with author, Glenda Benton, October 28, 2013.}
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\[173 \text{ Petrzalka and Mannon, “Keepin’ This Little Town Going,” 246.}
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society. In order for her husband to be involved, Margaret had to stay at home and take care of their six children. Before she joined the fair board as a member of the Crafts Committee in 1972 (she later served as the Chairman of the Crafts Section and the Secretary-Treasurer for the Women’s Section), she had been asked to help run the school children’s fair, which she had agreed to, but as she explained

Well, I had small children, I had six children you know [laughs], and it was very hard, and when I farmed them out to a lady in Alberton, she didn’t think that I got back quick enough but as soon as the judging was over I was back home, and I said, that’s it!, until my husband became president of the fair, and then they asked me to join the fair then.¹⁷⁴

Even though her husband and the Lovering family had been involved for many years, she explained “I just couldn’t with small children, because, how can you drag a bunch of children to the fair and try to help?” Although Margaret explained that a lot of women “took their kids with them… they didn’t have six children [laughs].”¹⁷⁵ Both married and unmarried women were involved in agricultural societies, and many married women also had husbands who were members. When a couple were members, however, the husbands’ involvement often took precedent over the wife’s because women were the ones expected to take care of any responsibilities at home.

Another issue that frustrated women was how some women’s divisions were still beholden to the main fair board for funds, funds the women themselves usually raised. Conflict could arise when women felt the men did not provide them with their fair share. Longtime member of the Erin Agricultural Society, Myrtle Reid, had been a “Lady Director” when the women organized a separate women’s division in 1953 to help the fair board pay for the newly built coliseum on the fairgrounds that housed the local ice rink. The women began a series of

¹⁷⁴ Interview with author, Margaret Lovering, August 19, 2014.
¹⁷⁵ Ibid.
fundraising activities, including managing a refreshment booth during weekend hockey games in the winter and catering bonspiels and other events held at the rink.\textsuperscript{176} It was because of the money they raised that the society could afford the payments and upkeep of the new building.\textsuperscript{177} She recalled how the “Ladies’ Division” had to turn over its fundraising efforts to the main fair board, and how women thought they should have some say in deciding how that money was spent. Myrtle explained

> I think there was always this nagging that…the women were giving over their proceeds from our fundraising to the guys and maybe not getting enough recognition for it, and then it came about that the women wanted to be represented on the main board to find out what they were doing…We all wanted to know what the guys were planning.\textsuperscript{178}

June Switzer, also a long-time member of the Erin Agricultural Society and a past-president, explained that even in the 1980s if women wanted to do something different, they had to bring their request to the board of directors. “At that time all the board were all men,” June described, and “depending on who was president at the time, you got totally dismissed and it was never brought up,” or “other times it was great.” Many of these women also had husbands serving who might forward their ideas, but if a president or fair board members were not inclined to listen, the women’s committee had significant difficulty facilitating their agenda. June explained how “one president I worked with – nice guy – but he was very old school. You women just do your thing, don’t suggest that we change things to make it this [or] that better for you.”\textsuperscript{179} Other women’s sections did create their own treasury to finance their competitions and had more autonomy.

\textsuperscript{176} June Switzer, \textit{Erin Fall Fair Since 1850, Written by June Switzer in Recognition of the 150th Anniversary of the Erin Agricultural Society} (Erin, Ont.: Erin Agricultural Society, 2000), 53.

\textsuperscript{177} Ibid, a.

\textsuperscript{178} Interview with author, Myrtle Reid, September 23, 2013. Women often did the majority of fundraising for agricultural societies. The Superintendent for Ontario Agricultural Societies, F. A. Lashley, emphasized in his 1960 OAAS Convention address that the “women of Paris and Burford,” were “to be commended for raising $3,000.00 and $1,000.00 respectively and turning this money over to the board to help finance the fair in general.” F. A. Lashley, “Report of the Superintendent,” in \textit{One Hundred and Seventh Annual Report of Ontario Agricultural Societies, 1960} (Ministry of Agriculture, 1961), 10.

\textsuperscript{179} Interview with author, June Switzer, September 12, 2013.
Glenda Benton recalled how the fair board of the Georgetown Agricultural Society had to borrow money from the women’s division one year just in order to pay out the prize money for exhibits outside of the women’s department. Still, many women continued to have their authority restricted, and increasingly they found this intolerable.

By the 1970s, a new generation of women was challenging the status quo. Second-wave feminism was influencing women in rural areas, and women in agricultural communities were establishing new organizations in which they could have a more meaningful role. In 1975, for example, over 300 farm women came together to form Women for the Survival of Agricultural (WSA). Members were concerned with the lack of communication between producers and consumers, unfair criticisms of the farm community, and “the inequalities that exist for farm women in regard to property and marital rights.” One of the founding members, Diane Harkin of Winchester, explained that their meetings were “alive and exciting,” and instead of talking about children and recipes, they “just talk farming.” WSA also sponsored other farm women to attend farm business courses. Harkin, and women like her, believed that farm women had a responsibility to tell farmers’ stories because they themselves were farmers, not simply farm wives.

The same change in mindset was seen at fairs. Women at the Canadian National Exhibition had already begun to challenge women’s unequal status on the fair board, and

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180 Interview with author, Glenda Benton, October 28, 2013.
181 Carbert, Agrarian Feminism; 145-6.
184 Ibid.
185 The Canadian National Exhibition Association had disallowed women from attending directors’ luncheons during the annual exhibition (a policy that began in the 1930s), and it was not until 1969 that “Prominent women who qualify” were invited, despite the fact that the CNE association had had women directors since 1959. L. C. Powell, the CNE general manager, said that the policy of not allowing women at the luncheon had been a result of limited space in the dining facilities, but Mrs. W. A. Wood, named a director in 1967 to represent the National
women involved in county and township societies also demanded more equality at all levels of fair administration. When June Switzer joined the Erin Agricultural Society in 1972, she became unsettled by the tradition of referring to female members and directors by their husbands’ names in prize lists and reports. June and her friend Mary Wall realized this needed to change:

Mary was one of the first I knew who kept her maiden name even though she was married, and it suddenly dawned on us that we were doing all this work – and at that point in time the women did all of the hall stuff and a whole lot more...we had more responsibilities really than a lot of the other directors had – and we’re thinking, “and I’m Mrs. Craig Switzer? I don’t think so! I have a name!” and that was in the early 1980s.¹⁸⁶

June no longer wanted to be referred to by her husband’s name; she wanted her own recognition and the ability for someone to say “hey June.” June explained that the idea of recognizing women by their first name was accepted widely; many believed it was long overdue.¹⁸⁷

Women’s increased responsibilities on the fairgrounds also reflected the changing influence of agricultural societies as tools of agricultural reform and innovation. Agricultural societies had once been an important part of the Ontario Department of Agriculture’s focus on agricultural improvement, but by the 1970s the annual report by the Minister of Agriculture and Food only briefly mentioned their activities. By 1980, the published report on agricultural societies was less than 130 words in length.¹⁸⁸ This neglect reflected agricultural societies’ declining importance in directing agricultural policy in the province. Although the societies continued to purport their commitment to agricultural improvement, they realized that their influence had been weakened over the course of the twentieth century in relation to the corporate and government-appointed agricultural experts, as well as the large number of specialized

Council of Women, asserted that the “CNE cannot continue to ignore the accomplishment of women just because they are women.” L. C. Powel and Mrs. W. A. Wood, quoted in “CNE decides to allow women to attend directors’ luncheons,” The Globe and Mail, April 26, 1969.
¹⁸⁶ Interview with author, June Switzer, September 12, 2013.
¹⁸⁷ Ibid.
¹⁸⁸ Annual Report for the year ending March 31, 1980 of the Minister of Agriculture and Food (Printed by order of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 1980), 21.
agricultural and livestock associations that had begun to make strides in the late-nineteenth century. The education of farm people had largely been taken over by these other groups, at the same time that rural populations were decreasing, and more entertainment options and greater mobility meant that more fairs had significant competition for rural and urban fairgoers’ attention. Agricultural societies were concerned about how they would remain relevant in the future if their allure had diminished. They decided that their role would become one of community building and educating an urban population that was increasingly removed from agriculture,¹⁸⁹ and women’s exhibits at fairs were praised for their ability to “create enthusiasm and a good community spirit” among local and visiting populations alike.¹⁹⁰

Agricultural societies’ most important tasks in the postwar period became their ability to foster community, encourage rural sociability, and educate neighbouring urban populations about agriculture and rural life – all things their female members had long been doing. Women’s work continued to connect the interests of farm, town, and city women and their exhibits attracted a diverse group of fairgoers. Baked and cooked goods, arts and crafts, flowers; these were all items that had the power to bridge geography and encourage people from both urban and rural backgrounds to participate at the fair. Fair organizers recognized that, in addition to rural people, urban visitors were needed for a successful fair, and they wondered if fair time should be known as “Rural Fellowship Day,” a day “when rural people can exhibit their produce and improve public relations with our urban neighbours.”¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ President [name unknown], quoted in “First Hundred Years for Neustadt’s Fall Fair: History and Prize List for 1970,” A971.020.001, Bruce County Archives.
Conclusion

The women who devoted so much volunteer time to their agricultural societies did so because they realized they were needed, and they enjoyed the work they did. When asked why she served and continued to serve on the Erin Agricultural Society’s fair board, June Switzer explained: “Partly because I know that I’m useful and that I’m helpful… you get a sense that [you] can do this job, and I feel that it is really necessary that somebody does this type of thing, and so I’m still there, and it’s still fun.” Margaret Lovering expressed similar feelings when she explained that she enjoyed the fair and being a part of an agricultural society. She felt her service was appreciated and needed: “They’re always calling, Marg would you do this, and Marg would you do that [laughs].” Rather than complaining about the amount of work they were often required to do, most women were pleased that their agricultural societies needed them. Of course, both June and Margaret were long-time members; other women may have simply stopped volunteering if they found they did not enjoy the work or receive the same benefits. Similar to rural women in general, female agricultural society members found that community service brought a measure of personal happiness knowing they were needed.

Fair women also faced challenges, including limited authority to influence the general management of fairs and often indifference to their interests and activities, but they responded to opportunities to increase their control, such as creating their own divisions within agricultural societies. Women’s divisions helped to create a female subculture within agricultural societies that allowed women a space to fight the subordination they may have felt by their exclusion from other fair board roles and opportunities. Ultimately, however, those who continued to participate did so because they believed the benefits they received outweighed the costs. One will never

192 Interview with author, June Switzer, September 12, 2013.
193 Interview with author, Margaret Lovering, August 19, 2014.
know how Velda Dickenson felt when she accepted her plaque in 1965 and heard the poem that had been written for her by her agricultural society friends. Did she focus on the “many friends won” and their “love and devotion”? Was she satisfied that women had separate, but important roles to play? Or did she long for more women to hold office in the upper echelons of agricultural society management? Whatever her inner-most feelings, or those of the women around her, most female agricultural society members were committed to serving in agricultural societies despite the inequalities that existed because they valued the contributions they made and believed they were doing important work to advance themselves, their families, and their communities.
Chapter 3: Feeding the Family: *Fair* Food for All

Food comes to mind when we think about fall fairs. People attracted to the midway associate fair food with popcorn, cotton candy, French fries, foot-long hotdogs, or the more recent invention, deep-fried Mars bars. Attendees of the homecrafts building expect homemade bread, pastries, pies, tarts and other domestic foodstuffs. Those who are mindful of the fair’s purpose for education associate food with everything from the beef and dairy cattle in the show ring, to the uniform groups of apples, tomatoes, beets, and potatoes exhibited in the agricultural hall.

While men’s contributions to food production were recognized as a part of the larger agricultural economy, in which commodity crops and livestock were grown to supply national and international markets, women’s food production was recognized as their contribution to their families and local communities. Just as women served male-directed fair boards, women’s food provisioning was seen as supplementary to men’s wage-earning capabilities on the family farm. The idea that women’s contributions were secondary to men’s shaped the types of food competitions they entered as well. Fairs were inherently political and performative, and by focusing on women’s achievements in competitions for garden vegetables, fruit, dairy and domestic produce, women were portrayed as the caretakers of the family and the community, rather than as producers for the nation. Still, women’s significant contributions to the household economy could not be ignored. Changes in women’s food exhibits over time highlight shifts in family provisioning that altered the nature of women’s work in the home, the garden, and the barnyard, and illustrate how women chose to accept or resist elements of a transforming foodscape in Ontario.
Through food exhibits women also improved the appearance of fairs. Female exhibitors and organizers tried to achieve orderly, tasteful, and skillfully presented displays as part of their larger role of refining the fairgrounds. Fair organizers supported women’s desire to showcase their “love for the beautiful,” in addition to their hard work, thrift, and material contributions to the household and community.

**Exhibiting Food: Showcasing the Bounty of the Countryside**

Food exhibits were an essential feature of fairs. They showcased the abundance of foodstuffs grown in the province and they were effective for showcasing women’s ability to provision and comfort the family. Visual knowledge was a fundamental way that women learned about and assessed their work at fairs, and food exhibits often reflected contemporary ideas about how items could be displayed in an orderly, intelligent, and tasteful manner. As Keith Walden explains in his study of the Toronto Industrial Exhibition, “a culture of the eye” dominated late-nineteenth century exhibitions and “the desire to see and the need to see became more acute.”¹ This included aspirational visions, such as items found in a middle-class parlour or a bountiful collection of fall fruit and vegetables that acted as a feast for the eye.

Both women and men contributed to the food shown at fairs, but it took time before female exhibitors gained recognition. Traditionally the male head of household was recorded in fair winners’ lists, even for products made by female household members. Initially this may have been because many agricultural societies only allowed members to compete, most of whom were male, but this tradition persisted long after competition became open to non-members as well. Furthermore, agricultural societies usually allowed family members to exhibit under a single membership fee, and yet women’s work was still identified as entries made by male household

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heads. This makes it difficult to say with certainty who in the household was most responsible for the food items exhibited, but with the long history of women making butter, cheese, bread, and other food products, as well as their work in the family garden, orchard, and hen house, it is safe to conclude that the items exhibited in these categories were often made by women.\(^2\) For example, even though the official winners list for the Erin Fair reported that John Thompson and Henry Smith won prizes for “two beautiful loaves” in 1865, it was also reported that the “home made bread, of which there were no less than 17 entries, showed what the thrifty wives of Erin could do.”\(^3\) Men’s names may have been reported in prize lists, but anyone reading those reports would have understood that winning entries were results of the talents of a Miss or a Mrs.\(^4\)

The practice of privileging the name of the male household head also reflected the idea that rural families were working units where everyone produced for the benefit of the household. However, family solidarity was more of an illusion than a reality because even though all family members may have contributed to the household economy, male heads of household were the legal owners of the land and the produce that came from it.\(^5\) Writers in nineteenth-century farm journals advocated for farm women’s rights and lamented the fact that many farm men


\(^3\) “Erin Agricultural Show,” *Guelph Mercury*, October 21, 1864.

\(^4\) Single or widowed women were the first to be recognized by their full name or title, and some married women were identified by their title in the late nineteenth century, but others continued to exhibit under their husbands’ names. Even in the 1970s, many newspapers and agricultural societies continued to identify women by their husbands’ first names rather than their own. Only single women were routinely identified by their first and last names.

considered themselves the breadwinners and ignored how women’s work sustained the family.\(^6\) Most rural people, however, accepted that men occupied the breadwinner role and were the public face of the family.\(^7\) Historian Katherine Jellison notes in her study about the impact of technology on farm women in the twentieth century that although women gained some degree of economic and political power over the course of the century, rural patriarchy remained. Even in the postwar period “men were still the ‘farmers’ and women their ‘helpers,’” a perception reinforced by women’s own assertion that they were not ‘farmers’ but ‘farm wives.’\(^8\) This idea is supported by other studies that conclude that Canadian farm families were typically organized as patriarchal institutions where women’s work was often undervalued and women themselves were rarely recognized as equal contributors in farm production.\(^9\) The public appreciated the work women exhibited at agricultural fairs, but women remained constrained to certain types of participation and their contributions were not always fully recognized.

Women’s contributions to fairs were not completely ignored because newspaper reporters routinely acknowledged that “No part of the exhibition is more instructive than that which comes under woman’s supervision.”\(^10\) The ability to feed the family was fundamental to women’s caretaking identities, and therefore prizes for food competitions were particularly prestigious. Men were advised that when selecting a wife they should insist she have culinary knowledge and skills because “however little we may in the days of our health and vigour care about choice food and cookery, we very soon get tired of heavy or burnt bread and of spoiled joints of meat.”\(^11\) Baking and cooking were said to be “an art upon which so much of our daily life depends,” so

\(^6\) “Woman’s Worth,” *Farmer’s Advocate and Home Magazine* 34 (June 1, 1899): 325.
\(^7\) Mrs. Signourney, cited in “The Two Sexes,” *Ontario Farmer* 3 (June 1871): 191.
\(^8\) Jellison, *Entitled to Power*, 179.
\(^10\) “Ladies at the Fall Fairs,” *Brampton Times*, October 16, 1868.
women were expected to perform it well. Women’s talent in the kitchen was central to their domestic skill, and thus their success as wives.

Thousands of women exhibited at fairs over the years, and their participation illustrated how they prided themselves on their reputations as good bakers, cooks, and provisioners. These women believed that competition was a legitimate means of determining and recognizing merit in a public arena. In 1868, the Brampton Times featured an article on women at fairs and asserted that

The prizes are worth contending for, aside from those offered by the committees. “The best bread maker in the country” is an honor that would sit gracefully on any woman. The finest butter neatly stamped… is certain to be looked at, and… to be inquired for.

Newspaper reporters also approved of the industrious character of female exhibitors. Women’s industry in producing foodstuffs, along with other domestic work, provided “a view to comfort, utility, and the sustentation of the family.” Food, which was “designed for the delectation of the palate or satisfaction of the appetite,” allowed women’s primary role as caretakers to be put on display and celebrated as something all women should aspire to and take pride in.

Vision’s privileged position in determining merit was an element of food displays that was rarely questioned. Fair organizers and judges promoted the idea that food’s quality could be judged by appearance, especially garden products, such as whole fruits and vegetables, that were often not tasted, but judged based on their appearance alone. By the twentieth century, the use of judging score cards became standard practice, and they emphasized fruit and vegetables’ form,

13 Ibid.
14 The “good taste and industry of the blooming daughters and hearty matrons of Ontario’s Albion” was lauded in the Brampton Times report of the 1868 Albion Fall Fair, while in 1870, the newspaper reported there was a generally falling off of exhibits at the county fair due to “Peel’s fair daughters… [having] reserved their industry and talent to swell the triumph of the Provincial Exhibition.”; “Albion Fall Fair,” Brampton Times, October 16, 1868; and “Peel Fall Fair, Another Grand Success,” Brampton Times, September 30, 1870.
15 “Chinguacousy Fall Fair,” Brampton Times, September 30, 1870.
16 “Peel Fall Fair: Another Grand Success,” Brampton Times, September 30, 1870.
shape, colour, uniformity, and condition as the basis for evaluation. For example, a vegetable’s quality was judged by its “Smoothness, texture, [and] freedom from blemishes,” and its uniformity was determined by ensuring that the specimens were “one size and colour.” The flavour of fruit was judged in some cases, but again, most points of analysis were based on size, colour, texture, form, and freedom from blemishes. General fairgoers relied on sight as their primary means of acquiring knowledge, especially since they were discouraged from getting close enough to taste, touch, or smell the entries. In her research on agricultural exhibitions in Nova Scotia, Sarah Spike employed what anthropologist Cristina Grasseni called “skilled visions” to explain how agricultural exhibitions used sight to educate the public on the ideal model for any given thing. Imparting visual knowledge was a fundamental purpose of fairs, whether that was through the confirmation of a purebred Shorthorn bull, or a three-tiered wedding cake.

Newspapers reporting on fairs confirmed that visually pleasing displays were an effective way to communicate knowledge to fairgoers. The reporter for the *Hillsburg Beaver* contended

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18 Ibid.
20 Neal Knapp argues late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American livestock improvers began to question whether the aesthetic traits desired in the show ring benefited an animal’s economic performance; Neal Knapp, “Transforming the Political Bodies of Livestock: Anglo-American Livestock Expositions,” (paper presented at the International Conference of the European Rural History Organisation (EURHO) University of Girona, Spain, September 7-10, 2015). In Ontario, W. E. Smallfield suggested at the 1923 Ontario Association of Fairs and Exhibitions Convention that the appearance of fine animals was not enough: “important as it is to have the fine looking animal, to please the eye of the spectators, the lesson will hardly be more than half taught if the placard of information is not there also…the educational value would be greatly increased if some competent person…gave a talk, elaborating on the points of superiority in the build and make-up of the pure-bred animal and emphasizing the profit, shown on the placard, of the good animal over the grade.” It later became common practice for judges to provide verbal reasons for their placings at most cattle shows, but this practice was not yet standard in the early part of the twentieth century; W. E. Smallfield, “How Can Rural Fairs Be Made More Attractive and of Greater Educational Value?” in *Ontario Department of Agriculture Twenty-Second Annual Report of the Agricultural Societies and of the Convention of the Association of Fairs and Exhibitions for the Year 1922…* (Toronto: Clarkson W. James, Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1922), 24.
that at the 1907 Erin Fair the crowd assembled did not care “a continental for ‘educational features,’ or would stand for them for any length of time.” Instead, the reporter noted the people wanted “good, well-arranged exhibits, sharp judging, no dragging or delays, and what we might term “movement.” The *Ontario Farmer* agreed that fairgoers obtained useful information when they kept “their eyes and ears open.” The article suggested that there were two classes of people at fairs, the observant and unobservant, and that only an enquiring mind found “enough to engage its best attention and waken its fullest energies on such occasions, while a dull sleepy mind will go and come like a door on its hinges.”22 Such rhetoric illustrates how fairgoers were expected to keep the spirit of improvement alive, and agricultural societies realized it was their duty to educate fairgoers in a way that was easily consumed.

Food exhibits attractively displayed knowledge, and reporters praised women for their contributions. At the 1863 Minto Township Fair in Harriston, the butter judges found the local entries to be superior and more tastefully arranged than those at the Provincial Exhibition. They also insisted that it was “the ladies [who] were instrumental in getting up the best part of the show.”23 At the 1870 Peel County Fair, credit was given to female exhibitors for the “butter and cheese, and staff of life…flanked on either side by deliciously clear jars of honey, bottles of home made wine, and [the] most luscious and tempting looking samples of table grapes, peaches, pears, &c., &c., which taken as a whole, formed a very pretty picture.”24 The “taste” with which food entries were arranged was more a comment on women’s ability to discern good quality and a high aesthetic standard than it was a comment on the foods’ perceived sensation of flavour.

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22 “Hints for the Month,” *Ontario Farmer* 3 (September 1871): 427.
23 “Minto Agricultural Show,” *Elora Observer*, October 23, 1863.
24 “Peel Fall Fair: Another Grand Success,” *Brampton Times*, September 30, 1870.
Flavour and texture were also conveyed visually. Displays “of toothsome edibles” that whetted the appetite of every passerby, and large exhibits of “bread, butter, honey, pies, cakes, pickles and preserves [that stood] out in tantalizing array to the hungry visitor” were especially appreciated. While other competitions in the “Ladies’ Department,” such as home manufactures, fancy work, and fine art also exhibited good taste, food exhibits were expected to also visually communicate “tasty.”

The popularity of food exhibits continued to grow over the years, and even during the uncertainty of the Second World War they flourished. At the 1944 Woodbridge Fair in York County, crowds jammed into the exhibition hall to see the bountiful foodstuffs grown and produced in the county. A reporter from the Globe and Mail provided a detailed account of the display: “… it was almost impossible to move in the mob that slowly surged past the fencing which separated the envious eyes from the tables on which were lined the cakes with deep frosting, pies of delicate autumn hues, cookies of tempting crispness and mountainous loaves of bread with bulbous eaves along their sides.” The luxury of plenty combined with a richness of colour, and the perceived quality of the taste and texture conveyed the sense that Woodbridge was a fertile agricultural region, blessed with skilled women who used the productiveness of the land and their superior talents to feed their families and communities.

The seasonality of fairs limited the variety of fresh food displayed. Fall fairs were usually annual harvest celebrations, so the types of fresh produce exhibited reflected what was seasonally available and at its peak of maturity. For women, it gave them time to preserve summer and fall fruits and vegetables, craft dairy products, and prepare other foodstuffs. While

25 “Aylmer’s Great Fair,” Aylmer Sun, September 25, 1902.
26 Ken W. MacTaggart, “Home Sciences Stressed at Fall Fair,” Globe and Mail, October 10, 1944.
27 Although spring and summer fairs existed, most fairs ran during the late-summer and fall months between late August and late October.
not all of Ontario’s variety of produce could be displayed at fall fairs, the most important products to the agricultural economy were usually represented. At the first Weston Agricultural and Horticultural Society’s Fair in 1876, it was noted that it was too late in the season for an extensive exhibit of fruit, and only late-harvest fruits such as apples were shown in great numbers. Despite this limitation, more than one hundred exhibitors participated in the fresh fruit competition that year.\textsuperscript{28} Apples’ seasonality, along with their general suitability for the Ontario climate, and popularity among residents in the province, resulted in a wealth of apple exhibits over the years.\textsuperscript{29}

For women’s food exhibits in particular, which day of the week the fair was held was critical. Throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century, fairs were not held on weekends. Agricultural societies adopted this practice to avoid the Sabbath, but some realized that Mondays posed problems too. In 1951, Mrs. Alex Robinson of Cochrane, the director of the women’s section of the OAAS, reported that one fair in her region suffered “a bad slump” in baking entries when it was held on a Monday.\textsuperscript{30} Robinson warned agricultural societies about the consequences of hosting fairs immediately after the Lord’s Day, when the more devout women in the community would not have the time to properly prepare their exhibits for competition.\textsuperscript{31}

Another challenge faced by food exhibit organizers was the weather during the growing season. Unlike domestic manufactures or fancywork, garden fruits and vegetables were dependent on good growing conditions. Unusually dry or rainy weather could result in a poor

\textsuperscript{28} “West Agricultural and Horticultural Society’s Fair,” \textit{Daily Globe} [Toronto], October 12, 1876.
\textsuperscript{29} For a full discussion of the prevalence of apples at fairs, see discussion in section “Garden Vegetables and Fruits.”
\textsuperscript{30} Mrs. Alex Robinson, “Women’s Division Reports; District 14,” in \textit{Ontario Department of Agriculture 97\textsuperscript{th} Annual report of Ontario Agricultural Societies, 1950, also Report of Ontario Association of Agricultural Societies...} (Toronto: Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1951), 71.
\textsuperscript{31} Arran-Tara Fall Fair Booklets, A959.034.001, Bruce County Archives, and Arran-Tara Agricultural Society Prize Lists, private collection of Ron Hammell, Dobbinton, Ontario. In 1956, exhibitors were instructed that bread had to be baked the day before judging, and by 1960 onward the prize list specified that all bread was to be 24 hours old.
harvest, and thus an inferior exhibit. At the 1883 Brampton Fair, it was reported that cold weather and severe frost had damaged fruits and flowers that year, so “no one expected to see a full and rich exhibit in these departments.”

Poor weather during the fair itself was another challenge. Rain was cited as the most frequent cause for reduced attendance. In 1877, it was reported that the great drawback of the Peel County Fair “was the rain and the mud…had the weather been fine the attendance of visitors would have been fully three times as many as it was, and the entries even greater in number than they were.” The reporter acknowledged that unfortunately agricultural societies could not help poor weather, and therefore “must be content and hope for better days in future.”

In 1884, the Peel County Fair again suffered downpours at fair time, but the local newspaper reporter saw the humour in such circumstances, especially in the way the conditions affected the women who attended: “As soon as the rain ceased, the crowds from down town began pouring in through the gates. The ground was wet, soft and soapy, and in less than half an hour after the crowd arrived it was in the most lovely, charming, slippery, muddy state that eye ever beheld.” The “lovely, charming” state of affairs left the reporter in particular awe of the women who “all honor to them for their pluck and patience, came sliding through and into the main hall.” “Such crushing, crowding and squeezing you never saw before,” the reporter declared. Despite this, however, he contended that “everybody enjoyed it immensely. There was more fun than at a country paring-bee.” Whether or not fairgoers enjoyed the ensuing chaos created by the wet and soggy conditions we cannot know. Women’s exhibits may have received more attention as

32 “Brampton Fair,” Brampton Conservator, October 5, 1883.
33 “Brampton Fair,” Brampton Conservator, October 12, 1877.
34 Ibid.
35 “Co. of Peel Fall Fair,” Brampton Conservator, October 10, 1884.
36 Ibid.
fairgoers sought shelter from the rain, but ultimately the lost revenue from visitors who decided to forgo the muddy mess had society members praying for good weather the following year.

Fair organizers also had to protect food exhibits and maintain their quality over the course of the fair. As local fairs grew in size and duration in the twentieth century, the women organizing the domestic science exhibits found it especially difficult to keep food in good condition. At the 1934 OAAS Convention, Miss May Needham, future President of the Women’s Section of the OAAS, advised domestic science committees that in order to contend with “flies, dust, and germs,” suitable display cases were needed to keep exhibits sanitary. Pests and rodents were another issue. In 1929, Miss Goodfellow, a Department of Agriculture Home Economist who was regularly called on to judge at local fairs and later Secretary-Treasurer of the Women’s Section of the OAAS, recalled a time when she had been judging the fancywork at one fair and she noticed a mouse running through the domestic science entries. She expressed her relief that she was not judging that exhibit, but later that evening the domestic science committee asked if she would take up the task, revealing they were disappointed with the appointed judge’s placings. “I did it,” Goodfellow explained, “but it wasn’t as pleasant a task as if I hadn’t seen that mouse.” Other “pests” also caused issues. The brazen fairgoer, for example, was a problem that only a proper set of barriers could deter. At the 1854 Provincial Exhibition it was reported that the butter was indeed considered excellent, thanks to the “house-

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38 Miss May Needham, “Some Suggestions for Improving Fall Fair Women’s Departments,” in Ontario Department of Agriculture, Thirty-Fourth Annual Report of the Agricultural Societies and the Convention of the Association of Fairs and Exhibitions for the Year 1934... (Toronto: Herbert H. Ball, Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1934), 24.
40 K. Goodfellow, “Ladies’ Exhibits at Fairs & Exhibitions,” in Ontario Department of Agriculture, Thirtieth Annual Report of the Agricultural Societies and of the Convention of the Association of Fairs and Exhibitions for the Year 1930... (Toronto: Herbert H. Ball, Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1930), 47.
wife” who, after “applying a thumbful to her mouth declared [it] ‘splendid.’”\textsuperscript{41} At the 1932 Springfield Fair, no children entered homemade candy in the children’s department because the previous year their entries had been stolen. The organizers set up barriers, including a locked entry and a high woven wire to guard the food and ensure children they should “have no fear of any further loss,” but the damage was done.\textsuperscript{42}

Women believed that new and improved products helped secure displays and encouraged progressivism and modernity. Needham advised all female delegates at the 1934 OAAS Convention to adopt the use of cellophane as a first step in protecting food exhibits because she saw cellophane as the best defense against pests, even better than glass covered cases, which she believed were a good idea but allowed flies to enter during the judging process.\textsuperscript{43} In the years following the Second World War, a lot of attention was paid to which fairs were making improvements. At the 1949 OAAS Convention, District Representative Miss Agnes Yuill from Middleville mentioned how, in continuing to grow and prosper, Renfrew Fair made sure that all baking was under glass,\textsuperscript{44} while Mrs. J. H. Booth of Port Arthur expressed satisfaction that the Lakehead Exhibition in Thunder Bay was arranging for a building specifically for women’s work that contained large glass cases so that all food exhibits would be protected.\textsuperscript{45} Mrs. Guthrie Reid of Teeswater expressed her pleasure with some of the fine, new buildings, arenas, and community halls built on fairgrounds in her district, but she stated explicitly that glass cases for

\textsuperscript{41}“The Provincial Exhibition,” \textit{Weekly Review} [Brampton], October 7, 1854.
\textsuperscript{42}“Springfield Fair Another Big Success,” \textit{Aylmer Express}, September 29, 1932.
\textsuperscript{43}Miss May Needham, “Some Suggestions for Improving Fall Fair Women’s Departments,” in \textit{Ontario Department of Agriculture, Thirty-Fourth Annual Report of the Agricultural Societies and the Convention of the Association of Fairs and Exhibitions for the Year 1934...} (Toronto: Herbert H. Ball, Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1934), 24.
\textsuperscript{44}Miss Agnes Yuill, “Women’s Division Reports; District No. 2,” in \textit{Ontario Department of Agriculture, 96th Annual report of Ontario Agricultural Societies, 1949...} (Toronto: Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1950), 56.
\textsuperscript{45}Mrs. J. H. Booth, “Women’s Division Reports; District No. 15,” in \textit{Ontario Department of Agriculture, 96th Annual report of Ontario Agricultural Societies, 1949...} (Toronto: Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1950), 60.
food exhibits were still needed. The next year the same concern was conveyed by Mrs. Allan Koehler who reported that her only criticism for the district was the lack of proper display cases.

If agricultural societies did not properly care for food exhibits they risked discouraging exhibitors who expected to consume or sell their entries afterwards. Agricultural societies also encouraged donors to sponsor special prizes. Donors gave first-place exhibitors a generous monetary sum or valuable item in return for the winning entry. If the entries were damaged or inedible, sponsors would be less inclined to donate the following year. Various community groups also raised money by auctioning off prize-winning exhibits. The exclusivity associated with purchasing (and eating) a winning food item, and an atmosphere of good-natured competition between peers often meant that high prices were paid. During the First World War, an auction at the Wallacetown Fair for the “prodigious loaves of bread, and likewise buns, for which W. McLaudress offered special prizes, caused considerable rivalry, especially among the citizens of St. Thomas, who know a good thing when they see it.” The society was able to raise $18 for the Red Cross from exhibitor-donated items. When food was kept safe and edible it continued to be a valuable asset.

Wastefulness was a point of contention for those who sought to improve food classes. This included waste from improperly protected exhibits, as well as excessive amounts of food required for individual entries. Thrift was a positive characteristic among rural women because it not only represented the “classic thrift” that signified a moral virtue associated with Protestant

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46 Mrs. Guthrie Reid, “Women’s Division Reports; District No. 10,” in *Ontario Department of Agriculture, 96th Annual report of Ontario Agricultural Societies, 1949*... (Toronto: Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1950), 59.
47 Mrs. Allan Koehler, “Women’s Division Reports; District No. 10,” in *Ontario Department of Agriculture, 97th Annual report of Ontario Agricultural Societies, 1950*... (Toronto: Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1951), 70.
49 Ibid.
ethical values, such as “self-discipline, hard work, sobriety, honesty, diligence, and industry,” but it was directly related to popular agrarian ideals of efficient production, where the farm man and woman both contributed to the farm enterprise through their adoption of scientific methods and careful economy. Careful economy was especially important during the Great Depression, and at the 1934 OAAS Convention Needham recommended that the quantity of food required per entry be reduced. She suggested that classes for large quantities of butter, such as the class for 20- to 30-pound crocks of butter, be eliminated. She reasoned that farmers were making less butter, and that it was “most unfair to pry to the bottom of a 30 lb. crock, to test for award, thus rendering the exhibit unfit for winter preservation.” She also suggested there was no need for large collections of canned fruit and vegetables, as one sealer was enough. Needham’s concern with waste was illustrative of the value of thrift during the difficult years of the Depression. Unlike the late-Victorian penchant for overabundance when constructing displays of foodstuffs at national and international fairs, the 1930s were a time when farmers and townspeople alike had to be efficient and frugal. Although most agricultural societies offered classes that were similar to those offered before the Depression, sometimes the amount of an item or the number of items required per entry was reduced, as evidenced in domestic science and dairy produce exhibits.


51 Taylor, *Fashioning Farmers*, chaps 4 and 5.

52 Needham, “Some Suggestions for Improving Fall Fair Women’s Departments,” 25.

53 Ibid.

54 Walden, *Becoming Modern in Toronto*, 141-44.

55 “Prize List, Exeter Agricultural Society Fall Show…1934,” Ontario Fall Fair Catalogues, XA1 MS A073, University of Guelph Archival & Special Collections. The Exeter Fair was like other fairs during this period that requested only single jar samples, typically a quart or a pint, of each canned product. Butter was mostly shown in 5-pound rolls or prints, and the largest amount required for one class was 10 pounds. Factory-made dairy produce classes, however, did require larger amounts (one class for 50 pounds of butter and another for a 50-pound cheese).
The way in which food exhibits were displayed was also important. At fairs a taxonomic frame of mind influenced people’s belief that the “completeness” of displays and their rational organization was necessary if an exhibit was to educate. At the 1876 Guelph Central Fair, the reporter for Toronto’s *Daily Globe* was upset with the lack of finished displays on the first day of the exhibition. He beseeched agricultural societies to “put a stop to the constantly growing evil of allowing exhibitors to deter putting their articles in place until near the close of the first day.”

He argued that all fairgoers, whether they arrived for the first day of the fair or the last, had the right to see a complete show, and he added that visitors were “not put in the best of humour by finding everything on deck in a state of provoking confusion.”

Beyond incomplete exhibits and tardy entries, the *Daily Globe* reporter also criticized disorganized displays. He was distressed by the jumbled exhibits that defied classification:

One is constantly stumbling across articles up stairs which under any regard for the eternal fitness of things should have been found alongside a similar class of goods down stairs, and *vice versa*. Just when one is congratulating himself and thanking his stars that he has got one department finished at last, in spite of digs in ribs from moving boxes and collisions with excited assistants, he finds that that department is “in parts” like Daniel Deronda, and that the “parts” are pretty much all over the building.

Disorganization hindered organizers’ ability to present entries to their best advantage and provide orderly, intelligent, and tasteful displays. The Victorians believed that proper systems of classification were essential for the clear communication of knowledge. The reality, however, is that most organizers were restricted by the facilities at their disposal. Women would have wanted their exhibits arranged intelligently and neatly, but most fairs housed various women’s

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56 “Guelph Central Fair, Opening Day,” *Daily Globe* [Toronto], October 4, 1876.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid. George Elliot’s 1876 novel *Daniel Deronda* consisted of two distinct parts, each with its own unique qualities. The newspaper reporters’ reference to the popular novel would have conveyed to readers how different the various exhibits collected together were, seemingly without reason.
exhibits, including foodstuffs, in one large building or shelter. Often these structures contained everything from home appliances and horse harness, to cakes and crazy quilts. Of course, not everyone was critical of fair organizers’ ability to construct displays. At the Union Fall Fair in Markham, a reporter for the *York Herald* praised the women’s exhibits for the taste and skill they displayed and the committee of management for ensuring the entries were “in excellent order.”

Fair organizers advocated for spacious halls to be built to showcase exhibits at their best. The Toronto Township Agricultural Society secured the use of a large new drill shed in 1868 so that “the prolific display of grain, fruit, dairy produce, manufactured articles, ladies’ work, &c.,” could be “neatly arranged,” while in 1892 the Bayham Agricultural Society secured a spacious building that allowed indoor exhibits to be displayed to their best advantage. As agricultural societies matured, they often tried to secure funds to renovate or erect new permanent exhibit halls for growing exhibits. The Picton Agricultural Society in Prince Edward County raised funds to build a “Crystal Palace” in 1887, which was modeled on the 1851 London Crystal Palace. The size and type of permanent structures on fairgrounds could, however, vary enormously.

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61 “Toronto Township Fall Fair,” *Brampton Times*, October 23, 1868.
63 “Albion Fall Fair, *Brampton Times*, October 16, 1868, and “The Markham Fair,” *Globe* [Toronto], October 6, 1894. The Albion Agricultural Society renovated the existing building on the fairgrounds. Although the reporter did not specify how the building had been renovated, common renovations included the resurfacing of dirt floors, fixing leaky roofs and barn-board walls, installing new windows, and adding additional tables and display cases for exhibits. Markham Fair erected a new, large two-storey exhibition hall made from wood and glass that was described as a “magnificent exhibition pavilion.” It was reportedly 150 feet long and 40 feet wide, with two storeys, for a total of 11,000 square feet of floor space. It cost the agricultural society over $3,000 to build.
Large exhibition halls were a matter of pride for fair organizers. Throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, agricultural societies sought ways to improve their fairgrounds, and often an impressive hall or arena was their most obvious sign of advancement. In 1950, Mrs. J. H. Booth, the district representative for the Dryden, Lenora, Rainy River, and Lakehead Fairs, proudly reported at the OAAS Women’s Meeting that a new building for women’s work only was built at the Lakehead Exhibition Grounds to celebrate their 60th
anniversary that included “large cases with glass windows for needlework.” Agricultural societies in Northern Ontario were often younger than many of their southern counterparts, and they were eager to highlight the improvement and progress they had made to illustrate that their fairs could be as progressive as southern ones.

Exhibitors’ adherence to instructions also allowed for an orderly and uniform exhibit. Exhibitors who did not follow the rules were usually disqualified from competition. In 1850, Mr. Thurtell, a judge at the county fair held in Guelph, remarked that a considerable number of excellent butter entries could not compete because they were not “rightly put up”; in this case samples were put in crocks rather than packed for export. Even by 1934, food exhibit organizers were advised to always “state exactly what is required” so that competitors understood that “if it calls for six buns, that means “six,” not “thirteen,” and if for light fruit cake, it does not mean “dark cake”; if for sandwiches for afternoon tea, that does not mean for a “lunch pail.”

When an entry was faulted for something not necessarily visible to fairgoers, mistrust and suspicion ensued. Needham told OAAS delegates in 1934 that

Sometimes care is not taken by the exhibitor to see that the pans in which bread, buns, biscuits etc., are baked, are free from stains which discolour the exhibit. We see a nice pan of biscuits, or buns, almost 100 per cent., and then we look at the underside and find they are stained, and have to be ruled out. The public cannot understand why they did not get the prize. If cooks were more careful about the pans, used for exhibits for the Fair, they might get more prizes.

An exhibitor’s unseen error confused the public and made the results difficult to understand when sight was the main method of fairgoers’ evaluation.

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64 Booth, “Women’s Division Reports; District No. 15,” 60.
65 “County Agricultural Show,” Guelph Advertiser, October 31, 1850.
67 Ibid.
Other times, food exhibitors purposely tried to deceive judges. At the 1936 OAAS Convention, judges described some of the “trickiest methods” they experienced from exhibitors. One judge recalled how a woman entered a jar of peas that had been uncooked and simply covered with cold water in order to preserve their green colour. Another woman entered a group of “home-preserved” fruits, which were discovered to have been purchased and “dumped into a sealer and taken to the fairgrounds.” These women believed that seeing was believing and that their entries would be judged on appearance alone, but their tricks were soon revealed when the sealer jars were opened for sampling. The idea that only appearance mattered also gave rise to a number of dishonest honey exhibitors:

One stunt, and a particularly nasty one, too, concerned honey. Good honey should be clear and not too thick. This, the women judges related, had apparently given rise to thoughts on the part of dishonest exhibitors that there might be other liquids that would fill the bill still better than the actual apiary product. Result: Curious judges who sampled honey shown in glass jars got a mouthful of castor oil at one fall fair – kerosene at another.

Actions such as these illustrate that women were not afraid of competition, and some were willing to cheat to win, risking their reputations as honest and moral individuals.

To legitimize results, and thus the integrity of what was on display, agricultural societies outlined their rules for exhibitors in their prize books. In the “Rules and Regulations” of the first Central Agricultural Society Fall Exhibition held in Walters Falls, Grey County, in 1889, organizers made it clear that

Upon the discovery of any fraud, or deception, either in the production of ownership, concerning any article exhibited, the Directors will have power to withhold any prize awarded and may prohibit any such party from exhibiting in

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68 Ibid.
69 David C. Jones, *Midways, Judges, and Smooth-Tongued Fakirs: The Illustrated Story of Country Fairs in the Prairie West* (Saskatoon: Western Producers Prairie Books, 1983), 101-2. Jones explains that at early Western-Canadian fairs the judging skills employed were often very primitive and food exhibits were seldom tasted or even smelled. Because of this many local exhibitors expected the judge to decide on appearance alone, and so, when a judge actually tasted the food prepared, cases of cheating were discovered.
70 “Lovely Ladies Stoop To Fall Fair Follies,” *Globe and Mail*, February 14, 1947.
any class for two or three years, and may publish the names of such persons or not, as may be deemed expedient.\textsuperscript{71}

The rules also guaranteed exhibitors that “No person shall be a Judge in any class, in which he is an exhibitor or interested in or has any relations exhibiting,” and they emphasized that the “Judges are expected, in the execution of their duties, to be careful to act with the most rigid impartiality, and make their entries in a clear and conspicuous manner.”\textsuperscript{72} Fair organizers reassured exhibitors that the measures in place ensured impartial competition, and they warned would-be cheaters of the consequences for dishonesty.

Despite the drama that could occur, most fairs were conducted yearly without any great controversy. Even criticism of judges was limited because generally fairgoers and exhibitors understood that most judges tried their best to award prizes fairly.\textsuperscript{73} Of course, some people questioned judges’ knowledge or judiciousness, but for the most part exhibitors recognized that the merits of their work would ultimately be rewarded. June Switzer of the Erin Agricultural Society explained how judging was subjective. She noted that despite the introduction of fairly strict point systems and standard classifications, judges had their own particularities and assumptions about how exhibits should be made and presented, and exhibitors understood this.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{71}“Central Agricultural Society Prize List of the First Annual Fall Exhibition, 1889,” Ontario Fall Fair Catalogues, XA1 MS A073, University of Guelph Archival & Special Collections.

\textsuperscript{72}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{73}Often those who accused others of cheating were themselves put under scrutiny and accused of being jealous of the final results. When John Smith wrote into the \textit{Brampton Times} to express his displeasure with a class placing, he recognized that “that when one finds fault with the decision of judges, he lays himself to the charge of undue interference; or when he complains of his being but an unsuccessful exhibitor, his opposition attributed to spring from disappointed ambition.” John Smith, “A Grievance,” \textit{Brampton Times}, October 23, 1868. Some agricultural societies also deterred unwarranted protests by requiring monetary deposits before protests would be considered, and only if the accused parties were found guilty would the accusers be returned their money. Typically, the fair board executive officers and directors would discuss the merit of any protest before any action was taken.

\textsuperscript{74}Interview by author, June Switzer, September 12, 2013.
June exhibited baked goods and other items at fairs because she wanted to showcase her talents, engage with her community, and enjoy the company of those she met there. When asked about the skills she developed because of her participation, she explained:

...when it looks really nice it also counts...even if it’s just a cinnamon bun, the presentation, the type of plate you put it on and the way you ice it, or whatever, or don’t ice it, has a bearing on everything and you can look in a showcase and see, oh, that one really looks nice in the way they presented it; so little details like that...paying attention to details, paying attention to rules, that if there is a rule that it’s supposed to be this size, well, you can be disqualified, and they won’t look at it even if it’s wonderful if it’s not the right size. Life lessons. Life lessons.\textsuperscript{75}

Visual knowledge was central for how women learned about and assessed their work at fairs. Women were expected to follow instructions, pay attention to details, and present a carefully, tastefully, and skillfully made entry that reflected their success as the caretaker of the family.

Food exhibit organizers were similarly committed to orderly and tasteful presentations of exhibits. An abundance of foodstuffs from the countryside was a marker of agricultural societies’ success in engaging with producers. At the 1960 Erin Fair, the colourful display of produce was enthusiastically described by the local paper: “On entering the coliseum, the eye was immediately drawn to a giant purple and gold cornucopia; and a horn of plenty it was, for flowing from its bell was every conceivable vegetable the soil could produce.”\textsuperscript{76} Women’s ability to use new techniques and materials for showcasing that bounty and their judicious and attractive arrangement of items and exhibits illustrated their dedication to improving and modernizing the fair and the countryside. By displaying their work, women were not only teaching others what proper homemade goods looked like, but they were also publicly presenting themselves as skillful rural women who contributed to the material and moral advancement of rural society.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{76} “Record Crowd Attend Ont.’s Preview of The Royal,” \textit{Erin Advocate}, October 13, 1960.
Dairy Produce

Dairy products were among the first items included at fairs that showcased farm women’s economic contributions and fetched some of the highest premiums on the fairground. The vast majority of dairying in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was done by women who made a significant economic contribution to the rural household, and therefore agricultural improvers were interested in its development. Dairy products highlighted rural values such as industry and thrift; traits that were a respected part of rural women’s identity. The evolution of dairy produce classes over the course of this investigation, however, illustrates that farm women produced goods that allowed them to contribute economically to the family, but when those products were no longer beneficial, either because they had a reduced market-share or the labour and time involved became too costly, women were unafraid to develop other forms of production that were more advantageous.

Dairying was important because it helped safeguard families who also relied on income from commodity crops whose prices depended on unpredictable export markets. Some dairy produce such as butter and cheese was exported, but dairy products generally had a strong local demand and were important to family provisioning. In 1851, homemade butter production was almost 16.1 million pounds; by 1891 it was 55.6 million pounds. Butter was always produced in greater amounts than cheese because it was more easily made and marketed, and before the rise of cheese factories it was more profitable.

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77 Marjorie Griffin Cohen, Women’s Work, Markets, and Economic Development in Nineteenth-Century Ontario (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 93-117. Cohen discusses how dairying was one of the most productive and important aspects of women’s farm work in Canada until the rise of cheese factories and creameries, which ultimately led to farm specialization and male control of the industry.


79 Cohen, Women’s Work, 104.

80 Ibid., 103-4.
Agricultural societies valued dairy exhibits because they encouraged farmers to improve dairying for the future. Reports of the inferiority of Canadian butter on the British market resulted in lower prices, and complaints that it was “badly made, badly packed, and, last but not least…put into bad tubs” prompted improvers to chastise producers.\(^8^1\) Most agricultural societies adopted dairy produce classes early on to try to improve the production of butter and cheese, and by mid-nineteenth-century most fairs had at least one class for each of these products, if not more.\(^8^2\)

Butter production was said to require great care and judgement.\(^8^3\) In 1859, the *Canadian Agriculturist* published an article about a celebrated award-winning female butter maker who advised the use of the purest of ingredients, clean instruments, milk kept at the proper temperature, proper churning, washing, and salting procedures, and finally, ensuring the product was correctly packaged and stored.\(^8^4\) Agricultural societies were hesitant to give women credit for some types of agricultural production, but they celebrated women’s role in dairying. Idealized images of milkmaids were popular in the nineteenth century,\(^8^5\) but rural men and women understood that dairying was onerous work that deserved praise for its importance to the farm economy.\(^8^6\) The dairy produce judge for the 1850 Eramosa Fair, Mr. E. Passmore, declared that he “was sure that if he were a young man, and looking for a wife, he would come to

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\(^8^1\) “Canadian Cheese and Butter,” *Farmer’s Advocate* 3 (June 1868): 87.
\(^8^2\) The 1847 Eramosa Fair had one class for the “Best Butter fit for exportation,” and one for “Best Butter for immediate use,” “Eramosa Show,” *Guelph & Galt Advertiser*, October 8, 1847.
\(^8^4\) “Butter Making,” *Canadian Agriculturist*, May 1859, 110.
\(^8^6\) Cohen, *Women’s Work*, 96-7. At the 1847 Puslinch Fair, the “housewives” were praised for the excellent dairy exhibits and the “great credit” they bestowed on the township, and the next year the “wives and daughters” of Puslinch again elicited praise from the judges for making their community proud with the fine dairy products they exhibited; “Puslinch Agricultural Show,” *Guelph & Galt Advertiser*, October 22, 1847, and “Puslinch Show,” *Guelph & Galt Advertiser*, October 5, 1848.
Eramosa for one—particularly if he were wanting one who could make good butter.”  

At the County Show in Guelph in 1854, the size and quality of the dairy display was a significant part of the fair’s success:

…it was amongst the butter that the greatest interest was evinced, and in which there was the greatest competition. Seven firkins of salt butter, and twenty-one entries of fresh, many so good that the judges wished they had prizes for one half, was a sight to make a dairy maid feel proud, and bore most honorable testimony to the industry of the farmers’ wives and daughters.  

The judges stated that the best entries were by women clearly committed to advancing their skills beyond the ordinary. The praise women received for their work was not simply local boosterism; women’s ability to produce superior dairy products was respected and encouraged.

Exhibitors usually received admiration for their dairy exhibits, but agricultural societies were often critical of the dairy industry more generally. At the 1848 Nichol Fair, a reporter noted that even though the cheese shown was very good, he lamented that Canadian farmers generally did not devote much attention to dairying. Some agricultural society and newspaper reports criticized the quality of Canadian dairy produce, particularly butter, and argued that these poor products decreased the overall value of dairy commodities and caused the “the blush of shame on the cheek of every producer.” When the entries for dairy produce were few, farmers were also criticized for their indifference. Dairy exhibits—good or bad, small or large—allowed agricultural societies and fairgoers the opportunity to discuss the industry and its future, as well as women’s efforts in improving this line of work.

87 “Eramosa Agricultural Show,” *Guelph Advertiser*, October 17, 1850.
88 “County Agricultural Exhibition,” *Guelph Advertiser*, October 26, 1854.
89 “Nichol Agricultural Show,” *Guelph & Galt Advertiser*, October 5, 1848.
90 “Annual report for the South Huron Agricultural Society,” January 31, 1879, Records of Agricultural Societies, Box 1, File 2, XA1 RHC A0386023, University of Guelph Archival & Special Collections.
91 “Guelph Central Fair,” *Guelph Daily Mercury*, 2 October 2, 1884. A local report lamented that the “show of dairy produce would scarcely do credit to a township fair” because there were so few entries.
Butter was more popularly shown at fairs because homemade cheese production was waning in the late nineteenth century. Domestic cheese production in Ontario was halved during the 1870s and continued to decline over the years, while the domestic production of butter plateaued for three decades after 1881. Even before many women gave up cheese-making, homemade cheese classes were generally seen as deficient. At the 1860 Perth County Fair in Stratford, it was reported the butter exhibit remained large and of good quality, but that there were only about half a dozen cheese entries, generally of inferior quality. The 1890 West Elgin Fair had 27 butter entries and 51 entries in bread, but there was only one exhibitor for cheese, Mr. W. Ostrander, and this was for “factory cheese.” Although the 1894 Markham Fair reported that the “cheese, both homemade and factory, is fully up to the high standard which Canadian cheese has attained,” most fairs by then had limited entries, largely confined to factory-made, rather than homemade cheese. The decline of cheese entries at fairs supports historians’ assertions that the rise of cheese factories in the province in the last quarter of the nineteenth century took a toll on homemade production. Production in cheese factories was often less wasteful, and provided a more reliable product, and greater amounts of cheese could be produced by a diminished workforce. In 1910, the total value of homemade cheese in Canada was $154,000, while the value of homemade butter was over $30 million for that same

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92 Cohen, Women’s Work, 108.
95 “Another Success: The West Elgin Fair Still Adds to its Reputation,” Advance [Dutton], October 2, 1890.
96 “The Markham Fair,” Globe [Toronto], October 6, 1894.
By the twentieth century, many fairs, such as Erin, discontinued the cheese competition altogether.  

Butter exhibitors made among the highest premiums in the nineteenth century, which indicated the value agricultural societies placed on the product. At the 1878 Brampton Fair, the most valuable award given was a horse rake worth $32, which was awarded to the winning “Span with wagon” entry in the horse show. In the cattle show the top prize was a feed mill worth $35, awarded to the best herd (one bull and four females). Other class prizes generally ranged between $1 and $5, but women competing in the firkin of butter class that year had the chance to win a sewing machine presented by T. Smyth, valued at $50. The competition attracted 48 entries and was reported by the local newspaper as among “the keenest in the whole fair.” Special top prizes donated by individuals and businesses were common for butter competitions. At the 1869 Peel County Fair, the best 25 pounds of butter received an additional $20, and at the 1884 Toronto Fair, Mrs. William Dolson of Alloa, Peel County, won $100 for the best tub of butter.  

Valuable prizes placed pressure on judges to select the right winner. At the 1853 Eramosa Fair, the judges “felt in a fix amongst the ladies,” because their butter entries were so good. The West Riding and Vaughan Agricultural Society hosted a successful butter exhibit that had 80 entries. The judges reportedly had difficulty deciding on the winners, and it was wondered

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99 Ibid., 109.
100 “Erin Fall Show,” Guelph Weekly Mercury and Advertiser, October 24, 1901.
101 “Brampton Fair, Delightful Weather,” Brampton Conservator, October 4, 1878.
102 Ibid.
103 “Peel County Fall Fair,” Brampton Times, August 27, 1869.
104 “The Toronto Fair,” Brampton Conservator, September 26, 1884.
105 “Eramosa Show,” The Guelph Advertiser, October 6, 1853. At the 1879 Markham Fair, it was reported that there was “an immense show of butter, and the judges, after two hours’ laborious tasting, came to the conclusion that it is a first-class lot”; “Markham Fall Exhibition,” Daily Globe [Toronto], October 4, 1879.
whether “ever such a show of butter was seen anywhere.” Butter competitions could be highly spirited. The reporter covering the 1912 Dufferin County Fair in Orangeville, wrote that the “county has some famous butter makers and there was great rivalry among the exhibitors to capture the cash prize of twenty-five dollars for the best ten pound butter prints, given by Mr. James Curry of Toronto, a former resident of Dufferin county.” Eighteen women competed and the winner, Mrs. Charles Crombie of Mono Township, exchanged her entry for Curry’s generous prize.

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, it was clear that homemade butter was waning. At the 1892 Puslinch Fall Show, the steady decline in competition was reasoned to be the result of the many creameries that existed in the region. After the First World War, new technology and a desire for greater product uniformity strengthened creameries’ market share. By the post-war period, butter classes had declined significantly. In 1950, at the OAAS Convention, district representative Mrs. A. Drysdale reported that despite growth in other competitions, butter competition entries were down in her district. Mrs. Kestle of Exeter also indicated that dairy produce was no longer a viable competition in her district and that most fairs decided to host non-competitive dairy displays sponsored by milk producers and creameries, rather than a traditional competition. When homemade dairy entries were made, it often

107 “Most Successful Fair for Years in Dufferin,” Globe [Toronto], September 23, 1912.
108 “Puslinch Fall Show,” Guelph Weekly Mercury and Advertiser, October 6, 1892.
110 Mrs. A Drysdale, “Women’s Division Reports; District No. 2,” in Ontario Department of Agriculture 97th Annual report of Ontario Agricultural Societies, 1950, also Report of Ontario Association of Agricultural Societies... (Toronto: Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1951), 68.
111 Mrs. Kestle, “Women’s Division Reports; District No. 2,” in Ontario Department of Agriculture 97th Annual report of Ontario Agricultural Societies, 1950, also Report of Ontario Association of Agricultural Societies... (Toronto: Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1951), 70.
surprised organizers. Mrs. W. C. Huckle of Bracebridge noted how she was surprised that one fair in her district still attracted entries for homemade bread and crocks of butter.\footnote{Mrs. W. C. Huckle, “Women’s Division Reports; District No. 2,” in \textit{Ontario Department of Agriculture 97th Annual report of Ontario Agricultural Societies, 1950, also Report of Ontario Association of Agricultural Societies...} (Toronto: Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1951), 70.}

By 1950, a long process of declining homemade dairy production meant that women no longer made homemade butter and cheese in large amounts. Butter could be bought more easily than produced, and the farm families that remained in dairying were expanding their herds and mechanizing in order to ship liquid milk off the farm to be processed rather than process it themselves.\footnote{Reaman, \textit{A History of Agriculture in Ontario}, vol. 2, 160. See also Jane Adams, \textit{The Transformation of Rural Life: Southern Illinois, 1890-1990} (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 189-90. The process of dairy specialization was also evidenced in the United States at this time, which also resulted in the loss of women’s dairy income.} Instead of making butter, dairy farmers focused on increasing liquid milk production and improving the quality and components of their milk through breeding better-quality cows. Dairy farming was an important agricultural sector in Ontario, and dairy cattle competitions grew in strength over the years. Domestic science classes for other foodstuffs continued to grow, and the number of female exhibitors increased, but dairy products were no longer the stars of the show.

\textbf{Garden Vegetables and Fruits}

The garden was central to many rural households. Agricultural journals, such as the \textit{Farmer’s Advocate}, argued that farmers should “have the best garden of any class of citizens,”\footnote{Henry Ives, “Prize Essay: The Farmer’s Garden,” \textit{Farmer’s Advocate and Home Magazine} 22 (April 1887): 109.} and garden vegetable and fruit classes proved popular at fairs. Men and women contributed to the production of garden produce, but because it is difficult to identify the work of women in early fair winners’ lists, it can be difficult to assess how many entries were the result of their efforts. Even when women were more commonly recognized for the entries in “Ladies’ Work,”
entries for garden vegetables and fruit classes were considered the result of a household effort, rather than individual effort, and fewer women were named as competitors. Still, by the late nineteenth century more women were being identified in these classes and competing alongside men for top prizes.

Women’s participation in garden exhibits reflected their provisioning role and ability to earn income for the family. Unlike paid wage work in garment-making or teaching, where women earned less than men simply because of their sex, garden products had a market value that was “not dependent on the hands which raised them.” An article published in the 1872 Farmer’s Advocate contended that many women had become excellent small-scale garden farmers, noting that one female market gardener who grew a variety of fruit “lost nothing in refinement of feeling by her out-door work,” and was happier and healthier because of it. This idea was also encouraged by the Ontario Farmer, which argued that even if gardening only returned a moderate profit, “in the re-establishment of impaired health, it was great.” While one must question the idyllic images presented by male reformers writing about women’s market gardening, their discourse at least shows that men accepted and encouraged female gardeners.

Women’s association with household gardening, however, may be why agricultural societies initially focused on field crops, typically cultivated by men, rather than small-scale gardening at early fairs. Agricultural societies privileged men’s agricultural pursuits, and so it is unsurprising the most early and mid-nineteenth century fairs turned their attention to the cultivation of crops, such as wheat, barley, oats, and corn, as well as field roots, such as turnips.

115 “Gardening as Women’s Work,” Farmer’s Advocate 6 (June 1871): 86.
116 “Lady Farmers,” Farmer’s Advocate 7 (March 1872): 43.
and potatoes. Many types and varieties of garden vegetables, fruit trees and bushes, flowers, and other plants grew in Upper Canada, but agricultural societies wanted to concentrate their efforts on improving grains, seeds, forage, tubers, and roots that were standard cash crops for farmers or used for livestock feed.

The production of garden vegetables and fruits had never been entirely gendered. Men, women, and children often worked together to produce these items for the family. In Upper Canada in the early nineteenth century, it was typical for men to plough the garden, but for women to plant and care for it. The division of labour in the garden meant that female heads of household were largely responsible for its management, and children could contribute significantly to its maintenance. And, of course, some individuals took on all or most of the gardening duties in the family, either out of interest or necessity, regardless of their gender.

Prize lists are useful records for analyzing the growth of garden exhibits and the changes in popular varieties of produce. An 1854 report of the Erin Fair identified two departments in which vegetables were listed: “Grains and Seeds” and “Roots.” Of the 22 classes listed in those departments, 14 could be broadly classified as vegetables, but some root vegetables such as turnips and beets would have also been used for livestock feed, not simply human consumption. Likely only 11 vegetable classes in the “Roots” category were meant, to some degree, for

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118 See the British American Cultivator and Canadian Agriculturist for monthly and annual reports of the Agricultural Association of Upper Canada, and township and county agricultural societies during the mid-nineteenth century.
119 Trade catalogues, such as William W. Custead, Catalogue of Fruit & Ornamental Trees, Flowering Shrubs, Garden Seeds and Greenhouse Plants, Bulbous Roots & Flower Seeds Cultivated and for Sale at the Toronto Nursery (York: William Lyon Mackenzie, printer to the House of Assembly, 1827), and newspaper advertisements, such as those found in the Colonial Advocate, Gleaner and Niagara, Gazette [Toronto], and Canadian Freeman, provide evidence of the availability nursery stock for many types of plants.
household consumption. Only one fruit class was offered, categorized under the “Roots” department, which was for the “Best half-bushel Apples,” but a discretionary prize was also awarded for an entry of “Isabella” Grape[s].”

By 1901, 32 vegetable classes existed in departments for “Grain and Seeds,” “Field Roots,” and the added departments of “Garden Roots and Vegetables” and “Fruits and Flowers”; more than double the number from the 1854 fair. Twenty-five of these vegetable classes were largely for household use. [Appendix B, Table 3.1]. The expansion of fruits was even more impressive, with 17 classes added (16 listed in the “Fruits and Flowers” department; “Citrons” were recorded in the “Garden Roots and Vegetables” department). This amounted to more than six times the number of fruit classes as found in 1854 [Appendix B, Table 3.2].

Although more kinds of vegetables and fruits were shown, the main reason for the expansion of classes was the increased number of plant varieties included in competitions. In 1854, the Erin Fair offered one class for onions; in 1901, five classes existed for different varieties. In 1854, one class for the best half-bushel of apples existed; by 1901, the competition had grown to ten classes for specific varieties, such as Golden Russet, Northern Spy, Greening, Baldwin, Snow, Colvert, and St. Lawrence.

Items such as onions, potatoes, turnips, and apples were popularly shown across the province because they were well-suited to regional growing conditions and they were often produced as surplus commodities that were sold to the local community or exported to other regions of the country and overseas. Agricultural societies focused on these products because

123 “Erin Agricultural Show,” Guelph Advertiser, November 2, 1854.
125 “Erin Fall Show,” Guelph Weekly Mercury and Advertiser, October 26, 1893; and “Erin Show, A Fine Exhibition and a Large Attendance,” Guelph Weekly Mercury and Advertiser, October 29, 1896. Potatoes were especially popular at the Erin Fair, and local newspapers regularly commented on the strength of the potato competition and the townships’ reputation as a significant producer in the county. In the nineteenth century potatoes were raised as a
of their larger significance to agriculture in the province. Apples were especially important to the horticultural industry in Ontario. They were promoted as the fruit to grow in Ontario, and their popularity was evidenced by the numerous apple classes offered at most fairs by the end of the nineteenth century. The number of apples exhibited was impressive. At the 1879 Grand Union Exhibition of the West Riding of York and Township of Vaughan Agricultural Societies, 113 of the 132 entries made in the fruit classes were for apples.\(^{126}\) The number of classes for different kinds of apples also grew significantly. The 1871 Peel County Fair offered two classes for apples; by 1878 there were 17. During this time, fruit classes at the Peel Fair expanded from eight official classes to more than 42 classes for different varieties of seasonal fruits, such as apples, pears, plums, peaches, and grapes [Appendix B; Table 3.3].\(^{127}\) Some classes required a large quantity of fruit to be shown, such as ten varieties of apples for a single entry, and were meant for farmers who were capitalizing on the growing export market for Canadian apples.\(^{128}\) In 1919, Canada’s horticultural reputation was cited as having “been made mainly from the fine apples that have been produced in this country.”\(^{129}\)

Horticultural classes were open to all sorts of exhibitors, but the increased number of classes that required large amounts of fruit per entry or many different varieties of a single fruit per entry, suggests that agricultural societies wanted to promote classes in which large-scale operators – men – would compete. The horticultural industry expanded significantly in the south-

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\(^{126}\) “West Riding of York and Township of Vaughan Agricultural Societies’ Exhibition,” Brampton Conservator, October 24, 1879.  
\(^{127}\) “Peel Fall Fair! Another Grand Success,” Brampton Times, October 6, 1871; and “Brampton Fair,” Brampton Conservator, October 11, 1878.  
\(^{128}\) Jones, History of Agriculture in Ontario, 319.  
central regions of Ontario in the late nineteenth century.\(^{130}\) Research on the best varieties of apples for cultivation in Ontario was conducted by the provincial Department of Agriculture and the Ontario Agricultural College,\(^{131}\) and fair judges for vegetable and fruit classes were often men who worked at these institutions. Rural families benefited from horticultural research,\(^{132}\) but its aim, and the addition of fair classes for newly developed varieties of apples and other fruits and vegetables, was to support and encourage leading male horticulturalists. Men, not women, were the desired audience of many of the horticultural classes agricultural societies sponsored.

Despite the increasing promotion of fruit and vegetables grown by large-scale growers, women continued to exhibit as well. At the 1892 Erin Fair, Miss M. Overland won the potato onion and celery classes, placed second in the “short horn table carrots” class, and placed second in the Colvert and St. Lawrence apple classes. Mrs. Smart was the second-prize winner for the squash class, while Mrs. Bennie won the Snow apple class, and placed second in the classes for American Golden Russett apples. Of the 32 different names listed as winners for the “Garden Roots and Vegetables” and “Fruit” classes, however, only three were women’s.\(^{133}\) For an agricultural society with a history of not recording the names of female exhibitors, one also has to wonder how many husbands took credit for their wives’ work. On the 1925 Erin Fair winners list, almost 30 years later, Miss M. Overland was still winning many of the garden classes, but she was joined by 10 other new female exhibitors who won prizes. Most women won for vegetables rather than fruit; fruit classes were generally for apple production.\(^{134}\) Jessie Milton, a long-time Georgetown Agricultural Society member, had a large garden from which she and her

\(^{130}\) Jones, History of Agriculture in Ontario, 318.
\(^{131}\) Ontario Department of Agriculture, “Apples,” Bulletin XV, Agricultural College, Guelph, August 18, 1887.
\(^{132}\) Reaman, History of Agriculture in Ontario, vol. 1, 99; Drummond, Progress without Planning, 37.
\(^{133}\) “Erin Fall Show,” Guelph Weekly Mercury, October 20, 1892.
\(^{134}\) “Average Crowd Attended Erin Fair Despite Inclement Weather,” Erin Advocate, October 15, 1925.
husband entered produce in fair competitions.¹³⁵ Many women may have also shared garden responsibilities with their husbands, but entered their exhibits in their husbands’ names.

Women were unafraid to compete alongside men in competitions where men were the main exhibitors. Women’s garden produce was seen as an “economical investment” that could be made into a “range of culinaries”¹³⁶ for their families, but it also provided an additional source of income. When Jessie Milton’s father died in 1936, her mother carried on farming with the help of her three children. During the Second World War, Jessie recalled that they could not find hired help, so along with some “shares” from neighbours, she and her sister and younger brother helped their mother with field work and milking. Milton remembers things were difficult for her mother, but she recalled that the best source of income for her family was the Northern Spy and McIntosh apples they sold from the orchard her father had planted in 1919.¹³⁷

During the Second World War, women’s food provisioning – in the field, in the garden, and in the kitchen – were all discussed at OAAS Conventions and women were encouraged to pay attention to the value of the family garden.¹³⁸ In wartime, women had an even greater role in food production, and were credited with saving agricultural harvests during periods of male labour shortage.¹³⁹ As in the United States, Victory Gardens and community canning projects in Canada acted as community builders,¹⁴⁰ while gardening clubs became a popular way to advocate for improved gardening practices and plant selection. Girl’s Garden Clubs with club

project titles such as “Vegetables to Keep Us Fit,” “Every Farm Home – a Vegetable Garden,” “Gardens for Health,” and “Strength for Victory” were led by home economists and other women to teach and encourage young women to do their duty to provision for the family and the nation.\textsuperscript{141} Agricultural societies sponsored display competitions at fairs to encourage young women to showcase their work and illustrate how women’s gardening was seen as a service to their family and their community.\textsuperscript{142} Women did their patriotic duty by growing food that would help win the war by keeping soldiers and workers fit, and future generations healthy.\textsuperscript{143}

In the postwar period, more attention was paid to new varieties of garden vegetables and fruits that were available to the household. Similar to ornamental gardeners, food gardeners benefited from the increasing array of plant varieties available in seed catalogues.\textsuperscript{144} The gardening column in the \textit{Farmer’s Advocate} told gardeners to purchase the newest and best varieties of plants, since new strains were introduced each year that made their hard work more rewarding.\textsuperscript{145}

Garden competitions remained popular because families appreciated the benefits of a home garden. Rural women exhibited garden produce because it showcased their market produce and gardening skills. Women’s gardening efforts continued to be associated with local, small-scale production, but during wartime they received more recognition for their ability to feed the

\textsuperscript{142} “Prize List, Collingwood Township Agricultural Society for the 1943 Fall Fair at Clarksburg,” Ontario Fall Fair Catalogues Collection, XA1 MS A073, University of Guelph Archival & Special Collections. The Collingwood Township Agricultural Society sponsored the “Girl’s Garden Brigade Exhibit” in 1943, which had three classes, one for an exhibit from first-year members that included “1 pint or 1 quart of canned tomatoes, 1 record book, 1 specimen of 5 kinds of vegetables, 5 specimens of 1 kind of vegetable not included in the single samples.” The second class was for entries open to second-year members that included a poster and exhibit on the subject “Vegetables to Keep Us Fit.” The third class was open to third-year members, and required a vegetable exhibit and poster on the subject “Our Well Stocked Cellar Conforms to Canada’s Official Food Rules.” The prizes ranged from 75 cents for worthy participation to $3.00 for the first-place exhibit.
\textsuperscript{143} For a study on food and food rationing during the Second World War, see Ian Mosby, \textit{Food Will Win the War: The Politics, Culture, and Science of Food on Canada’s Home Front} (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014).
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid.
nation. Women also appreciated the ability to grow food that could be used to make other foodstuffs, such as canned goods and other preserves, which they believed was important for the health and economy of their households.

**Canned Goods**

While everyone exhibited raw vegetables and fruits, the domestic science exhibitors were mostly women. Canned vegetables and fruit showcased women’s ability to add value to grown produce and their skill and thriftiness in the kitchen. In 1855, the *Canadian Agriculturist* published a poem that conveyed the delight a well-stocked household pantry provoked:

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FAMILY JARS.
Jars of jelly, jars of jam,
Jars of potted beef and ham,
Jars of early gooseberries nice,
Jars of mince-meat, jars of spice,
Jars of orange marmalade,
Jars of pickles, all home-made,
Jars of cordial cider wine,
Jars of honey, superfine,
Would the only jars were these,
Which occur in families!
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The canning process was a task that mainly women performed. Farming journals advised rural women that with a small outlay of time and labor they could grow fruit and make a good profit selling canned fruit, jams, and jellies. The *Farmer’s Advocate’s* Minnie May advised women that fruit, such as pears, quinces, peaches, plums, apples and cherries, were profitably grown, and that when preparing jars of jellies, jams, catsup, and other sauces, they needed to present them attractively and make them look tempting so that they sold easily.

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146 “Family Jars,” *Canadian Agriculturist* (April 1855): 120.
149 Ibid.
Agricultural societies’ encouraged women’s canning by introducing a variety of “Domestic Produce,” later renamed “Domestic Science,” classes at fairs for canned fruits and vegetables, jams, jellies, marmalades, vinegar, catsup, salad dressings, and canned meats, such as chicken, pork, and beef. Preserving food for the family was an important part of women’s household labour in the nineteenth century. Many rural women had the space to grow vegetables and fruit or collect wild berries, which gave some families enough food to support most of their needs throughout the winter and early spring.150 With the invention of the Mason jar in mid-century and improvements in home canning processes, women canned more than ever before and with better results.151 Women’s canning expanded even further in the twentieth century when cheap glass was more readily available.152

The Women’s Institutes of Ontario and the Department of Agriculture encouraged women to can as an economical way to provision their household.153 Agricultural societies offered classes for canned goods, held demonstrations, and constructed displays for educating rural women on the most effective preserving methods. Because exhibits showcased the finished product rather than the method of preserving, demonstrations were also used to advance women’s learning.154 Agricultural societies and other rural reformers recognized that women made the majority of household purchases, and that therefore they needed to be educated about their consumer choices.155 In the minds of reformers, rural women needed to be progressive and...

153 Ambrose, For Home and Country, 102.
154 At the 1918 C.N.E., the Consumers’ Gas Company of Toronto sponsored an exhibit on preserving; “C.N.E. exhibit of food preservation using ring-top preserving jars: “Can What You Can’t Eat” and “If U Can U Should Can,” ca. 1918, Consumer Gas Company Ltd. Fonds 1034, Item 712, City of Toronto Archives.
155 Taylor, Fashioning Farmers, 76.
professional homemakers, trained and efficient consumers, and good, market-oriented producers. Rural women often dismissed reformers who criticized their practises and labelled them ignorant and backward, but when new technology or methods were presented at fairs, women were more open to receiving the message. Thousands of women competed at fairs across Ontario, and thousands more attended to watch and learn.

During times of scarcity women’s canning activity was particularly important in keeping families supplied with a variety of foods and saving money. During the Depression, home canning was so widespread that in the United States glass jar sales soared above any sales in the preceding decade. The sales of factory canned goods, which had doubled between 1919 and 1929, correspondingly dropped with an increase in home canned products. Farm families relied on self-provisioning rather than just cash income throughout this period. This illustrates how growing food and making value-added products remained important for the economy of the household.

Many women prided themselves on their canned preserves. Jessie Milton recalled how her family had a large garden and orchard, and how her mother always preserved food for the family. She described how her mother never purchased canned goods until the 1940s, explaining “that would be a very embarrassing thing, to be caught with a can.” Glenda Benton recalled how her family canned vegetables and fruit, but also meat: “My dad would kill our own beef and mother would can the beef right in the jars, the sealers, because there were no freezers…so that

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156 Ibid., 76-82.
157 Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*, 196.
159 Ibid.
would be our beef in the winter.”

Glenda Benton and Jessie Milton, like other women, were skilled in the canning process and utilized those skills throughout their lives. Benton explained that she started exhibiting at the Georgetown Fall Fair in baking and preserves because she was making around 12 different kinds of preserves every year anyway, so “all of a sudden I thought, well, why don’t I show them at the fair, and that’s what I did.”

The popularity of canned goods was clearly evident in fair prize lists. In 1900, most township fairs held about a half-dozen classes for different jellies and canned fruits and vegetables. By 1920, however, fairs such as the Brooke and Alvinston Fall Fair in Lambton County were offering more than 31 classes for pickles, preserves, and canned poultry and meat [Appendix B, Table 3.4]. Exhibits of canned goods were popular because, unlike baking that needed to be freshly made, canned items could be made months in advance, easily transported, and displayed with little concern about sanitation or spoilage.

The popularity of canned goods increased in the 1930s, and while some fairs reduced classes during the Second World War, classes expanded again in the postwar period. The Collingwood Township Fair in Clarksburg is a great example of this. In 1930, the Fair had 15 classes for a variety of canned vegetables, fruits, meats, jams, sauces, and dressings. In 1935, classes grew to 23 with the addition of items such as “Homemade Catsup” and the separation of previously grouped items. In 1940, classes for homemade soup mixtures and cold meat sauces were dropped, but more jam classes and new classes for canned beans and tomato juice were added, totaling 24 classes. The number of classes was reduced to 18 in 1945 because organizers amalgamated classes so that exhibitors had to enter three types of canned fruits together in one

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162 Interview with author, Glenda Benton, October 28, 2013.
163 Ibid.
164 “Prize List of the Brooke and Alvinston Fall Fair, 1920,” Ontario Fall Fair Catalogues, XA1 MS A073, University of Guelph Archival & Special Collections.
class rather than multiple classes. By 1950, 27 classes existed, including one for canned pineapple. Women’s knowledge and creativity was tested with the addition of a class for “A Home Canned Meal” [Appendix B, Table 3.5].

In the postwar period, canning continued to be part of rural women’s household provisioning. Even in a period when canning was not an economic necessity and the number of canned goods for purchase increased, rural women continued this practice because it saved money. Preserving was associated with desirable characteristics, such as industry and thrift – personal traits that continued to be a source of pride for rural women. Photographs of canning exhibits show that women were interested in what other women in the community were making [Figure 3.2]. Female judges, exhibitors and fairgoers alike understood the hard work that went into each jar on display, but they remained committed to preserving foodstuffs because of their continued value for the rural household and community more broadly.

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165 “Collingwood Township Agricultural Society Fall Fair Prize List, 1930;” “Collingwood Township Agricultural Society Fall Fair Prize List, 1935;” “Collingwood Township Agricultural Society Fall Fair Prize List, 1940;” “Collingwood Township Agricultural Society Fall Fair Prize List, 1945;” “Collingwood Township Agricultural Society Fall Fair Prize List, 1950,” Ontario Fall Fair Catalogues, XA1 MS A073, University of Guelph Archival & Special Collections.

166 Neth, Preserving the Family Farm, 240.
Baked Goods and Other Culinary Fare

Rural households considered that baking and cooking were necessities, and well into the mid-twentieth century women continued to make a variety of baked goods and home-cooked meals that provided value-added foodstuffs for their families’ consumption, as well as for sale or barter in the community.\textsuperscript{167} Many women enjoyed cooking and baking, while for others it was simply a chore.\textsuperscript{168} At fairs, baking classes and cooked goods usually fell under the label of domestic produce, domestic science, or culinary arts. This section focuses on baked items

\textsuperscript{167} Charlotte van de Vorst, \textit{Making Ends Meet: Farm Women’s Work in Manitoba} (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2002), 65; Cynthia Comacchio, \textit{The Infinite Bonds of Family: Domesticity in Canada, 1850-1940} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 34.

because even though some cooked food appeared at fairs, such as casseroles or meat loaves, baked goods were much more prevalent because they could be displayed longer and more easily. They were also popular because they illustrated women’s ability to produce sweet treats and delicious fare for their families. Long-time exhibitors in baking classes testified to the enjoyment women received from showing their baking. The *Globe and Mail* reported in 1938 that “Mrs. Freeman Green, 84-year-old resident of Ridgetown, made her seventy-second consecutive entry at the Ridgetown Fair.” Green started exhibiting when she was 12 years old, when she “made her first entry with a loaf of bread, and since then has never missed a year.”

Considerable skill was needed to bake well, and women respected those who won top prizes for baked goods. Similar to other exhibits, baking classes evolved over the years, showing that women were willing to adopt new products and experiment with new foodstuffs, although much of the food they prepared were perennial favourites.

In the nineteenth century, most rural women made bread, be it a coarser or finer variety, and were proud of their ability. Unlike working-class women in urban centres who commonly bought bread, rural families tended to make their own. The task of making it was laborious, especially for yeast breads. Attention to detail was also important in order to maintain yeast cultures, while proper kneading required a significant degree of physical exertion. Articles in farm journals suggested that bread making was a subject that interested many, and various recipes and methods were described for making the best varieties. Diaries from women in nineteenth-century Ontario suggest that baking good bread was a significant achievement.

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172 Ibid.
Matilda Bowers Eby expressed satisfaction when, at the age of 19, she recorded that she had been baking all day and produced the “most beautiful” looking bread, also admitting, “I almost flatter myself that I will become a good baker yet; something not every woman can brag of.”

Minnie May, the popular columnist for the *Farmer’s Advocate* in the nineteenth century, also agreed that bread making was important and stood “at the head of domestic accomplishments, since the health and happiness of the family depend incalculably on bread, ‘the staff of life.’”

Bread was the first type of baked good shown at fairs across Ontario in the 1860s. Bread, alongside butter and cheese, was considered a valuable food staple that showcased rural women’s skills. At the 1864 Guelph Township Fair, the first bread class for the “best 6 lb loaf of bread” drew seven entries, which was considered a good showing for a new class. At the Eramosa Fair that same year it was agreed that the bread class was “an excellent idea” when 22 entries were made, four times as many entries as the year before when the class was first offered.

Similar to butter, bread classes received high premiums and special prizes. At the 1869 Peel County Fall Fair, the winner of the class for “the best two loaves of homemade Bread” won a Balmoral Stove, valued at $28. At the 1878 Peel County Fair, women made 23 entries of “hop yeast bread” and 13 entries for buns. The newspaper congratulated the winners and warned that anyone “who would not be content to make a square meal on such bread, buns and butter as

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175 Minnie May, Minnie May’s Department, *Farmer’s Advocate* 12 (June 1877): 138.
176 “Guelph Township Agricultural Show,” *Guelph Mercury*, October 7, 1864.
177 “Eramosa Agricultural Show,” *Guelph Mercury*, October 14, 1864.
178 “County of Peel Fall Fair,” *Brampton Times*, August 27, 1869.
were shown at Brampton Fair this week ought to be sent to break stones for the corporations and fed a week of saw dust.”

Initially bread classes consisted mostly of loaves and buns. The addition of other baked items, such as biscuits, pies, cakes, and tarts, were added to some agricultural societies’ prize lists in the 1880s and 1890s, but generally they were limited until the twentieth century. Fewer baked goods classes likely reflected agricultural societies’ preference for less perishable exhibits, as well as their focus on other pursuits. Baking was also a laborious task during the nineteenth century, and although bakers received some help in the form of leavening agents in the mid to late nineteenth century, it was still a difficult and uncertain task at the best of times.

Women who entered baked goods were praised for their industry and ability to make attractive foodstuffs. Although judges were able to taste exhibits, fairgoers based their judgement on appearance alone, therefore it was important that exhibitors knew “how to make the staff of life palatable as well as attractive” [Figures 3.3, 3.4, and 3.5]. Although some reports suggested that judges initially only used appearance when selecting their winners, generally it was common procedure that sight, smell, and taste contributed to an entry’s placing. Some women complained, however, that because judges typically chose the winners before the fair opened to the public and without explanation, appearance was what everyone else relied on to make their own judgements. Therefore, it was important that items looked delicious.

179 “Brampton Fair, Delightful Weather – Immense Crowds – Magnificent Display, Receipts Far Above Any Former County Exhibition,” Brampton Conservator, October 4, 1878.
180 “Erin Exhibition,” Guelph Mercury, October 24, 1889; “Eramosa Show,” Guelph Mercury, October 10, 1889; and “Central Agricultural Society Prize List of the First Annual Fall Exhibition, 1900,” Ontario Fall Fair Catalogues, XA1 MS A073, University of Guelph Archival & Special Collections.
181 Root and de Rochemont, Eating in America, 225.
182 “Erin Fall Show,” Guelph Weekly Mercury and Advertiser, October 21, 1897.
183 “Women and the Local Fair,” Farmer’s Advocate and Home Magazine 73 (February 24, 1938): 100.
baking at the 1889 Nassagaweya Fair showcased “toothsome” exhibits, leaving fairgoers hungry for a bite. At the 1894 Markham Fair, it was reported:

The bread and baking shown are of a very high quality, and afford a clue to the healthy appearance of the people of this neighbourhood. Snow-white bread, light buns and pies, cakes and tartlettes that would not incommode a new-born babe were constantly surrounded by good housewives, who always appear to enjoy looking at other housewives’ work.

The “snow-white” bread and “light” coloured buns spoke to society’s understanding of goodness and purity. Purity Flour was a brand of flour that also sponsored fair competitions and whose advertisements in farm and home journals depicted women in white outfits and gloves, seated embroidering the words “purity” at a table where delicate looking cakes and buns were placed. Ideals of purity and wholesomeness were associated with women’s domesticity. At the 1899 West Durham Fair in Bowmanville, women entered 132 items in the domestic produce classes, and the display of goods was described as “exceedingly fine.” Baked goods were especially appealing food exhibits; from the more lavish cakes, tarts, and pies, to the more quotidian breads and buns, these items encouraged fairgoers to imagine the wonderful textures and tastes each entry had. The creation of delicious looking food enticed passersby, who praised women for their “mouth-watering” entries.

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184 “Nassagaweya Fall Show,” Guelph Mercury and Advertiser, October 17, 1889.
185 “The Markham Fair,” Globe [Toronto], October 6, 1894.
186 “Purity Flour,” Farmer’s Advocate and Home Magazine 54 (October 2, 1919): 1753.
187 “West Durham Fair,” Globe [Toronto], September 18, 1899.
188 “Judge's Decision is Final,” 1959, St. Thomas Times-Journal fonds, Elgin County Archives, C8 Sh3 B1 F11 1.
[Figure 3.3] Hamilton Spectator, “Binbrook Fair,” 1955, Local History & Archives, 32022191097852, Hamilton Public Library. Caption: “Judging the Cakes - Directors of Binbrook Fair, Mrs. A. Mitchell and Mrs. K. Switzer, of Binbrook, discuss the merits of some of the exhibits in the cake competition with the judge, Mrs. G. Cutler, of Welland.”

[Figure 3.4] “Judge’s Decision is Final,” 1959, St. Thomas Times-Journal fonds, C8 Sh3 B1 F11 1, Elgin County Archives. Caption: “One of the largest displays in the exhibits building at the Rodney Fair this year is in the domestic science section, where hundreds of mouth-watering cakes and pastries are being shown. Some types of exhibits are more fun to judge than others, and the baking exhibit is about the best. Judging test cake samples are, from left to right, Mrs. Wilfred McMillan, domestic science bookkeeper; Mrs. Andrew Cipu and Mrs. Phillip Schliehauf; Mrs. Ruth Little, women’s division president; Mrs. Dave McPherson, Dutton, judge; and Mrs. A. Plyley.”
In the twentieth century, fairs continued to offer bread competitions. Women were told that if “good bread is of such great importance, there is surely no other accomplishment in cookery over which a woman or girl should be so proud as over her ability to make it – make it fit to take a prize at a fair.” The number of other baked goods classes was also growing. At the 1890 Central Agricultural Society’s Fair in Walters Falls, Grey County, the classes for baked items featured one for “Home-made Bread, 2 loaves,” “Pie, Frosted,” and “Fruit Cake, plain, not iced.” The homemade bread class excluded bakers, and the first prize winner was awarded “1 pair Gentlemen’s Plush Slippers,” valued at $1.75 and second place received “1 pair

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Ladies’ Slippers,” valued at $1.00. In 1900, the classes increased to include a special prize for two loaves of bread baked from the flour milled by R. Clarke of Walters Falls, “Jelly cake, 3 layers,” and “Best Pumpkins Pie,” the winner of which received a one-year subscription to the *Owen Sound Sun*. By 1910, the classes increased to a total of eight because of the additions of buns, biscuits, and more pie varieties [Appendix B, Table 3.6].

Like bread, other baked goods attracted donor-sponsored prizes. Sponsors donated prizes based on what they believed female exhibitors would appreciate, and, of course, what the donors themselves wanted to give. For instance, at the 1925 Pinkerton Fair, the girl under 18 years of age who won the “Best Loaf of White Bread and Best Apple Pie” won a pair of candlesticks valued at $3.50, and the winner of the “Best Fruitcake” won a parasol worth $5.00. Donors awarded prizes they believed were coveted enough to encourage women to showcase their baking skills. The idea that young “ladies” needed and wanted candlesticks for their dining tables or attractive parasols for strolling down streets or attending garden parties was conveyed by awarding these items as prizes. These prizes were feminized symbols of middle-class respectability, items associated with the same characteristics that every good wife and baker were expected to have had [Figure 3.6].

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190 “Central Agricultural Society Prize List of the Second Annual Fall Exhibition, 1890,” Ontario Fall Fair Catalogues, XA1 MS A073, University of Guelph Archival & Special Collections.
191 “Prize List of the Twelfth Annual Fall Exhibition to be Held in Walters Falls, 1900,” Ontario Fall Fair Catalogues, XA1 MS A073, University of Guelph Archival & Special Collections.
192 “Prize List of the Twenty-Second Annual Fall Exhibition, to be Held at Walters Falls, 1910,” Ontario Fall Fair Catalogues, XA1 MS A073, University of Guelph Archival & Special Collections.
193 “Prize List of the Pinkerton Exhibition, 1925,” Pinkerton Fall Fair Prize Lists, A2011.502.001, Bruce County Archives.
Local mills and flour companies also offered special prizes to advertise their merchandise. At the 1925 Pinkerton Fair, local mill owners Wm. Knechtel and Son of Hanover offered 50 pounds of “O Canada” flour to the winner for the best bread made from their flour and 25 pounds of “Canadian Beauty” flour to the best pie made from their flour.\textsuperscript{194} At the 1940 Collingwood Township Fair, a number of local millers offered special prizes, including the Collingwood Milling Company, which sponsored a 98-pound bag of North Star Bread Flour to the winner and a bag of Magic Pastry Flour to the second-place winner of “the best collection of Pies (to compare one Apple, one Pumpkin, one Raisin, one Lemon).”\textsuperscript{195} At the 1940 Fair in

\textsuperscript{194} “Prize List of the Pinkerton Exhibition, 1925,” Pinkerton Fall Fair Prize Lists, A2011.502.001, Bruce County Archives.

\textsuperscript{195} Collingwood Township Agricultural Society Fall Fair Prize List, 1940,” Ontario Fall Fair Catalogues, XA1 MS A073, University of Guelph Archival & Special Collections.
Aberfoyle, contestants who used Ogilive Flour to bake a winning entry in the bread class won a 12 ½-inch silver-plated cake platter in addition to the regular prize money, and if they used Ogilive Flour to bake their fancy buns, tea biscuits, apple pie, or white layer cake, they won a 9-inch silver-plated platter for each winning entry.196

Large multi-national flour companies sponsored whole sections of baking classes that required the use of their products. Robin Hood Flour sponsored baking classes across the province and placed advertisements in fair prize lists. For instance, at the 1940 Erin Fair, Robin Hood Flour doubled the cash prizes awarded in 11 of the regular baking classes if winners used their flour. Competing flour companies and dealers also enticed exhibitors to enter the classes they sponsored by offering generous prizes [Appendix B, Table 3.7].197 Paid advertisements in fair prize lists also served to inform exhibitors about why their products were the best. In 1940, Robin Hood Flour advertised that “At Fairs and Exhibitions right across Canada, in open competition with all other flours, Robin Hood won: More than 83% of all FIRST PRIZES, More than 76% of all SECOND PRIZES for BREAD, CAKES AND PASTRY” [Figure 3.7].198 In 1945, they advertised that it was the flour that “4 out of 5 Champion Home Bakers throughout Canada year after year use” [Figure 3.8]. Robin Hood Flour’s continued sponsorship and advertising campaigns at fairs in the postwar years reiterated the idea that “No other flour even APPROACHES this prizes-winning record!”200

196 “100th Anniversary Puslinch Agricultural Society Prize List, 1940” Fergus Fall Fair Collection, MU 202, A1978.30, Wellington County Museum and Archives.
197 “Erin Fall Fair Prize List, 1940,” Erin Agricultural Society collection, 1862-1987, A1989.97, Wellington County Museum and Archives. Organizers asked exhibitors to submit a grocers’ sales slip showing the purchase of the flour within “a reasonable time prior to the date of the contest.”
200 “Brussels Fall Fair Prize List, 1954,” Ontario Fall Fair Catalogues, XA1 MS A073, University of Guelph Archival & Special Collections.
[Figure 3.7] Robin Hood Flour, “Double Your Prize Money,” 1940 Erin Fall Fair Prize List, Erin Agricultural Society collection, 1862-1987, A1989.97, Wellington County Museum and Archives.
Companies also sponsored classes to promote other food products, such as corn starch and corn syrup [Appendix B, Table 3.7]. At the 1954 Brussels Fair, Canada Packers Ltd. sponsored the “New Domestic Pie and Cake Competition,” where exhibitors were required to use New Domestic Shortening in order to compete for a “5 lb. pail of New Domestic and box of Canada Packers assorted products.”201 Fairs offered classes with special merchandise prizes for items such as graham cracker or chocolate cakes so that companies such as McCormick and

201 “Brussels Fall Fair Prize List, 1954,” Ontario Fall Fair Catalogues, XA1 MS A073, University of Guelph Archival & Special Collections.
Neilson could promote their graham cracker crumbs or cocoa. Baked goods were made with at least some, if not all, purchased ingredients, so national companies and local businesses took advantage of the opportunity to promote their merchandise at fairs and win loyal customers.

Agricultural societies were trusted institutions in rural communities, and fairs guaranteed a crowd, so companies tried to partner with them to convince consumers of the quality of their products. In the nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries, rural consumers were still suspicious of food produced in factories and believed manufactured foodstuffs negatively affected their health and their pocketbook. Foods such as Campbell’s Soup and Jell-O, however, intrigued them because they offered opportunities to save time and expand their culinary choices. Although most domestic sciences classes were for baked goods, by the postwar period more fairs had refrigeration and suitable display cases, so organizers expanded prize lists to include more perishable food items, such as jellied salads. Similar to the classes that promoted flour and other baking ingredients, the promotion of ingredients such as Jell-O reflected and encouraged changes in food culture. Fairs introduced people to new ideas and conveniences, and they were used by manufacturers and businesses to build public confidence in their products, demonstrate the quality of their goods, and showcase advancements for “enhanced rural living.”

202 “Dorchester Fair Prize List, 1966,” Ontario Fall Fair Catalogues, XA1 MS A073, University of Guelph Archival & Special Collections. The Dorchester Fair also had an additional 13 classes sponsored by larger companies such as Standard Brands Limited (makers of Magic Baking Powder and Fleischmann’s Yeast), J. M. Scheider Limited (Crispy-flake Shortening), and Fry-Cadbury (Fry’s Cocoa), as well as 6 additional special prize classes sponsored by local businesses for various kinds of baked goods.

203 Cowan, More Work for Mother, 71-72.


205 Ibid.


207 Walden, Becoming Modern, 80-118; Jones, Midways, Judges, and Smooth-Tongued Fakirs, 4.
In the 1950s and 1960s baking competitions continued to flourish. Prizes, such as the $300 first prize for the light and dark layer cake contest at the 1951 Leamington Fair, stimulated competition. Some food exhibits had hundreds of entries, such as the 171 pie entries made for the 1951 Harrow Fair pie classes. New competitions, such as the “Bake Queen Special” awarded at the 1960 Erin Fair for the top tray displaying bread, fruit cake, pie, light cake, petit fours, and macaroons, inspired interest among exhibitors and displayed beautiful examples of “culinary art.” Other “Baking Queen” awards were given to women who excelled by earning the most points in the overall competition. “Bake Queen” was a prestigious title that women earned by showcasing their overall baking talent. Winners illustrated their individual ability, but their success was also sometimes a matter of family pride. Multiple generations of families often competed as younger women worked to uphold their mothers’ and grandmothers’ hard-won reputations. For example, at the 1968 Shedden Fair, 20-year-old Deanna Bogart and her grandmother, Mrs. Bogart, won most of the prizes in the domestic science competition [Figure 3.9]. Mrs. Bogart was a previous winner of the fair’s Silver Rose for baking, and Deanna held the title of “Baking Queen.” These titles demonstrated a woman’s success not just as a baker, but as a wife and mother or future wife and mother.

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210 See Chapter 7 for a discussion of the “Beauty Queen” and pageant culture of the postwar period.

In the 1970s, more changes in home cooking and eating habits were demonstrated in domestic science classes. The inclusion of classes for “chop suey loaf” and “Macaroni Salad” reflected agricultural societies’ acknowledgement of rural women’s growing interest in new food trends,\(^{212}\) while classes such as “T. V. Evening Snack for a Teen-Ager” illustrated changes in dining etiquette and family dynamics. The staple classes also remained, and items such as homemade bread continued to be exhibited, which highlighted bread’s privileged position as the

home-baked good. Even though homemade bread may not have been a staple of all farm homes by this time, its traditional importance in the rural household and the skill with which a good loaf of bread was made ensured that the product continued to be exhibited at fairs and used as a symbol of domestic competence.213

In the postwar period, another noticeable feature of domestic science classes was the emphasis placed on showcasing “culinary art,” rather than simply food. At many fairs the “Domestic Science” department became the “Culinary Arts” department, and women’s skill, artistry, and originality in crafting food was highlighted and admired. Themed cake decorating competitions became popular for providing women opportunities to illustrate their creativity by illustrating a variety of themes, including centennial celebrations, national symbols, public holidays, animals, and musical instruments [Figures 3.10, 3.11, and 3.12]. These cakes were another illustration of women’s ability to entertain and attract fairgoers with their appealing displays. Rural women wanted to display their creative side and show how their skills in the kitchen were used for more than simply the prudent management of the household; they were also expressions of artistry and originality.

213 Elva Fletcher, “Spotlight on Homemade Breads,” Country Guide: The Farm Magazine (February 1979): 68-9. The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food (OMAF) economics branch promoted programs for home baking, cooking, and other domestic manufactures, and hundreds of women enrolled in these courses because they were pleased with the skills they learned and developed. The 200 women from Kent and Essex counties who enrolled in OMAF’s “Spotlight on Bread” project were satisfied they gained valuable knowledge to improve their bread making, which was important because they believed “there’s something special about homemade bread.”
Caption: “Mrs. Rose Marie McCallum, of Ailsa Craig, is shown here with her Centennial cake which received first prize at Wallacetown's annual fall fair yesterday. Mrs. McCallum is a former Wallacetown resident. She was both delighted and surprised when informed that her cake had won.”

Caption: “Canada’s flag issue was carried into the baking field yesterday at the Wallacetown Fair. The contestants in the Domestic Science category combined their culinary talents with their artistic bents to offer on cake toppings ideas for a flag design. The entries in the class are being carefully scrutinized here by the judge, Mrs. William Beattie, of R.R. 1, Staples.”
Conclusion

Women’s food exhibits drew exhibitors, impressed organizers, and enticed fairgoers. Food exhibits were colourful and mouthwatering. They were a visual representation of the characteristics most valued in rural women: thrift, industry, domestic skill, and the nurturing of and responsibility to one’s family and community. The continued cultivation and canning of garden vegetables and fruits, as well as the baking of bread and other foodstuff, reflected how despite the availability of mass-produced foods, rural women continued to take pride in the skill needed to make homemade goods that they believed offered superior taste and economy. The
importance of rural women’s homegrown and homemade foodstuff as part of a blended mix of provisioning practices in years before 1945 supports recent scholarship on farm families’ consumption practices. Women’s desire to maintain these practices in the postwar period suggest that those practices continued to be appreciated economically, socially, and/or culturally. The desire to make one’s own bread, for example, was a reflection of the perceived quality of homemade food items, but also a desire to maintain cherished practices such as self-provisioning, which were valued rural traits. Other items such as dairy products were no longer worth the time or trouble, but the domestic skill women displayed by making canned goods and other added-value foodstuffs awarded them recognition as careful consumers and useful producers. Despite the changes that occurred over the years, a great deal of continuity remained. Women engaged in market activities when it benefited them, and they gave up homemade production that no longer did. The continued dominance of food exhibits, especially prepared food exhibits, as women’s work also served to perpetuate gender norms and traditional ideas about the necessity of women’s culinary abilities. Many women enjoyed this work and sought self-expression and personal meaning through the food they made, but they also understood that the appearance of their fair exhibits reflected, not just on the items shown, but on their characters as well. Nevertheless, rural women believed that homemade foodstuffs benefitted them and their households, and they also wanted to continue practices that helped to maintain elements of the rural traditions that they cherished.

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214 See Gal, “Grassroots Consumption.”
Chapter 4: 
Cultivating Beauty: The Flower Show

Similar to other women’s exhibits, agricultural societies initially considered flowers to be unimportant, but by the second half of the nineteenth century they added flower classes because they believed flowers contributed to the attractiveness of fairgrounds and stimulated rural beautification projects more broadly. Generally, more women competed in flower shows than men. Society perceived women as having a “natural affinity for genteel culture,”¹ and fair organizers promoted ornamental gardening classes as a way to inspire women to adopt the principles of honest industry, moral fortitude, and refinement; all characteristics encouraged by other women’s exhibits. Women were often responsible for taking care of their families’ spiritual needs, and rural reformers argued that the cultivation of flowers aroused a moral discipline that could be visually communicated. Women’s disciplined application of labour and design principles resulted in a visual representation of their morality and taste, which improvers believed motivated others to adopt the same disciplined habits and improved minds. In the twentieth century, gardening advocates also associated flower gardening with an appreciation for scientific endeavours and modern aesthetics; traits women could use to show that they were progressive homemakers.² An understanding of beauty remained central to these ideas, and women who were able to demonstrate their understanding of the concept, combined with discipline and good judgement, illustrated the respectable characteristics necessary for proper womanhood.

² Taylor, *Fashioning Farmers*, 82.
Nineteenth-Century Flower Shows

Trade catalogues advertising nursery stock and newspaper advertisements for different varieties of garden vegetables, fruit trees and bushes, flowers, and other plants had existed early on in Upper Canada, and nineteenth-century British North American newcomers, travellers, and long-time residents were interested in the region’s plants and flowers and made great efforts to import ornamental plants that replicated their home countries’ environment. Agricultural societies, however, generally paid little attention to garden plants, especially ornamentals, when determining which exhibits to include at fairs. They were more concerned with offering premiums that benefitted farmers cultivating field crops or raising livestock, pursuits believed to be the backbone of the farming economy. Even horticultural societies such as the Toronto Horticultural Society, the first in the province, focused primarily on promoting fruit trees and vegetables rather than ornamental plants, and the majority of classes at horticultural shows during this period were for fruits and vegetables.

Organizers of the first Provincial Exhibition in 1846 did not hold a flower competition, but they did show interest in ornamental gardening when they presented some prize winners with

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3 See trade catalogues, such as William W. Custead, *Catalogue of Fruit & Ornamental Trees, Flowering Shrubs, Garden Seeds and Greenhouse Plants, Bulbous Roots & Flower Seeds Cultivated and for Sale at the Toronto Nursery* (York: William Lyon Mackenzie, printer to the House of Assembly, 1827); and newspapers, such as the *Colonial Advocate*, the *British American Cultivator*, the *Gleaner and Niagara*, the *Toronto Gazette*, and the *Canadian Freeman*.


5 Similar to other fairs of the period, the first Provincial Exhibition held in 1846 did not include flower classes.


7 “Elora Horticultural Society,” *Guelph Advertiser*, September 25, 1851. The other 24 classes were all for various kinds of vegetables and fruits, including beans, melons, carrots, parsnips, potatoes, onions, beets, kale, cabbage, tomatoes, celery, pumpkins, squash, citrons, cucumber, hops, apples, and plums.
articles and books on the topic, such as the book *Gardening for Ladies*.\(^8\) This book was written in 1840 by Jane Loudon, an English woman described as being “to Victorian gardening what Mrs. Beeton was to cookery.”\(^9\) The book sold over 200,000 copies and was soon reprinted in North America as the fuller version *Gardening for Ladies; and Companion to The Flower-Garden*. Loudon wrote the book because she found that many books intended for professional gardeners were not suitable for amateurs.\(^10\) She wanted to communicate clearly the basic knowledge all female gardeners should know. *Gardening for Ladies* included the essentials of “kitchen gardening,” but the majority of the text discussed the proper methods of flower gardening and plants one should cultivate. By awarding this book as a prize, the provincial association recognized that flower gardening was a worthwhile pursuit for women.

Nineteenth-century rural reformers advocated ornamental gardening because they were critical of Ontario’s lack of “cultivated” spaces. Although documentary and photographic evidence illustrates the existence of flower gardens during this period, reformers consistently lamented residents’ inability to appreciate the “moral and spiritual welfare” that ornamental gardening afforded.\(^11\) In 1847, the agricultural journal the *British American Cultivator* published an article that criticized the state of horticulture. The author regretted that Canadian farmers were “reproached with being sluggards in regard to their gardens.”\(^12\) He argued that farmers who had

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\(^10\) Mrs. Loudon, *Gardening for Ladies; and Companion to The Flower-Garden* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1843), xi.


\(^12\) “On Horticulture,” *British American Cultivator* (April 1847): 126.
finished clearing their land and were in possession of “good health, good soil, and ample time” should be disgraced for not owning “a nicely cultivated and trimly kept garden and orchard.\textsuperscript{13}"

The author quoted at length from Dr. Darlington, an American horticulturalist who emphasized the necessity of ornamental gardens for instilling higher principles. Darlington argued that food gardens sustained families’ physical needs, but ornamental gardens were necessary for their spiritual needs. He argued that “the training of the most ornamental trees and shrubbery – the culture of the sweetest and most beautiful flowers – and the arrangement of the whole in accordance with the principles of a refined, disciplined, unsophisticated taste” was needed. He expressed that “all that is connected with comfort and beauty around [sic] our-dwellings – all that can gratify the palate, delight the eye, or regale the most fastidious of the sense” was essential if “the highest mental accomplishments” were to be achieved, and “the more sordid or grovelling passions” suppressed.\textsuperscript{14} Darlington’s association of ornamental gardening with principles of beauty, intelligence, refinement, and purity of mind suggested that the pursuit created a more refined and civilized countryside. He proposed that even small improvements could affect great change:

That the habitual association with interesting plants and flowers exerts a salutary influence on the human character, is a truth universally felt and understood…Who ever anticipated boorish rudeness, or met with incivility, among the enthusiastic votaries of Flora? Was it ever known, that a rural residence, tastefully planned, and appropriately adorned with floral beauties, was not the abode of refinement and intelligence? Even the scanty display of blossoms in a window – or the careful trailing of honey suckle, round a cottage door – is an unmistakeable evidence of gentle spirits, and an improved humanity, within.\textsuperscript{15}

An individual’s failure to engage in ornamental gardening displayed an absence of civility and a deficiency of character. Darlington lamented that many substantial farmers did not adorn their

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 126-27.
\textsuperscript{15} “On Horticulture,” \textit{British American Cultivator} (April 1847): 127.
homes with ornamental trees, shrubs, and flowers, and he asked, “What can be expected from a family, raised under circumstances so unpropitious to the formation of correct taste, or the cultivation of the finer feelings?”

In the 1860s, reformers continued to criticize rural residents for not cultivating beautiful surroundings. In 1864, a person with the initials W.T.G wrote to the editor of the Canada Farmer to complain that farmers and townspeople only cared for “utility” when considering the landscape around them, rather than the “refreshing” and “improving” qualities that an ornamental garden instilled. He advised residents that their homesteads could be made more attractive if they added well-kept flower beds, ornamental trees, and shrubs. Gardening was not a luxury, he argued, but a necessity if one wished to improve one’s lot in life.

…it is the home of the wealthy gentleman or farmer which proves generally most attractive. Not because the owners can better afford it than their poorer neighbours, but the industry and talent, which lie at the root of their prosperity, beget in them the love of improvement, and the garden affords the widest scope for it…

W.T.G believed a person’s inability to cultivate a beautiful garden was a reflection of their indifference to improvement and a marker of coarseness and idleness. In 1868, the Farmer’s Advocate urged farmers to adorn their homes, reasoning that a “love for trees and plants and flowers is natural to every refined and well developed mind…Whatever makes a home pleasant and attractive, lessens the temptation to stray into paths of evil.”

In these examples “farmers” were the target of criticism, but readers understood that farm wives were often responsible for the maintenance of home gardens, and as the moral guardians of the home, they were also responsible for enhancing their family’s spiritual well-being.

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16 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 “Home Adornment,” Farmer’s Advocate 3 (September 1868): 133.
1874, a reader wrote to the Farmer’s Advocate’s Minnie May to insist on an association between a woman’s character and her appreciation of flowers. The reader believed that any woman who did not love flowers was “a mistake of nature,” because the “delicate and the beautiful should have sympathy with all in nature that possess the same qualities.”

Another concerned proponent of flower gardening wondered why flowers were not cultivated more extensively in Canada. He explained his surprise to “meet with ladies claiming to be passionately fond of flowers, who knew everything about dress, etc., yet cannot give the names of half a dozen different flowers.”

The author happily reported, however, that these “careless florists” were disappearing and a more perseverant and successful “class of ladies” was emerging. He accompanied his description of the progress of women’s work in ornamental gardening with two images, one that represented the fashionable but careless florist, and the other the more modest, attentive, and hardworking gardener [Figure 4.1].

The careless florist’s garden was in a state of demise and disorder, while the attentive gardener’s efforts resulted in a bounty of beautiful, healthy plants, arranged in perfect symmetry. Each garden represented the women’s general characters. Also, the attentive gardener was able to control her environment through a disciplined application of labour and design principles. In the same way that women displayed carefully presented foodstuffs, women’s careful presentation of ornamental plants served to create a vision of orderliness that reformers believed would inspire all who gazed upon them to develop similar habits and an improving mind. Advocates of ornamental gardening suggested that women who said they did not have time to garden and develop these traits simply needed to reallocate the “waste time” they devoted to gossiping with friends to this elevating pursuit instead.

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21 “Illustrated Florist,” Farmer’s Advocate 10 (June 1875): 117.
22 Ibid.
Farm women were responsible for their families’ happiness, and when rearing their children they were expected to provide a suitable environment in which their children’s spirits and characters could flourish. A writer for the British American Cultivator argued that it was a mother’s job to imbue her children with desirable characteristics, such as “honesty, temperance, industry, benevolence, and morality,” and eliminate contrary characteristics, such as “vice, fraud, drunkenness, idleness, and covetousness.”24 A mother was assigned the “daily, hourly task of weeding her little garden – of eradicating those odious productions, and plating the human heart with the lily, and the rose, and the amaranth, that fadeless flower, emblem of Truth.”25 The Farmer’s Advocate also advertised that women purchase flower catalogues because they were “worth five times [their] price to any mother that wishes to have refinement, neatness, beauty, and adornment impressed on the minds of her family.”26 Rural reformers told women that flowers possessed a moral influence that pleased, cheered, and refined the mind and made the

24 “For What is a Mother Responsible?” British American Cultivator (February 1846): 56.
25 Ibid.
26 “To the Ladies,” Farmer’s Advocate 7 (March 1872): 41.
home more attractive, peaceful, and heaven-like.\textsuperscript{27} As a natural extension of a woman’s rule over the hearth, her participation in cultivating the literal and figurative family garden was necessary if her family was to thrive.

The Provincial Exhibition first offered a floral competition in 1849,\textsuperscript{28} but it took much longer before many county and township fairs added flower classes to their prize lists. Most of the larger county fairs had at least some flower classes for table and hand bouquets and plant collections by the 1860s,\textsuperscript{29} but many township fairs took longer to include flower shows. At the Erin Township Fair during this period, no official flower classes existed, although some discretionary awards were given for floral wreaths and arrangements in the 1850s and 1860s.\textsuperscript{30} Even by 1889, the Erin Fair only had two classes: one for a collection of garden flowers and the other for a collection of house plants.\textsuperscript{31}

Most flower classes at this time focused on arrangements and collections of flowers, and women were the main exhibitors. A description of flowers shown in Hespeler in 1889 conveys women’s talent for creating beautiful arrangements:

The show of flowers was large and fine. A fancy piece by Miss Carrie Olaflin, containing a looking glass with a swan and waterlilies reflected in it, representing a lake, bordered with marigolds and evergreens and surmounted by the words, “Prosperity to Hespeler,” was a work of art. A fancy floral piece by Miss Whitmer was also very attractive...A sickle, on moss ground and everlasting flowers, with a bunch of wheat in the centre, by Miss Whitmer, was greatly admired, everything to make the display being gathered and made by the lady herself.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{27}“Pansies,” Farmer’s Advocate 4 (July 1869): 104; and “Ladies!” Farmer’s Advocate 7 (May 1872): 73.
\textsuperscript{28}“Annual Show of the Provincial Agricultural Association,” Canadian Agriculturist (1849): 258.
\textsuperscript{29}“County of Peel Fall Fair,” Brampton Times, October 9, 1868.
\textsuperscript{30}“Township of Erin,” Guelph Advertiser, November 8, 1855. Miss McKenzie was awarded a discretionary prize for her “Vase Flowers.” In 1865, James Brown won a discretionary prize for a “Wreath of Flowers”; only men’s names were listed in the winners’ list that year, including for “Domestic Manufactures and Ladies’ Work,” so whether Mr. or Mrs. Brown constructed the floral wreath is unclear; “The Erin Fall Show,” Guelph Mercury, October 19, 1865.
\textsuperscript{31}“Erin Exhibition,” Guelph Mercury, October 24, 1889.
\textsuperscript{32}“Hespeler’s First Show: Fine Weather and a Great Success,” Guelph Mercury, October 10, 1889.
Detailed newspaper descriptions of floral exhibits such as the one above identified competitors by name, therefore highlighting their association with characteristics such as good morals, industry, and taste. They provided an image in words so that even if one could not attend the fair, one nevertheless could envision how the flowers had been artfully arranged. A reporter for the London Advertiser contended that tasteful bouquets and other flower exhibits drew “out the skill and cultivate[d] the taste of the maker,” and gave “pleasure to the thousands who study them.”33 Floral exhibits enriched the minds of exhibitors and the fairgoers by inspiring and developing sophistication and refinement. The visual knowledge imparted through a skillfully grown plant that reached perfect form or a tastefully arranged floral ornament based on classical elements of symmetry and design served to teach women how to understand these principles, how to cultivate them, and how to apply them in the future.

Men also competed in early flower shows, but typically those men held a privileged status in rural society, such as a town judge or minister.34 Their ability to illustrate taste did not emasculate them because their class position was associated with elevated and refined sensibilities. By the 1880s, the other men who competed were typically owners of commercial nurseries and flower shops. This was often the case for larger provincial and regional fairs. For example, at the 1890 Central Exhibition in Guelph, the flower show report identified “the largest exhibitors” to be William Mann, James Gilchrist, Noah Sunley, John Marriott, and Robert Brooks, and noted that the plants displayed were “especially fine and do credit to our local men, all of whom have gained a provincial reputation.”35 These “local men” were nurserymen, such as

33 “Ladies at the Fall Fairs,” London Advertiser, reprinted in Brampton Times, October 16, 1868.
34 For example, the same year that the Brampton Times reporter singled out women for their floral exhibits at the Peel County Fair in 1868, the printed winners’ list revealed that both Judge Scott and Rev. R. Arnold won some of the top flower class prizes. A judge and a reverend were educated men who were expected to have cultured tastes and could appreciate beauty. Judge Scott, for instance, became a long-time exhibitor, eventually becoming a flower show judge.
35 “Central Exhibition: A Successful Show – The Receipts Fair,” Guelph Mercury, October 2, 1890.
Robert Brooks of Fergus, who had “swept everything before him in Toronto for begonias and English pansies.” Nursery owners competed at larger fairs to showcase their merchandise and win renown from the quality of their plants.

Smaller fairs, however, privileged the amateur gardener, the majority of whom were women. Social reformers said women were drawn to beauty as a reflection of their own natures, and therefore their very femininity gave them a decided advantage in flower gardening because it allowed them to appreciate beautiful things. At the 1868 Peel County Fair, the local newspaper reported that flower exhibits “elicited great praise and showed the good taste of the ladies who got them up.” Women, not men, were credited with having the ability to tastefully arrange flowers for competition.

Flowers were used to beautify the fairgrounds and encourage fairgoers to appreciate an attractive landscape. Agricultural societies wanted to set an example for how to improve the countryside, and many societies made significant investments by planting flowers, trees, and shrubs to improve the appearance of the outside fairgrounds. During the fair, however, the most cost-effective way to make the main agricultural hall attractive was to encourage large and vibrant displays of plants and flowers. Newspaper reporters testified that floral exhibits added a general brilliance to fair buildings, which contributed to the overall impression of a successful fair. At the 1871 Peel County Fair, the local newspaper described the impressive floral display and noted how, in addition to the flowers which came from “the carefully tended flower bed,” there were also vases of wild flowers that exemplified “the oft repeated assertion that nature in her native wilderness can, for effect, successfully compete with art.”

36 Ibid.
37 “County of Peel Fall Fair,” Brampton Times, October 9, 1868.
39 “Peel Fall Fair! Another Grand Success!” Brampton Times, October 6, 1871.
Newspaper reporters often commented on how women’s feminine presence beautified the fairgrounds, so showing flowers was simply another way women amplified their ability to make fair space attractive. Many women who attended fairs were noted for showing off “their best,” whether that was a new fur coat, or good looks. At the 1857 Toronto Township Fair, the agricultural society’s secretary noticed with pleasure how “the show ground became actually brilliant with the gay dresses of the ladies”; and at the Markham Fair in 1869, a reporter pointed out how the “bevy of blooming, rosy-cheeked lasses, in their best bib and tucker” were “closely followed by a band of bashful admirers.” Many men believed that women made fairgrounds more attractive with their presence and that their food, fancywork, fine art, and flower exhibits acted as an extension of how “blooming, rosey-cheeked lasses” contributed to a more beautiful and civilized event. A reporter for the Farmer’s Advocate argued in 1868 that he would like to see prizes awarded to women at every township fair for the best bouquet of flowers because “Many would attend the exhibitions to see the pretty flowers and pretty faces,” and “the boys would love them no less because they admire a flower.”

Flower shows also provided a clear visual illustration of an area’s agricultural potential. At the 1880 Western Fair, the fair’s president, George Douglas, argued that in addition to the splendid display of livestock, grains, and agricultural implements that signalled the progress of the region to international visitors, the “flowers in the Horticultural Hall must tend to completely dissipate that prejudice with regard to the Canadian climate that has hitherto, more than anything

40 “Average Crowd Attended Erin Fair Despite Inclement Weather,” Erin Advocate, October 15, 1925. The reporter commented that the event was “a splendid opportunity for milady to show her new fur coat,” and he noted how Miss Ella McQuarrie was “judged to be the finest looking young lady on the grounds.”
41 “Toronto Township Fall Fair,” Weekly Review [Brampton], October 17, 1857.
42 “Fall Fair at Markham,” York Herald, October 15, 1869.
43 Ibid.
44 “Agricultural Exhibitions,” Farmer’s Advocate 3 (January 1868): 2.
else, prevented the better class of emigrants from seeking our shores.” Douglas contended that flowers illustrated the productivity of the land and the desirability of the province’s climate. Along with crops, flowers showcased the province’s agricultural possibilities, which Douglas believed attracted “the better class of emigrants.” His comment illustrated the belief that individuals who appreciated ornamental gardening were more refined and intelligent, and therefore better suited to improving their domestic and agricultural pursuits and contributing to the welfare of the province.

In the 1870s and 1880s, rural reformers promoted the improvement of rural homes, farms, and landscapes as an important way to improve rural life. Wealthy owners built large country homes and hired professional gardeners to landscape and maintain their expansive grounds, but middling and well-to-do farmers were also taking pride in presenting well-landscaped homesteads. The Historical County Atlases published in Ontario in this period were idealized representations of homes, farms, and businesses, but they illustrate the belief that residents should create strategically located, orderly and attractive spaces. Figure 4.2 provides an example of a farm in Peel County that used trees as practical windbreaks and sources of shade, but trees, shrubs, and other plants were also used for purely ornamental purposes. Rural reformers believed a beautiful farm was an efficient farm, one where “flowers, gardens, trees and pleasant surroundings outside…make children love the homestead,” and therefore kept them “in love with the farm.” Reformers were particularly concerned with rural depopulation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the need to keep young people from leaving the farm for the attractions of the city was often made as an argument for promoting beautification

45 George Douglas, “President’s Address, Western Fair, 1880,” East-Middlesex Agricultural Society Minute Book, 1873-1913, B5289-1, University of Western Ontario Archives.
46 Reaman, A History of Agriculture in Ontario, 149.
47 “The Farm,” Brampton Conservator, April 4, 1879.
projects. In the 1880s, the Department of Agriculture took on the task of beautifying farms and set the standard of what “an oasis of rural tranquility and beauty” should be. Government personnel encouraged the adoption of ornamental plants as a way to keep farm families content and happy working the land. Rural reformers warned that if homes were not made pleasant and enjoyable, “farmers’ sons and farmers’ daughters become restless,” for “Children must be made to love their homes, else the attractions of cities and villages will surely lure them away.” An article in the *Guelph Weekly Mercury* urged farmers to consider the rights of their daughters, especially in terms of remuneration for their work, but it also encouraged them to make their homes attractive and “cultivate a taste in the girls for flowers” because these “features, with a moderate amount of work, should produce a happy contented home life on the farm.”

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48 Harris and Mueller, “Making Science Beautiful,” 110. Rural depopulation was an increasing concern to rural reformers in the early twentieth century, and the same types of projects were implemented to fight against migration and urban influence. See Young, “Conscription, Rural Depopulation, and the Farmers of Ontario,” and Halpern, *And On That Farm He Had a Wife*, 88, 105.

49 Julie Harris and Jennifer Mueller, “Making Science Beautiful: The Central Experimental Farm, 1886-1939,” *Ontario History* 89, no. 2 (June 1997): 119. The Department of Agriculture, in conjunction with the Experimental Farms Branch, made farm beautification a priority at Experimental farms across the province and the country. The Central Experimental Farm in Ottawa was to showcase farm beautification.

50 “Farmer’s Homes,” *Farmer’s Advocate* 6 (June 1871): 84.

By the late nineteenth century, agricultural societies also held more flower classes because ornamental gardening had become a popular hobby in rural communities. The link between the mind and the soil had been well-established, and by the later decades of the nineteenth century ornamental gardening was a respected recreational activity. As the profile of floriculture was heightened, rural communities became active in promoting ornamental gardens in both private and public spaces. The Victorian landscape style of carpet bedding and geometrical layouts was popular in Canada by the 1860s, but many rural gardeners opted for an assortment of plants and flowers (depending on what grew best) rather than an orchestrated and

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manicured garden. Although some consideration was given to overall garden design, most agricultural societies focused on presenting fair displays that illustrated a range of plants, single or in collection, and cut flower arrangements as a way to encourage more recreational gardening. Some agricultural societies reportedly had elaborate “floral temples” set up during fair time, but generally recreating a landscaped ornamental garden or flower bed was impractical and exhibits were typically limited to individual varieties of flowers or mixed arrangements.

Flower competitions also expanded because horticulture was a growing industry in the province by late nineteenth century. Agricultural journals and newspapers regularly advertised flower seeds, and it was noted that “every little town has one or more persons who are making a living profit on small seeds and plants for the garden, the window and the lawn; and in each city large establishments are profitably supported by the lovers of beauty.” The “landscape” lawn mower was also becoming a popular garden tool during this period among “all who desire to have a well-kept piece of grass.” Garden historian Edwina von Baeyer contends that a distinctive shift took place in gardening practices in the 1880s. She argues that the rise of industrialism brought new wealth and amenities to communities, while the rise of technology, the availability of markets, and greater population concentration created an atmosphere where ornamental gardening became “a social marker, a status symbol.” In urban areas the pursuit of ornamental gardens was closely linked with class, wealth, and leisure. In the countryside, wealthier residents with hired help also tended to have more formal and elaborate gardens, but flower gardening was generally enjoyed by various rural households. For instance, the 1898

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54 Ibid., 6.
59 Ibid., 200.
Mary McCulloch was a single 38-year-old woman who lived with her mother and found paid employment as a housekeeper. She lived in Snelgrove, a small rural hamlet in Peel County, and her diary revealed her passion for growing flowers. She regularly referenced her garden work, including how she cared for her vegetables, fruit bushes, and trees, and how she spent considerable time tending to her flowers. In April, Mary recorded that she sent the boys (children of a widower for whom she acted as housekeeper) “up to the Hutchinsons with some Rose bushes and some flower roots.” The next week she recorded that her brother George had brought her a white peony root from Mrs. Henderson, but she was disappointed when she found it “badly broken.” She explained, “I am afraid it will not grow, but I hope it may, for they are so nice.” Mary recorded planting Sweet Williams (*dianthus barbatus*), Scarlet Lightning (*lychnis chalcedonica*), hollyhocks, roses, and Lily of the Valley. She planted seeds and bulbs, transplanted flowers, weeded her flower beds, exchanged flower bulbs with neighbours, and gifted flowers for special events. Mary spent time and money cultivating her flowers, and she showed considerable care when she detailed her efforts to stake out her flower garden or fix up hot-beds to protect early growth.

Mary’s story illustrates that flowers interested more than just wealthy residents in rural communities. Although it is not known if Mary participated at any flower shows, women who did win prizes came from different backgrounds. For example, at the 1880 Peel County Fair, Miss McVean won the “Everlasting Bouquet” class. The McVean daughters lived on their family
farm in the Toronto Gore district of Peel. Miss Elizabeth Rowden, who won the class for a collection of annuals in bloom, lived with her widowed 68-year-old mother and was employed as a dressmaker in Brampton. Mrs. H. (Sarah) Baskerville won the Coxcombs class; she farmed with her husband and her young children in Chinguacousy Township. These women illustrate how flowers, and flower shows, were enjoyed by all sorts of women in varying circumstances and at different stages of life.

The Peel County Fair’s flower show expanded rapidly in the 1870s. At the show in 1868, only four classes existed, but the number increased to 22 classes by 1878. Peel County experienced a boom in the greenhouse industry during these years that continued into the twentieth century. Brampton, the location of the Peel County Fair, came to be known as the flower town of Canada because of the success of horticulturalists, such as K. Chisholm and E. Dale & Son, in the late nineteenth century. Although women still competed at the fair flower show during this period, the added classes were generally meant to showcase the plants of large-scale horticultural operations, and many of the local nurserymen dominated prize lists. At the 1878 fair, classes were offered for specific varieties of flowers, such as dahlias, peonies, fuchsias, phlox drummondii, roses, verbenas, zinnias, gladioli, and marigolds, as well as for different types of table and hand bouquets, baskets, or larger collections of single or mixed varieties of plants and flowers, and specific flower designs or ornaments. By 1880, six more classes were added so that the flower exhibit had grown seven-fold since 1868 [Appendix B; Table 4.1]. By the 1880s, farm journals were regularly featuring articles that catered towards the

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64 Year: 1881; Census Place: Toronto Gore, Peel, Ontario; Roll: C_13252; Page: 27; Family No: 119.
65 Year: 1881; Census Place: Brampton, Peel, Ontario; Roll: C_13252; Page: 1; Family No: 3.
66 Year: 1881; Census Place: Chinguacousy, Peel, Ontario; Roll: C_13252; Page: 18; Family No: 92.
67 Brampton Centennial Committee, Brampton's 100th Anniversary as an Incorporated Town, 1873-1973 (Brampton, ON: Corporation of the Town of Brampton and the Brampton Centennial Committee, 1973).
68 “Brampton Fair, Delightful Weather – Immense Crowds – Magnificent Display, Receipts Far Above Any Former County Exhibition,” Brampton Conservator, October 4, 1878.
increasingly specialized horticultural industry in the province, and the changes made at the Peel County Fair reflected a desire to cater towards the growing number of nurserymen. By the 1890s, most flower exhibitors at the Peel Fair were horticulturalists trying to market their growing merchandise.

The Peel County Fair was located in a mature agricultural community, close to important urban centres in the province, and therefore attracted more participation from large-scale nurserymen than most township and county fairs. Smaller fairs, however, typically continued to attract more female exhibitors. For example, a report of the 1889 Nassagaweya Township Fair boasted that the “display of house plants and flowers, cut flowers, would have done credit to more pretentious exhibitions,” and four of the five winners listed were all identified as women.

The less “pretentious” a show was the more women entered as contenders.

**Flower Exhibits in the Early Twentieth Century**

The twentieth century continued to witness the proliferation and growth of flower shows. The rising prosperity of rural Ontario led some women to seek ornamental gardening as a creative process where they selected, designed, and nurtured their gardens to maturity. By this time some agricultural and horticultural societies had amalgamated, which increased the number of entries made at fair flower shows. Fair organizers became interested in how flower competitions could represent ideas of science and progress in a modern age. Scientists were

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70 At the 1890 Central Fair in Guelph, the exhibitors described as taking top prize in these classes of the flower competition were all nurserymen. “Central Exhibition,” Guelph Mercury, October 2, 1890.
71 “Nassagaweya Fall Show,” Guelph Mercury, October 17, 1889. The first and second winners from the prize list were as follows: “Selection of natural flowers, Mrs Joshua Norrish, Mrs Jas Ramsay; Selection of window plants, Mrs McLaughlan, Mrs W Anderson; Bouquet for table, Mrs Joshua Norrish, Mrs Jas Ramsay; Bouquet for hand, Mrs James Ramsay, Geo Strange.”
conducting research on flowers at the provincial and national departments of agriculture and the Ontario Agricultural College, and the new varieties of ornamental plants they developed showcased how the application of science resulted in “improved” plant life that was better suited to growing conditions in Ontario.\(^{73}\) The new varieties of flowers that were promoted at fairs, along with the classic favourites, showcased the traditional characteristics of beauty and taste, but also newer elements of adaptability and innovation. The flowers shown at fairs represented all level of gardening skills, but every entry was thought to encourage others in the community to further gratify their senses, enlighten their minds, and beautify their environment.

At the start of the twentieth century many flower shows remained small, but they were growing. In 1910, the Erin Fair offered seven classes for geraniums, begonias, foliage plants, sunflowers, a bouquet, a collection of garden flowers, and a collection of house plants.\(^{74}\) The same year, the Egremont Fair’s flower show consisted of only five classes for a collection of flowers, cut flowers, hand bouquet, a coleus plant, and a house plant of any other kind.\(^{75}\) The Shedden Fair still did not have an official flower show; only a special prize for “The best and largest variety of flowers.”\(^{76}\) The Arran-Tara Fair, however, had grown significantly in size and now offered 22 classes in the floral department for a variety of plants and flowers, such as asters, pansies, verbenas, petunias, coxcombs, zinnias, dahlias, begonias, gladioli, geraniums, fuchsias, balsams, sweet peas ferns, and roses, as well as collections of house plants, foliage plants, large or table bouquets, small or hand bouquets, and collections of annuals cut and named.\(^{77}\)


\(^{75}\) “Fall Fair of Egremont Agricultural Society Prize List, 1910,” Ontario Fall Fair Catalogues Collection, XA1 MS A073, University of Guelph Archival & Special Collections.

\(^{76}\) “Shedden Fair a Big Success,” *Dutton Advance*, October 20, 1910.

\(^{77}\) “Prize List of the Arran-Tara Annual Fall Exhibition, 1910,” Arran-Tara Fall Fair Booklets, A959.034.001, Bruce County Archives.
Government-sponsored horticultural research had begun in the nineteenth-century, but in the twentieth century significant strides were made in plant breeding in Ontario. In 1908, the Horticultural Department of the Ontario Agricultural College was reorganized. J. W. Crow, initially a lecturer at the OAC, but later the Professor of Horticulture at the College, began experimenting with flower breeding in addition to his development of new varieties of fruits and vegetables. His advances in the breeding of gladiolus, among other flower breeds inspired Isabella Preston, who later became renowned for her hybrid plants.78 Preston was not the first woman breeding flowers in Ontario, but her work had a substantial legacy for women in horticultural research and the industry more generally. She was a star pupil of Crow, and the first person to successfully crossbred two species of lily (previously thought impossible). 79 Preston later worked at the Central Experimental Farm in Ottawa and gained international acclaim for creating new breeds of ornamentals and publishing popular books and articles on floriculture.80 She became one of the top hybridists in Canada, and her achievements were considered to be “all the more remarkable as she was a woman in a traditionally male occupation.”81 Preston and women like her encouraged other women to pursue horticultural pursuits and demand recognition for their work.82

Throughout the First World War, flower exhibits continued. In 1916, the Farmer’s Advocate and Home Magazine noted that the war might cause some women of Canada “to turn their attention to more absolutely essential things in horticulture and agriculture,”83 but most writers suggested that despite the demands on women’s and men’s time during the war, they still

79 Von Baeyer, Roses and Rhetoric, 166-67.
80 Ibid., 166-67.
81 Ibid., 165.
82 “Our Gardens Owe Much to These Leaders,” Farmer’s Advocate and Home Magazine 73 (March 10, 1938): 128. Preston was presented with the J. E. Carter medal for outstanding contributions in origination of ornamental plants at the Ontario Horticultural Association’s annual meeting in Toronto.
should make some effort to plant flowers in addition to other farm tasks because there was “nothing more refreshing and encouraging when tired and blue than some blossoms to work among, or even a few minutes at the window gazing at them will cheer one up and give more courage to face the next duty.”

Though nurserymen came to dominate flower classes in places such as Peel, in other regions women continued to be the majority of the flower exhibitors at local fairs. At the 1919 Aylmer Fair, 20 flower and plant classes were offered. Of the 32 names recorded as winners in these classes, 25 of those were women and only 7 men. By 1925, the Erin Fair had increased the number of classes in the flower competition to 23, and of the 42 names listed as winners, 28 were women. The judge of the competition, Mrs. W. Fairbairn of Orangeville, was also female. Culturally, flower gardening was feminized. Flowers evoked specific emotions; for example, moss was said to signify maternal love, pansies represented thoughts and remembrance, and red roses represented romantic love. Women’s association with the spiritual and emotional kept them firmly tied to the cultivation and exhibition of flowers.

The association between gardening and desirable personal traits continued in the 1920s. In 1926, Ada L. Potts published an article in the Canadian Home and Gardens magazine in which she argued that observing a person’s garden revealed a good deal about his or her character. She also pointed out that gardening was “a reflector of the aesthetic side of mankind,” and “as much an art as painting.” In another article she referenced Alfred Austin’s idea that one’s garden was “interwoven with one’s tastes, preferences, and character, and constitutes a sort

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85 “Aylmer Fair Drew Big Attendance,” Aylmer Express, October 2, 1919.
86 “Average Crowd Attended Erin Fair Despite Inclement Weather,” Erin Advocate, October 15, 1925.
of unwritten, but withal manifest, autobiograph[y].”

The *Canadian Home and Gardens* magazine was a lifestyle magazine that catered towards the home and leisure activities of the upper-middle and upper classes, so those reading Potts’ articles were likely in a position to agree that one’s aesthetic represented one’s character. But it was not simply the wealthy that conveyed these ideas. The beautification and landscape projects promoted by farm journals agreed that a “flower garden is the ambition of many a good farmer’s wife.”

A good flower garden was inherently reflective of a good wife, mother, and woman.

**Flower Exhibits during the Great Depression and the Second World War**

Flower shows may seem superfluous during times of hardship, but Ontario fair flower classes continued to expand during the Great Depression and the Second World War. The year of 1934 was a notoriously difficult one for Ontarians; rates of business failure and personal bankruptcy increased, while farm incomes had declined by over 40 percent from five years prior. Yet this was the same year that the Erin Fair was reported as having the “finest exhibit and largest crowd ever.” American cultural historian Lawrence Levine notes that during the Great Depression tens of millions of Americans attended movies weekly despite the economic turmoil of the times. Levine argues that “even in the midst of disaster life goes on and human beings find ways not merely of adapting to the forces that buffet them but often rising above their circumstances and participating actively in the shaping of their lives.”

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92 “Finest Exhibit And Largest Crowd Ever At Erin Fall Fair,” *Erin Advocate*, October 11, 1934.
94 Ibid., 257-58.
not to minimize hardships and trauma, but to “assert that human beings are not wholly molded by their immediate experiences; they are the bearers of a culture which is not static and unbending but continually in a state of process, perennially the product of interaction between the past and the present.”  

The strength of flower shows at Ontario fairs during the Depression suggests that rural families valued the beauty derived from flowers, a relatively inexpensive luxury, and they worked to incorporate them into their lives, even during financially difficult times. Agricultural societies continued to promote flower exhibits for their moral influence and advised that flowers be “given a commanding position, preferably near the entrance where a pleasing impression may be created in the minds of all entering the hall.”  

Flowers contributed to the atmosphere of the fair, and because women were the majority of exhibitors, their work was displayed front and center.

This was also a period when women’s roles and responsibilities in agricultural societies were expanding. Women were beginning to gain authority over the management of flower shows, which helped them promote the classes that best represented their interests and talents. Flower arranging was an especially popular pastime among women, and one that received increasing attention from horticultural writers. Florists and gardeners advocated for the seriousness of the art of floral arranging, and they directed their advice to women because they believed they were the natural practitioners of this art form. Women were also being given credit for being more scientific and design-oriented – features typically associated with men – in their choice of flowers and their overall presentation.

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95 Ibid., 258.
96 John F. Clark, “Staging Horticultural Products at a Fair,” in Ontario Department of Agriculture Thirty-First Annuals Report of the Agricultural Societies and of the Convention of the Association of Fairs and Exhibitions for the Year 1931... (Toronto: Herbert H. Ball, Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1931), 19.
97 See Chapter 2 for full analysis of shifts in women’s roles in agricultural societies.
When women became “lady directors” and associate directors on most fair boards in the 1930s, they joined the managing committees for flower shows and strengthened their ability to improve the exhibits that interested them. As more women took over the management duties of the Arran-Tara Fair flower show, for example, the competition grew. In the 1930s, an all-women committee managed the competition, which had grown to its largest size yet.\footnote{“Prize List of the Arran-Tara Annual Exhibition, 1910,” and “Arran-Tara Agricultural Society Annual Fall Fair, 1933,” Arran-Tara Fall Fair Booklets, A959.034.001, Bruce County Archives. Arran-Tara Fair had had a large flower show before many other fairs, but its classes grew from 22 before the First World War to 34 in 1933 once an all-female committee managed the flower show.} By 1950, the flower show included 56 regular classes and 6 special prize classes. The flower department committee was directed by 3 women, and 17 women served as “lady directors” on the fair board \footnote{“Prize List, Arran-Tara Agricultural Society Fall Exhibition, 1950,” Arran-Tara Fall Fair Booklets, A959.034.001, Bruce County Archives.} [Appendix B, Table 4.2].\footnote{“Arran-Tara Agricultural Society Annual Fall Fair, 1950,” Arran-Tara Fall Fair Booklets, A959.034.001, Bruce County Archives.}

Other fairs experienced similar growth in flower shows under women’s direction. At the 1936 Seaforth Fall Fair in Huron County, the floral exhibit offered 45 classes for various breeds of flowers and varieties within breeds, as well as a number of classes for collections of plants, bouquets, and arrangements.\footnote{“Seaford Fall Fair Prize List, 1925,” and “Seaford Fall Fair Prize List, 1936,” Ontario Fall Fair Catalogues Collection, XA1 MS A073, University of Guelph Archival & Special Collections.} The 1936 East Huron Fall Fair listed 37 classes for various types of cut, potted, and arranged flowers and plants.\footnote{“East Huron Fall Fair Prize List, 1936,” Ontario Fall Fair Catalogues Collection, XA1 MS A073, University of Guelph Archival & Special Collections.} The growing strength of the flower show was evident in other counties across the province as well. In Lambton County in the 1930s, both the Forest Agricultural Society and the Brooke and Alvinston Agricultural Society offered more than 30 flower classes. In Oxford County, the Ingersoll Fair had 32 classes and the Drumbo Fair had...
44 classes for various breed and varieties of cut flowers, potted plants, and decorative arrangements.102

Single variety plant and flower classes were common at flower shows, but flower arrangements were increasingly popular, and here women excelled. Books on flower arranging started to become more common in the 1930s. A voluminous book on the topic that was published in 1935 and reprinted in 1938 was F. F. Rockwell and Ester C. Grayson’s *Flower Arrangement*.103 Rockwell and Grayson were prolific writers on gardens and flowers in North America, but they also focused on the art of flower arranging at home and at the exhibition.104 Their books sought to teach individuals how to master the principles of proper floral arranging because they believed that “Every man or woman who learns to arrange flowers beautifully makes his or her environment more attractive and becomes one or more enlisted in the army of workers striving to bring to the mass of mankind an appreciation of finer things.”105 They believed that when people commonly appreciated fine things, society would take “a long step towards a higher civilization.” They also wanted to bring more attention to the art of flower arranging. They contended that anyone who thought that flower arranging was trivial or

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102 “Forest Agricultural Society Annual Exhibition Prize List, 1936,” “Brooke and Alvinston Fall Fair Prize List, 1936,” “1936 Ingersoll Fair Prize List,” and “Drumbo Fair Prize List, 1936,” Ontario Fall Fair Catalogues Collection, XA1 MS A073, University of Guelph Archival & Special Collections.
inconsequential was “merely unintelligent.” Flower arrangement, they argued, was “a true form of artistic expression” similar to “engraving, painting, or sculpture.” They argued that the “question of material is secondary; what counts is the assertion of an idea in terms of beauty.”

For garden writers such as Rockwell and Grayson, flowers allowed women to express their skill and artistry while cultivating deeper, more sophisticated sensibilities.

In the same way that women learned how to properly exhibit foodstuff at fairs by visually studying winning entries, those who advocated floral arranging emphasized visual learning. They encouraged flower show exhibitors to know that by displaying their work publicly they facilitated improvement in their art; “one need only visit any one of the innumerable local flower shows, view the first or second year entries in flower arrangement classes, and then go back a year or two later and note the improvement.”

Rockwell and Grayson argued that any woman would “feel quite flattered to have a reputation for the beauty of the flower arrangements with which she graces her living rooms as for her rich and tempting tea cakes, her dainty china or chic gowns.”

Rural and urban women alike were expected to know how to use flowers to decorate the home, yard, church, or fair hall. Fair flower classes put a judgement on that skill and rewarded those who successful exhibited it.

Twentieth-century instructional books about flower arranging went on at length about principles of design, balance, unity, and color, and they described various styles of arrangements, from line arrangements which included Japanese and Modern styles, to mass arrangements that focused on period identification, such as French Empire, Victorian, Georgian, and Colonial. Rural and small-town women had a history of being intrigued by other cultures and historical

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106 Ibid.
107 Rockwell and Grayson, Flower Arrangement, 3.
108 Ibid.
periods, and they applied this interest to their work with flowers. In the 1930s, Rockwell and Grayson advocated for a mixture of form principles in what they called “Conservative Modern.” Modern line arrangements required innovation, strength, severity, and contrast, while mass arrangements employed classic flower breeds, the blending of period-specific colours, and a fullness of composition that would emphasize the richness of traditional displays. Conservative Modern designs were advocated as the most popular form in the 1930s because they were “said to blend line and mass principles in a happy combination which preserves the best of both.” Gardeners were expected to be innovative, yet understand the principles of tradition; they had to apply strong design, but still express their femininity through their arrangements. This required ingenuity, especially if one was required to use more untraditional garden and field items, such as the incorporation of vegetables, fruits, or wild plants.

By the 1930s, women were advocating for more female leadership in horticultural organizations. Loetitia Wilson, who was the only woman on the Ottawa Horticultural Society’s board of directors for many years, contended that female leaders were needed in horticultural societies because they understood “the needs of the small gardener, have good taste in the choice of plants, [are] economical purchasers, and moreover, have time to devote to Society affairs.” Wilson also wanted more women to get involved because she knew that they were the majority of home gardeners. Wilson advocated for women’s “scientific garden work,” because she believed women were more adept at such work, arguing that “hybridizing needs the neat fingers

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110 Ibid., 31.
111 Ibid., 38-45.
112 “Artistry with Summer’s Bloom,” Canadian Home and Garden (June 1940): 30.
114 Ibid., 14-15.
and patience of women, it calls for taste and perception of colours.” She cited Isabella Preston as a woman whose work with lilies was an inspiration to Canadian female and male gardeners alike. As with others who fought for more opportunities for women at this time, Wilson used the “separate but equal” argument that stereotyped female attributes by suggesting women were useful because they had unique characteristics. Women’s neat fingers, patience, taste, and perception of colour were the reasons why Wilson believed they should be included in horticultural societies and horticultural pursuits more broadly.

During the Second World War, women’s involvement in fair management and flower exhibits continued to expand. At the 1940 Collingwood Township Fair, an all-female committee of five ran the “Plants and Flowers” department. Most flower committees during this period were exclusively or almost exclusively women. The growth and recognition of women’s roles in agricultural societies that began in the 1930s continued into the postwar period so that women were increasingly positioned in leadership roles where they could promote the exhibits that meant most to them.

**Flower Power: Flower Shows in the Postwar Period**

Gardening’s popularity as a recreational activity continued to grow in the postwar years, and so too did the number of flower classes at fairs. During this time, rural populations were declining in Ontario and fairs were seeking additional ways to entice urban visitors to the

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115 Ibid., 15.
116 “Collingwood Township Agricultural Society Fall Fair Prize List, 1940.” In 1945, one man joined three women to run the show, but by 1950 the committee was again all female. “Collingwood Township Agricultural Society Fall Fair Prize List, 1945,” “Collingwood Township Agricultural Society Fall Fair Prize List, 1950,” Ontario Fall Fair Catalogues, XA1 MS A073, University of Guelph Archival & Special Collections.
117 For example, see “Arran-Tara Agricultural Society Annual Exhibition Prize List, 1949,” Arran-Tara Fall Fair Booklets, A959.034.001, Bruce County Archives; “Erin Fall Fair Prize List, 1949,” Erin Agricultural Society fonds, A1989.97, Wellington County Museum and Archives; “Burford Fair Prize List, 1945;” “Shedden Fair Prize List, 1949,” Ontario Fall Fair Catalogues Collection, XA1 MS A073, University of Guelph Archival & Special Collections.
fairgrounds. Agricultural societies embraced the opportunity to expand the popular flower show, and the increasing number of female organizers were also eager to expand their authority, so they promoted and worked hard to facilitate a larger exhibit. Maya Holson argues in her study about private gardening in southern Ontario in the 1950s that gardening proliferated in the region as a result of good “economic conditions, advances in technology, increases in home ownership and the growth of new suburbs typified by single-family dwellings.” She also contends that the expansion of gardening during this time was a result of a return to traditional gender ideals and a desire to use new gardening tools, such as chemical fertilizers and new cultivars.

Rural women enjoyed gardening as a creative hobby. The association between flower gardening and improving one’s self and one’s community remained, but women believed flowers offered a chance for personal expression and the physiological benefits of working leisurely outdoors. Ethel Chapman was a guest speaker at the 1953 OAAS Convention and in her talk, “Fairs and Their Trends in Family Living,” she noted that flower exhibits encouraged “another hobby that seems to mean a lot to the happiness of country women in their homes.” She explained that the Women’s Institute had held an essay contest on the topic “A Country Woman’s Day,” and she “noticed that practically all the women said they hated washing the cream separator and they loved working in their flower gardens. It was recreation rather than work.”

Miss Margaret Dove of Toronto presented a paper at the 1954 OAAS Convention, and she focused on the popular pastime of flower arranging and argued that all arrangements should

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119 Ibid.
121 Ibid.
be judged on four basic principles: design, scale, balance, and harmony. Design signified the creator’s ability to create a pleasing shape or outline for an arrangement; scale denoted the size and relationship of the plant material to the container; balance referred to the arrangers’ ability to successfully create symmetrical or asymmetrical balance in their arrangement, and harmony meant that all parts of the arrangement blended well together. Colour was significant in creating harmony, and Dove suggested women refer to a colour chart to create the appropriate balance. She recommended that exhibitors should use containers that enhanced the flowers selected, and therefore suggested “neutral or harmonious colours and simple forms” as appropriate vessels.

In the same way that artists understood the fundamentals of painting, or fancy-needle workers understood the various patterns and styles, women who arranged flowers for competition were expected to follow basic principles before adding their own creative and artistic elements.

The increased variety of flowers offered in seed catalogues and farm and home journals also reflected a growing interest in the kinds of flowers available and well-suited for Ontario gardens. In 1950, an article in the Canadian journal, Your Garden and Home, reported that

> Every January the seed catalogs bring a galaxy of new flower introductions that hold a thrill for every gardener… Breeding methods, not heard of a few years ago, are used to bring you better and more interesting flowers. Look at some of the introductions of the past several years and you will find flowers that have been developed with x-ray treatment, colchicine and increased chromosome counts.

Flower gardening was big business in North America. Although amateur breeding still existed, plant breeders hired by large seed companies typically determined what kinds of new flowers were on the market. Most rural women were less concerned about developing a new breed or variety of flower than they were about selecting plants that would grow well and beautify their

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123 Ibid.
124 Ibid., 85.
property. They showcased their skilled gardening and taste by exhibiting plants and arrangements of flowers that were well-grown, in good condition, and attractively displayed. New varieties of flowers, such as the larger Chrysanthemum cultivars shown in Figure 4.3, helped women achieve an impressive exhibit.

![Figure 4.3] “Blossoms Attract,” 1968, St. Thomas Times-Journal fonds, C8 Sh2 B2 F3 29, Elgin County Archives. Caption: “One of the many exhibits that appeal to ladies are the flowers on display at the Aylmer Fair. These two ladies found the large blossoms had an extra air of attraction to them. The ladies are, left to right, Mrs. Joan Hobbs, 8 Davies Street, Aylmer and Miss Alice Matthews, 13 York Street, Aylmer.”

The 1950s and 1960s was a period when flower classes continued to expand to include a variety of new single flower varieties and colour variants. For instance, at the 1959 Erin Fair, 50 flower classes were offered for a wide-ranging selection of flowers of different kinds, varieties, colours, and numbers of blooms. The 1965 Arran-Tara Fair had 58 regular flower classes and an additional 10 special classes sponsored by local individuals and businesses and large

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corporations such as Simpson Sears [Appendix B; Table 4.3].

Similar to the 1950s, the 1960s also offered women an increasing array of plant varieties that could be easily purchased from seed catalogues. Women could seek advice in printed material on what varieties to grow and then see the real flowers at the fair displayed as single blooms or in arrangements. Flower arranging remained popular, and the judging standards continued to be based on elements of design and plant selection. Laura Chisholm advised in an article she wrote for the Farmer’s Advocate in 1964 that all potential flower show and fall fair exhibitors should follow the judging guidelines outlined in the handbook published by the Ontario Horticultural Association in cooperation with the Agricultural and Horticultural Societies Branch of the Ontario Department of Agriculture, and she outlined some of the popular themed arrangements promoted, such as “Glamorous Hostess,” “Barn Dance,” “Tea Time,” and “Housewife’s Dream.” By this time, most flower shows had adopted a variety of floral arrangement classes that showcased greater creativity and more entertaining designs. Variety specific classes remained, but flower show committees privileged themed arrangements and collections.

The 1970s was a rapidly urbanizing time and therefore it is not surprising that fair organizers wished to reflect on the “good old days,” as much as they wished to encourage new and creative designs. At the 1974 Erin Fair, in addition to the use of flowers, arrangement classes incorporated weathered wood, dried material, moss, tree leaves, weeds, fruit, and fabric, along with specialized containers, such as brass or copper tins, antique vases, old pitchers, or vegetables, such as pumpkins, to illustrate specific themes. Many of these themes recalled rural

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129 Laura Chisholm, “Living with flowers,” Farmer’s Advocate 99 (September 12, 1964): 28. “Glamorous Hostess” was a corsage class; “Barn Dance” was a composition using fruits, flowers, and weeds; “Tea time” was an arrangement in a cup and saucer; and “Housewife’s Dream” was an arrangement that included a kitchen utensil in its composition.

Similarly, at the 1976 Erin Fair, more themes that harkened to the past (or imagined past) were embraced, such as “Country Fall Fair,” “Summer Memories,” “Quilt Block,” and “Country Kitchen.”

Other themes, however, embraced more modern aesthetics or ideas. In 1974, classes for flower arrangements included themes for “Extremely Modern”, “Patio Party”, and “A Trip Around the World” [Appendix B, Table 4.4]. In 1976, the increasing immigrant community in Ontario was recognized in the theme “Italiano,” while current events and popular holidays were also recognized in the themes “Tribute to 76 Olympics” and “Hallowe’en” [Figure 4.4].

Women were eager for the creative opportunities these classes encouraged. Men were not completely excluded, of course, and organizers even tried to encourage their participation in flower arrangement classes by offering classes for themes such as “Gone Fishing,” which was open to male exhibitors only. Women, however, now dominated the organizing committees of flower shows. Traditional, single-stem flower variety entries still existed that encouraged the perfection of an individual plant, but more attention was also being paid to showcasing originality and fun. The women organizing flower competitions in the 1970s clearly wanted to experiment with and express the new trends in floral arrangements. They also wanted to put on a successful fair and, more importantly, a successful flower competition. If that meant bringing

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more entertainment into the flower show, alongside traditional representations of beauty and taste, they were happy to do it.


**Conclusion**

Nineteenth- and twentieth-century fair flower shows provide a window into the values and ideas of rural women and men. The ideas of discipline and taste were central components of
the promotion of flower exhibits in the nineteenth century, and the legacy of a disciplined application of labour and design principles to produce visual representations of personal character continued into the twentieth century. Visions of orderliness and good aesthetic judgement were promoted as the best ways to inspire organized habits and improved minds.

Although women were the main exhibitors at flower shows over the years, some agricultural societies in the late nineteenth century privileged male exhibitors in an effort to enhance the “seriousness” of the show and showcase the best commercial exhibitors in floriculture. Undeterred, women used the opportunity to compete in more flower classes, not withdraw. In the 1930s and 1940s, most official organizers of flower shows were women, and they chose to focus on exhibits that showcased gardening skill and creativity of design, which found full expression in the postwar period.

The cultivation of flowers was first seen as a civilizing act that uplifted rural families and beautified the countryside. Fair organizers believed that the “best class” of people enjoyed flowers. The range of rural women who exhibited flowers at fairs, however, illustrates that individuals of various socio-economic statuses were eligible for such a classification. Yet, although women’s desire to organize, compete in, and visit flower exhibits continued to be connected to their desire to portray respectability and traditionally defined feminine characteristics, such as thrift, beauty, taste, and artistry, they also sought opportunities to provide leadership in flower competitions and determine which elements of the show were most important to them.
Chapter 5: Providing Comfort, Refinement and Respectability: Ladies’ Domestic Manufactures, Fancy Work, and Fine Art

The previous chapters illustrate how rural communities valued women’s food and flower exhibits because they illustrated respected female skills, such as women’s ability to contribute to the physical, psychological, and spiritual well-beings of their families. Domestic manufactures, fancywork, and fine arts were also central to women’s capacity to provide for, comfort, and uplift their families. Domestic manufactures represented women’s ability to make useful household goods, such as cloth and clothing, while fancywork included more decorative skills, such as lace work and embroidery. Fine arts typically designated drawn and painted artwork, and later photography. Domestic manufactures were among the first exhibits included to showcase women’s contributions in the countryside, while fancywork and fine art classes were added to most township and county fairs by the 1870s and 1880s. Whereas men and women exhibited fine art, domestic manufactures and fancywork in the form of knit, sewn, crocheted, and embroidered goods, were a female affair. Also, an important element of these handcrafted items was the legacy they had for their makers. Unlike butter, bread, jams, flowers, and other perishables, domestic manufactures, fancywork, and fine arts exhibits could outlast their creators. The objects women made for fair competition often remained as lasting tributes to their makers and were passed down in the family for generations. These artifacts contribute to our understanding of the cultural framework of women’s lives.

Women who exhibited home-woven textiles, homespun wool, hand sewn quilts and clothing, and knitted apparel represented themselves as important contributors to the household economy and beacons of thrift and industriousness. Such items, and the traits associated with
making them, evoked the image of the independent and self-supporting rural household, a much-loved symbol of the prosperity and opportunity that boosters claimed awaited immigrants traveling to North America throughout the nineteenth century. By the later part of the century, the focus on domestic manufacture gave way to more emphasis on fancywork and fine arts. The increased availability and affordability of mass-produced textiles and clothing signaled a shift in rural households’ production of domestic manufactures. Some items were no longer worth producing at home. At the same time, middle-class standards of respectability and refinement permeated the countryside and created a growing demand for craft and artwork that showcased women’s unique talents and characteristics.

In the twentieth century, agricultural societies continued to promote the creation of things both beautiful and useful, but even more emphasis was given to exhibits that allowed women to express artistic initiative and individuality. What becomes clear is that the overwhelming story of women’s participation in these exhibits is one of continuity rather than change. Women’s “thriftiness” remained valued due to cyclical periods of scarcity and self-provisioning’s privileged position in rural communities and also because meanings of thrift were able to transform over time. In the twentieth century, a growing sense of thrift as a “consumer” quality that emphasized efficiency and intelligent consumption was layered on top of the more “classic” Victorian sense of thrift as a moral indicator of self-discipline and industry.\(^1\) Thrift was not contradictory to consumption, but rather, it represented smart consumer choices and the ability to save in one area of life to spend in another.

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Domestic Manufactures, Fancy Work, and Fine Arts in the Nineteenth Century

Women’s skill in manufacturing cloth, clothing, and other household furnishings was a significant part of their assigned value in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Early fair classes for women’s work included homemade cloth, flannel, and woolen socks – all items that showcased women’s “Domestic Industry.” Organizers believed these items represented women’s contributions to the household economy, and as the list of classes expanded to include items such as homespun yarn, handmade socks and stockings, woollen mitts and gloves, counterpanes, quilts, mats, clothes, and hats, the things women made for their families or for sale or barter in the community were generally recognized.

Provisioning for the household by creating woven, sewn, and knitted items, however, was not just about saved income. Women and men associated desirable personal characteristics such as being “thrifty” with these activities. An article published in the Farmer’s Advocate in 1868 argued that a “good housewife” kept regular accounts of household income and expenditures and was cognizant of the family budget. A women who was a good, efficient housekeeper was considered “a pearl among women” and “one of the prizes in the great lottery of life.” Women’s ability to spin yarn, manufacture rugs, sew dresses, or knit dozens of warm mittens illustrated personal attributes of industry and broader ideals of independence and self-sufficiency. Agricultural societies sought to reward women who had these attributes and encourage others to adopt them.

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2 McCalla, Planting the Province, 100.
3 “Frontenac Cattle Show,” British Whig [Kingston], October 14, 1835.
6 “Hints on Housekeeping,” Farmer’s Advocate 3 (April 1868): 60.
In the late 1850s and 1860s, agricultural societies expanded classes for domestic manufactures, and provided clearer classifications between exhibits. For example, at the 1857 Toronto Township Fall Fair, the “Manufactured Goods” division included fulled cloth and flannel, while “Ladies’ Work” consisted of embroidery, needlework, crotchet work, sewing and knitting. By the 1870s, most fairs classified domestic manufactures as separate from items that were more decorative and fancy. Domestic manufactures were practical household goods that rural families needed and could create for themselves.

Agricultural societies promoted homemade items because they believed material expressions of thrift and self-sufficiency were part of a moral order that also emphasized “self-discipline, hard work, sobriety, honesty, diligence, and industry,” all central characteristics of contemporary ideas of citizenship and middle-class respectability. The rhetoric of improvement encouraged the ideology that celebrated family solidarity, household industry, and images of domesticated women who were “industrious, self-sacrificing, and patriotic.” Agricultural improvers generally saw their role as one that worked to advance the interests of the nation through the expansion of agricultural productivity, and while they promoted a modern capitalist agriculture that meant interdependence with the rest of the society, the ethos of self-sufficiency and the independent farm family was also powerful. Agricultural improvers encouraged the advancement of women’s domestic manufactures as a way to promote thrift as a strategy of personal and communal well-being. Rural improvers believed these actions advanced the interests of the family and broader community. Local reporters praised the work of women who exhibited domestic manufactures at the 1866 Puslinch Independent Fair and emphasized how the

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9 “Toronto Township Fall Fair,” *Weekly Review* [Brampton], October 17, 1857.
11 Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun*, 413.
13 Ferry, *Uniting in Measures of Common Good*, 170.
exhibits were proof that the wives and daughters of Puslinch were “thrifty” and efficient homemakers.14

Agricultural societies promoted classes for homespun cloth, but it is worth noting that women in nineteenth-century Ontario were not limited to homespun in their daily lives. Rural general store accounts illustrate that rural families did buy ready-made fabrics such as cotton or silk, or fabrics with more sophisticated patterns or of superior quality than they could or desired to produce at home. Other families spun yarn, but had a weaver produce their blankets and cloth. Families also produced their own textiles and fashioned their own goods, but few relied solely on homespun cloth.15

Nevertheless, homespun cloth constituted an important part of farm production for much of the nineteenth century, especially in low-income areas, and was a useful source of income for rural women whose labour outside of the home was limited.16 Self-sufficiency in cloth production was not the goal of rural households; women produced cloth as a response to the opportunities made available by the market.17 Agricultural societies promoted homespun cloth because it represented women’s prudence and industry. Historian Beatrice Craig argues in her work Backwoods Consumers and Homespun Capitalists, that rural women, like men, were “utility not profit maximizers”; they understood the opportunities offered by the market and took advantage of them, but they also tried to balance the need for material goods with their need for time for other tasks, including leisure.18

14 “Puslinch Independent Fall Show,” Guelph Mercury, October 11, 1866.
17 Béatrice Craig, Backwoods Consumers and Homespun Capitalists: The Rise of a Market Culture in Eastern Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 183.
18 Ibid., 196.
The homespun cloth production in Ontario waned in the late nineteenth century and so did classes for these items at fairs. At the Erin Fair, the amount of homespun cloth required for competition decreased from 10 yards in 1864 to 5 yards in 1889, and to an unspecified amount by 1901.19 Agricultural societies initially supported local home- and factory-made cloth and praised the work shown at fairs as “little inferior in appearance to the product of the English looms.”20 After the Canadian production of handwoven cloth peaked around 1870 followed by a significant decline by the twentieth century,21 however, it was not long before only homespun stocking yarn remained [Appendix B; Table 5.1].22 By the early twentieth century, the industry had been transformed and agricultural societies no longer saw the future in these homemade manufactures.

In her study of nineteenth-century New England agricultural fairs, Catherine Kelly has suggested that declines in textile production were unsettling for rural improvers because they contrasted with their perception of the independent and self-sufficient farm family. She argues that fair organizers had to confront such change while they tried to maintain “a ritual aimed at creating tradition.”23 Fairs did create a sense of continuity with the past, but Kelly’s argument overlooks their main impetus, which was to improve agricultural life and evolve. Agricultural societies updated their domestic manufactures classes to reflect the reality that fewer homespun fabrics were being made, but increased the amount of sewn, knitted, crocheted, etc., items were produced [Appendix B, Table 5.1]. While homespun cloth waned, homemade clothing and decor did not.

20 “Fall Fair at Markham,” York Herald, October 15, 1869.
21 Inwood and Wagg, “The Survival of Handloom Weaving in Rural Canada Circa 1870.”
The transformation of readymade fabrics into homemade goods continued to represent values of economy and hard work. Women’s homemade clothing, quilts, and other pieces of household décor demonstrated that they embraced the advances of a market society that provided an increasingly wide variety of fabrics and sewing notions, but still encouraged traditional modes of household economy. Unlike weaving, which had significant input costs and decreasing market demand, sewing continued to be important for the creation and maintenance of family clothing. The purchase of cheap yarn allowed women to knit relatively inexpensive socks and sweaters, and readymade fabrics allowed them to sew low-cost clothing. Sewing and knitting could be done at home, even by those who were sick, weak, or supervising children. The sewing machine also became an affordable household purchase that alleviated “toiling with the needle,” which was said to be more destructive to women’s health than other household labours. The types of classes offered at fairs represented items that still held value for rural residents as marketable commodities, cost-saving articles, or treasured items.

Women’s domestic manufactures and fancywork were part of an inseparable message for how women should use their industry to enhance the respectability of their families, inspire their neighbours, and glorify their country. Laurel Ulrich Thatcher notes in *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* that a desire for refinement grew among rural families in the nineteenth century, and, at the same time that they responded to rhetoric for agricultural improvement, they also understood that “women might be both manufacturers and ladies.” Domestic manufactures provided function and comfort, fancy work conveyed a family’s taste and refinement, and both displayed beauty and utility. When these

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25 Ibid., 448-9.
items were brought together and displayed at fairs, reporters emphasized how they did credit to
women’s character. At the 1868 Albion Fair it was reported that

The display of ladies’ work was very creditable to the good taste and industry of
the blooming daughters and hearty matrons of Ontario’s Albion, and the other
productions of their facile and industrious hands displayed on the tables, gave
good evidence of their ability to furnish forth good cheer to all friends and visitors
at their hospitable homesteads.28

In 1865, the Eramosa Agricultural Society proclaimed the domestic manufactures exhibits
showcased “some exceedingly clever work in coverlets.”29 Before the 1870 Peel County
Fair, the agricultural society expressed its full confidence that “thanks to the nimble fingers
of the ladies,” which allowed them to excel in their work, the exhibits under their domain
would be a success.30 Reporters praised women who used their feminine skill to artistically
arrange and present home-crafted goods that showcased the “supremely comfortable and
neatly decorated homes which are the pride and glory of Canada, and credit to their
inmates.”31 At the 1881 Etobicoke Township Fair, women’s domestic manufactures and
fancywork were proudly acknowledged:

Etobicoke has always been celebrated for its domestic manufactures, and the
comfortable looking lamb’s wool socks and stockings and tastefully made shirts,
found many admirers. The articles which come under the general head of “ladies’
work” also gave evidence that the farmers’ daughters of Etobicoke are clever
needlewomen, and possessed of much taste.32

Commentators on women’s work emphasized women’s tastefulness and craftsmanship,
but the utility of homecrafts to create comfortable spaces remained essential. At the 1899 West
Elgin Fair, the ladies were praised for exhibiting articles that displayed elegant artistry, but were

28 “Albion Fall Fair,” Brampton Times, October 16, 1868.
30 “Peel County Fair,” Brampton Times, September 23, 1870.
31 Ibid.
also useful rather than simply ornamental.\textsuperscript{33} Men in agricultural societies appreciated the function and form of women’s exhibits because they too tried to achieve the same combination of traits in their show stock. They understood that in order to receive the best prices for their breeding animals they needed to combine “beauty and utility,”\textsuperscript{34} so they supported the idea that women’s work should be similarly balanced.

“Fancy work” was often the term given to items more elaborately decorated than simple domestic manufactures and more fancy than functional. This included things such as ornamental needle and lace work, crocheting, embroidering, beading and braiding work, as well as wire and wax flowers and arrangements made from moss or hair. Some items were strictly ornamental, while others were useful as well. Most types of fancy work did not appear in Ontario fair prize lists until the 1860s, and their presence signalled changes in the countryside more generally. By Confederation in 1867, Ontario’s economy was best described as an agricultural and artisanal economy rather than a commercial one, but that was changing.\textsuperscript{35} From the 1870s onward the industrial sector of the province grew significantly, especially industries linked to consumer goods.\textsuperscript{36} Despite cyclical downturns in the mid-1870s and early 1890s, Ontario’s economy generally experienced growth that was significantly accelerated by the 1900s.\textsuperscript{37} Rural families were enticed by a greater number of goods and services, and at the same time they were influenced by a Victorian middle-class culture of consumption.\textsuperscript{38} The things one owned had increasingly become important markers of identity, and the popularity of fancy work was a reflection of this.

\textsuperscript{33} “The West Elgin Fair,” \textit{Advance} [Dutton], September 18, 1899).
\textsuperscript{34} “Beauty and Utility Combined,” \textit{Farmer’s Advocate and Home Magazine} 34 (June 15, 1899): 350.
\textsuperscript{35} Drummond, \textit{Progress without Planning}, 6.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 107.
\textsuperscript{37} Baskerville, \textit{Sites of Power}, 159.
\textsuperscript{38} Bushman, \textit{The Refinement of America}, xviii.
Fancy work was often used to adorn household furniture and decorate rooms. As more home furnishings became affordable in the late nineteenth century, rural women could take advantage of investing in store-bought sofas and other furniture that increased the comfort of their homes, while still exhibiting thrift by decorating those pieces with homemade fancywork. David Handlin explains in his study of the American home that nineteenth-century women justified the purchase of home furnishings because a “handmade bedspread and pillowcase rendered a store-bought bed suitable to the values of economy. A display of flowers from the garden justified a table or even a piano.”39 Rural women’s desire to create fancywork signalled both their increased capacity to pursue more leisurely activities, especially among middling farm families and town and village residents, and their understanding that these items cultivated refinement and created tangible evidence of their middle-class status, while still allowing them to maintain their identities as efficient and thrifty housewives. By the Victorian period, the attainment, or at least the understanding, of beauty was a sign of respectability and progress that was important to anyone – rural or urban – who desired upward social mobility.40 Women found pleasure and economy in making knitted, crocheted, and other fancywork items, but they also found social recognition.41 The idea of being industrious and a lady was not contradictory in the minds of rural people.

Not everyone was happy about rural women’s consumer choices or leisurely pursuits. During the mid-nineteenth century, concerns had already been expressed in Upper Canada that farmer’s daughters were becoming “unproductive hands” in the household. In 1846, the British American Cultivator reprinted a lengthy cautionary tale that advised farmers to prepare their

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41 Minnie May, Minnie May’s Department, Farmer’s Advocate and Home Magazine 23 (October 1888): 318.
daughters for labour on the farm, not a leisured life that would limit both his and her prosperity. The author described a conversation he had with “one of the most respectable farmers in the country” who explained how he had done his utmost to educate his daughter – including in the creation of “fine needlework, embroidery, and drawings” – but was distressed because

In the loss of her mother she is my whole dependence, but instead of waiting upon me, I am obliged to hire a servant to wait upon her… I told her a few days since that my stockings were worn out, and that I had a good deal of wool in the chamber, which I wished she would card and spin. Her reply was, in a tone of unaffected surprise, “Why father, no young lady does that; and besides it is so much easier to send it to the mill and have it carded there.” – Well, I continued, you will knit the stockings if I get the wool spun? “Why, ne, father! Mother never taught me how to knit, because she said it would interfere with my lessons; and then, if I knew how, it would take a great deal of time, and be much cheaper to buy the stockings at the store.”

The author warned farmers not to create a distaste for labour among their daughters. He argued that even if domestic manufactures took time and could be purchased cheaply, “they who might produce it must be sustained at an equal expense, whether they work or are idle.” Rural newspapers often featured articles that suggested fathers should educate their girls to be “wives, mothers, heads of families, and useful members of society,” not “vain, thoughtless, dressy slattern[s].” Women were to embrace their duties in the countryside and not be “ashamed of honest industry,” or “temped by the appearance of a better dress, a broach or a bonnet.”

What is missed by such stories and rhetoric is the importance of fancywork as an artistic outlet for rural women. Decorative items were popular in rural households. The skilled creation of fancywork gave evidence of a woman’s “special refinement” and her ability to contribute to the respectability of the household. Rural women who valued their identities “as inhabitants of a

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42 “Education of Farmers’ Daughters,” British American Cultivator (March 1846): 89.
43 Ibid.
44 “Female Education,” Canadian Agriculturist 1 (January 1848): 27.
46 Schlereth, Victorian America, 120-21.
particularly female sphere” created fancywork as a way to distinguish themselves from men and other women who had neither the ability, nor perhaps the leisure time and desire, to highlight such skill. Furthermore, unlike cleaning or mending chores that were relegated to servants or children whenever possible, the fashioning of clothing and fine sewing were high-status tasks in the hierarchy of household chores and not generally viewed as drudgery. Typically, needlework, especially fancy needlework, required a level of skill and experience that meant female heads of household performed the task. This work was high on the status hierarchy of the household, therefore young women who learned these skills and exhibited them at fairs could be especially boastful.

Refined rural women appreciated the elegancies of life but recognized that they did not guarantee happiness; it was the “cheerful heart” that could “arrange the most discordant material into harmony and beauty.” In the same way that women organized their environment through ornamental gardening or displays of floral arrangements and food, fancywork gave women a measure of control. The disciplined application of the human mind allowed women to perform straight and even stitches, maintain an even tension when knitting, or implement the symmetrical design of a quilt, all of which brought order to their immediate environment. A woman’s ability to create, not just purchase, items of beauty gave her options when fashioning her domestic realm. Furthermore, just as she could alter her landscape with flower borders, she could alter her interior-scape with a crazy patch cushion, improving the view for all those who experienced it.

49 Jodey Nurse, “Reaching Rural Ontario: The County of Peel Agricultural Society and the Peel County Fall Fair, 1853-1883,” (MA thesis, University of Guelph, 2010), 69. A study of the 1871 Peel County Fair winners’ prize list reveals that across categories of women’s work, women were more likely to be married than not. Still, 28 percent of female exhibitors were single, a percentage that was six times greater than for men.
50 Minnie May, Minnie May’s Department, Farmer’s Advocate 12 (May 1877): 115.
In the 1870s and 1880s, interior design crusaders encouraged women to embellish their homes with their own handiwork as a means of connecting the decoration of homes to the proper moral growth and gentility of a family.\textsuperscript{51} In the 1880s, rural journals encouraged this movement by publishing instructions for fancywork, such as crocheted cotton tidies and knitted afghans.\textsuperscript{52} The home, however, had its limits as a medium for public expression. Fair exhibits, on the other hand, presented women with the opportunity to receive broader communal acknowledgement beyond friends and family. The introduction of this type of work at fairs signalled agricultural societies’ acceptance that items showcasing women’s taste, refinement, respectability, and skill were worthy of display and something all rural women should aspire to create. In fact, when women failed to display enough of their work at fairs, as was the case at the Harriston Fair in 1901, newspaper reporters chastised them for shirking their duty:

Last year there was a remarkable falling off in the number of exhibits in ladies work and other productions such as are usually found in the inside of the hall. We trust that our lady exhibitors will see that this does not occur again...\textsuperscript{53}

The individual merit of each item may have held little interest for male reporters who sometimes glossed over “the galaxy of human femininity” of women’s fancywork,\textsuperscript{54} but fancywork’s effect on the overall fair display was important to them. As previously discussed, agricultural societies pragmatically promoted women’s exhibits as a way to increase their attendance at fairs, but they also recognized that fancywork exhibits and other attractive displays elevated these events by demonstrating honest industry and style.


\textsuperscript{52} Minnie May, Minnie May’s Department, \textit{Farmer’s Advocate and Home Magazine} 21 (November 1886): 341.

\textsuperscript{53} “Peel Fall Exhibition,” \textit{Brampton Conservator}, August 1, 1879.

\textsuperscript{54} “Harriston Fall Show,” \textit{Mount Forest Confederate}, October, 9, 1902.
By the late nineteenth century most fairs had classes devoted to fancywork for a variety of sewn, knit, embroidered, crocheted, tatted, appliqued, or braided items. Even stuffed birds and animals, wax sculptures, and human hair work found a place in prize lists. The most popular of these items were various kinds of embroidered fabrics and lace work. Classes for embroidery generally did not specify the type of embroidery done, be that low, raised, or laid work, but it did indicate the type of material used, such as cotton or muslin, silk or satin, or cloth. At the 1889 Erin Fair, three embroidery classes were separated by the fabric used, not the style, and although the two lace work classes were specified, point lace and Honiton lace, most classes were vague in description [Appendix B, Table 5.2]. Specific categories of lace work allowed for creativity in design and appearance. Honiton lace was a very fine hand-made bobbin lace made fashionable by Queen Victoria’s Honiton lace wedding dress and ranked first among the English laces. Honiton lace was also considered simpler lace to make than French and Belgian lace designs, but the designs could vary considerably. Agricultural societies likely kept classes broad to encourage maximum participation and allow more individuality, even if it made judging more difficult.

The popularity of fancy needlework among female exhibitors illustrates how personalized items were important to rural women, but it also shows a commitment by some women to continue to make traditional handicrafts despite the availability of machine-made and imported items. Advocates of reviving the traditional art of making lace by hand argued that design was central. They claimed that the “charm of variety and the beauty of novelty can only be found in the work of skilled hands, guided by fanciful minds, and not in the productions of iron wheels set

It was hoped that women who engaged in the art of needlework learned from traditional work, but were also induced to “aim still higher, so that by exerting the fanciful and imaginative faculties so largely possessed by the refined of the fair sex, they may attain the same perfection in diversity and beauty of design.” Women were encouraged to take up needlework and other forms of art and craft as a means of preserving the past, and, more importantly, as a way to enlighten their spirit, refine their tastes, and innovate for future generations.

Fundamental to nineteenth-century femininity was the concept of taste. As previously discussed, taste represented women’s understanding of superior quality and elegant aesthetics. Some social reformers questioned if rural women, who had “a severe limit on their culture and accomplishments,” were capable of the delicacy and elegance of manners demanded of the broader feminine sex. Rural women, however, illustrated that taste was possible in the countryside, even if pretentious displays of wealth were rare. Rozsika Parker argues in her history of embroidery that taste became more about morality and spirituality than class standing by the eighteenth century, and that good taste was a regulating factor of women’s lives, conveyed by their actions, words, and creations. She contends that femininity was a social marker, and that “every footstool and screen and pair of slippers made a statement about the family’s social aspirations.” Historian Richard L. Bushman also notes that refinement was less about an artificial imposition than “a personal quality like courage or kindness, ingrained in

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58 Daisy Waterhouse Hawkins, Old Point Lace and How to Copy and Imitate It (London: Chatto and Windus, Piccadilly, 1878), 11.
60 Bushman, The Refinement of America, 326-7.
62 Ibid., 159.
one’s character and among the most admirable of the virtues.” He explains that social reformers promoted the idea that taste was not a property of class, but was possible for everyone. The pursuit of beauty, not wealth, allowed people of different backgrounds and stations in life to exhibit taste. Therefore, rural women’s labour did not preclude them from also displaying refinement. Rural women’s fancywork was a way to acknowledge their understanding of taste, as much as it was to display their aspiration or arrival to middle-class respectability.

Another important consideration is how the things women made reflected their roles as custodians in addition to creators. One example of women’s objects as “devices for building relationships and lineages over time” was the hairwork shown at fairs across Ontario in the late-Victorian period. Hairwork was a common class at fairs in the 1890s, but even in the 1860s some fairs promoted this work, and reporters commented on the beautiful specimens shown. Hairwork was usually composed entirely of the hair of loved ones, both living and deceased, and woven into wreaths, bouquets, wall decorations, and other keepsakes. Wreaths and bouquets fashioned into lifelike twigs and flowers were especially popular. While we might view these items as strange keepsakes, at the time they were treasured as memorials and remembrances of loved ones and beautiful objects that acted as mediums for personal expression. Figure 5.1 is a picture of a hair wreath that was made by a woman from the hair of fifteen family members to create “a lasting symbol of family unity.” Hairwork and other forms of decorative craft were most popular at fairs at the “height of the middle-class parlor as memory palace” during the

64 Ibid., 330.
66 “Nichol and Pilkington Union Show,” Guelph Mercury, October 11, 1866. Mrs. Walker was signalled out for her “beautiful specimen of hair work.”
1890s, when objects were used to create a ritual setting packed with meaning and symbolic associations.\(^6^9\) Parlor objects acted as shrines to a host of personal sentiments and connections. Ulrich argues that when individuals inscribed their names on material objects they “assured some sort of immortality.”\(^7^0\) A hair wreath went beyond an inscription and left behind a physical part of a person. Such an object was as inalienable and sentimental a possession as one could make, and women used hairwork to express solidarity, memorialize family, and create unity in their relationships.

![Figure 5.1](image-url) “Mrs. Hamlin’s Family History Wreath,” The Lost Art of Sentimental Hairwork, Victorian Gothic, entry posted on February 4, 2012, [http://www.victoriangothic.org/the-lost-art-of-sentimental-hairwork/](http://www.victoriangothic.org/the-lost-art-of-sentimental-hairwork/) (accessed April 22, 2015). This intricately woven bouquet was made entirely of human hair and at its centre was an index card with the names of fifteen people, included Mrs. Hamlin’s own. Described as a “conventional middle class lady,” Hamlin used the hair of family members to create “a lasting symbol of family unity.”

Fine art exhibits were added later in the nineteenth century at many fairs in the province. Artwork was considered another medium for displaying skill and taste. Agricultural journals, such as the *Farmer’s Advocate and Home Magazine*, published articles that instructed readers on

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\(^{7^0}\) Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun*, 117.
the art of painting, and the image of the female painter was used to represent the target audience of such instruction.\textsuperscript{71} Similar to fancywork, fine arts allowed rural women to illustrate their creativity and style through respectable and refined activity.

The importance of fine arts at World’s Fairs and other large national and international exhibitions has received significant attention by historians and art historians,\textsuperscript{72} but virtually no attempt has been made to consider this work at local agricultural fairs. Part of the reason for this might be that the fine art displayed at fairs was often considered of lesser quality and not worth serious attention. Indeed, even the art at large provincial exhibitions was not highly regarded. The \textit{Ontario Farmer} reported that at the 1869 provincial show in London, Ontario, “In the fine arts, there were specimens enough, such as they were, but many were mere daubs and blotches…”\textsuperscript{73} The following year the reporter gave a more generous assessment of the work, explaining that “progress and improvement were distinctly perceptible.” However, a general lowering of expectations was also expressed:

Even in the fine arts, where from year to year in the past there have been those deficiencies which might be reasonably looked for in a new country, and in regard to which perhaps too severe a style of criticism has been indulged in, there was this year very fewer daubs and gaudily coloured pieces, fewer old acquaintances familiar to the eye by successive appearances on such occasions; and a larger proportion of really meritorious new things, proving that we have a race of native artists who already do us no discredit...\textsuperscript{74}

At the Guelph Central Fair, the reporter covering fine arts weighed the successes and failures of both male and female artists, but he was generally more dismissive of female painters, simply noting that their work had been either “fairly” or “tolerably” painted.\textsuperscript{75} The most attention

\textsuperscript{71}“The Art of Water-Color Landscape Painting,” \textit{Farmer’s Advocate and Home Magazine} 21 (November 1886): 343.
\textsuperscript{72}See Weimann, \textit{The Fair Women}; Palm, “Women Muralists, Modern Women and Feminine Spaces”; and Corn, \textit{Women Building History}.
\textsuperscript{73}“The Arts’ Department at the Recent Provincial Show,” \textit{Ontario Farmer}, October 1869, 318.
\textsuperscript{74}“The Arts Department of the Recent Provincial Exhibition,” \textit{Ontario Farmer}, November 1870, 344.
\textsuperscript{75}“The Guelph Central Fair, Opening Day, Number of Entries,” \textit{Daily Globe} [Toronto], September 16, 1874.
he paid a female painter was when he criticized Nancy Strickland, a regular exhibitor who showed her work at fairs across the province, for her copy of a Myles Birkett Foster painting. Foster was an artist renowned for his picturesque depictions of English country landscapes and rural life.\textsuperscript{76} He noted that she had “rendered the colouring well, but in which, apparently from a too servile imitation of detail, there are evidences of a cramped execution.”\textsuperscript{77} These comments are illustrative of why women’s art was dismissed more broadly. Unlike the “professional” male artists that displayed their work, women’s art was considered “amateur,” an idea that was reinforced by women who exhibited copies of famous paintings. Still, even women who exhibited original artwork were not believed to have the skill of their male counterparts. Most of the male artists who exhibited at fairs had received some form of formal training and their art was how they made a living, but women generally did not have the advantage of formal training, and because their work was created in leisure, it was considered of little or no value.\textsuperscript{78}

Furthermore, along with male hobbyists, female artists were assumed to apply “a studious adherence to established conventions, a presumed lack of seriousness and an absence of innovation.”\textsuperscript{79} Women were also believed to engage in “art-making” because they saw it as a social accomplishment that ensured or enhanced their social position.\textsuperscript{80} It was therefore assumed that women who exhibited artwork did so to showcase good taste, respectable skills, and genteel sensibility, rather than any real desire to achieve artistic merit. Although the number of artwork classes differed at county and township fairs, agricultural societies showcased women’s artistic sensibilities despite the criticism they sometimes received because their art provided another opportunity to make a claim to rural refinement.

\textsuperscript{76} Frank Lewis, \textit{Myles Birkett Foster, 1825-1899} (Leigh-on-Sea, UK: F. Lewis, 1973).

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{78} Maria Tippett, \textit{By A Lady: Celebrating Three Centuries of Art by Canadian Women} (Toronto: Viking, 1992), 14.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 11.
Similar to art and fancywork, domestic manufactures could display originality and artistry that was praiseworthy. At the 1853 Erin Fair, women were admired for the “ingenuity” and “workmanship” necessary to craft beautiful quilts.\(^1\) Although quilts were a staple of home manufactures at the time, they still allowed women to show their inventiveness and resourcefulness by constructing intricate patterns and selecting appropriate colour schemes. The women who exhibited quilts at the 1865 Arthur Fair were praised for the nine handsome quilts shown, which “proved beyond question that the ladies of Arthur are possessed of considerable taste.”\(^2\) General patterns were common in many forms of handicraft, but women still had the opportunity to create unique pieces of work.\(^3\)

In the nineteenth century, the size and scale of women’s exhibits grew so that by the twentieth century domestic manufactures, fancywork, and fine arts were central fair features that promoted an array of handcrafted items. Despite some rhetoric about which items were useful and which were ornamental, generally the things women exhibited at fairs were said to possess a number of qualities, including their ability to encourage thrift and industry, convey beauty and taste, honour the past and foster solidarity, and allow rural women a public arena in which to display their individual artistry and talent.

“Ladies’ Work” and Arts and Crafts in the Twentieth Century

The number of classes at fairs for “Ladies’ Work” and other arts and crafts continued to increase in the twentieth century and the expansion of domestic manufactures was especially evident. Although women exhibited fewer homespun items, the importance of sewn items

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\(^1\) “Erin Agricultural Show,” *Guelph Advertiser*, November 3, 1853.

\(^2\) “Arthur Agricultural Society,” *Guelph Mercury*, October 5, 1865.

Despite the increased affordability and availability of ready-made clothing, most rural women did not turn whole-heartedly to department stores, mail-order catalogues, or even corner stores to buy ready-to-wear garments. The early twentieth century saw the expansion of rural women’s organizations, such as the WI, which encouraged domestic science instruction as a central part of rural women’s skillset and an example of their careful economy. Many women were relieved of the burden of making their husbands’ clothing, but cheaper fabric and the sewing machine were still used to make their own and their children’s clothing. Even in the postwar period rural women actively engaged in boosting family income or saving costs by producing value-added products. More than simply economizing, however, women in the twentieth century were also expected to be up-to-date on current fashions and consider new styles and fabrics when producing household clothing and other manufactures.

During the First World War, agricultural societies and local community groups altered the decor in exhibit halls by adding patriotic flags and displays, but little changed in terms of the types of classes offered. The same sewn and knit goods exhibited before the war continued to be shown, and generally more items were added to prize lists. Class changes usually reflected changes in fashion rather than shifts caused by wartime measures. The only detectable effect the war had on “Ladies’ Work” at the Egremont Fair was the retraction of a previously-enacted rule restricting exhibitors from showing anything other than items made in the previous two years. The agricultural society explained that “On account of so many ladies working for patriotic

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85 Strasser, *Never Done*, 126.

purposes, Ladies’ Work of any year may be shown.” Canadian women were engaged in supporting the war effort by raising funds, producing goods and foodstuffs, and taking on more unconventional work roles. Thousands of women mobilized and concentrated their efforts in groups such as the IODE, the Canadian Red Cross, Women’s Institutes, local women’s councils, and the YWCA to organize and coordinate war relief projects to raise funds for patriotic purposes. The WIs in Ontario raised an estimated 4 million dollars for the Red Cross, which included money raised to finance medical relief and transport, field kitchens, and knitted and sewn materials and apparel. Mrs. Walter Buchanan of Ravenna described women’s wartime knitting contributions in a poem published in the Farmer’s Advocate. Her poem concluded by encouraging soldiers to push on and think about the women supporting them back home:

On, Canadian soldier,
Bravely take your knocks;
Think of nimble fingers
Busy knitting socks

By the 1920s and 1930s, women’s and children’s clothing classes were the most popular. For example, at the 1925 Seaforth Fair in Huron County, the only class in the “Domestic Needle Craft” section specifically for men’s apparel was one for “Men’s sleeping garment, machine made,” while classes for women’s clothing included ones for aprons, house dresses, and slips, in addition to the larger category of classes for “Ladies’ Work,” which included six classes for “Ladies’ Wear” and six classes for “Infants’ Wear,” but no men’s wear [Appendix B, Table

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87 Egremont Agricultural Society Fall Fair Prize List, 1917, Ontario Fall Fair Catalogues, XA1 MS A073, University of Guelph Archival & Special Collections.
89 Federated Women’s Institutes of Ontario, Ontario Women’s Institute Story, 53.
91 Ibid.
The availability of cheaper ready-made men’s apparel meant that many women no longer manufactured most of their husbands’ clothing. Constructing garments was a laborious task, and even though more affordable fabric and better home-sewing machines encouraged women to continue to make some clothing for themselves and their children, women tended to buy men’s clothes.

The maintenance of domestic manufactures remained central to rural women’s organizations such as the Women’s Institutes, which were led by women who believed instruction in domestic sciences – both food and home manufactures – was necessary if rural families were to succeed. Social reformers such as Adelaide Hoodless argued that women’s proper management of the farm home and their ability to produce household goods reduced their need to purchase ready-made items, which benefited their pocketbooks. Farm journals regularly advertised patterns for women’s and girls’ dresses, nightgowns, and aprons, and even sewn toy animals. Although some cried out against a “pleasure-mad, luxury-chasing people” on “the path of wanton extravagance,” and insisted society needed a nation-wide campaign to return to “the highway of thrift and sensible living” after the rush of post-war indulgence, the reality was that many families continued to value economy and thrift.

The ability to fashion, alter, and mend one’s clothing was especially important during times of scarcity or depression. During the Great Depression, many fair classes remained the same, but new classes also materialized that promoted thrift, such as the Erin Fair’s 1934 class

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92 “Prize List, Seaforth Fall Fair, 1925,” Ontario Fall Fair Catalogues, XA1 MS A073, University of Guelph Archival & Special Collections.
93 Gal, “Grassroots Consumption,” 225-28; and Strasser, Never Done, 126.
94 Kechnie, Organizing Rural Women, 31-2.
97 van de Vorst, Making Ends Meet, 67.
for “Darning on worn sock.” At the 1934 West Elgin Fair in Wallacetown, classes included a
“Child’s Dress, made from old garment,” and an “Apron, made from flour sacks.” The North
Bruce and Saugeen Agricultural Society offered a whole section of classes dedicated to items of
thrift in 1934. The “Thrift Section” of the domestic manufactures department included
competitions for “Best Apron, made from flour or sugar sacks,” “Best Child’s Pantie Suit, made
from sacks,” “Table cover, made from sacks,” “Best Quilt, made from waste material,” and
“Collection of Six Articles for Kitchen Use, made from sacks.” These classes promoted
women’s ability to improve their families’ standard of living by controlling waste. Making do or
making over was an important way to economize. Men proudly reported on their wives’ ability
to reduce household expenditures, and research has shown that farm women’s pattern of self-
sufficiency prevailed at most family income levels, which illustrated a shared commitment to
these practices.

By the 1930s, “Ladies’ Work” committees also emphasized that they wanted new
articles, not previously shown items. They amalgamated the two sections of classes that had
allowed for new and old work into one section that required work to be made within the last year
or two. For example, at the 1930 Collingwood Township Fair, a rule specified that “Works of
Art and Ladies Works…may be exhibited for two years, after which time, the exhibit will be
ruled out. This rule will be strictly enforced.” Organizers also warned women that judges were
“authorized by the Directors of this Society to discard all soiled, defaced or old work and

98 Erin Fall Fair Prize List 1934,” Erin Agricultural Society fonds, A1989.97, Wellington County Museum and
Archives.
99 “Seventy-Fourth Annual Exhibition of the West Elgin Fair and Beef Cattle Show Prize List, 1934,” ECVF Box
48, File 39, Elgin County Archives.
100 “Prize List, North Bruce & Saugeen Agricultural Society Fall Fair to be held at Port Elgin, 1934,” Box 29, Bruce
County Archives.
101 Neth, Preserving the Family Farm, 31.
102 Ibid., 31-2.
103 1930 Prize List, Collingwood Township Agricultural Society,” Ontario Fall Fair Catalogues, XA1 MS A073,
University of Guelph Archival & Special Collections.
instructed to award the prizes to new and up-to-date work. In case of no competition, unless the exhibit is worthy, the prize will be withheld.” Fair organizers discouraged exhibitors from entering old or damaged entries because they believed they had a responsibility to promote the best and latest in domestic industry. The slogan, “New Styles; New Ideas, New Handwork” reflected the value placed on up-to-date exhibits that illustrated current trends and practices.\textsuperscript{104}

Women were expected to be knowledgeable about current fashions and consider new styles, fabrics and other “in vogue” materials if they wanted to receive first prize. It was no longer enough to exhibit tasteful and skillful items; women had to also illustrate that they engaged with the latest in products and design. For example, at the 1930 Collingwood Township Fair, a class for housedresses specified that entries should showcase a “smart new idea,” while those for boudoir jackets and caps were expected to present a “dainty new style.” Colour was also important. Women had to know what fashionable and appropriate colours were, especially in men’s wear classes, where work was to be “strictly new and appropriate Colors.”\textsuperscript{105} Part of women’s ability to display femininity was their understanding of masculinity. When making items for their husbands and sons, women were to respect the gendered styles and colours of clothing considered appropriate.

In the 1940s, women’s fair exhibits drew attention to their wartime efforts. The Women’s War Work Committee of the Canadian Red Cross organized to supply military forces and civilians with both the comforts and necessities of life.\textsuperscript{106} The Red Cross branches throughout Ontario coordinated their efforts and created a quota system to ensure that women were producing needed articles rather than unnecessary supplies.\textsuperscript{107} Traditional gender roles were

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{106} E. H. A. Watson, \textit{Ontario Red Cross, 1914-1946} (Canadian Red Cross Society, 1946), 32.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
upset in many cases during these years, but the renewed effort to supply men and civilians overseas with home-made goods emphasized women’s maternal and household duties, helping to “patch-up”, if not restore, traditional notions of womanhood.\footnote{108}{See Ruth Roach Pierson, “They’re Still Women After All”: The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986).}

Fairs served to help promote and display the wartime supplies and clothing women were making. The majority of classes remained the same as those offered previously, but in 1940 new ones emerged that represented women’s war efforts and patriotism. Convalescent jackets, knitted helmets, and sleeveless sweaters were all items needed for soldiers and created to display at fairs.\footnote{109}{“Erin Fall Fair Prize List, 1940,” Erin Agricultural Society collection, 1862-1987, A1989.97, Wellington County Museum and Archives.} At the Collingwood Township Fair a special class was offered for the “Best Collection of Red Cross Work by any Society,”\footnote{110}{“Collingwood Township Agricultural Society Fall Fair Prize List, 1940,” Ontario Fall Fair Catalogues, XA1 MS A073, University of Guelph Archival & Special Collections.} and a whole category of classes was created at Sombra Agricultural Society’s Fall Exhibition in Lambton County for the “The Red Cross Division.” Items included knitted goods and sewing for soldiers, airmen or sailors, including socks, mitts, scarves, sweaters, helmets, jackets, hospital gowns, pajamas, and bed jackets, and they were to be made according to Red Cross specifications and donated to the cause.\footnote{111}{“Sombra Agricultural Society, 1940 Prize List,” Ontario Fall Fair Catalogues, XA1 MS A073, University of Guelph Archival & Special Collections.}

By 1945, fairs across Ontario were committed to hosting classes to supply items to the Red Cross and other government relief agencies. At the Burford Fair in Brant County, the local Red Cross Society supplied exhibitors with the material needed to make items for the Red Cross Exhibit. The prize money and the items themselves went to the Red Cross, credited as a special donation from the exhibitors. The apparel made included socks (navy, service; grey, wheeling; and sea boot socks), scarves (Navy and Amy), sweaters (khaki, wheeling wool; heavy service wool), men’s pyjamas, navy gloves, mitts, a quilt, and refugee clothing (three articles: girl’s
pantie dress, boy’s suit, and boy’s pyjamas). By 1945, the Collingwood Township Fair expanded its war work classes and created nine classes for the “Patriotic Division of Domestic Needlecraft.” Again, items such as socks, scarves, mitts, turtle neck sweaters, helmets or caps, and gloves – all to be suitable for either Army, Navy, or Air Force servicemen – were promoted, as well as classes for a “box suitable for sending to member of the Armed Services Overseas” and a collection of articles made by any “Patriotic Society,” to include “Sewing for civilians, British, Russian, etc.; Quilts, Children’s dresses and bloomers; Dresses for girls; Knitted Clothing for Armed Services and Civilians; Layettes.” Additionally, the same special prize of a pair of blankets offered by Collingwood resident Max Faith since 1940 was offered to the winning entry for the “Best collection of Red Cross Work by any Society.”

Similar to the First World War, the Second World War required thousands of women to put their domestic skills to use to make innumerable knitted and sewn goods for soldiers and refugees. Fairs highlighted the work women did and promoted their campaigns.

Thrift remained a virtue for rural women in the period of prosperity that followed the Second World War, and the skills required to create, mend, knit, and crochet items for everyday use were encouraged. At the 1950 Arran-Tara Fair, 67 classes in “Ladies’ Work” displayed a range of sewn and knit items in categories such as “Children’s Wear,” “Ladies’ Wear,” “Men’s

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112 “Burford Fair Prize List, 1945,” Ontario Fall Fair Catalogues,XA1 MS A073, University of Guelph Archival & Special Collections. The Red Cross asked knitters to use Canadian wheeling wool specifically, and this was required in many fair prize lists; “Red Cross headquarters are asking that knitters realize the conditions overseas and that the coarse Canadian wheeling wool is what is wanted for men’s socks. It has been learned from officers overseas that the men’s socks do not last one really long day’s marching, when made with a soft wool. The coarse wheeling is what farmers and miners use and the conditions of their work approach nearly to those of active service. Headquarters officials draw to the attention of knitters that country women who buy, knit and wash their men’s socks, prefer this wool. It, like other wools issued, has been thoroughly tested.” “Wheeling Wool Is Best for War Socks,” Ottawa Citizen, February 29, 1940.

113 “Collingwood Township Agricultural Society Prize List, 1945,” Ontario Fall Fair Catalogues, XA1 MS A073, University of Guelph Archival & Special Collections.

Wear,” “Dining Room Furnishings,” “Bedroom Furnishings,” “Living Room Furnishings,” “Kitchen Accessories,” and “Miscellaneous.”¹¹⁵ Nine additional donor-sponsored special classes awarded prizes for items such as a child’s play dress or a woman’s sun dress. New categories and classes focused on women’s ability to decorate the home with a greater variety of needle and craftwork items, while more classes for leisure apparel signaled families’ increased ability to participate in recreational activities. Traditional classes also remained and continued to be promoted as reflecting rural skills and values. For example, Fleming Furniture in Owen Sound sponsored a homemaker’s special at the 1950 Arran-Tara Fair that consisted of an appliqué quilt, hooked rug, crocheted doily, pint of preserved peaches, and a basket of mixed flowers. This class emphasized how a resourceful and talented rural homemaker drew on a variety of skills to create a comfortable and happy home.

By the 1960s, most fairs had established a fairly consistent “Ladies’ Work” prize list that included classes for various home accessories and manufactures, infants and children’s wear, ladies’ wear, and some men’s apparel. Even though some agricultural societies reduced domestic manufactures classes slightly over the course of the decade, most of the classes remained the same and represented a broad range of useful things for the home and family [Appendix B, Table 5.4].¹¹⁶ The items rural women exhibited conveyed the idea that they still took pride in fashioning clothing and items of household décor, an idea supported by studies on rural women’s home production. The report of a 1979 study by the Council on Rural Development Canada indicated that 60 percent of rural women surveyed produced household clothing for their

¹¹⁵ “Prize List of the Arran-Tara Agricultural Society Fall Fair, 1950,” Arran-Tara Fall Fair Booklets, A959.034.001, Bruce County Archives.
families. Agricultural magazines also featured articles on homemade clothing, including trendier items such as knit and crocheted ponchos. Whether women were making traditional items, such as a man’s shirt, or new ones, such as a barbecue apron embellished with liquid embroidery trim, they used their skill and industry to make useful items that they showcased at fairs. Gail Bartlett, a long-time member of the Binbrook Agricultural Society and past-president of the homecrafts division, recalled:

I used to make all my daughters’ dresses, so they were entered in the fair, and most the time they won first prize, and when they went to school the next day after the fair they wore the dresses and they were so proud because they had the ribbon. They took their ribbon to school to show everybody.

Rural women and their families were proud they maintained practices of self-sufficiency and traditional rural skills, but they also valued their modernity and kept abreast of new crafts and fashions.

Fancywork and fine arts remained popular fair exhibits in the twentieth century as well, but they underwent changes that reflected new technology and aesthetic standards. The arts and crafts movement in Canada that began in the late 1890s was primarily led by women who believed the best in arts and crafts needed to be promoted to preserve their heritage and advance the craft. The promotion of craft work across Canada by various organizations meant that more women created embroidered goods, lace work, crocheted dollies, and other decorative work than ever before. Beginning in the 1900s, changes to home design called for a refashioning of the formal, eclectic Victorian-styled parlor into a family room that was more

117 Council on Rural Development Canada, Rural Women, 87.
120 Interview with author, Gail Bartlett, August 19, 2014.
122 Ibid., 297.
functional and inviting for everyday use, but many forms of fancywork continued to be popular because they were compatible with modern design.\textsuperscript{123} Some items, such as hair wreaths, wax fruit, stuffed birds and animals, and paintings on muslin, no longer reflected the aesthetic of the modern times, and were dropped from most fair prize lists by the 1910s, although stuffed birds managed to remain on the prize lists until the 1920s.\textsuperscript{124} Item such as crocheted tablecloths, lace-trimmed pillow cases, and embroidered towels continued to be made, however, because they had beauty and served modern functions [Figure 5.2].\textsuperscript{125} Even during the Second World War, when the 1943 OAAS Women’s President, Miss Lillian M. Rutherford, advised female delegates, “Let us be patriotic and leave fine needlework off lists for the duration,”\textsuperscript{126} women continued to show fancywork.

\textsuperscript{123} Grier, “The Decline of the Memory Palace,” 68-9.
\textsuperscript{124} “Erin Fair Was Best In Years,” Erin Advocate, October 16, 1924; and “Average Crowd Attended Erin Fair Despite Inclement Weather,” Erin Advocate, October 15, 1925.
\textsuperscript{125} Handlin, The American Home, 446-8.
\textsuperscript{126} Miss Lillian M. Rutherford, “Address of President,” in Ontario Department of Agriculture, Forty-Third Annual Report of the Agricultural Societies and the Convention of the Association of Agricultural Societies for 1943... (Toronto: T. E. Bowman, Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1943), 21.
The stylish, modern attire worn by Holmes suggests that women who cared about contemporary fashions did not consider fancywork to be anti-modern, but rather, a compatible element of fashionable décor.

Fancywork was a popular exhibit that offered a way for rural women to maintain traditional skills and create connections with their past. Figure 5.3 is a photograph taken at the 1955 Waterdown Fair of four women surveying fancywork. The caption read: “Looking at the needlework display at the Waterdown Fair this week these ladies decide that women still have time to express their creative urge in intricate stitches and patterns as their grandmothers did.”

This description reveals two ideas: first, that women continued to value fancywork as an outlet

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for their creativity and artistry; and second, that the creation of fancywork was an activity that connected women with their mothers, grandmothers, and other female relations. Although rural women followed contemporary ideas about fashion and aesthetics, they also continued to make traditional items if those things represented important skills, ideas, or connections. Various forms of fancywork continued to be made, and some craftwork that had gone out of fashion saw a revival in the postwar years.\textsuperscript{128}

\textbf{Figure 5.3} Hamilton Spectator, “Waterdown Fair,” 1955, Local History & Archives, 32022191097548, Hamilton Public Library. Caption: “Looking at the needlework display at the Waterdown Fair this week these ladies decide that women still have time to express their creative urge in intricate stitches and patterns as their grandmothers did. From left are; Mrs. Lewis Binkley, Carlisle; Mrs. Gordon Ofield, RR 2, Dundas; Mrs. Charles Cook, Waterdown; Mrs. Charles Harper, Carlisle.”

Similar to the nineteenth century, most art classes in the first half of the twentieth century were for oil and water colour paintings, as well as pencil, crayon, and ink sketches. The subject matter also continued to be mostly landscapes, portraits, flowers, fruit and vegetables, animals,

and local landmarks or scenery [Figure 5.4]. In the post-war period, attempts to engage with more popular styles of painting were also evidenced. Although not a new form of art, abstract painting was certainly more common on fair prize lists by the 1970s. At the 1974 Erin Fair a class was added for this style of art (granted so too were pictures depicting pioneer scenes). The judges of artwork tended to be the same women engaged to judge other craft and handiwork, and in much the same way that previous artwork was dismissed at fairs, the art shown in the postwar period was not perceived as having great artistic merit because it was generally the work of amateurs rather than professionals. Reporters expressed an appreciation of the local talent, but few detailed accounts of the artwork were given.

One significant change in the art department was the expansion of amateur photography. Photography classes had existed in the nineteenth century, but mostly only professional
photographers competed. By the 1930s, however, most fairs had added some classes for Kodak pictures to their prize lists, and the number of amateur photography classes expanded significantly in the postwar years. The growth of photography illustrates the accessibility and popularity of the technology. The Kodak film camera and its subsequent mass-production allowed more amateurs to participate. Kodak cameras were advertised to farmers as a way to keep a photographic record of the improvements they made to their farms, and they were told that “In every phase of farm work and farm life there are pictures that are interesting and valuable. And you can make them” [Figure 5.5]. It was also reported that more women were becoming successful professional photographers, while others “had a fancy for the Kodak as an amusement.” Some women purportedly confined their talents to photographing children and weddings because these scenes were suitably related to women’s domesticity and femininity.

129 “Peel Fall Fair! Another Grand Success!” Brampton Times, October 6, 1871. J. W. Cole, the local Brampton photographer, was the only competitor in the 1871 classes for “Collection of ambrotypes” and “Photographs.” Ambrotypes were a particular type of collodion positive, in which Canadian balsam was used to seal the collodion plate to the cover glass. This process was patented by American photographer James Ambrose Cutting in 1854 and commonly used in North America until the 1880s. Colin Harding, “How to Spot a Collodion Positive, Also Known as an Ambrotype (early 1850s-1880s),” National Media Museum, entry posted April 24, 2013, http://blog.nationalmediamuseum.org.uk/find-out-when-a-photo-was-taken-identify-collodion-positive-ambrotype/ (accessed June 21, 2016).
131 Minnie May, Minnie May’s Department, Farmer’s Advocate and Home Magazine 34 (October 16, 1899): 586.
Another important shift in the postwar period was the merging of fine art, fancywork, and other crafts into an “Arts and Crafts” department [Appendix B, Table 5.5]. This title change is significant, especially when individual classes are considered. Quilt classes at the Erin Fair, for example, were once part of the domestic manufactures competition. By the 1950s quilts were exhibited in the fancywork competition, elevated from home manufactures, and by the 1970s they were deemed pieces of art and craftwork. Once women had considered quilts beautiful, but routine and functional, products of the rural household. Now they were art; a traditional craft made by a select number of women with specialized skills. Quilts had always represented a combination of usefulness and ornamentation that a lot of women’s exhibits symbolized. When
crazy quilts were popular in the 1890s, newspaper reports commented on how they made a particularly brilliant display at fairs.\textsuperscript{132} Women used fabric scraps to make quilts, which highlighted their thrift, but this fabric was beautifully pieced together in a way that evidenced their taste.\textsuperscript{133} The artistry required for quilting was recognized, as it had previously been, but now fewer women were taking up the practice and it became a specialized skill rather than a domestic necessity. Antique quilts were also beginning to be considered valuable artifacts of economic and social history in Ontario, and their display in art galleries and museums spoke both to their meaningful history, and to the artistic value they held.\textsuperscript{134} In 1967, agricultural societies offered classes for heirloom quilts as a way to commemorate Canada’s Centennial.\textsuperscript{135} Women exhibited quilts at the fairs, not as common home manufactured, but as an attempt to preserve an art form they loved. Although fewer women were making quilts by the 1970s, they were still a cherished part of rural society’s past, and thus identity, and they continued to hold significant meaning for rural women in particular.

Craftwork continued to allow women to personalize their homes in a way that displayed positive ideas about thrift and skill. \textit{Country Guide: The Farm Magazine} provided a section for “Country Living” that catered towards the interests of rural women. In 1979, these articles included recipes, craftwork instructions, fashion notes, and individual profiles of interesting women. A “Country Crafts” section was a regular feature that provided women with instructions on how to make things such as knit, crocheted, sewn, and hooked cushion covers and table mats.

\textsuperscript{133} “Eramosa Show,” \textit{Guelph Mercury}, October 10, 1889.
\textsuperscript{134} Catharine Anne Wilson, “Shaking Out the Quilt and Quilting Bee: Ontario Farm Diaries and the Dynamics of Household and Neighbourhood Production,” paper presented at The Local is Global: Gender and Rural Connections across Time and Place, Rural Women's Studies Association Triennial Conference, San Marcos, Texas, United States of America, February 19-21, 2015.
\textsuperscript{135} Tessier, \textit{Spencerville Fair}, 243.
or embroidered pictures.\textsuperscript{136} Craftwork continued to be important to rural women who enjoyed using their needlework skills to personalize their home. Most of the fancywork was traditional forms of stitched, knit, tatted, and crocheted household goods, but some women looked to use their art to replicate other art forms. For instance, Mrs. George Davis was congratulated for her “outstanding” entry at the 1960 Erin Fair when she won first prize for a filet-crocheted wall panel of the Last Supper.\textsuperscript{137}

Despite some changes, however, the central qualities of women’s work remained largely unaffected. Some items were added over the years, and others removed. And while not every item entered for competition reached the ideal standards of taste, artistry, and skill desired by organizers, women’s exhibits still symbolized women’s desire to learn and improve. Most of the items women exhibited were things that could have been purchased, but by choosing to create their own and display them publicly, women affirmed their appreciation for the personalized objects, required skills, and associated characteristics they represented.

The Legacy of Women’s Work:

Perhaps there is no greater testament to the meaning of women’s handiwork than the way in which it was saved and cherished long after the women themselves were gone. The examples of women’s exhibits that have been meticulously cared for, not only by the women themselves, but by their family members, reveal their significant worth. Two such items include a pair of finely knitted fancy children’s socks and a woman’s cream-coloured wool flannel nightgown with embroidered trim. Both were made around the turn of the twentieth century by Sarah


Wheeler Jackson and donated to the Wellington County Museum by her granddaughter [Figures 5.6 and 5.7].\textsuperscript{138} Sarah Jackson was born to an established family in Erin Township in 1856, and she married her husband David Jackson in 1872 at the age of 16.\textsuperscript{139} The Jacksons were farmers and active participants at the Erin Fair; Sarah herself is said to have shown her handiwork and cookery there for over 57 years.\textsuperscript{140} The quality of Sarah’s work is obvious. The fine knitting of the socks and the homemade eyelet embroidery in satin stitch with scalloped edge on the nightgown illustrate the skill she possessed. The nightgown was stitched with a sewing machine, while the embroidery is believed to be handmade.\textsuperscript{141} The use of purchased fabric and yarn, machine stitching, and handsewn embroidery and knitting testify to the ways in which rural women consumed and produced in order to clothe their families and furnish and decorate their homes. Both items show no sign of wear, and the care with which they were crafted and maintained suggests both pride in their creation, and strong sentiment to the meaning behind them. Indeed, as Kathleen Cairns and Eliane Leslau Silverman suggest in their work \textit{Treasures: The Stories Women Tell about the Things They Keep}, material possessions are often kept as a reflection of self-identity, hold rich biographical meanings, and help women to tell the stories of their lives.\textsuperscript{142} For Jackson, her socks and nightgown symbolized her economy and skill, but the fine knitting she used to construct the socks and the use of embroidery on the trim of the nightgown illustrate how Jackson also wished to display taste and refinement. These items embodied her understanding of what beautiful and useful objects could be.


\textsuperscript{139} Registrations of Marriages, Series MS932-8; Reel 8, Archives of Ontario.


\textsuperscript{141} Museum staff believe that the embroidered trim on the flannel nightgown is homemade.

\textsuperscript{142} Kathleen Cairns and Eliane Leslau Silverman, \textit{Treasures: The Stories Women Tell about the Things They Keep} (Alberta: University of Calgary Press, 2004), xii-xiii.
[Figure 5.6] Sarah Jane (Wheeler) Jackson, “Sock,” circa 1900, 2004.14.5.02, Wellington County Museum and Archives. Photograph by author.
[Figure 5.7] Sarah Jane (Wheeler) Jackson, “Nightgown,” circa 1900, 1954.97.1, Wellington County Museum and Archives. Photograph by author.
The ability to fashion clothing was passed down from Sarah to her daughter Clara, who, like her mother, left behind evidence of the family tradition of exhibiting at fairs in the form of a blue cotton men’s work shirt with white stitching [Figure 5.8]. The work shirt was made in 1925 and shown at the Erin and Acton Fairs that year. Clara Jackson Robertson was married in 1896 at the age of 19 to George Gray Robertson, a 25-year-old blacksmith. A regular exhibitor, Clara was an accomplished seamstress and quilter who won many prizes at fairs for her quilts and clothing, as well as baking and fancywork. This particular shirt was exhibited but never worn, and kept as a treasured item. The care taken for the shirt is evident; donated to the Wellington County Museum and Archives by her daughter-in-law, the 91-year-old machine-stitched shirt looks as if it was fashioned yesterday. For Clara, the homemade shirt represented a number of things. As a seamstress, sewing was a marketable skill, and the shirt illustrated her proficiency in this line of work. By exhibiting the shirt at fairs, Clara demonstrated the value she placed on presenting her work for public consumption, and her desire to maintain the family tradition of participating at these events. The maintenance and treasuring of this everyday item suggest a pride of ownership and recognition of personal skill and ability.

143 Archives of Ontario; Series: MS932; Reel: 91.
Fanny Colwill Calvert was also proud of the fancywork she made and kept safe over the years. Calvert immigrated to Canada from England in 1890 and settled in Guelph two years later. After a second marriage that failed, Calvert pursued her own career, becoming an active
businesswoman in the community by managing rental homes and owning a shop that sold drapery and milling supplies.\textsuperscript{145} Despite her business success, Calvert still made time for artistic endeavours, and the oil paintings, wood carvings, sculptures, and craftwork she left behind are proof of her commitment and ability. Calvert was especially interested in ornamental needlework. She exhibited Battenberg lace, tatting, crotchet edgings, and Irish crotchet at fairs such as Galt, Fergus, Elmira, Barrie, and many others. It was reported that she received numerous first prizes for her work, and that she used the prize money she earned to pay her taxes.\textsuperscript{146} In 1914, she entered 30 items of art and fancywork at the Caledonia Fair alone that year.\textsuperscript{147} The more than 50 samples of crochet and lace work donated to the University of Guelph Archives and Special Collections display a strong attention to detail, intricacy, and precision [Figure 5.9]. While the monetary rewards Calvert received were clearly incentives to exhibit, the significant time Calvert took to make and exhibit these items and their preservation over time suggests both personal and subsequently familial affection for these objects.


\textsuperscript{146} The specific amount and type of taxes paid was not recorded. Providence description for “Handiworked laces of Fanny Calvert, 68 Queen St., Guelph, 1902-1910,” Regional History Collection, X1R MS A 743, University of Guelph Archival & Special Collections.

\textsuperscript{147} [Untitled documents], Fanny Colwill Calvert files, MacDonald Stewart Art Centre, UG 997.006.001 – UG 997.006.006.
Other material objects passed down in families that connected women to fairs were not items they had entered for competition, but rather things they created with the awards they and their families received. For example, women sometimes made quilts out of fair ribbons. Beyond prize money, agricultural societies awarded other items that encouraged exhibitors to participate, including useful material goods or trophies and plaques. Ribbons, however, were the most common objects awarded in addition to premiums. For agricultural societies, ribbons were relatively inexpensive to buy, but they were highly visible symbols of accomplishment that marked an individual’s success in a designated pursuit. The problem with ribbons, however, was that they had little utility beyond their representation of achievement. Sometimes, however,
women refashioned and repurposed fair ribbons into quilt pieces that, when sewn together, created a family heirloom that honoured a family’s achievements, history, identity, and community ties.

Scholars have argued that quilts created bonds among female relatives because the act of quilting involved a transfer of skill from mothers to daughters or other female relatives that reaffirmed family ties and female connectedness. Fair ribbon quilts also, however, demonstrate that women could use quilts to connect with their male kin. For example, Bernice, Irene, and Edna Rudd used the ribbons won by their father, William James Rudd, to construct a unique quilt that showcased Rudd’s success at livestock competitions at regional, national, and international fairs between 1891 and 1901 [Figure 5.10].

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148 Marjorie Kaethler and Susan D. Shantz, Quilts of Waterloo County: A Sampling (Waterloo: Marjorie Kaethler, 1990), 11; and Marilyn I. Walker, Ontario’s Heritage Quilts (Toronto: Stoddart, 1992), 44.
[Figure 5.10] Bernice, Irene, and Edna Rudd, “Quilt, Commemorative,” circa 1901, 2000.26.1, Wellington County Museum and Archives.
The Rudds farmed in Eramosa Township, Wellington County, and bred prize-winning North Devon cattle.\textsuperscript{149} William Rudd’s youngest daughters, Bernice, Irene, and Edna, selected from the many ribbons he had won at prestigious cattle shows to create a quilt that represented his and his family’s achievements.\textsuperscript{150} The unique design of the quilt reflected the various shapes, lengths, and colours of the silk ribbons. Rather than the smaller ribbons that were typically distributed at township and county fall fairs, the larger regional and international fairs offered large silk ribbons or banners that were impressive because of their scale and quality. Their visibility, and the high level of competition they represented, undoubtedly amplified pride of ownership.\textsuperscript{151} The number of ribbons they won and top finishes they achieved show the success of the Rudd livestock. At the time the quilt is thought to have been made, Bernice was 20 years old, Irene was 14 years old, and Edna was 12 years old. Their father was 56 years of age.\textsuperscript{152} Bernice was the oldest and likely the most experienced quilter who facilitated the creation of the quilt, aided by her younger sisters.

Similar to other groups of women who constructed quilts, the Rudd sisters likely worked together to craft their identities as talented needle workers and arbiters of rural respectability and taste. But this quilt meant more than a chance to forge sisterhood and learn valuable skills; it also

\textsuperscript{149} Historical Atlas of the County of Wellington, Ontario, Compiled, Drawn and Published from Personal Examinations and Surveys (Toronto: Historical Atlas Publishing Co., 1906), 59.

\textsuperscript{150} Historical Atlas of the County of Wellington, Ontario, 59; Archives of Ontario; Series: MS932; Reel: 103; Archives of Ontario; Series: MS932; Reel: 120; Year: 1901; Census Place: Eramosa, Wellington (south/sud), Ontario; Page: 3; Family No: 19. William’s sons Ralph and Cleveland helped show at the fairs, especially in the years leading up to the turn of the century. In 1900, William’s oldest son Ralph married Sarah Emma Wilson on March 22 and moved to his own farm near Arkell. Cleveland, William’s second eldest son, married Mary Ethel McFarlane on June 21, 1905 and became the farm manager for his father’s large operation. While his oldest daughter Ida had already married and left the farm, his younger daughters Bernice, Irene, and Edna remained home along with his youngest son George.

\textsuperscript{151} The prize ribbons used for the quilt were won at such prestigious shows as Provincial Fat Stock Show (later renamed the Provincial Fat Stock and Dairy Show), the Ontario Provincial Winter Fair held in Guelph, the Toronto Industrial Exhibition, and the Pan-American Exposition held in Buffalo, New York. This appears to have been only a portion of the ribbons William was awarded over the years because he also reportedly exhibited in Chicago, Quebec City, Montreal, Ottawa, and Kingston. Historical Atlas of the County of Wellington, Ontario, 59.

\textsuperscript{152} Year: 1901; Census Place: Eramosa, Wellington (south/sud), Ontario; Page: 3; Family No: 19.
signified the girls’ interest and pride in their father’s and family’s achievements. While it is
difficult to know if the young women were involved in the family cattle business, they cared
enough about it to put in the time and effort needed to sew together an object that memorialized
their family’s success in the cattle industry.

The Rudd family fair ribbon quilt was made from prize ribbons, but not all ribbons
distributed at fairs denoted winning exhibitors. Fair ribbons were also used on the fairgrounds to
distinguish agricultural society members, fair directors, and judges. Designatory ribbons
conveyed an individual’s position or contribution to a community organization or event, and thus
symbolized their civic engagement and public influence.

Elizabeth Ann Donaldson used various designatory ribbons from a variety of
organizations and events in her region to create a beautifully constructed crazy quilt in the early
twentieth century [Figure 5.11]. Similar to the Rudd family quilt that tied together the
accomplishments of kin, Donaldson’s quilt honoured past accomplishments, displayed values
and identity, and connected the skill and interests of male and female family members.
Donaldson’s crazy quilt consisted of a variety of ribbons from community events and
organizations, as well as other materials, including scraps of silks, satins, and velvets of various
textures, colours, and patterns. Donaldson stitched hundreds of patches of fabric by hand into
eight 26-centimeter squared blocks, which were machine sewn together in four rows of four and
backed with fabric printed with chrysanthemums and forsythia on a light green background. She
embroidered each block by hand in a variation of stitches and added embroidered motifs, many
of which depicted flowers.153

153 Crazy quilts appealed to many skilled needle workers because the irregular-shaped scraps of fabric allowed
women to incorporate remnant and used material more easily, while also showcasing a variety of embroidery
stitches and embellishments. Elizabeth Donaldson’s skilled needlework was evident by the brightly coloured thread,
which highlighted each stitch made. Embroidery was a talent that was expected of all “refined” ladies, and no doubt
Elizabeth enjoyed the opportunity to showcase her considerable skill. For more on the skill required for crazy quilting, see Walker, *Ontario’s Heritage Quilts*, 63.
Donaldson’s quilt reflected her situation in life. At 32 years of age she married William Donaldson, who was ten years her senior and kept a general store and post office in Hillsburg. She and William never had any children. Elizabeth’s circumstances likely gave her the time for additional leisure activities and the access to an array of sewing supplies, fabrics, and patterns. The quilt itself was a token of Elizabeth’s creativity, talent, and interests, but it also honoured her husband by incorporating the seven various designatory ribbons used to signify his civic involvement, including his position as judge at the Luther Agricultural Society Fair (a township fair that no longer exists, but was originally located in Wellington North), and his directorship in the Erin Agricultural Society for 1896 and 1897 [Figure 5.12].

154 Providence description for “Quilt, Crazy,” 1910-1920, made by Elizabeth Ann (Huxley) Donaldson, 1977.37.1, Wellington County Museum and Archives; and Year: 1891; Census Place: Erin, Wellington South, Ontario; Roll: T-6377; Family No: 182; Year: 1901; Census Place: Erin, Wellington (south/sud), Ontario; Page: 9; Family No: 96; Year: 1911; Census Place: 11 - Erin Township, Hillsburg Police Village, Wellington South, Ontario; Page: 3; Family No: 29; Reference Number: RG 31; Folder Number: 97; Census Place: Erin (Township), Wellington South, Ontario; Page Number: 22.

155 The quilt also included two souvenir ribbons for Queen Victoria’s birthday celebrations in 1898, a member’s ribbon for the Georgetown Driving Park in 1891, a Hillsburg Turf Association Dominion Day Celebration ribbon for 1894, and an Elora Citizen’s Demonstration guest ribbon, dated August 6, 1894.
Crazy quilts that used silk and other fine materials were often made to be displayed and treasured, rather than for everyday use. Elizabeth’s quilt is a perfect example of how quilts were a powerful visual medium that communicated more than just a pleasant image. Anyone who saw this quilt would have admired its design and creativity, but one would also have observed how it clearly conveyed the Donaldsons’ dedication to local agricultural societies, and therefore commitment to and standing in their community. Janet Floyd argues that in the nineteenth-century “quilts began to be used as important props in the increasingly elaborate staging of particular life events and friendship groups.”¹⁵⁶ For Elizabeth, her crazy quilt positioned her and her husband among the rural reformers who believed that agricultural societies and fairs were necessary for the betterment of the community. The additional designatory ribbons she used from

local voluntary groups and civic events further highlighted the Donaldsons’ general conviction that residents should support their communities, big and small.

Fair ribbon quilts could also be very personal, especially when they were made from the ribbons women won themselves. One such quilt was made by Christena Nelena (McMillan) Neal, known as Lena, from ribbons she reportedly won at the Wellington County Fair in Fergus [Figure 5.13]. Lena was a life member of the Northgate Women’s Institute, which may have influenced her desire to compete and display her domestic skill. She was born in 1898, and she married her husband, Leslie Howard Neal, in 1923. They lived on a farm in Arthur Township and had eight children between 1925 and 1938.157

[Figure 5.13] Christena Nelena (McMillan) Neal, “Quilt,” circa 1950-60, 2010.36.1., Wellington County Museum and Archives.
As with Donaldson’s crazy quilt, Neal’s displays a variety of colours, textures, and fabrics, but her quilt is less skillfully constructed [Figure 5.14]. The design is pleasing but on closer inspection the stitching is uneven and the fabric pieces haphazardly cut. No attempt at embroidery was made. Neal used seven third-place ribbons, four fourth-place ribbons, and one unspecified sweepstake ribbon in her design; it appears first- and second-place prizes eluded her. It is unclear what classes the ribbons represent and when they were won, and the quilt’s construction suggests Lena was only an occasional sewer. Still, the quilt remains in good condition, and the time and care taken to fashion the quilt, and the pride she revealed in the awards she had won, should not be ignored.

[Figure 5.14] Christena Nelena (McMillan) Neal, “Quilt,” circa 1950-60, 2010.36.1., Wellington County Museum and Archives.

In her material cultural study of clothing and the aesthetics of self, Sophie Woodward argues that by understanding how women assemble an outfit, for example, one can better
understand “the complex construction of surface” that takes place. Clothing, she argues, is “part of the multifaceted surface, being the site where the self is constituted through both its internal and external relationships.” Quilts, like clothing, mediated the relationship between an individual and the outside world. Individual expressions of creativity, taste, and skill were combined with external considerations such as the patterns, technology, and materials available to make a quilt. In addition to representing material goods, Lena’s quilt acted as a medium to express broader ideas she had about worthwhile pursuits and what she believed acted as markers of personal success. Although Lena did not receive first prize, the ribbons she won at the Wellington County Fair still had significant meaning for her, enough that she took the time to create an object that would forever honour and bear witness to her accomplishments and interests.

Finally, perhaps there is no greater example of the importance women’s exhibits had for their creators than the recognition this work received in their obituaries, the document that signified how they would be remembered. The obituary for Nancy Strickland, the painter who was criticized for the “too servile imitation of detail” in her work, illustrates how the recognition she obtained at fairs clearly outweighed any criticism. Strickland was a long-time exhibitor of ladies’ work and fine art at township, county, provincial, and world fairs, and her obituary in 1886 revealed the significant place her art had in her life. After describing her years as a school teacher, the notice went on to express that

Her inclinations, however, soon led her to devote her talents to other work than teaching. She had a rare gift for fancy needlework, for painting and drawing and in these she acquired great proficiency. Her skill to these things [sic] was well known throughout this country, as many diplomas and medals testify. She also

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enjoyed the distinction of receiving diplomas and medals abroad, both from the Centennial at Philadelphia, in 1876, and from the Paris Exposition in 1878. The author of the obituary went on to acknowledge Strickland as a strong Christian, a clever and good woman who led a beautiful life, and a woman of “excellent judgment combined with force of character,” but it is still clear that her identity as an artist and exhibitor were central to her and those around her. Strickland’s death was reported across the province, and the notices emphasized this identity. The Huron Expositor announced that “Miss Nancy Strickland, of Oshawa, who has for years secured the lion’s share of prizes for the ladies’ and other work at the Provincial, Western and other fairs, died recently from the effects of a tumour.” The daughter of an immigrant farmer who had come to Ontario from England with his wife and four daughters, Strickland would ultimately remain single throughout her life, becoming the primary caregiver for her parents. For a woman who clearly devoted so much of her life to others, the individual achievement she found at fairs was undoubtedly a source of pride, self-expression, and articulation of her artistry.

Conclusion

By displaying their domestic manufactures, fancywork, and fine arts at fairs, women also displayed characteristics such as careful economy, hard work, and refinement. Moreover, their exhibits’ ability to blur “the distinction between self and object” meant that each creation was a deeply personal one. The women I interviewed who exhibited at fairs explained how they

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161 Ibid.
162 “Canada,” Huron Expositor, March 26, 1886.
163 Census of 1851 (Canada East, Canada West, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia). Ottawa, Canada. Place: Whitby, Ontario County, Canada West (Ontario); Schedule: A; Roll: C_11742; Page: 21; Line: 17, Library and Archives Canada.
became “hooked” on showing their work because of the joy it instilled. Gail Bartlett recalled how she was introduced to fair competition and the effect it had:

I thought [fairs were] just selling. Everybody selling their goods and their vegetables, and maybe like a bazaar. It was a shock to see all these prize ribbons and people entering and winning. And the next year the neighbour said, “well you sew, come on, you enter,” so I did enter and I had several firsts…I’ve been hooked ever since to the fair.165

Gail went on to explain that she believed women who exhibited did so because “it’s just in our blood.” Gail was proud of her work and the many awards she won over the years. She explained she sewed every day, and it was important to her that she showed this work to others: “I really like showing what I can make. I’m not out there to say I’m out to win this year, but I like to exhibit…I just love to show and see what other people put in the fair.”166 For fair women, the items they made and won were important to them, and many times these objects had lasting legacies for their families as well.

Rural women’s objects are critical to our understanding of their lives because they help us reconstruct what women did, the values and ideas they held dear, and how they wanted to be remembered. The values and ideas represented by home manufactures, fancywork, and fine arts include a similar commitment to household provisioning, thrift, and industry, as well as middle-class respectability, taste, and refinement that was highlighted in previous chapters, but they also illustrate how rural women cherished individual expression and artistry and worked hard to create personal legacies of talent and skill that their families and communities would remember them by for generations to come.

165 Interview with author, Gail Bartlett, August 19, 2014.
166 Ibid.
The three previous chapters focused on women’s presence inside the exhibition hall. Whether they were admiring or exhibiting canned peaches or doilies, where women belonged and what they were to be doing on the fairgrounds seemed clear. But women also ventured into fair competitions traditionally reserved for men. In this chapter, women’s participation in horse and livestock shows illustrates how female exhibitors went beyond the exhibition hall and contested traditionally feminine categories of competition. Horse and livestock shows were initially seen as male preserves, but over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries women challenged the gendered space and roles that existed and created a place for themselves in the show ring.

Women first began participating in the “outdoor show” by exhibiting horses. Women’s horsemanship was put on display once fair organizers realized audiences wanted to see the “spectacle” of women’s driving and riding classes. Women’s participation in cattle, pig, sheep, and poultry showing was slower to materialize. Initially the only recorded female exhibitors in cattle shows were widowed women who could claim title to their livestock. By the mid-twentieth century, however, youth organizations, such as 4-H, made livestock showing an acceptable activity for both boys and girls, which helped encourage more women to enter the show ring. Still, while women participated in this “masculine pursuit,” reports of their involvement emphasized their feminine characteristics. By highlighting women’s beauty rather than skill, their delicacy rather than strength, and their uniqueness rather than prevalence in the show ring, women’s participation was highly gendered. Over time this improved, and many women found both validation and acclaim by pursuing their interests in livestock and horse showing. This transition, although
incomplete, gave women the confidence to expand their influence in agricultural societies and undertake larger leadership roles in agriculture in the late-twentieth century.

**An Overview of Women and Animals in the Countryside**

Historians writing about women’s work and rural life in nineteenth-century Ontario have recognized their importance in caring for and profiting from livestock.¹ Farm women and girls were often responsible for the daily upkeep and by-products derived from farm animals, especially chickens and dairy cattle [Figure 6.1], and women’s association with characteristics such as compassion, self-sacrifice, and gentleness made them well-suited to the task. But even though women often had a great deal of influence over livestock care and by-product production, they very rarely owned the resources of production – the animals themselves.² Marjorie Griffin Cohen explains in her discussion of farm women’s labour that the “concentration of ownership of the means of production by males meant that women’s labour throughout their lives would be subject, either directly or indirectly, to male power and authority.”³ Farm women were able to exercise more control over the money they earned from poultry and dairying, but generally major decisions about livestock and farm management were undertaken by men.

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Livestock breeding was improved in Ontario during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries because agricultural improvers believed quality farm animals were necessary for efficient production. Very few women, however, had a significant effect on horse and livestock breeding in Canada during this period. Perhaps this is not surprising considering women’s general exclusion from horse sports and livestock competitions more broadly. Examples of women involved in race horse breeding in Britain at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries exist,

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4 For a discussion of the importance of improved farm animals and scientific breeding, see Margaret Derry’s extensive research, including Ontario’s Cattle Kingdom: Purebred Breeders and Their World, 1870-1920 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001); Bred for Perfection: Shorthorn Cattle, Collies, and Arabian Horses Since 1800 (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2003); Horses in Society: A Story of Animal Breeding and Marketing, 1800-1920 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006); and Art and Science in Breeding: Creating Better Chickens (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012).
but these women were usually members of the upper classes.\textsuperscript{5} Harness racing was another equestrian sport that originated “as a sport centered on male camaraderie, based on shared maleness and class status.”\textsuperscript{6} Despite the popularity of harness racing in North America, few women participated in the sport or bred harness horses. \textsuperscript{7} Even in the early twentieth century, the record of Canada’s great horsemen is just that, a record of men.\textsuperscript{8}

Livestock breeding was seen as a masculine pursuit. Women’s caretaker role on the farm meant that more managerial decisions, such as stock breeding, were beyond their influence. It was generally argued that women’s “natural” characteristics of tenderness, kindness, compassion, and their nurturing instincts made them well-suited to care for animals, but they lacked the rational and scientific mind, business acumen, analytical ability, and know-how necessary to breed improved livestock.\textsuperscript{9} Only men were deemed to have the qualifications necessary “to attain the highest success in the art.”\textsuperscript{10} These traits included strong analytical powers, where a “man judges as a whole instead of in detail,” persistence and perseverance in adhering to a plan, a correct and educated eye to detect “form and quality,” a mind free from prejudice and bias, an understanding of cause and effect, a measure of caution so that he would not be “prone to jump to conclusions from insufficient data,” and finally, he should be “an artist, capable of forming an ideal model of perfection.”\textsuperscript{11} To be a successful breeder, a person had to have the capacity to judge. As historian

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\textsuperscript{5} Wray Vamplew and Joyce Kay, \textit{Encyclopedia of British Horseracing} (New York: Routledge, 2005), 342.
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{8} See Zita Barbara May, \textit{Canada’s International Equestrians} (Toronto: Burns & MacEachern Limited, 1975).
\textsuperscript{9} Leslie Irvine and Jenny R. Vermilya, “Gendered Work in a Feminized Profession: The Case of Veterinary Medicine,” \textit{Gender and Society} 24, no. 1 (February 2010), 56-82. Women today are still broadly characterized in this way. Irvine and Vermilya find that veterinary medicine maintains institutionalized inequality and hegemonic masculinity, despite women constituting half of its practitioners and almost 80 percent of students. Women are seen as less capable and professional based on gendered ideas of women’s inherent traits and abilities.
\textsuperscript{10} “Hints to Cattle Breeders,” \textit{Farmer’s Advocate} 6 (August 1871): 119.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
Cecilia Morgan notes in her work *Public Men and Virtuous Women*, conservative writings “juxtaposed feminine foolishness and flightiness with solid, reasoned male judgement,” positioning rational, logical thinking as a masculine trait, and ignorance and excessive emotions with femininity.\(^\text{12}\) Furthermore, the sexual nature of the act of breeding animals itself may have been reason enough to exclude “the delicate sex.”

Although rare, some examples of famous female breeders exist. One such cattle breeder was Mrs. Eliza Maria Jones of Brockville, Ontario [Figure 6.2]. Jones was born Eliza Maria Harvey on December 24, 1838, in Maitland, Upper Canada. She came from a prosperous Upper-Canadian family and was educated in Montreal and Scotland, but returned to the family farm to care for her five younger siblings when her mother died prematurely. When she married and settled in Brockville, she started her own small dairy farm. Jones began her herd with grade cattle, but after purchasing an outstanding Jersey-cross cow in 1873, she was convinced that purebred dairy cattle were necessary for a successful dairy operation. Jones was a proponent of scientific agriculture and utilized the latest in farm technology and nutrition to help produce superior butter, which she sold to prestigious clients across North America, shipping over 7,000 pounds a year. She personally oversaw all aspects of her farm and hired three men to help with the farm labour.\(^\text{13}\) Her husband Chilion Jones was largely absent and had little to do with her dairy operation,\(^\text{14}\) so the men she employed were likely necessary, especially when dealing with her Jersey bulls, animals considered “often treacherous and difficult to handle.”\(^\text{15}\)

\(^\text{12}\) Morgan, *Public Men and Virtuous Women*, 70.
\(^\text{14}\) Ibid.
Jones developed her purebred herd from cattle she purchased from Romeo H. Stephens of Montreal, whose own herd was developed from cattle purchased from the Royal Herd at Windsor, as well as cattle she imported from New England and the Isle of Jersey. Jones met with immediate success when she exhibited her cattle at agricultural fairs in the 1880s. Although she complained that her domestic and family affairs did not allow her to do more showing, as they “must always come first,” she still exhibited across Ontario, Quebec, and New York State, and sold cattle throughout North America. Jones was a member of the Canadian Jersey Cattle Breeders’ Association, an author of popular books on dairying and dairy animals, a frequent contributor to

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agricultural journals, and an international butter judge. In 1897 she was declared “the best dairywomen on the continent” by the Toronto periodical *Farming*.\textsuperscript{17}

In 1899, the *Farmer’s Advocate and Home Magazine* had a series of biographies of successful Canadian livestock breeders and Jones was the only female breeder featured. Her farm near Brockville, named Belvedere, was described as a beautiful farm with a “commodious dwelling” that gave “evidences of culture and refinement, and the absence of any indications of extravagance or unnecessary display,” but it was from “the reputation of her far-famed herd of high-class Jersey cattle, and their signally successful career in scoring records in the show ring and in practical tests for butter production, that Mrs. Jones’ name has become so widely known” \textbf{[Figure 6.3]}. The article went on to chronicle the various purchases and sales of cattle Jones made, the awards she won, the production records she broke, and the impressive success she had breeding quality dairy cattle. Most importantly, Jones was congratulated for her ability to “make dairying pay”:

\begin{quote}
The reason we have dwelt at length upon Belvedere is because the establishment there had been of more real practical use than any place of the kind before. Here are no costly appliances, no fancy fixtures, no artificial care, but good, plain and PAYING business management. As a fine old farmer said to his wife, when on a visit there: “Golly, Maria, Mrs. Jones ain’t got a single thing that we can’t have too.” This it is that has made Belvedere an object lesson for the whole Dominion, and proved that it is within the power of anyone to make dairying pay. All her life, Mrs. Jones labored to teach people how to make the \textit{most} butter, the \textit{best} butter, and, above all, butter produced \textit{at the least cost}.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

Jones’ superior managerial skills, in addition to her ability to breed quality cattle, was praised by the author and used as an example of how others (men included) should conduct their farming operations. When asked if she still planned to exhibit what cattle she had left after downsizing her herd in 1896, Jones explained that due to her increasing age and “family cares,” and the fact that

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 665.
“she could not add to her reputation,” she would likely never exhibit again, but her “interest in stock and dairy matters [was] keener than ever.”

Jones was an exceptional woman. Despite being married with a family of six, she exhibited livestock in her own name and received international recognition and praise for her work. This reflected her talent and skill as a farm owner and operator, but it was also possible because of her class and position in Canadian society. Most women who worked and oversaw the general management of farm livestock never attained such fame or distinction. Although Jones clearly demonstrated women’s ability to be successful farm managers and livestock breeders, and she was praised for the instruction she provided on making “dairying pay,” she was viewed as the exception, rather than the rule.

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19 Ibid.
Despite the success that some privileged women were able to achieve, most women were excluded from the elite position of successful livestock breeder. This was the case in most professions for women in nineteenth-century Canada, especially ones that involved large capital expenditure and direct competition with men.\textsuperscript{20} As the Ontario dairy industry began to move from the farm to the factory around the turn of the century as more and more butter and cheese production became factory-oriented, male labourers began to dominate dairy processing.\textsuperscript{21} Women continued to do dairy work at home and butter was more commonly homemade than cheese, but altogether dairy processing in Ontario was increasingly industrialized.

Another area of farming traditionally under female control was the poultry industry. Farm journalists contended that women were “better adapted” to poultry-raising than men because they could “more faithfully attend to the many little details that go to make the sum total of success” in this line of work.\textsuperscript{22} They advised women to make a name for themselves by supplying markets with superior poultry and eggs,\textsuperscript{23} but generally women only raised stock – breeders were traditionally men.\textsuperscript{24} By the mid-twentieth century, more large-sized flocks existed and a greater emphasis was placed on meat production. Women might still work with chickens on the farm after 1960, but if these were large flocks, they typically did not manage the operation.\textsuperscript{25} In many livestock industries men and women needed to work together, but this collaboration did not mean equality.\textsuperscript{26} The difference between working with livestock and making decisions about breeding,

\textsuperscript{22} “Women and Poultry,” \textit{Farmer’s Advocate and Home Magazine} 34 (April 1899): 178.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{24} Derry, \textit{Art and Science in Breeding}, 208.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 173.
\textsuperscript{26} Sally McMurray, “Women’s Work in Agriculture: Divergent Trends in England and America, 1800 to 1930,” \textit{Comparative Studies in Society and History} 34, no. 2 (April, 1992): 253-4. McMurray emphasizes the collaboration that took place between men and women in order to produce milk. She notes that women participated in decisions
management, and marketing were important, and women’s separation from these responsibilities ultimately limited their ability to claim full partnership on the farm and in the show ring.

**Female Horse and Livestock Exhibitors in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries**

Early horse and livestock owners and fair exhibitors were almost always men. Female livestock exhibitors were rare in the nineteenth century. Generally it was difficult to find female exhibitors’ names in winners’ lists, even for items specifically defined as “Ladies’ Work,” so finding women’s names in horse and cattle competitions is especially difficult. The examples are few, but they do exist. Mrs. Gapper was a regular horse exhibitor at the Home District Agricultural Society’s fairs before 1850. At the 1836 Fair she won second and third prizes in the mare class. Out of all the livestock exhibitors, she was the only woman. At the 1840 Spring Fair, she was again the only female exhibitor, and this time she won the mare class for draft horses. The next year, Gapper won a first and second prize in a particularly strong horse competition. Some other women who exhibited livestock and horses at fairs included Mrs. McCormick, who won second prize for the “Best Sow” class at the 1847 Eramosa Fair in Wellington County. Janet McRobbie, the second prize winner of the yearling filly class at the 1853 Puslinch Agricultural Society Show, and Mrs. Gordon, who was the only female exhibitor listed in any livestock or horse class at the 1889 Central Exhibition in Guelph. She won second prize in the two-year-old gelding class for heavy horses.

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27 See chapter 3 for a discussion of how women were initially not recognized for their exhibits at fairs.
31 “Eramosa Show,” *Guelph and Galt Advertiser*, October 8, 1847.
32 “Puslinch Agricultural Society,” *Guelph Advertiser*, October 20, 1853.
33 “Central Riding Exhibition,” *Guelph Weekly Mercury and Advertiser*, October 17, 1889.
An investigation of these women reveals that they were all widows. Mrs. Gapper appears to have been Mrs. Gapper Sr., the mother of Mary Sophia Gapper O’Brien, whose journals describing her time in Upper Canada between 1828 and 1838 have become popular primary sources for historians investigating pioneer women in Ontario. Mrs. Gapper was a wealthy woman, whose husband, the Reverend Edmund Gapper, was both a Squire and Rector of Charlton Adam in England before he died in 1809. She came to Canada with her daughter Mary to help look after her son William’s household while his wife Fanny expected their second child. When Mary met Edward O’Brien and married, however, Mrs. Gapper decided that she would remain in Upper Canada and live principally with her daughter and occasionally with her other children. Mrs. Gapper’s sons and son-in-law were all active members of the Home Agricultural Society and they likely encouraged her to enter her horses at the fair.

Mrs. Abigail McCarter McCormick continued to exhibit at the Eramosa Fair decades after her husband Robert McCormick died in 1828. Abigail had three daughters at the time of her husband’s death, the youngest being only one year old. Abigail’s family was established in the community, however, and she may have believed that participating at the fair was an important way to market her livestock and other farm and domestic produce, while maintaining her family’s social position despite the loss of her husband.

36 Mary O’Brien, journal entry for May 15, 1830, in The Journals of Mary O’Brien, 1828-1838 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1968), 105. Mary notes that her brother William had strained his back and could not attend the agricultural society meeting, but that her brother Richard and husband Edward attended. Mary also notes that her sister-in-laws “exclaimed at this most unbridegroom-like proceeding” when her husband left his newly married bride so soon after the wedding, but Mary explains that “as he had been chiefly instrumental in promoting it, I encouraged him to go.” In the editor’s endnotes, Miller explains that this meeting was to set up the executive of the Home Agricultural Society, which had been postponed in April.
Janet McPherson McRobbie was born in Scotland in 1830 and immigrated to Canada with her family in 1841. Janet married Lodwich McRobbie, a farmer and one of four brothers who moved from Perthshire, Scotland, to Canada around 1833. Lodwich died in 1852 at the age of 34, leaving 22-year-old Janet with a son not yet one year old. Janet later remarried and had six more children, but her decision to exhibit at the Puslinch Fair the year after her first husband’s death must have been difficult. The McRobbie family were active exhibitors and members of the Puslinch Agricultural Society, however, and Janet herself seemed to enjoy competing, as her many awards attested.

The Mrs. Gordon who exhibited at the Central Exhibition in Guelph was likely Mary Gordon of Elora, the widow of Andrew Gordon who died in 1883 of tuberculous. When Mary entered her horse at the District Fair in 1889 she would have been 68 years old. Mary was listed as the head of her household in the 1891 Census, and she lived with her daughter Isabella, as well as three young lodgers – two 25-year-old males, and one female. Mary also had two adult sons, one of which, George, was a harness maker like his father, and perhaps helped his mother exhibit horses to showcase his own work.

38 Year: 1851; Census Place: Brock, Ontario County, Canada West (Ontario); Schedule: A; Roll: C_11743; Page: 9; Line: 2; Year: 1871; Census Place: Puslinch, Wellington South, Ontario; Roll: C-9945; Page: 35; Family No: 115; Year: 1881; Census Place: Arthur, Wellington North, Ontario; Roll: C_13260; Page: 80; Family No: 325; Year: 1891; Census Place: Arthur, Wellington North, Ontario; Roll: T-6376; Family No: 270; Historical Atlas of the County of Wellington, Ontario. “Badenoch: 1832-1967,” Puslinch Township History from The Clarks of Tomfad, http://www.clarksoftomfad.ca/BadenochCentennial1832-1967.htm (accessed May 17, 2015).
40 Archives of Ontario; Series: MS935; Reel: 35.
41 Year: 1891; Census Place: Elora, Wellington Centre, Ontario; Roll: T-6376; Family No: 210.
42 Year: 1881; Census Place: Elora, Wellington Centre, Ontario; Roll: C_13259; Page: 3; Family No: 11.; George was 28 years old and listed as a harness maker, while her 24-year-old son William was a law student, and her 14-year-old son was still in school. Isabella, the eldest and only daughter remained single throughout her lifetime and lived with her mother as her companion and dependent after the death of her father; Year: 1901; Census Place: Elora (Village), Wellington (centre), Ontario; Page: 7; Family No: 87; Year: 1911; Census Place: 49 - Elora, Wellington South, Ontario; Page: 6; Family No: 70.
These examples illustrate the responsibility that many women took for their families, property, and chattel after their husbands passed away. In her work on women’s legal history, Lori Chambers has argued that, despite a dower that was meant to safeguard wives when their husbands died, in practice “the dower portion often failed to provide widows with adequate support because it gave the wife a life interest in realty, a right to enjoy but not to alienate such land; it did not give her a claim on any personal property or the money or chattels owned by the husband.” The concern of contemporaries, including the editors of the *Upper Canada Law Journal*, was that the law did not provide widows with a guarantee that they would recover money after the death of a spouse, and thus failed to provide relief for those who needed it. The women who entered their animals at fairs, however, demonstrated that they upheld their position as the head of the household and maintained ownership of both land and chattel, even when they had adult sons. Widowed women with either a particular interest in breeding stock or a desire to market their animals and farm products could continue to exhibit animals, perhaps with the help of their children and relatives. Whether women wanted to maintain the legacy of their late-husbands who showed previously, create their own reputations, or simply exhibit as they did before their husbands died, one cannot known for sure. What we do know, however, is that women sometimes exhibited their animals, and although it is unlikely that they were “at the halter” in the show ring during this period, their participation nevertheless created a foundation for future change.

Nineteenth-century women were generally discouraged from participating in public events, and men were critical of women who “appropriated” male occupations. They believed

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44 Ibid., 19-20.
men alone should be breadwinners, and that women had neither the “intellectual initiative” nor “disciplined rationality” that was required for most professions. By the mid-nineteenth century women were participating at fairs, but their participation was mainly limited to competing in home manufactures and domestic produce. For example, an 1880 article in the Brampton Conservator encouraged parents to take their children to the fair to stimulate “a spirit of emulation” for their respective tasks:

Let the boys have some poultry or animal to show; the girls, some flowers or fruit they can watch the season through, and then exhibit as the result of their care…If one shows a talent for housekeeping, let her exhibit canned fruit or a loaf of bread of her own making, and if the boys have any mechanical skill or genius in any direction, let it be encouraged and made the most of.

Girls were expected to showcase domestic skills, while boys could pursue agricultural and mechanical undertakings and “genius in any direction” – other than domestic skills, of course. This had a lasting consequence for women who struggled in subsequent decades to showcase their skill outside of the indoor show.

At the same time that gendered assumptions of female traits limited women’s opportunities, women were proving that they had the skill and drive to work with farm animals, and the talent and intelligence to manage farming operations. In her study of English female cheesemakers, Sally McMurray argues that many dairywomen participated in all matters of decision-making on dairy farms, and occasionally some men turned the entire operation over to their wives so they could


46 Gidney and Millar, Professional Gentlemen, 328-332.
47 See Chapters 3, 4, and 5.
48 “Take the Children to the Fair,” Brampton Conservator, September 17, 1880.
focus on other aspects of the farm or go out for day labour.\(^{49}\) In British North America, the Hudson’s Bay Company hired an experience English dairywoman, Mrs. Capendal, to run a dairy operation at Fort Vancouver in 1835. When Capendal and her husband arrived, however, she was disappointed with the cattle and conditions of the fort, and soon returned to England, having found things at Fort Vancouver “different to what she expected.”\(^{50}\) Mrs. Capendal’s departure illustrated her managerial expectations and ability to protest when unsatisfied. Other women who moved to western Canada appeared more eager to embrace a new environment, learn new skills, and develop their talents outside of the domestic sphere. For instance, some woman who came to Alberta during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had to develop their riding skills if they wanted to visit friends and become part of everyday ranch activities. Violet Pearl Skypes’ horsemanship allowed her to participate in herding cattle and training horses, and Mary Inderwick cited her superior riding ability as the reason why male employees accepted her authority.\(^{51}\) Women’s ability to “communicate knowledgeably about the tasks, the men, the horses, and the dreams for the future of the ranch” were vital for the success of their operations, but also to their personal happiness on the range.\(^{52}\) Women of various socio-economic and geographic backgrounds had different experiences with livestock, but most rural women in Ontario had some relationship with and responsibility for the animals that formed the basis of the livestock and horse competitions at fairs.

Still, Ontario agricultural societies remained wary of introducing competitions that highlighted women’s skill outside the domestic sphere. In the 1860s, the *Farmer’s Advocate*...
published articles that criticized the use of women’s equestrian events as fair attractions in the United States. In a satirical article published in the Farmer’s Advocate, reprinted from an American newspaper, Moore’s Rural New Yorker, the author, tongue-in-cheek, “congratulated” agricultural societies for hosting women’s equestrian races, which

illustrat[ed] how a modest woman, with her blood up, may be most skillfully thrown from her horse, heels over head, into the soil of a race track, mount again and win the applause of the refined throng who admire the performance, and the premium offered by the Agricultural Society to encourage and develop such skill.53

Other reports of American women’s horse racing were also published in the Farmer’s Advocate and their “unnaturalness” was emphasized. In Decatur, Illinois, twelve women raced on horseback, “every horse under full run, the ladies were applying the whip, and the air was filled with hats, ribbons, laces, and “fixins,” which were said to “have no place on the race track.”54 When one woman riding bareback was thrown from her horse, she was still able to remount and cross the finish line in third place. She received loud applause from the audience, despite being “covered with dirt by his fall, and her clothes torn almost in shreds.”55 Examples such as these served to warn against women’s horse racing by illustrating their danger and the unfeminine behaviour they occasioned.

Despite criticism, however, by the late 1860s female riding and driving classes came to Ontario. These classes were not full-out races, however; they judged women’s ability to perform functional tasks such as having a horse walk, trot, reverse, etc. Women’s riding and driving classes were very different from the speed races that also took place at fairs. Both women and men could feel comfortable about a class that emphasized control, rather than a chaotic free-for-all race to the finish line. Women’s equestrian classes were created to evaluate their ability to handle a horse

53 “Attractions at Fairs,” Farmer’s Advocate 4 (December 1869): 181; reprint from Moore’s Rural New Yorker.
55 Ibid.
under saddle or behind a cart in much the same way they were expected to ride or drive during regular travel. Men and women in the province usually drove rather than rode horses to make daily trips and visits, and this is likely the reason that “ladies’ driving” classes were initially more popular than riding classes. Still, both types of classes were promoted, and in 1868 the Beeton Agricultural Society allowed women to compete in “the special prize for riding” free of charge to encourage their participation. Although some women hesitated to showcase their horsemanship, driving and riding classes necessitated that women be seated (unlike line classes which required exhibitors to walk and run), and therefore their dresses and skirts were not hindrances and proper feminine dress and decorum were maintained [Figure 6.4].

[Figure 6.4]: Image of women riding side saddle in Cheryl MacDonald, Splendor in the Fall: Norfolk County Fair: An Unbroken Heritage (Simcoe, On: Norfolk County Agricultural Society, 1990), 100.

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56 Derry, Horses in Society, 33.
57 “Mono Mills, Oct. 31, 1868,” Beeton Agricultural Society Minute Book entry, Electoral Division of Cardwell Agricultural Society…Minute Book, accession 988-3, R2B S5 Sh4, Simcoe County Archives.
Women’s riding and driving competitions became popular because fairgoers enjoyed watching women compete in these classes. In 1879, four women competed in the ladies’ driving class at the Cooksville fair in front of a packed crowd. The winner, Mrs. Ireland of Meadowvale, reportedly showed she was “truly an expert with the “ribbons,” and managed her horse as few men could do.” At the 1881 Peel County Fair, the “ladies riding race” was reported as among the “best of the sports,” and Miss Annie Lyons, who won the class, received a premium of $6 for her effort. The popular “lady driver class” earned the winner, again Mrs. Ireland, “a pair of cabinet photo frames valued at four dollars.” At the 1881 Centre Wellington Agricultural Exhibition, “the great attraction of the day was the lady riders,” and although only four women competed, the local newspaper reported that “the judges had more difficulty in selecting the best rider than in any other part of their judicial duties.” Female exhibitors likely enjoyed the opportunity to showcase their horsemanship skills, and the prizes were also worthwhile.

Women’s driving and riding classes offered organizers a way to entice people to the fair without succumbing to more contentious forms of entertainment, such as vaudeville shows or carnival acts, although they were sometimes described as sensationalist nonetheless. At the 1886 Toronto Industrial Exhibition it was reported the “Lady riders and drivers will attract even without the horses…and when a horse rears up and falls back flat on a lady and kills her, as was the case in Toronto, the excitement is too great for many, but still the most attractive to some, despite the accident.” Women who rode or drove horses were not necessarily novel, but their doing so in front a grandstand of people for money was. The potential drama that resulted from a difficult

58 “Cooksville Fair,” Brampton Conservator, October 17, 1879.
59 “The County Exhibition,” Brampton Conservator, October 7, 1881.
60 “Centre Wellington,” Globe and Mail, October 8, 1881.
horse with an unskilled rider, for example, provided additional entertainment. Working with horses could be dangerous, and although some people questioned women’s suitability for the show ring, others were fascinated by it. The *Brampton Conservator* reported that at the 1880 Burwick Fair “One Unlucky Accident occurred. Miss Lizzie Chafor’s horse fell and Miss Chafor’s leg was broken just above the ankle.” The risks of competing were clear, but often this simply helped to further sensationalize the event.

At the 1884 Central Exhibition in Guelph, ladies’ driver classes were featured in advertisements for the exhibition alongside “Indian Club Swinging and Bar Bell exercise” demonstrations, bicycle races, and music band performances. The Wallacetown Fair in 1889 featured a “lady drivers” class with a hefty purse of $9 alongside regular men’s horse racing as another way to whip up excitement. A report of the 1910 West Elgin Fair celebrated the fact that the fair was “a purely agricultural exhibition, devoid of the amusement element that is so necessary to many other fairs to maintain their existence,” but the reporter failed to note that the fair’s success also relied on the popular “Speeding Events” and classes such as the “best lady driver” in order to draw crowds. Even in the twentieth century women’s driving classes maintained an element of novelty that set them apart from other horse show events. At the 1921 Springfield Fair it was reported that

There was excellent sport in front of the grand stand. The Springfield band supplied the music, and besides, the track racing there was much sport to entertain the crowds. In the contest for lady drivers, Mrs. Anson Chambers, of Avon, won first and in a similar contest for girls under 16 Miss Mary Winter won first and Miss Viola Chambers, second.

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63 “Burwick Fair,” *Brampton Conservator*, October 22, 1880.
65 “The Wallacetown Fair,” *Advance* [Dutton], September 26, 1889. Other classes in this category of competition included “trotters and pacers, purse $50; farmers’ trot, purse, $15; boys’ running race, purse $6; running race, purse $20; lady drivers, purse $9.”
67 Ibid.
Women’s driving classes were singled out as being special fair features along with band performances, speed races, and other novelty contests. The “best lady driver” was a popular class because it entertained and provided an unusual spectacle for fairgoers.69

Reporters rarely failed to describe women’s appearance when competing in these classes. Female exhibitors, like men, were expected to create an attractive and appealing image in the show ring by showing a well “turned-out” cart or buggy, horse, harness, and personal attire. Unlike men, however, women’s appearance meant more than simply being neat; they were expected to bring grace and beauty to the show ring. At the 1910 Wallacetown Fair, the local newspaper described the female drivers who “lined up before the judges and spectators” as making “a picture that would be difficult to excel.”70 When J. Lockie Wilson, the Superintendent of Ontario Agricultural and Horticultural Societies, wrote a letter to the province’s agricultural societies to outline some rules to follow when judging lady drivers, he explained that, in addition to sitting in the carriage and holding the reins and whip appropriately, a lady driver should also sit in “a comfortable, yet graceful position.” He suggested that part of the competition should require the lady driver to receive a passenger, and also make an exit from and entry into the carriage. Lockie Wilson described the precise actions judges should watch for, including where the lady driver’s hands should be placed on the reins or feet on the carriage, noting that judges “should see that this is done correctly and gracefully.”71 Similar to men, women were still required to exhibit the proper

driving skills and horsemanship, but they were also required to do so in as feminine and graceful a manner as possible.

Organizers and fairgoers emphasized women’s appearance and demeanour as a way to promote acceptance of women’s place in the horse ring. Fair organizers’ desire for attractive participants perhaps prompted the 1938 Hanover Fair Horse Show Committee to award the first-place lady driver with a “Permanent Wave, value $5.00,” donated from the class sponsor Mrs. V. Wendorf of Hanover. Similarly, the 1899 Arran-Tara Fair organizers may have wished to highlight the more refined, domestic tastes of the winner of the “Best Lady Rider” class by awarding her a pair of embroidery scissors. Horsewomen showcased the masculine skill associated with horsemanship, but they could not distance themselves too far from such feminine characteristics as grace and domesticity. Although Mrs. Ireland’s impressive driving skills won her numerous prizes and a reputation for being a capable horseperson, this recognition of skill was tempered by other descriptions of women’s driving classes that focused on the appearance of the ladies at the reins or the novelty of the competition.

By the 1920s and 1930s, however, horse and livestock competitions were becoming less gendered than they had once been. Women now competed alongside men in light horse and pony driving, riding, and line classes. Exhibitors who entered driving and riding competitions were usually judged on their skill as well as their horses’ confirmation and ability. Line classes, however, were focused solely on confirmation. Leadline showmanship classes had emerged by

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72 Walden, *Becoming Modern in Toronto*, 184-5. Keith Walden discusses how female performers who transgressed gender norms often had to be described in feminine terms in order to reassure the public that they remained tied to conventional womanhood and the domestic sphere.

73 “Prize List of the Hanover Fair, 1938,” Reference Box, Sports and Fairs B, Box 29, Bruce County Archives.

this time,\textsuperscript{75} but generally line classes were used to judge the physical attributes of a horse (height, width, strength, sounds feet and legs, etc.). Women who exhibited in these classes emphasized their contribution to the horse’s breeding and their ability to show horses to their best advantage, otherwise they would not have exhibited the animal themselves.

Women who competed in a variety of classes in the general horse show demonstrated that they were not afraid to compete alongside men. At the 1924 Erin Fair, the horse show prize list recorded that Mrs. J. W. Snow won second for the colt or filly foal in the carriage horse competition, and Mrs. R. Sloan won third for the brood mare class and third for the colt or filly foal in the roadster competition.\textsuperscript{76} At the 1938 Erin Fair, Miss Mary Ansley of Brampton won first place for her half-breed brood mare and Miss Vivian Clark of Norval for her two-year-old gelding or filly in the line classes.\textsuperscript{77} All these women were competing against men to win these awards. The horse show directors and judges continued to be men, but more women were exhibiting. Some women showed with their husbands, promoting the stock raised on their family farms, while others showed individually, highlighting women’s ability to stake their own claim in the industry.

\textbf{Rural School Fairs, Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs, and 4-H: Training Women to Show in the Twentieth Century}

By mid-twentieth century, more women were showing horses and other types of livestock, but the progression continued to be slow. When the first rural school fair was introduced in 1909 to encourage rural children to pursue agriculture and appreciate rural life, this influenced agricultural societies to consider offering more horse and livestock competitions for both sexes.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{75} See page 24 for a deeper discussion of youth showing livestock.
\textsuperscript{76} “Erin Fair Was Best In Years,” \textit{Erin Advocate}, October 16, 1924.
\textsuperscript{77} “Erin Fair Broke All Records,” \textit{Erin Advocate}, October 18, 1938.
\textsuperscript{78} Rural school fairs began in Ontario in 1909 when three rural schools located in North Dumfries Township in Waterloo County held a fair. F. C. Hart, a provincial agricultural representative, had arranged for vegetable seeds to
Rural school fairs, sponsored by the Ontario Department of Agriculture, taught both girls and boys how to show horses and livestock, and young women were therefore more accustomed to the show ring when the agricultural societies held their fairs.⁷⁹ At the 1920 rural school fair in Vaughan Township, York County, livestock classes included Barred Rock chickens and roasters (the chicks were hatched from eggs supplied by the Ontario Agricultural Department), heavy horse foals, light horse foals, purebred or grade dairy calves, purebred or grade beef calves, and a lamb class.⁸⁰ Generally the animals shown were under one year of age. Students had to train their animals and ensure they were halter-broken before show day. Some classes were judged solely on the animal’s confirmation, while others were showmanship classes meant to evaluate students on their handling skills. Showmanship classes emphasized a child’s ability, rather than the stock owned by their parents. Also, unlike competitions for “Manual Training” and “Baking and Sewing,” the first being for boys only and the latter for girls only, the livestock and horse competitions were open to both sexes.⁸¹ Boys and girls competed against one another for top prize, illustrating organizers’ belief that both sexes had the ability to compete and achieve success in the show ring.

⁷⁹ Madill, *History of Agricultural Education in Ontario*, 187-188. Madill reported that prize lists usually included classes for “grain, roots, corn, flowers, poultry, essays, writing, collections of weeds, of woods, and of leaves, cooking, sewing, manual training, and lives stock.” He also noted that contests for “oratory, singing, sewing, stock-judging, and driving,” as well for “races of various kinds,” were held because of spectator interest. Older boys competed in “poultry plucking, weed naming, whittling, carpenter work,” while older girls exhibited “preserved fruit and loaves of bread.”

⁸⁰ “Vaughan Township Eighth Annual Rural School Fair Prize List, 1920,” Rural School Fairs Programs, M002.3 Box 4, File 8, City of Vaughan Archives.

⁸¹ Ibid.
At the same time that rural school fairs were becoming popular, Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs, the forerunners of 4-H Clubs, which were also government and community-sponsored, became widespread across the province and often their “Achievement Day” shows were held at fairs sponsored by agricultural societies. Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs’ tended to segregate the sexes more often in the first half of the twentieth century; girls participated in homemaking and garden clubs and boys participated in crop, machinery, and livestock clubs. This arrangement was typical, but not universal. For example, at the 1917 Erin Fair a special class was offered for “Calf, pure bred or grade, to be fed and cared for by a boy or girl under 17 years of age for at least six weeks before the Fair.” There was also a class for “Two pigs, Bacon Type, pure bred or grade, to be fed and cared for by a boy or girl under 17 years of age for at least six weeks before the Fair.” In 1919, a Boys’ and Girls’ Calf Club was established in Grenville County, and for the project both boys and girls purchased young milking Holstein heifers and recorded their milk production. In 1921 in Elgin County, it was reported that there was a St. Thomas District Boys’ and Girls’ Purebred Livestock Club, and at the 1931 Elgin County Fair, a junior section in the dairy cattle competition offered classes for boys and girls to show their heifers. The major prizes that year for the “Best showman of dairy cattle under twenty-one years,” “best dairy type calf over 6 months, and under one year,” “best purebred Holstein calf,” and the “best calf raised on Royal Purple calf meal” all went to female exhibitors. The first Boys’ and Girls’ Club in Leeds County was the Brockville

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82 Lee, Head, Heart, Hands, Health, 182.
84 Ibid.
85 “Successful Calf Club in Grenville County,” Farmer’s Advocate and Home Magazine 54 (October 30, 1919): 1956.
86 “Big Crowds Attended The Aylmer & East Elgin County Fair,” Aylmer Express, September 29, 1921.
87 “Elgin County Fair and Cattle Show,” Aylmer Express, September 17, 1931. The majority of prizes were won by Betty Armour and Dorothy and Leslie Davis.
District Pig Club, which began in 1923 with eleven male and three female members between the ages of 15 and 18 years.\textsuperscript{88}

At other local Ontario fairs sponsored by agricultural societies, however, competitions remained gendered. There was still only a Boys’ Calf Club at the 1938 Aylmer Fair,\textsuperscript{89} and at the 1940 Belmont Fair it was a “Boys’ Calf Club and the Boys’ Foal Club” that competed.\textsuperscript{90} In Victoria County, it was not until 1939 that the first co-ed club was formed when the Poultry Club first accepted female members.\textsuperscript{91} From photographic evidence of beef and dairy calf clubs in the 1930s, it appears that most, if not all, of the members were boys.\textsuperscript{92} Agnes Foster’s account of her club work in the 1930s confirms the division that existed. She explained that garden and homemaking clubs, as well as public speaking contests were acceptable for girls, but livestock clubs were not, a fact she regretted deeply:

> I had five brothers, all of whom were involved with agricultural clubs. Since I knew how to show a calf, lead a colt, choose show potatoes, and tie a sheaf of grain for competition, I worked with them on their projects. I watched with envy while the boys brought home shields, trophies, silver trays, won trips to Chicago or the Royal 500, and participated on winning judging teams in county, provincial, and Canadian competitions. Oh how often I wished I had been born a boy.\textsuperscript{93}

The experience of Agnes Foster was likely similar to many young women across Ontario. They may have done the same work as their brothers on the farm, but they were not supposed to publicly display the same skills. Although some young women participated in livestock shows at this time, it was still seen as curious. At the 1937 Ottawa Winter Fair, a local newspaper reported that

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{88} Lee, Head, Heart, Hands, Health, 65.
  \item \textsuperscript{89} “The Biggest Crowd in Aylmer’s History Expected at the Fair,” Aylmer Express, September 22, 1938.
  \item \textsuperscript{90} “Belmont Fair Today,” Aylmer Express, September 26, 1940.
  \item \textsuperscript{91} Lee, Head, Heart, Hands, Health, 80.
  \item \textsuperscript{92} Only boys are shown showing cattle and horses in the photographs in the Archives of Ontario 4-H Collection that predate 1940. 4-H Collection, RG 16-275-2, Container 1. Archives of Ontario.
  \item \textsuperscript{93} Agnes Foster, “Agnes Foster: One Leader’s Story,” in John B. Lee, Head, Heart, Hands, Health: A History of 4-H in Ontario (Toronto: Ontario 4-H Council 1994), 151.
\end{itemize}
Miss Bompas of Bells Corners represented alone the fairer sex amongst more than a score of men and youths as she smartly showed a fine Ayrshire heifer at the Ottawa Fair...Nor did she mind being the lone girl in the ring, with the hundreds of pairs of eyes watching. Naturally there would be the odd feminine touch. Miss Bompas had a brush handily set in a dress pocket and now and then she would whip it out and carefully brush the coat of her Ayrshire. She kept it prettied up as she walked around.94

The article neglected to report on Ellen Bompas’ final placing in the class, and even though it notes how “smartly” she exhibited her heifer, the fact that she was the sole female exhibitor and the “cynosure of all eyes” suggests that her participation was very unusual. The reporter tried to dissipate any anxiety felt by her presence by describing her feminine attributes, such as her focus on keeping her heifer “prettied up” while they walked around the show ring.95

As Agnes Foster noted, and photographic evidence indicates, it was often boys who were afforded the opportunity to travel to local, regional, and provincial fairs in order to compete in dairy and beef calf competitions and develop their skills and knowledge, as well as meet others in the industry, which benefited them later in their careers if they remained in the agricultural sector.96 Boys participated in these competitions because, as future farmers, they were expected to use what they had learned in these clubs to be successful in their future husbandry.

Draft horse clubs were especially male-oriented. Although the junior section of the 1935 Erin Fair beef cattle competition was open to both boys and girls between the ages of 7 and 20 years, in the heavy horse division, the Wellington Foal Club required that members be “boys between the ages of 12 and 20 years at time of entry.”97 At the 1938 Manitoulin Fair, the Kagawong Boys’ Foal Club was also strictly male. Why girls could show calves, but not draft horse foals is

95 Ibid.
96 Foster, “Agnes Foster: One Leader’s Story,” 151, and 4-H Collection, RG 16-275-2, Container 1, Archives of Ontario.
significant. Female exhibitors in heavy horse competitions were virtually non-existent during this period, which likely reflected the fact that while women could be found driving carriages, and girls riding ponies, they were not supposed to be active participants in field work on the farm, which often involved the use of heavy horses for plowing fields, planting or harvesting crops, or pulling logs from the woods. Furthermore, the very size and strength of draft animals were reasons enough to discourage women from showing them [Figure 6.5]. In her work on plowing matches, Catharine Anne Wilson examines how men viewed plowing as a “manly art,” where “rugged, independent work and mastery over nature were the core tenets of rural masculinity.”98 Heavy horses were both tools for and symbols of men’s work and strength, and therefore they were not suitable animals for women to exhibit.

The irregularity with which girls were included and excluded from agricultural clubs in the first half of the twentieth century reflected how some people struggled with the idea of including girls in activities meant to prepare boys for their responsibilities as farm men. From the beginning, youth agricultural clubs were meant to teach boys about agricultural technology, crop innovation, and animal husbandry. Domestic science associations and clubs for girls were premised on women’s duties in the home and community. Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs were modeled after earlier American youth organizations,⁹⁹ as well as rural Ontario organizations such as the Farmer’s

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⁹⁹ Thomas Wessel and Marilyn Wessel, *4-H: An American Idea 1900-1980: A History of 4-H* (Chevy Chase, Maryland: National 4-H Council, 1982), 14. Wessel and Wessel explain that the “principal emphasis in boys’ club work until 1910 had been on finding a means of conveying new agricultural techniques from experiment stations and land-grant colleges to farm operators. The basic purpose was to improve agricultural techniques and increase
Institutes and Women’s Institutes that separated the sexes into agricultural and homemaking activities.\textsuperscript{100} In her study of the Women’s Institute in Ontario, Margaret Kechnie argues that even though farm women believed that “farm women’s work should not be limited to the home” and that they “should learn about crops and soil and everything else around the farm,” she also notes that “providing farm women with agricultural education was never a part of the extension education offered through the WI.”\textsuperscript{101} Agricultural youth organizations initially had trouble deciding how inclusive they should be. While it was fine to promote a Girls’ Homemaking or Gardening Club, there seemed to be more apprehension about how useful livestock husbandry training was for girls.

Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs were changing, however, and by the 1940s girls started to join livestock clubs, which resulted in a visible change in membership [Figures 6.6].\textsuperscript{102} During the Second World War, women, especially young women, were tasked with playing a larger role in agricultural production at home or in organized groups, such as the Farmerettes or the Women’s Land Brigades, while men were away.\textsuperscript{103} In addition to the other rights women were gaining in the mid-twentieth century, they also gained more opportunities to showcase their farming work.\textsuperscript{104}

\textsuperscript{100} See Carbert, Agrarian Feminism; and Kechnie, Organizing Rural Women.
\textsuperscript{101} Kechnie, Organizing Rural Women, 97.
\textsuperscript{102} Lee, Head, Heart, Hands, Health, 69.
\textsuperscript{103} Mosby, Food Will Win the War, 119.
\textsuperscript{104} “Recruiting Our Land Army,” Farmer’s Advocate and Home Magazine 76 (January 23, 1941): 36, 40; “The Girls Who Saved the Apple Crop. All Over Canada Farm Women are Doing Their Full Share – in the Essential Service of Food Production,” Farmer’s Advocate and Home Magazine (May 28, 1942): 316; and “Youth on Its Mettle. Young Women of the Farm Rally to the Colours – Gardens are Cultivated with Patriotic Fervour,” Farmer’s Advocate and Home Magazine (September 24, 1942): 557.
An even more pronounced shift in membership occurred in the years following the official adoption of the 4-H name in 1952. In that year, Boy’s and Girl’s Clubs became 4-H Clubs, although the project work that continued under the name 4-H was split into two divisions, the 4-H Girls’ Homemaking Clubs and the 4-H Agricultural Clubs.\footnote{Lee, Head, Heart, Hands, Health, 195.} Maintaining the designation of “Girl’s Homemaking Clubs” was important to Miss Florence P. Eadie, who served with the Ontario Department of Agriculture for 36 years and was credited with establishing the format of the Homemaking Clubs. She was adamant that in order to maintain “the integrity of the Homemaking Clubs” girls had to remain in the title.\footnote{Ibid., 191 and 195.} This decision, along with society’s general reluctance to
see men perform domestic tasks, ensured the members in homemaking clubs remained almost entirely female. 4-H livestock clubs, however, encouraged more girls to exhibit at the same time that young women began serving in leadership positions for other agricultural youth organizations such as Junior Farmers. In 1952, Mae Todd was elected the President of the Bruce County Junior Farmers, the top executive position in the County organization. Todd used her position to emphasize that the “aim or purpose of the Junior Farmer movement is to bring together rural youth…At club meetings, boys and girls learn to take part in discussion groups, to learn proper business procedure in conducting meetings, and the most important factor is that they learn to cooperate and to work willingly with others.”

Mae highlighted the shared interests and goals between girls and boys in Junior Farmers, explaining that “Many Juniors take an active part in seed and livestock judging competitions, curling bonspiels, hockey and softball series, debating and public speaking events, choir concerts, as well as our Annual County Barn Dance held at Paisley in October.”

The inclusion of girls in livestock judging competitions was also important because it signified that women were capable of accurate observation, sound judgement, courage, honesty, and clear communication – characteristics that had long heralded men as the only inherently qualified appraisers of improved farm livestock. In the 1950s, a film was produced that captured the inter-county judging competition at the Ontario Agricultural College in Guelph. The majority of participants were male, but females competed too. One segment of the film showed participants judging poultry and focused on a young woman handling and inspecting a chicken. The film’s commentator announced “if you’ve already noticed, boys aren’t the only ones who win places on

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107 Mae Todd, “Junior Association Teaches Way of Co-Operative Living,” in Bruce County Year Book (Mildmay, ON: Bruce County Federation of Agriculture, 1952,” 37.
108 Ibid.
competition teams, and this girl is not going to be outdone by any boy."110 4-H livestock club leaders – who were all male during this period – recognized that girls could make excellent judges and they increasingly encouraged their female members to compete in judging competitions [Figure 6.7]. 111

[Figure 6.7]: “Annual Livestock Judging in Shedden,” 1960, St. Thomas Times-Journal fonds, C9 Sh2 B1 F46 13, Elgin County Archives. Caption: “Which One? - Four-H Club members from all over the county gathered at Shedden Fairgrounds this morning for their annual livestock judging competition. In the above photo three young club members are contemplating how they will place a class of Suffolk ram lambs while 4-H club leaders hold them for inspection…”

110 4-H Interclub Competitions, [1955?], Print, black and white, sound; 16 mm, RG 16-35-0-33-1, Archives of Ontario.
111 J. C. Ready, A Manual in Canadian Agriculture (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1930), 143. Ready, a previous supervisor of Agricultural Education in British Columbia, included in his A Manual in Canadian Agriculture in the dairy cow and dairying chapter a picture of a young girl rehearsing her judging with her male coach that was entitled “Girls Make Excellent Judges.” Unfortunately, no further explanation for why girls were particularly strong judges was given here, but other contemporary assessments of female club members suggested that girls’ eyesight and patience were useful qualifications for livestock judging; Barbara Villy Cormack, “Learn to Do by Doing”: The History of 4-H in Canada (s.l.: s.n., 1971?), 30.
By the 1950s, female members of 4-H clubs were regularly winning cattle competitions and receiving accolades for doing so. In 1954, Katherine Merry received significant attention when she beat out 180 other male and female 4-H members to win the prestigious Queen’s Guineas at the Royal Winter Fair. The Milton newspaper, *The Canadian Champion*, reported that Katherine’s win “was indicative of the high regard and esteem in which [she] is held by her fellow 4H Club members throughout Ontario.” The reporter described Katherine as

...a deserving winner – for six years she has been a top club member – once before she won the reserve award. Our readers may be interested to learn that nearly every night for the past six months, Katherine has walked her steer two to three miles. Halton may well be proud of Katherine.¹¹²

At the 1958 Aylmer Fair, Sandra Duffy won the coveted top showmanship award for the Elgin 4-H Dairy Calf Club in what was reported to be “an exceptionally outstanding class” of male and female participants [Figure 6.8].¹¹³ At the 1959 Rodney Fair, Aldborough 4-H Junior Calf Club member Patricia McLean won both the showmanship and the Shorthorn yearling steer classes. The report of the show acknowledged that McLean and her steer “Moondoggie” had won in spite of a large number of excellent entries, and that the pair went on to compete at the Royal Winter Fair that year [Figure 6.9].¹¹⁴ Qualifying to compete at the Royal Winter Fair was a significant achievement that represented McLean’s success in the show ring. Katherine Merry, Sandra Duffy, and Patricia McLean were examples of young women who found success and praise for their hard work and dedication to working with cattle.

¹¹² “Halton Girl Competes with 180 to Win Queen’s Guineas,” *Canadian Champion* [Milton], November 25, 1954.
[Figure 6.8]: “Event Winners,” 1958, St. Thomas Times-Journal fonds, C8 Sh2 B2 F3 6, Elgin County Archives. Caption: “Showmanship Award- To Sandra Dufty, R.R. 5, St. Thomas, went the coveted showmanship award of the Elgin 4-H Dairy Calf Club show. Here George Stephenson, Aylmer, presents the Royal Bank of Canada silver tray, to Sandra who won out in an exceptionally outstanding class.”
“Rodney Fair - Thousands Attend,” 1959, St. Thomas Times-Journal fonds, C8 Sh3 B1 F11 2, Elgin County Archives. Caption: “Showmanship Winner - A large number of excellent entries were featured again this year in the 4-H Aldborough Junior Calf Club show at the 105th Rodney Fair. Patricia McLean, Rodney, took first prize in showmanship and first place in the steer class with her one-year-old Shorthorn, ‘Moondoggie’. Patricia plans to enter her prize animal at the Royal Winter Fair. In the above photo, Miss McLean leads ‘Moondoggie’ back to her stall following the parade of livestock.”
Female ‘Showmen’ Show Men What They Can Do: The Postwar Period

Adult women, not just young women, were also becoming more active at fair cattle shows during this period. Mrs. McKay could often be found in the beef cattle show ring along with her husband James McKay at the Erin Fair, and many other local fairs [Figure 6.10]. Mr. McKay was the herdsmen of the successful Aberdeen Angus farm, Malden Farms, owned by Dr. W. F. James, but both he and his wife contributed to caring for and managing the cattle and the farming operation. When the bull owned by Dr. James won the Royal Winter Fair in 1953, it was Mr. McKay, with Mrs. McKay at his side, who first accepted the award.115 The passion the McKays had for cattle was transferred to their daughter Evelyn, who also participated regularly in the cattle show ring.

[Figure 6.10]: “Aberdeen Angus Bull, owned by Dr. W. F. James, Georgetown, Mrs. James McKay at halter, 1954,” Erin Agricultural Society Private Photo Collection, Erin, Ontario.

Women were also more active in the horse ring in the postwar period. The exhibition of heavy horses remained a masculine pursuit, but women thrived in the pony and light horse classes. Gender-specific classes for lady riders and drivers still existed, with prizes that were equally gender-specific. At the 1949 Erin Fair the first-place prize for the “Lady Rider” class was a Danby Toaster, and the winner of the “Lady Driver” class won Weston Bakery Ltd. Merchandise. Generally, however, female exhibitors competed alongside men in regular light horse classes. Mrs. Mary Welsh, Mrs. Irene Wheeler, Mrs. Mary Woods, Miss Joyce McMillan, and Mrs. Edna Day all took home prizes in the general light horse division classes at the 1949 Erin Fair [Figure 6.11]. Women also owned, and sometimes bred, the animals they exhibited. At the 1950 Ancaster Fair, Mary E. Welsh of Brantford proudly posed for a picture with her winning saddle pony, Jimmy Fleetfoot. Women were now actively competing with men in many horse show divisions, and showing that they were more than ready for the competition.

116 While the general heavy horse show remained dominated by men, youth classes did exist that included female show people. At the 1947 Arran-Tara Agricultural Society’s Annual Exhibition, the special classes for the heavy horses included a class for “Boy Driver – 15 years or under.” No such class existed for girls and women drivers in the heavy horse competition. Still, that same year there was an award for the best halter broken foal, exhibited by a showman under the age of 16 years. The next year, in 1948, it was clarified in the prize list that the competition was open to “boy or girl under 16 years. Arran-Tara Agricultural Society’s Fall Exhibition Prize List, 1947,” Private Collection.
118 “Record Exhibit and Crowd At Erin Fair,” Erin Advocate, October 13, 1949.
The success that female equestrians achieved on the national and international stage also contributed to the broader acceptance of horsewomen on the fairgrounds. Female riders had begun to compete at elite equestrian competitions around the mid-twentieth century and they earned praise for their successes. At the 1949 Royal Horse Show, Mrs. Dorinda Hall-Holland of London, Ontario, beat more experienced professional riders to win the open jumping stakes class. Her win was an upset, and one that provided a thrilling evening that left “No yawning, squirming spectators that night!”  

The following year, Eva Valdes competed for Mexico, becoming the first woman

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120 May, Canada’s International Equestrians, 64.
on an international jumping team.\textsuperscript{121} It was not long before women in other countries also won spots on their national equestrian teams. In 1952, Mrs. George Jacobson of Montreal was selected for the Canadian Show Jumping Team, becoming the first woman to represent Canada internationally.\textsuperscript{122} The next year, 17-year-old Shirley Thomas of Ottawa was chosen to join the Canadian team and competed successfully at Washington, Toronto, and Harrisburg, New York. It was recorded that the “excellent performances of the very young, good-looking Ottawa girl were given extra applause.”\textsuperscript{123} Women’s appearance remained a point of interest for reporters, illustrating the broader societal attention placed on women’s looks, but their talent in the show ring could not be denied. These women gave female riders more visibility on the horse show circuit, and their success encouraged other women to follow suit.

**Gender Identity Persists in the Show Ring**

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 71.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 111.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 112.

\[\text{Figure 6.12}\] “A Smile or Two [Cartoon],” *Farmer’s Advocate* 99 (September 12, 1964): 30.
Despite women’s success in the show ring, stereotypes remained that emphasized women’s appearances disproportionately to their skills, which resulted in a general trivialization of their contributions to agriculture. In the 4-H literature and handbooks distributed to members, farmers were typically depicted as male, especially when performing tasks such as driving tractors, working with machinery, and selecting and judging breeding stock. Although girls and young women were now participating in work previously thought to be men’s work, such as working with cattle and learning farm equipment safety, agriculture as a profession remained a masculine domain and gendered ideas about men’s and women’s roles continued [Figure 6.12]. Even when young women found success showing cattle, gender distinctions were obvious. For example, it is unlikely that had a boy won the reserve champion junior female calf prize at the Erin Fair, the newspaper headline and caption would have read as it did when Judy Merry won that honour in 1952. The newspaper article, titled “Beauty and the Beast at Erin,” commented that

Pretty girls were only one of the features of the Regional Shorthorn Show held at Erin on Monday. There were many fine-looking cattle, too, in the opinion of the judges. Judy Merry, of Oakville, a daughter of Shorthorn breeder W. H. Merry, who herself has been showing cattle for many years, pleased connoisseurs both ways. (Judy led her calf, Bapton Golden Gertie, to the reserve champion junior female championship). [Figure 6.13]

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124 Extension Branch Ontario Department of Agriculture and Food, 4-H Beef Junior Manual, Production and Marketing (Ontario: Ontario Department of Agriculture and Food, 1969); Extension Branch Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food, First Aid (Ontario: Ontario Department of Agriculture and Food, 1979); Extension Branch Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Human Factors in Safety (Ontario: Ontario Department of Agriculture and Food, 1979); Extension Branch Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Farm Fire Safety (Ontario: Ontario Department of Agriculture and Food, 1979); Extension Branch Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Pesticide Safety (Ontario: Ontario Department of Agriculture and Food, 1979); Extension Branch Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Common Machine Hazards (Ontario: Ontario Department of Agriculture and Food, 1979); 4-H Collection, RG 16-275-1, Archives of Ontario.
Despite the differences that existed, and the barriers that remained, the young women who participated in livestock clubs and showcased their talent at fairs helped pave the way for women’s further involvement in horse and livestock showing, as well as in the industries more broadly. Girls who grew up being members of 4-H cattle, tractor, or crop clubs pursued their passions in these fields for many years. June Switzer recalled how her participation in 4-H helped her believe that she could do anything she set her mind to. Born in 1950, June described how she was treated no differently than the boys in her co-ed 4-H clubs, which included livestock and tractor clubs. June
had been raised on what she termed “an equal opportunity farm.” Her mother was the one most interested in the farm livestock, and while her mother was responsible for the turkeys and laying hens, her passion was the dairy herd. She milked, kept records, and made the breeding decisions. June recognized that her parents were “really ahead of their time,” and that she was fortunate to have grown up with a mother who modelled this behaviour and father who encouraged her “to do whatever [she] wanted to do.” She also credited the 4-H clubs she belonged to for creating an atmosphere where boys and girls competed on equal footing. June described how “4-H opened up so many avenues for me.” She stated that she could do anything she wanted in 4-H, and that “it wasn’t until I got out into the other world that I found out that that’s not the way it is in the real world… I found out men weren’t all like this… that they had no idea a woman could do this.” For June, her ability to show a calf or drive a tractor was a source of pride. Her family and her participation in 4-H taught her that there were no limits to what she could achieve, on the farm or otherwise, so it was all the more startling for her when, as a young professional woman and later as a married woman, she met people who questioned her abilities and discouraged her from performing tasks that were supposedly not women’s work. June recognized, however, that there were changes taking place, starting in the 1970s and taking fuller form by the 1980s. June recalled, while “it would have been unheard of to have women on the cattle committee in 1960,” in time women became important committee members and participants in most aspects of the fair, especially in livestock competitions.125

Another woman whose experience showing cattle led to a lifelong commitment to agriculture was Phyllis MacMaster. Phyllis MacMaster was born in Hawkesbury, Ontario, the first of seven children in her farm family. Phyllis’ mother was responsible for the traditional

125 Interview with author, June Switzer, September 12, 2013.
domestic tasks of a farm household, but she also worked in the dairy barn, and when Phyllis was asked about her childhood recollections, she explained that in her family “you went with your parents to the barn. I think that’s how I developed my appreciation for agriculture and why I worked in that industry.” Phyllis noted that from a young age she helped in the barn by feeding calves and pushing in hay to the cattle. But it was when, in her teenage years, Phyllis joined 4-H and experienced the excitement of showing cattle that she really developed a passion for the dairy industry. Phyllis also participated in homemaking clubs, but 4-H Dairy Club competitions were especially exciting and she enjoyed competing in the show ring. Phyllis later went on to become one of a few well-recognized female dairy cattle judges, and she was proud that she was often asked to provide her placings and reasons at dairy judging schools and competitions. Phyllis explained: “That gives me recognition that I’m doing a good job, that [your peers] value your opinion.” Another clear example of how Phyllis’ early experiences shaped her life was when she received her Bachelor of Science in Agriculture at the University of Guelph, was among the first women to work in the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food (OMAF), and went on to become the first female agricultural representative in the province in 1984. Phyllis credits her career choices to her early love of farming, and she also believes she benefited from a shift in the late 1970s when women were increasingly recognized for the work they did on the farm. When she stepped into her position as agricultural representative, she felt her employers “had a lot of confidence that [she] would be able to work and develop relationships with farm families.”

Women’s encouragement in pursuing livestock and other agricultural pursuits at a young age enabled them to expand their roles when given the opportunity.

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126 Interview with author, Phyllis MacMaster, August 19, 2015.
127 Ibid.
Conclusion

Despite the positive experiences remembered by June, and the significant advances that were made for female horse and livestock exhibitors, women who exhibited farm animals remained a minority. Although youth clubs encouraged more girls to take up the lead line at livestock shows, the idea that men were breeders, managers, and farmers, and women were caretakers and helpmates, did not disappear. Young women had gained access to the show ring, and even older women took up the lead line, but the power relations remained uneven – men were still the ones organizing, officiating, and judging these events, and the majority of exhibitors. Furthermore, the stereotype of the hardy, masculine farmer continued, and despite significant strides in women’s sense of belonging and authority in livestock industries, the gendered dimension of food-animal production limited women’s ability to be full stakeholders.\textsuperscript{128}

Over time, however, rural communities accepted that at least some women were talented show people and knowledgeable exhibitors in the horse and livestock show rings. Once seen as novel participants, whose femininity limited their ability and credibility, women were starting to become more accepted as farm partners and showpersons.\textsuperscript{129} The transition to gender equality in agricultural industries is not complete. In the second half of the twentieth century, however, women built on earlier progress to significantly advance their participation in equine sport and livestock competitions. Like women’s experience on agricultural society fair boards, women who exhibited farm animals found that gaining recognition and respect was often slow, but they nevertheless embraced opportunities to move into arenas previously closed to them. By the 1970s,

\textsuperscript{128} Wilkie, \textit{Livestock/Deadstock}, 59-63.
a masculine agricultural system and separate gender expectations remained,\textsuperscript{130} but women were making advances and building on the achievements of the women who came before them – including acquiring increasing numbers of first prize ribbons in the show ring.

\textsuperscript{130} Barker Devine, \textit{On Behalf of the Family Farm}, 139.
CHAPTER 7: Women Show Themselves: From Food Booths to Baby Shows

Whether women were fairgoers or fundraisers, competed in baby shows or Fair Queen contests, performed feats of acrobatics and skydiving or simply lived long enough to win an award for being the oldest person on the fairgrounds, women participated at fairs in various ways that nourished, amused, and entertained. The medley of topics discussed in this chapter examine how women contributed to fairs beyond their participation as agricultural society members, directors, and executive officers, or as exhibitors in agricultural and domestic competitions. Women also used fairs to meet with friends, neighbours and potential suitors, fundraise for community organizations and causes, make money as professional entertainers, perform athletic, musical, and dramatic talents, or display their abilities as successful mothers, Dairy Princesses, or Fair Queens. How women utilized the fairgrounds depended on their individual talents, needs, and aspirations, but they all shaped the meaning of these events and contributed to the visibility of women’s activities and roles in rural communities across the province. This chapter also illustrates how women’s mobility and range of activity on fairgrounds increased. As shown in the last chapter, women moved beyond the exhibition hall to enter the livestock and horse barns and show rings; in this chapter, women are shown to move beyond the dining, theatre, and exhibit halls and into the midway at the turn of the century and in front of the grandstand by the interwar years, essentially making women visible in every space of the fairgrounds.

Women Managing Fair Banquets and Fundraising with Food and Fun

Similar to women’s food exhibits, women’s production of ready-made food for fairgoers demonstrated their ability to provide care and nourishment. In the nineteenth century women
typically contributed to supplying food to fairgoers by serving lunches and dinners at agricultural society banquets, and they were paid for their service, but by the twentieth century most women voluntarily sold food on the fairgrounds to fundraise for various women’s organizations and the causes they supported. Groups such as the Ontario Women’s Institutes, Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire, Christian Women’s associations, Women’s War Work Committees for the Canadian Red Cross, and many other church and community groups benefited from the funds women raised by organizing food tents and booths, and dinners to feed fairgoers. These groups also used other fundraising methods, such as tag drives, concert performances, and dances to aid their causes and contribute to the festivities on the fairgrounds. The funds women procured supported causes that were important to them, but their work also enhanced women’s social authority and heightened their public presence.

Selling food was a particularly popular way for women to fundraise because, as any fairgoer would have told you, a trip to the fair was incomplete without indulging in some sort of delicious treat. Cheryl MacDonald notes in her history of the Norfolk County Fair that “Food has been so much a part of the fair that it has been mostly taken for granted,”¹ and she suggests that few records specify exactly what was being served on the fairgrounds. However, local newspaper accounts, fair board meeting minutes, Women’s Institute meeting minutes, and oral histories provide some detail about the food available at fairs. Rural Canadian communities have a long history of celebrating with food. Harvest festivals and banquets were held during times of celebration and thanksgiving,² while individual families thanked their neighbours for their help

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¹ Cheryl MacDonald, Splendor in the Fall: Norfolk County Fair: An Unbroken Heritage (Simcoe, On: Norfolk County Agricultural Society, 1990), 88.
during reciprocal work bees by hosting hearty meals. At fairs, women utilized those culinary skills to feed fairgoers with homemade food.

In the nineteenth century most reports about fair food focused on the agricultural society fair banquet that was usually held at the end of a fair at a local hotel. Initially, women were not guests, but rather workers who served a substantial feast of items such as “roast beef and plum pudding, with their various accompaniments.” The proprietors’ wife or female staff did the cooking, not farmers’ wives or women on the fairground. The speeches were made to the “gentlemen” in the room and published lists of dinner visitors indicated an all-male attendance. Banquets were hosted for male agricultural society members, directors, and invited guests to enjoy one another’s company, congratulate each other on a job well done at the fair, and reflect on the broader agricultural improvements being made in the community and province. At the 1880 Exhibition of the West Riding of York and Township of Vaughan Agricultural Societies (later named the Grand Union Exhibition), the dinner was held at the Woodbridge Hotel. The president of the society, John Abell, a local implement manufacturer, congratulated society members for the agricultural improvements they had made, and the group assembled toasted the Queen and the royal family, sang the national anthem, as well as a song entitled “Jolly Good Fellow” and a “Scotch song which was much enjoyed.” The fair’s judges also gave speeches that elicited “peals of laughter,” followed by a pledge to the Toronto Industrial Exhibition and a speech from Captain McMaster advising farmers to “make their boys farmers instead of clerks.” Accounts such as this illustrate how fair banquets were public venues for expressing ideas about citizenship, loyalty to

4 “Fergus Fair,” Guelph & Gault Advertiser, October 1, 1847.
5 “Burwick Fair”: The Annual Autumnal Exhibition of West Riding of York and Township of Vaughan Agricultural Societies,” Brampton Conservator, October 22, 1880.
the monarchy, service to the country, and commitment to agricultural reforms and farming as an occupation. Although matters of loyalty and service were familiar to women as well, they had neither the political power nor public authority to speak on topics related to how future agricultural progress would be achieved. Furthermore, the raucous nature of the dinners, the boisterous singing, and much-noted drinking were not seen as respectable for women.

At banquets men asserted their right to lead by reflecting on past activities and charting the course for the future — without the interference of women. Women’s efforts were sometimes acknowledged, as demonstrated by “the enthusiastic and vociferous manner in which they were toasted during the banquet”⁶ of the 1857 Toronto Township Fall Fair, but when men sat down to a fair dinner, discussion focused on improved cattle breeding and farm land, not how to better educate women on the production of domestic goods and the advancement of their skills in lacework or beading.⁷ Women’s work was worthy of display, but not serious consideration by agricultural societies.

By the end of nineteenth century, women began to be invited to fair banquets. At the 1892 Woodbridge Fair, the wives and daughters of agricultural society members and prominent guests attended “an elaborate banquet” in the Agricultural Hall on the last evening of the fair. At the banquet, speeches were made and guests drank to “her Majesty’s health,”⁸ but the boisterous atmosphere of earlier dinners was absent. By this time, fairs had become much more than livestock shows; they were now symbolic of the interests of rural families – men, women, and children – rather than exclusively focused on men’s agricultural and industrial pursuits.

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⁶ “Toronto Township Fall Fair,” Weekly Review [Brampton], October 17, 1857.
⁷ “Etobicoke Annual Fair and Cattle Show,” Globe [Toronto], October 15, 1868.
⁸ “The Woodbridge Fair,” Globe [Toronto], October 20, 1892.
In the twentieth century, women’s groups, rather than an independent innkeeper or hotelier, often organized fair banquets. The Women’s Institutes became known for their catering services, which allowed them to raise funds while also fostering rural sociability and community service. Agricultural societies eagerly sought their help to provide affordable fair meals for the burgeoning crowds that regularly attended fairs. Many fairs and communities also had their own halls that could be used to host these dinners, so the local hotel space was no longer necessary. In 1913, the Shedden Women’s Institute organized the Shedden Fair’s banquet, and they continued to do so in subsequent years, in addition to selling food from booths during fair time. When “lady director” positions were established on the fair board, female agricultural society members often took up the task of organizing lunches and dinners, and often they were the ones who served their fellow male members. The “helpmate” role they were expected to play was obvious.

Fundraising was the main reason why women’s groups served meals on the fairgrounds. The First World War was a catalyst for women using fairs as venues to raise money. Groups such as the Women’s Institutes of Ontario, the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire, and church Ladies’ Aid Societies spent considerable time and effort preparing and selling food to raise money for the war effort. At the 1914 Wallacetown Fair, the IODE served lunch in the Fair’s hall and made $95, which they donated to the Red Cross Fund. Two years later at the same fair, the Women’s Institute “served excellent meals” and earned $90 for the Red Cross Fund.

Women also expanded their mobility and visibility on the fairgrounds by taking their fundraising activities outside of halls and into the midway where they organized refreshment booths alongside other concessionaires. At the 1915 Norfolk County Fair, both the IODE and Red

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9 “August 27, 1913,” Shedden Women’s Institute Minute Book, 1913-1919, Elgin County Archives, C9 Sh4 B1 F1.
10 See Chapter 2 for a discussion of lady directors and women’s sections of agricultural societies.
11 “Wallacetown Fair,” Advance [Dutton], October 8, 1914.
12 “Wallacetown Fair,” Advance [Dutton], October 5, 1916.
Cross managed refreshment booths that sold fruit, soft drinks, wieners, and biscuits, and the Ladies’ Aid Society of the local Baptist Church served hot meals in the dining hall. During the Second World War, women’s groups continued to use food as a fundraiser. At the 1944 Woodbridge Fair, sixteen of the Smithfield Friendship Ladies were “back with their little food counter (All Profits for War Work), and they sold about 100 pies, milk cans of tea and coffee, and yards of sandwiches. They baked the pies themselves.” During peace time, women also sold food at fairs to fundraise. The Shedden Women’s Institute continued to manage a food booth after the First World War in order to support a variety of other causes. In the 1920s, they made a profit of $48.10 from the meals served at the fair, and the money was used to buy batten and lining for a quilt being prepared to send to a needy family.

Agricultural societies continued to rely on women to host luncheons, and women went to special effort if these luncheons honoured special fair guests and dignitaries. In 1938, the Rotary-Kiwanis Luncheon in the Legion Hall was held on the third day of the Aylmer Fair and Ontario Premier Mitch Hepburn was the distinguished guest. The Ladies Auxiliary of the Legion served more than one hundred people that year, which resulted in some having to eat “in the basement and hallway of the hall, standing up.” The next year, the Ladies’ Auxiliary to the Canadian Legion again hosted the noon luncheon, where the meal was declared a splendid success.

Providing food for fairgoers was a natural extension of women’s duty in the home. By the mid-twentieth century, many women’s groups hosted food booths in various locations around fairgrounds to help satisfy fairgoers’ hunger. In 1950, a newspaper article on the Bolton Fair

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13 MacDonald, Splendor in the Fall, 88.
14 “Home Sciences Stressed at Fall Fair,” Globe and Mail, October 10, 1944.
15 “August 26, 1925,” Shedden Women’s Institute Minute Book, 1922-1926, Elgin County Archives, C9 Sh4 B1 F2.
17 “Thousands Attend Aylmer Fair Despite Cold Winds and Threatening Rains,” Aylmer Express, September 28, 1939.
emphasized how “Women’s organizations are to the forefront at every well conducted Fall Fair and Bolton was no exception. Here members of the Women’s Guild of the Presbyterian Church are hard at work satisfying the needs of the “inner-man.” A photograph accompanied the article that showed two women serving up pie to customers, one of which was a particularly eager-looking man waiting for his slice of pie. Women were expected to take care of the needs of men – especially when those needs involved food. Women’s responsibility for feeding their families was extended to feeding their communities at fair time.

Sometimes competition between organizations also ensued, as each group looked to entice visitors to their food booths. At the 1949 Woodbridge Fair, the Presbyterian Ladies’ Aid booth was especially busy feeding the crowds of fairgoers that flocked to the grandstand. Not to be outdone at the other end of the grandstand was the United Church Women’s Association. The newspaper reported that they also “had a busy day in their booth under the grandstand where they sold coffee, sandwiches, pie and other foodstuffs.” Thirteen women and the Reverend J. A. H. Hodgson were pictured [Figure 7.1]. Historian Diane Tye notes that church women’s production of food “brought women together and allowed them to contribute in concrete and very meaningful ways to their communities,” but she also highlights that it served to legitimate “their position as unpaid domestic workers, who were often pressured to perform important, but invisible, work that church and community members – women included – did not recognize as work.” While it is true that a great deal of women’s volunteer work has gone unrecognized and ignored as “real work,” at fairs women’s volunteer work was visible for the whole community to see and

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20 Ibid.
21 Tye, Baking as Biography, 150-1.
22 Ibid., 150.
appreciate. The work of female volunteers was visible to both women and men when performed in shared spaces such as the midway. Studies of rural women’s volunteerism have also shown that they saw their work as critical to the social and economic vitality of their communities.\footnote{Petzelka and Mannon, “Keepin’ this Little Town Going,” 253.}

![Figure 7.1]: The Molson’s Photographer, [Untitled photograph], \textit{Woodbridge News}, October 13, 1949.

Competition also existed between charitable organizations and commercial vendors. Women’s food and beverage tents and booths competed against concession stands run by midway companies or other professional food retailers who offered fairgoers everything from hot dogs, candy, ice cream, and soft drinks, to tea, sandwiches, and full-service beef dinners. At early fairs, food and drink stands also sold “intoxicating liquors,” which some complained were indulged in “too freely” and caused quarrels on the fairgrounds. This led to the explicit banning of such sales.\footnote{“County of Peel Fall Fair,” \textit{Brampton Times}, August 27, 1869.} Later on most fairs were dry, but competition between food stands was often fierce. At the 1921
Aylmer Fair, “dozens of booths serving hot dogs, ice cream, soft drinks, etc.” were competing for fairgoers’ patronage. The food provided by commercial concessionaries was especially well-liked among the youth because they tended to serve candy and other novel treats. Children and teenagers, and even parents, were drawn to the midway, the space on the fairgrounds where visitors could enjoy sideshows, games of chance or skill, carnival rides, and other amusements, so it was no surprise that they also indulged in ice cream, cotton candy, soft drinks, and other fast food and treats. Despite the competition women’s booths received from the professional vendors, however, their stands were still popular for their well-priced, wholesome, and delicious meals. At the 1932 Elgin County Fair, fairgoers were notified beforehand that the Gleaners Class of St. Paul’s Church and the Aylmer Women’s Institute would be serving food at reasonable prices that were sure to satisfy. Local newspaper fair reports thanked the “ladies” who “worked day and night serving many a hungry and thirsty fair-goer.”

Women also used the fairgrounds to fundraise in other ways. The women’s auxiliary of the hospital in Aylmer conducted a tag day at the 1921 fair where “a goodly sum was raised by the ladies.” Charitable organizations often used tag days to solicit money in return for a tag inscribed with the group’s slogan. Individuals who purchased a tag for a small charitable donation made their support for a cause or association known. In 1939, the Aylmer Branch of the Canadian Red

25 “Big Crowds Attended The Aylmer & East Elgin County Fair,” Aylmer Express, September 29, 1921.
26 Guy Scott, Country Fairs in Canada (Markham, ON: Fitzhenry and Whiteside Limited, 2006), 58-9. Midways were the more organized and corporatized version of the early sideshow entertainment found at some fairs in the nineteenth century. Modern midways with mechanized rides appeared after 1900.
28 “Come to Elgin County Fair Next Week,” Aylmer Express (1 Sept. 1932).
30 “Big Crowds Attended The Aylmer & East Elgin County Fair,” Aylmer Express, September 29, 1921.
Cross ran a booth outside the Aylmer Fair’s Crystal Palace and “had taggers mingling with the crowds throughout the duration of the Fair” in an effort to raise funds to “carry on efficiently” with their war work.32 The newspaper also reported proudly that the Red Cross booth was attractively arranged with such patriotic symbols as the Union Jack and Red Cross flags.33 Despite the cold winds and rains at the fair, the Red Cross Taggers collected $277 in two days. Fairgoers had “made a wonderful response to the Red Cross appeal for funds and registration of workers,” and one woman, Mrs. H. J. Hart, the winner of a car raffled off at the fair, shared her good fortune by donating $100 to the Red Cross.34

At fairs, women’s fundraising efforts raised much-needed cash, advertised their charities, and encouraged others to get involved in their campaigns. Women’s Work Committees of the Canadian Red Cross displayed items of women’s work at fairs that had been made to ship to Britain for war relief. The Aylmer and Malahide Red Cross showcased “a number of beautiful quilts, knitted goods, hospital supplies, articles of clothing, jam, etc.” at the 1941 Aylmer Fair and posted a display card that announced that the Aylmer, Lyons, Luton, Lakeview, Kingsmill, Mapleton and Bayham Women’s Institutes had “made 5,800 lbs of jam for overseas and that 3360 lbs. [had] already been shipped through the local branch of the Red Cross” that year.35

Dances and concerts were also popular fundraisers. These events raised money for charity groups, but they also encouraged rural sociability and community spirit. At the 1881 East Grey County Fair in Flesherton, the Ladies Aid Society held a concert in the Town Hall on the evening of the fair that was “a grand success” in raising money for the group.36 At the 1907 Mount Forest

32 “Thousands Attend Aylmer Fair Despite Cold Winds and Threatening Rains,” Aylmer Express, September 28, 1939.
33 Ibid.
34 “Red Cross Well Patronized at Aylmer Fair,” Aylmer Express, September 28, 1939.
35 “Thousands Attend Aylmer Free Fair,” Aylmer Express, September 25, 1941.
36 “County and Township Fairs,” Globe [Toronto], October 8, 1881.
Fair, tickets for the concert cost twenty-five cents and the program included a performance from the Mount Forest Concert Band, solo pianos, a Scottish comic song, humorous readings, and costume character songs. In 1940, the Erin Village Red Cross hosted a successful concert the night of the fair. The concert featured a play entitled “The Girl From Out Yonder” that was performed by the community’s youth and raised a profit of $20. Although not an enormous sum of money, $20 was not insignificant and could buy a lot of wool yarn to use to knit soldiers’ apparel. Every little bit of money raised was important for many community charity groups, but their activities were also important for bringing the community together for an evening of fun and good fellowship.

Rural women were often responsible for fostering community spirit and encouraging local residents to do their part in supporting projects of communal, national, and even international importance. Women’s fundraising efforts were as modest as raising money to make a quilt or as complex as coordinating aid for wartime efforts. Agricultural societies benefited from women who were willing to devote their time and energy to feed and entertain fairgoers in return for the ability to raise money and awareness for causes they held dear. The women who participated in these efforts also received broader recognition for their work, which helped cement their social authority in the community.

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38 “Excellent Exhibit In All Classes and Large Crowd At Fair,” *Erin Advocate*, October 17, 1940.
Special Attractions: Women Who Performed

Women’s fair work was not always about serving others. Some women were professional entertainers who profited from appearing at fairs. Carnival shows were widely popular in North America by the late nineteenth century and women often headlined as dancers, acrobats, and other performers.\textsuperscript{40} The fact that these women were encouraged or employed to perform so publicly also signalled an acceptance of women’s place in the spotlight, although their performances and those given by local women varied considerably. Professional entertainers were able to transgress traditional boundaries of femininity and domestic womanhood in a way that local women simply could not. Initially township and county agricultural societies dismissed the more “common” vaudeville acts and instead responded to fairgoers’ desire for more entertainment by adding women’s driving and riding classes. When more spectacle was demanded by the public, however, women’s performances grew to include many other types of activities. Whether female performers were seen as rare spectacles or representative of broader social change, their visibility performing centre-stage on the fairgrounds was significant for advancing their public presence.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, agricultural societies promoted their fairs as opportunities for education and rural sociability, and also media for entertainment, but community members often had difficulty agreeing on what kinds of entertainment should be allowed. The nineteenth century was a period when “the industries of spectacle” experienced a mass cultural explosion in North America.\textsuperscript{41} Agricultural societies and society more generally grappled with including entertainment that was sensational enough to draw in crowds, but did not

\textsuperscript{40} See R. M. Lewis, \textit{From Traveling Show to Vaudeville: Theatrical Spectacle in America, 1830-1910} (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins Press, 2003).
necessarily support their ideological underpinnings. The division between those who supported broader forms of spectacle and those who did not ultimately rested on each side’s understanding of what function fair entertainment served. In 1859, a reporter for the *York Herald* published an article that enthusiastically supported a local councillor who had “introduced, and carried a by-law to prevent, by a stringent license, the exhibitions of horse-riding, puppet shows, &c.,” in order to “preserve and advance public morality.” The reporter argued that “every exhibition that does not blend instruction with amusement” was disgraceful, and local officials had a responsibility to “see to it that our morals are not exposed to unnecessary temptation.” Rural reformers believed agricultural societies were tasked with using their judgement to decide what amusement was intellectually and spiritually uplifting, and while some agricultural society members believed more novel attractions were needed to increase gate receipts, others lamented events that detracted from fairs’ educational exhibits.

Female performers were especially troublesome for fair organizers. H. B. Cowan, the Provincial Superintendent of Agricultural and Horticultural Societies, questioned how “women contortionists” could be a justified form of entertainment, and charged that their inclusion was “a disgrace, rather than a benefit, to the farmers of Ontario.” Farm journals, such as *The Farmer’s Advocate*, agreed with Cowan, insisting that only innocent attractions and educational features were in good taste, and congratulating fairs that forbade “serpent eaters” and “skirt dancers.” Female dancers, similar to other vaudeville performers, were worrisome because they represented

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42 Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*, 6.
44 County Member, letter to the editor, “More about the Central Exhibition,” *Guelph Mercury and Advertiser*, September 26, 1889.
45 “Agricultural Exhibitions,” *Farmer’s Advocate* 3 (January 1868): 2.
47 “Simcoe’s Model Fair,” *The Farmer’s Advocate*, November 2, 1903.
the moral decay and “vile culture of cities which hosted the larger exhibitions.”\textsuperscript{48} Women were supposed to bring refinement to fairs and help make them respectable community events, not further disgrace the fair experience.

Most county and township fairs in Ontario, however, maintained modest forms of amusement, and female performers were usually local women – amateurs not professionals – whose presence was considered wholesome and uplifting. At the 1880 Burwick Fair, women were a key part of the dinner performance during closing celebrations. In the evening a “grand concert” was held in the local Orange Hall that included a performance by the Woodbridge Brass Band, featuring “lady singers” Mrs. Machie and Miss Cunnington. Miss M. E. Fielding read a selection from “King John” and recited, by special request, “The fate of McGregor.” The entertainment portion of the evening was closed by an address made by Mr. Meek, who thanked the performers and “spoke in high terms of the singing of…the elocutionary powers of the lady reader of the evening who he said possessed reading powers of considerable dramatic worth.”\textsuperscript{49} The 1891 Eramosa Fair Concert “drew a full house,” to hear Miss K. Strong sing. Strong sang a number of songs, “much to the delight of the audience who appreciated her fine voice,” including a solo song entitled, “A Bird from Over the Sea,” as well as two duets with Mr. Fax, “Master and Pupil,” and “Learning to Read.”\textsuperscript{50}

Women also took centre stage to give educational talks to agricultural society members and fairgoers, which typically took place at a local town theatre or fair dining or exhibition hall. At the 1870 Minto Fair, the success of the banquet was credited to a female guest speaker. A local newspaper reported that the evening’s speeches were good, “especially by a lady advocate of

\textsuperscript{48} Jones, Midways, Judges, and Smooth-Tongued Fakirs, 97.
\textsuperscript{49} “Burwick Fair”: The Annual Autumnal Exhibition of West Riding of York and Township of Vaughan Agricultural Societies,” \textit{Brampton Conservator}, October 22, 1880.
\textsuperscript{50} “Eramosa Fall Show,” \textit{Guelph Mercury and Advertiser}, October, 18, 1891.
“woman’s rights,” and being strictly on teetotal principles, passed off very pleasantly.”\textsuperscript{51} Although the woman’s speech focused on teetotalism, rather than women’s rights, the agricultural society’s decision to include her illustrated that they were not deterred by her connection to the more controversial movement and were acknowledging her “right” to express her opinion in a public venue. It may have been her ability to advocate eloquently for teetotalism, not for women’s rights, that allowed the speech to pass off pleasantly.

Agricultural societies also sought women who exhibited unique, if not exotic, identities and talents. At the 1881 Markham Fair, the local newspaper, the \textit{Liberal}, reported that the highlight for visitors was witnessing “Mrs. Flanders, otherwise Aoewentaiyouh (Beautiful Land),” who “appeared in the pavilion in full Indian costume. This lady is a sister of Dr. Oronhyteka (Burning Sky).”\textsuperscript{52} The \textit{Globe} also reported on “Mrs. Flands, of Hagarsville,” who they described as an “Indian lady” who exhibited in the “Ladies’ Work” classes and won many prizes. The \textit{Globe} also reported that she attracted a great deal of attention when she appeared in “beautiful Indian costume” before fairgoers.\textsuperscript{53} Oronhyatekha, also known as Dr. Peter Martin, was a member of the Six Nations and a famous Mohawk physician who led a rather extraordinary life from the time he was born in 1841 to his death in 1907.\textsuperscript{54} Although little is known about his sister, it was recorded that their family had been a large one, and that the female members were especially capable at fashioning clothing.\textsuperscript{55} Despite reporters’ difficulty with her name, the significant attention her participation received highlighted how First Nations people were applauded for accepting “civilized practices,” such as excelling at westernized domestic pursuits, yet still identified as

\textsuperscript{51} “Minto Agricultural Society,” \textit{Elora Observer}, September 30, 1870.
\textsuperscript{52} “Markham Fair,” \textit{Liberal} [Richmond Hill], October 14, 1881.
\textsuperscript{53} “Markham Fair,” \textit{Globe} [Toronto], October 8, 1881.
\textsuperscript{54} OAAS Women’s Section Past-President Ethel Brant Monture wrote about the life of Oronhyatekha in her book, \textit{Canadian Portraits: Brant, Crowfoot, Oronhyatekha: Famous Indians} (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Company, 1960), 131-158.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 133.
fundamentally different because of their “otherness.” In the case of Aoewentaïyouh, she appealed to white people who wanted to see First Nations peoples assimilated, yet who were also simultaneously fascinated with the spectacle and exoticness that aboriginal women symbolized.56

Women and men also sometimes exhibited collections of international curiosities, such as Mrs. Robert Webster, who exhibited a collection of Indian, Japanese, and Chinese curios that drew attention at the 1891 Centre Wellington Fair.57 These examples illustrate late-nineteenth-century Ontarians’ desire to consume knowledge of other peoples and nations, albeit in often superficial and limited capacities.58 The entertainment and “colour” that racial performance and display brought to the fairgrounds was appealing to white people when they supported the popular racial attitudes of the day.59

By the twentieth century, the number of professional female performers employed at fairs continued to grow. These professional performers were, however, very different from the female guest speakers and amateur singers and dancers who had performed at earlier fairs. Instead of providing educational speeches and enlightening musical performances, professional female entertainers appealed to fairgoers’ desire for more novel or scandalous forms of entertainment. At the 1902 Aylmer Fair, the Aylmer Sun reported that the circus attraction, which was “surely to please,” included the 8 Cornellas, the Flying Moorer, and Mlle. Marjorie’s troupe of trained dogs.60 In 1914, the main attraction at the Norfolk County Fair was Miss Dorothy DeVonda, a female

57 “Centre Wellington Fair,” Guelph Weekly Mercury and Advertiser, October 15, 1891.
58 See Beausaert, “Foreigners in Town.”
59 Rydell, All the World’s a Fair, 6.
60 “Aylmer’s Great Fair,” Aylmer Sun, September 25, 1902.
skydiver whose performance the previous year was so popular that they hired her back again [Figure 7.2]. Despite suffering “slight injuries in an accident to her parachute at Dunnville recently,” DeVonda made a “spectacular parachute drop from a height of 8000 feet,” according to the *British Canadian* newspaper. DeVonda was identified as an “accomplished and daring young lady” who capably “performed her dangerous act.” Women who performed dangerous feats were exciting attractions that some agricultural societies were willing to employ if it guaranteed paying visitors, but neither the agricultural society member nor the regular fairgoer, male or female, would have wanted the women in their family to perform in such a way.

[Figure 7.2]: “Norfolk County Fair [Advertisement],” *British Canadian* [Simcoe], October 7, 1914.

Although professional female entertainers became more common, local women continued to perform at fairs as well, especially in the ever-popular musical and dance recitals and pageants,

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61 “Norfolk County Fair [Advertisement],” *British Canadian* [Simcoe], October 7, 1914.
62 “Norfolk County Fair,” *British Canadian* [Simcoe], October 21, 1914.
63 Ibid.
which appealed to people’s rural folk traditions or patriotic sentiments. At the 1923 Norfolk County Fair, an audience of over 2,000 people jammed the grandstand to watch the “Historical Pageant of Norfolk County,” which featured “Hundreds of Norfolk’s Prettiest Girls” in scenes that included “Pioneers in Covered Wagons,” and “Governor Simcoe’s Visit.” The pageant was praised for its “picturesque close with Miss Canada surrounded by her people and Miss Norfolk as one of her maids of honor.” Norfolk resident Marguerite Clark portrayed Miss Norfolk and Mary Spencer played Miss Canada. At the 1924 Erin Fair, the Guelph Pipe Band furnished the musical program, and the crowd enjoyed a performance from a “Wee Lass,” who, along with the pipers, “stepped to several good old Scotch and Irish reels and jigs, and received a real applause.”

A large number of residents in Guelph were of Scottish and Irish descent and they enjoyed performances that affirmed their heritage. Similarly, the popular “Old Time Fiddlers’ Contest” at the Erin Fair attracted a large group of contestants in 1938, but it was a female fiddler, Mrs. Moffet of Glencross, “who got a ‘big hand’ from the crowd” and was awarded one of the top honours in the competition.

The step dancing and square dancing competitions also drew the attention of a large portion of the crowd; especially was this true of the old time square dance, which was gracefully performed by the four couples from Camilla, who won fame at Toronto Exhibition. Old folks who recall the happy days of the farm home dance parties, enjoyed it to the full, and the young generation got a big kick out of comparing the grace and style of the old time dance with the big apple and other fads of the day.

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64 MacDonald, Splendor in the Fall, 58.
65 “Norfolk County Fair, Hon. John S. Martin at Opening,” British Canadian [Simcoe], September 26, 1923.
66 “Erin Fair Was Best In Years,” Erin Advocate, October 16, 1924.
68 Ibid.
Women performers and contestants aided agricultural societies by appealing to the traditions and history of rural communities and encouraging entertainment that was more wholesome, and less urban, than the more divisive vaudeville attractions employed at other fairs.

As the twentieth century progressed, agricultural societies still drew fairgoers with more modest forms of entertainment, but societies that wanted to attract visitors from further abroad believed they needed to employ professional entertainment. Some of the female performers who helped to entice large crowds to the 1935 Norfolk County Fair included the “Four Dancing Dolls, “Beth Watson, Canada’s Premier Scotch Piper & Dancer,” “Myrtle Collins, Acrobatic Dancer,” “Joyce Brown, Comedy Singer and Dancer,” “Ruth and Joyce, Adagio Dancers,” and “Jan and Merle, Adagio and Apache Team – Stars of the National Motor Show.” The 1938 Aylmer Fair featured more than “16 big acts with more than 50 people,” which included the “high-class” vaudeville acts the Goldettes and Dainty Estrellita. The Goldettes were “beautiful dancing girls in gorgeous costumes,” while Dainty Estrellita was “the toe dancing star of her age.” These “beautiful dancing girls” and the other musical, acrobatic, and comedic acts drew large crowds and packed the grandstands to the point that many fairgoers had to be satisfied to find standing space only. In 1941, the show in front of the grandstand was again one of the main attractions, and among the trained animals, high-wire performers, acrobats, magicians, and clowns, the “dance numbers by gorgeous girls,” were touted as “two hours of real good fun and entertainment.” Agricultural societies continued to look for ways to set their fairs apart from the rest, and professional female performers were often employed as star attractions.

69 “Norfolk County Fair [Advertisement],” Norfolk Observer, October 7, 1935.
70 “The Biggest Crowd in Aylmer’s History Expected at the Fair,” Aylmer Express, September 22, 1938.
72 “Thousands Attend Aylmer Free Fair,” Aylmer Express, September 25, 1941.
In the postwar period, professional female entertainers continued to be featured. At the 1949 Orono Fair, Barbara Fairchild and her horse War Paint were hired to wow the crowd with her exhibition of trick riding [Figure 7.3]. The newspaper report emphasized that the “Pretty Miss Barbara Fairchild” gave a skilled performance, but also an “eye pleasing” one. Even though female equestrians were more common by the mid-twentieth century, Barbara Fairchild’s trick riding transgressed sex roles by demonstrating her competency in a more dangerous form of horse sport. Similar to Dorothy DeVonda, whose daring skydiving act pushed the limits of what was acceptable female behaviour, Barbara Fairchild was able to perform such “masculine” skills because she was an outsider. Local women who indulged in similar acts would have been transgressing acceptable standards of morality, propriety, and refinement, all aspects of good taste that were being encouraged and rewarded in women’s exhibits, such as food, flowers, and fancywork. In order to ease anxiety created by these outside women who subverted gender norms, reporters attempted to “ground them in the conventional world” by emphasizing their more traditional feminine attributes. For instance, reporters emphasised Fairchild’s attractiveness as a way to reassure fairgoers of her femininity.

74 Walden, Becoming Modern in Toronto, 184-5.
Other professional female entertainers profited from society’s desire for female beauty and sexuality. Although local women would have been expected to be modest in dress and behaviour, “outside” women were engaged to display their “gorgeous and shapely” bodies. Such performances were not without controversy, but professional shows such as the “Vive Les Girls” performance at the 1958 Norfolk County Fair profited from the public’s desire to see female sexuality and “beauty and form in motion.”75 Not all Ontario fairs hired professional female performers; indeed, most fairs did not have the budget or desire to employ the same kinds of entertainment found at the larger exhibitions. As Canadian Statesman columnist Ed Youngman explained when comparing the Orono Fair with the Canadian National Exhibition in 1963, “[the

75 Ibid., 73.
CNE] quit “girlie” shows this year; we never started them; always being content to do our ogling in the open air, and using our imagination as to what’s under the dresses.”

Fairs across Ontario featured a variety of female entertainers in front of the grandstand or in the concert or exhibition hall. Some were local women whose performances typically conformed to normative feminine behaviour and intellectual and musical accomplishment. These women displayed good taste by showcasing talents that symbolized acceptable standards of morality and propriety. Other women – usually outsiders who were professional entertainers – demonstrated that women could do daring, physical acts, or profit from society’s not-so-hidden obsession with sex and beauty. Some women sought opportunities to show their talent, others simply to make some money; some women supported normative gender ideals and others transgressed them. Usually who defied acceptable standards of behaviour, however, depended on where those women resided. Local women had more pressure to conform to gender norms and ideas surrounding respectability and taste that were so prominently displayed in domestic exhibits. Although all female performance enlarged women’s access to the public stage and shifted societal views of women’s abilities to some degree, not all women were given the same opportunities to move beyond traditional boundaries of femininity.

**Other Contests for Fair Women**

Beyond entertainment and food, agricultural societies encouraged local women to display their skills to the community by competing in a variety of contests, most of which were added to fair programs in the twentieth century. Some contests took place centre stage in front of the grandstand, while others attracted a more intimate audience. These contests judged women’s

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abilities on fair day rather than work they prepared beforehand. Such contests were not about production, but performance. Women won awards for a variety of skills such as musical talent, beauty, athleticism – even how to milk a cow. These contests were entertaining, but they also displayed valued abilities. Unlike the professional female entertainers whose actions were expected to be amusing, but not necessarily suitable for respectable women, the local women of all ages who participated in fair contests were expected to showcase talents and traits that supported normative feminine behaviour. These competitions were often age-related and carried value-laden messages. Contests for the oldest person on the fairgrounds awarded older women for their continued loyalty, Fair Queen contests awarded young women for their beauty and energy, and baby contests awarded married women for their childbearing and mothering. Agricultural societies usually organized these competitions at little cost, but they still attracted significant participation and attention from fairgoers. When women entered these contests, they were not simply passive onlookers, but active participants who decided their involvement provided some sort of personal and/or communal benefit. Women who participated showcased their talents and often received prizes and awards, as well as varying levels of celebrity status.

Women’s physical and participatory longevity was honoured at fairs when they won awards for being the oldest person on the fairgrounds. Before official competitions were held, local newspaper reporters sometimes commented on long-returning visitors or exhibitors. At the 1916 Wallacetown Fair, the Dutton Advance notified readers that one of the oldest fairgoers was Mrs. Helen Gunn of Wallacetown, who had never missed a fair. They explained that this year, “owing to her great age, she was unable to go about as usual, but, seated in an auto, was keenly interested in everything that transpired.”77 As an agricultural society matured, and the annual fair aged, it

77 “Wallacetown Fair,” Advance [Dutton], October 5, 1916.
became a badge of honour to be recognized as a citizen who had been a long-time fair supporter. When this support was turned into a regular competition by the postwar period, women were typically the winners. In 1946, 86-year-old Miss Sarah Patterson and 80-year-old Mrs. Sarah Carrevan were awarded prizes for the oldest persons at the Smithville Fair [Figure 7.4].78 At the 1950 Coe Hill Fair, Mrs. Mary Whitmore, 82, and Mrs. Anne Whitmore, 88, won the honour that year.79 At the 1978 Markham Fair, “several hundred senior citizens “signed in” at the special historical booth,” where it was discovered that the oldest visitor to the fair was 94-year-old Norah Macklem of Stouffville. Mary Rose of Markham was runner-up at 92 years of age.80

[Figure 7.4]: Hamilton Spectator, “Fair,” 1946, Local History & Archives, 32022191073309, Hamilton Public Library. Caption: “Miss Sarah Patterson 86, and Mrs. Sarah Carrevan 80.”

Other fair contests focused on how women performed specific tasks. In 1934, some OAAS delegates expressed concern that the entertainment on fair grounds was eclipsing their agricultural exhibits. To remedy the situation, one fair director, Malcolm Calder, encouraged agricultural societies to host milking contests for women, arguing that the Beaverton Fair milking contest had proven a big attraction with fairgoers. The next year, it was suggested that milk maid contests and chicken plucking contests were “suitable” attractions for merging education and entertainment. The appeal of these types of attractions was obvious. They fulfilled agricultural societies’ mandate of educating rural women, yet allowed for the competition and live entertainment that interested fairgoers.

Other popular fair contests judged women on their public speaking, singing, dancing, or musical talent. Although these competitions were not agricultural, they showcased elements of femininity and womanhood that were valued in rural society. Women’s contests, similar to their exhibits, were expected to showcase hard work and talent, but also elements of middle-class refinement. The ability to sing a tune, play an instrument, or speak eloquently on a topic showcased a woman’s skill and respectability. Unlike professional female entertainers who were employed because of their novel behaviour, local women entered contests to showcase their devotion to traditional feminine talents and characteristics. At the 1897 Erin Fair, Miss Alma Lamont, who was only 12 years old, took first prize in the Highland fling dance competition, in which she was reported to have “looked charming in her Highland dress.” In 1924, the Erin Fair held a public speaking contest that was open to the pupils of the township, and the top three prizes all went to

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83 “Erin Fall Show: A Fine Exhibition and a Great Crowd,” Guelph Weekly Mercury and Advertiser, October 21, 1897.
young women. At the 1928 Georgetown Fair, the first- and second-prize winners in the public speaking contest were young women also, and Margaret McMaster of Glen Williams beat John Creighton of Georgetown to win first prize and a silver cup in the piano competition.

Athletic competitions were also popular for both men and women at fairs in the twentieth century. By late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, sporting events were acceptable places for the sexes to socialize and whole families often attended. Women had more opportunities to engage in sport, including ice skating, croquet, bicycling, baseball, and rowing. In 1886, an article in the *Farmer’s Advocate* advertised rowing for girls as “a healthy and invigorating exercise,” and approvingly reported that

> the fact that “our girls” are developing tastes of this kind is a very satisfactory sign of the times. In former days, the rules upon which they were brought up were peculiarly restrictive, and few outdoor amusements were open to them; but now, the desirability of their having more invigorating recreation…is becoming generally admitted.

By the twentieth century, changes to women’s fashion and the promotion of female physical education helped to further encourage young women to participate in sport, and competitions became more “vigorous, competitive, and organized.”

Fair organizers incorporated sporting contests in their program as another way to draw in crowds. Although not considered suitable for adult women, fair organizers encouraged young women to compete in sporting events as a way to embrace the expanding North American sporting culture and to keep young people interested and actively participating in the fair. At the 1910

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85 “Good Crowd Present at Georgetown Fair,” *Globe* [Toronto], September 25, 1928.


Weston Fair, boys and girls competed separately in contests for foot races, wheelbarrow races, sack races, potato races, bicycle races, and relay races. Long-jump competitions and three-legged races were offered for boys only. Although girls and boys did not compete against one another at these races, competitions for girls still illustrated and encouraged their athleticism. Some fairs limited races and other sporting events to boys and men only, but the majority of fairs included events for women.

Young women also played team sports at fairs. At the 1911 Newmarket Fair, an “interesting feature” was the basketball match between the Newmarket and Richmond Hill girls’ high school teams. The Richmond Hill team won the game by a score of 26 to 19. For young women in Ontario, softball was another popular sporting activity. The growth of softball in Canada paralleled that of the United States, and by the 1940s softball was lauded as the number one sport for women in North America. In Canada, women’s softball leagues flourished in the 1930s, and by the 1940s, when the All-American Girls’ Softball League was established, scouts were recruiting female players from across Canada to play. Generally, women’s league players were young women who retired from the sport once married, but in some of the professional leagues women continued to play after marriage and even children. Women’s softball games and tournaments were held at fairs across Ontario. Their pervasiveness reflected softball’s acceptance as a respectable leisure activity for girls and young women. At the 1928 Georgetown Fair, the final game in the women’s softball tournament attracted a crowd, and at the 1931 Elgin County Fair,
one of the main highlights was the softball tournament where men’s and women’s teams competed and attracted a large crowd of spectators who appreciated the strong competition by both sexes. In 1940, the Puslinch Agricultural Society offered a winning prize of $1.25 to the girl who won a softball-throwing competition. Sports such as basketball and baseball were noncontact sports that maintained a level of decorum for female players, yet nevertheless showed great skill and athleticism.

Fairs also offered competitions that judged young women on their physical appearance, not just their physical abilities. Some competitions were fairly innocent, such as the “Freckle Contest” at Lion’s Head Fair, which was deemed “a big hit.” A competition for “the best head of unbobbed hair on girls 8 to 18 years” was held at the 1925 Thorold Fair. The editor of the Thorold Post, John H. Thompson, sponsored the winning prize money to protest against the increasing number of women who were cutting their hair short. He asserted that if he “had a thousand girls, not one would have bobbed hair,” arguing that the “Creator made female hair long, and I am in favor of leaving it that way.” Despite the obvious problem with Thompson’s logic, the competition itself was a success. Over 19 girls entered, and 11-year-old Gertrude Wallace, “whose lovely head of light blonde wavy tresses was considered best,” won the competition. The judges considered the length, texture and care of the hair when making their final decision, also making it clear that the young women’s “faces did not count.”

The most popular contests, however, judged female contestants’ beauty and manners. Fair beauty contests, and the later “Fair Queen” contests, developed over the course of the late

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96 “Splendid Exhibits at Elgin County Fair and Dairy Cattle Show,” Aylmer Express, September 10, 1931.
97 “100th Anniversary Puslinch Agricultural Society Prize List, 1940” Fergus Fall Fair Collection, MU 202, A1978.30, Wellington County Museum and Archives.
99 “Woman’s Crowning Glory Is Feature of Fall Fair,” Globe [Toronto], October 8, 1925.
nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and often only young, single women were eligible. Although most Fair Queen competitions emphasized that they were not just about beauty, the earlier competitions made it clear that a woman’s physical attractiveness was central to the judging criteria. At the 1911 Cooksville Fair, one of the “most amusing competitions” was a contest in which a donor awarded a fruit cake to “the best looking girl.” A newspaper report noted that “evidently it is a cake of great renown, for as pretty a bevy of damsels congregated as could be wished.”

This early beauty contest was likely influenced by similar contests that began in the United States in the late nineteenth century. American beauty contests started as a way to attract publicity and tourism to resort towns and community festivals. The Toronto Industrial Exhibition had tried to host a beauty contest in 1884, convinced that Canadian beauty could not be surpassed, but despite the organizers’ promise to keep contestants’ identities secret except for the two winning entries (judged by photographic portraits), the competition failed because women “were reluctant to court public view deliberately.” In the twentieth century, that reluctance began to dissipate as women moved ever more into the public eye.

It was not until the postwar period, however, that beauty and Fair Queen contests proliferated. Beauty contests had shifted away from their side-show roots to become more professional, and career- and scholarship-oriented competitions. In doing so, they also became part of the culture that built on the tradition of middle class civic boosterism. The Miss Canada Pageant began in Hamilton in 1940, but moved to Toronto in 1949 and was renamed the Miss Canada Health, Talent and Beauty Pageant. A reporter for the Globe and Mail wrote in 1949 that

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100 “A Novel Prize at Cooksville Fair: Cake for Best-Looking Young Lady – Fine Exhibit of Fruit and Stock,” Globe [Toronto], October 7, 1911.
102 Walden, Becoming Modern in Toronto, 155.
103 Ballerino, Wilk, and Stoeltje, Beauty Queens on the Global Stage, 4-5.
the contest was no longer “just a pulchritude parade.” Although he explained women still wore bathing suits, which revealed “legs galore,” he also noted that “the whole tone of the thing is being uplifted. Beauty alone doesn’t win the prize (it says here) without health, talent, poise, bearing, grace and … er … looks.” The reporter’s tongue-in-cheek comments suggested that he was not completely convinced that the pageant was transformed, but he did note that the prizes were worth significantly more than previously. Before the winner won $200; now Miss Canada received $3,000 in scholarships, a diamond ring worth $1,000, and more than $1,000 worth of other gifts, in addition to a trip across Canada.

Local fairs recognized the appeal of these events and the contestants they attracted. At the 1951 Norfolk County Fair, Miss Canada of 1951, Marjorie Kelly, visited the fairgrounds. The local paper, the *Reformer*, reported that the North Walsingham native was

> the living manifestation of the beauty, culture, co-operativeness and enthusiasm that we of Norfolk are so proud, particularly among our youth. We appreciated her presence at the fair, and her readiness to share her talents with others. Her words of acceptance of the scroll of honor, presented to her by the Warden on behalf of the people of Norfolk showed her to be unspoiled by her successes, proud of her community, her county, and intensely Canadian. As she sang “Land of Hope and Glory” we knew why she was chosen as Miss Canada and no more appropriate expression of a person’s feelings towards their country and way of life was ever made. [Italics added]

The characteristics of beauty, culture, cooperativeness and enthusiasm that Kelly was praised for revealed the normative notions of ladylike behaviour. Kelly had grown up on a tobacco farm in the far west end of Norfolk County and credited the hard work she did on her family farm with giving her the discipline to succeed and “never give up on anything I started.” Kelly went on to compete in the Miss America pageant, and she ultimately moved to the United States after meeting

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105 Ibid.
106 MacDonald, *Splendor in the Fall*, 73.
her future husband, but in 1951 Fair she was a perfect representative of a young, local woman whose physical appearance, comportment, and speech epitomized the proper womanhood and female citizenship that community leaders hoped all female residents would emulate.

Fair beauty contests existed within a larger framework of global beauty pageants. Scholars have shown that beauty pageants were used to encourage prescribed ideals of womanhood and citizenship. Pageants portrayed, and ultimately judged, racial, ethnic, and cultural difference. When agricultural societies adopted “Fair Queen” competitions as an annual feature of the fair, the young women who won these titles never won the prestige that a national beauty title bestowed, but they nevertheless achieved a certain degree of celebrity in their communities, and the same feminine characteristics were put on display. Also, by the 1960s the OAAS sponsored a provincial competition at the Canadian National Exhibition where local Fair Queen winners competed for a provincial title.

By the 1960s and 1970s, most fairs in Ontario had some form of Fair Queen competition. Some of those contests specified beauty as a fundamental component of evaluation, while others emphasized a woman’s personality. The 1965 Orono Fair Beauty Queen Contest was sponsored by an Oshawa beverage company, Smith Beverages, and open to female contestants who were 16 years of age and resided in Durham County. Short formal dresses were worn by all contestants and

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the “most beautiful” was crowned “Miss Durham Central.” The “Miss Durham Central” competition was labeled a beauty contest, but most fairs refused the Beauty Queen title, instead opting to crown their winner Fair Queen. Beauty was just one – albeit important – element of the judging at these competitions. For example, the 1965 Miss Acton Fall Fair competition advertised that poise and personality were just as important as appearance. It was not enough for a winner to be beautiful, she also had to display the ladylike characteristics, such as cooperation, grace, and eagerness, which organizers expected from a community representative.

The eligibility of contestants often involved age and residence. The Miss Acton Fair competition was reportedly the first of its kind in Southern Ontario when it began in 1963, and the Canadian National Exhibition (CNE) reportedly modeled its Fair Queen contest after this competition. In 1965, the Miss Acton Fair contest was open to “single girls, 15 years and over (no age limit), from the town of Acton, and four townships, Erin, Eramosa, Esquesing, and Nassagaweya.” The eligibility rules ensured that women were young, unmarried, and lived in the community. Racial, ethnic, and cultural differences among contestants were not publicized, either because they did not exist in these largely homogenous rural communities where most contestants were likely of European-Canadian extraction, or because organizers and the media chose to ignore the diversity that existed. Beauty pageant organizers often argued that single women were necessary because married women did not have the time to devote to their duties as Queens, but organizers likely wanted contestants who represented purity and wholesomeness – virtues that only young, chaste women could claim. The desired characteristics of cooperativeness

109 The prize for first place was $25, second place $15, and third place $10. “Beauty Contest at Orono Fair,” Canadian Statesman [Bowmanville], August 18, 1965.
113 King-O’Riain, Pure Beauty, 116.
and youthful enthusiasm may have also been easier to find in younger contestants. Fair Queen contest organizers often selected public figures from the community to judge contests, and sometimes they were able to secure more broadly recognized public figures or celebrities. The first Acton Fair Queen contest in 1963 secured three well-known radio and television personalities to judge the contest: Norm Marshall, a popular Hamilton radio and television sportscaster; Clifford Muir, a manager of a Guelph radio station; and Big Al Jones, a western commentator from Kitchener television.\(^\text{114}\) All of the 1963 Acton Fair Queen contest judges were men, and although they may not have all privileged the same characteristics, it is likely that normative heterosexual notions of femininity and beauty played a role in how they selected winners. They considered young women who were cooperative and willing to serve their community, who displayed the appropriate decorum, taste, and style, as worthy of representing the fair.

Contestants for the Miss Acton Fair Contest participated in an advance competition parade where they wore “street togs, dresses and high heels.”\(^\text{115}\) Following the parade they had interviews with the judges. To build drama and draw in the crowds, the results of the contest were kept secret until the crowning ceremony on the first night of the fair. The winner won most of the prizes, but the runners-up, her “ladies-in-waiting,” also received “part of the prize loot,” which included cash, vouchers, and merchandise from local merchants and businesses.\(^\text{116}\)

Young women participated in these contests for more than prizes. They understood that the title of Fair Queen bestowed a measure of approval and admiration from their peers and the broader community. A description of the 1976 Miss Acton Fair contest illustrated the attention the contestants received:


\(^{116}\) Ibid.
Though the audience jammed into the Acton Arena Friday expressed its enjoyment of the variety show by clapping and cheering, an atmosphere of tension lingered. The crowd was waiting. They wanted to see which of the 13 girls entered in the Miss Acton Fall Fair competition would receive the crown…117

The winning contestant, Charmaine Bigelow, was described as an aspiring dental hygienist who was “a tall, slim girl with long, straight light brown hair and large innocent eyes which sparkled with tears” when the master of ceremonies announced her as the winner.118 As part of her duties, she attended local functions as the Acton Fair’s representative, attended the OAAS convention in Toronto, and competed against Fair Queens from all over Ontario for the provincial crown at the CNE. Charmaine Bigelow’s win meant that she received prizes, including roses, trophies, “the traditional silver tierra” and “velvet red cape,” in addition to gifts and vouchers from local merchants. The prizes themselves were not the scholarships or endorsements associated with larger beauty pageants, although the roses, tiara, and cape were familiar symbols, but for many young women their win bestowed a measure of pride regardless of the awards. When asked why she had wanted to enter the competition, she explained that she had wanted “to make her family proud.”119

This was also the reason Marilyn Ilott, the 1979 Markham Fair Queen, decided to compete. She was a student at Seneca College in a fashion design program and a part-time model, and she was described as a “pretty brunette with a sparkling smile and pleasing personality.”120 Marilyn Ilott’s grandmother and sister had encouraged her to compete, and when she won, she expressed her joy that her grandfather, who was turning 91 years old, was able to attend the event. She told reporters that she entered the competition for her grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Reuben Meyer, who were

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118 Ibid.
120 “The fair(est) of all,” Stouffville Tribune, September 20, 1979.
reportedly “two of the happiest people attending the event.”

The young women who participated, the crowds that amassed to watch, the local merchants who donated prizes, the directors who organized, and the agricultural societies who supported the contests – all of these individuals championed the idea that winning a Fair Queen title was a significant accomplishment. The women who entered these competitions did so with the hope of individual recognition, but also with the desire to make their families and community proud. It took courage and commitment to participate in these contests, but perhaps the clearest indication that women enjoyed the honour bestowed by these titles were the jubilant smiles they wore when photographed being crowned.

[Figure 7.5].

[Figure 7.5]: “Shedden Fair – Fair Queen,” St. Thomas Times-Journal, June 30, 1973, St. Thomas Times-Journals fonds, C8 Sh3 B1 F19 19, Elgin County Archives.

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121 Ibid.
The era of the Fair Queen was also a time when women competed for the title of Dairy Princess, Grape Queen, Tobacco Queen, and Queen of the Furrow, to name just a few of the various associations or industries that supported such contests. Many of these contests took place at fairs, or the winners attended fairs to represent their industries or associations. Typically, the women who entered these contests had to have knowledge and/or skills related to groups they hoped to represent. For instance, a component of the Dairy Princess competition evaluated how contestants milked a cow, while the Queen of the Furrow was expected to exhibit skill with a tractor and plow. The Ontario Dairy Princess competitions were especially popular at this time. Each county selected a winner who went on to compete in the provincial competition held at the CNE, and the provincial winner went on to compete at the National Dairy Queen contest.\(^{123}\) Beyond the dairying skills required, the contests also differed from Fair Queen contests because they allowed married women to compete. Dairy Princesses often acted as ambassadors and educators who were expected to be mature and well-informed about industry they represented. These women attended fairs to distribute prizes at dairy cattle shows, visited schools to teach students about dairy farming and products, and travelled on international dairy farm and show tours. Dairy Queens were given significant responsibilities to represent the industry at local, provincial, national, and international functions.\(^{124}\) The Dairy Queen competition was acknowledged as a different type of contest because, “Instead of bathing-suits, considered standard

\(^{123}\) “Counties to Pick Prettiest Dairy Maids for C.N.E.,” \textit{Stouffville Tribune}, July 18, 1957; and “Local Girls Have Chance in Dairy Princess Contest,” \textit{Newmarket Era and Express}, July 25, 1957. The first CNE Dairy Queen contest was held in 1956. More than fifty contestants competed, but they were mainly from the greater Toronto area. Other regions in the province also wanted the opportunity to “show off their milkmaids,” and therefore they coordinated to create county competitions sponsored by the Ontario Dairy Producers Co-ordinating Board, the Canadian National exhibition, and the \textit{Toronto Telegram}, and local committees. The competition was open to female residents from 16 to 29 years of age, married or single, and the winners of each county competition competed at the provincial competition at the CNE, where valuable cash and merchandise could be won. Women were judged on their “on appearance, self expression [sic], and the ability and efficiency in operating a milking machine in milking a cow.”

equipment for most potential beauty queens, wardrobes included all-white uniforms of slims, shirts, caps and shoes with ankle socks,” and prizes included “such gifts as sanitizers for milk tanks and filters for milk strainers.”¹²⁵

It would be unfair to say Fair Queen contests were just about beauty, especially since many of the later incarnations of this competition required contestants to be knowledgeable about farming in the region and capable spokespeople for the fairs themselves, but it is clear that the amount of skill required to be Fair Queen did not compare to the more responsibility-laden titles such as Dairy Princess. Still, both Fair Queen and Dairy Princess contestants had their own reasons for entering these competitions. Personal ambition, the desire to make family proud, acknowledgement by peers, the ability to represent a community, and material rewards were all reasons why many women competed in such contests and ultimately found fame on and off the fairgrounds. One might question whether or not competitions that emphasized beauty and traditional forms of femininity improved women’s status on the fairgrounds. The publicity women received for acting as the public face for a long-standing agricultural and community organization, however, suggests that their participation represented the further normalization of women as essential contributors to agricultural fairs, albeit in a thoroughly gendered way.

**Showcasing Motherhood: Women and Baby Shows**

Another significant contest at fairs was the baby show, which was primarily about celebrating motherhood. By the early half of the twentieth century, many fairs encouraged mothers to put their children on display to be judged, often in full view of fairgoers in front of the

¹²⁵ Ibid.
Baby shows were a reflection of how mothers’ skills were increasingly scrutinized in the twentieth century. In the late nineteenth century, state fairs in the United States adopted baby shows as a means of promoting and measuring the nation’s success in childrearing, and it was not long before Canadian fairs followed suit. It was believed that a baby’s measurements were needed to calculate their normalcy, and thus health, and so a baby’s height and weight, as well as circumference of the head, chest, and abdomen, and the length of arms and legs were all assessed to compare with the ideal. Fair organizers in Ontario who promoted baby shows were likely also influenced by the “Better Babies’ Movement” – a progressive reform movement that sought to teach women how to be efficient and expert mothers. Health care professionals across Canada believed public health required significant reform, and as child welfare causes became more publicized by World War One, reformers made a concerted effort to improve national health by modernizing the Canadian family and childrearing methods. By the 1920s, Canada’s emerging welfare state was developing mechanisms to formalize definitions of proper parenting. Social reformers thought Canadian mothers were handicapped by ignorance, and medical professionals advocated for “scientific motherhood” in the form of “expert tutoring and supervisions of child-rearing duties.” New hospitals, childcare clinics, visiting nurses, and school programs all worked to advance modern ideas of proper childcare. At agricultural fairs, baby shows were adopted as part of this movement. In the same way that fair competition was used to educate men

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126 Tessier, Spencerville Fair, 235. At the Spencerville Fair the first baby shows were conducted in front of the grandstand but later moved to the Town Hall auditorium in the postwar years.
128 Taylor, Fashioning Farmers, 78.
129 Comacchio, Nations Are Built of Babies, 3-4.
131 Comacchio, Nations are Built of Babies, 4.
about raising livestock, baby shows were used to encourage mothers to raise healthy children. Fairs also promoted the instruction of proper childcare practices through the installation of health exhibits and displays that focused on educating mothers about infant and preschool health.\textsuperscript{132} Furthermore, baby contests strengthened the idea that the maintenance of health standards was a woman’s individual responsibility.\textsuperscript{133} The prize a baby received at a baby show was believed to be related to the skill and care of the mother in its upbringing. And, of course, baby shows were popular entertainment.

While women’s roles in propagandizing health and hygiene were emphasized in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the idea that rural women were responsible for raising healthy citizens was not new to the countryside. In 1846, an article in the \textit{British American Cultivator} explained how it was women’s responsibility to ensure the physical, spiritual, and moral growth of their children:

She is responsible for the nursing and rearing of her progeny; for their physical constitution and growth; their exercise and proper sustenance in early life… She is responsible for the child’s \textit{habits}; including cleanliness, order, conversation, eating, sleeping, manners, and general propriety of behavior… She is responsible for their deportment. She can make them fearful and cringing; she can make them modest or impertinent; ingenious or deceitful; mean or manly; clownish or polite… She is to a very considerable extent responsible for the temper and disposition of her children. Constitutionally they may be violent, irritable, or revengeful; but for the regulation or correction of these passions a mother is responsible.\textsuperscript{134}

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\textsuperscript{132} Exhibits related to infant care were popular. At the 1938 Western Fair in London, two of the many health exhibits on display included an exhibit of the Memorial Hospital for Sick Children that stressed the importance of proper feeding for infants and the Queen Alexandra Sanitorium’s display on how to avoid infections and disease; “Good Health Plays the Leading Role,” \textit{Farmer’s Advocate and Home Magazine} 73 (September 22, 1938): 580. At the 1949 Lion’s Head Fair, the Bruce County Health Unit’s display was reported to be a “great crowd-drawer” because of Miss Turnam, one of the nurses at the Health Exhibit, who was on hand to answer fairgoers’ questions about infant and preschool health. “Fall Fair Time in Ontario,” \textit{Woodbridge News}, October 6, 1949.


\textsuperscript{134} “For What is a Mother Responsible?” \textit{British American Cultivator} (February 1846): 56.
The article laid blame on mothers for any of their children’s failings, which the author argued was “a living monument of parental disregard; because generally speaking, a mother can, if she will, greatly control children in these matters.”

Mothers’ responsibility to raise well-adjusted and healthy children was well-established by the time the earliest baby shows were announced in Ontario. But although baby shows eventually gained considerable popularity, they were not always received with such fervor. An article published in the Farmer’s Advocate, reprinted from an American newspaper, Moore’s Rural New Yorker, satirized American agricultural societies for the attractions they employed, including how they believed that “exhibitions of the fairest girls, the prettiest and fattiest babies, the youngest mothers of the largest families,” could serve to “awaken a profound interest in Agriculture and a love of Rural life.”

In Ontario, “Susan, from Streetsville,” also disagreed with such contests, and wrote a letter to the editor of the Brampton Conservator to protest the 1878 Cooksville Fair baby show. She argued that “to exhibit human creatures like so many cattle or pigs, I consider degrading, and feel sorry that such low vulgarism should be borrowed from Yankeedom. No mother, I think, will be found to compete in this department…” Despite Susan’s protest, however, the show went on and was deemed a success by the agricultural society. The prize-winning “best and handsomest baby under eighteen months old” won a silver medal valued at $10, donated by seedsman William Rennie of Toronto.

The newspaper reporter stated matter-of-factly that the Cooksville Fair was “just the place to offer a silver medal for the handsomest baby,” because “the young ladies who attend Cooksville Fairs, are the prettiest, sweetest-looking and most

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135 Ibid.
137 Susan from Streetsville, letter to the editor, “Cooksville Fall Fair Prizes,” Brampton Conservator, April 5, 1878.
stylishly dressed.” By exhibiting their children, women were also exhibiting themselves. They chose to compete in such competitions because they believed they had superior childcare and parenting skills, or simply had the most handsome children. Whatever the case, clearly the opportunity to be acknowledged by their peers and win a prize was too hard to resist for some.

By the First World War, crowds of people came to watch fair baby shows. The people who attended these shows were supposed to take away a visible representation of what a healthy baby or toddler should look like. Parents were to compare these model children to their own, recognize any deficiencies in their offspring, and seek the appropriate expert advice on how to ameliorate any shortcomings. Of course, what parents actually learned after watching these events, and whether that knowledge spurred action cannot be determined. Furthermore, baby show spectators were not always satisfied with judges’ evaluations, which suggested doubt in the exercise altogether. It seems spectators were more interested in the spectacle of the shows, the judgement of their peers, and the sight of the “happy little totes” that decorated the stage. At the 1914 Norfolk County Fair, 22 mothers entered their children in the baby show, which was described as the most popular attraction at the fair. The reporter covering the event explained that

of course it was taken for granted that each and every one honestly believed that their own baby was “the best thing that ever happened,” and deserved first prize. But sad to relate, only three passed the judges eagle eyes. Spectators of the show agreed that the most winsome and pretty baby of the whole coterie was the cherub who drew third prize.  

Who these judges were, and why their evaluation of the babies shown contrasted with that of the audience is unclear. If the judges were physicians and nurses, as was common during this time, perhaps their training led them to believe that the healthiest child was not necessarily the prettiest, and thus the untrained spectator was unequipped to appreciate their decision. Or, perhaps

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139 “Cooksville Fair,” Brampton Conservator, October 18, 1878.
140 “Norfolk County Fair,” British Canadian [Simcoe], October 21, 1914.
the evaluation of babies was much more subjective than either the organizers or judges would have liked to admit. The baby show, similar to the women’s exhibits discussed in previous chapters, illustrated the limitations of visual learning. Agricultural societies relied on sight to teach fairgoers, but often seeing was not enough to fully convey the knowledge fairgoers required to properly assess every person or thing on the fairgrounds.

The difficult task of selecting a winning baby was made more difficult if the judge assigned questioned his or her own judgment. The baby show was another highly anticipated event at the 1916 Wallacetown Fair, and when the judge, Magistrate Hunt, went about selecting a winner from the 12 “handsomest and cutest little Canadians” he had ever seen, he confessed he was “up a tree.” He noted that although he adjudicated on the most intricate legal disputes, he could not make a decision and instead asked the two ladies assisting him to award the first prize.141 If the judge was a local resident, the prospect of facing a bevy of disappointed mothers after the show was likely frightening. Magistrate Hunt may have realized that his flattery of the children and expressed difficulty with the task would not save him from this possibility, prompting his decision to pass on the final judgement. Whether his female assistants were nurses, better equipped to handle the decision, is not clear.

Women were expected to be knowledgeable childcare givers, but baby shows did not challenge the hierarchical authority men had over evaluating women’s skills – maternal or otherwise. By the 1930s, most baby shows employed male physicians to judge the competition with the assistance of local nurses [Figure 7.6 and 7.7]. Fair organizers likely felt that employing medical professionals helped support their claim that these contests were scientific assessments of infants’ health, and that doctors had the most expertise in making such judgements. The director

141 “Wallacetown Fair,” Advance [Dutton], October 5, 1916.
of the show at the 1938 Aylmer Fair was Dr. H. G. McLay and his committee was composed of Fred R. Barnum and Ralph O. Standish. Mrs. E. S. Livermore was the “hostess” at the Crystal Palace, where the show took place, while Mrs. Byde Parker was the official weigher and Miss Bancroft was the official stenographer. Miss Frey, Mrs. L. D. Stocks and Mrs. Elvin Wisson were the nurses who aided Dr. McLay in his evaluation of the contestants. At the 1938 Mount Forest Fair, two doctors from Toronto, Dr. Geo. Gardiner and Dr. W. T. Noonan, judged the event with the help of public school nurses who weighed and measured more than 50 contestants. The women assisting and the female nurses employed often did the majority of the work, but the male doctors and directors were officially in charge. Unless men relinquished their power, such as Magistrate Hunt had, they were the ones supervising these events, and they were usually the ones officially passing judgement.


[Figure 7.6]: “Group Photograph,” 1939, P1783, Thunder Bay Public Library. Description: “Black and white group photograph taken during the Murillo Fall Fair. Identified in the photo are Dr. Caldwell (background), Mrs. Jack Dawson (1st on the left) and Anne Sinclair (nurse).”

[Figure 7.7]: “Fall Fair Time in Ontario,” Woodbridge News, September 29, 1949. Caption: “The Champion Loudly Protested at New Hamburg and refused to pose for the press. Pamela Ritz, daughter of Mrs. R. C. Ritz, winner of 1-2 year class baby contest, violently objected and held out her arms for mother, as Nurse Iva McTavish of Kitchener Hospital held her up for all to see.”
Baby Shows were as much about spectacle as they were about conveying knowledge. The belief that medical practitioners knew best, and that a child’s health could be determined based on their measurements, build, attractiveness, and mannerisms was used to promote these shows as educational, rather than simply entertaining, but the popularity of these “attractions,” the thronging crowds, the disagreement about the winners, and the promotion of the “beautiful types of babyhood,” suggest entertainment was a significant part of their appeal. Promoting beautiful rural infants was the reason why men such as John S. Martin, the Ontario Minister of Agriculture, arranged for the Ontario Picture Bureau to attend the 1925 Norfolk County Fair to film the baby show as one of the highlighted events “captured on celluloid for all the world to see.” In 1931, the Springfield Fair baby show was the centre of attention and drew “the crowd from every other part of the grounds.” In addition to the classes for babies, the local Women’s Institute sponsored a prize for “the best looking mother with babe under one year,” which was won by Mrs. L. C. Murphy and her daughter, Viola Betty. The show also featured prizes for the most recently married couple and the oldest couple attending. Earlier fair competitions, such as the 1914 Wallacetown Fair competition for the largest family, also encouraged large rural families. At the 1919 Aylmer Fair, the “best and healthiest family under 10 years of age” was awarded a prize. The focus on strong-bodied soldiers and the nation’s health during wartime resulted in subsequent efforts to improve national health in Ontario. These additional competitions allowed fair organizers to promote their ideal family by providing a strong visual representation to the community and “all the world” that rural people and rural living were central to the strength of the nation.

144 Ibid., 107-108.
145 MacDonald, Splendor in the Fall, 21.
146 “Springfield Fair Another Big Success,” Aylmer Express, September 29, 1931.
147 Ibid.
148 “Wallacetown Fair,” Advance [Dutton], October 8, 1914.
149 “Aylmer Fair Drew Big Attendance,” Aylmer Express, October 2, 1919.
150 Comacchio, Nations Are Built of Babies, 3.
Baby shows persisted in the postwar period and contest reports continued to emphasize how they provided effective visual representations of the excellent job rural families did in raising their young. A series of photographs titled “Fall Time in Ontario” featured images taken at fairs and were published in newspapers across Ontario in the 1940s and 1950s. In a 1949 edition, photographs of children at fairs were featured to illustrate that “nowhere in the world is there a sturdier or more photogenic younger generation than right here in Ontario.” A province-wide report of the 1950 Fergus Fair included numerous photos of the large baby contest that year, and noted that “They raise fine crops in Wellington County, but none finer, or in which they take more pride, than babies such as these.” The display of happy, healthy children at fairs was used as evidence of the success of rural families in raising the next generation of Canadian citizenry. Fairs were working towards improving all elements of rural life, and raising a strong family was considered just as important as breeding an improved herd of livestock or growing a superior field of crops.

Even in the 1970s, the popularity of baby shows did not wane, despite criticisms that the shows were out of step with modern society. Isabella Bardoel, a reporter from the Globe and Mail, attended the popular Rockton Fair to report on the baby show that year. Bardoel described how “Hundreds of anxious parents and grandparents jammed into one of the fair’s largest tents… to view and stew over the largest crop of infants from the area ranging from 3 months to 18 months.” She noted that every passerby was drawn to watch the competition: “Log sawing, nail driving, horse and wagon demonstrations and tractor pulls didn’t have the drawing power of about 80 dribbling babies.” Jeanette Jamieson, the first female president of the Rockton Agricultural

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Society, was interviewed, and she explained the society had thought about dropping the event because “Some people criticized the idea of judging babies,” and “to every mother her baby is the best – and that’s the way it should be,” but because the event continued to be as popular as ever the society decided to carry on. The prizes were not what drove participation – that year the first prize was $5, second prize a small box of baby food, and the top three babies won ribbons – but rather it was mothers’ pride for their children that drove them to compete. Mary Lee Rainy of Cambridge, 19, entered her daughter Sarah Jane who won in the girls’ 12- to 18-month category at the Rockton Show. Her excitement could not be contained when she declared “My mother will just die, she’ll be so happy.” Bardoel noted that the expressions of the mothers whose babies did not win the prize “clearly showed the opposite reaction,” but nevertheless the event continued because of parents’ desire to proudly showcase their children to their community and receive affirmation for their ability to raise such beautiful children [Figure 7.8].

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By this time, most shows no longer had doctors presiding as judges, although nurses continued to be involved, perhaps in order to maintain the appearance of some scientific or medical basis. Overall, however, the baby shows of the 1970s had a lot in common with those that came a century earlier. They gave proud parents the opportunity to showcase their successful childrearing and agricultural societies the chance to illustrate how rural families were succeeding in raising the next generation of Canadians. The concept of success expressed, however, was based primarily on an infant’s appearance – their measurements, build, attractiveness, and mannerisms. The baby show was another event agricultural societies used to support the idea that appearance was a legitimate means for determining merit.
Female Fairgoers: Seeing and Being Seen

Women showed themselves simply by attending fairs. Many women who went to Ontario fairs never organized an event, entered a contest, worked a booth, or performed on a stage, but they used the fair and the fairgrounds to their advantage to meet with friends and family, to make new acquaintances, learn a new skill, discover a new product, or simply to be entertained. Whatever they were doing on the fairgrounds, they were seeing and being seen.

Fairs provided opportunities to meet with friends and neighbours who were interested and engaged in similar pursuits. In his investigation of twentieth-century agricultural fairs and ploughing matches, David Mizener argues that the “exchange of greeting and the conversations between family, friends, and acquaintances at these events played a crucial role in renewing ties that formed the basis of kinship networks and communities.”156 Indeed, the “happy delighted groups,” reported the Brampton Times in 1869, would find the Peel County Fair to be “a great County re-union, and not a few from a distance will embrace the opportunity of meeting their old friends and connexion.”157 The newspaper also reported the next year that the “yeoman of Peel will turn out en masse [to the fair]…for the very good and sufficient reason that their “roof-trees” would quiver with family indignation if they were even to hint at remaining at home.”158 In 1901, the social element of the West Elgin Fair was considered one of its central features. It was reported that its “long years of usefulness and prosperity have drawn around it many friends to all parts of the adjoining townships, who make it an unfailing point to meet annually to exchange greetings.”159

157 “County of Peel Agricultural Exhibition,” Brampton Times, October 1, 1869.
158 “Peel County Fair,” Brampton Times, October 23, 1870.
159 “The West Elgin Fair,” Advance [Dutton], October 3, 1901.
Young people also attended fairs to interact with the opposite sex. For a single woman or man who had exhausted their immediate circle of prospects, fairs provided important places to seek out a future husband or wife. Township and County fairs brought families from around the region together who may have had limited contact otherwise, and many young adults saw fairs as a chance to encounter the opposite sex in a public setting. When 19-year-old John Ferguson attended the 1869 Edmonton Fair in Peel County he noted in his diary that he was disappointed that the cold and wet day had resulted in the “girls [being] rather scarce.” The fair was not a complete disappointment, however, because he considered those young women who were in attendance to be a “scarce but select” group.\footnote{John Ferguson diary entry, Monday, October 11, 1869, John H. Ferguson fonds, [Microfilm] MS 297, Reels 1-2, Archives of Ontario.} A study of the 1871 Peel County Fair reveals that the event attracted a disproportionately high number of young women of marriageable age who competed in fair competitions. This likely reflected their desire to showcase their competency in domestic pursuits, which would have been attractive to potential suitors.\footnote{Nurse, “Reaching Rural Ontario,” 69.}

Women did not have to compete to be noticed. Simply being visible was often enough to draw attention. Women who competed in beauty contests or performed specific talents and skills obviously increased their publicity, but women’s physical beauty was often noted when they simply walked through the fairgrounds. As discussed in earlier chapters, women’s presence often elicited reporters’ praise for their attractiveness, and whether because of their “brilliant” and “gay”\footnote{“Toronto Township Fall Fair,” \textit{Weekly Review [Brampton]}, October 17, 1857.} or their “blooming,” “rosy-cheek[s],”\footnote{“Fall Fair at Markham,” \textit{York Herald}, October 15, 1869.} women beautified and refined the fairgrounds, and men took notice. When women exhibited items such as bread and fancywork they received respect for the skill and taste these items displayed. When women walked through the fairgrounds,
however, they were observed for their behaviour and appearance, and they knew it. For example, before Whitby Township resident Frances Tweedie attended the 1866 Scarboro Fair, she and her friend Jennie spent time busily fixing their dresses and skirts for the fair, and she spent the week of the fair socializing and visiting with friends, especially of the opposite sex, paying little regard to the exhibits on display.\textsuperscript{164} In 1909, an anonymous writer penned a poem in the *Erin Advocate* to describe how he went to the Erin fair with the explicit purpose of seeing the girl he loved. As he described, he was not there to see the horses’ race or the roots and grain, nor did he care about the vegetables or fruit on display. Instead, he cared only for his girl:

> When I go up to Erin Fair  
> I hope the girl I love is there;  
> She is a lovely sight to see  
> She comes from pretty Comingsby  
> She is a peach, she is a pear  
> A sweet muckmelon, rich and rare;  
>
> When I go up to Erin Fair  
> I hope the girl I love is there;  
> They’ll race their horses all in vain  
> I will not see the roots and grain,  
> I will not see the squash – a beaut –  
> Nor glimpse the honey or the fruit;  
> Fruit, pumpkins, crazy quilts, avaunt,  
> My girl is all the show I want.  
>
> She’s an inducement and a lure;  
> Blindfold me and I’ll find her sure;  
> And if ten thousand filled the park,  
> I’d find my sweetheart in the dark,  
> I hope the girl I love is there,  
> When I go up to Erin Fair.\textsuperscript{165}

While some connections at fairs were instant, others developed over time. Agricultural society members who served during fairs often created lasting relationships, many platonic, but

\textsuperscript{164} Frances Tweedie Milne diary entries, Friday, September 21 to 28, 1866, Frances Milne fonds, F 763, Archives of Ontario.

\textsuperscript{165} Switzer, *Erin Fall Fair*, 36.
others were romantic. In a 1979 newspaper article, newly married couple Charles and Violet Barrett, both in their 80s, explained how their relationship began with their local fair involvement. Charles Barrett was the Secretary-Treasurer of the Caledon Agricultural Society from 1936 until 1957 when he was married to his first wife. Violet’s first husband, Ben Bull, was a previous fair president. Violet started exhibiting in 1927, and was the director and committee member of the Children’s School Department for many years. The couple had known each long before their marriage, but it was not until Violet’s first husband passed away, followed soon after by Charles’ wife’s death, that the two reconnected and eventually married. Charles had taken some time away from fair duties, but because Violet was the convener of the children’s section that year, he was “back at the fair helping out his new wife.”

Fairs were places where “multitudes from all points of the compass” flocked together, and often friendships and courtships developed that might have otherwise proven more difficult to establish. Women young and old met with family, friends, and peers to enjoy the festivities of the day, but also to create, sustain, and build relationships for the future [Figure 7.9].

167 “Toronto Township Fall Fair,” Weekly Review [Brampton], October 17, 1857.
Conclusion:

Fairs offered women the chance to take in the exhibits, be entertained, earn money and awards, win accolades and fame, see old friends, and establish new relationships. But whether women were fundraising, competing, courting, or earning a living, they were making themselves and their passions visible. Even women who never organized an event, entered a contest, worked a booth, or performed on a stage had an important role to play. If they purchased a gate pass and made their way to the hall to see the women’s exhibits, bought a piece of pie or a concert ticket, or simply found a seat in the grandstand to watch a female entertainer perform her act, they all helped support the work other women did in their community and beyond.

Women increased their mobility and presence on the fairgrounds by moving beyond the dining, concert, and theatre hall to also find space to situate themselves in front of the grandstand, the midway, and everywhere else in between. As fairgoers, women had long traversed most areas of the fairgrounds – whether they were welcome or not – but as performers, contestants, and
volunteers, more space was available to them as their fair activities expanded. Women’s increased visibility on the fairgrounds also reflected their enlarged public presence in society more broadly, but fairs offered opportunities for women to push the boundaries of some social mores, at the same time that they reinforced others. Woman’s ability to challenge and confirm gendered notions of womanhood at fairs illustrated how conflicted these concepts were in the first place. But women were not just visible and mobile, they were also increasingly vocal, and in the 1980s and 1990s they continued to push the limits of their fair experiences.
The story of women’s involvement in agricultural societies and fairs is more than simply lists of fancywork, accounts of judging mishaps, or tales of female balloonists. The things women made, the activities they took part in, and the service they provided on the fairgrounds allow for a better understanding of rural women’s values, beliefs, and day-to-day lives. Fairs are microcosms for the larger rural world. While the anonymity of large urban exhibitions may have provided greater suspension of reality and a liminal space in which to experiment with alternate behaviour, local fairs provided a deeper representation of life as it was lived beyond the fairground gates. For many rural people, fairs were closely connected to their lives because they were organized by local residents who often ensured that their interests were represented. The ideas and behaviours individuals exhibited at these events also remained closely bound to their identities after the fairs themselves were over.

The challenge of a study that covers a large period of time and attempts to use a specific group of rural women to make useful generalizations is that the diverse nature of rural women’s lives is not always fully evident.\(^1\) The geographic parameters and source material I have used have contributed to an analysis that focuses on women who were typically white, Anglo, English-speaking Ontarians. Agricultural societies maintained a commitment to serving what they perceived as agrarian interests over other rural interests. Also, this study has focused on why women were actively involved in agricultural societies and fairs, rather than why some women

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were not. As a result of all these factors, the analysis of women’s experiences is less complicated by the intersection of other important axes of social power relations, including class, occupation, race, and ethnicity.²

Comparing rural women’s experiences in this thesis with what we know of urban women is difficult. The very definition of the term rural is a contested one, and therefore making comparisons between rural women and the more developed scholarly literature on urban women during this period is problematic. In addition, historical feminist scholarship in Canada has emphasized the diversity of women’s experiences across the country, and so the task of identifying shared rural women’s experiences and comparing the differences between urban and rural women is daunting.³

Still, this study suggests some comparison. Rural women’s service to their communities, even in organizations that were often hesitant to accept them, highlights both their commitment to maintaining the fabric of kinship and community, as well as their desire to play a public role at perhaps the most important social gathering of the year. Rural women understood bonds of interdependence from their household experiences, and they chose to emphasize cooperation over conflict when participating in agricultural societies and at fairs. Without romanticizing this cooperation, one can still acknowledge that rural women, and rural society generally, valued notions of mutuality and recognized elements of shared work. Unlike urban women, rural women often worked side-by-side with their husbands and claimed a level of intimacy with their spouses’ labour that urban women did not. Furthermore, in the post-war period urban women were entering the paid work force in greater numbers and were attracted to the Women’s Liberation Movement

² Ibid., 2.
³ For a useful discussion of important foundational works and current scholarly research contributing to feminist history, see Catherine Carstairs and Nancy Janoviec, eds., Feminist History in Canada: New Essays on Women, Gender, Work, and Nation (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013).
and calls for equal wage for equal work. Meanwhile, most rural women still worked alongside their husbands on the family farm and were tempered by the need to place family and community before feminist ideology, especially since these social networks were fundamental for emotional, social, and financial support. In agricultural societies, female members recognized unfair practices in the organization, however, and they negotiated the subservience caused by unequal distributions of power by creating separate women’s divisions where they could enjoy the camaraderie of other women, discuss ideas and activities that interested them, and build confidence in their ability to provide leadership on the fair board. This dissertation supports scholars who argue that, although women were constrained by a patriarchal system, they employed feminist strategies, including “female cooperation, collaboration, and female empowerment.” They sought out shared interests at fairs, developed ways to serve those interests in agricultural societies, and inspired and enabled other women to pursue their goals on the fairgrounds.

It could also be argued that women’s decision to emphasize separation over integration impeded their progress in achieving more authority in agricultural societies more broadly, but women’s conscious decision to largely govern themselves was significant. Although some women’s divisions still remained beholden to fair board men for funds, by electing their own ruling executive and conducting their own meetings to discuss issues important to them, these women displayed a gender consciousness that allowed them to advance their interests with limited male interference. The confidence women also developed in their own departments gave them the courage later on to put their name forward for main fair board executive positions, including president. Women who were elected to these positions by other male and female members illustrate

4 Barker Devine, On Behalf of the Family Farm, 140-42.
5 Ibid., 142; see also Maggie Andrews, The Acceptable Face of Feminism; and Halpern, And On That Farm He Had a Wife.
that they had achieved a level of respect and appreciation from their peers despite their sex. Gendered assumptions were never completely erased in agricultural societies, but men could act as allies for women who wished to expand their participation. At the same time, other women could act to inhibit their peers’ growing authority.

Women’s volunteer work also found recognition at fairs. Researchers of women’s volunteerism have noted that women’s voluntary efforts have often been ignored as “real work” by society, but the service women gave at fairs was visible for the whole community to see and appreciate. Rural women were not afraid to recognize the value of their work and press for others to recognize its importance as well. The “culture of the eye” that Keith Walden uses to discuss nineteenth-century exhibitions and fairgoers’ understanding of objects as illustrative of social status is applicable to women’s exhibits at local fairs, but it can also be applied to visual confirmations of women’s volunteerism. At fairs, people witnessed women’s voluntary work, such as their success fundraising for various community, national, and international causes, which strengthened their claims for social authority in the community and increased their responsibilities as engaged citizens. This study agrees with the literature on fairs and exhibitions that highlight women’s ability to use fairs as spaces for public recognition.

Furthermore, women’s involvement at fairs reveals a great deal about the boundaries of acceptable womanhood and femininity. The competitions women entered and the things they exhibited illustrate rural people’s ideas about feminine expression and identity. Women’s exhibits – from dairy produce to handicrafts – showcased women’s commitment to supplementing the

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6 Tye, Baking as Biography, 150.
7 Walden, Becoming Modern in Toronto, 119.
8 Heaman, The Inglorious Arts of Peace; Walden, Becoming Modern in Toronto; Boisseau and Markwyn, eds., Gendering the Fair; Greenhalgh, Ephemeral Vista; Weimann, The Fair Women; Palm, “Women Muralists, Modern Women and Feminine Spaces”; Corn, Women Building History; Bland, “Women and World’s Fairs”; and Light Townsend Cummins, “From the Midway to the Hall of State at Fair Park.”
household income and nourishing and nurturing the family, and emphasized their respectable status and understanding of beauty and refinement. Rural women exhibited items that furthered their identities as efficient and industrious housewives and refined and sophisticated women. The things women made for fair competitions or from awards received also served to memorialize their past achievements, create bonds between them and their families and communities, and provide visual representations for current and future generations of their valued beliefs and interests. By competing at fairs, women publically demonstrated esteemed characteristics, such as industry, thrift, taste, and respectability, which helped entrench these ideals in the countryside. Fairs were sites that validated women’s domestic activities by giving them a public venue for expression.

Related to women’s public visibility was the importance of appearance. The visual nature of fairs was a general element of these events, but the focus on women’s appearance as central to their fair participation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was especially gendered. Female beauty was an important element for why women’s presence at fairs was considered desirable by male organizers. The work women displayed at fairs was often valued first and foremost for its appearance, and women’s presentation of attractive work was related to their morality and taste. When women pursued traditionally masculine pursuits and moved into masculinized spaces, their ability to showcase an appearance of femininity and respectability was often necessary. Women challenged the privileging of appearance by showcasing skills such as horsemanship and livestock showmanship, but even women’s abilities in these areas were judged in conjunction with their appearance.

Despite these limitations, however, female fair exhibitors continued to work towards enlarging the female sphere and challenging the status quo on the fairgrounds by increasingly showcasing talents that challenged traditional notions and confirmations of femininity. Although
agricultural societies’ perception of womanhood was largely influenced by what women exhibited in the exhibition hall rather than in the show ring, women who participated in competitions traditionally reserved for men demonstrated their skill in these arenas, and thus challenged conventional perceptions of femininity. Horse and livestock classes allowed women an opportunity to demonstrate skills not typically feminine, which in turn led to a reshaping of gender boundaries. Women claimed traits that had previously been perceived as masculine, such as power, courage, knowledge, and leadership. Although initially uncomfortable with women’s entry into this world, men came to value what women contributed to the show ring through their hard work and dedication.

Women also enlarged the space they occupied at fairs by participating in a variety of contests and voluntary work that increased their mobility and thus visibility in spaces that had previously been limited mainly to men. Women moved beyond dining and exhibition halls into the midway and the grandstand, not simply as fairgoers, but as active participants in these spaces. Women took advantage of opportunities to enlarge their physical boundaries on the fairgrounds, and although many of their activities continued to reinforce traditional ideas of female behaviour, fairs also presented visions of women that dismantled these socially constructed notions of proper femininity.

The challenges women faced and continue to face in agricultural societies and fairs, and indeed in society more broadly, should not be ignored, but it is useful to listen to women’s own remembrances, which emphasize the positive experiences they had, including the friendships and skills they acquired over the years, and the joy and personal meaning they found in their fair activities. For the most part, women who participated revealed deep affection for these groups and events and the people connected to them. A recognition of their appreciation of agricultural
societies and fairs does not ignore the patriarchy that existed and continued to exist which disadvantaged women.

In 1980 and the decades that followed, women continued to struggle against sexist ideas about their proper roles and responsibilities in agricultural societies, which, similar to rural societies in general, were based on unequal distributions of power and influence. By this time, only a small minority of agricultural societies had had a woman serve as president, and members, including women who actively sought to increase women’s involvement on fair boards, still believed that their leadership was better served by men. Other women never felt this way and fought for women to gain access to all departments and spaces on the fairgrounds. The 1970s was a significant decade for the advancement of women in agricultural societies and in society more generally, but it would not be until the late 1990s when most agricultural societies had had at least one female president serve or had women take part in committees of management previously dominated by men. For the societies that later achieved a gender balance, or saw a majority of female members enlist, criticism that “too many women” now served on fair boards was sometimes heard. Conversely, some people found it strange that men started to enter handicraft and culinary arts competitions in the homecrafts department and began winning awards in traditionally women’s work.

Ultimately, this dissertation agrees with other studies of rural feminism that allow for the term “feminisms” and understands the definition of feminism as a capacious one, filled with a variety of meanings, that can give women in the past the ability to claim a feminist history based

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10 “Earning his fair share,” *Guelph Tribune*, September 18, 2014. Photo Caption: “South end resident Rick Westgarth poses with just a few of the ribbons he has picked up this summer for the baked and canned goods he’s entered in country fairs. Competing in fairs has become a year-round hobby for the retired teacher, who spends his winters working on homecrafts and preserving and then bakes up a storm just before fair weekend. This season, he will compete in seven fairs, finishing in Erin on Thanksgiving weekend.”
on their deconstruction of notions of femininity and their work to empower and improve the lives of other women. The hundreds of thousands of women who participated at fairs across Ontario in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries displayed their work and abilities as worthy of attention, and in doing so heightened women’s status in the private and public spheres. They also took advantage of opportunities caused by war, depression, or social change to achieve more authority and they used that increased power to further expand and support the interests and activities of rural women. Women took advantage of fairs to create friendships, serve and promote community causes, showcase and develop skills and talents, make family heirlooms, assert social authority, earn some cash, and/or simply enjoy a good spectacle. Women benefited from the multifarious nature of fairs as places where women could either support or dismantle notions of feminine behaviour and proper womanhood. This idea may be a messy one, but it illustrates the complexity of rural women’s lived lives and the reality that they often straddled multiple lines of identity, not all of which were in complete harmony or complete opposition.

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Appendix A: Charts

Note: The coloured charts represent the gendered nature of the fair board positions. Although rare, some women served in largely male-dominated positions earlier than the specified date, and some men served in largely female-dominated positions at later dates. Also, some agricultural societies organized or named their fair board positions differently. The charts are meant to illustrate the typical types of positions and their gendered distribution.

Chart 2.1: Example of Agricultural Society Fair Board Hierarchy, Nineteenth Century

Male agricultural society members
Chart 2.2: Example of Agricultural Society Fair Board Hierarchy, 1930s

- Male agricultural society members
- Female agricultural society members
Chart 2.3: Example of Agricultural Society Fair Board Hierarchy, 1950s

Male agricultural society members
Female agricultural society members
Male and female agricultural society members
Appendix B: Tables

*Note: All individual classes are copied as they appear in the original prize lists. This includes original spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.*

Table 3.1:  
**Erin Township Agricultural Society Fair, Erin, Wellington County**  
**Classes for Vegetables, 1854 and 1901**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1854</th>
<th>1901</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Best bushel of Pink-eyed Potatoes</td>
<td>Early potatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best bushel of any other kind (potato)</td>
<td>Elephant potatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best bushel Swedish Turnips</td>
<td>Pearless Savoy (potato)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best bushel any other kind (turnip)</td>
<td>Any other late variety (potato)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best doz. Onions</td>
<td>Swede Turnips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best dozen Carrots</td>
<td>Heaviest Swede turnips, properly trimmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best six Cabbages</td>
<td>Turnips, any other kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best dozen Tomatoes</td>
<td>Mangold Wurtzel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best dozen Parsnips</td>
<td>Sugar Beets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best dozen Beets</td>
<td>Field carrots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best dozen Mangel Wurzel</td>
<td>Pumpkin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Squash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parsnips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Table carrots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Red onions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Onions, any other kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Potato onions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English potato onions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Top onions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cauliflower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cabbage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heaviest cabbage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tomatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Celery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Radish*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Radishes were listed under the “Fruit and Flower” category in the fair prize list, but have been included in the vegetable list here to illustrate item specific classes. Many times fairs or newspaper reports miscategorised classes in prize lists.*
**Table 3.2:**
Erin Township Agricultural Society Fair, Erin, Wellington County
Classes for Fruit, 1854 and 1901

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1854</th>
<th>1901</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Best half-bushel Apples</td>
<td>American Golden Russett (apples)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Isabella&quot; Grape*</td>
<td>North Spy (apples)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greenings (apples)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Baldwin (apples)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter apples, any other kind,</td>
<td>Winter apples, any other kind, correctly named</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>correctly named</td>
<td>Snow (apples)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Colverts (apples)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>St. Lawrence (apples)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fall apples, any other kind, correctly named</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Winter apples, collection of 6 varieties, named</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fall pears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Winter pears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crab apples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black grapes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grapes, any other color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Citrons*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Citrons were listed under the “Garden Roots and Vegetables” category in the fair prize list, but have been listed with fruit here to illustrate item specific classes. “Isabella” Grapes were awarded a discretionary prize by the judges for their merit, despite no official class in which to enter.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1871</th>
<th>1878</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Winter Apples</td>
<td>10 varieties apples</td>
<td>10 varieties apples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall Apples</td>
<td>4 varieties cooking apples</td>
<td>4 varieties cooking apples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety of Pears</td>
<td>4 varieties table apples</td>
<td>Snow apples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample of Peaches</td>
<td>Duchess of Oldenburg apples</td>
<td>Fall Pippin apples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quinces</td>
<td>St. Lawrence apples</td>
<td>Gravenstein apples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample of Egg Plums</td>
<td>Spitzenburg apples</td>
<td>Ribston Pippin apples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample of Plums</td>
<td>Rambeay apples</td>
<td>St. Lawrence apples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Clusters of Colored Grapes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Duchess de Angouleme pears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best collection of table grapes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Vicar of Winkfield pears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Three varieties plums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Greengages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Egg plums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lombard plums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dessert plums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cooking plums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Peaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Colored grapes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Concord grapes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Isabella grapes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Delaware grapes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Adirondac grapes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Clinton grapes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rogers No. 4 grapes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rogers No. 15 grapes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rogers No. 19 grapes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hartford Prolific grapes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Arnold’s Othelle grapes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.3:**
**Peel County Agricultural Society Fair, Brampton, Peel County**
**Classes for Fruit, 1871 and 1878**
Table 3.4:
Brooke and Alvinston Agricultural Society Fair, Alvinston, Lambton County
Classes for Canned Goods, 1920

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1920</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 sealer canned raspberries, red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 sealer canned cherries, red or black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 sealer canned rhubarb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 sealer canned pears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 sealer canned plums, green or yellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 sealer canned peaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 sealer preserved strawberries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 sealer preserved apples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 sealer preserved citron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 sealer preserved peaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 sealer grape jam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 sealer black raspberry jam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 sealer black currant jam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 glass apple jelly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 glass red currant jelly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 glass raspberry jelly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 glass other native fruit jelly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 glass orange or grape fruit marmalade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 glass native fruit marmalade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 sealer canned tomatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 sealer canned corn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 sealer canned peas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 sealer canned beans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 sealer other vegetable canned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 sealer canned chicken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 sealer canned mince meat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 bottle mixed pickles, sour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 bottle mustard pickles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 bottle sweet pickles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 bottle other variety pickles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 bottle tomato catsup</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.5: 
Collingwood Township Agricultural Society Fair, Clarksburg, Grey County 
Classes for Canned Goods, 1930, 1935, 1940, 1945, and 1950

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1930</th>
<th>1935</th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>1945</th>
<th>1950</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One pint sealer, canned corn, any method</td>
<td>Pint Sealer Canned Peas</td>
<td>Pint Canned Strawberries</td>
<td>Pint Sandwich Filling (home prepared)</td>
<td>A Home Canned Meal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One pint sealer, canned peas, any method</td>
<td>Pint Sealer Canned Peas</td>
<td>Pint Canned Peaches</td>
<td>Pint Canned Tomatoes (whole)</td>
<td>Pint Canned Tomatoes (whole)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One pint sealer, canned chicken</td>
<td>Pint Sealer Canned Peas</td>
<td>Pint Canned Peaches</td>
<td>Pint Canned Beans</td>
<td>Pint Canned Tomatoes (whole)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One pint each canned Peaches, Pears, Plums</td>
<td>Pint Sealer Canned Peas</td>
<td>Pint Canned Peaches</td>
<td>Pint Canned Beans</td>
<td>Pint Canned Tomatoes (whole)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One pint each canned Gooseberry, Black Currant and Citron</td>
<td>Pint Sealer Canned Peas</td>
<td>Pint Canned Peaches</td>
<td>Pint Canned Beans</td>
<td>Pint Canned Tomatoes (whole)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jam, 2 var., 1 pt. each, &quot;turner first,&quot; canned</td>
<td>Pint Sealer Canned Peas</td>
<td>Pint Canned Peaches</td>
<td>Pint Canned Beans</td>
<td>Pint Canned Tomatoes (whole)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marmalade, 2 var., each named</td>
<td>Pint Sealer Canned Peas</td>
<td>Pint Canned Peaches</td>
<td>Pint Canned Beans</td>
<td>Pint Canned Tomatoes (whole)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soup Mixture, homemade, 1 qt., attach recipe</td>
<td>Pint Sealer Canned Peas</td>
<td>Pint Canned Peaches</td>
<td>Pint Canned Beans</td>
<td>Pint Canned Tomatoes (whole)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salad Dressing, homemade, 1 pt., attach recipe</td>
<td>Pint Sealer Canned Peas</td>
<td>Pint Canned Peaches</td>
<td>Pint Canned Beans</td>
<td>Pint Canned Tomatoes (whole)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pickles mixed, 2 var., sweet and sour, 1 pt. each</td>
<td>Pint Sealer Canned Peas</td>
<td>Pint Canned Peaches</td>
<td>Pint Canned Beans</td>
<td>Pint Canned Tomatoes (whole)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One quart celery Cold Meat Sauce</td>
<td>Pint Sealer Canned Peas</td>
<td>Pint Canned Peaches</td>
<td>Pint Canned Beans</td>
<td>Pint Canned Tomatoes (whole)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One quart Celery Preserved Rhubarb</td>
<td>Pint Sealer Canned Peas</td>
<td>Pint Canned Peaches</td>
<td>Pint Canned Beans</td>
<td>Pint Canned Tomatoes (whole)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 quart mustard pickles</td>
<td>Pint Sealer Canned Peas</td>
<td>Pint Canned Peaches</td>
<td>Pint Canned Beans</td>
<td>Pint Canned Tomatoes (whole)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One quart mustard pickles</td>
<td>Pint Sealer Canned Peas</td>
<td>Pint Canned Peaches</td>
<td>Pint Canned Beans</td>
<td>Pint Canned Tomatoes (whole)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 quart Celery Preserved Rhubarb</td>
<td>Pint Sealer Canned Peas</td>
<td>Pint Canned Peaches</td>
<td>Pint Canned Beans</td>
<td>Pint Canned Tomatoes (whole)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 pint cold Pickled Cucumbers</td>
<td>Pint Sealer Canned Peas</td>
<td>Pint Canned Peaches</td>
<td>Pint Canned Beans</td>
<td>Pint Canned Tomatoes (whole)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One quart Celery Preserved Rhubarb</td>
<td>Pint Sealer Canned Peas</td>
<td>Pint Canned Peaches</td>
<td>Pint Canned Beans</td>
<td>Pint Canned Tomatoes (whole)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table shows the canned goods classes for the Collingwood Township Agricultural Society Fair from 1930 to 1950. Each year includes classes for different types of canned goods, such as fruits, vegetables, pickles, and dressings, with specific quantities and methods for preparation.
Table 3.6:  
Central Agricultural Society Fair, Walters Falls, Grey County  
Classes for Baked Goods, 1890, 1900, and 1910

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1890</th>
<th>1900</th>
<th>1910</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Home-made Bread, 2 loaves, (Baker's excluded)</td>
<td>Special by R. Clarke, W. F., 2 loaves bread made from his flour</td>
<td>Bread, 2 loaves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pie, Frosted</td>
<td>2 loaves bread society prize</td>
<td>Fruit cake not iced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fruit Cake, plain, not iced</td>
<td>Fruit cake, not iced, Jelly cake, 3 layers</td>
<td>Jelly cake, two layers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Best Pumpkin Pie</td>
<td>Pumpkin pie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Apple pie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lemon pie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Home-made biscuits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Home-made buns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Table 3.7:**
Erin Township Agricultural Society Fair, Erin, Wellington County
Classes for Baked Goods, 1940

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1940</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bread, 3 lb. loaf, to be made in pan 9 1/4 x 3 x 4 in. *+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown Bread, whole wheat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fancy Buns, five *+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plain Buns, half dozen *+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plain Biscuits, half dozen *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk Rolls, half dozen *+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plain Scones, half dozen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best Apple Pie *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best Pumpkin Pie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best Raisin Pie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best Layer Cake, dark, iced *+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best Layer Cake, light, iced *+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection of Fancy Baking, 5 varieties only *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection of Plain Baking, 5 varieties only *+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Cake of Shortbread, made on a 9 in. pie plate *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate of Fancy Sandwiches, 16 sandwiches, 4 var. +</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Baking Specials**

For the best apple pie and half dozen biscuits made from Lily White Pastry Flour…
By P. J. Sinclair, Dealer in Flour…the best two loaves of bread, made from High Loaf Flour…
By Lloyd Lyons, Groceries [etc.]…the best load of bread made from Prairie Rose Bread Flour…
For the best Apple Pie made from Planet Flour…by P. J. Sinclair, dealer in Flour…
For a light layer cake, iced, made by a bride since the Fair of 1939…
By St. Lawrence Starch Co., Ltd…the best Lemon Pie…Durham starch to be used.
By St. Lawrence Starch Co., Ltd…the best Butter Tarts…Bee Hive Golden Corn Syrup to be used.
By St. Lawrence Starch Co., Ltd…the best quart of Canned Peaches…Bee Hive Golden Corn Syrup to be used.
By St. Lawrence Starch Co., Ltd…the best pound of Divinity Fudge…Bee Hive Golden Corn Syrup to be used.
By St. Lawrence Starch Co., Ltd…the best Butterscotch Pie…Using Durham Corn Starch.
By the Canada Starch Sales Co. Ltd…for 1 nut and date loaf…[to use Crown Brand Corn Syrup]
By the Canada Starch Sales Co. Ltd…for Muffins, half dozen, whole wheat, flour or bran…[to use Crown Brand Corn Syrup]
By the Canada Starch Sales Co. Ltd…for 12 rolled cookies, 3 varieties, 4 of each…[to use Crown Brand Corn Syrup]
By the Canada Starch Sales Co. Ltd…for six syrup tarts…[to use Crown Brand Corn Syrup]

*Classes also sponsored by Robin Hood Flour
+ Classes also sponsored by the McArthur Milling Company
**Table 4.1:**
**Peel County Agricultural Society Fair, Brampton, Peel County**
**Classes for Flowers and Plants, 1868 and 1880**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1868</th>
<th>1880</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Best Table Boquet Garden Flowers</td>
<td>Six standard dahlias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best Hand Boquet of Garden Flowers</td>
<td>Six bouquet dahlias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best Hand Boquet of Wild Flowers</td>
<td>Large vase bouquet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best Collection Dried Plants</td>
<td>Table bouquet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money-wort Plant*</td>
<td>Hand bouquet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bouquet of everlasting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bouquet of wild flowers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection of 24 greenhouse plants</td>
<td>Collection of peonies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pansies, 10 varieties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collection fuchsias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Native Ferns, 4 varieties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Foreign Ferns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection of annuals in bloom</td>
<td>Collection foliage plants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection foliage plants</td>
<td>Collection roses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Single Geraniums, 4 named</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection doubled Zinnias</td>
<td>Doubled Geraniums, 4 named</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection Phlox Drummondii</td>
<td>Collection Verbenas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection double Zinnias</td>
<td>Collection Gladiolas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection Drummondii</td>
<td>Best display of cut flowers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection Gladiolas</td>
<td>Four Window plants in flower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best display of cut flowers</td>
<td>Two hanging baskets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four Window plants in flower</td>
<td>Collection ten-week stalks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two hanging baskets</td>
<td>Collection Marigolds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection ten-week stalks</td>
<td>Two new or rare plants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two new or rare plants</td>
<td>Coxcombs*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Discretionary Prize*
Table 4.2:  
Arran-Tara Agricultural Society Fair, Tara, Bruce County  
Classes for Flowers and Plants, 1910, 1933, and 1950

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1910</th>
<th>1933</th>
<th>1950</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collection Annuals, cut and named</td>
<td>House Plants, 6 varieties</td>
<td>Geraniums, in bloom, 3 different colors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection Asters, 6 varieties, 2 of each variety</td>
<td>Annuals, cut and named, 8</td>
<td>Foliage Plants, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection Pansies, 12 varieties cut</td>
<td>Dahlias, cut and named, 8</td>
<td>Collection of 3 Miniature Cacti, Separate containers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection Verbena, 6 varieties cut</td>
<td>Geraniums, in bloom, 3</td>
<td>Begonia, 2, Fibrous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection Double Petunias, not less than 6</td>
<td>Dahlias, pompom or ball</td>
<td>Fern, single sword</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection Cockscombs, not less than 6</td>
<td>Asters</td>
<td>Baby's Tears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection Dahlias, not less than 4</td>
<td>Pansies</td>
<td>Begonia Tuberous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection Begonias</td>
<td>Petunias</td>
<td>Geranium, Ivy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection Geraniums</td>
<td>Zinnias</td>
<td>Gloxinia, in bloom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection Fuchsias, 3 in bloom</td>
<td>Gladiolies, 8 varieties</td>
<td>Unusual or Rare House Plant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection Foliage Plants, not less than 3 in pot</td>
<td>Cosmos</td>
<td>Princesa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect House Plants, (professionals not to compete)</td>
<td>Everlasting Bouquet</td>
<td>Collection Dahlias in basket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four German Stocks in Bloom</td>
<td>Snapdragon</td>
<td>Bouquet in vase for living room table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four or Table Bouquet</td>
<td>Helianthus or Sun Flower, 3 blooms</td>
<td>Basket cut flowers, quality &amp; arrangement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Bouquet</td>
<td>Michaelmas Daisy</td>
<td>Floral Centre for dining table, 6&quot; or under</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanging Basket</td>
<td>Bunch Cut Salvia</td>
<td>Floral Arrangement, suitable for Coffee Table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House Rose in Pot</td>
<td>Decorative Begonia, 1</td>
<td>Petunias, single, 3 or more varieties, long stems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Fern in Pot</td>
<td>Amaryllis in bloom</td>
<td>Petunias, double, 3 or more varieties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection Sweet Peas</td>
<td>Salpiglossis</td>
<td>Pansies, 8 blooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marigold, African, 6 blooms</td>
<td>Zinnias, coll. giant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marigold, French, 6 blooms</td>
<td>Zinnias, coll. Lillipet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bouquet in vase for living room table</td>
<td>Gladioli, 3 varieties, 2 of each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Basket cut flowers, quality and arrangements</td>
<td>Gladioli, 1 variety, 3 spikes (red)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Single Maiden Hair Fern</td>
<td>Roses, collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Single Sword Fern</td>
<td>Gladioli, 1 var., 3 spikes, white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gloxinia in bloom, 1 pot</td>
<td>Dahlias, decorative, 1 var., 3 blooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nasturtium, 6 blooms</td>
<td>Dahlias, cactus, 1 var., 3 blooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phlox, 3 blooms, different varieties</td>
<td>Sweet Peas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dahlias, double, mixed, 8 blooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chrysanthemum, 5 sprays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Salpiglossis, 8 sprays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Marigolds, African, 8 blooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Marigolds, French, 8 blooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Salvia, 6 stalks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Calendulas, collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nasturtiums, 6 double</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nasturtiums, 6 single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Snapdragon, 6 spikes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Boutonniere, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cosmos, 8 blooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Larkspur, double annual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dining Table Centre, suitable for Thanksgiving, not necessarily flowers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dining Table Decoration, suitable for a wedding anniversary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Special Section: Exhibitors to reside with five miles of Tara  
Bouquet, any other flower not on list  
Stocks, 5 blooms  
Dahlias, 1, decorative  
Rose, single bloom  
Scabiosa, 8 blooms  
Winter Table Decoration, mounted on base  
Cactus, any other variety  
Decorative Begonia  
Fuchisia, in bloom  
African Violet

SPECIALS: Limited to residents within 10 miles of Tara  
Corsage  
Coll. African Violets, 3 var.  
Olive McDonald Flowers. Best dish garden...  
Tara Women's Institute - Basket Cut Flowers. Quality and Arrangement  
Floor Basket of Flowers, suitable for Church decoration...  
C. A. Abbott - Best basket of mixed gladioli...
### Table 4.3:
**Arran-Tara Agricultural Society Fair, Tara, Bruce County**
**Classes for Flowers and Plants, 1965**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1965</th>
<th>—Continued below—</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African Violet, double, single crown</td>
<td>Marigolds, African, 7 stems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Violet, single, single crown</td>
<td>Marigolds, French, 7 stems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Violet, three varieties, single crown</td>
<td>Petunias, single, ruffled, 3 or more colours, 5 stems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby Tears</td>
<td>Petunias, double, 3 or more colours, 5 stems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begonia, 1 fibrous in bloom</td>
<td>Annual Phlox, 7 stems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begonia, decorative</td>
<td>Stocks, 5 stems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begonia, tuberous</td>
<td>Rose, single bloom, any colour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cactus or Succulent</td>
<td>Rose, Peace, single bloom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coleus Plants (three)</td>
<td>Roses, collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geranium, any variety house grown</td>
<td>Roses, arrangement of all white, all pink, all yellow, or all cream, in low bowl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geranium, 3 different colours, house grown</td>
<td>Salpiglossis, 7 sprays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient Plant (young plant preferred)</td>
<td>Scarletia, 7 stems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asters, double, mixed 7 stems</td>
<td>Snapdragon, 7 spikes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asters, single, 7 stems</td>
<td>Zinnias, 7 stems, giant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asters, Powder Puff, 7 stems</td>
<td>Zinnias, Lilliput, 7 stems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cornflower, bouquet</td>
<td>Diasanthus, vases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cosmos, 9 sprays</td>
<td>Arrangement for a living room table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chrysanthemum, 3 sprays</td>
<td>Floral Arrangement, 3 miniature containers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dahlia, decorative, 1 bloom</td>
<td>Centre for dining table, 10” or under</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dahlia, 1 decorative, 1 variety, 3 blooms</td>
<td>Arrangement, modern, roses predominating in low container</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dahlia, Cactus, 1 variety, 3 blooms</td>
<td>Bouquet, from our fields, natural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dahlia, ball, 3 1/2 inches or over, 7 blooms</td>
<td>Bouquet for a sick child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dahlias, pom-pom, less than 2 inches in diameter, 7 blooms</td>
<td>Any flower, not listed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dahlias, any other variety</td>
<td>Specials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calendulas, collection of 7</td>
<td>Miss Dent of Northern Nurseries - Corsage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gladioli, any variety, 1 spike</td>
<td>Mrs. Sidney Rose - Bride’s Bouquet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gladioli, 1 variety, 3 spikes, pink</td>
<td>Mrs. George Morrison - Table Flower Arrangement to illustrate old song, with named displayed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gladioli, 1 var., 3 spikes, white</td>
<td>Mrs. Fred Patterson - Tea Cup Arrangement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gladioli, 1 var., 3 spikes, red</td>
<td>T. N. Duff - Collection of Floribunda Roses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gladioli, 6 spikes, 6 varieties</td>
<td>Mrs. Earl Carson - Winter Coffee Table Arrangement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gladioli, basket, mixed</td>
<td>Miss Emily Grant - Collection of Cactus Dahlias (not less than 6 blooms)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasturtiums, 7 blooms</td>
<td>Horticultural Society - Best basket of Dahlias, arrangement considered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parries, collection of 7 blooms with foliage</td>
<td>Simpson Sears Special - Best Basket of Gladioli (not less than 12 spikes)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---Continued on next column---
Table 4.4:
Erin Township Agricultural Society Fair, Erin, Wellington County
Classes for Flowers and Plants, 1974

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1974</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vase of cut flowers, annuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vase of cut flowers, biennials or perennials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowl of cut flowers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annuals, 6 varieties, exhibited in 6 qt. basket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best specimen of a cut flower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974 introduction - named</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coleus, 3 plants potted separately in 4&quot; pots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climbing vine - not over 4 feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrarium - must be established growing plants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House plant, in bloom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House plant, decorative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dish garden, 3 cacti and 3 succulents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table plant, in bloom, under 10 inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begonia, with bloom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asparagus fern, sprengeri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most unusual plant, named</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;A County Thanksgiving&quot; horizontal arrangement for dining table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Autumn Gold&quot;, tones of yellow, in brass or copper container</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Log Cabin Days&quot;, wild flowers in an old pitcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Nature's Best&quot;, weathered wood, dried material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wall plaque, driftwood natural materials may be formed, tinting permitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Ice Storm&quot; - white branches and foliage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Grannies Favourite&quot;, cut geraniums, own foliage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christmas Wreath - moss, evergreen, dried materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;For the Birds&quot;, featuring sunflowers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Oriental Mood&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Autumn Bounty&quot;, Ontario fruit and flowers in a pedestal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Extremely Modern&quot;, for a living-room corner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Evening Glo&quot;, floating candles, for a coffee table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Patio Party,&quot; using ground or pumpkin etc., as container</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handmade planter with growing plants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;A trip around the world&quot;, featuring a rock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Gay Pari&quot;, a tower of bright flowers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Ontario&quot;, one-sided arrangement featuring maple leaves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Mexico&quot;, featuring cacti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Scotland&quot;, one-sided arrangement using tartan and Scotch Thistle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.1:
Erin Township Agricultural Society Fair, Erin, Wellington County
Classes for Domestic Manufactures, 1864, 1889, and 1910

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1864</th>
<th>1889</th>
<th>1910</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quilt</td>
<td>1) Woollen counterpane</td>
<td>1) Woollen quilt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair blankets made by hand</td>
<td>Cotton counterpane</td>
<td>Woollen blankets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten yards fulled cloth</td>
<td>Woolen quilt</td>
<td>Sheets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten yards flannel</td>
<td>Cotton quilt, made by hand</td>
<td>Woollen socks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specimen of knitting</td>
<td>Cotton quilt, machine made</td>
<td>Woollen stockings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spun stocking yarn</td>
<td>Log cabin quilt</td>
<td>Homespun stocking yarn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straw hat</td>
<td>Tufted quilt</td>
<td>Pair cotton stockings, fancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best made shirt</td>
<td>Pair blankets, made by hand</td>
<td>Rag carpet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specimen of fancy needle work</td>
<td>Pair sheets, made by hand</td>
<td>Carpet, any other kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISCRETIONARY</td>
<td>Blankets, factory made</td>
<td>Hooked mat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cone basket</td>
<td>Flannel, 5 yards</td>
<td>Mat, any other kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarf</td>
<td>Winsey, 5 yards</td>
<td>Pair woollen mitts, gent's plain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braiding</td>
<td>Carpe, 5 yards</td>
<td>Woollen mitts, gent's fancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embroidery</td>
<td>Hooked mat</td>
<td>Pair gloves gents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fancy wreath</td>
<td>Homespun stocking yarn</td>
<td>Ladies' mitts, fancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pair cotton socks</td>
<td>Gent's flannel shirt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pair woollen socks</td>
<td>Gent's flannelette night shirt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pair woollen mitts</td>
<td>Ladies' flannelette night dress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pair woollen stockings</td>
<td>Sofa afghan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Woollen jacket</td>
<td>Ladies’ woollen jacket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Straw hat</td>
<td>Baby's dress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Woolen counterpane</td>
<td>Silk quilt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cotton counterpane</td>
<td>Ladies' plain shirt waist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Woolen quilt</td>
<td>White bed spread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cotton quilt, made by hand</td>
<td>Ladies' white bed spread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cotton quilt, machine made</td>
<td>Knitted counterpane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tuffed quilt</td>
<td>Crochet counterpane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pair blankets, made by hand</td>
<td>Cotton quilt, machine made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pair sheets, made by hand</td>
<td>Cotton quilt, hand made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blankets, factory made</td>
<td>Log cabin quilt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fullled cloth, 5 yards</td>
<td>Tufted quilt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flannel, 5 yards</td>
<td>Fancy quilt, any other kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>---Continued on next page---</td>
<td>Woollen counterpane</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---Continued on next page---
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1864</th>
<th>1889</th>
<th>1910</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>---Continued ---</td>
<td>---Continued ---</td>
<td>---Continued ---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winsey, 5 yards</td>
<td>2) Woollen quilt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gentlemen's plaid</td>
<td>Woollen blankets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hooked mat</td>
<td>Sheets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homespun stocking yarn</td>
<td>Woollen socks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair cotton socks</td>
<td>Woollen stockings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair woollen socks</td>
<td>Homespun stocking yarn</td>
<td>Rag carpet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair woollen mitts</td>
<td></td>
<td>Carpet, any other kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair cotton stockings</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hooked mat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair woollen stockings</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mat, any other kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXTRAS</td>
<td>Mat, any other kind</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knitted drawers</td>
<td>Pair woollen mitts, gent's plain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloves</td>
<td>Woollen mitts, gent's fancy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ladies Mitts</td>
<td>Woollen mitts, driving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blankets</td>
<td>Ladies' mitts, fancy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gent's flannel shirt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gent's flannelette night shirt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ladies' flannelette night dress</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sofa afghan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ladies’ woollen jacket</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>patching on woollen garment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Silk quilt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ladies' plain shirt waist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ladies' white night dress</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Darning an old sock or stocking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knitted counterpane</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crochet counterpane</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cotton quilt, hand made</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Log cabin quilt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gent's white shirt machine made</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Button holes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.2:  
Erin Township Agricultural Society Fair, Erin, Wellington County  
Classes for Fancywork, 1889

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1889</th>
<th>---Continued ---</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1)</td>
<td>Lace point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirt men's fine, unwashed machine made</td>
<td>Lace honiton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silver wire wreath</td>
<td>Etching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wax fruit or flowers</td>
<td>Ornamental beadwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair work</td>
<td>Pillow shams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embroidery on cotton or muslin</td>
<td>Tidy, woollen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embroidery on silk or satin</td>
<td>Tidy, cotton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embroidery on cloth</td>
<td>Bead work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lace point</td>
<td>Braiding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lace honiton</td>
<td>Tatting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Etching</td>
<td>Crochet work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ornamental beadwork</td>
<td>Worsted work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pillow shams</td>
<td>Fancy wool work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tidy, woollen</td>
<td>Sofa cushion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tidy, cotton</td>
<td>Scarf, woollen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bead work</td>
<td>Motto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braiding</td>
<td>Collection of stuffed birds and animals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tatting</td>
<td>Single stuffed bird or animal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crochet work</td>
<td>EXTRAS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worsted work</td>
<td>Wall bouquet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fancy wool work</td>
<td>Paper picture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofa cushion</td>
<td>Painted plaque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarf, woollen</td>
<td>Ottoman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motto</td>
<td>Foot rest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection of stuffed birds and animals</td>
<td>Macrame work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single stuffed bird or animal</td>
<td>Table mats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2)</td>
<td>Painting on muslin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirt men's fine, unwashed machine made</td>
<td>Woollen blankets and drapes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flower wreath</td>
<td>Card bracket and drape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silver wire wreath</td>
<td>Slippers and cap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wax fruit or flowers</td>
<td>Arassne work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair work</td>
<td>Shaving sheet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embroidery on cotton or muslin</td>
<td>Thermometer holder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embroidery on silk or satin</td>
<td>Ribbon on plush</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embroidery on cloth</td>
<td>Fancy table drape</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---Continued on next column---

1) Items made previous to the last fair
2) Items made since the last fair

Extras: Items that received discretionary prizes
# Table 5.3:
Seaforth Agricultural Society Fair, Seaforth, Huron County
Classes for Ladies’ Work, 1925

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1925</th>
<th>---Continued ---</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Domestic Needle Craft</strong></td>
<td><strong>Bed Room Furnishings (sub-section)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serviettes, four, hand trimmed</td>
<td>Day slips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table napkins, 4, initialed or monogramed</td>
<td>Pillow slips, pair, embroidered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buffet set, three piece</td>
<td>Pillow slips, pair, other hand work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table cloth and 2 napkins, embroidered, most practical</td>
<td>Pair of towels, other hand work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ladies’ Work</strong></td>
<td>Pair of guest towels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lace, Irish crochet</td>
<td>Fancy sheet and pillow slips to match</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lace, filet, cotton</td>
<td>Dresser set, three piece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lace, knitted, cotton</td>
<td>Dresser set, washable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tatting, display</td>
<td><strong>Ladies’ Wear (sub-section)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawn Work, display, 3 pieces</td>
<td>Night robe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawn Work, Italian</td>
<td>Camisole, hand made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embroidery, cross stitch</td>
<td>Fancy handkerchiefs, 3 samples handwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embroidery, display, 3 pieces</td>
<td>Fair Bedroom slippers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embroidery, modern conventional, colored</td>
<td>Fancy collars and cuffs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fancy Work Bag</td>
<td>Ladies’ scarf, fancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curtains, hand made</td>
<td><strong>Infants’ Wear (sub-section)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dining Room Furnishings (sub-section)</strong></td>
<td>Short dress, washable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luncheon set, 5 pieces</td>
<td>Fancy dress, handmade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea Cloth</td>
<td>Bonnet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set of table mats</td>
<td>Wool Jacket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set of table doyleys</td>
<td>Bathrobe or kimona</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tray cloth</td>
<td>Set of underwear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre piece, embroidered in silk</td>
<td><strong>Living Room Furnishings (sub-section)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre piece, embroidered in cotton</td>
<td>Table runner, colored</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre piece, linen with colored border</td>
<td>Centre piece, colored</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---Continued on next column---
Table 5.4:
Arran-Tara Agricultural Society Fair, Tara, Bruce County
Classes for Ladies’ Work, 1960 and 1970

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1960</th>
<th>1970</th>
<th>1980</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children’s Wear</strong></td>
<td><strong>Dining Room Furnishings</strong></td>
<td><strong>Children’s Wear</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cot Quilt</td>
<td>Lunch Set, five pieces</td>
<td>Child’s Slipper Socks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denim Overalls, 2 to 5 years</td>
<td>Set of three Hot Pad Mats</td>
<td>Baby’s Sweater, Bonnet and Booties (hand-crocheted)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child’s Dress, smocked, 5 yrs. or under, Mercerized Cotton</td>
<td>4 Place Mats, any work, white or colored</td>
<td>Baby’s Sweater, Bonnet and Booties (hand-knitted)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Pair Child’s Sox</td>
<td>Crochet Table Cloth, 46” in length</td>
<td>Child’s Pyjamas (flannel) (size 6 to 10 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby’s Sweater, Bonnet and Booties (hand-knitted)</td>
<td>Bath Set, Crocheted</td>
<td>Child’s Sweater (bulky knit)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby’s Sweater, Bonnet and Booties (hand-knitted)</td>
<td><strong>Bedroom Furnishings</strong></td>
<td>Baby’s Sweater (bulky knit)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant’s Flannel Nightie</td>
<td>Quilt, showing fancy quilting, plain color</td>
<td>Lucoth’s Sweater (polyester)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child’s Pyjamas (flannel) (size 6 to 10 years)</td>
<td>Quilt, pieced</td>
<td>Child’s Skirt Set (pullover)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl’s Rain Breeched Rain, No Hymans</td>
<td>Quilt, pieced and applique</td>
<td>Child’s Wool Cap or Hat and Mittens (touch)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl’s Illuxed Pinafore, size 8 to 10 years</td>
<td>Quilt, pieced and applique</td>
<td><strong>Bedroom Wear</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy’s Shirt, cotton, size 6 to 10 years</td>
<td>1 Pair Pillow Cases, embroidered</td>
<td>Overblouse, cotton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl’s Champion, size 10 years</td>
<td>1 Pair Pillow Cases, crocheted trim</td>
<td>Overblouse, cotton (sample of material attached)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children’s Wear</strong></td>
<td>1 Pair Pillow Cases, homette trim</td>
<td>Cushion, Crewel Embroidered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denim Overalls, 2 to 5 years</td>
<td>Quilt fancy applique</td>
<td>Sun-Dress, cotton (sample of material attached)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set of three Hot Pad Mats</td>
<td><strong>Living Room Furnishings</strong></td>
<td>Tea Apron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Place Mats, any work, white or colored</td>
<td>Cushions, wool or wool trim</td>
<td>Vest, Bruce Tartan (sample of material attached)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crochet Table Cloth, 46” in length</td>
<td>Cushion, Corduroy</td>
<td>Men’s Sport Shirt, Paisley (sample of material attached)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bath Set, Crocheted</td>
<td>Cushion, any other kind</td>
<td>Men’s Sweater, bulky knit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Living Room Furnishings</strong></td>
<td>Chair Set, 3 pieces</td>
<td>Large Kitchen Apron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cushions, wool or wool trim</td>
<td>Collection Crocheted Pieces…</td>
<td>Large Kitchen Apron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cushion, Corduroy</td>
<td>Knitted Doily</td>
<td>Large Tea Towel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cushion, any other kind</td>
<td>Knitted Doily</td>
<td>Tea Towels, hand-made, embroidered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair Set, 3 pieces</td>
<td>Knitted Doily</td>
<td>3 Pot Holders, crocheted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection Crocheted Pieces…</td>
<td>Knitted Doily</td>
<td><strong>Kitchen Accessories</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kitchen Accessories</strong></td>
<td>Knitted Doily</td>
<td>Socks, hand knit (fingerling or double knitting yarn)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half Apron, cotton</td>
<td>Mitts, hand knit, fine</td>
<td>Socks, hand knit (fingerling or double knitting yarn)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Kitchen Apron</td>
<td>Vest, Bruce Tartan (sample of material attached)</td>
<td>Mitts, hand knit, fine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cobbler's Apron, sample mat, Attached</td>
<td>Men’s Sport Shirt, Paisley (sample of material attached)</td>
<td>Mitts, hand knit, fine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Pot Holders, crocheted</td>
<td>Men’s Sweater, bulky knit</td>
<td>Large Kitchen Apron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Pair Tea Towels, hand-made, embroidered</td>
<td><strong>Living Room Furnishings</strong></td>
<td>Large Table Cloth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Miscellaneous</strong></td>
<td>Large Tea Towel</td>
<td>Lunch Set, 5 pieces (tied embroidery)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrapped package for a Bride’s Gift</td>
<td><strong>Kitchen Accessories</strong></td>
<td>Large Tea Towel, 5 pieces (tied embroidery)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article made from flour sack, over 16” x 12”</td>
<td>Socks, hand knit (fingerling or double knitting yarn)</td>
<td>Large Tea Towel, 5 pieces (tied embroidery)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar-Starched Crocheted Novelty</td>
<td>Mitts, hand knit, fine</td>
<td>One Cologne and 4 Piece Mats (machine embroidered)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article of Needlework by a New Canadian</td>
<td><strong>Kitchen Accessories</strong></td>
<td>Breakfast Cloth, gay color (not plastic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children’s Wear</strong></td>
<td><strong>Bedroom Furnishings</strong></td>
<td><strong>Kitchen Accessories</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---Continued on next column---
Table 5.5:  
Erin Township Agricultural Society Fair, Erin, Wellington County  
Classes for Arts and Crafts, 1974  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1974</th>
<th>---Continued---</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Originals) Drawing or sketch, pencil or charcoal</td>
<td>Afghan, crochet or knit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local scene, oils with title</td>
<td>Tablecloth, crochet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portrait, any medium</td>
<td>Cushion, smocked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street scene, named</td>
<td>(Miscellaneous hobbies) half apron, cross-stitch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bird life, any medium</td>
<td>Place mats, set of 4, any media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern art, other than paint</td>
<td>Batik, any article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract painting</td>
<td>Candle, hand-made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Copy Work Only, Oils) flowers</td>
<td>Christmas table arrangement, stationnary, not to exceed 12&quot; x 14&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>winter landscape</td>
<td>Costume Jewellery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Pastels) Pioneer scene</td>
<td>Crochet article - novelty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flowers and/or fruit</td>
<td>macrame - any article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Crafts and Hobbies) Quilt, crib, nursery design</td>
<td>Copper enamelling, any article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quilt, child's</td>
<td>Block printing, any article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quilt, applique</td>
<td>An article made from a square yard of material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quilt, pieced</td>
<td>Something new from something old, STATING ORIGINAL ARTICLE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quilt, plain material, quilting only to be judged</td>
<td>Article made from terry cloth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quilt blocks, pieced and/or applique, 4 different, named and mounted</td>
<td>Stuffed toy, hand-made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pillow cases, one pair, embroidered</td>
<td>Child's Toy, hand-made, using any other media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pillow cases, one pair, cross-stitch</td>
<td>Slipper socks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Living Room) Hooked Rug, latchet</td>
<td>Picture, framed, embroidered or crewel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hooked rug, wool strips</td>
<td>Wall hanging - not framed, any media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article of needlepoint, finished</td>
<td>Amateur Photography - 3 coloured prints of local interest, mounted and named</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---Continued on next column---</td>
<td>Any other hand-made article</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bibliography

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C9 Sh4 B1 F1. Shedden Women’s Institute Fonds
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MACDONALD STEWART ART CENTRE
UG 997.006.001 – UG 997.006.006. Fanny Colwill Calvert files

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Mary McCulloch Diary, 1898
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2003-47-3-2157. Photograph. “Exhibitors at the Fall Fair, 1950”

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P1783. Photograph. “Group Photograph (1939).”

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