



DANBURY TIMES

The Great Danbury Fair

Have you ever been to an agricultural fair? An agricultural fair is where farmers brought their crops and animals to show, trade and to compete in contests.

Going to fairs was a special event in the early 1800's. People in our area went to the Fairfield County Agricultural fair. This fair moved from town to town. In 1869 Danburians became tired of traveling to the fair. They started the Great Danbury Fair which was a major annual event in Danbury for over a hundred years. It attracted visitors from near and far. After some time 100 acres of land were purchased for the fair grounds.



Fair Grounds, Danbury, Conn.

Admission in 1887 was 25 cents for adults and 15 cents for children.



Inside the Farmer's Tent.

The Fair had many attractions. The Farmer's tent was very popular. It was where most of the contest entries were exhibited. People entered vegetables, baked goods, and other homemade items for the judges to sample. The Manufacturing Section displayed hats, boots, saddles and wagons.

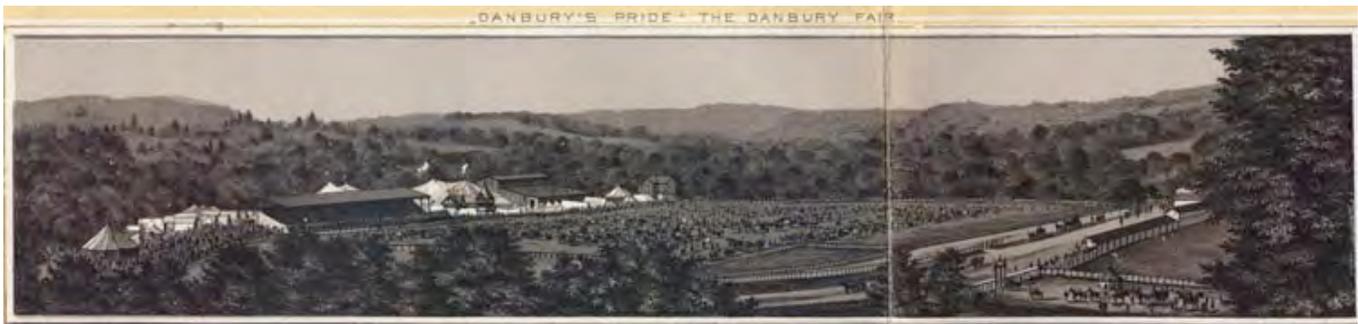


Fair Grounds, Danbury, Conn.



Danbury Fair View.

A popular attraction was the horse races. Over the years, many attractions were added to the fair.



By 1901, the fair was attracting thousands of people. It was becoming very popular. People traveled to the Fair by streetcars, automobiles and trains. In 1908, electricity came to the fairgrounds so people could stay longer each day.

John Leahy

From the time John Leahy was 5 years old in 1900 until he died in 1974, he attended the Danbury Fair every year. In 1942, he received a portion of the Danbury Fair in exchange for an overdue fuel bill. By 1945 Leahy was the major owner of the fair.



The next year, Leahy and C. Irving Jarvis began making improvements to the fair. They planted flowers, fixed up buildings and midways. They added hard surface driveways, fences, and new lighting. Fees for parking and coin boxes in the bathrooms were removed. They wanted the Danbury Fair to be the most beautiful fairground in the East.

Grandstand Attractions

—HEHEH—

MIDGET AUTO RACES

SAT. SEPT. 27 SUN. SEPT. 28
and SUNDAY, OCT. 5

*Races start promptly at 2 p.m.
Ticket windows open at noon*

—HEHEH—

BIG 3-RING CIRCUS

*Show starts promptly at 2 p.m.
Ticket windows open at noon*

MON., SEPT. 29 TUES., SEPT. 30 WED., OCT. 1
THURS., OCT. 2 FRI. OCT. 3 SAT. OCT. 4

The real circus in all its splendor!

ANIMALS! SEALS! CLOWNS!
AERIAL ARTISTS! TRAPEZE ARTISTS!

*A big-time circus presenting all the stunts,
comedy, trained animal acts and parade.*

An attraction no one will want to miss!

As the economy in Danbury began to change, there were fewer farms and more factories. Leahy recognized that things were changing. Even though most Danburians were no longer growing produce, he wanted families to have the opportunity to enjoy the agricultural competitions. People continued to bring vegetables and other things they grew or made to be judged at the fair.



As a little boy, Leahy dreamed of having his own circus. While he never owned a circus, he fulfilled his lifelong dream by running the fair. There were big top attractions and the daily parade. Leahy led the daily Grand Parade himself.

Eventually the length of the fair was extended from six to nine days. As the fair continued to grow, there were car races, rides, food, sideshows and dancing. Danbury school children displayed their art in a special show. There were contests with prizes for the biggest pumpkin, best sewing, or the tastiest cake. People ate foods such as hot dogs, pizza, calzones, and hot apple pie. Stock cars races began in 1951.

The last Danbury Fair was in 1981. Later the Danbury Fair Mall was built on the same site and named in its honor. Near the food court you can see old photos of the original Danbury Fair.



The Midway had rides, food, and amusements.

FIRST DAY										LAST DAY
SAT.	SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THUR.	FRI.	SAT.	SUN.	MON.	
OCT.	OCT.	OCT.	OCT.	OCT.	OCT.	OCT.	OCT.	OCT.	OCT.	
3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	COLUMBUS DAY
GATES - OPEN 9:30 A. M.						CLOSE 7:00 P. M. DAILY				
ADMISSION PRICES										
GENERAL ADMISSION										
Adults \$3.18 + 32 Tax = \$3.50										
Children under 12 \$2.27 + 23 Tax = \$2.50										
AUTOMOBILE PARKING FREE TO CAPACITY OF OUR LOTS!										
GROUP DISCOUNT ADMISSION PRICES (groups of 50 or more)										
Adults \$2.95 + 30 Tax = \$3.25										
Children under 12 \$2.05 + 20 Tax = \$2.25										
Bus Parking - Each bus \$5.00 (includes driver admission to grounds & Grandstand)										
FREE ADMISSION TO BABES IN ARMS TO GROUNDS										
ADMISSION TO GRANDSTAND SHOW EVERY DAY!!										

This ticket was used to enter the fair. A free ticket was given to Danbury school children on a special day each year and schools were closed for Fair Day!



The Grand Parade included the famous Clydesdale horses.



This stock car raced on the 1/3 mile race track at the Danbury Fairgrounds.



Danbury Fair Timeline

In 1899, there were only 23 people in Danbury who did not attend the fair. According to one report, they were all in jail!

1869 First Annual Fair and Cattle Show was in a small tent borrowed from the Barnum and Bailey Circus.

1878 Electricity came to the fair for the exhibitors of machinery.

1879 The New York and New England railroad brought people to the fair.

1880 Horse trotting races came to the fair.

1881 Children competed for the most attractive cage of pet animals and the best exhibition of butterflies.

1885 Farmers brought 45 varieties of apples for competition, 31 kinds of pears, 56 kinds of grapes, and 23 kinds of cake.

1887 Admission to the fair was 25 cents.

1889 The schools were closed and the factories were shut down so that everyone could go to the fair.

1895 The trolley track was laid to the fairgrounds.

1896 The first horseless carriage to be seen in Danbury was shown at the fair.

1904 Automobile races and motorcycle races were added to the fair.

1908 The fairgrounds were electrified.

1911 Hammond made a thrilling airplane flight in dangerous winds.

1914 The last horse carriage show took place.

1918 The flu epidemic closed the Fair.

1932 The fair was opened for the first time on a Sunday.

1941 Fire destroyed the big top.

1946 John W. Leahy started making changes to the fair.

1951 Modified stock car racing came to the fair and continued until the end of the fair in 1981.

1954 The telephone answering machine was exhibited for the first time.

1974 Charles Ives Centennial Concert conducted by Leonard Bernstein was held on the fairgrounds in July.

1974 John Leahy died in March.

1981 The last Danbury Fair was held.



The Legend of Sleepy Hollow statue was one of many large figures at the fair.



Each year, school children had a special art exhibit at the fair.

John Longobricco remembers the fair. "Danbury Fair was a gentle place. People were never rude. They were on their best behavior. They cared about one another and had a lot of fun."

"I lost the charcoal painting of my kids while at the fair and it took someone four hours to track me down and get it back to me. I couldn't believe that someone would take that much time to help out someone that they did not even know."