

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TRINITY COUNTY FAIR

Since the early days of Trinity County were concerned mostly with mining, and since fairs are usually organized in response to agricultural interests, it was quite some time after the gold rush before there was any interest in creating a Trinity County Fair. The idea was discussed somewhat indifferently during the decade from 1910 to 1919, but the consensus seemed to be that there was nothing in Trinity County worth exhibiting.

People from Trinity County sometimes attended the Shasta District Fair in Anderson, which had already been in operation for several years, but no one from Trinity County had ever exhibited there, even though at that time Trinity County residents were eligible to enter.

A Hayfork rancher named H. C. Smith thought this attitude was unfortunate. He had tried to convince several of his friends and neighbors to back the idea of a local fair without success. He had tried to convince them at least to enter the Anderson Fair. The answer was always the same, Trinity County couldn't compete with "The Valley."

Finally, Mr. Smith got fed up with all this negativism. He knew Trinity County could compete and he decided he had the nerve to prove it. When the premium list for the 1920 Anderson Fair was announced, Mr. Smith submitted an entry blank for a Special Feature Booth representing Trinity County. The Anderson Fair management assumed that Mr. Smith was representing a group drawn from all over the county and accepted the entry. The fact was, he was doing it entirely on his own. Using produce and materials only from his own ranch, Mr. Smith set up the booth at Anderson. It won a blue ribbon. You can imagine the surprise that awaited visitors from Trinity County when they discovered that not only was their county represented at the Fair but had won a first prize.

H.C. Smith's audacious trick created exactly the effect he had intended. Within weeks after the close of the Anderson Fair, the county was buzzing with plans for a county fair. John Donald Rourke, son of one of the original Hayfork Valley settlers, Dennis Rourke, asked the Trinity County Board of Supervisors to authorize a County Fair to be held in 1921. His request was granted subject to finding a location, preferably in the Hayfork Valley, the agricultural center of the county. A committee was formed consisting of Mr. Rourke, Harry Everest, Clarence Maxon, John Enos and John Coumbs, to find a spot.

They learned that the Hoyt Ranch (now known as the Lem Jackson place) was available. The space was rented, and temporary structures were put up. A large gate was constructed at the entrance to the ranch, identifying the site as the home of the first Trinity County Fair the committee was then appointed in toto as the first Board of Directors of the Fair and an operating budget was approved- total amount, \$200.00.

The 1921 Trinity County Fair was a spectacular success, drawing visitors not only from all over the county, but also from outside. It was apparent immediately that rented land would not be adequate for a permanent fair. It was therefore decided to move the 1922 Fair to county-owned land and build a more permanent fairgrounds.

Where the Hayfork Valley Union Elementary School now stands, next to Highway 3 and easily accessible, was the location of the site selected. Construction began immediately. Three structures were erected: a livestock barn, a shop area, and a large exhibit hall. A large arena was also built. This new fairgrounds, with a few later additions, including a wooden grandstand, served the county for many years.

As the single exhibit hall became inadequate to hold all the exhibits, smaller structures were added. Exhibit booths were open to the outdoors. Still, in spite of sometimes slightly primitive conditions, the Fair was always a very popular social event and was the center of activity in the county for a few days late every summer.

In 1928, the current practice of having a parade the last day of the fair was instituted. For a few years previously, a parade had been held on Thursday morning.

In 1936, because the Fair budget had grown to several thousand dollars and was becoming a burden to county government, application was made to the state for financing. Since the late 1920's, the state had been developing a state-wide system of fairs, some of which were run by counties and some by District Agricultural Associations. (Many so-called County Fairs are really D.A.A.'s.) The state created a new Trinity County Agriculture Association and took over the budget of the fair. However, the county was still allowed to run the Fair and the county auditor acted also as business manager of the Fair. Actual operations were handled by the Fair Board through committees.

In 1942, with the entire country mobilized for war, the Fair was cancelled. By the time the war was over in 1945, a lot of changes had taken place. The state had decided to make District Agricultural Associations part of the state government, with board members appointed by the governor. Several D.A.A.'s were disbanded, including that of Trinity County. The Board of Supervisors voted to hold a 1946 County Fair and were able to get financing from the state without reconstituting the District Agricultural Association. Thus, Trinity County was then, and is now, nearly unique in the state in having a truly County Fair without using any county funds to operate it. Lassen is the only other fair so structured. All funds come from the State Horse Racing Tax just as if the Fair were operated by a D.A.A., and yet the county retains primary control of the Fair's operation, although it must follow state guidelines and budgetary control.

The county also was given the right to appoint all employees, including manager. The first manager of the newly organized Trinity County Fair was Don Berry. One of his first jobs was to move the fairgrounds to its present site, which it shared with the Hayfork High School. Since attendance was below 6,000, and since the number of exhibits was proportionally low, it was quite possible to use the grounds in the summer without drastically interfering with the operation of the high school.

The Board of Supervisors, even though it legally had to retain actual control of the Fair's operation, delegated much of its peripheral Fair responsibilities to a newly formed Fair Advisory Board, whose members it appointed. This was made up of people from all over the county who were concerned about the Fair and its progress. They met monthly with the Fair manager to arrive at policies and procedures.

After nineteen years of service, during which he had definitely imprinted the Fair with his own warm personality, Don Berry retired as manager. The Board selected Ron Maraviov to succeed him. At this time, the Fair was changed from 3 to 4 days. Ron was manager for four Fair years, leaving in 1968 to go to Woodland, where he still manages the Yolo County Fair (actually a District Agricultural Association). He was succeeded in 1969 by Duane Foster, who stayed until June 1973. He was followed by Tom Brazil, then Max Forbes in 1975 and Len Bassham, who has been manager since February of this year. (The Advisory Board was temporarily dissolved in late 1977.)

Glenda Harrison, who had been secretary of the Fair during most of Mr. Berry's regime, was succeeded in 1968 by Ann Franke, but returned in 1976 to stay one more year. She also had worked at Fair time in the interim. The present secretary is Carole Lucan, who came on board in October 1977, and was acting manager during the two months between Mr. Forbes' departure and Mr. Bassham's appointment. Sam Rose, our head maintenance man, arrived in 1966.

The Trinity County Fair has changed a lot since 1921. The budget has gone from \$200 per year to \$130,000. Attendance had grown from a few hundred to nearly 30,000. It is the hope of the present management that as the Fair continues to grow and change, as it inevitably will-the traditions which have grown up over the years will continue to operate that Days Gone By will not be forgotten and that the original spirit of H. C. Smith will live on and prove continually true: have something worth showing off! The people of Trinity County do have something worth showing off!

WESTERN FAIRS ASSOCIATION

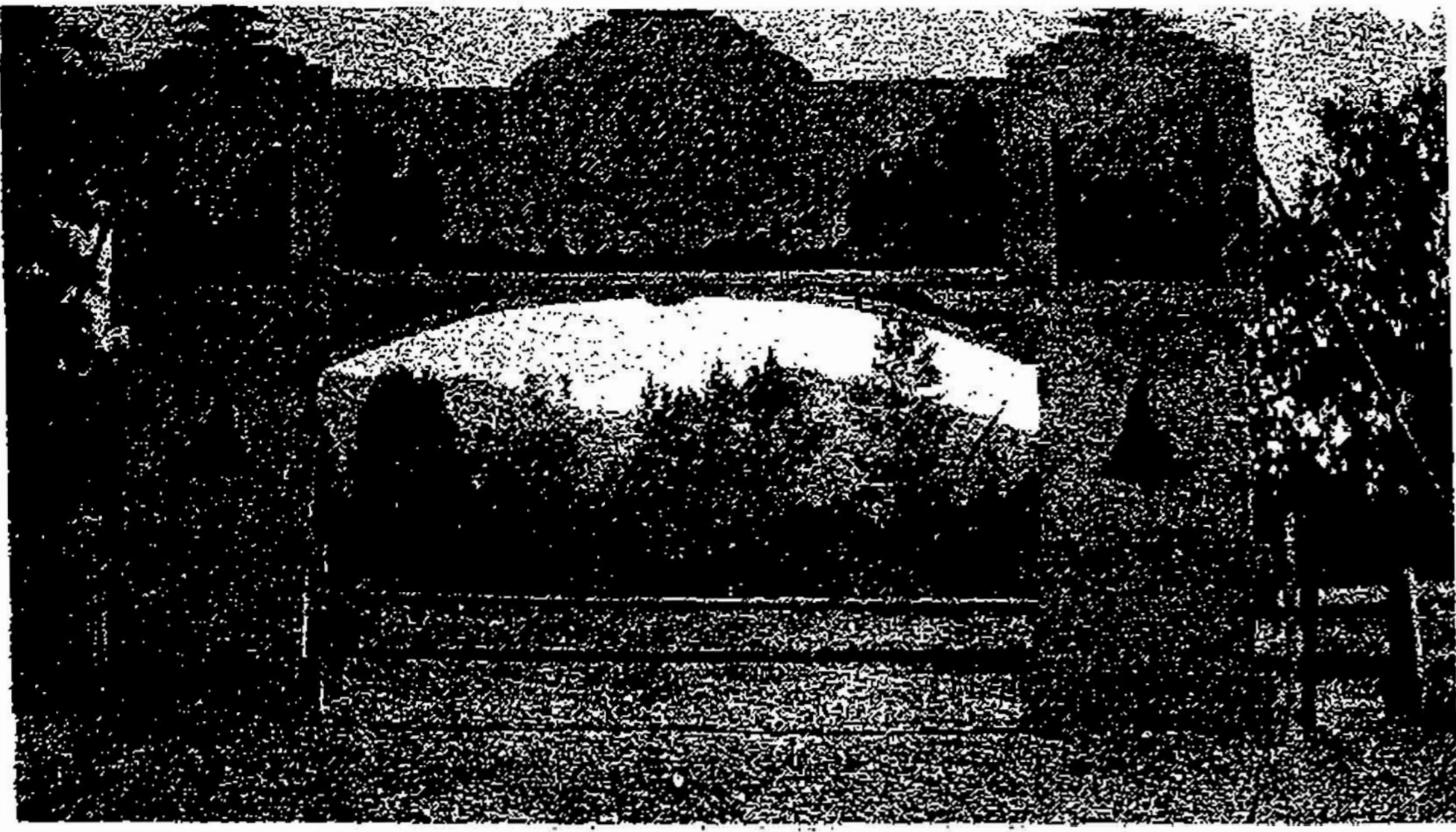
The Trinity County Fair is a member of the Western Fairs Association, which is an incorporated service and lobbying organization with headquarters in Sacramento. Most county and district fairs in California are members, as are many other county and state fairs across the United States and Canada. Most carnival companies (including Butler Amusements, Inc., our carnival at this year's fair), large concession companies, rodeo contractors and some circuses are also members.

Early every year, the association holds a membership convention at which fair managers and directors may preview the entertainers and concessionaires that will be available for that year's fairs. Managers and directors can also compare notes on problems they have in common.

During the rest of the year, the association spends most of its time lobbying in Sacramento and other capitols, and keeping the various members informed as to what bills are pending.

Because of the large number of members, the Western Fairs Association is divided into districts. The Trinity County Fair is a member of the Cascade Area District. Other members in the district are the Siskiyou Golden Fair in Yreka, the Tulelake-Butte Valley Fair in Tulelake, the Modoc County Fair, the intermountain Fair in Fall River Mills, the Shasta District Fair in Anderson, the Tehama County Fair, the Lassen County Fair and the Nevada State Fair.

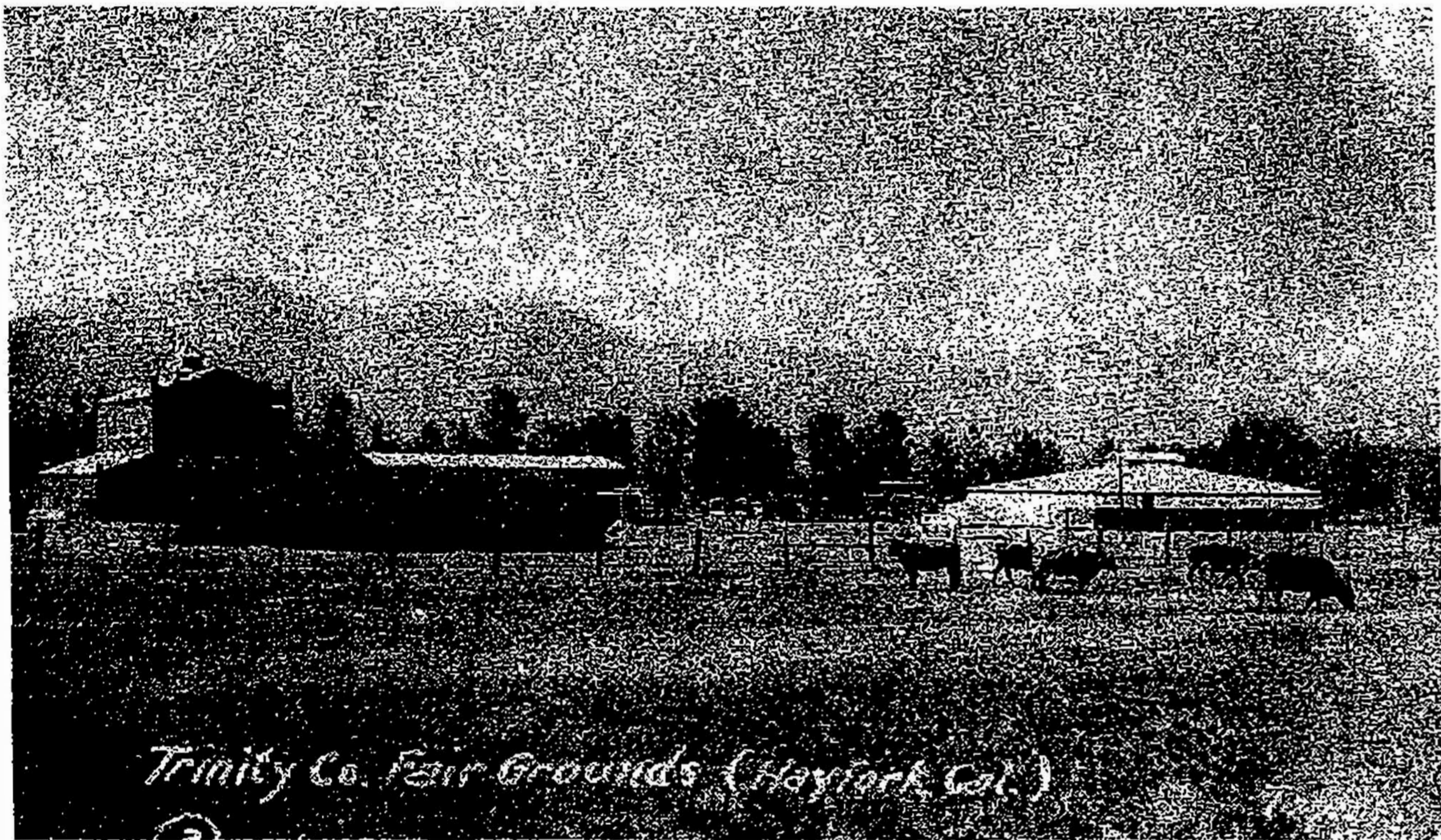
Any Trinity County resident who is interested in learning more about the association, or bills pending in Sacramento which would affect the Fair, are invited to come by the Fair Office.



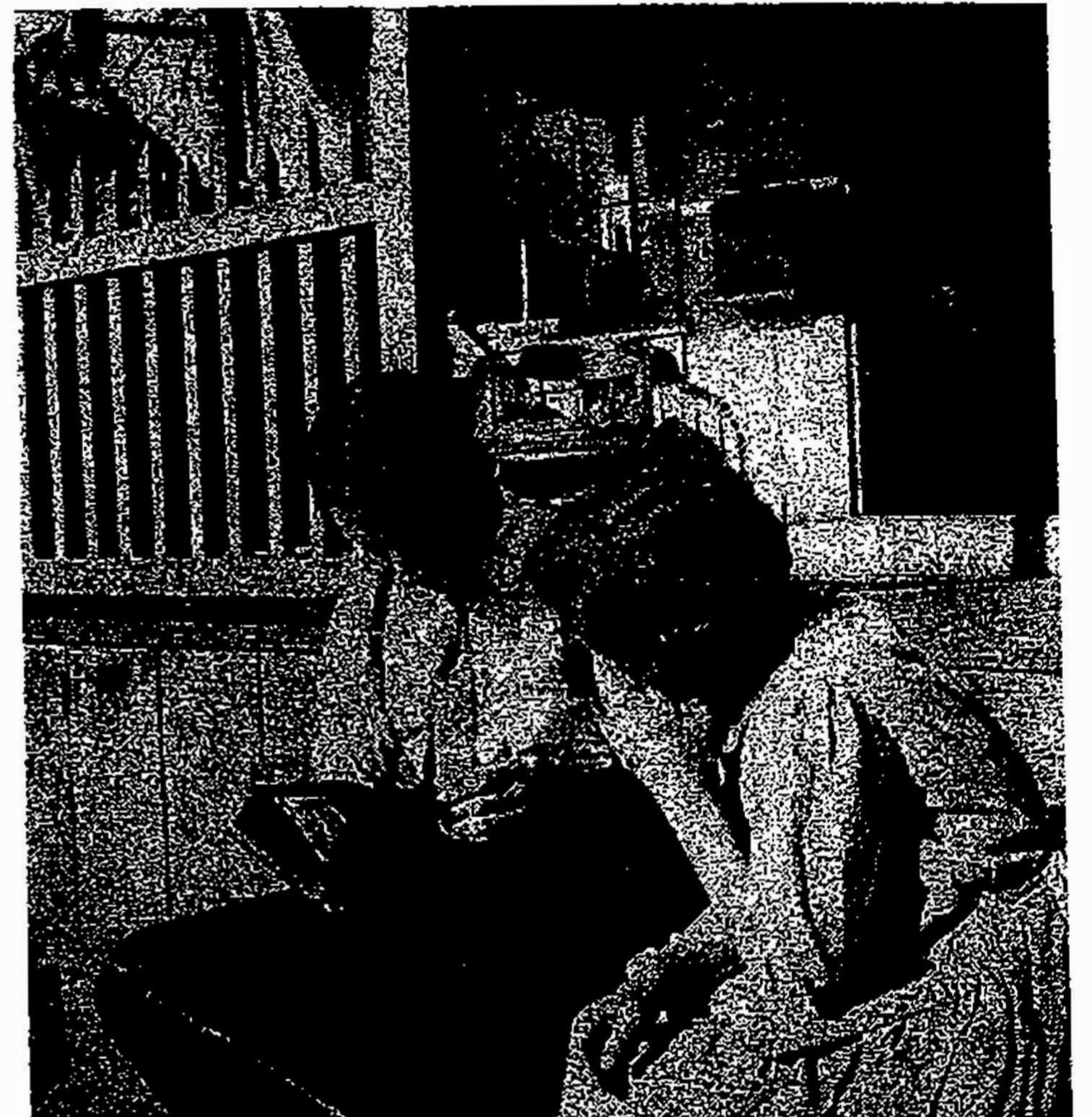
The entrance gate at the original 1921 fairgrounds.



Getting ready for the horse show, 1920's.



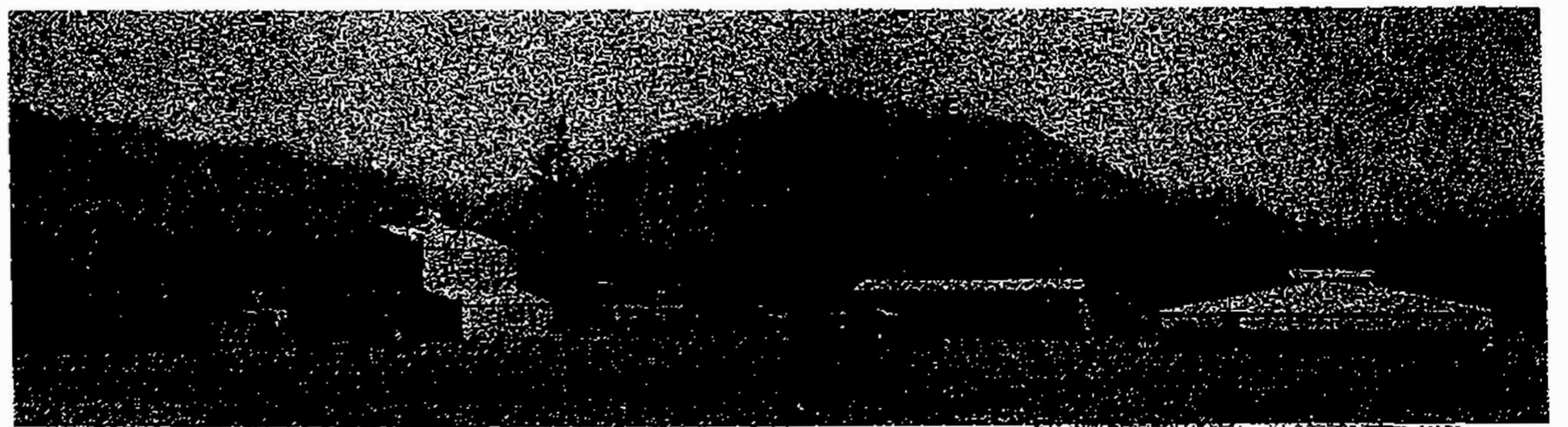
Another view of the old fairgrounds. Looking southwest.



Jim Trimble and Alice Vanderhoof looking at picture scrapbook at site of what is now Ernie's Dept. Store.



Charles Everest standing where Ernie's Dept. Store is now located.



The old fairgrounds (where elementary school is now). Main exhibit hall on the left; live-stock barn on the right. Looking southeast.



Lin Campbell with his Blue Mammoth Jack mule, weight 900 lbs.