

First Morrow County Fair held in 1903

The Morrow County Fair is now celebrating its 98th birthday, with the first fair held in 1903. Other interesting facts below include notation of a three year-cancellation of the fair during World War II.

- 1913 First Morrow County Fair held in the area of what is now the park and museum on Main Street. There were 200 entries of livestock and land products, no premiums were paid.
- 1915 Paid out \$1,500 in premium money. Fair held in early September.
- 1918 In January the first Oregon State Extension Office was established in Heppner. The 4-H program began in the early 1900s under the supervision of the Extension Service. Lucy Rogers, then school superintendent, was instrumental in helping to activate the county's 4-H program.
- 1919 County-wide participation was noted as Irrigon won first in community exhibits, and Boardman was awarded the best school exhibit.
- 1920 Boardman had its first commercial fair in September; exhibits were then sent express to Salem for the State Fair. It was the only county fair that year. Fairs in the south end of the county were held intermittently for a number of years.
- 1922 Rodeo area was established when L.V. Gentry donated that site for rodeos. The adjoining fairgrounds accommodations came about when the county traded the block on Main Street to the city of Heppner in exchange for the disbanded Civilian Conservation Corps site (workers had been housed in barracks buildings).
- 1923-
- 1930 County Extension agent and volunteers stage the fair. County court then appointed a three-person fair board to oversee activities.
- 1937 Beginning of FFA (Future Farmers of America). The program became an integral part of rural county fairs. Participation included livestock and shop projects, judging contests, demonstrations and tractor driving contests. Pole building sheds were erected to accommodate livestock exhibits for both open class and youth. Volunteer labor was contributed by ranchers and farmers.
- 1939 County fair in Heppner became an annual event after it was relocated to the present day rodeo/fair site. Old wooden buildings from the CCC site were converted into space for fair exhibits and became the permanent site.
- 1945 No Fair was held for three years during World War II
- 1946 A wooden barn building became the site of the newly formed Wrangler Riding Club; the club managed a horse show in conjunction with the fair activities.
- 1949 Beef and Sheep Building built.
- 1952 Brought about better exhibit space, construction of a large cinderblock building, (pavilion). A wooden dance floor was also installed for rodeo dances, community events and other activities throughout the year. Expanded areas of interest, in addition to home economics, land products and livestock classes, flower crafts, arts and hobby interests were added. Restrooms and dressing rooms built, used during football and baseball seasons, as well as rodeo and fair.
- 1954 Fairs in the north end of the county were discontinued when it became a state law limiting one fair per county.
- 1955 Dormitory built for overnight accommodations for those youth exhibitors living some distance from the fair.
- 1961 4-H snack shack was built on the grounds to provide meals for fairgoers and a source of revenue for 4-H programs by using volunteer labor.
- 1965 More livestock exhibit space was needed; a steel enclosed barn building was erected. Bleachers seats inside were added in 1966. Though limited in space this barn building has accommodated numerous horse-related events, including cow cutting and other events throughout the years. Additional outside show rings were added.
- 1968 A south grandstand was built to replace an old wooden structure. A large portion of the rodeo area was seeded to grass, thus accommodating school sports, summer baseball and other events. 1986 re-carpeted.
- 1975 Building converted from Wrangler Riding Club to house a collection of antique farm equipment donated to the county by Harold Peck. It is now by the Farm Museum.

1983 Fair growth necessitated installation of sewer lines; by hooking up to the city sewer system outdated septic tanks were eliminated.

1985 Trailer house donated by county court to help with overcrowding.

1996 A five member fair board was expanded to seven members, as fair interest continued to grow.

Installation of new water mains throughout Fair complex and new water lines to all buildings.

1997 Building and moving of rodeo area to smaller profession size rodeo arena and permanent steel spectator seating was added, instigated by the rodeo committee. Community support and volunteer labor helped finance new lighting for the grounds to provide illumination for nighttime rodeo events and football games. Additional parking areas for the rodeo were accomplished by filling in an area adjoining those grounds.

1998 Installation of new bathrooms in Fair pavilion.

New eight-inch water main-line from grade school to Fair entrance to accommodate fire protection for the Wilkinson Arena and all out-buildings.

1999 Through many volunteer hours and fund raising, the Wilkinson Arena was built to be used for 4-H and open class livestock exhibits. Other times of the year it is available to the public for barrel racing, roping or just riding.

2001 FFA discontinued in the county

2005 FFA started again in Irrigon and Boardman

2007 FFA started again in Heppner.

Old dormitory remodeled, new floors, showers installed in outside restrooms.

New floors installed in inside bathrooms.

Replaced pavilion roof with tin.

2008 Small animals area built, now a storage area

Fair buildings painted.

2009 4-H kitchen extended/remodeled

2010 Eric Chick painted and carpeted football bleachers as a scouting project.

High school built a new snack shack and remodeled the restrooms on football field.

2011 4-H annex roof replaced/repared.

Columbia Basin Electric Co-op

Extends our congratulations and best wishes to all the participants in the

MORROW COUNTY FAIR and OREGON TRAIL PRO RODEO

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