



**University of Guelph
Department of History**

MA Thesis Defence

Student: Jodey Nurse	Date: September 30, 2010
Time: 10:00 – 12:00	Place: Room 132, MacKinnon Building

Abstract

**Reaching Rural Ontario: The County of Peel Agricultural Society
and the Peel County Fall Fair, 1853-1883**

In 1871 the Peel County Fall Fair was considered a grand success by the local newspaper, *The Brampton Times*. Even though the writer noted that “perfection has not been reached,” the fair was praised for the excellent exhibits presented and its marked improvement over former years. Improvements made to the fairgrounds that year were noted approvingly and the large array of visitors was described as a “joyous” crowd with “exhilarated spirits.” Full of animals of all shapes and sizes, the latest in agricultural implements and manufactured products, the best of crops, vegetables and fruits on display, along with an assortment of dairy products, homes crafts and fine art, the Peel County Fall Fair was an event that was eagerly anticipated by the area’s residents. Organizers of the fair promoted the event as an opportunity for farmers and artisans to make comparisons between the winning entries exhibited so that they too could evaluate their own products and livestock and strive to emulate any superior items.

This county agricultural fair and the description provided were similar to those of many of the county agricultural fairs held across the province of Ontario in the 1870s. Focused on the agricultural and manufactured products being produced in the province, these events sought to influence producers into adopting better breeds, more improved methods of cultivation, new and enhanced agricultural implements and machinery, and more desirable forms of household production and artistic pursuits. Yet, while education was touted as the primary function of agricultural fairs and exhibitions, this study will reveal that the county agricultural fair also provided a number of other important functions. A detailed analysis of the 1871 Peel County Fall Fair and the fair’s participants is achieved by linking participants with data collected in the 1871 Census of Canada, as well as through the analysis of one family farm diary and numerous newspaper accounts. This investigation shows the ways in which fairs were representative of the cultural and economic changes occurring in the countryside and how they had been shaped to meet the changing needs of rural people. This study challenges previous assumptions about the limited appeal of agricultural societies and fairs and shows that fair exhibitors and agricultural society members represented the diversity of individuals found throughout the nineteenth-century countryside. In particular, agricultural fairs by 1871 had become essential components of the rural landscape by providing valued social, recreational, and economic opportunities for rural communities.

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