

## Indiana's Second State Fair

By WILLIAM M. RESER

The Second State Fair of Indiana was held at Lafayette, October 10-14, 1853.<sup>1</sup> The First had been held at Indianapolis, October 19-21, 1852. These Fairs were among the first in America, such expositions being a part of a new movement to improve the system of agriculture prevailing in large portions of the United States.

Very early in our state's existence the individuals of most trades, professions, or other pursuits of life formed associations or societies for mutual advancement and protection. The tillers of the soil were behind all others in organizing, because, being so isolated, they had been accustomed to solve their own problems, each by his own initiative.

In Indiana the first attempt to organize husbandry was made on April 8, 1809, when a group of citizens of Knox County meeting at the court house in Vincennes perfected an organization for the purpose of "encouraging agriculture and manufactures." They elected William Henry Harrison (Territorial Governor) president, and John Johnson secretary.<sup>2</sup> At that time there did not exist any statutory act governing such an organization. This organization was active for some time, as shown by announcements of meetings from time to time in the Vincennes *Western Sun*.<sup>3</sup>

The first Indiana act relative to the formation and governing of agricultural societies (limited to county or district) was passed on January 22, 1829.<sup>4</sup> This was superseded by an act of February 7, 1835, which provided for the organization of a State Board of Agriculture, as well as county and township societies.<sup>5</sup> This was revised or added to, in some minor details, in 1847.<sup>6</sup> Immediately following this act, a State Board of Agriculture was organized, but its operations were feeble and inefficient and results were small. Before 1850 it was in such an inactive state as to be practically nonexistent.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was read before one of the sessions (Saturday, P.M.) of the seventeenth annual Indiana History Conference which was held at the Claypool and Lincoln Hotels in Indianapolis on Dec. 13-14, 1935.

<sup>2</sup> Vincennes *Western Sun*, April 8, 1809; Lafayette *Courier*, March 26, 1853.

<sup>3</sup> *Western Sun*, July 8, 1809; April 14, 21, May 5, 13, 19, 26, June 2, and July 14, 28, 1810; June 22 and July 6, 1811.

<sup>4</sup> *Revised Laws of Indiana*, 1831, 67-69.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 1834-1840, 87-94.

<sup>6</sup> *General Laws of Indiana*, 1847, 128.

In England at this time—middle of the nineteenth century—every phase of the agricultural industry had to be carried on efficiently in order that the restricted land area might produce as much as possible of the food and clothing needed to supply the ever increasing population. There, land was limited but labor was abundant and cheap, while in America, land was exceedingly plentiful and labor scarce and high. There, farming methods were intensive, while here they were superficial and slovenly. In America, man power for the harvest was scarce and consumption of farm products limited. It was not a question of raising a crop but how, with the shortage of labor, to harvest it. About this time—1840 to 1850—transportation facilities began to develop, thus making an outlet for surplus products. This stimulated American genius to invent machinery for abridging human toil in the cultivation and harvesting of crops.

At this time American students of agriculture began to comprehend the resources and limitations of the fertility of their farms. They began to observe the practical verification of Liebig's theory of vegetable growth—that it consisted in taking chemicals from the soil, mainly, and converting them into plant structures; and that continuously taking from, and never returning anything to it, was robbing mother earth of her fertility. Thus, attention was directed to the preservation of soil fertility. Not only was the soil studied but other scientific agricultural principles were introduced and practiced such as: the careful selecting and the developing of new and better varieties of seeds; improving of stock by scientific breeding, promoting horticulture; and, in many other ways adopting more modern methods and policies. It was only advanced farmers who did not have "wheat that turned to cheat," any more than cats that turned to rats. Neither did they raise long-nosed, arch-backed, slab-sided hogs — "razor-backs" (sometimes called "landpikes" or "alligators")—that were built more for penetrating thickets and racing across prairies than for the pork barrel; nor scraggy cattle, more adapted to serve as hat racks than as subjects for the butcher's block. Nor did they thumb the almanac looking up the signs of the zodiac so as to *coöperate* with the moon; nor depend upon chance to give them "good luck" or "bad luck." Instead, they

coupled industry with observation, experience and study for the attainment of advancement and success in their vocation.

The non-progressive state of American agriculture was especially emphasized when, at the *Universal Fair* held at Hyde Park, London, in 1851 (the first international exposition ever held), the products of American farms were outclassed in every department.<sup>7</sup> This was especially humiliating to our farmers, because American soil was rated as being the most fertile, originally, of any under cultivation in the world. But for genius and skill in designing and constructing implements, the Americans carried off the highest honors. The department exhibiting the iron-bottom plow and the McCormick reaper was one of the most popular at the London Fair. Despite the prejudice against the iron plow, on the ground that it would poison the soil; and the ridicule heaped upon the reaper by a London periodical, which called it "an ugly cross between a windmill and a flying machine," the manufacturers placed many, many orders and leased many patterns upon which they were to receive royalties.<sup>8</sup>

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, America was behind all other countries, in her class, in her system of agriculture. She had no schools, national, state or private, for teaching the scientific principles of farming. The leaders of agriculture in Indiana, observing the results of scientific practices in other countries, believed that this great industry should adopt locally some organized method for educating the tillers of the soil. Fostering this idea they secured the passage of an act on February 14, 1851, by which a new State Board of Agriculture and county societies could be organized. This act went further than its predecessors in making it possible to receive appropriations from public funds to assist in financing agricultural fairs.<sup>9</sup> These fairs, with their displays and lectures, were called "Peoples Colleges" for educating the common farmers in the first principles of the science of their vocation. Pursuant to this act, a group of men met on May 27, 1851, in the Hall of the House of Representatives in Indianapolis and organized the State Board of Agriculture, which has been in active existence ever since.<sup>10</sup> They unanimously

<sup>7</sup> *Report of the Indiana State Board of Agriculture*, 1856, 652.

<sup>8</sup> *Report of the Indiana State Board of Agriculture*, 1851, 88. Address of Joseph R. Williams.

<sup>9</sup> *Report of State Board of Agriculture*, 1869, 263-270.

<sup>10</sup> *Report of State Board of Agriculture*, 1851, 5.

elected as president, Joseph A. Wright, then Governor of Indiana; and as secretary, John B. Dillon, Indiana's eminent historian.<sup>11</sup>

The greatest incentive to the enactment of this law of 1851 was the demand for agricultural education. All through the official actions of the Board and in addresses before the meetings of the state and county organizations for the first ten or more years, was voiced a plea for agricultural schools, or a curriculum somewhere within the existing schools, by which the science of agriculture would be taught. At the second session of the Board, in January, 1852, it was "Resolved, That the Board appoint a committee to take into consideration the propriety of suggesting some feasible plan for the establishment of an agricultural school."<sup>12</sup> For the accomplishment of this object there was proposed every conceivable plan or measure; for instance, a branch in the common schools, a chair in the State University at Bloomington, or the establishment of a regular agricultural university. When all these seemed likely to fail, serious consideration was given to a proposal that the State Board of Agriculture, itself, foster an agricultural college. After thorough investigation and much deliberation this idea was abandoned because it "would cost a sum of money which is entirely beyond the control of this board."<sup>13</sup>

When the Morrill Act, which proposed donating public lands to the individual states for the purpose of endowing agricultural colleges, came up in the federal Congress, the Indiana State Board of Agriculture officially endorsed it and petitioned members from Indiana to vote for its passage.<sup>14</sup> After the law was passed, July 2, 1862,<sup>15</sup> and the Indiana Legislature delayed complying with the terms of acceptance of the land grant, it was petitioned by the Board to act,<sup>16</sup> which was finally done on March 6, 1865,<sup>17</sup> following which Purdue University was founded on May 6, 1869.<sup>18</sup>

At the first meeting of the Indiana State Board of Agriculture in 1851 there were adopted ten rules, one of which

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-16.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>13</sup> *Report of State Board of Agriculture*, 1855, 6.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 1858-1859, xxii.

<sup>15</sup> *United States Statutes at Large*, XII, 503.

<sup>16</sup> *Report of State Board of Agriculture*, 1865, 231.

<sup>17</sup> *General Laws of Indiana*, 1865, 106-111.

<sup>18</sup> *Laws of Indiana*, Special Session, 1869, 24-25.

was, that annual exhibitions—fairs—must be held between the first of September and the first of November.<sup>19</sup> No fair was held the year the Board was organized. The first exhibition took place on October 19-21, 1852, upon a tract of land adjoining the city of Indianapolis, reserved by the state and generally known as the "military grounds."<sup>20</sup> This site is known today, as Military Park, and has been within the Indianapolis city limits for many years.

After the first fair had been held at Indianapolis, and the State Board had voted to adopt, like other states, the migratory system—holding the fair from year to year at different points in the state<sup>21</sup>—the place of holding the second fair was opened "to the bid of the several cities of the state."<sup>22</sup> Among the contenders was Lafayette, situated on the Wabash River, a stream noted ever since the days of the French explorers for its trade routes and the fertile lands in its valley.

One of the many claims made by Lafayette for its selection was its accessibility. It had steamboat service, being at the head of navigation on the Wabash River. It had canal transportation, for the Wabash and Erie Canal passed through the city as it traversed the region between Toledo on Lake Erie at the north, and Evansville on the Ohio River at the south. Added to these water transportation facilities were two railroads that had just been completed, one from New Albany to Michigan City and the other from Lafayette to Indianapolis. The former has the reputation of having the first locomotive under its own power, to turn a wheel in the Wabash Valley (June 20, 1851),<sup>23</sup> and, also, the first passenger coach to cross the Wabash River anywhere, when on August 20, 1853, it made a courtesy run to the Battle Ground.<sup>24</sup> Lafayette also boasted of a new plank road, starting from Crawfordsville, twenty-eight miles to the south, and extending to and through the town to Dayton, eight miles to the east. Lafayette claimed entertainment facilities because of its numerous public houses and the proverbial hospitality of its citizens—every home being open to guests. About six weeks before the fair was to open, the Bramble House, one of the finest

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<sup>19</sup> *Report of State Board of Agriculture*, 1851, 18.

<sup>20</sup> *Indiana Farmer*, I, 328-360.

<sup>21</sup> *Report of State Board of Agriculture*, 1852, 66.

<sup>22</sup> *Lafayette Journal*, March 10, 1853.

<sup>23</sup> *Diary of S. K. Richards*.

<sup>24</sup> *Lafayette Journal*, Aug. 23, 1853.

hostelries in the state at that time, was completed and opened for business.<sup>25</sup>

This city (Lafayette) promptly signified its willingness to comply with the State Board's requirements for securing location: Namely, 20 acres or more, of ground, fenced; a speaker's stand and seats for 2,000; two buildings, each 200 feet long and 20 feet wide, known as Manufacturer's Hall and Mechanic's Hall; 200 good substantial stalls for horses; well covered pens and other structures for cattle, sheep, swine and fowls; offices for secretary and treasurer; ample forage and water, and \$2,000 in cash to be paid by September 20, 1853.

Lafayette's application for the location of this fair having been accepted, she fulfilled the requirements in a satisfactory manner. Horace Greeley, a noted guest at the fair, stated that "The citizens of Lafayette have done their whole duty in the premises."<sup>26</sup>

Lafayette submitted to the committee on location five sites from which to choose: The Tippecanoe County Agricultural Society's grounds, Stockton's Grove, the grounds of Godlove S. Orth, and W. K. Rochester's land. This last tract was chosen, the use of which was donated by the owner. It consisted of an elevated table-land of thirty acres or more, bounded by a ravine on the south, what is now Washington Street on the west, Kossuth Street on the north, and the "Circle" of Highland Park addition on the east. Within the boundaries of this tract few ground changes have been made within the intervening eighty-two years, except that it is divided into two parts by a deep cut made when Fourth Street was constructed on its present grade, and a gash made in the north side when Fifth Street was opened. This table-land area topped one of the bluffs that bordered the valley of the Wabash, and consisted of a wooded area interspersed with open spaces. The western point jutted out from the main body of the elevated ground and commanded an inspiring view of the Wabash River basin and its bordering hills, with the city of Lafayette lying in the foreground on the northeast. Upon the highest and most commanding point an observation tower fifty feet high was erected. Here, visitors, for a nominal sum, each, were elevated, by man power, to the top to view the scenic panorama of the Wabash Valley with its bor-

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, March 10, 1853.

<sup>26</sup> *New York Tribune*, quoted in *Lafayette Journal*, Oct. 11, 1853.

dering wooded hills. From the top of this tower could be seen, also, five of the surrounding prairies: namely, Grand, Wild Cat, Pretty and Wea prairies, and Wea Plains.

The fair was held October 10-14, 1853. On the last day, Thursday, Horace Greeley, of the New York *Tribune*, delivered the address of the occasion on "*What the Sister Arts Teach as to Farming*." The address "was one of the Lion matters of the occasion"<sup>27</sup> and "was more extensively published by the papers than any other address of the same kind."<sup>28</sup> This address teemed with deep thought and its style of composition was most commendable. Greeley's outstanding plea was, that a farmer should be educated in the science of his calling. But he further stated; "If they [the farmers] were to turn on me with the inquiry, 'Where shall we study? How and where are we to learn how to analyze soils and make ourselves familiar with all the science which lies at the base of agriculture,' I would have to reply, 'There is no such institution in America.'"<sup>29</sup> But if he stood today, at that same spot, he could most truthfully answer that inquiry by pointing to the northwest and saying: "Yonder, in the distance where those chimneys and those red-tile-roofed buildings appear is an institution that is at your service, ready to impart all that is known of scientific agriculture—it is, Purdue University!"

At the time (1853), the whole scientific world was agog with Liebig's theory as to the composition of the soil and its relation to organic chemistry, or plant life. Horace Greeley, and others went so far as to say that the farmer who could not chemically analyze his soil, tell wherein it was deficient or superabundant in certain elements, and adjust the constituents to the crops he wished to raise, was not a scientific farmer.<sup>30</sup>

In that decade, all lecturers at agricultural meetings talked in terms of oxygen-carbon-hydrogen-nitrogen-potash-soda-ammonia-manganese-lime-alumina-silex, *et cetera*, *et cetera*, apparently under the impression that every farmer should have a little laboratory in the corner of his woodshed or in his kitchen where he could utilize part of his noon hour each

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<sup>27</sup> *Wabash Courier* (Terre Haute), Oct. 22, 1853.

<sup>28</sup> *Indiana Journal* (Indianapolis), Oct. 25, 1853.

<sup>29</sup> *Report of the State Board of Agriculture*, 1853, 28.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

day in analyzing the clod or the stalk of vegetation he had been working over that very morning. These lecturers were not dirt farmers at all, but lawyers, doctors, politicians, and the like, who had been reading some of the mass of literature scattered throughout the world since Liebig of Germany, the "Father of Agricultural Chemistry," had propounded his popular theory on organic chemistry before the British Agricultural Association in 1840 and again in 1842. Some of the most advanced chemists of the period from 1850 to 1860 in their enthusiasm over the advancement attained, made the flat statement that organic chemistry had reached the status of an exact science. We are informed, and reliably so, that, even today, organic chemistry has not reached the point where it can be termed an *exact science*.<sup>31</sup>

Though the laboratory has explained many things that were formerly enigmatical, and made many amazing revelations, still, it cannot explain chemically, why Indiana apples have an unsurpassed flavor; or, why the Greeley potatoes of Colorado, or the Rocky Ford melons of the same state, are superior in taste to all others; or, why the maple syrup of Vermont is unequaled. And we might add, also, that the chemical laboratory cannot explain why the state of Kentucky acquired the reputation of having the most beautiful women; although we admit today, that, chemicals are reputed to have something to do with improving the attractiveness of most, if not all, of our women folk—especially if we believe the radio announcers.

As the date for the Second State Fair approached, Lafayette began to fill with visitors. They came afoot, on horseback, by private conveyances, canal packets, steamboats, stagecoaches and by railroad cars, until the capacity of the town was strained to the utmost. The normal population of Lafayette was under ten thousand people, but by Thursday it had jumped to an estimated sixty thousand souls.<sup>32</sup> The visitors could be handled during the day, but how and where to bed them at night was a serious proposition. Private homes as well as public houses were crowded to capacity. The Masonic, Odd Fellows, and Temperance halls were thrown open and "All bedless persons were gratuitously taken in and

<sup>31</sup> "All competent chemists unqualifiedly assert that organic chemistry is not an exact science."—S. D. Conner, M.S., Research Chemist, Purdue University.

<sup>32</sup> Lafayette Journal, Oct. 12, 1853.



snugly cared for.”<sup>33</sup> Steamboats and canal packets tied up at the wharfs were filled with sleepers. Many went by the newly completed railroad to Crawfordsville for night lodging. The *Indiana Journal* reported that “The private citizens did everything in their power for the comfort and accommodation of strangers.”<sup>34</sup> With all the hordes of people crowded into the small town and grounds, “there was not a single accident reported.”<sup>35</sup> But that was before this speed-craze age of automobiles.

The newly built and inadequately equipped railroads were so overtaxed handling the passengers—five thousand came by rail alone—the fair exhibits and the increased freight incident to the exposition, as to be almost completely broken down when the departing rush commenced on Friday. On Friday morning Horace Greeley started by the New Albany and Salem Railroad for LaPorte where he was scheduled for an address at one o'clock Saturday. After numerous mishaps the engine became completely disabled by the time Brookston was reached. There being no other engine obtainable, he boarded a handcar propelled, at first, by four sons of Erin working in relays of two. These were replaced at Culvertown by two Germans. They crept along through the night and finally, at four in the morning, reached Westville; from there, after two hours rest, Mr. Greeley departed by wagon on the remaining eleven miles of the trip. He arrived at LaPorte in time to make his scheduled address. After returning to New York he wrote for his paper, the *New York Tribune*, an article entitled, “A NIGHT RIDE ON A HANDCAR,” classically portraying his trip and correctly foretelling the future of the region traversed, along the route of the Monon Railroad from Lafayette to Westville.<sup>36</sup>

For a description of the fair and the exhibits dependence must be placed, mainly, upon notes gleaned from Horace Greeley's account, which was reprinted in the *Lafayette Journal* of October 22, 1853. He described the exhibits as “a mixture of good, bad and indifferent.” The arrangement of the grounds, he stated, seemed to have pleased everybody. Of

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 17, 1853.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, quoting from the *Indiana Journal*.

<sup>35</sup> *Lafayette Journal*, Oct. 17, 1853.

<sup>36</sup> Brookston is about 12 miles north of Lafayette. Westville, a town on the railway line from New Albany to Michigan City, is 11 miles southwest of LaPorte. Over the route followed by Greeley, he must have traveled in all close to ninety miles by hand car and wagon in his heroic effort to keep his engagement in LaPorte.

cattle and horses there were hundreds, but with few exceptions they showed lack of scientific breeding or competent selection. The sheep and swine exhibit, he pronounced poor. Of chickens, there were multitudes, a splendid collection of fine birds among which Shanghais predominated. Of ducks and turkeys, there were only a few. Of apples, there was as fine a display as ever seen. Pears, very few and indifferent as to quality. Peaches were few, but fine specimens; grapes, only a few and those mediocre. Butter and cheese were good, but there was a very meagre showing. Of honey, there was a good display. Of manufactured articles and implements there was a very limited display. There were squashes so immense that ten weighed half a ton, the largest one weighing 185 pounds. Surely the soil where they grew was not lacking in fertility. Of onions and potatoes, there was a good display. Greeley's final comment on the Fair was: "Interesting, should have been magnificent."

The *Lafayette Journal* of October 17, 1853, stated: "Not a single sample of Cereal was upon the ground . . . not a grain of Wheat, or of Corn (except, indeed, as horse feed or as required to test the efficiency of some corn sheller) was to be seen. Neither was there a thimble full of Clover or Timothy seed. . . . There were quilts enough on exhibition—and magnificent quilts they were too—to overlay the whole state from the Miami to the Kankakee." No wonder people of today are pleasantly surprised when they have an opportunity to inspect a display of old quilts, for many of them are fine indeed. They were an outlet for the art instincts of frontier women.

The following items are gathered from the Treasurer's report for 1853.<sup>87</sup>

Receipts:

From sale of badges (\$1.00 each) .....	\$4,874.50
From sale of tickets (25¢ each) .....	1,876.50
Other receipts .....	679.77
Total .....	<u>\$7,430.77</u>

<sup>87</sup> *Report of State Board of Agriculture, 1853, 39-40.* On the face of the Treasurer's report, it might be inferred that the sale of badges at one dollar each saved the management of the fair from financial disaster. However, since each badge-holder was privileged to use his badge as a family season-ticket, it seems clear that the sale of such badges was a losing venture. During the period of the Fair, a great many badges covered a large number of admissions, especially since quite a few families entering the grounds tended to include "extra members."

## Disbursements:

Bill for silverware (prizes) .....	\$1,564.45
Premiums paid in cash .....	842.00
Other expenses .....	3,993.17
Total .....	<u>\$6,399.62</u>

Balance ..... \$1,031.15

The total number of entries according to the *Lafayette Journal* of Oct. 17, 1853 was 1500. Premiums in those days consisted, for the most part, in silverware, subscriptions to farm journals, and diplomas.<sup>38</sup>

While the State Fair of 1853 may not have been "magnificent," as Horace Greeley lamented, yet it awakened an interest in high farming which eventually resulted in the establishment of an institution for educating the tillers of the soil in the science as well as the art of farming.

It seems to have been prophetic that from the spot on that elevated table-land where the speaker's stand was erected to be used on that fourteenth day of October, 1853, one can look, today, out over the city of Lafayette and the Wabash River, stream noted in history and song, and over the tree tops and homes of West Lafayette, and see in the distance the buildings of Purdue University, the institution devoted in part to Scientific Agriculture. Purdue University—the plea of Horace Greeley for the teaching of science in farming, come to fruition.

<sup>38</sup> The term *diplomas* refers to certificates issued to those who made exhibits, expressing recognition of meritorious articles.