

This is Jon Sapper for Community Comment.

The 116<sup>th</sup> Humboldt County Fair is up and running. In 1896, the Fair Association ~~was~~ approved a proposal by the citizens of Ferndale asking for the Fair. Before that happened though, the City of Eureka wanted it, but that request was denied.

The first fair in Humboldt County was actually held in 1861, in Hydesville. It moved to Eureka in 1863. That year it operated with a deficit, but the shortfall was picked up by the State of California. No further comment necessary..... Fruit exhibits were a main attraction, but one of the other highlights was a sample of tobacco and cigars. Yes, tobacco.....and a quote from The Humboldt Times Newspaper said, "Enough has been grown in our county this season to test the superior quality of our soil and the excellence of our climate for the production of the quote 'weed'. " I think weed has another connotation today and I'm sure it's not displayed at the Fair, but yes, tobacco was grown and manufactured on Table Bluff in 1863.

In 1866, the fair moved to Rohnerville, where livestock and farm animals were on display. Two of the highlights of that fair were the invention of the pea huller by Sam Strong of Eel River and the shingle machine, invented by Harry Rogers of Eureka. Innovation was alive and well in 1866. During the next 30 years, the fair moved around before settling in Ferndale. It wasn't until 1922 that the fair became officially known as the Humboldt County Fair.

Today's fair has many of the same themes as were evident 100 years ago. Farm animals and livestock, local artisans, exhibits, musical acts, the midway, horseracing and kids and families eating cotton candy, hot dogs, desserts and ice cream.

I took my grandmother to the fair during the last few years of her life when she couldn't drive. The first place she wanted to go was to the needlepoint exhibit. She looked at the first place work and said, "I do better than that." I wasn't going to argue with my 86 year old grandmother. But I did say, "Why don't you enter your work?" That never happened and each year we would make the pilgrimage to the needlepoint exhibit and she would say the same thing, "I do better work than that".

There are some who say that county fairs are outdated and not important in today's world. I disagree. When I go to the fair, I usually see friends who I haven't seen since the last fair. Those connections and traditions are important. Traditions like county fairs can help us to reflect on values that are important to us as a community.

Go to the fair this year. Check out the exhibits. Buy a pretzel from the Ferndale 8<sup>th</sup> graders who are learning about what it takes to run a small business. And, yea, check out the needlepoint. It's not as good as my grandmother's work.

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