

About the Sauk County Fair

Organizing

On Saturday, October 28, 1854, a meeting of the farmers of Sauk County was held at the Court House for the purpose of organizing a County Agricultural Society. At that meeting, Alexander Crawford was called to the Chair and J. S. Mosley was chosen as Secretary. The Chair then appointed a committee to draft a constitution for the Society. The members of that committee were I. W. Morley of Dellona, R. R. Remington of Baraboo and W. J. Huntington of Dellona. Judge Clarke's name as well as Mr. Rudd's was then added to the committee's roster. The next meeting was later called for February 22, 1855 at Taylor's Hall.

The **Sauk County Agricultural Society** was organized in the city of Baraboo on February 22, 1855. Alexander Crawford was acting president and James S. Mosely, Secretary. After Articles & By-Laws were written an election of officers was held. The following offices were elected.

- James M. Clarke, President
- Daniel Pound, VP
- James S. Mosely, Secretary
- R. H. Davis, Treasurer

There were 24 People present and they each signed the constitution and paid \$1.00 to join.

A premium list was arranged and on October 16, 1855 the "1st. Annual Cattle Show and Fair of Sauk County Agricultural Society" was held in the John Taylor building. It is interesting to note that the premiums were paid in State Transactions and Certificates only and the show was confined to fruits, flowers, vegetables and other products of the soil.

There exists some disagreement on the date of the first fair. A letter dated 1906, written to the Baraboo News from L.W. Morley of Ableman, stated that he attended the first fair on October 1 and 2 in 1856.

Morley remembered the first exhibit being held in the old courthouse, which stood at about 120 Fourth Avenue. Many other residents of Baraboo confirmed this location at that time. After that, exhibits were made at Taylor's Hall, located at the southeast corner of Broadway and Third Avenue. There were cash premiums paid in the amount of \$250. However, there are records that point to the first fair definitely being held on October 16, 1855.

In 1858, the Fair was held in Reedsburg. The affairs of the society began to improve, premiums were increased and in 1859, 10 acres of land was leased from John R. Crawford.

In 1860, P. A. Bassett constructed a six-foot board fence around the grounds and a trotting track measuring 130 rods around was added. A building measuring 18 by 100 was constructed for purposes of exhibition, and contained 200 feet of tables and 200 feet of floor space. Two stands were erected and rented to parties who would then be responsible for furnishing refreshments for the duration of the fair. The fair was held on September 19 and 20. There were 800 entries recorded and premiums of \$227.50 were paid in cash. However, interest seemed to wane in the coming years, probably due to the War of the Rebellion also known as the Civil War...if such a war is possible. One record indicates that there were no fairs held in 1863, 1864 or 1865. The society eventually was revived and a fair was held in 1866 and two succeeding years. Note: An article in the 9/23/1868 *Baraboo Republic* states that no fair would be held in 1868 (contrary to prior paragraph.) There was however a Horse Fair which commenced on October 15, at the Baraboo Driving Park.

On September 18, 1869, a meeting of the executive committee was called, not having a quorum present it was decided not to have a fair that year. The organization had leased for the past 10 years from J. B. Crawford, 10 acres for the fair site. The contract expired after the fair the prior fall and Crawford then offered the Society use of the land for two years at a cost of \$100 per year. The society realizing that they would have to put up buildings and then remove them at the end of two years decided it would be too costly. So, it was decided to forego a Fair in "69."

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The hop crash and the termination of the lease crippled the enterprise but in 1870 a new start was made. Locations under consideration for new fair grounds were as follows: the existing race track grounds could be had for \$300 an acre, the Crandall place site which had 10 acres being offered at \$125 per acre; the Warren Wood forty at \$1400 and the Adam Nixon site.

In January of 1870, D. P. Crandall sold 80 acres and a house to J. J. Gattiker and H. H. Potter for \$5,000. This property was located three-quarters of a mile northeast of the Court House, on Peck Prairie Road. Gattiker and Potter then offered the Society 10 acres near the center of the property for the new fair grounds. No decision would be reached until the ground was free of snow and could be better observed.

The July 6, 1870 issue of the *Baraboo Republic* stated, "The search has been narrowed down to the Canfield property, which was located directly diagonally opposite the Tavern in Lyons and the Wood place, east of Adam Nixon's place on the Portage Road." Final decision was to be made within a week.

Eventually, forty acres of land was purchased from Adam Nixon for \$1540, the land was located one mile east of the city limits and 1-1/2 miles east of the courthouse. It presented, on the front, 40 rods on the Portage Road running back 160 rods. The south half of the forty was in turn sold to C. C. Remington for \$600. This price was stated as being at ante-railroad prices.

Workman became busy enclosing the grounds with a substantial fence and it was expected that a suitable building would be erected in time to receive articles for exhibition, an excellent track would be graded for riding and driving, and in general all necessary arrangements, including of course, facilities for the accommodation of stock, would be completed by the time fixed for the holding of the Fair.

A fair was held on October 6th. and 7th. that same year with a large tent for a shelter. The receipts of \$794.61 added to the treasury's balance of \$731.59 produced a new balance of \$1525.20. Expenses incurred for material, labor, premiums, payment of the land, etc. summed up to \$2684.18, leaving indebtedness.

- The Plowing Match Trial of Draft Teams on Stone Boats and exhibition of Perry's Gang Plow took place on the second day at 10 o'clock AM.
- The half-mile race for a purse of 410 took place at 2 o'clock PM the first day.
- At 11 o'clock the second day a Trotting Match for a purse of \$25.
- At 1 o'clock a Running Race for a purse of \$15.
- At 2 o'clock the Ladies riding match for a \$10 purse.

At the end of 1871, additional expenses were incurred due to the construction of a new 30 X 50 Exhibition Hall at a cost of \$750 plus a new fence. The building stood 12 feet high at the sides and 22 ft. to the ridgepole in the center. The appearance of the building was said to be tasteful, without excess ornamentation; the roof was relieved and surmounted by two light Mansard Gothic towers. The height from the ground to the apex of the towers was 40 feet. Twelve windows, aside from the double doors at both ends of the hall, afforded ample light.

This building, which was designed by Mr. Thos. Thompson, increased the society's indebtedness by \$628.34 and in spite of \$881.30 in receipts, at the close of the Fair season, the society was in debt \$1,155 owing to the erection of buildings and fences. From 1871 to 1877 the receipts covered the interest and premiums in full but left no balance after expenses.

In 1878 "the pro rata claim" was resorted to which had the effect probably of discouraging exhibitors; following this, the plan of free entries was adopted which had a wholesome effect, increasing the exhibits, and the receipts of the gateway showed an increase of \$200 annually over the years.

In 1882 the debt of about \$1,200 was eliminated by subscription by local businessmen and farmers. Also the ladies furnished meals at the October fair which added \$200 to the treasury. Thereafter, up until 1891, large additions were made to the exhibition building, neat and substantial stables were erected and a fence enclosed the grounds.

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In August of 1883 extensive improvements were being made for the coming fair. The main exhibition building had been rendered more comfortable by the addition of a new floor and two wings, each 35 by 30 making the whole building across 55 ft. by 100. All of the unsightly sheds were removed and the materials used to construct stalls for stock placed on exhibition.

The following description of the 1883 fair was found in an 1883 copy of the *Baraboo Republic*:

The fair of 1883 was largely attended and visitors found order in all departments. The first display that caught one's eye upon entering the grounds was a wrought iron fence, set with corner pieces and a gate, exhibited by W. Wackler. On the east side of the grounds was a large selection of farm machinery brilliant with red and yellow paint. Mr. Bender exhibited mowers, reapers and buggies; G. G. Gollmar plows and drags, C. Thuerer plows, drags and mowers. Mr. Moeller showed a fine lot of buggies. The "farmer's handy gate" was displayed by L. Butterfield. The stock exhibit was fully up to previous years.

In the main building the rush for space and additional entries almost overwhelmed the superintendents. The field and garden products were unusually full. H. R. Ryan, C. A. Ryan, L. Lippett, J. W. Wood and P. J. Putnam exhibited in this department. Fred N. Lang had an extensive exhibit of seeds and sample vegetables.

In the fruit department Charles Hirschinger had the greatest number of entries. He occupied one side of the space allotted for fruit. George Townsend had about 60 entries, among them 13 varieties of new Russian apples, bearing such names as Kleneffs, Ukraine, Zolotoreffs, etc. E. Maxham had an equally good show with 25 varieties of apples. Mr. A. Christie had a good show of apples, but was crowded out of the fruit hall and displayed among the field products.

On the other side of the hall, a dainty display was the confectionery and cake of Mr. Blass tastefully arranged under glass. George Phipps added a case of rich fancy articles and the stove exhibits were further enhanced by a large variety of fancy tin and tableware. Pfannstiehl's case of samples was complete and presented a site for epicures with its fancy cheeses, coffees, sauces and fruits.

Other exhibits were of Kimball organs by Mr. Conway and domestic sewing machines by H. Mould. Mr. Donovan showed some of the new style plaques known as Barbarine ware. They represented flowers and other objects in full relief on plaster casts. When painted they are very pretty.

The cut flowers made a nice show, and the pansies shown by Wm. Toole were never so beautiful before. Many other exhibits were displayed quite wonderfully.

The races afforded much amusement. The entries for the foot race numbered seven at the start with only two finishing. George Sullivan took first prize and John Handy the second.

The farmer's race had four entries. Mr. C. Waterbury's horse won the first and third heat. Mr. Mather's was ruled out. There were two entries for the green race, Hackett and Ewing, Hackett winning the first prize.

The baby show caused considerable merriment. The winner of the prize was a "colored baby" of Nate Owens. There were fourteen entries and the winning baby received 298 votes out of a total of 465.

All together there were over 1000 entries.

In 1891, Sauk County spent \$1,000 on a new barn, out buildings, grading and new walks and by the end of the season the society was in debt \$779.59

In August of 1893, work commenced on the new Grandstand. It was said the seats would be made of plank, 2-1/2 feet wide. At this time other buildings and a high board fence were nearing completion. A meeting of the stockholders of the Baraboo Grand Stand Association

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met on October 1, 1894. A dividend of 12-1/2% was declared. The Sauk County Agricultural Society comes in for the first 10% from the sale of seats. The fair association also held two shares on which they received \$200.

In June of 1896, architect Reuben McFarland finished plans for a new building, which will be constructed by the Society sometime prior to the next fair, which would be held in the fall. The building would be either 40 X 40 or 40 X 60 and would be used for fine arts and educational exhibits. The building was expected to cost about \$1,000 and the location would be on a line between the present buildings and the grandstand, about where the dining hall stood the prior year. Graff & Netcher were low bidders for the new Fine Arts Building at \$1,000 and received the contract for constructing it.

At a special meeting of the Society held at the courthouse on August 8, 1898, it was proposed to reorganize as a stock company. The following gentlemen appointed a committee of investigation to report at the next annual meeting of the society:

- John M. True
- H. Marriott
- J. S. Hall
- N. H. Smith
- G. A. Pabodie.

This committee presented its report at the annual meeting held at the same place on the 25th. day of February, 1899, with the recommendation that the Society resolve itself into a stock company.

The committee resolved that the aggregate valuation of the property of the Society was \$8,000; that the same may be divided into eight hundred shares of ten dollars each and that the shares should be offered to various individuals within the county of Sauk.

In 1903, the officers of the society were busy mapping out new improvements to be made prior to the next exhibit. A new judges' stand was being planned, the grandstand required some improvements and a chicken exhibit building would be erected. New roofs would also be placed on some of the older buildings. Indeed, the improvements

took place. When the fair opened on September 22, the new chicken house was up and painted a nice red, ditto the judge's new stand. The grandstand had been moved back so the spectators could get a better look at the races. Also the roofs of many buildings were repaired and painted red. The *Reedsburg Times* noted "that after all the meditating the County Seat fellows did over gas and water troubles it was necessary that they do something fierce to relieve their feelings, so they painted the fairground buildings red."

In September of 1907, the fence along the west side of the grounds was moved farther west to the edge of the street thus expanding the ground space inside the fenced area for the midway.

The following poem was published in the Baraboo News in 1911:

The Sauk County Fair;

By N. G. Abbott, Harrisburg, South Dakota

When the summer days are over,
And the cooling breezes blow,
And a fellow feels like living
Somewhat longer; don't you know?
When the sun's fierce heat is mellowed
By the hazy summer's air,
Somehow, I think of Baraboo
And Sauk County's annual fair.

When I ride on a train or steamer,
I must spend a lot of "dough";
'Tis the same way with an auto
No matter where I go.
But somehow, fancy travels free
When the autumn days are rare,
And it ever takes me with it
To Sauk County's Annual Fair.

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My fancy loves to wander far
 To the pleasant shady nooks
Midst rock-ribbed hills and meadows sweet,
 Shimmering lakes and babbling brooks
It finds surrounding Baraboo,
 And 'tis ever present there,
When the hazy autumn weather
 Brings Sauk County's Annual Fair.

In thought, my friends, these autumn days,
 I'm again at Baraboo,
I pass along a dusty road
 To the fairground gates with you,
And with the merry laughing throng
 I climb the foot-worn stair
To a seat within the grandstand
 At Sauk County's Annual Fair.

I ramble up the "midway" lane,
 From the gate to Pumpkin Hall;
Through the Fine Art's rare exhibit,
 View the cattle sheds and all.
And of the grand attractions show,
 I can claim an equal share
With you my old Wisconsin friends,
 At Sauk County's Annual Fair.

In August of 1913 a new barn was completed in which
racehorses would be housed.

The following article was printed in the 8/14/1924 issue of the
Baraboo Weekly News.

Apropos of a recent article on the old Baraboo Race track,
B. Frank Ames of LaValle, former Baraboo resident stated:

"I remember the old race track spoken of by Henry Slye. I
think it was made in the year of 1868. The year before this,
1867, the Sauk county fair was held on the John Crawford farm,
later the Ruggles farm, and now the John Kelly farm. There was
only one horse entered to race and I rode along to speed her up.
She could probably trot a mile in 4 or 5 minutes.

The promoters of that racetrack as I remember were
Captain Ellsworth, Seive Emery, his brother, Frank, and Nate
Inman. Frank Emery Jr. came in later as a jockey.

Jim Clark was ever on hand to care for racehorses.

In speaking of racing in meadows and streets, races were
run on East street, from Eighth street 80 rods north, drawing lots
to see if they should run up hill or down. The last race I
remember there was between Captain Ellsworth's horse and one
owned by Joe Udell. Ellsworth came in best running down hill.

One horse, a trotter, Black Hawk by name owned by Bill
Wells, came with the races later. He could go like the wind if he
so desired. As a horse has brains, there was little more in it than
just stepping on the gas.

A Real Fight

As for fights, there was one I remember. A familiar figure
on the streets was a colored man who started a disturbance about
horse racing and politics. Two Irishmen differed with him. One
of our respected ministers of today soon settled it by jumping
out from under ball clubs as he was as good with his fist as his
ball clubs.

I wonder how many remember the night after word came
that Lee had surrendered?

Also, who remembers the big flood in the spring of 1866
when every dam and bridge on the Baraboo River went out?
Snow two feet deep, and ice 2-1/2 feet thick in Pratt's milldam
all went with the heavy rain. A few days later when the water
was somewhat lower, a rowboat was over turned and a Mr.
Donahue drowned.

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In May of 1925, the board was planning a new educational building. The building would resemble a modern rural schoolhouse in outside appearance and would contain enough space to display all the exhibits from the country schools. One large corner was to be fitted up so that the county nurse could display all of her equipment and hold conferences if required. The opposite corner would be used for displaying charts and graphs from the county superintendent's office. There were also provisions for an area to display vegetables, flowers, manual training and cooking. The building would cost in the area of \$2,000 and would be ready of the 1925 Fair. When the 48 X 60 building was completed it was painted white with a touch of green.

In August of 1929, Geo. Isenberg & Son received a contract for the construction of a calf barn. It was planned that the building would be complete by the first of September.

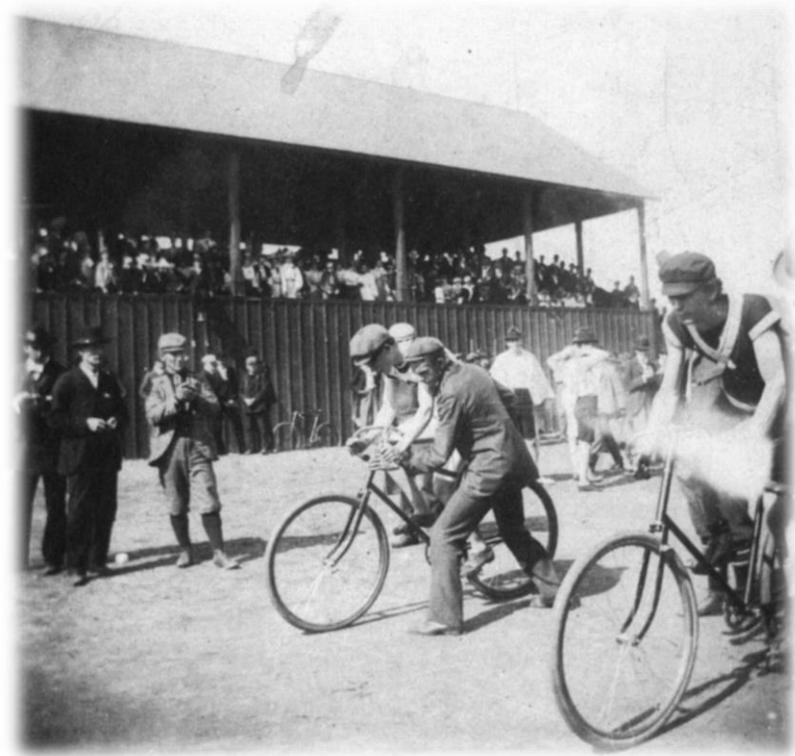
In 1930, the fair grounds were to be improved by a long needed grandstand, following favorable action on the project, at the annual meeting of the stockholders. The project was to be started at once so it would be ready for the following year. The plan called for about 2000 seating capacity. Along with the new grandstand was a new dining hall (May have been below the grandstand.)

On December 2, 1932, a fire of unknown origin destroyed three barns at the Sauk County fairgrounds about 2:45 pm. The buildings were totally consumed at an estimated damage of \$1300 according to W. T. Marriott, secretary of the Sauk County Fair Association. The loss was covered by insurance.

The buildings were the old horse barns, originally used for housing horses when races were the center of interest at fair season.

By 1933, the society had 360 shareholders, with twenty-seven or more holding two shares and the rest one. The officers of the Society were as follows:

- President, Frank, M. Morley
- Vice-President, George Martiny
- Secretary, Wm. T. Marriott
- Treasurer, Urban Mather.



Early 20th. Century Bicycle Races

In November of 1936, the county board of supervisors voted to construct an \$1,800.00 4-H building. The building would be a two-story structure at least 30 by 60 feet. The first floor would be used for 4H club exhibits such as canning, sewing, cooking and farm crops while the second floor would contain sleeping quarters for the boys and girls and their supervisors. Prior to this time the boys and girls, as many as 100, had been sleeping in tents and trailers which made it difficult to supervise. By June of 1937 the building was nearing completion. The 32 X 60, two-story building was placed just south of the Educational building.

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In May of 1946, the fair board voted to construct a swine building and to appropriate \$500 for it. Also plans for the purchase of a tree-planting machine was approved. In January of 1947, during the Sauk County Agricultural Society's annual meeting, the members voted not to have the fair operate on Sundays. They caved in to the requests of the Baraboo Ministerial Association's request.

In November of 1954 the Sauk County Board of Supervisors appropriated \$1,000 to add a show ring complete with bleachers in the 4H calf barn. Also in 1954, A. H. Thayer, the fair secretary reported that the treasury had over \$500.00 on hand. The association voted to purchase all the grandstand shares with that fund.

In August of 1956 an article, in the local newspaper, asked for volunteer labor to help finish the construction of a new swine barn on the grounds. The Sauk County Board of Supervisors made the new building possible when they appropriated the sum of \$2,500 for the new building, which was badly needed to replace the old barn.

In June of 1947, the first automobile races held in Sauk County since 1924 were run at the fairgrounds. The midget autos ran on a newly renovated half-mile track. An estimated crowd of 2500 attended the Lions Club sponsored event. Rollo Prothero had held the track speed record up until this time.

During the early years of the 21st. century some of the old buildings were removed making way for new ones. In 2010 efforts were underway to reestablish the grandstand to a safe and acceptable building. The Grandstand as it stands was constructed in 1930 replacing an earlier one which was constructed in 1893.

Original Membership c1855

James M. Clarke, William J. Huntington, R. R. Remington, Benjamin L. Brier, Isaac W. Morley, Charles L. Clarke, B. B. Brier, William Steest[], Francis K. Jenkins, John B. Walbridge, B. F. Mills, Rufus N. Flint, Alexander Crawford, John B. Crawford, S. V. R. Ableman, Charles H. Williams, Moses M. Chaplin, Ebenezer Matrin

[Martin?], Stephen M. Burdick, Samuel Northrop, Oliver W. Thomas, James S. Moseley, Daniel Pound, and John Asker. In September of 1855 Clarke resigned as president and R. G. Camp was appointed to fill the vacancy.

At the following meeting held on March 15, 1856, Camp was elected President, I. W. Morley...vice president, R. H. Davis...Treasurer and M. C. Waite...secretary. An executive committee was chosen, one from each of the seventeen townships.

Early Sauk County Fair



Sauk County Fair circa 1910

...WHAT YOU WILL SEE...

AT THE

Great Sauk County Fair

BARABOO, WISCONSIN,

Sept. 26, 27, 28 and 29, 1899

You Will See All Previous Records Broken.

TUESDAY, SEPT. 26. OPENING DAY.

You will see the largest and best exhibits. Purchase a membership ticket and make your own entries and be happy. All entries in live stock and poultry close Saturday, Sept. 23; all other entries close at six o'clock Tuesday, Sept. 26.

WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 27. CHILDREN'S DAY.
All under 14 admitted free. You will see the great half mile and repeat

RUNNING RACE.

You will see the 2:28 TROTTING. You will see the FREE FOR ALL PACE. You will see

Comanche Charlie's Great Wild West Hippodrome and Horse Fair.

You will see the famous Six-Horse Race without riders or drivers. You will see the thrilling Four-Horse Chariot Races. You will hear all the bands in Sauk county combined in one

Grand Band Concert

making a band of over 100 pieces. You will see a whole circus performance in front of the grand stand given by Comanche Charlie's famous troupe of acrobats and contortionists. You will go home at night with the feeling that the management of the fair have certainly out-done all previous efforts.

THURSDAY, SEPT. 28. EVERYBODY'S DAY.

You will see the One-Mile Novelty Running Race. You will see the 2:40 Trotting. You will see the 2:28 Pace. You will see Comanche Charlie's Wild West Hippodrome and Horse Fair in an entire change of program. You will see the famous Six-Horse Race again. You will see the Four-Horse Tandem Race. You will see six horses race against time, hitched to a chariot. You will hear the band contest and the big band. You will see an entirely

NEW AND NOVEL CIRCUS PERFORMANCE

in front of the grand stand. After summing up all you will say you have seen the best fair ever held in this part of the country.

FRIDAY, SEPT. 29. ANOTHER BIG DAY.

You will see the ½ mile and repeat running race. You will see the Free For All Trotting Race. You will see the 2:38 Pace. You will see for the last time

Comanche Charlie's Famous Wild West Hippodrome Attraction.

You will hear plenty of good music. You will see a display in every department such as was never brought together before in this part of the country. You will see the famous Pony Express. You will see the Mexican Pickup. You will see the

Chariot Races and Six-Horse Race.

You will see more new and thrilling circus acts in front of the grand stand.

Bear in mind that Comanche Charlie's Wild West Hippodrome and Horse Fair will give a complete performance each day of the fair.

The management has secured this combination at a great expense and feels confident that they will receive the good will of all who see this great attraction.

Remember we give

\$1500.00 in Speed Purses

\$1000.00 in Premiums

\$600.00 in Special Premiums

\$1500.00 in Special Attractions

\$250.00 in Prizes for Oratorical, Essay and Debating Contests.

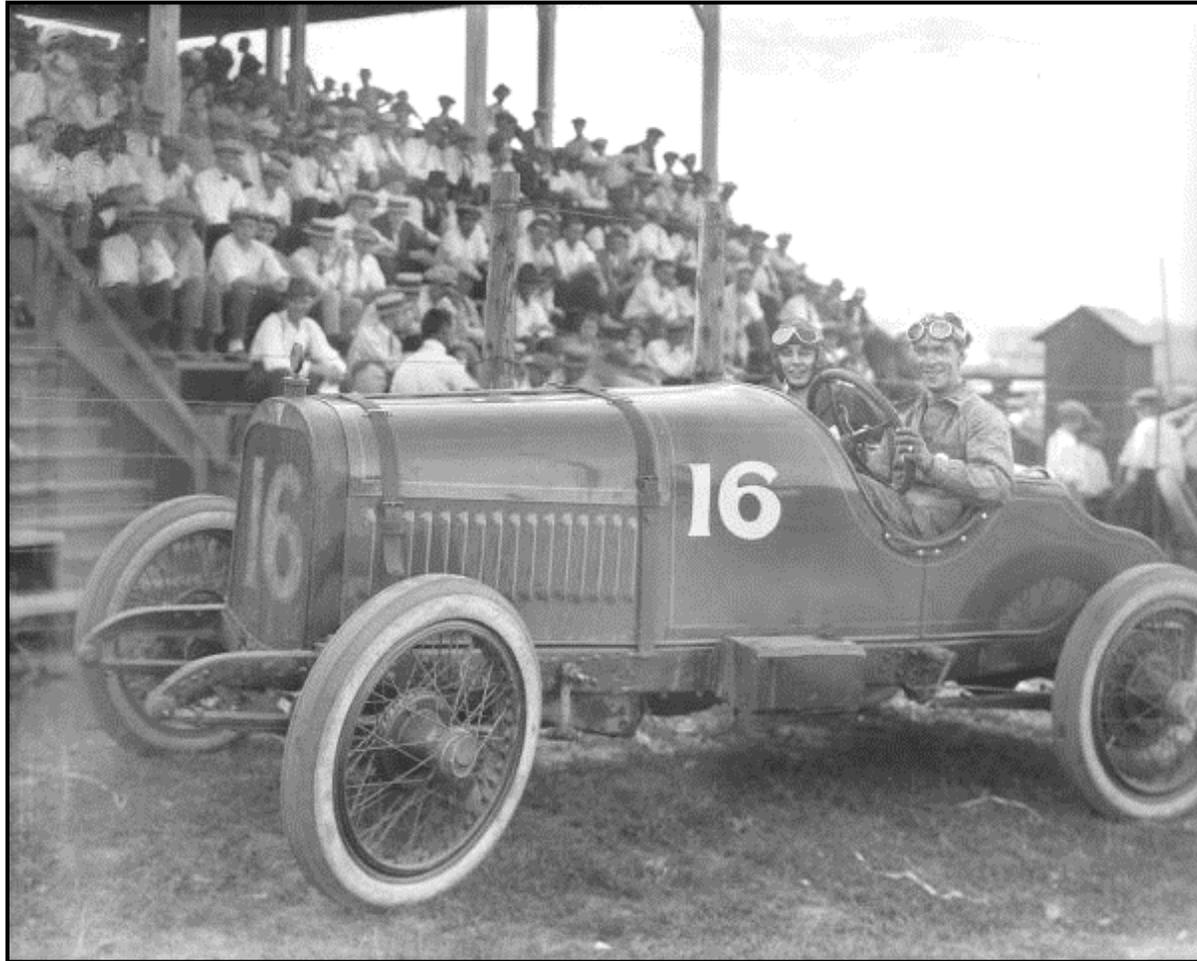
Special rates on C. & N. W. R. y of 1½ fare for round trip between Sparta and Baraboo and Madison and Baraboo. Special trains will leave Baraboo every night going north at 6:30 p. m. and going south at 7:00 p. m.

Attend the Great Sauk County Fair and be happy. A clean fair in every particular—a feast all the time. Plenty of water, plenty of food and plenty of fun for every body.

Don't Forget the Dates--Sept. 26, 27, 28 and 29, 1899.

Premium lists can be had at Marriott Bros.' Store or of Geo. A. Pabodie, Baraboo, Wis.
H. MARRIOTT, PRES., S. A. PELTON, VICE PRES., G. A. PABODIE, SEC., FRANKLIN JOHNSON, TREAS., JOHN M. TRUE, SUPT. PR., J. W. DAVIS, SUPT. SPEED, F. E. MOREY, MUSICAL DIRECTOR.

Early Sauk County Fair Racing Machine



Driver Unknown