

Local history buffs and genealogy fans know that a book referred to as “The Blanchard Book” is a storehouse of interesting information about our area back in the early days. The official title of the book is “Counties of Morgan, Monroe, and Brown Indiana. Historical and Biographical” and the author is Charles Blanchard. It was first published in 1884. So Morgan County had been rolling along better than 60 years at this point. This book is available in the Morgan County Public Library and it is also available from Amazon. Well worth the price to learn more about early area settlers. The county has a long history as an agricultural community fairs to showcase agricultural products have been happening hundreds of years in England and Europe. So today we visit the early days of agricultural fairs in Morgan County. The text is from “The Blanchard Book”:

“On the 20th of November, 1837 pursuant to a notice from the County Commissioners, a number of the citizens of Washington Township met at the court house to organize an agricultural society, in accordance with the provisions of a legislative enactment of the previous winter.....No fair was held, as the organization soon died. Then second agricultural organization of this character was effected in August, 1851.....The first fair was held on the open ground northeast of Martinsville (now in town) on the 25th of October, 1851. The following premiums were paid: Best horse, best jack, best year old colt, best suckling colt, best brood mare, best bull, best calf, best yoke of oxen, best boar, best bushel of wheat, best sixty ears of corn, best saddle and bridle, best peck of onions, best bushel of Irish potatoes and best butter....The membership of the society about this time was seventy-five.....The second fair was held at Martinsville in the southwest portion of the town. A small yard had been fenced in, to compel the curious and others to pay each a fee of 10 cents to see the exhibits. It is state by Mr. Ray that several citizens presumed that they could pass in without paying, and when they were refused admission unless the necessary 10 cents was forthcoming, they went of in high dudgeon. The premiums paid amounted to \$128.90. A.B. Conduitt delivered an address of about an hour in length which was published in full in the ‘State Agricultural Reports’. On the second and last day of the fair, the rain fell so incessantly that not a lady appears on the grounds. An excellent showing of livestock, grain, and vegetables was made. It is believed that the third or fourth was held at Centerton, though this is uncertain.....

No fair was held in 1856, owing to the political excitement. In 1857 a large well attended fair was held at Centerton. And so they continued with increasing prosperity in every branch. Occasionally a year would pass with no fair, as during one or more years of rebellion.....Some townships of the county took no interest whatever in the success of the organization....The society at Martinsville in 1879 bought of Morgan County for \$1,536.75 twenty acres and forty-nine hundredths of an acres which had formerly belonged to the poor farm and fitted up this ground for fairs, the first being held there in 1880. The grounds compare favorably with those of other counties of the State in building, fencing, sheds, track, water and accommodations. At the Fair of 1882, about 500 premiums were paid, aggregating about \$3,000.00”

The political excitement referred to in 1856 had to do with the presidential election in which James Buchanan was elected. The issue of “popular sovereignty” was ever much on the lips. This meant that the Nebraska territory could decide whether to enter the union as a slave or free state. Apparently the pressure cooker was beginning to build up steam. You can also see the importance of true “horse

power” on the farms in the 1800’s as the prizes for horse exhibits. The first fairs were strictly agricultural expositions which have evolved into the multi-entertainment events of today.

The history and heritage of the county fair as well as our agricultural forefathers helped to shape Morgan County. Over the years the county fair had been taken for granted, that was until 2020 and the pandemic and the cancelation of the fair. Check out the Morgan County Public library for more interesting history in our rich genealogy section and to see more Morgan County History be sure and stop in the Morgan County Museum. The hours are Mondays 10am-2pm, Thursday 4pm-7pm and Saturday 10am-2pm.

**Counties of Morgan
Monroe, and Brown
Indiana. Historical
and biographical**

Charles Blanchard

