



MEDIA RELATIONS DEPARTMENT
PO BOX 389 RHINEBECK, NY 12572
PHONE: [\(845\) 876-4000](tel:(845)876-4000)
FAX: [\(845\) 876-4003](tel:(845)876-4003)

Contact: Vicki Imperati at vimperati@dutchessfair.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

THE FAIR COMES TO RHINEBECK

July 30th, 2019

Rhinebeck, NY - In the years following the Revolutionary War Dutchess County enjoyed an era of great prosperity and the countryside was dotted by large and productive farms. The farmers were the moneyed men of the community. Buoyed by their successes, a group of the most prominent men in the county met on February 15, 1806 to form *The Society of Dutchess County for the Promotion of Agriculture*. The organization's first President was Samuel Bard of Hyde Park. The Society's first fair was held in 1809 and continued annually for a number of years with prizes given for achievements in stock raising, quality and quantity of crops and domestic manufactures.

The roots of the current Agricultural Society began on October 16, 1841 with the formation of the Agricultural Society of Dutchess County at Daniel P. Emigh's hotel in Washington Hollow. A fair was held the following two years at the same location. Between 1844 and 1851 the fairs alternated between Poughkeepsie and Washington Hollow. In 1852 in order to establish a permanent location for the fair, the Society leased 7 acres of land in Washington Hollow in the vicinity of the current Barracks of Troop K of the New York State Police. The fair



MEDIA RELATIONS DEPARTMENT
PO BOX 389 RHINEBECK, NY 12572
PHONE: (845) 876-4000
FAX: (845) 876-4003

continued in this location for the next 35 years and gradually developed the fairgrounds to include wooden grandstands, a half-mile track, an octagonal exhibit hall, and various livestock barns and sheds.

Over the years other fairs were started in Rhinebeck, Amenia and Poughkeepsie and attendance at the Washington Hollow location declined. These other fairs were not destined to survive for long but by the 1880s there was a growing feeling that the Washington Hollow venue was located too far away from the population center at Poughkeepsie. In 1888 a decision was made to relocate the fair to the city's Hudson River Driving Park.

The move resulted in an immediate growth in attendance which was partially attributed to the addition of new attractions such as thrill shows, stunts and midway rides. The 1910 fair was one of the most successful, due in part to the appearance of former President Theodore Roosevelt who spoke to a crowd of 30,000 people.

The next few years were not so successful and there was no fair in 1916 and by 1917 the United States had entered the Great War leaving no real enthusiasm for a fair and meagre gathering was all that could be organized. By 1918 the Society was experiencing severe financial concerns and they were unable to prepay the rental fee for the Driving Park resulting in the cancellation of the fair.



MEDIA RELATIONS DEPARTMENT
PO BOX 389 RHINEBECK, NY 12572
PHONE: (845) 876-4000
FAX: (845) 876-4003

The following year beer magnate Jacob Ruppert, owner of the Driving Park refused his consent for the Society to hold their annual fair there. Failure to hold a fair for the second consecutive year put the Society at risk of losing its charter. Hearing of this situation and eager to promote the interests of Rhinebeck a group of local businessmen who were members of the Rhinebeck Realty Company attended a directors' meeting and offered to have the fair operated under their auspices at the Springbrook Race Track. On June 5, 1919 the Poughkeepsie Eagle-News reported the relocation of the fair to Rhinebeck. Among the leaders instrumental in relocating the fair were Benson Frost Sr., R. Raymond Rikert, and Dr. George N. Miller of Rhinebeck, and J. Griswold Webb of Hyde Park and Frank Chase of Pine Plains.

With only three short months until the September 16th start of the fair, planning began in earnest for what the organizers hoped would be a real country fair confined exclusively to local exhibitors. The three day fair, with a general admission of 25c, children under 12 free, promised livestock, poultry, farm produce, machinery and big free shows. Hoping to prove that the decision to move to Rhinebeck was right the locals did their best to make the fair memorable. Surprisingly, among all the wonderful offerings the most memorable event of the fair was the hotly contested mule race between Mrs. Roland Delano Redmond driving Mrs. Vincent Astor's pet mule Black Joe and Mrs. J.



MEDIA RELATIONS DEPARTMENT
PO BOX 389 RHINEBECK, NY 12572
PHONE: (845) 876-4000
FAX: (845) 876-4003

Griswold Webb with her white mule Bonnie Annie. At the end of two heats Mrs. Redmond brought in Black Joe by a fraction of an inch to claim the Blue Ribbon.

This year marks the 100th Anniversary of the fair's arrival in Rhinebeck. Over the past century there have been the expected ups and downs of any enterprise dependent on the economy and the weather. While much has changed much has remained true to the vision of those 1919 directors who chose to take a chance on Rhinebeck. This year you will still find the livestock, the poultry, the farm produce, the machinery and the rides. You'll still find the competitions for young and old and you'll still go home tired and happy after a long day at the county fair. Sadly, it's unlikely you'll find a mule race between two aristocratic ladies. Maybe next year.

###