



President's Message by Ike Odom 1985

"Beyond their Wildest Dreams" is probably the best phrase to describe the 1985 Rapides Parish in the minds of the small group of determined men and women who many years ago decided that Rapides Parish needed a full-fledged fair with all the glamour of rides, shows, concessions and exhibits. Many skeptics stated that this was the type of entertainment and recreation that the citizens of this area wanted or would support. Not to be discouraged, this group worked even harder towards their goal. They met and decided to conduct the first real fair that Rapides Parish had held in many years. With only two large rented tents, a small carnival that was willing to take a lot of financial risk, and a host of willing helpers, work began. A sage grass pasture just west of Alexandria, which is the current site of the Coliseum and LA National Guard Armory, was offered the group for its first site.

Besides the lack support of many influential people, other major problems made the first fair a difficult one. For example, the two tents which were scheduled to arrive from Biloxi, MS, were delayed because of hurricane. Also, Alexandria received some downpours just a few days before fair time. However, the rains didn't dampen the spirits of those determine to have a fair.

With tents finally erected, the initial group and many others went to work. Using cheap willow lumber, hog an sheep pens and a show ring were erected. Tie spaces for cows and make-shift tables for exhibits were set up. Sawdust was placed in aisles and pens. Parish residents responded favorably by filling the tents to overflow with their exhibits. The carnival arrived with rides and games which set up a wet cow pasture. Now it is time to open. Would the people of Rapides Parish support the fair? Yes, they came! The aisles were packed with excited spectators and the games and rides ran on into the night. Thus, the first fair proved that the parish did need and would support a good "ole time county fair." Before this fair was to bring down its tents and close its door for the first time, it was decided that the fair should be continued on an annual basis. Plans were soon underway for future fairs.

With the band wagon rolling, many were now ready to get aboard. The skeptics came forward with offers of help. After only a few tent fairs, it was felt that the fair needed a permanent home and permanent facilities. Authority was granted for the citizens of Rapides Parish to vote on a bond issue to fund what is now known as the Rapides Parish Coliseum complex.

Of course the Fair Board's work was not done. Continued close supervision assured that the needs of the fair were met. This resulted in planning and constructing the livestock barn and exhibit building. With completion of this project, the fair board work was still not done. There was always room for improvement. The designated carnival area, which was on dirt, was asphalted and a barnyard nursery building was constructed with fair funds. Most recently new pig and lamb pens were built in the barn and concrete aisles were added.

The fair was obviously grown a great deal since its conception. With this in mind, we've chose to dedicate the 1985 fair to every board member in the past who has contributed so much to its development. We challenge future board members to continue with unselfish efforts to strive for the growth and improvement of the fair.

Welcome to the 1985 Rapides Parish Fair.

Isaac S. Odom
President
Rapides Parish Fair Board