

FIRST COUNTY FAIRS IN GRAY COUNTY

Gray County, Kansas

Written by Juanita Trebilcock

Consultants: Charles S. Sturtevant, Walter C. Bean, and Jim Phelps, all of Cimarron, Kansas

References: The Jacksonian, Cimarron, Kansas Newspaper - Published in October 1915

** Additional information added about certain people mentioned in this story*

County Fair photographs provided by Sara McFarland, Research Librarian, at the Cimarron (Kansas) City Library

The first County Fair to be held in Gray County took place on the 6th, 7th, and 8th of October in 1915. Small agricultural displays had been held for a few years before that on the streets of Cimarron, but there was nothing that could really be called a county fair.



The First Gray County Fair held in 1915 in Cimarron, Kansas
“Kennedy’s Wild West show drew large crowds.”

A Fair Association board was organized approximately two months before the fair took place, with Walter C. Bean*, a Cimarron merchant, as president. A man named

Peterson, who was editor of the Jacksonian Newspaper at Cimarron, was Secretary. Mr. Peterson is now the editor of the magazine "Better Homes and Gardens." (*Elmer T. Peterson was editor of Better Homes and Gardens from 1927 to 1937.*)

The Fair Association Board represented the people of Gray County, who had a vision of holding the greatest fair ever put on in this western part of Kansas. With only two months in which to work, their results were astonishing.

New fairgrounds had to be prepared and buildings for the exhibits constructed. A race track had to be made, and a grandstand built. Many other details took up the thoughts and time of the fair association board. The fair was widely advertised.

The fairgrounds were located straight west of the 'Tudor and Bean' Store (now the Covert Drug Store location), at the end of Avenue A. There was a Jitney that carried passengers from the store to the fairgrounds. (*A Jitney was a small bus or car that picked up and discharged passengers, initially charging each passenger five cents.*) All vehicles which entered the fairgrounds had to turn either east or west after entering the gate. Extra admission was not charged for the buggies, wagons, or cars.

Tags were bought, which gave the purchasers entrance to the fairgrounds. The tags were tied on with different colored strings. Red strings were used for the first day, white strings were used for the second day, and blue strings for the third day. If a season ticket was bought, the string attached was green, which gave the wearer entrance for the entire three days of the fair. The red, white, and blue stringed tags cost thirty-five cents each, and the season tag cost seventy-five cents.

The railroad superintendent provided special train service both morning and evening for people going to the fair from either the east or the west.

The main object of the Gray County Fair was to display domestic science and agriculture products. However, there were many other features of the fair that were for entertainment and amusement only.

Perhaps the county fair's most outstanding feature was the airplane flying by the aviator C. V. Cessna. It was the first time in the history of Gray County that an airplane was flown here. People for miles around attended the fair for the sole purpose of watching the plane. The following is an article taken from the Cimarron Jacksonian the week before the fair. "*Every day, this wonderful new invention by an American, which is now playing an all-important part in the great European War, will mount to dizzy heights under its own power, and its daring pilot will go through the same kind of military maneuvers as are used in the war.*" The fact that this fair was held during the war added to the immense interest in seeing the airplanes. And like all new inventions, it filled the people with a certain wonder and awe.

There were many other interesting features connected with that first fair. One was the

motorboat that Mr. Bean had on the lake near Cimarron. It proved to be a good attraction. There was also a tractor demonstration, which made a favorable impression.

Kennedy's Wild West show drew large crowds, and the merry-go-round, Ferris wheel, and Motordrome provided more amusement. Fortune tellers, refreshment stands, and sideshows were other new features not expected. Baseball games, horse races, auto races, and motorcycle races were also scheduled.



1915 Gray County Fair held in Cimarron, Kansas
"The Merry-go-round and Ferris wheel provided more amusement."

Entries for the fair were made the first of the week, and by Tuesday night, there were five hundred entries, with many more expected by Wednesday noon, this being the deadline for all entries. Many other displays of livestock and soil products were brought to the fair that weren't eligible for prizes because they were brought from outside the county. There were also machinery displays.

Twice as many amusement concessions were sold as had been expected. During fair week, a night attraction was the Dougherty Stock Company, which put on plays at the Dorean Opera House. The Stock Company consisted of twelve players, and their entertainment was already known and well liked in Gray County.

A grand sweepstakes prize was offered for the best exhibition. There was a chance of anyone making forty or fifty dollars just by bringing their best exhibits to the fair.

Besides the exhibits, there were a few other features that depended entirely on the cooperation and enterprise of Gray County citizens. A half-mile speedway had been built for the races. Perhaps one of the most interesting of the races was the Ford race for all Ford automobile owners in the county. There was also a free bronco-busting exhibition.

The Gray County Fair started with a rush on Wednesday morning, 6 Oct 1915, at Cimarron, Kansas. Perhaps the most outstanding note that morning was a feeling of skepticism among the majority of the people. Scarcely one thousand people attended the fair that first day. They could not believe that the fair would be as wonderful an event as had been advertised. The day was lovely, and the first feature started at ten in the morning. It was a baseball game between Copeland and Montezuma, followed by a band concert. At twelve o'clock noon, the entries ended, and judging began. There were between 1000 and 1100 entries made. The new fairgrounds were dedicated at one o'clock, in an address by Secretary of Agriculture Mohler. At one-thirty, the first set in the championship series of baseball was played by Ensign and Montezuma. The races were held after three o'clock. First was a one-fourth-mile running race, then a half-mile trot, and then a ten-mile motorcycle race. The airplane flight by Aviator Cessna was held at the most convenient time in the afternoon.

The news of the great county fair spread at the end of the first day, and all skepticism vanished. Approximately seventeen hundred people attended the fair on the second day. At ten o'clock in the morning, Ingalls and Cimarron played a baseball game. A band concert and stock parade were held at one o'clock in the afternoon. Another set of the championship series of baseball between Ensign and Montezuma was played that afternoon, and Cessna made another airplane flight. At three o'clock, the races started again. First was the one-fourth mile dash, followed by the one-half mile running race. After that came the one-mile novelty race, and then the exciting ten-mile Ford race.

About twenty-three hundred attended the fair on the third and final day. The first feature that day was the school parade of children and then came the floats at eleven in the morning. The parade was followed by sports. A band concert was held at one in the afternoon, followed by the final game in the baseball championship series between Ensign and Montezuma. Ensign won two games out of the three. A football game between Cimarron and Dodge City was played at three o'clock. Dodge City was victorious with a score of 5 to 0. Cessna made his last airplane flight at the fair that afternoon.

The races were held at three-thirty. A half-mile dash was held first, then a five-lap relay, followed by a ten-mile motorcycle race, a free-for-all who wished to enter.



Motorcycle races at the *1915 Gray County Fair*

The Gray County Fair was a great success. It fully paid for its own expenses, with a small surplus left over. The receipts taken in were \$1,698.55, and the cost was \$1,315.12, leaving a profit of \$383.43. Of course, this is just the fair itself and does not include the new grounds' expense.

The most common remark heard at the fair was, "This fair is better than most fairs back east." Many said, "The agricultural display is superior to that at the Hutchinson State Fair." Perhaps the corn exhibit was the most outstanding single exhibit. The corn was exceptionally good, and the presentation was unusual. It was favorably compared with the corn exhibit at the Wichita Soils Products exposition the preceding year.

Gray County schools were well represented. A woman who had moved to Gray County from Indiana was heard to remark, "This is the first real fair I've seen since I came from the East." Many from Garden City attended the fair and made favorable comments on its success.

The directors, heads of departments, other officers, and private individuals showed an admirable boosting spirit. The management gave more attractions for less money than any fair in this part of Kansas.

No drunkenness or disorderly conduct took place on the fairgrounds. No serious

accidents occurred. The racetrack was new, but it was in good condition, nevertheless, and there were few casualties.

Besides affording a week of amusement, the Gray County Fair drew the county more closely together. Each town and community did its part in making the fair a success. Nothing had happened for years, which firmly established a friendly feeling between the communities at the fair. Credit for the fair's success was not given to any individual or group of individuals but to everyone who helped in any way. Several newspapermen and other noted men in the state gave the fair their approval. The Dodge City Globe published the following ... *"The Cimarron Gray County Fair was a great success in many respects. Besides the great demonstration of Gray County products and a week of good amusement, it gave all Gray County visitors to the fair a better opinion of their county and drew many out-of-the-county visitors. About two hundred people from Dodge City attended the last day of the fair. The Cimarron Fair stopped all arguments about whether a county fair could be successfully conducted in Western Kansas. From all appearances, the Gray County Fair will become an established custom"*.

So, what seemed an almost impossible feat became one of the most significant fairs held in Western Kansas. Everyone who attended pronounced it as very successful.

Additional Information

WALTER C. BEAN

WALTER CLARK BEAN, son of John Walker Bean (1855-1925) and Ada (*Adda*) Clark (1856-1928), was born on 8 Nov 1879 in Hillsboro, Highland County, Ohio. Sometime after the year 1900, Walter and his parents left Ohio, settling in Spearville, Ford County, Kansas.

Walter married INA HARRISON, daughter of William W. Harrison (1850-1900) and Mary Anna Miller (1851-1935), on 20 Sep 1904 at her mother's home in Topeka, Kansas. Attending their wedding from out of town were Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Bean of Spearville, Mrs. Joseph H. Tudor of St. Johns, Mr. Guy Harrison of St. Johns, Mr. J. A. Howard of Salina, Miss Lena Tudor of Lawrence, and Mr. J. L. Eade of Denver, Colorado. Walter and Ina settled in Spearville after they were married.

Ina was born on 11 Nov 1878, in St. John, Stafford County, Kansas. Walter and Ina had one child, a daughter, AGATHA MAE BEAN, born 30 Aug 1908 in Spearville.

In 1912, the family moved to Cimarron, Gray County, Kansas. There, in 1913, Walter went into business with his Uncle, Joseph H. Tudor. Their stores were called "Tudor and Bean." They furnished dry goods, clothing, shoes, household furnishings, and groceries. Their first stores were in St. John, Macksville, Spearville, and Cimarron. They later expanded to other counties and towns in Kansas.

Walter and Ina moved to Topeka, Shawnee County, Kansas, in about 1949. Walter passed away there on 2 Apr 1951. Ina moved back to Cimarron after his death to be close to their daughter, living there at that time. She died in Cimarron on 25 Dec 1969. Walter and Ina were both buried at the Mount Hope Cemetery in Topeka, Shawnee County, Kansas.

Their daughter, Agatha Bean, attended Washburn College in Topeka, Kansas. She later worked for the Topeka Public Library. She also worked as a music teacher. Agatha married Scherl L. Walquist, son of John E. Walquist and Margaret Jones. They had one son, John Clark Walquist. Agatha died on 5 Apr 1991 in Dodge City, Ford County, Kansas, and Scherl Walquist died on 31 Aug 1995 in Lawrence, Douglas County, Kansas. Both were buried at the Mount Hope Cemetery in Topeka, Kansas.

Newspaper Obituary WALTER C. BEAN

Obituary provided by Rhonda at the Kansas Heritage Center in Dodge City, Kansas

Dodge City (Kansas) Daily Globe – Tuesday, 3 Apr 1951

W. C. BEAN DIES AT 71

Topeka – Walter C. Bean, a prominent Southwestern Kansas merchant for almost half a century, died Monday in a local hospital. He was 71.

Mr. Bean retired from business in 1945 and moved to Topeka last year. He had been in the mercantile business with his uncle, J. H. Tudor, and operated stores in Spearville, Cimarron, St. John, and Macksville.

Mr. Bean was born in Hillsboro, Ohio, on 8 Nov 1879.

He was a member of Preston Lodge No. 283, A. F. and A. M. of Cimarron, Dodge City Commandery No. 35 Knights Templar, Dodge City Council No. 16 Royal Arch Mason, I.O.O.F. Lodge No. 288 of Cimarron, the Cimarron Rotary Club, and the Federated Methodist and Presbyterian Church of Cimarron.

Survivors are his wife, a daughter, Mrs. Scherl L. Walquist, and a grandson, John Clark Walquist, all of Topeka.