

**Sturgis Library Archives  
Town and Local History Collection**

**Barnstable County Fair Collection  
MS. 97**

**Extent:** 3 boxes + 1 framed poster

**Scope and Content Note:** The collection consists of documents, manuscripts, memorabilia, ephemera, photographs, ribbons, artifacts, plans, blueprints, and posters related to the Barnstable Agricultural and County Fairs dating from 1873 to 1939. The collection was acquired from Dave Crocker, whose grandfather was a Fair Committee Chairperson and instrumental in the planning and implementation of the Fair in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Historical and Biographical Information:** According to the Barnstable County Fair website (<http://www.barnstablecountryfair.org>) the Barnstable County Agricultural Society held its first Fair, consisting primarily of livestock and handicraft exhibits, in October of 1844 at the County Court House in Barnstable Village, and later relocated to the Bacon Farm property east of the Courthouse on the north side of Route 6A.

By the late 1800's and early 1900's, the County Fair had become the most popular annual event on Cape Cod. Some of the attractions were Grange exhibits, trotting horses, sulky racing, vaudeville acts, motorcycle racing, livestock exhibits, horse and oxen drags, fireworks and food tents, featuring clam chowder, homemade doughnuts and pies, and coffee, sponsored by local organizations. The children's Day and the Salt Hay Stack at the East Sandwich Grange were annual favorites. Two of the most successful and colorful Fairs recorded during that period were the Fairs of 1899 and 1920.

In 1899, vendors calling their wares, sideshow barkers announcing bizarre sights, and the merry-go-round weaving its melodic spell charmed approximately 12,000. All the exhibitors' stalls were full, with no less than 100 categories and more than 1,200 participants. \$800 purses attracted much interest in the trotting races, and the Hyannis Band Concert drew a festive crowd. The biggest Cape Cod sports event of the times, the series finals and the championship baseball games, were among the special attractions. The Agricultural Ball was highlight, in the gaily-trimmed Exhibition Hall, where ladies and gentleman in evening finery danced to the music of Brigham's eight-piece band.

History has it that the fair of 1920 was the most financially successful. The society erected a \$2,500 poultry building and spent \$1,500 on paint throughout the Fairgrounds. Everywhere, Fairgoers saw refreshment stands, vendors and gee-gawks. Baseball games and trotting races were still a big attraction, and no fair in the state could match the Cape Cod exhibits.

As if exhausted by such grandness, each fair in the years following 1920 was less colorful, until the Barnstable County Agricultural Society declared in 1931 that its 87th Fair would be its last.

In 1932, the "40 and 8" of the American Legion attempted to continue the tradition. They were able to recreate many of the old-time fair features, but notably absent were the horse show, the dog show, the livestock and handiworks exhibits-all County Fair mainstays. An eclipse that year brought an estimated 100,000 cars to Cape Cod, however, gaining an unexpected boost to Fair attendance.

In 1939, another attempt was made to revive the Fair, for a Tercentennial celebration. Mayor Dart from Barnstable, England, presided over the event. This was the last year that the Fair was held in Barnstable Village, and they pulled out all the stops to recreate the Fair in its glory days. In the years to follow, until World War II, the Fairgrounds were used for circuses and rodeos.

After the Second World War numerous attempts were made to revive the Fair, first in a location in Marstons Mills. In 1973 land in Falmouth on the site of the Chesterbrook School was purchased, and the Fair has been held in that location ever since.

**Related Material:** The Sturgis Library has copies of the Fair Bulletins 1905-1931 and 1971 in the Lothrop collection: LOTHROP REF 394.6 BAR.

**Access:** Unrestricted. Credit Sturgis Library archives for publication.

**Acquisition:** Purchased from Dave Crocker, 2010.

**Processed by:** Lucy Loomis, August 2010.

**Contents:** See following pages.

**Contents:**

Framed poster,  
standing against  
wall in vault

Horse Show, Barnstable Fair  
Wednesday & Thursday, August 30-31 [1916?]

Box 1      Small  
              box  
              inside  
Box 1

Barnstable County Agricultural Society/Fair ephemera [25 items]  
1879-1939 + 5 undated items  
Entrance tickets, premiums, parking ticket, Ball tickets,  
complimentary tickets, spectator's tickets, dance cards, member's  
tickets, multi-ticket packets, and exhibitor's passes

Box 1      Fldr 1

5 photocopied newspaper articles  
1939 Exhibit of firefighting apparatus  
1980-81 Fire destroys original fair building and 2<sup>nd</sup> fire damages  
newly renovated building

Fldr 2

Images & Photographs : Includes images of fairgrounds, buildings, horse  
races, baseball games, tents, carriages, fire apparatus, grandstands, people,  
exhibits, and 1980/81 fires  
A. Images circa 1880s-1920s [20 items]  
B. Images 1939/40 [10 items]  
C. Images 1980-81 [4 items]

Fldr 3

Agricultural Hall/Fairgrounds Programs & Publications 1873-1939  
[14 items] including:

- Transactions of the Barnstable County Agricultural Society 1873
- Packet of handbills for plays & entertainment at the Agricultural Hall  
as well as halls in Cotuit, Falmouth, Woods Holl [sic], Centerville, &  
Chatham
- Playbills (2) for *A Scrap of Paper – a Theatrical Entertainment*, 1885
- Playbills (2) for *A Tableaux of Idylls of the King*, 1885
- Fair Bulletin, 1931
- Tercentenary Pet Show flier, 1939
- Official Fair Program (2), 1939
- Tercentenary Flower Show flier, 1939
- Track and Field Meet flier, 1939
- Barnstable County Fair History, 1844-1988

- Box 1
- Fldr 4 3 letters from Benjamin Sears to Alfred Crocker, Jr. regarding committee appointments, 1930-1932
- Fldr 5 Barnstable Tercentenary Committee stationary, 1639-1939 [5 items]
- Unused Committee letterhead (1)
  - Unused Committee postcard (1)
  - Unused Committee envelopes (3)
- Fldr 6 Tercentenary Committee Publications [2 items]
- *Barnstable – A Little Guide to Some of Her Historic Scenes*
  - *Proceedings of the Tercentenary Anniversary of Barnstable, Massachusetts*
- Fldr 7 Coins and Ribbons [18 items]
- 1 Tercentenary commemorative coin [with accompanying article]
  - 1 round paper label
  - 16 award ribbons 1909-1939 for Barnstable Agricultural and County Fair events
- Fldr 8 Barnstable Fair paper advertising stick fan, 1909
- Box 2 2 items
1. Sterling silver serving spoon engraved with the words: *Special Award for Cranberries, Barnstable Agricultural Society, September 13, 1893.*
  2. Silver two-handled award cup engraved with the words: *“Barnstable county Agricultural Society, First Prize Runabout Horse, Aug 30-31, 1916.”*
- Box 3
- Maps, charts, blueprints, & a poster
- Item 1 Tercentenary Map of Barnstable, Mass. 1639-1939
- Item 2 Grading Plan, Horse Show Ring, Barnstable Country Agricultural Fair, Vaughan Bacon, Surveyor, November, 1915
- Item 3 Grounds of the Barnstable Agricultural Society, Surveyed by Dallas Bacon, December, 1911

- Box 3    Item 4    Grounds of the Barnstable Agricultural Society, Surveyed by Dallas Bacon, December, 1911 [Same date as Item 3 but slightly different layout]
- Item 5    Tercentenary Fair Poster, August 24-25-26 with image of harness racing
- Item 6    Blueprint, Seal of the Town of Barnstable, Tercentenary 1639-1939