

Country Fairs in Canada By Guy Scott

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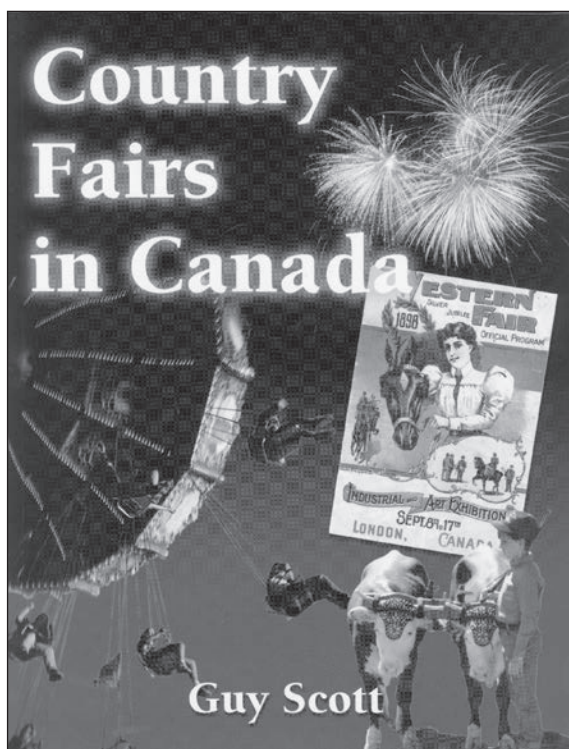
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Country Fairs in Canada

By Guy Scott. Markham: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 2006. xiv + 218 pp. \$34.95 softcover. ISBN 1-55041-121-7.

Guy Scott enthusiastically synthesizes the rich cultural legacy of country fairs in Canada, from the first in Nova Scotia in 1765 to the present, and convincingly predicts their survival because organizers are adept at fine-tuning to suit the times. While short on analysis, *Country Fairs in Canada* is full of stunning archival photographs, hundreds of facts, amusing anecdotes, and moderate opinions. Scott shows how country fairs – also called agricultural fairs because so many were sponsored by agricultural societies – were so important to small communities, even if they only happened once a year. While

most were (and are) local and only one day long, some large provincial gatherings last several days; Toronto's Canadian National Exhibition and Royal Agricultural Winter Fair are examples. Country fairs were, and continue to be, multi-purpose events, offering any combination of marketplace, employment agency, and educational forum. Produce exhibitions, demonstrations of agricultural improvements and rural skills, and livestock and homecraft competitions are staple ingredients. Starting in the late nineteenth century, fairs became carnival and entertainment showcases too. Most began as vehicles to educate farmers, later shifting to educating urbanites who remain the main attendees today. Scott ably demonstrates that fairs were once the link between industry, farmers, and housewives.

The text is arranged in ten non-chronological, themed chapters, liberally seasoned with images. Scott summarizes the longevity and appeal of fairs in "Fair Culture in Canada," and then goes back in European history to discuss their origins in "Ancient Traditions." A history of Canada's fairs follows. Next he concentrates on six key topics: the midway, entertainment, commercial exhibits, the exhibit hall, livestock, and parades. Scott's last chapter is "The Thrill of it All: Children and Fairs." Some of us remember and recognize these attractions, and Scott rather assumes that readers all make the same connection. Several times he claims the institution as uniquely Canadian and each fair one-of-a-kind, while what emanates is the *shared* nature of fairs across Canada, and indeed throughout North America. Certainly this seems to me to be part of their charm and success. Scott is fairly Ontario-centric, partly due to the large population mass and number of fairs in the province, compared with

Canada as a whole, and partly due to his previous research, published as *A History of Agricultural Societies and Fairs in Ontario, 1792-1992*. About six hundred fairs were thriving in Canada in 2003. Ontario had 230, while Alberta was a distant second with seventy-four. Quebec was sixth with just thirty-four. Fairs are still living entities in Canada, not elements of olden times consigned to a history book.

Stylistically, Scott's short sentences beget a staccato tempo that could have been modified by linking them via prepositions. Surprisingly, many quotations are unattributed, anecdotes related without source, and images undated. Whoever thought to photograph the pyramids of E.B. Eddy Company toilet paper rolls, and where? (p. 124) Would I be correct in guessing it was in the 1890s? Some facts are contradictory, even on the same page. We read that the world's biggest pumpkin weighed 1,385 lb., or maybe 1,018 lb. (p. 140) Most egregiously, the endnotes have several omissions and mistakes. The bibliography is good, but Scott fails to cite the archives and old newspapers he mentions

in his acknowledgements, making many points difficult to pursue for further research. I would love to know which fair's archives hold entries for an essay contest entitled "Requirements of a good farmer's wife." Curiously, Scott does not seem to have explored settlers' accounts for references to fairs. As usual the index is merely adequate: many photographs are not cited, for instance, which is a shame because they are the true gold of this handsome book.

In his conclusion, Scott apologizes for not doing his topic justice, but his self-effacement is unnecessary. *Country Fairs in Canada* is a lively and evocative meander through a snippet of Canadiana.

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In the Shadow of Detroit:

Gordon M. McGregor, Ford of Canada and Motoropolis

By David Roberts. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2006. 326 pages. Illustrations. \$US 34.95 hardcover. ISBN 0-8143-3284-6

More than any other single vehicle, the Model T Ford (1908-27) had a pivotal role in putting Canada on wheels. By the end of 1921, over 300,000 of these vehicles had been built in Canada, one third of them exported. Beginning in a small and failing wagon works on the edge of Walkerville and protected by a

thirty-five per cent duty on finished vehicles, the Ford Motor Company of Canada Ltd. had become the largest enterprise in the Border Cities and one of the largest motor works outside the United States. Nearly forty per cent of the local workforce was employed in the plant which could manufacture 60,000 vehicles annually. The gleaming reinforced concrete buildings on the riverside were a testimony to the success of contemporary Ford methods: a standardized product, volume production, a well-disciplined labour