THE HISTORY OF THE HORSHAM AGRICULTURAL SHOW 1876 – TODAY

Shows were not held in the years, 1940, 1941, and 1942, which was during the most anxious period of World War II, so that the one hundredth show was held in 1978. The Wimmera District Agricultural and Pastoral Society held show throughout the Wimmera including surrounding towns such as Stawell, Murtoa, Dimboola and so on.

We do not know any details of the formation of the Horsham and Wimmera District Pastoral and Agricultural Society. No minute books earlier than 1980, have survived. We do not know the names of the first members of the Society, but we do know details of the committee and of the first show. The first show was well advertised in local newspapers and a full advertisement appeared in the Hamilton Spectator of 28 June 1876. On Saturday the 5 August 1876, the Hamilton Spectator published a short report of the first Horsham show and similar reports appeared in the Age, Argus, Australasian, Leader and Weekly Times at the same time. (The local newspaper, the Horsham Times commenced in 1873 but no copies were preserved til 1882).

A summary of the day included exceedingly fine weather with a large attendance of people. Features were displays of horses, both draught and blood stock, agricultural implements, with meagre representation of beef cattle, pigs. In the miscellaneous class there was a fair display of knitting, crochet and needlework which attracted much attention from the ladies.

It is not known when the Wimmera District Pastoral and Agricultural Society ceased to use the word Wimmera in its name, but certainly, inscribed early prizes for these shows, which have remained in people’s possession have caused confusion with the shows of the Horsham and Wimmera District Agricultural and Pastoral Society which was being held, from 1876, at the same time.

It was the practice to change the president of the Society each year for the first years and, at least in the first year, there was an Honorary Secretary although after that the secretary was paid for his services.

In the early years, the finances of the Society were derived from the subscriptions of the members and also, a number of the financial commitments for prizes were received from donations.

In February 1907 the president (J. Weldon Power) asked for an expression of opinion from those present, first, as to the desirability of holding a two-day show and secondly, the date on which the show should be held. Agreement for a two-day show was made and the date was set for September 24 and 25. It still stands at around those dates today.

In 1936 the Ladies’ Committee was formed and in that year with Mrs. G.B Woodgate nominated as President. Mr. W. Johnson, the champion tree feller, was invited to the show that year and Orm Short provided his amplifier system for the show in what must have been one of the first occasions when a public address system was used.

In the 1960’s wood chopping contests were popular as were the sideshows and many locals remember ‘Vanessa the Undresser’. In the 1970’s and 80’s the Highland Dancing Competition always greeted visitors at the front entrance.

Throughout the years the horse events have continued to dominate with showjumping a feature. The Miss Showgirl competition began to wane in the early 2000’s, continuing on til 2018 when it was taken out of the competition schedule.  We support the Victorian Ag Shows' Rural Ambassador Awards each year, if suitable candidates present.

In 2007, the sale of alcohol through the publicans booths and consumption was prohibited which made the event a more family friendly environment particularly at Sideshow Alley. Whether to have wet or dry shows had been a bone of contention since 1917.  A beer garden was reintroduced in 2015.