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**Elkanah Watson**

Engraved from a portrait painted by F. R. Spencer, 1826

## Elkanah Watson and Early Agricultural Fairs, 1790-1860

Mark A. Mastromarino

The agricultural fair provides a microcosm through which we can examine the contours of early nineteenth-century rural New England society. As Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote after a visit to Brighton in the autumn of 1841: "All this scene of the fair was very characteristic and peculiar -- cheerful and lively, too, in the bright, warm sun. I must see it again; for it ought to be studied."<sup>1</sup>

The agricultural fair owed its popularity to the uncanny ability of one man, Elkanah Watson, to understand and meet the needs of the rural population in the early decades of the nineteenth century. It has survived to the present because of its responsiveness to the changing needs of its participants. The agricultural fair succeeded because, like the early New England farm household, it was multifunctional. The fair was an educational, social, recreational, ceremonial, and commercial institution.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Nathaniel Hawthorne, The American Notebooks, ed. by Claude M. Simpson, The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne (Columbus, Ohio, 1972), 8: 201. The only full-length work of scholarship on the subject has been Wayne Caldwell Neely, The Agricultural Fair (New York, 1935), a sociological study. The recent periodical literature includes Mark A. Mastromarino, "'Cattle Aplenty and Other Things in Proportion': The Agricultural Society and Fair in Franklin County, Massachusetts, 1810-1860," UCLA Historical Journal (1984), 5: 50-75.
2. For the multifunctionalism of early New England homes, see John Demos, A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth County (New York, 1970). The literature by and on Watson is limited: Elkanah Watson, History of Agricultural Societies on the Modern Berkshire System (Albany, N.Y., 1820) and History of the Rise and Progress, and Existing Condition of the Western Canals in the State of New York (Albany, N.Y., 1820); Winslow C. Watson, ed., Men and Times of the Revolution; or Memoirs of Elkanah Watson (New York, 1856); J. E. A. Smith, The History of Pittsfield (Berkshire County) Massachusetts, from the Year 1800 to the Year 1876 (Springfield, 1876), pp. 170-180, 316-351; Hugh Meredith Flick, "Elkanah Watson: Gentleman-Promoter, 1758-1842," Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1958, and "Elkanah Watson's Activities on Behalf of Agriculture," Agriculture History (1947), 21:

The modern agricultural fair has always been a battery of various activities. As one Connecticut Valley farmer wrote in his journal in 1850: "September 25. Clear. To Greenfield to the Cattle Show for the first time. Cattle Aplenty and Other Things in Proportion." These "other things" have traditionally consisted of exhibits, and prizes for the same; ceremonies such as processions, religious exercises, award presentations, and agricultural dinners and dances; speeches and addresses; contests; and opportunities for buying, selling, and hiring animals, goods, and services. The relative importance of these features at different Massachusetts fairs can tell us much about Massachusetts society in the early 1800s.<sup>3</sup>

The idea of holding a fair to introduce ordinary people to principles of agricultural improvement first came to Elkanah Watson in the autumn of 1807. This gentleman farmer and New York entrepreneur hoped to popularize the Spanish merino breed of sheep, which, with its longer, finer fleece, would enable American woolen manufacturers to produce a grade of cloth comparable to the quality of British imports. Therefore, after he moved from Albany to Pittsfield, he showed his two recently acquired merinos on the public square. He later wrote: "Many farmers, and even women were excited by curiosity to attend this . . . novel . . . exhibition. I reasoned . . . if two animals are capable of exciting so much attention, what would be the effect on a larger scale, with larger animals?"<sup>4</sup>

At the time, Watson belonged to the New York Society for the Promotion of Agriculture, Arts, and Manufactures. Like the Boston-based Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture, which had been chartered in 1792, this was an elite urban association. Watson came to realize how out-of-touch these societies were with the realities the average husbandman faced. Most practical farmers had no time for experiments nor much faith in

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193-198; Arthur Pound, Native Stock: The Rise of the American Spirit Seen in Six Lives (New York, 1931), pp. 197-267. The bulk of Watson's original papers are preserved at the New York State Library in Albany.

3. Julius C. Robbins, Diary and Weatherbook, ms. in Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association Library, Deerfield, Mass.
4. Watson, History of Agricultural Societies, p. 116. For more on merino sheep, see Arthur H. Cole, "Agricultural Crazes," American Economic Review (1926), 16: 622-639; L. G. Connor, "A Brief History of the Sheep Industry in the United States," Annual Report of the American Historical Association (1918), 1: 93-197.

"book farming." Watson understood that "a different organization, to seize upon the human heart . . . became indispensable. To do this, some eclat was necessary."<sup>5</sup>

He found just what he was looking for when he attended the annual shearing of the merino flock belonging to Robert Livingston in June of 1810. Part promotional show and part social event, this festival consisted of numerous activities, some of which were later adopted by Watson's fairs. He was delighted with the affair and hoped to achieve the same results of good fellowship and agricultural enlightenment among the common people of Pittsfield.<sup>6</sup> That same summer he persuaded two dozen of Berkshire County's more substantial citizens to support an exhibition of farm animals. The reluctant participants exhibited and inspected 383 sheep, 109 oxen, 7 bulls, 3 heifers, 2 calves, and a boar. A large proportion of the animals were blooded stock, and, of course, merino sheep predominated. In addition, the farmers benefited from a shared sense of accomplishment. Watson recalled they "march[ed] round the square, . . . [and I] stepped in front, [and] gave three cheers, in which they all united. [We] then parted, well pleased with the day, and with each other."<sup>7</sup>

This camaraderie was institutionalized that winter by the creation and incorporation of the Berkshire Agricultural Society. Its principal objective was to make that 1810 cattle show an annual event that would impress the farming public with the results of scientific agriculture. Watson later explained that the society's "plan was to seize the bull by the horns, and lead the way by great exertions, into the heart of the community. This was effected, by touching a string which never fails, (if properly directed) to vibrate in unison with all, viz -- self-love -- self-interest." Whereas the

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5. Watson, History of Agricultural Societies, p. 160. For the history of the agricultural reform movement before 1810, see Percy Wells Bidwell and John I. Falconer, History of Agriculture in the Northern United States, 1620-1860 (Washington, D.C., 1925), pp. 184-195; Hugh M. Flick, "Elkanah Watson's Activities on Behalf of Agriculture," Agricultural History (1947), 21: 193-198; Tamara Plakins Thornton, "Between Generations: Boston Agricultural Reform and the Aging of New England, 1815-1830," New England Quarterly (1986), 59: 189-211.

6. Greenfield (Massachusetts) Gazette, July 10, 1810.

7. Pittsfield Sun, Aug. 8, 1810; Watson, History of Agricultural Societies, pp. 118-119; Smith, History of Pittsfield, p. 329.

earlier agricultural societies addressed the minds of gentlemen farmers, the Berkshire Agricultural Society catered to the hearts and the hands of practical farmers.<sup>8</sup>

The society's first fairs, then, attempted to divorce ordinary farm families from their traditional agricultural practices while they were not looking. They were to be enlightened by first being distracted by a silent appeal to their feelings of neighborliness, pride, competitiveness, and self-interest. The Pittsfield fairs, under Watson's direction from 1811 to 1816, achieved this through a variety of measures. Although these first agricultural fairs consisted of features with overlapping social, recreational, ceremonial, and commercial purposes, Watson concentrated his efforts on the social and ceremonial aspects. He believed that an appeal to the need for communal entertainment and social interaction in the fifty year-old village and the popular love of ritual would prove stronger to rural farm families than any other kind of attraction. He optimistically wrote: "After a few years . . . when excitements are no longer necessary to lead the people to a knowledge of their true interest . . . no further efforts will be required. . . . Books and science will then become all important."<sup>9</sup>

Until then, interest had to be aroused and sustained. Therefore, "every measure" at the Berkshire Agricultural Society's first fair, held in September of 1811, "through a variety of ceremony, was well calculated to produce a deep impression." Most impressive was a half-mile-long procession described by its organizer as "splendid, novel, and imposing, beyond any thing of the kind, ever exhibited in America." It consisted of a band, sixty-nine oxen drawing a plow, members of the agricultural society, platforms with working textile machinery and local manufactures, artisans and mechanics, and mounted marshalls. The parade was intended to dignify and advertise Watson's new society, but it also fulfilled the purposes of all ritualistic behavior by uniting participants in shared action, re-emphasizing traditional values, and defining one's place in the social universe. This helps to explain why "those who enjoyed it

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8. Watson, History of Agricultural Societies, p. 132.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

as children described it to their dying day with unequaled vividness and enthusiasm."<sup>10</sup>

Another significant ceremony was the presentation of awards. Watson stated that this "always produced great effect. Our constant aim was not only to excite an ardent spirit of emulation among the candidates for premiums, but to impress the minds of the audience, and produce some tincture of envy, so as to call forth more extended efforts." The prizes were not mere blue ribbons, but were pieces of engraved silver plate accompanied by ornate certificates. The awards ceremony was dignified by being held in the church, where the trophies were placed to good advantage on a green-cloth-covered table in front of the pulpit. When the president of the society announced the winners one by one, they rose and stood at their seats, and the head marshal delivered their prizes. "This concluded," Watson wrote proudly, "the band strikes up a national air, every countenance beaming with pleasure, under the impression the[se] fascinating measures never fail to produce."<sup>11</sup>

In order to increase the participation of women, who were especially important between 1807 and 1816 as domestic woolen manufacturers, the society decided to hold a cloth show in January of 1813. It offered sixty dollars in prizes exclusively to women on the condition that winners receive the awards in person. As Watson later remembered: "Many superior articles were exhibited . . . but no female appeared to claim the premiums. Native timidity . . . restrained them. No one dared to be the first to support a new project. . . . [W]ith no small difficulty, [I] prevailed on my good wife to accompany me [and] then dispatched messengers to the other ladies of the village announcing she waited for them, at the Cloth Show. . . . [T]he Hall was speedily filled with female spectators and candidates." At the fair the following October, many of the fifteen

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10. *Ibid.*, pp. 123-124, 143-144; Smith, History of Pittsfield, pp. 335-339. Watson wrote that the procession "cost me an infinity of trouble, and some cash, but it resulted in exciting general attention in the Northern States; and placing our Society on elevated ground." See History of Agricultural Societies, p. 123. The society spent \$500 on its first fair.

11. Watson, History of Agricultural Societies, pp. 43-44, 142.

successful female prizewinners accepted their awards proudly, but with blushing faces and downcast eyes.<sup>12</sup>

Other new features were added after 1811 specifically to "enlist the sympathies and arouse the interest of the females of the county." These included religious exercises and an "Agricultural Ball." In 1812, the members of the agricultural society and their wives attended services in the church on fair day. A pastoral prayer was given, an ode composed for the occasion was read, and an agricultural hymn was sung. With these measures, Watson hoped to solicit the cooperation of the men of the community who stood aloof, despite a newspaper notice for the first fair stating that "Innocent recreations will be permitted, but everything tending to immorality will be discountenanced."<sup>13</sup>

The "Agricultural Ball," first held in 1813, was an innocent enough recreation. Traditional social diversions in Pittsfield consisted of only the occasional public ball, more common private assemblies, tea parties, hunting frolics, cornhuskings, and ministers' bees. The formal ball that concluded fair day was therefore a welcome addition, even though nobody was permitted to attend wearing any imported cloth. Watson wrote that "its direct object was to promote domestic manufactures, by exciting emulation, and by inducing females to feel a pride in appearing decorated in the works of their own hands, on a public occasion." The principal ornaments at these events were heads of wheat, artificial flowers, and handsome festoons of cedar and hemlock. Watson noted that these had "an interesting pastoral effect" and he looked forward to the day "when our females shall generally despise foreign chains and gewgaws."<sup>14</sup>

Looking back, Watson wrote in 1820 that "Some have objected to the parade, . . . the folly of wheat cockades, . . . the dancing, . . . [and] the intermixing religious exercises, as totally irrelevant to the promotion of agriculture." But he knew that these critics had completely missed the point of the new society and its agricultural

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12. W. C. Watson, ed., Men and Times of the Revolution, p. 369; Watson, History of Agricultural Societies, pp. 129-130; Smith, History of Pittsfield, p. 343.

13. Smith, History of Pittsfield, p. 340; Watson, History of Agricultural Societies, pp. 125, 143-144; Pittsfield Sun, Sept. 22, 1811.

14. Smith, History of Pittsfield, p. 53; Watson, History of Agricultural Societies, pp. 131-132, 160-161, 172.



fair. In order to teach the common farmer about agricultural improvement, one first had to get his attention; only then was it possible to motivate him to participate in the activities of an agricultural society. The early Berkshire agricultural fairs accomplished these goals admirably through ceremonies and social events. Its educational program was more subtle, but not absent. Although the annual agricultural address given at the fair usually had didactic designs, farmers probably learned more from the exhibits. By seeing superior animals and products and by holding discussions with their owners, a man could draw his own conclusions as to the efficacy of scientific agriculture.<sup>15</sup>

Commercialism was not completely absent from Watson's early fairs, however. Even at the first one, the hawkers and vendors who haunted Berkshire County's general musters and Fourth of July celebrations had set up booths to sell refreshments and Yankee notions. A friend wrote Watson in 1811 requesting his permission to bring a flock of merinos for the specific purpose of selling them. But Watson always regarded his fair as something more than a commercial institution, as something different from common market fairs. Thus, when he failed to acquire financial aid after the 1811 event, he wrote despondently: "Should our hopes be illusive, and no further premiums be given, it is contemplated, in that unfortunate event, to establish, on the basis of this institution, regular annual fairs, to be held . . . for the interchange and sale of animals, and domestic manufactures."<sup>16</sup>

The leaders of the old Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture (MSPA) did not fret about such niceties. In 1816, they admitted how much more effective than their own were Watson's ideas on agricultural organization and education. They did not provide the Berkshire Agricultural Society with the grants of state money that Watson had often requested. Instead, the Massachusetts society organized an agricultural fair of its own in Brighton, and it had a noticeable commercial cast to it. In 1816 at the Pittsfield fair, Watson announced: "The mother society in this state, is at length aroused from her lethargy, cautiously treading in your footsteps; the

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15. Watson, History of Agricultural Societies, pp. 160-161.

16. Smith, History of Pittsfield, p. 333; Elisha Jenkins to Elkanah Watson, Sept. 17, 1811, ms. in Elkanah Watson papers, box 6, folder 5, New York State Library, Albany; Watson, History of Agricultural Societies, p. 131.

week ensuing, they will exhibit their first cattle show at Brighton; they are blessed with respectable funds, which have been for years accumulating, but of no practical use to the community thus far: they will now excite a laudable spirit of emulation in the vicinity of the capital."<sup>17</sup>

Watson may have resented all the money the MSPA had saved by not sharing the wealth with his own society (as he was also undoubtedly miffed by the Bostonians' snubbing of the Berkshire society when it deliberately failed to acknowledge its influence), but this treasury did provide the MSPA with a sound financial basis for the Brighton fairs.<sup>18</sup> Although the Massachusetts society spent money left and right on its fairs, the events never really amounted to more than glorified cattle shows. The prizes awarded at the first Brighton fair were worth almost four times those of the first Pittsfield ones. At its second fair alone, held in 1817, the MSPA gave out an astounding \$1,300 in prizes, and spent almost \$200 on the Cattle Show Dinner for society members. It even hired an artist to paint one of the prizewinning cows, paid to have a sketch of the painting engraved, and then spent more money to have copies printed for its periodical. The discrepancy in financial resources of the two societies is best demonstrated by the fact that the Berkshire society was unable to obtain permanent fairgrounds until 1855, over forty years after its first fair; the Massachusetts society did so in 1818, two years after its first fair.<sup>19</sup> But Watson had the last laugh:

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17. Watson, History of Agricultural Societies, p. 139. For the financial difficulties of the Berkshire Agricultural Society and Watson's appeals to the Boston elite, see Mark A. Mastromarino, "'The Best Hopes of Agriculture': The History of the Agricultural Fair in Massachusetts, from 1800 to 1860" (B.A. Thesis, Boston College, 1983), pp. 88-96; Watson, History of Agricultural Societies, pp. 124, 131-132; W. C. Watson, ed., Men and Times of the Revolution, p. 380; and Smith, History of Pittsfield, p. 336.

18. The snub appeared in the society's organ, the Massachusetts Agricultural Repository and Journal (June 1816), 4: 202: "The Trustees . . . taking into consideration the importance of improving the breed of domestic animals, and influenced by the example of enlightened societies in all parts of Europe, who have established annual exhibitions of such animals, . . . have determined to establish an Annual Show of Cattle." The emphasis was added by this author.

19. See Smith, History of Pittsfield, pp. 662-664; Mastromarino, "'The Best Hopes of Agriculture,'" pp. 101-105; William Marchione, "The Parting of Ways: Brighton's Withdrawal from Cambridge in 1807," ms. pp. 18-19, in Brighton Historical Society, Brighton, Mass.; and entry for May 9, 1818 in MSPA Record Book, II, Records of the MSPA, Box 20, in Mass. Historical Society, Boston.

his fairs remained popular long after the Brighton one ended in 1844.

An 1813 MSPA committee on cattle shows reported favorably on the matter, as a "Successful cattle show [would] reach . . . the popular heart . . . thereby [using] a . . . most effective method of diffusing agricultural knowledge, the method of 'object teaching.'" It recommended that the first fair be held at Brighton because it was "the most convenient location for the citizens at large." As the site of an important weekly market fair for cattle since the Revolutionary War, the town could easily accommodate herds and crowds. It was only natural, then, that the Brighton agricultural fairs were most concerned with livestock farming and animal husbandry.<sup>20</sup>

The Brighton fairs seem to have lacked Watson's eclat, but this appearance may reflect the nature of the sources rather than historical reality. The Massachusetts society never had as zealous a publicist as Elkanah Watson. Whatever the case, at the first Brighton fair, held on October 8, 1816, there were no parades, no elaborately planned awards ceremonies (and cash prizes were given to premium winners instead of silver trophies), no religious exercises, and no "Agricultural Ball." In the morning, members of the MSPA assembled for the annual meeting of the society and soberly conducted business. Afterwards, judges viewed the many animals on exhibit. The society and its distinguished guests, always including some Brighton bigwigs, then enjoyed dinner together at the nearby Hastings Tavern. The public reassembled later in the afternoon to hear the names of prizewinners announced.<sup>21</sup>

The most exciting feature of the Brighton fair was the MSPA's only original contribution, a plowing match (later adopted by the Berkshire Agricultural Society in 1818). This trial of working oxen had the functional utility of showing off prime beasts in action and demonstrating the effectiveness of new plows, but the crowds enjoyed it as a sporting event. It was not necessarily a race, but a

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20. From the centennial volume of the MSPA, quoted in Alfred Charles True, A History of Agricultural Education in the United States, 1785-1925 (Washington, D.C., 1929), p. 12; Mass. Agricultural Repository and Journal (June 1816), 4: 202. For the Brighton cattle market, see David C. Smith and Anne E. Bridges, "The Brighton Market: Feeding Nineteenth-Century Boston," Agricultural History (1982), 56: 3-19.

21. Mastromarino, "The Best Hopes of Agriculture," pp. 98-100.

test of expertise. Most teams took about thirty minutes to complete their designated plots, and contestants were judged on results as well as speed. Many people were attracted by the masterly handling of the teams, and the excitement was enhanced by the inevitable wagers that were placed on the outcome.<sup>22</sup>

In arousing interest in agricultural improvement by means of an agricultural fair, the MSPA did not make its chief appeal to the popular love of ceremony or to the common need for socialization, as did Watson. Instead, its strongest pitches were at people's purses and pockets. In 1816, the society advertised that the new Brighton cattle show and fair would benefit farmers by "draw[ing] together a great collection of persons, . . . thus . . . much facilitat[ing] the sale of . . . cattle. [A]lso . . . the animals, which . . . command the prizes, will sell at very much enhanced prices." In 1820, the society hoped that its annual exhibitions would not only introduce husbandmen to improved breeds, but would also "enhance [the] market value [of winning livestock], thus giving to the raiser, besides his personal gratification in the prize, a substantial reward."<sup>23</sup>

Because the Brighton agricultural fair was situated at an important crossroads in the midst of the major concentration of the Massachusetts population, it soon became a predominantly commercial institution. Not located in a remote corner of the Commonwealth, as was the Pittsfield fair, it had a much higher visibility. The Brighton cattle show and fair "embraced gentlemen of science and practical Agriculturalists from all the neighboring states." Since the fair drew thousands of people who patronized Brighton businesses, the town selectmen donated land to the MSPA in 1817, hoping to persuade the society to locate the fair there permanently.<sup>24</sup> Actually, Abiel Winship gave 6.5 acres to Brighton for the fairgrounds. Brighton's largest public house, Winship's Cattle Fair Tavern on the Watertown Highway, happened to front the lot. The society's trustees accepted the offer and began construction of its "Agricultural Hall" and its extensive animal pens in June of 1818. The society moved into the building before it was dedicated that fall

22. See Smith, *History of Pittsfield*, p. 344. Apparently, plowing contests were held before 1811 in Hartford, Connecticut, but not as part of an agricultural fair.

23. *Mass. Agric. Repos. and Jour.* (June 1816), 4: 204; (Jan. 1820), 6: 19.

24. Quotation from *Franklin Herald* (Greenfield, Mass.), Oct. 26, 1819.

on fair day. But after only a decade, the MSPA seriously began to reconsider the educational utility of an agricultural fair. It was becoming obvious that most exhibitors and fairgoers came to the Brighton show not so much as to improve agriculture but to improve their personal finances. Such features as "the public sales of Manufactures and Animals" held at the 1829 fair only advanced individuals' accounts.<sup>25</sup>

Since the Brighton fair was promoting the material interests of individual farmers more than it was furthering the general advancement of agriculture, the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture decided not to hold it in 1831, 1834, 1836, and 1837. While considering the final disposition of its own agricultural fair, the society donated the money it usually awarded as prizes to the county societies which were incorporated and had by then organized fairs of their own. These included the Barnstable, Berkshire, Bristol, Essex, Franklin, Hampden, Hampshire, Plymouth, and Worcester county agricultural societies. In 1844, with the Worcester County Agricultural Society, the MSPA co-sponsored a "Grand Cattle Show" in Worcester. By that October, the trustees had made up their minds; the society retired from the agricultural fair business, sold its Brighton building at public auction, and returned its land to the town.<sup>26</sup>

During its first decade of existence, however, the Brighton fair, like its immediate predecessor in Pittsfield, had spawned imitators, including a fair first held in Northampton in 1818, and one in Worcester in 1819. The Bristol County Agricultural Society, which was organized in 1823, soon followed suit. In 1819 the state government began giving annual grants to county agricultural societies, to support their fairs and prize programs. These grants saved many fairs from ruin in the face of declining agricultural prices following the War of 1812. By 1856, there were twenty-one

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25. Aug. 29, 1818 in MSPA Record Book, III, Records of the MSPA, Box 20; New England Farmer (Sept. 1830), 8: 90-91. In 1836, the society held a Butter and Cheese Exhibit in Boston instead of the annual Brighton cattle show and fair. Although the judges were at liberty to withhold from the auction following the event any wares they deemed were entered and exhibited for the express purpose of selling them, to have done so would have been folly. Most of the contestants were primarily interested in selling their products, not just showing them.

26. See "Report to the Commissioner of Massachusetts, 1843," in Records of the MSPA, box 32.

incorporated agricultural societies in Massachusetts, and most of these were founded on the Berkshire system and held annual fairs.<sup>27</sup>

Granting these annual bounties was only the first step in increasing state involvement in agricultural affairs. As far as the agricultural societies were concerned, this culminated in 1852 with the creation of a State Board of Agriculture to oversee their operations. But the government also became more involved in more formal institutions of agricultural education. Private efforts to found agricultural schools and academies had been limited, and the state could not afford to operate a college devoted to agricultural science and to the practice of farming, although it desired to establish one. In 1863, however, a year after Congress passed the Morrill Act, federal land grants enabled the state to purchase four hundred acres in Amherst and to begin construction of a campus. The Massachusetts Agricultural College received its first class in 1867, and the State Agricultural Experiment Station opened there in 1882 to conduct and present the results of agricultural research.<sup>28</sup>

Thus had the process of innovation and diffusion been removed from the agricultural societies, and the educational mission of their agricultural fairs been assumed by other institutions. As farming became more commercialized and as agricultural knowledge became more sophisticated, farmers no longer relied on exhibits and addresses at the county fairs for information on scientific advances. Instead, they came to depend on reports and papers of the State Board of Agriculture. Elkanah Watson's prediction had come true, but it did not result in the disappearance of the agricultural fair. Because of the other functions it fulfilled, providing amusements, social diversion, and commercial opportunities for the rural populace, the annual county fair had become a permanent event in the rural tradition.

It is not coincidental that the first modern agricultural fairs originated in towns where commercial opportunities for farmers were greater. Profits, as well as patriotism, fueled the early American agricultural reform movement. Only farmers who had regular access to stable markets would be interested in increasing crop yields or raising improved breeds of livestock. Both Pittsfield and Brighton farmers were so situated. When British cloth imports

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27. Mastromarino, "The Best Hopes of Agriculture," pp. 147-158.

28. See *ibid.*, pp. 153-154.

were drastically reduced from 1807 to 1816, American woolen manufacturers increased their output to fill the void. Because of the waterpower of its many streams and the technical expertise of Yorkshire clothiers who had recently settled there, Pittsfield became a center of the American woolen industry. Its factories provided an expanding market for quality raw wool. That led to the importance of merinos to Watson, to the Berkshire Agricultural Society, and to the growing significance of domestic manufactures at the Pittsfield fairs. Likewise, the increasing urban population of Boston could not feed itself, so suburban farmers profited from providing the city-dwellers with meat, vegetables, poultry, eggs, and dairy products. In both areas, the more a family could produce, the more it could sell. Thus, these farmers had more of an incentive than others of their countrymen to learn about agricultural improvement through agricultural societies and fairs.<sup>29</sup>

The fairs increasingly drew more than farmers, however, and they continued to thrive because of their non-agricultural features. Agricultural societies began to consider them more as business operations and recognized how much they could profit by concentrating their energies on the commercial, recreational, and social aspects that appealed to the growing non-agricultural population. The societies bought land to build private fairgrounds and then charged admission fees to nonmembers. They also began to charge entry fees for exhibitors and rented out booth space. There was no shortage of either exhibitors or vendors, as many people sought to take advantage of the huge crowds which were attracted by exciting new features like horse-racing. Local merchants and manufacturers who had first used the exhibits to advertise their products now set up tables of their own. Charitable organizations engaged in fund-raising at the fairs, and politicians were sure to

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29. See Connor, "A Brief History of the Sheep Industry," AHA Annual Report (1918), 1: 93-97; Smith, History of Pittsfield, pp. 36-48, 158-180. Only seventy dollars was offered as prizes at the first Berkshire fair in 1811, all for animals; of the \$208 offered in 1812, \$50 went to a single prize for broadcloth (won by Watson); in 1813, of the sixty-three prizes awarded at the fair (totaling \$400), twenty-six were for homespun and commercially manufactured cloth. See Watson, History of Agricultural Societies, pp. 124-125, 129-130; Smith, History of Pittsfield, pp. 338-343.

visit the autumnal events during their election campaigns.<sup>30</sup> Even before the industrialization that accompanied the Civil War, then, agricultural fairs in Massachusetts were more than agricultural events. They had already begun to evolve into the institution which has continued to the present day. But in the early nineteenth century, as one gentleman stated so aptly in a toast at the "Agricultural Dinner" of the 1822 Brighton fair, "the shows of the county Societies [provided] the best hopes of Agriculture."<sup>31</sup>

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30. For a case study examining the changes taking place at one fair over time, see Mastromarino, "Cattle Aplenty and Other Things in Proportion," UCLA Historical Journal (1984), 5: 66-68.

31. Mastromarino, "'The Best Hopes of Agriculture,'" p. 162.