

Quyón Agriculture Society and Quyón Ensemble : from agricultural fair to the Quyón « Jamfest »

Maude-Emmanuelle Lambert

Creation of the Quyón Agriculture Society

In 1919, a group of citizens established the Pontiac Agricultural Society, C Division, also known as the Quyón Agricultural Society. The new organization purchased from the Wright family, a property at the centre of the Village of Quyón, delimited by the Quyón and Ottawa Rivers¹. The members of the society did the groundwork, cleaned and laid out the site themselves, so that the Agricultural Department of Canada could accept that exhibits would be held on the site. The idea behind this citizens' initiative was on one hand, to get the children interested in agriculture and on the other hand, to improve agricultural practices.

The first Quyón Agricultural Fair took place on September 7th and 8th, 1920. At the beginning, the exhibit was held outdoors. Cows and horses were tied up to trees, while chickens and other birds were being judged in their cages. As for milk products, baking and artisanal goods produced by farmers' wives, these exhibits were set up under a tent².

Later, several buildings were built to house both the exhibitors and the animals: two stables for the cows, two others for the workhorses, one for racehorses, a counter for refreshments, etc. A huge track half a mile in circumference was also set up to hold horse races. These events were the most popular in all of the Ottawa Valley and over the years, the way the exhibit site was set-up, it became one of the most beautiful parks in the region.

Categories of competition at the Agricultural Fair

During the 1965 fair, various animals were registered in the competition. Workhorses, show horses and ponies. Cows were set apart by their breed, if they were good milking cows or if they were intended for slaughter. The same applied to sheep and pigs. In the "milk products and honey" category, exhibitors were invited to submit their eggs, honey and maple syrup to the judges and the various homemade products such as bread, bran muffins, apple pie and fruit cake were also judged. Canning and flowers that were cultivated could also be submitted to the competition. Domestic skills, as they were called at the time, also did very well: knitting, quilting, rug hooking, etc.

¹ Manon Leroux, *L'autre Outaouais* (Gatineau, Pièce sur pièce, 2012), p. 164.

² Wendy Higgins, « Quyón Fair-y tales », *The Equity*, June 16, 1993.

The members of the various Women's Institute organizations in the area (Wyman, Starks Corners, Beechgrove, Bristol, Fort-Coulonge, Clarendon and Quyon) also had their own categories entered in the exhibit that year, a two-layer cake, a stuffed rabbit, decorated eggs, a hand-woven Easter basket and hot-cross buns. The grain, fruits and vegetable categories closed the exhibit. The recipients, who accumulated the most points in their category, were awarded prizes consisting of money or items such as a sack of flour or a subscription to the *Ottawa Citizen*³. The exhibit was also for the children. A category for the youngest exhibitor was even created over the years. The Quyon Calf Club members, which became the 4H Club, are also encouraged to participate by entering their animals as well as their school projects.

However, the highlight of the show was the demonstration of animals, especially the horses and draught animals. The "heavy pull" event was one of the most popular. Located at the centre of the fairgrounds, the horse track drew in numerous curious people who came to admire the fastest or the most elegant horses of the region.

Again recently, certain local breeders entered their horses in larger fairs, such as the ones in Ottawa and Toronto, and won awards. In 2006, at the age of 72, Minor Chevrier won first place in the Roadster Standard Bred category at the Toronto's Royal Agricultural Winter Fair⁴. In 2008, it was 74 year-old Donald (Duck) Trudeau's turn to win, making off with eight ribbons at this fair, one of which was the first prize and the "reserve champion" in the Shetland class, as well as the second and third position in the "Pleasure" class⁵.

Non-agricultural activities

Over the years, various entertainment activities, having very little to no connection to agriculture, were added to the fair program. Also, in 1972, there was a classic car parade⁶. A racing competition for the children was included in the 1973 edition of the fair and a "Pet Show", a pet contest (dogs, cats, birds, etc.) was proposed for the first time in 1980⁷. Tractor pulls, some of which were modified, were also very popular with the public⁸. Another staple of the fair was the election of Miss Quyon, among the young girls sponsored by various associations or businesses. Thus, in 1980, the winner was Josée Perrier representing the Eardley

³ Quyon Agricultural Society, *46th Annual Quyon Fair. Prize List*, 1965.

⁴ *Pontiac Journal*, 2006.

⁵ Amanda Dupuis, « Three Pontiacers compete in Royal Winter Fair », *The Equity*, January 16, 2008.

⁶ Charles Dickson, « Scene at Quyon Fair », *The Equity*, 1972.

⁷ « Quyon Fair complete results », *The Equity*, August 29, 1973; « Quyon Fair », *The Equity*, August 6, 1980.

⁸ S. Wyman MacKechnie, « Quyon's 54th Fair was a fantastic success », *The Equity*, August 28, 1974.

Recreation Association⁹. Miss Quyon was called upon to play an active role during the fair and throughout the following year. She was mainly selected based on her public speaking skills, in addition to her appearance and her stage presence¹⁰.

In the 1990s, a car demolition derby was added to the long list of fair activities, as well as fair rides for children. Music was of course at the heart of the celebrations: on the main stage, fiddlers and guitarists from all over the Ottawa Valley enlivened the evenings¹¹. In 1993, even wrestling matches were held (pro-team and midgets) in order to attract additional visitors¹²! In 1995, a gladiator competition and all-terrain vehicle (ATV) races through the mud were also introduced¹³. A parade and fireworks also livened up these few days of festivities for all who attended.

Difficulties and re-orientation

In the early 1900s, the event experienced a decline in attendance and a decrease in the number of categories. Thus at the 1991 fair, cattle breeders and milk producers were not present, nor were the farmers' wives or exhibitors. Nevertheless, the "heavy horses" category, such as the Belgian and Percherons returned to the competition¹⁴. The entrance fee also remained fixed and the event was moved to early July (to be combined with the Canada Day celebrations) rather than in the Fall, in order to take advantage of vacationers, and thus ensuring the event's sustainability and even its viability¹⁵. In 1997, the date of the fair is once again changed, because of its proximity to the St-John the Baptist holiday¹⁶.

The same year, new regulations force the Quebec Agricultural Society to be dissolved and to be formed as a non-profit organization, under the authority of the Ministry of Finances. In order to share the management costs of the fairgrounds, the members of the Agricultural Society's Board of Directors persuaded other community organizations who used the property, to establish an organization that would be in charge. Quyon Ensemble was officially created in 1999. In addition to the members of the Pontiac Agricultural Society's C Division, this

⁹ « Quyon Fair », *The Equity*, August 6, 1980.

¹⁰ « The girls were judged on neatness, poise and appearance. They also had to talk for a few minutes on a chosen subject, perform a talent, and answer a surprise question. » Denise Belec, « Quyon Fair Pageant packs hall », *The Equity*, August 17, 1988.

¹¹ « Quyon Fair entertainment », *The Equity*, July 3, 1991.

¹² Wendy Higgins, « Good crowds, good weather bless 74th annual Quyon Fair », *The Equity*, July 17, 1993.

¹³ Sylvia Bakker, « Best ever Quyon Fair », *The Equity*, July 5, 1995

¹⁴ Richard Wills, « Crowds down, but records broken at the 71st Annual Fair in Quyon », *The Equity*, August 1, 1990; Pat Schoular, « 91' Quyon Fair the best in years! », *The Equity*, July 3, 1991.

¹⁵ Wendy Higgins, « Quyon fair-y tales », *The Equity*, June 16, 1993.

¹⁶ Sylvia Bakker, « New dates for Quyon Fair », *The Equity*, February 12, 1997.

organization consisted of the Quyon Lions and Lionettes, the local branch of the Royal Canadian Legion, the Quyon Citizens' Committee, the Pontiac Fish and Game Club and the Municipality of Pontiac¹⁷.

In 2001 the very last edition of the Quyon Fair was held. Too expensive to manage and unprofitable without the fair rides, the Quyon Ensemble Board of Directors made the difficult decision to end this institution, 80 years later¹⁸. Nevertheless, one of the most popular folk music festivals in all of the Ottawa Valley was created : the Quyon JamFest.

Quyon JamFest

Using the popular formula of the Pontiac Pride (a music « jamboree » held in mid-July during the 1990s) the Quyon JamFest, an ongoing yearly event since the summer of 2002, during three days, brings together some of the greatest names in music, to the great pleasure of the festival-goers and campers. The first edition received approximately 120 recreational vehicles and campers on the former fairgrounds¹⁹. During the third year of the Festival in 2004, 187 groups of campers gather at the fairgrounds²⁰. In 2007, the festival welcomed a true country legend, Tommy Cash²¹. In 2008, it was Charlie Major, winner of two Juno Awards (1994 and 1995) who headlined the festival²². Between 2500 and 3000 people came to hear the various live entertainers. The following year the festival shifted, focusing its programming on “classic country” to please an audience in the 40 years plus demographic, but especially to ensure the financial health of the event for years to come²³.

Always very popular in 2015, this festival was possible thanks to the financial support of local businesses, the Municipality of Pontiac and the constant and monumental work of the Quyon Ensemble volunteers²⁴.

A few Presidents of the Quyon Agricultural Society and of Quyon Ensemble: C.C. Hutchinson, Gervase O'Reilly, Raymond Davis, Ken Bronson, John McBane, Joey Keon, Gary Wilson, Donald Trudeau, Minor Chevrier, Jack Graham, Lorne Coyle, Kathy Armitage and Shirley-Mae Davis.

¹⁷ *Quyon-Onslow, 1875-2000. Souvenir of the Millenium.*

¹⁸ Ron Pickering, « Annual agricultural fair may change concept to music festival », *The Equity*, January 30, 2002.

¹⁹ Michael Lloyd, « Quyon Country Jamfest a feast for music lovers », *The Equity*, July 3, 2002.

²⁰ Heather Dickson, « Quyon Jamfest another singing success », *The Equity*, July 7, 2004.

²¹ Amanda Dupuis, « Tommy Cash coming to Quyon », *The Equity*, June 27, 2007.

²² Wilbur McLean, « Jam Fest a country success in Quyon », *The Equity*, July 8, 2008.

²³ Leah Iverson, « JamFest to focus on classic country », *The Equity*, June 17, 2009.

²⁴ For additional information on the Jamfest, consult the [internet site](#).