

PREFACE

Let us take a walk through "Barrett Park" along Waskasoo Creek, in the beautiful City of Red Deer, follow a winding wagon trail that has nearly disappeared by time, stroll quietly southward on what was once called "Rita Avenue", then turn westward towards a large area called the "Fair Grounds".

In the passing years small houses have crawled close to its wire fence and it is now known by the eloquent name of "Red Deer Exhibition", but to the Oldtimers it was a wonderful place, nestled in the center of a flower covered prairie and bounded by a very high board fence.

This was really Red Deer's first recreation center, as all kinds of sports were carried on all year - football, horse racing, picnics, swimming in summer and skating in winter on the nearby Waskasoo Creek, and of course, the "Annual Fair".

The following is the story of that beloved "Heart of Red Deer" - "The Fair Grounds" !



read

**FIRST PRIZE**

THE WESTERN EXPOSITION  
RED DEER, ALBERTA

74 EXHIBITOR'S TAG

Class 169

Exhibit creative writing

Exhibitor Jessie S. Barrett

Address R. D.

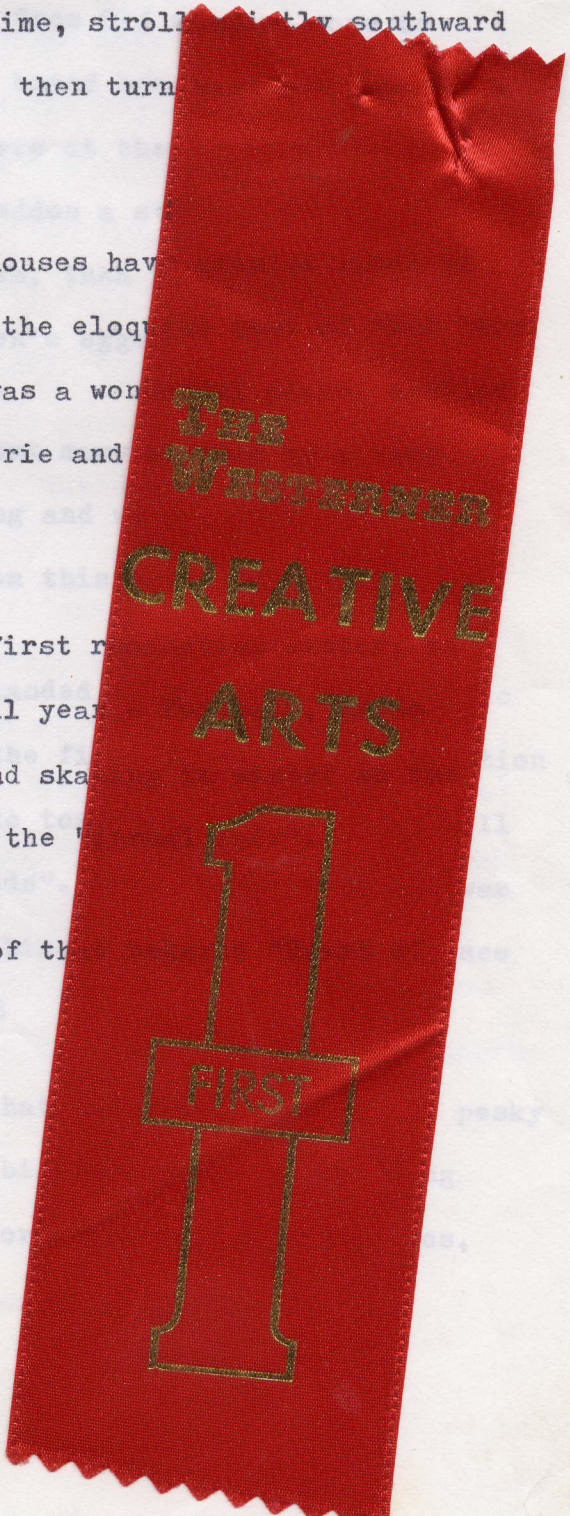
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"THE FAIR GROUNDS"

The first time I heard the name of "the fair grounds", believe it or not, was in Scotland. I was the youngest of four children who were getting ready, with our Mother, to emigrate to Canada to join our Father in a small town called Red Deer, in 1911.

We had just received a letter from Dad who had gone to Canada three months before. I sat with bated breath, as the words went on in Mother's soft brogue. "We were at the "Fair Grounds" playing football today, when all of a sudden a storm broke loose - first rain - then hail stones, small ones, then larger and at last they came thundering down as large as hen's eggs".

The letter went on to tell about many other things in that new land, but this was something exciting and we children were ready for anything as we set out with Mother on this great adventure.

After a hazardous journey we landed at the Canadian Pacific Railway station. Dad met us and about the first thing I paid attention to was "there is going to be a big parade tomorrow, and everyone will march from the station to the Fair Grounds". Now, a six-year old was delighted, this was the first exciting thing to happen - I was to see the Fair Grounds - it must be beautiful!

As time went on, I found out that mosquitos were little pesky insects, big grasshoppers (but not that big) jumped out of the long grass, and that mice were just like the ordinary Scotch mice. Yes,



the first few weeks in our new home were exciting, but I never saw hail stones as big as hen's eggs until many years later, in fact nearly 50 years.

A few years ago, strange as it may seem, my childhood wish was granted - we had a mighty storm on July 23rd, 1971 in Red Deer. "You ask me where?" - why at the Fair Grounds of course! "And where did I seek refuge from those big stones thundering down on the people attending the fair?" - in the Arena of course. I had become separated from my husband Ed and the family and they had taken refuge in the Arena, but by the time I got to it the place was overflowing with pleasure-seeking farmers and citizens of the city and district so I was directed to go across to the ground floor of the Grandstand - you know the place - one for men - one for ladies!

But we must get back to the early days. Every chance we children had, we climbed that fence, but when the "fair" was on, my Dad - who always took tickets at the gate - would give us enough money to enter the stile in a respectable "Wright manner" - this was about 10¢ (that was to pay to enter and a little to spend after we were inside). Dad thought we were honest but it was much more fun to climb over the fence and save our money! We always used the north-east corner, (it was farthest from the gate), and when we jumped over on to the other side we landed into a group of Indian tents. Year after year they were there and the children like us made friends, and we looked forward to seeing them every time.



Still another thing I remember was getting ready for the "Fair". That took three weeks, but it was during our school holidays and we loved the anticipation as much as the fulfillment. Dad had a large garden and at that time the "Flower Show", now known as the "Horticulture Society", was held at the Fair in the Fairgrounds. Now that was a flurry- getting ready - the flowers and vegetables had to be washed and selected, then taken over the night before to be displayed at the Show the next day.

What I remember most was the Scottish family that lived by the Waskasoo Creek, as they always kept a cow and she had a calf every year. One year they decided to show this little animal at the Fair. You see the Fair Grounds was used for everything - cattle showing - rabbit judging - hens and roosters, oh just everything was on show at the Fair.

Now getting this little calf ready for exhibition was a wonderful time and all the children around the neighborhood would go down to look her over every day. Yes, she was improving - and at last we all decided it was time to prepare her for going to the show. We washed, scrubbed, combed and gave her all the necessary ablutions. Her hairs in her ears were clipped, her little horns (really just knobs) were carefully polished and her toes, if calves have toes, were cleaned and oh that tail! It was combed, then washed and recombined, over and over again, and especially when she lay down in the barn among the fertilizer (I could call it another name). At last she was taken over to her stall in the barn at the grounds by at least twelve excited youngsters. To this day I don't know if



she won a prize or a ribbon, but I do know we worked harder than any farmer getting his whole herd ready to show - and we did it all for free !

Yes, the "Fair Grounds" was and still is a place of pleasure and excitement, which brings our farmers and our business men together in friendship.

I must tell you about the first (and the last) aeroplane that landed in the fair grounds. A lady stunt flyer by the name of Katherine Stinson was going to come right down in the centre of the field and do a few stunts. It was exciting, but as we watched her come closer and closer we were really worried. Not that she might be killed - that was a mere detail - or that she couldn't land - that wasn't important to us children or the oldtimers - but that she might break some of our buildings! - especially the old race track house where all the officials stood in their striped coats and straw hats. We as youngsters of course loved that place, we knew it as a wonderful two-story playhouse (for all the year except the month of August). Well maybe the Flyer might smash our grandstand and that would be desecration - hadn't we children always rushed over after the trains and horse drawn drays had departed with the midway folk. We looked all among the benches for a little money or some peanuts dropped from some man's pocket when he was busy watching the girlie shows on the platform.

Well, nothing was smashed that exciting day by that crazy aeroplane, but it was a thriller while it lasted and when Miss Stinson



started to take the plane off the ground to fly away into the blue horizon, she barely made it and the roof of the Wright house was nearly scalped and the family shivered for hours afterward.

There were many little happy incidences that happened; gypsies were common at that time and they sometimes came to our home to ask small favors such as a little bit of sewing on a torn dress and Mother, though she never went over, was invited in payment to come and have her fortune told. One particular story is rather amusing. Many of the Midway people made their own meals right at the grounds, and so when they left several of us children would go over to see what treasures we could find. (I often wonder why we did not get typhoid or diptheria but I guess children have guardian angels at times like that !). We found colored pieces of cloth and paper which we brought back to our own playhouses.

One day we found a paper bag with white powder in it. We took it home and watched Dad painting the fence. When he finished and went indoors we mixed this powder with water and made biscuits. "Where can we bake them?" asked Fanny my friend. "Oh we will leave them all along the fence until morning, I'm sure the fence is dry enough. We can decide then how to bake them".

After placing them neatly all along the top railing we said goodbye and went each to her bed very happy with our culinary endeavors. The next morning - what a commotion and what reprimands too - it had been self-raising flour and the morning sun coming



Michener hill near the fair grounds, had caused the biscuits to rise and crawl all over the newly painted posts and boards.

We could go on with many stories, but let us go back to our favorite childhood places, wander over the fast disappearing trails, past the "boys swimming hole", stand for a moment and watch the creek with its memories of beavers and muskrats, go up the winding path through the spruces to the top of Michener hill. Glance back and close our books on memories. Smile and maybe shed a few tears as we look down and see our beloved "Fair Grounds" nestled like a jewel surrounded by green hills and in the evening glowing with the beauty of an Alberta Sunset.

Many large cities have parks and gardens right in the center of their business world - as havens of rest and recreation for their children and grownups.

Let us hope no matter how large we may grow, we the city people with wisdom, will keep at least part of our heritage:

"The Heart of our beloved Red Deer"

"The Fair Grounds"