

# London As a City Welcomes Its Fair Visitors

## Steady Growth; Financial Success Are Features of London's Annual Western Fair Since Its Inception

From the Small Two-Day Fair That Was First Held in 1868 the Western Has Steadily Grown by Leaps and Bounds Until It Has Reached Its Present, Proud Position of the Leading Annual Exhibition of Western Ontario.

The Western Fair is the Exhibition which has always paid its own way, 100 cents on the dollar in prize money, and closed up its books after each fair with a substantial balance on the right side of the ledger.

This is a record which makes the Western Fair almost unique among exhibitions of the kind, a record difficult for people associated with similar enterprises elsewhere to credit without the proof of statistics.

When a deputation from the Western Fair board waited upon the Dominion Government some time ago in connection with a grant, even Canada's minister of public works could hardly believe his ears when he heard the statement that the Western Fair had never known a deficit. This was a matter to be gone into, something which required an after-session with the deputation and the query: "Do you mean to say it is absolutely true your exhibition has never had a deficit?"

It was a proud moment for the representatives when they were able to answer: "Absolutely true."

This is all the more remarkable when it is realized the Western Fair will be in the jubilee class a couple of years hence.

**First Fair in 1868.**  
It takes a person with a pretty long memory and a generous accumulation of years to recall the first Western Fair which was held in London on September 29 and 30, 1868, on the military grounds, then situated on Richmond street north, where the C. P. R. station now stands. It is on record that the first fair was a decided success, although the weather, especially on the second day, was far from favorable.

The "Crystal Palace," situated on Wellington street, between what is now Hyman street and Central avenue, was occupied by the military, even as the Main Building on the present grounds has been occupied by the military during the past winter. On account of this occupancy, the old drill shed, which stood where the collegiate institute now stands, was used for such articles as required to be put inside a building, while the live stock was shown on the grounds near the palace.

**Some Old Exhibitors.**  
The horse classes are reported as being well filled, and the following exhibitors are mentioned: A. McTavish, Lobo Township; A. Laurie, London; Robert Murray and Alex. McArthur, Westminster; William Saddle, Dorchester; J. W. McLaugh and T. McLean, Lobo.

In cattle, Messrs. Peters and Pincomb showed a number of Devons, and George Robson, London Township, carried away first prize for the best pair of working oxen.

A few sheep and swine were shown, and a fine display of poultry by Messrs. Hogue, Peters and Routledge.

Local manufacturers called to exhibit their products. John Elliot, of the Phoenix Foundry, London, showed a specimen of the Ball's Ohio combined reaper and mower; the Joseph Hall Works, Oshawa, reapers, with self-rake attachment; the "Ayr Combined" was shown by J. Watson of Ayr, Ont.; Anderson's combined pea harvester and hayrake, by Stewart, Bruce & Co.; seed drills and plows by William and James Walker, Westminster; hard grass seed, George Murray, Westminster; seed drills, Messrs. Maxwell and Whitelaw, Paris; wood-sawing machines, E. Leonard; plows, George Gray, London, and J. McSherry, Iona; ditching machines, Robert Robson; hayforks, Elliot Grieve; harrows, Jacob Metzger; pumps, N. Reynolds and J. M. Cousins; wagons by Plummer and Pacey; straw cutters, J. M. Cousins; carriages by J. Campbell, Abbott Bros., Thompson & Moran, Smith & Gordon, McKellar & Stewart, Pacey & Sons, Shotwell & McCarty.

Furniture was exhibited by Mr. Moorehead and C. Coombs; stoves by McCarty's, while many other articles of general interest were on exhibition.

The receipts of the first fair, including all grants, amounted to \$2,570.20. The expenditure, including \$1,520 paid in prizes, was \$2,823.45, leaving a balance to the credit of the association of \$557.75.

**Formed by Amalgamation.**  
The Western Fair Association was formed on April 22, 1868, by the amalgamation of the East Middlesex Agricultural Society and the London District Horticultural and Agricultural Society.

For some years previous to this the East Middlesex Society had been in existence, holding a yearly "Fall Show" on the society's own show grounds on Talbot street, north of Oxford. These fall shows were of greatest interest to the farming community, and in addition to exhibits of live stock, etc., a plowing match usually took place.

At this period in the country's history a "Provincial Exhibition," under the direction of the Provincial Government, was held annually and passed around to the various centres of the province, and to this can in a large measure be traced the awakening of ambition to hold a yearly exhibition on a larger scale than had been done before. Far-sighted men saw in such an exhibition great benefit for the city apart from the educational advantages.

**Co-operation's Start.**  
With this object in view, a move was made at the annual meeting of the East Middlesex Agricultural Society on January 15, 1867, to dispose of the property on Talbot street and secure the use of the military grounds on Richmond street.

The motion was lost, but a committee was appointed, composed of the president, George McGee, John Wheaton and John Elliott, to confer with similar committees from the city and county councils, "to discuss plans holding a larger fair in the near future."

The exhibition was held at the old place in the autumn of 1868, owing to

inability to secure the military grounds through the city, through Mayor Frank Smith, later Hon. Frank Smith, had been asked for the use.

The London District Horticultural and Agricultural Society was organized as a result of a public meeting called by His Worship Mayor Frank Smith, and held on November 13, 1867. At this meeting a committee was appointed to canvas the citizens for funds to start an exhibition.

**Definite Organization in 1868.**  
On February 8, 1868, definite action was taken and a full list of officers elected. Bylaws were drawn up and committees appointed for different purposes.

During that year the Government passed an act allowing small grants to agricultural societies holding shows. The new society took advantage of this act, and drew a grant, as well as the East Middlesex Society. This was used to good advantage, and continued for years according to the membership each year. The amalgamation of funds achieved on April 22nd. Both societies referred to are still in existence and their present officers still form a part of the Western Fair Association.

**Jas. Johnston First President.**  
The officers appointed at this first meeting, and who constituted the first board of the Western Fair Association, were: President, Jas. Johnston (also president of the London District Horticultural and Agricultural Society); vice-president, Geo. McGee (president of the East Middlesex Agricultural Society); Messrs. William McBride and Henry Anderson, joint secretaries, and Messrs. Alex. Kerr and John Stuart, joint treasurers.

The joint efforts of the two societies welded together in the Western Fair Association, made possible the successful exhibition held the first year of amalgamation.

**Still Represented.**  
Both societies are still in existence and both are still equally represented on the Western Fair Board, which is composed of 21 directors, 6 appointed by the East Middlesex Agricultural Society, 6 by the city council, through which the London Horticultural and Agricultural Society is represented, and 9 appointed at the annual meeting of the Western Fair Association, which is always held on the second Wednesday in February.

The association is made up of representatives from various societies, cattle breeders, swine breeders, horse breeders, etc., each being entitled to two representatives on the association. Fifty-two societies were represented at the annual meeting this year, held on the second Wednesday in February, giving 128 members in the association, including the directors.

The association elects the president and vice-president and appoints all officers. The directors receive no remuneration, unless a pass for the exhibition and meals at Fair time be considered for the services they render.

**New Stables Erected.**  
Twelve thousand dollars were offered in prize money, of which more than \$7,000 was paid in 1875. New stables were erected and new fencing placed around the grounds.

Bad weather interfered with the attendance of 1876. In addition, this was the year of the Centennial Exhibition at Philadelphia, many of the farmers of Western Ontario and others going to the West.

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### Year By Year At the Western Fair

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Every year since 1868 a Western Fair has been held in London. In 1869 London was again lucky enough to obtain the Provincial Exhibition, and \$200 was appropriated for the use of the local committee in preparing the grounds. The feature given most prominence in the records was a visit to the exhibition of Prince Arthur, Duke of Connaught, the same Duke of Connaught who is now Governor-General of Canada.

In 1870.

At the annual meeting of the East Middlesex Society on January 20, 1870, it was unanimously decided to sell the Talbot street property. In the meantime arrangements had been made with the city for the permanent use of the military grounds. A large amount of money having been expended on buildings by the Government, assisted by the city for the Provincial Exhibition of 1869, everything was in good condition for the Western Fair of 1870. Owing to the success of the two previous years, it was decided to hold a three days' fair, and September 27, 28 and 29 were fixed as the dates.

After expenses and prize money to the amount of \$3,452.23 had been paid to exhibitors, a balance of \$550.12 was left in the hands of the treasurer, A. S. Emery. Up to this time very little had been paid in salaries to any officials, the secretary receiving about \$20 a year for his work.

**A Four Days' Fair.**  
The exhibition of 1871 was a still more ambitious undertaking, a four days' fair, commencing September 26, with Richard Tooley, M. P. F., as president, and William McBride as secretary.

In 1872 his Excellency the Governor-General and Lady Dufferin honored the Fair with their presence. William McBride again secretary, and A. S. Emery treasurer.

The exhibition of 1873 was a Provincial Fair.

**Troubles of Its Own.**  
Notwithstanding "troubles of its own," the exhibition of 1874 wound up with a cash balance to its credit of \$4,000.

The troubles were of this nature: Early in the year an agitation was started to open certain streets through the grounds and dispose of the property for building purposes. The officers of the different societies opposed this in every possible way, and finally succeeded in having a vote of the people taken. It was carried by an overwhelming majority to leave the grounds as they were. Notwithstanding this victory, the uncertainty had a bad effect on the exhibition.

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more than \$7,000, and a construction account of \$1,491.35.

A. McCormick was now president; John Nixon and Thomas Partridge Jun., vice-presidents; William McBride, secretary; William Bolton, treasurer, and J. B. Smyth, superintendent of grounds. The auditors were J. S. Dewar and A. G. Smyth.

In 1880, an agitation was again started to sell the grounds, and a bylaw submitted to the people, which was again voted down.

**Secretary Lost in Victoria Disaster.**  
During 1881, the secretary, Mr. McBride, was drowned in the Victoria disaster on the river. J. B. Smyth was elected to succeed him.

The exhibition of 1882, held in the first week of October, proved most successful. Over \$11,000 was taken in from the sale of tickets, \$1,600 from the sale of booths and privileges, and \$1,000 each given over from the two societies as grants. More than \$8,000 was taken in prizes, and first mention is made this year of advertising, the account being \$1,200. Two thousand dollars was expended on construction work. The year closed with a balance of more than \$1,000 reported by the new treasurer, D. McKenzie, who holds the position until the present time.

**Expansion in 1883.**  
In 1883, \$2,400 was added to the prize list, attractions were secured, and an evening performance attempted. To make this possible, a grandstand was erected at a cost of \$1,100, and a fence placed around the horse ring costing \$300.

The year 1884 was a record one, so far as entries and exhibits were concerned, but owing to weather conditions the attendance fell off by some six or eight thousand. The amount paid out in prizes exceeded the gate receipts by \$375. As a result the new board considered the advisability of cutting down the prize list. An evidence of the growing recognition that "it will pay to advertise" was found in the general attitude that more money should be spent in advertising the exhibition to insure its success.

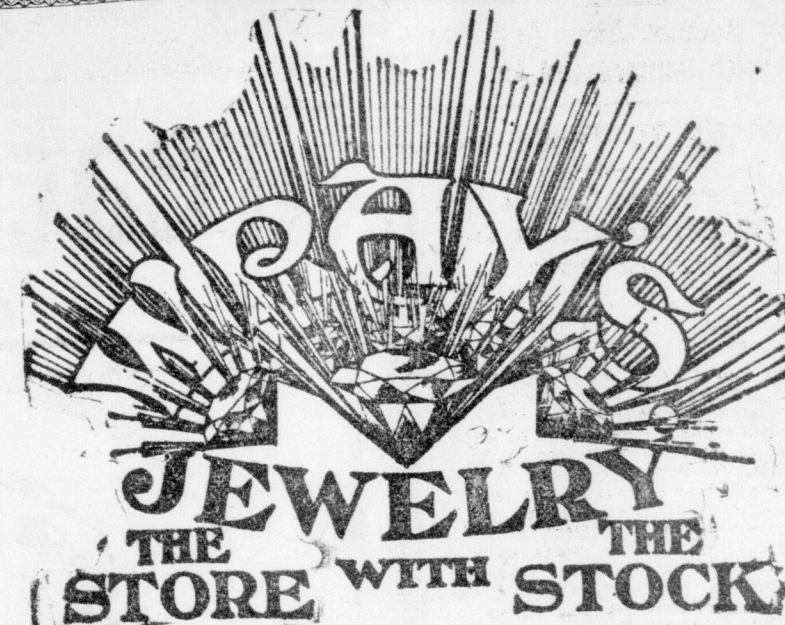
**An Incorporated Organization.**  
Following the provincial fair of 1885, the exhibition of 1886 was considerably disturbed on account of certain portions of the grounds having been sold. Application was made to Hon. John Carling for the use of the stables at the old brewery in case they should be needed. A request which was freely granted.

On April 18, 1887, the Western Fair Association became an incorporated institution. The following prominent names appeared on the bill presented to the Legislature for an act of incorporation: James Cowan, mayor; A. W. Porte, J. W. Little, Richard Lawrence Cleveland, Donald McKenzie, George Douglas, John Walker, Thomas Green, W. Y. Brunton, T. H. Marsh, John Green, R. C. Struthers, John Wolfe, W. J. Reid, A. M. Smart, W. R. Hobbs, T. R. Parker, Robert Lewis and M. Masurel.

Notices were sent out, and the first annual meeting under the new act held April 29, 1887, at which the following directors were elected: A. W. Porte, F. B. Leys, W. Y. Brunton, W. M. Gartshore, T. H. Marsh, W. R. Hobbs, A. M. Smart, R. Lewis, W. J. Reid, J. W. Little, J. D. Sharman, and Allen Bogue. At a subsequent meeting Mr. Porte was

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\$12.00.

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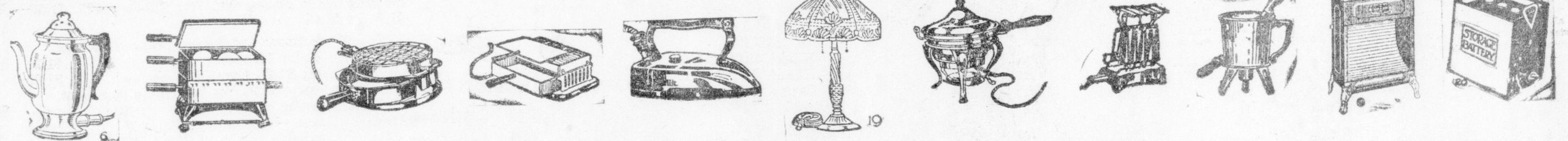
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