

# Not just animals



VERA SLOAN/Colby Free Press

The Thomas County Fair always has more on display than just animals. Displays include flowers, vegetables and art, all put forward by county youth.

# County fair grew from

By Vera Sloan  
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and Fourth St. After people had eaten a potluck noon meal, and speakers and special music were finished, they would travel to Benson's grove north of town to finish the day with a good game of baseball.

In remembering past county fairs, Old Settlers Day is one of the first things to come to mind. It was once so popular that people who attended it regularly considered extending it to a two-day affair.

The event had an almost club-like atmosphere and those who participated even had a few gripes they wanted aired.

From an article taken from the Aug. 26, 1909, issue of the *Colby Free Press*, some of the attendees were quoted as saying that, "If Colby wants the old settlers meeting let them secure a big tent that will afford plenty of shade and then set it back on some well-located vacant lot where it will be quiet."

The view of those who participated seemed to be that the original intended purpose of having a special time set aside for Old Settlers Day was that "it would be a quiet day spent largely in visiting and social intercourse and let the idea of getting the crowds together for the benefit of people who have something to make a few dollars out of the gathering be pretty decently veiled if not completely eliminated."

Early history indicates several hundred would show up to celebrate the event, with a band, dinner and speakers.

They met in the tabernacle, an octagonal building that occupied a corner near Range

One particular time, according to historical records, the game was with Selden, who was late in arriving because they had to catch a freight train to Colby. Colby won the game 6 to 5, and after the game, everyone came back to town and visited a while and "at a late hour, departed for home. It was a day well spent, no accidents or mistakes to mar the pleasure."

Other articles from the past say the Thomas County Fair was known as Western Kansas' Largest Fair. They even had their own annual publication touting all the events.

The Thomas County Fair as we know it now was an outgrowth of the original fair-like celebration, The Farmers Institute, which was organized soon after the formal organization of Thomas County. History records early-day settlers George Kinkel and J.A. Day (father of O.L. Day and great-grandfather of Maurice Sloan) were leaders in the organization of the Institute.

Horse racing was big during the early fairs and was a main attraction, with races every day for three days. Free acts like Times Square Revue were performed in front of the grandstand between races. Purses for the horse races were high. Six of the 15 races paid \$250 each.

Welcome to the  
**Thomas  
County Fair!!**

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the fair!

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