

Cuyahoga County Fairgrounds

In the early 1870s, the Cuyahoga County Fair Association, the entity responsible for organizing the first Cuyahoga County Fair in 1847 on grounds south of Cleveland in Newburgh, Ohio, had a number of directors like John W. Williams, I.W. Pope, W.T. Uphill, Alexander Frazer, H.H. Kelley, and Washington Gates who were Chagrin Falls residents. In 1872, the Directors of the Fair association met to discuss the future of the Fair and the possibility of moving the Fair to a new location, which inspired I.W. Pope to encourage them to consider Chagrin Falls. In January of 1873, the Fair Association entered into a lease agreement with the recently organized Union Fair Association of Chagrin Falls for the use of what would become known as the “Fairgrounds” on East Washington Street. The founders of the Union Fair Association, I.W. Pope, H.S. Osmond, Frank Brown, H.H. Benjamin, William Hutchings, Jefferson Fisher, Alfred Williams, Dr. H.W. Curtiss, and Joseph Stoneman, were all well known around the village of Chagrin Falls. In May of 1873, the Association purchased 28 acres of land on East Washington Street from Harvey Bassett at a cost of \$2,575. The aforementioned land that the Union Fair Association purchased is now the current location of the Chagrin Falls Middle School and High School campuses. The Association additionally purchased the right to quarry stone on the property and to build a culvert to harness the springs that ran through the property, therefore assuring the availability of water for use of livestock during the fair season.

Upon its acquisition of the land, the Union Fair Association laid out a half mile long track and constructed a grandstand, horse stables, fencing, and an exhibit hall on the grounds. The Association put their facilities to use on a large scale for the first time in May of 1874, when they held the first racing meet at the Fairgrounds. The first race had an entry fee of five dollars and had prize money equaling around \$4,000. These meets were common at the Fairgrounds in the months leading up to the Fair. Although the racing meets held at the Fairgrounds appeared to be popular in that racing cards were filled, the average race attendance was very poor and the Union Fair quickly encountered financial difficulties. To counter the Union Fair Association’s inability to make money on all of their races, the Cuyahoga County Fair Association loaned the Union Fair money to assist in the maintenance of the barns and grandstands. The financial assistance, however, was short lived, as the Union Fair Association was forced to file for bankruptcy in 1877.

Despite the demise of the Union Fair Association, horse racing in Chagrin did not experience a similar degree of failure. The County Fair was not held in 1879, which prompted the directors to form the Union Agricultural Society to ensure that racing would continue at the



Spectators enjoy horse racing at the Fairgrounds

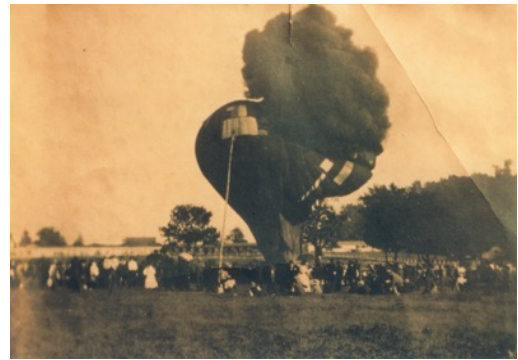


Fairgrounds. In 1892, the Horseman's Club was organized to hold matinee races at the Fairgrounds. In 1893, the Chagrin Falls driving club continued to hold race meets at the grounds into the early twentieth century.

During the nearly 50 years in which the Cuyahoga County Fair was held in Chagrin, the Fair provided a showcase for agricultural products and livestock, as well as a venue for local manufacturers to demonstrate their wares. The County Fair was always held at the end of the growing season, which meant that it would typically take place as early as mid-August and sometimes as late as early to mid October. The Fair that was held in Chagrin was commonly referred to as the "East Cuyahoga County Fair" until 1925, when the Cuyahoga County Commissioners decided to move the Fair west to Berea.

The word "East" was commonly added to the fair name due to the fact that there were always multiple fairs being held in Cuyahoga: one on the east side of the County, the other on the west. The fair in Chagrin offered a variety of unique attractions like a giant ferris wheel that was placed in the midway of the race track. The midway of the track also was where visitors would find live bands, vendors, and other entertainment. At the 1915 County Fair, Prof. Oscar Hunt and his wife, Elizabeth, preformed daring feats often in the form of them parachuting from balloons or performing trapeze stunts. Spectators even had the opportunity to ride up in their balloon with the purchase of a ticket. At the first fair, there was a ten dollar purse awarded to the winner of a footrace around the track, which was won by Tom Bright of Chagrin Falls with a time of two minutes and thirty eight seconds. There was also a "flying machine" demonstration twice per day and a record fast automobile at the 1915 County Fair. In terms of pricing, a single adult admission ticket into the 1916 fair cost only twenty-five cents, a children's ticket was only priced at only ten cents, and a parking space inside of the track cost fifty cents. There was also a ticketing option known as the "Membership Ticket" that was a one dollar option that provided the buyer with four tickets into the Fair. The Fairgrounds initially had wooden grandstands for visitors to sit in, which were later replaced by a pair of cement grandstands in 1913, which still stand today as the home grandstands at Chagrin Falls High School's C.S. Harris Field.

Today, the Chagrin Falls Middle School and High School lie on grounds where the fairgrounds once stood. In the end, the Fairgrounds have played an important role in shaping the regional visibility of Chagrin Falls and will continue to be ingrained in the history of this town.



Above: A hot air balloon intended to entertain visitors catches fire at the Fairgrounds

Below: The infield of the Fairgrounds race track during the east Cuyahoga County Fair

