

St. Tammany Parish Fair Association formed in 1910. Records show that the first fair started out as a pet show held in what was then the City Park. In 1911, it was called the St. Tammany Stock, Poultry & Pet Animal Exhibition.

The first president was D.J. Sanders. Cash prizes were awarded to winners in the poultry and animal divisions in 1911 amounted to \$81 and 2 essay prizes of \$2.50 each were presented. Receipts for the 1911 Exhibition totaled \$845 and disbursements amounted to \$541.32. Net receipts went into the Park Improvement Fund.

By 1915 the fair had outgrown City Park and was moved to its present location at 1304 N. Columbia St. in Covington. The fair association became incorporated and sold stock to finance the necessary building program. Parish school children worked and raised money to help build the School Exhibit.

School children were required to attend the fair en masse. This meant a very early rising and a long train trip for most of them since the train was the only means of transportation for many years. Upon arrival in Covington, the children were lined up on Main Street and marched to the fairgrounds, quite a distance for them to walk. Once at the grounds, they became part of the exciting scene - foot races, tugs of war, sack races, the greased pig, a baby contest to determine the most healthy baby, and of course a great number of animals to be petted and appraised, For a number of years, school children observed Arbor Day by planting trees on the fairgrounds.

The railroad cooperated by offering a special roundtrip for \$1.00 and folks came from up and down the coast to partake of the delicious food cooked up by the Women's Progressive Union. The best cooks in the country served seafood gumbo, roast chicken, roast turkey, homemade pies, in fact home made everything! They even made their own mayonnaise. One group operated an ice cream stand and the ice cream was shipped from New Orleans by train. There was a separate coffee shop and lemonade by the barrels was provided by the various committees. There were few soft drinks, such as became popular in the 20's.

A carnival air was added in later years when carnivals wanted to use the grounds for winter living quarters and were allowed to become part of the activity. Prior to this the music that filled the air was often old-fashioned fiddling by those who competed in the Old Fiddlers' Contest. Now there is the Battle of the Bands.

There were flower shows, horse races and hundreds of shining jars of jellies, jams, preserves, pickles, fruit, and vegetables all vying for top honors.

Miss Hazel Dickson was crowned Queen of the St. Tammany Parish Fair in October, 1925, and was presented a diamond ring.

The Depression came along, then World War II, and then suddenly everyone thought canning, cooking, preserving and even sewing was best left to industry. The Fair almost died out. In the mid-fifties, it was revitalized by state appropriations. At the same time it became more carnival-like to meet the demands of the times. Rodeos sprung up and kept the country flavor alive.

Around the 50's, when the schools had Fair Day, buses would run kids over to the fair grounds. If you didn't go, you were counted absent from school.

Big companies with displays of machinery crowded with the animals and group efforts became more popular than individual exhibits. In fact, the clubs took precedence over individuals when a choice of space allotment was necessary. In 1967 individual displays of clothing, foods and house furnishing were discontinued.

Bruce Cleland said, "The Fair was quite a big deal for us kids growing up in the 50's and 60's. I remember one year I entered bantam chickens as part of my 4-H project. I rode them in the basket of my bicycle from my house on south Tyler St. (present location of Sonic) to the Fairgrounds. After winning a blue ribbon, I also retrieved them from the fairgrounds in the same manner."

During the 60's they had horse racing at the fair. The road on the grounds is round for that reason. People would bring their own horses to race at the fair. Spectators would sit on the old grandstands that are still standing today (2022).

Dennis Glass remembers "Eugene Revere used to ride his horse from Lee Road down to the fairgrounds and race him. He won several races with that old horse! There also used to be tractor driving contests. People would bring their tractors to drive and the tractor dealers would also bring equipment for demonstration."

In the early 70's, there was a resurgence in handcrafted articles, and a deep satisfaction and pride in doing things with our hands using "our own" homemade or homegrown products. During this time, a new \$60,000 Home Economic Exhibit Building was built. In fact, every building except for the barn was built by the fair association. Needlecrafts, leather goods, school exhibits, and commercial exhibits are only a few of the many attractions on display. The fair also featured an old time quilting bee, an old time blacksmith shop demonstration, and old time sugar cane grinding and syrup making.

In addition to all of the arts and crafts displays the fair held a rodeo, a junior horse show and an open horse show. The biggest attractions during that time were the wide assortment of livestock exhibits: beef, swine, sheep and dairy cattle. There was also a sky diving exhibition put on by some of the world's best known parachutists. They attempted to form a 10 man star. For entertainment, there was a Battle of the Bands, gospel singing, talent show, square dancing and

no less than 5 beauty pageants. There was even a contest for the first baby born during the fair!

Weather has played a factor in whether the fair has been held. After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the area was in such devastation that it was impossible to have a fair. Covid played a factor in not having a fair in 2020. Hurricane Ida forced the fair to close in 2021.

Our Fair Association has been honored to have our queens go on to win state titles. Erika Schwarz, crowned Fair Queen in 1995, went on to win the title of 1996 Miss Louisiana America as well as \$36,865 in scholarships. In 2011, Gabrielle Palma was crowned the St. Tammany Parish Fair Queen. She attended the 2012 Louisiana Association of Fairs and Festivals Convention where she was then crowned the 2012 LAFF Queen of Queens.

While many things have changed over the years, one thing still remains the same: the focus on our community. The Fair now features (2022) 16 fair pageants, a Rodeo Queen Contest, Essay and Poster contest, Kids Day, Gospel Night, Parade, Opening Ceremony, Cheer/Dance Competition, Rodeo, Livestock competitions, Exhibits, entertainment and carnival rides. During the years that Trey Folse was our school Superintendent, every single school participated in the school booths. The Fair Association also gives back approximately \$25,000 annually to the schools, to exhibit entries and in scholarships.

“Come one, come all” - this traditional cry of fairs rings true for St. Tammany Parish Fair. Handmade, home made and home grown hold the spotlight and bring back the delightful days of the old time country fair. See you there...at the St. Tammany Parish Fair!