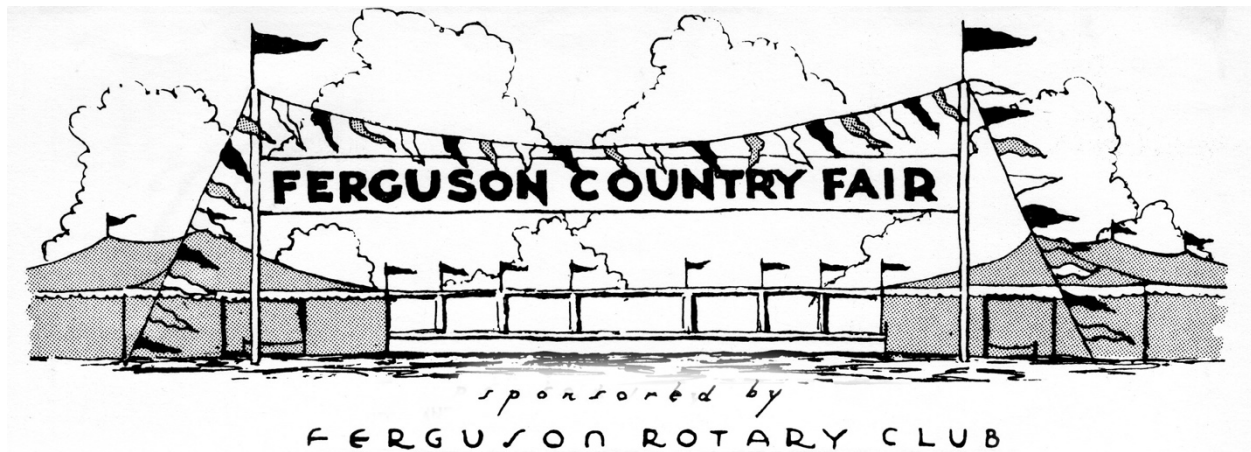




Ferguson Has a History Museum

Ferguson has a Historical Society and a History Museum. We encourage any people reading this article to join in the conversation and become a member.



In the last three months we featured the Ferguson Country Fair – an event sponsored by the Ferguson Rotary from 1949 until 1961. We had mentioned that Rotary International was and is an organization of businessmen and professionals dedicated to assisting their community. A key person in the creation and operation of the fair was Bill Crume (President in 1949 and some years to follow). Ferguson Rotary disbanded in 2011. In this month’s article we will detail the final years of the fair, 1957 to 1961.

In last month’s article we presented some of the more outstanding events during the 1949-1957 years. As a reminder, some of the key events were: the flying saucer, the “Mutt Show”, the wedding between Evelyn Kelley and “Eddie” Allred, the Boxing Cats, the Treasure Hunt, the many parades, the local talent (Scouts, dancers, entertainers) as well as the fair memoirs of Kathy (Owen) Noelker. As you will find out, the final years also offered many new events and ideas for promotion of the Ferguson Country Fair.

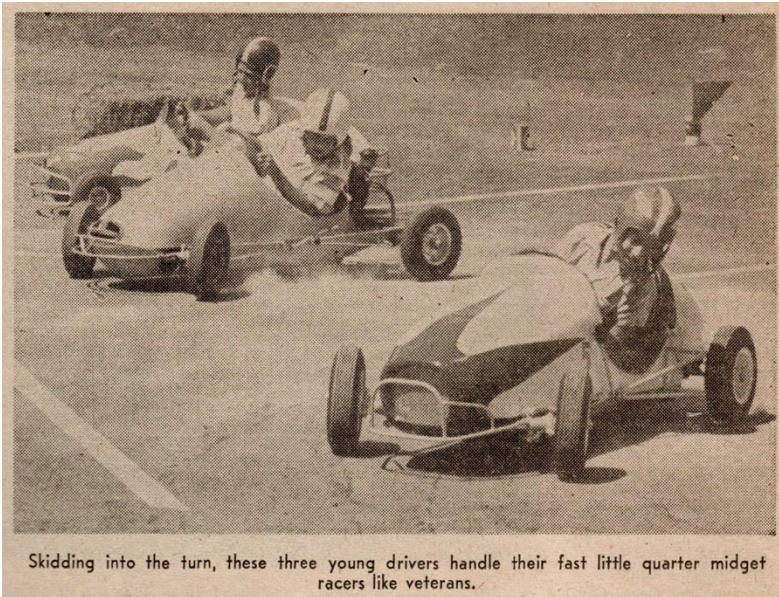
The 1957 Ferguson Country Fair opened on Wednesday September 4th for four days. This was the 9th consecutive fair. Like the earlier fairs, and included by popular demand, was the food and crafts tent with the contests and displays along with a livestock area. Once again, the fair featured a “Greased Pig” contest (*“the pig will be good*



and greasy”). The creators of the fair were always looking for a good “gimmick” to bring people into the fair. One of 1957’s gimmicks is the *Mayor’s Milking Contest* – where several local mayors would compete to see who was the best “milker”. There were other unique contests: The *Boy with the Most Freckles* and to keep things equal, The *Girl with the Longest Pigtails*. This is the first year that we noticed the addition of a Rock ‘n Roll Band – *The Jokers*. By 1957 people my age were getting old enough to attend the fair on our own. *The Jokers* were a welcome addition. Admission prices held steady at 25-cents for adults and 10-cents for kids. You can bet we stooped a little when we paid.

Judy (Craig) McCarty, on and off a resident of Ferguson recalled the 1957 fair. She remembered that *Leonards House of Jewels* (then located on the corner of Carson and Florissant Rd), handed out envelopes containing a note for either a rhinestone or a real diamond. You took your unopened envelope to the store and would receive what you won. She won the diamond, had a ring designed for it and wears it today.

The 1958 fair also started on a Wednesday, September 3 and went through the 6th. Before looking at the events of 1958, we need to remember that the purpose of the fair was two-fold: one was to bring the city of Ferguson before the area and second was to raise money for local groups. The Rotary announced that previous fairs had put lights on Ferguson High’s field, financed a Japanese exchange student, bought an inhaler for the Fire Department, and for 1958 it was helping finance a new hospital to be located at Brotherton and Florissant Road. I don’t remember anything about that hospital and to my knowledge it was never built. The stage featured the *Johnny Polzin Dance Band*, the “*Country Cousins*” square dance group, the *Ferguson High Chorus* and, once again, the *Emma Ogle School of Dance*. But the big event was the



Skidding into the turn, these three young drivers handle their fast little quarter midget racers like veterans.

Quarter Midget Auto Racers. These professionally built little racers (capable of about 30 mph) were driven by kids from 4 to 15 – their dads were the pit crew.

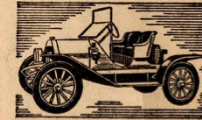
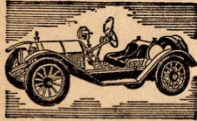
In 1959 the fair ran from September 9th through the 12th. As in past years it was held on the Merchants Parking Lot (the parking lot to the west of Aldi’s). This was a big year for livestock with cattle, hogs, sheep along with turkeys and chickens. You can add

some new smells to the cotton candy and hot dogs. Featured acts included *Ernie Heldman* (a very famous local magician) along with *Captain Eddie* who swung around on a high pole, *Norma Koch* (Acrobat),

Big name professional entertainers, several acts each night, different each night. See "Captain Eddie", America's most famous sway-pole act, twice each night.

ANTIQUÉ AUTO SHOW

Remember the "model T"



Rolls Royce
Rex
Stutz



Daimler
Moon
Chalmers



Reutaus (a puppeteer and skater) and *Bob Holt* an impersonator. One highlight of the fair was an opening parade of antique autos.

In 1960 the fair started on Wednesday, August 17 and ran through Saturday the 20th. This is the first time the fair started in August. Featured acts this year included *Kimris* "the Sabre Jet Sensation" (ariel act), *Jim O'Neil* who did barrel-jumping, *Deede Dawn* (a contortionist), *McGinty and Ray* a "Wonder Dog" act and *The Claytons* who did a lariat and western act. 1960 saw a return the the antique auto and, of course, livestock.



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6:00 to Midnight






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guson Rotary Club for Charity.

Winner of Renault - Dauphine given away at Ferguson Fair, was Mr. Humphrey of 305 Tiffin, Ferguson 35, Mo. Miles cars Traveled was 141 miles on one tank of gas. People in picture left to right Rotarian's: Mr. E. Gough, Mrs. E. Gough, winner Mr. Humphrey, Mr. Eugene Ziaja and Dr. Boettcher.

1961, which began on August 23rd and ended on August 26th, was the final year of the Ferguson Country Fair. Apparently *McGinty and Ray* (Ray was the "Wonder Dog") were invited back and added were the *Del-Raes*, an ariel act. The Rotarians added a *Fish Fry* to the events along with two

car auctions: on Friday night a Plymouth was auctioned and on Saturday it was a Ford. No reports on how that came out. Cars were definitely a focus as there was also a *Renault Dauphine Contest*. The Dauphine (a small French car being introduced to compete with the Volkswagen Beetle) was driven all four days of the fair. To win the car you had to be the closest to guess the actual miles per tank of gas. We also don't know how that came out – was the Dauphine more economical than a Beetle – We do know that a *Mr. Humphry*, of 141 Tiffin, won

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the car with his guess of 141 miles on one tank. There was also a large display of aircraft (McDonnell) and military (Army) equipment.

On the last day of the fair, the organizers of the fair took a survey of people's reactions to the fair. 1006 people were surveyed – half of which were from Ferguson. 80% were from North County. The remaining 20% came from all around St. Louis City and County as well as Illinois. When asked “how did you hear about the fair?” about half the people responded “How could you NOT hear of the fair”. To the question “What did you like best?”, many simply answered that they liked everything about the fair – however the Art & Hobby show, the livestock areas and the professional and amateur acts rated highly. While generally positive, there were a few negative comments including the cost of the rides, lack of places to sit and relax, some thought the fair area was too small and a few wanted the sale of Beer. The report summary, as submitted by Bill Crume, was “all in all, the results of the survey indicate to me that we are performing a valuable project in the field of community service, through giving people pride in their home town, and that we are also doing a good job at selling Rotary.” The fairs were a success! Why did they stop?

The fairs stopped for me as in 1961 I graduated from High School and went to college. I was no longer around in late August or September. I have heard that there were some “smaller” fairs after 1961 at a different location in Ferguson, but I have located no proof of this in the archives.

My summary of the fairs, based on my personal experiences (that's me on the left and my Dad on the right) along with research from the History House, is that the fairs were a great success and a great part of the history of Ferguson. Following the war was a great time of growth for the City of Ferguson – a great time for the growth of civic groups like the Ferguson Rotary. History is made up of notable events and people, but it is also a story of everyday communities and their citizens.



What did people do in their everyday lives? What interested them? What activities did they prefer? The Ferguson Country Fair helps to answer these questions. Look at the events, the entertainment, the activities the fair offered – you see what everyday citizens of the area – of the time – enjoyed. Take away the “instant communication” of today, would we enjoy the same things? Would we still love to see McGinty and “the Wonder Dog” Roy or a man swinging around on a high pole. Possibly. We still have the Missouri and Illinois State Fairs with similar events and updated entertainment. Times change. We change, but we still love to have fun!

Information for this article came from personal memories and the files of the Ferguson Historical Society.

Membership in the Ferguson Historical Society is open to anyone – membership levels range from \$20.00 to \$50.00 a year. If you are interested in joining or have any suggestions, questions, or items to donate to the Ferguson Historical Society, please contact Jerry Benner at fjbenner@mindspring.com. You are also welcome to visit the History Museum at 1064 Smith (behind the Community Center) by e-mailing the above address. Note: we will need to schedule a date for you, so ask well in advance

“The Ferguson Historical Society is dedicated to preserving and promoting the history of Ferguson Missouri. Membership is open to all sharing our interest.”