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Abstract

A particular kind of allure surrounds agricultural fairs in Oklahoma. Agricultural fairs, which include county, regional, and state fairs in the United States, support emotional connections between fair participants and fair-related activities, as well as a perception of an American tradition. Aside from the midway and food vendors, most fairs continue a historic practice focused on teaching a strong work ethic and providing techniques for becoming a successful farmer in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The historic small farmer, sometimes referred to as the yeoman farmer, at one time represented an economic and social ideal. Yeoman farmers, whether male or female, may have only existed as a living tradition for a short time, but their memory and the values represented in this iconic figure continue. Agricultural fairs originally educated farmers and their families about the essentials for maintaining productive farming operations. Though these essentials have changed, many activities at the fair remain the same as a reminder of the skills associated with sustaining agriculture prior to the overly industrialized farming practices that now dominate.

The purpose of this project was to understand why county fairs continue to be an important institution in American society and why people continue to be drawn to them. An emotional tie to fairs as a particular cultural place supports ongoing efforts to sustain the vitality of these events regardless of social and economic changes that transpire in local communities or to agricultural production. Research for this study began in libraries and archives with a

search into the history of agricultural fairs in Oklahoma. The research continued with an ethnographic study at three fair sites around the state: Alfalfa County in far northwestern Oklahoma, Mayes County in eastern Oklahoma, and Oklahoma County in central Oklahoma. These sites were chosen based on community size, distance to urban areas, and level of participation at the local county fair. The community's connection to the agricultural industry was also considered. This study of Oklahoma county fairs also includes an exploration of the relationship between places and cultural identities that is a powerful part of the human condition. The bond to place helps individuals define their sense of self or identity. Aspects of identity linked to place can be termed place-identity (Tuan, 1974). Place-identity refers to an exchange of ideas and emotions between individuals and groups who develop meaning and interpretations of a place while garnering a sense of distinctiveness associated with that place. County fairs are especially intriguing to the study of place-identity because they are temporary events that happen once a year and they are not related to the way most people live. In this regard, fairs can be understood as liminal places within a ritual process based on Turner's (1969) definition. Fairs connect to daily life through participants but are disconnected events similar to the celebration of a holiday. The vast majority of people in the United States live an urban lifestyle and earn income from professions not associated with agriculture. Yet, many of these individuals participate in their local county fair through their children's youth activities such as 4-H or FFA, as volunteers who host the event, or as competitors in livestock or arts and craft shows.

Three objectives supported the research question behind this study of county fairs. The first objective was to collect information about the structure and value of county fairs in communities. Fair participants answered a set of questions posed about what makes fairs important. The second objective was to conduct a study of fairs in terms of their seemingly enigmatic purpose as a supporter of a nostalgic view of America's agrarian past and a current promoter of innovation and technology in agriculture. Third, the study involved documenting fair participation as it builds personal connections or attachments to a particular place. Connection to place underlies the reasons why some cultural groups engage in certain activities. This kind of connection also becomes the basis for developing and reinforcing examples of place-identity. In this sense, county fairs are both an idea and a location, the meanings of which interpenetrate group-identity studies within a cultural geographic context.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In Stong's 1932 novel *State Fair*, readers follow an Iowa farm family (the Frakes) on their quests for love and glory at the Iowa State Fair (Stong, 1932/1996). The fictional tale describes Stong's background and experiences growing up in rural Iowa and attending the county and state fairs annually. Strong used the book as a way to reminisce about his personal memory of going to the fair as an adolescent. He also illustrated how fairs operate as both comfort zones and contexts of uncertainty for attendees by shuffling his characters between situations that are familiar while pushing them to seek out the new or unfamiliar. The novel's main theme was what the fair meant or what it offered to those who participated, both in a real setting as remembered by Strong and in a fictional setting that he illustrated. The fairs he remembered allowed a person to escape the daily routine of farm life into a different world.

Stong's view of fairs has a curious resonance across the American psyche. Quoting Strong in the foreword, McCown (1996, p. xi) wrote, "The Frakes had stepped for a moment into a fantasy." McCown was drawn by Stong's interest in fantasy as a thematic device. This theme plays a role in defining particular kinds of places and settings. It also establishes desires and expectations for those engaged in activities taking place in that setting, as McCown (1996, p. xi) describes.

> The plot of *State Fair* is simple. Each member of the Frake family attends the fair with a purpose. Father Abel Frake, a farmer and stockbreeder, wants his Hampshire boar "Blue Boy" to win the sweepstakes. Abel's wife Melissa wants to win blue ribbons for her pickles. Son Wayne wants revenge at the hoopla stand, a carnival game

> in which prizes are won by tossing rings. And daughter Margy wants some fun. Wayne and Margy are also looking for romantic adventures.

Stong's novel became a bestseller and led to three lucrative film adaptations of the book between 1933 and 1962 (Ferrer, 1962; King, 1933; Lang, 1945). The latter two film versions were based on a musical by Rodgers and Hammerstein.

Stong is not the only writer to ruminate about experiences with agricultural fairs. Nonfiction writers have also discussed their fascination with fair activities over the years, often with similar perspectives to the fiction developed by Stong (Fish, 1998; Grace, 2006; McCarry, 1997). Most agriculture fairs[1] operate in a landscape that draws attention to common cultural values and social situations valuable to many in the United States. These fairs represent many things Americans cherish about the country's agrarian roots. They are intensified, romanticized culminations of everything wholesome about farm life or growing up in a small town. Several examples in the literature present fairs as romanticized experiences usurping or masking the challenges and dysfunctionalities of ordinary life in rural America. According to Prosterman (1995), "The county fair represents a world [people] would like to exist . . . which reinforce[s] a sense of togetherness in a fractured and strife-ridden world" (p. 12). In some ways, fairs are a remnant of Thomas Jefferson's iconic yeoman farmer[2] (Boundless, 2014; Foust, 1975). In Jefferson's preindustrial society,

[1] Agricultural fairs are competitive exhibitions of livestock, agricultural products, and household skills held annually by a town, county, or state. The term can be used interchangeably with the definition of a fair by location as long as it is understood in context or implied.

[2] A yeoman farmer is a farmer who cultivates his own land. It likely originated in the 14th century from the Middle English word for yeman or yoman. In late medieval society, a yeoman was a member of a class of small freeholders or landowners with common birth, as opposed to being of noble birth, who attained political rights sooner than other non-gentrified classes. The term yeoman throughout this study is used to represent yeoman as a mythic ideal and does not

most people hoped to own a self-reliant farm. The success of the emerging colonial economy in North America was based on expanding this definition of farming through unsettled lands west of the Appalachian Mountains and eventually beyond. This ideal was the benchmark of economic success before the middle class became the iconic representatives of American society. Aspects of fair activities today allude to that past. Many of the activities associated with agricultural fairs took place at the first fairs in the early 19th century, with fairs as pageants and expositions offering opportunities for everyone to participate in the yeoman dream. The basis of the dream is the ability to know the land by raising one's own produce and livestock or to be efficient at tasks required of farm families for sustainability such as quilting, canning, knitting, and other craft arts.

Interest in agricultural fairs comes from many outlets. As I authored this study, my interest incorporated the thoughts, influences, and perspectives introduced by Stong (1932/1996) and supported by Prosterman (1995) under the notion that fairs are part of America's agricultural legacy. The legacy is intriguing given that the vast majority of contemporary American society, including me, is no longer bound to life on a farm or other rural settings. If agricultural fairs are about reinforcing the yeoman farmer identity, I set out to determine what the attraction is given that the 19th-century yeoman farm does not exist and most people do not engage in any kind of commercial farming.

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serve as a gender reference. In U.S. history, the yeoman farmer classification could apply to many male or female adults and children who exhibited qualities associated with the term. For example, the term yeoman when used as an adjective means to perform or render in a loyal, valiant, useful, or workmanlike manner, especially in situations that involve a great deal of effort or labor ("Yeoman," n.d.).

For more than a century, fairs served as the principal agricultural exposition and site for education on a host of topics related to farming, herding, breeding, processing agricultural commodities, and managing farm households. Over the past century, agriculture has changed dramatically. A 2005 U.S. Department of Agriculture report highlighted the dramatic shift in American farming over time (Dimitri, 2005). American agriculture in the early 20th century was labor intensive and took place on many small, diversified farms. Rural America represented over 50% of the U.S. population. The farms represented almost half the U.S. workforce and had millions of work animals employed to assist with many essential tasks. Each farm varied but had an average of five different commodities or agricultural ventures. In contrast, the agricultural sector of the 21st century is concentrated on fewer large, specialized farms where 2% of the U.S. population lives (U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA], 2009). Farms in the mid-American states, such as Oklahoma, have long been highly productive and mechanized, but fewer farmers working larger sections of land dominate the industry in the 21st century and employ only a small percentage of the U.S. workforce. Five million tractors now replace what horses and mules did more than 100 years ago (Gardner, 2002).

Despite these economic changes, agricultural fairs continue to maintain a following. The overall attendance at county fairs declined in recent decades, but a rapid decline leveled off in the 1990s as key groups such as FFA, 4-H, county and state agricultural extension agents, local fair boards, and other groups worked to ensure the vitality of these events as important, annual

celebrations. County fairs include a variety of activities and ways for people across a county to express themselves socially, culturally, and politically. An increased focus on less agricultural-based programming and more reliance on aspects of the fair that align with popular culture interests, such as carnival rides, concerts, and food, and with environmental sustainability, such as exhibits and demonstrations produced by or from the perspective of agribusiness interests, helps sustain these events in communities where few people live on farms. For these communities and others, the sustainability of county fairs is about keeping a distinct portion of these events the same as they have been for decades. Livestock shows, trade booths from agricultural related businesses, displays related to crop production such as biggest produce and most bountiful grain production, and competitions focused on cooking and canning are still an important part of all agricultural fairs.

Problem Statement

Nonfiction authors, including authors of academic research, seldom consider what agricultural fairs represent today or why participants intimately engage in these events. The purpose of my research was to fill this gap. For participants, fairs are special events like holidays that also occur annually. In particular, fairs operate outside of Americans' daily routine, much like Christmas, Thanksgiving, Independence Day, Passover, or Easter. In this regard, fairs are liminal experiences or interludes set apart from everyday normative experience (Moore & Myerhoff, 1977; Turner, 1969). Yet, they are also an integral part of a common cultural context. Fairs generate multiple

junctures where participants with varying backgrounds congregate to share their experiences, many of which relate to a century-old vernacular and agrarian identity. The sense of identity puts the engagement with fairs into a realm of nostalgia. Nostalgia connotes sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past, typically for a period or place with happy personal associations. Many scholars have written about the role nostalgia plays in the definition of place. In geography, Bale (1989) related the concept to attachments people have to sports venues. Chase and Shaw (1989) edited a widely cited anthology that included an exploration into the implications of nostalgia on perceptions related to a host of considerations, including Lowenthal's (1989) essay on historic remembrance. Cronon (1983, 1996), an environmental historian, wrote extensively on how nostalgia affects the perception of place and the preservation of landscape.

By highlighting these previous studies, I am not suggesting that fairs are entirely nostalgic or that interest in agricultural fairs is misguided. Rather, fairs are a niche cultural interest. Fairs exist as cultural phenomena. Broad sectors of the population attend state and county fairs for the carnival rides and food vendors, and comparatively few may participate in the competitions, shows, and other agriculturally related activities. Nevertheless, the interest some have in activities other than rides or food was worth studying. I learned through my fieldwork that county fairs in particular are modest events focused on participants' interests in agricultural activities and not on the broader

entertainment outlets common to many state fairs, such as carnivals, rodeos, horse or car races, food, and concert performances.

From these considerations, I set out to learn more about the role and influence of agricultural fairs in communities. Having grown up in Oklahoma, I have a particular interest in county fairs across the state. As opposed to state fairs, these local venues have a stronger overall connection to the agricultural fairs of the past. State fairs have this connection as well, but nonagricultural entertainment options often overshadow the customary fair activities. State fairs, including Oklahoma's two state fairs, focus on attracting crowds through headline shows, circus and popular musical performers, family variety shows such as *Disney on Ice*, trade shows and traveling vendors, and thrills acquired from amusement-park rides. A study of county fairs allowed for a less distracted analysis of the human connection to place and opened up the possibility of understanding why local fairs persist and what draws people to them. This research and analysis leads to new knowledge about county fairs in Oklahoma and about how engagement with fairs can help support personal interests and community connection among groups with similar interests. County fairs are as much about social and cultural identity as they are about agriculture.

County fairs have long included core groups that practice varying degrees of participation. In a formal sense, such groups include the elected fair board and its appointed superintendents, staff of the county extension office, 4-H (which stands for *Head, Heart, Hands, and Health)*, the National FFA

Organization (FFA), and the state-associated Oklahoma Home Community Education (OHCE).[3] Less structured groups include the fair volunteers, unaffiliated individuals who compete in fair activities, people who attend fairs as part of their profession, and people who attend as a form of education, recreation, or entertainment.

Individuals often play multiple roles. For example, members of the FFA and 4-H are dedicated to education and youth-based activities while also working to promote fairs to the community through the actions of the fair board, the county agricultural extension office, and volunteer or membership organizations. Another role is as bystanders or individuals neither involved in organizing nor participating in scheduled activities who are part of the general crowd that supports those involved in particular events.

The variety of ways that people create and reinforce group identity has long been an essential area of study among many social scientists. These include actions by members that are formal, intrinsic, and required by the group and actions that are informal, incidental, and optional. Geographers have expanded this work by studying connections between established identities and

[3] Organizations that help produce local and state agricultural fairs are unique to the county and the event where they reside. As discussed in Chapter 5, the fair board is a body elected by county residents. The board appoints volunteer organizers called superintendents to help produce different sections of the fair such as the animal shows and arts and crafts events. Both 4-H and FFA are national youth organizations with a strong background in agricultural projects and activities. Each of these is organized by county with chapters hosted on either school sites or the county extension office. The county extension office is staffed by state officials with expertise and knowledge related to agriculture in the county. While they primarily serve local farmers and ranchers, they also organize educational programs for youth and the community. The OHCE is part of this educational effort. Member of this group teach and promote interest in what used to be called home economics, including sewing, quilting, knitting, cooking, canning, and other activities once a necessity for small, thriving family farms.

place.[4] Place-making is a process that illustrates humanity's desire to form a bond and claim ownership of spaces. These bonds can help individuals define their sense of self or identity. Aspects of identity linked to place can be termed *place-identity* (Proshansky, 1978). Place-identity should be thought of as an exchange whereby individuals and groups both develop meaning and interpretation for a place while garnering a sense of distinctiveness by association with that place. Place-identity has been described as a person's incorporation of place into a larger sense of self and defined as the set "of memories, conceptions, interpretations, ideas, and related feelings about specific physical settings, as well as types of settings" (Proshansky, Fabian, & Karminoff, 1983, p. 60). Place attachment is a part of place-identity, but place-identity is more than just attachment. Place-identity is a substructure of self-identity functioning much like gender and social class and consists of perceptions and comprehensions regarding the place.

Research Objectives

Three research objectives guided my consideration of fairs. These objectives served as the foundation of my premise that governed my collection of data and review of materials. First, I focused on collecting information about the current structure and value of county fairs. I posed questions to fair participants about what makes fairs important. I openly addressed this issue

[4] Much can said about the range of geographic material produced on this topic, some of which will be discussed further in this study as it relates to proposed research objectives and the findings outlined in subsequent chapters. Some examples of influential work include *Space & Place: Theories of Identity and Location* (Carter, Donald, & Squires, 1993) and *Place and the Politics of Identity* (Keith & Pile, 1993), both of which explored the way cultural identity and construction of place form through various laudable factors. A broader consideration of identity and place from a geographic perspective exists in McDowell (1997) and Cresswell (2004).

given that many community groups or their members no longer have an association with farming or do not earn a living through agriculture. My second objective was to study fairs in terms of their seemingly enigmatic purpose of supporting a nostalgic view of a mythic American past while promoting further innovation and technological development toward a robust future. Third, I documented the ways that participating in an event like a county fair can build personal connections or attachments to particular locales. These connections become the platform underlying subcultural group activities and become the basis for developing and reinforcing place-identity. In this sense, county fairs are both an ideology and a location, the meanings of which interpenetrate group identity within a cultural geographic context.

Scope

Research into this project began in 2008, which was 5 years before interviews with participants began. I visited half a dozen county fairs and at least one of the two state fairs in Oklahoma annually to collect information on the public structure and activities germane to county fairs in Oklahoma. I also reviewed documents in the state archives, local libraries, and local archives. To design and complete my fieldwork, I narrowed my documentation and research locations to three Oklahoma counties: Alfalfa, Mayes, and Oklahoma (see Figure 1). I based this choice of locations on a combination of factors, including variations in event activities, community population size and demographic profiles, and geographic location relative to metropolitan statistical areas

(MSAs) around the state. The three counties provided a variety of settings across Oklahoma useful in conducting this study.[5]

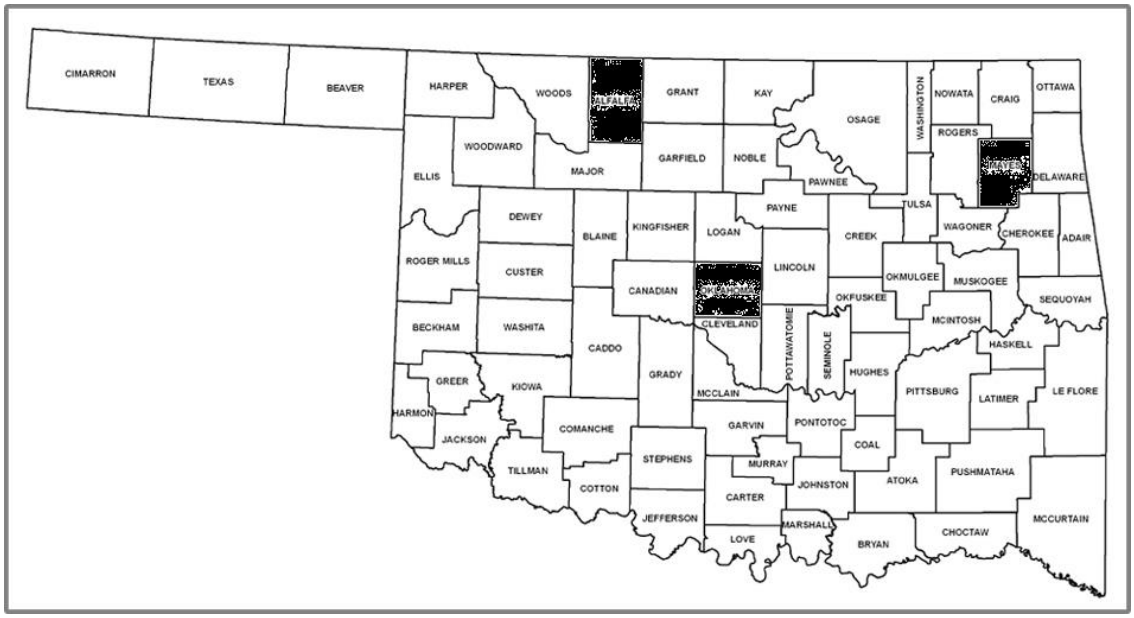


Figure 1. 2014 map of Oklahoma with fieldwork counties marked: northwestern (Alfalfa), eastern (Mayes), and central (Oklahoma).

In the summer and fall of 2013 and in the winter of 2014, I visited these sites to conduct a formal review of their county fairs. I combed their records, interviewed organizers, and observed and participated in each fair. The interviews were semistructured consultations with individuals identified as active participants in and organizers of county fairs. At each site, I met with 18-24 individuals. These informants represented a major, primary source for my research. Their comments helped illustrate how fairs work to build cultural identities for particular people. Regular and sustained engagement with the preparation process and activities associated with county fairs was important to

[5] More information on why these counties were chosen and other consideration that went into conducting fieldwork for this study is found in chapter 3 on methodology.

document in terms of how this contact influences personal perception and attachment to fairs as events.

Significance

A vibrant and interactive perspective on the environment includes the social, cultural, and psychological meanings of a place. Canter (1977, 1997), an environmental psychologist, has explored the latitudes of meaning associated with place. Canter was inspired by both the theory of behavior settings and phenomenology when he employed place as a term and developed his psychology of place. In Canter's terms, place is the product of physical attributes, human conceptions, and location-based activities. In comparison with Canter's (1977) psychology of place, Stokols and Shumaker's (1981) "transactional view of settings" (p. 441) can be seen as a view that further emphasizes the interdependent relationship between people and environment and that describes people and place as a unit, thereby highlighting the reciprocal influence among individuals and places. Like Massey (2005), I worked from a context that establishes place as a transaction where space itself is open, relational, and part of an ongoing process. Other recent graduate studies supported the vitality of this form of inquiry among younger scholars also interested in defining place as a geographical space that has acquired meaning because of a person's interaction with the space (Sowers, 2010; Speller, 2000).

The term place has been essential to geography since the 1970s (Easthope, 2004), but humanistic critique in geography started considering its

implications to the discipline in the late 1960s (Patterson & Williams, 2005). The study of place has taken researchers in many directions. Phenomenology, for instance, focuses on the subjective experience and perception of a person's lifeworld[6] (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2004; Husserl, 1970). Relph's (1976) research on *sense of place* and *placelessness* and Tuan's (1974, 1977) work on positive affective ties to place described as *topophilia* worked toward defining place in relation to terms such as *insideness* and *outsideness* to express people's feelings of being part of a group or attached to a place. Relph and Tuan also separated concepts of place when making distinctions between sense of place and rootedness, where sense of place refers to an awareness of a positive feeling about a place and to rootedness as a sense of being home. Place has also been explored by Seamon (1979), Buttimer and Seamon (1980), and Hart (1979). Seamon's early work (alongside Buttimer) connected human interest in places to a broader set of attachments than what interested Relph and Tuan. But, attachment to place is not always positive, nor does rootedness imply a willing attachment to place. Hart's exploration of children provided a sometimes ephemeral but oftentimes instinctual connection of place. Seamon in particular continues to pursue these issues vigorously in geography and architecture through the lens of phenomenology. Canter's (1977) work on place, Proshansky and colleagues' analysis of place-identity (Proshansky, 1978; Proshansky et al., 1983; Proshansky & Fabian, 1987), and Altman and Low's

[6] The term lifeworld refers to all the immediate experiences, activities, and contacts that make up the world of an individual or the groups they connect. In this research, the term lifeworld helps establish a distinction between life experiences of the everyday versus life experiences that occur just in the context of the fair. The term also helped establish a connection between experiences at the fair that emulate everyday experiences.

(1992) study of place attachment are other important efforts in the research literature on place. All the different concepts that researchers have used in relation to place, such as sense of place, place attachment, place-identity, and place dependence, are difficult to separate and have overlapping definitions. The phrase *sense of place* holds special meaning for cultural geographers, as it draws attention to the power and importance of location and landscape in studying culture. The term also emphasizes the ever-changing perspective of place as a process experienced by both a particular individual or group and differing groups who potentially have their own perspective on the same place. Studying agricultural fairs offered a unique opportunity to further understanding about sense of place because they are a structured locale with a long-standing place-making process.

I have a broad interest in agricultural fairs. However, this study went beyond a general fascination of these community events. The study built on a well-established dialogue about how places are maintained and how they relate to the cultural identity of individuals who hold some level of attachment to these places. The implications of this study extend beyond what is germane to agricultural fairs. The significance of this study applies to the way cultural identity occurs with other groups studied within a geographic context (e.g., DeLyser, 1999; Sowers, 2010). The need to expand the importance of this work beyond the context of agricultural fairs is important in terms of relevancy. Scholars and other writers have not ignored agricultural fairs and expositions. Therefore, a research project based on studying agricultural fairs for the sake of

documenting the locations and activities would have been too elementary. Fairs are one of the most widely documented events in American society, but there has been little effort to understand or contextualize them as distinct events. However, their mundane popularity and commonality are precisely why they made a good foundation of research for this study. By establishing a framework for examining fairs, the model could provide another set of opportunities to look at all kinds of cultural landscapes and their role in group identity and place-making. A model such as this provides a way to examine the cultural landscape where scholarship or public sentiment has been taken for granted or place-identity has not thought to exist because no defined cultural group has been identified to support efforts to articulate a definition of place within that landscape.

In conducting this research, I intend to use the study to increase the analytical considerations of agricultural fairs regarding their sociocultural phenomenology. I also hope to see alternative views of fairs develop resulting from my research and any dialogue with communities and scholars that results. I want to move beyond the focus of certain publications from the 30 years that present agricultural fairs solely as intrinsic links to America's popular culture iconography and nostalgia. While there is nothing wrong with this view, an expanded framework would provide a refreshing look at fairs, including how fairs in their traditional form still maintain some of their original iconic status. This examination could include whether aspects of a county fair, namely the carnival, food vendors, and other nonagricultural activities, are undermining the

value of the agricultural or home craft events. Another way to think about studying county fairs is to consider whether the changing dynamic of agriculture in the United States isolates the value of fairs to simply memories. With the rise of other forms of celebration and public gathering in communities across the United States, the genre of agricultural fairs could already be obsolete. However, attachment to activities does not have to be relevant to lifeworlds. Emotional considerations can lead to financial investment in activities that aid in supporting a positive view of one's self, one's legacy, or one's value system. Business interests recognize the importance of a feel-good attitude by consumers, which may be why some corporations such as John Deere still sponsor activities and events at local agricultural fairs. To understand and evaluate these points of view, it is necessary to review the significance of agricultural fairs in a contemporary context through more details and across a diverse spectrum of academic analysis.

In establishing a framework for this research, my academic career influenced this work. As an undergraduate art major and as a folk studies graduate student, I repeatedly deliberated the validity behind Louis Sullivan's (1896) statement, "form follows function." While originally an architectural declaration, contemporary artists and humanities scholars use this statement in many ways to support rebellions against older conventions about art and cultural expression or affirmations to established conventions. In Michael Asher's visual art critique class at the California Institute for the Arts, heated debates ensued among students and faculty concerning the fine line between

conceptual frameworks and aesthetic pursuits in cultural expression. In Michael Ann Williams's folk art class at Western Kentucky University, students engaged this concept in an effort to understand folk landscapes as defined by Kniffen and Glassie in contrast to definitions that emerged from ethnographic documentations of folk artists by scholars such as Jones (1989) and Santino (2004). It is easy to see how Sullivan's statement holds true as documented in Kniffen's work on the diffusion of folk architecture (Kniffen & Glassie, 1966), but Jones's work with furniture maker and outsider artist Chester Cornett dispelled this analytical thought (Jones, 1989). Jones and others have (Vlach, Bronner, & American Folklife Center, 1992) offered a conceptualization of culture based on personal expression and individual attachment (Santino, 2004), which for me aligns with the spirit of the research questions posed in this introduction. Ultimately, this project involved working toward rethinking how cultural identity should be understood within the place-making process and in contemporary geographic thought. The study of place-making allows researchers to study both form and function, regardless of whether one follows the other. The form of a landscape and the function of a landscape work in tandem when it comes to county fairs, as revealed in the coming chapters. This consideration also allows one to reflect on how the relationship between form and function plays back to an individual's involvement in this process through determining the individual's attachment to place and the reason that attachment is important.

Chapter Overview

The following chapters present the process completed in conducting this study. Chapters include both empirical qualitative data and subjective analyses germane to this study. The literature review in Chapter 2 highlights relevant studies and academic contexts that frame my methodology, the information collected, and the basis for my analysis relative to previous research on the topic. The literature review includes an overview of how this study relates to previous work on agricultural fairs and on place-identity. Chapter 3 addresses the methodology and the applied method in completing this work. This chapter includes an explanation of the procedures in this study on county fairs and place-identity. It includes information on data sources, characteristics of the participants interviewed, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques. Essentially, this was a qualitative study informed by the application of an ethnographic strategy to collect field observations and conduct interviews with fair participants. In Chapter 3, I also talk about how the research process relates to the research question. Importantly, I articulate how human participant interviews were used to inform this study and how precautions were taken to ensure the protection of participants' rights.

In the latter parts of this study, which begin in Chapter 4, I make an effort to establish a relationship between people and place through my research. Chapter 4 provides a background or context to county fairs in Oklahoma. The geographic context for county fairs is understood both from the perspective of county fairs in the United States over time and from the point of view of

Oklahoma's agricultural history. Chapter 5 includes information and considerations for planning, organizing, and hosting county fairs. Through library and archive research, interviews, and ethnographic observations, an elaborate description of county fairs is provided. Chapter 5 includes general comments about fair activities, as well as specifics related to the three primary research sites at the heart of this study. While subjectivity is implicit throughout this work, this chapter is written in an objective manner to report the essential findings of my fieldwork and data collection. Chapter 6 provides a summary of my interviews and begins the analysis of my findings. Chapters 4 through 6 provide the crux of my research. In these chapters, my research questions and the actual research become connected. However, the latter part of Chapter 6 packages the research in advance of my concluding remarks. Chapter 7 is the conclusion of this study in which I apply the data and materials highlighted in the six preceding chapters to the research question and the study objectives previously outlined in this opening chapter. In the conclusion, I pull together all the relevant information to support my thesis and suggest ways to interpret my research about how fairs relate to place-identity, including speculations on how this study can be useful in future scholarship.

Chapter 2: Place-Identity and Agricultural Fairs in Previous Scholarship

In the anthology *The Role of Place Identity in the Perception, Understanding, and Design of Built Environments* (Casakin and Bernardo, 2011), architect Hernan Casakin challenged scholars to become more prolific in studying place-identity to establish a better understanding of what constitutes this term and why it is so important to particular groups and locations. "While place identity constitutes a significant theme for debate, the relationship between identity, place, architecture, and urban design still deserves more attention. What constitutes place-identity is a controversial issue that continues to generate heated discussion and disagreement" (Casakin and Bernardo, 2011, p. 8). Bernardo and Palma (2005) echoed this assessment of a fractured understanding of place and identity. I did not attempt to quell the debates Casakin (and perhaps Bernardo or Palma) hoped to resolve, but I did expand perspective on identity and place, at least within geography. Contrary to Casakin's comments, place studies have been widely reviewed by geography and geographers increasingly look toward defining place as a process rather than as a thing. This idea of process has become an exciting part of the ongoing dialogue among scholars from varying disciplines interested in place-identity. The research presented in this study emerged from the premise that individuals and groups rely on place association to create and sustain aspects of identity, including connections to cultural contexts from the past. County fairs play a role in the cultural identity of some people, which also links current

cultural expression with the past. Fairs are temporary places that would not exist if individuals and groups hosting them did not support the ideals associated with fairs historically and, as I introduce in later chapters, mythologically.

As discussed in upcoming chapters, the purpose of a fair is diverse and includes a myriad of activities supported by several organizations and dedicated people, most of whom volunteer their time. Therefore, the value of this study also rests with a reflection about agricultural fairs in the United States not considered in previous studies. In fact, an underlying critique of previous research exists in various chapters of this work, including this chapter. For example, rare to previous research methods are diverse groups of people consulted about their experience with fairs. I interviewed a cross-section of fair participants to learn more about how age and length of association with fairs influence perceptions of these events. Built into my research design, I also took into account the different perspectives between fairs hosted in highly rural communities, more populated rural or suburban communities, and urban settings. These two considerations influence how people evaluate the success and challenges of hosting and participating in their local fair. Like any topic of research, there is a history and a framework for how agricultural fairs (whether on a state or county level) are perceived. Reviewing the literature that has documented that perspective helps put this study in context. In addition, the literature review positions this investigation within the study of cultural

geography and helps explain how this relates county fairs back to the concept of place-identity in the social sciences and humanities.

Study of Place-Identity

Since the 1970s, the definition of place in geographical terms has focused on the combination of location (i.e., a particular space) and meaning (Agnew, 1987; Cresswell, 2004; Tuan, 1977). Places are locations with meaning derived from a series of both denotations and connotations. Places do not exist naturally; rather, they become made through a place-making process. The process is highly fluid based on ways identity is formed and attachments to place become defined. According to Bernardo and Palma (2005), "People are attached to places by processes that reflect their behavioural, cognitive and emotional experiences in their socio-physical environment" (p. 75). These factors also influence context, which according Breakwell's identity process model (1986, 1992) involves four principles of identity. The formation of place-identity occurs in everyone and can be understood through different layers of attachment such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, distinctiveness, and continuity. These layers are mostly about personal attachments to place, but outside influences such as positions of authority relative to a place can influence place attachment.

Geographical interest in the ideas relating to identity and place initially gained momentum with the development of humanistic geography. The humanistic approach to cultural geography was born from the work of Yi-Fu Tuan, and scholarship in this vein tends to be concerned with humanity's

perceptions and values as associated with the interpretation of cultural landscape. Scholars in this area seek what it means to be a human being (Conzen, 1990; Jordan & Kaups, 1997; Jordan, Kilpinen, & Gritzner, 1997), which was an essential element in my previous research on family narratives and the role of historic places in community identity (Roberts, 1998, 2000).

To the extent that meaning plays a role in the creation of cultural environments, humanistic geographers are concerned with documenting interpretations. All landscapes, particularly those concerning place association, form through personal and group interpretations of places. Humanistic geography has focused on how interpretations of places emerge through human creativity, human consciousness, and the human condition (Murphy, Jordan-Bychkov, & Bychkova-Jordan, 2008; Till, 1999; Tuan, 1996). Humanistic geographic perspective approaches the subjectivity of interpretation as a first step toward establishing a framework for investigating how interpretations materialize through historic, cultural, social, political, and economic influences and what they mean moving forward for the groups that generate these interpretations. Unlike other areas of cultural geography, they humanistic geographers have considered these issues in concert with traditional humanities disciplines such as history, philosophy, folklore, anthropology, and literature. Those who consider themselves humanistic geographers engage and accept a wide range of humanistic philosophies, including phenomenology, idealism, materialism, pragmatism, and realism. Two methods of interpreting landscape predominate. The first one emphasizes

tangible elements in the cultural landscape, and the second one stresses issues of cultural perception or the intangible elements in or derived from landscape.

Although humanistic geographers are known for this area of analysis, they are not the only ones thinking about these issues. Tuan is often credited with introducing this topic; however, environmental psychologist Proshansky (1978) helped establish a discipline around these issues and published a set of important considerations about place-identity. Place-identity refers to an individual's incorporation of place into a larger concept of self and is defined as a "potpourri of memories, conceptions, interpretations, ideas, and related feelings about specific physical settings, as well as types of settings" (Proshansky et al., 1983, p. 60). Place attachment is considered a part of place-identity, but place-identity is more than attachment. Place-identity is a substructure of self-identity, much like gender and social class, and is comprised of perceptions and comprehensions regarding the landscape. These perceptions and conceptions can be organized into two types. One type consists of memories, thoughts, values, and settings. The second type consists of the relationship among different settings, such as home, school, and neighborhood (Proshansky & Fabian, 1987). Most studies, including mine on county fairs, incorporate some aspect of these two types in their research and analysis.

To understand the foundations of place-identity, it is important to consider its development during adolescence. Identity develops as children learn to differentiate themselves from people around them. Much can be said

about this process of differentiation, but for the sake of brevity, identity occurs when a range of influences become factors that guide learned behavior and the establishment of a distinct self. Such factors include the natural order of human existence (biological factors), the background of the individual (context and extent of nurturing during adolescence), and personal realizations about the relationship between one's self and environment (judgment factors). Other factors can include political, economic, and social influences that interject influence through overt and covert messaging. An example is to think of the way gender identity is sold through retail outlets or the way the media portray particular races and ethnic groups in the news or in advertising. Similarly, place-identity develops as children learn to see themselves as distinct from, but related to, their physical environment. The development of place is similar to development of identity in one's self. Some of the same factors that influence identity of self also influence identity of place. Language plays an important role in this regard. What children hear and infer about places from their peers, adults, community, and media creates a portrait of space that creates an identity for that space. Portraits of space are essential to place-making and to forming place-identity. Among the first identity determinants are those rooted in children's experience with toys, clothes, and rooms. The home is the environment of primary importance, followed by the neighborhood and the school. Here, social and environmental skills help one formulate associated relationships. In addition, the lenses from which children later will recognize, evaluate, and create places form.

Place-identity changes happen throughout a person's lifetime (Proshansky & Fabian, 1987). Five central functions of place-identity are recognition, meaning, expressive-requirement, mediating change, and anxiety and defense function. While Proshansky and other environmental psychologists articulated the value and range of these functions, for this study these functions provided a foundation for understanding the relationship participants have with county fairs. Each person relates to place in his or her own unique ways. Younger fair participants recognize the value of the fair as an outlet for expressing their interests in agricultural competitions, among other ways to participate. Older fair participants react to the changes to the fair during their years of involvement. During my fieldwork, both age groups expressed some apprehension and anxiety about the future of county fairs. While the details of these reactions will surface in later chapters, these brief examples show how the five central functions of place-identity can occur in a myriad of combinations and contexts. Place-identity becomes a cognitive reservoir against which every physical setting is experienced (Proshansky et al., 1983).

Researchers of place-identity are concerned with a set of concepts and ideas about place and identity in a variety of disciplines, including environmental psychology, philosophy, semiotics, urban sociology, geography, urban planning, urban design, architecture, and landscape architecture. For geographers, place-identity has meant paying attention to the subjective experience of people in a world of places (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977). A link

exists between many geographic studies of place-identity and the study of phenomenology. Many geographers have explored the theoretical possibilities introduced by 20th-century phenomenology scholars and existential philosophers. The earliest examples of Relph's work (1970, 1976) on place research have become an integral part of nearly all forms of phenomenology and humanism in geography. Phenomenology is the interpretive study of human experience that seeks to describe how knowledge and familiarity become human experiences. Phenomenological studies examine and clarify these human experiences "as they spontaneously occur in the course of daily life" (von Eckartsberg, 1998, p. 3) and present a "description of human life as it is lived and reflected upon in all of its first-person concreteness, urgency, and ambiguity" (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997, p. 5).

Place presents a critical tie between people and their lifeworld. The study of place as an experience has been an essential part of geography for decades (Pollio et al., 1997). Pollio et al. (1997) noted, "Geographical science has in fact a phenomenological basis; that it is to say, it derives from geographical consciousness. . . . [G]eographers and geography exist only in a society with a geographical sense" (p. 21). In a similar way, Relph (1976) explained that "place has often been identified implicitly as the essential feature of the phenomenological foundations of geography" (p. 5). The study of place as an experiential phenomenon gained ground as other scholars began to consider the implications of Tuan and Relph's work (Cresswell, 2004; Peet, 1998). Another early influence was Buttimer (1976), who asked in "Grasping

the Dynamism of the Lifeworld" if dwellings should be defined as nouns or verbs. Buttimer believed that the structuralist work on place took a decidedly outsider perspective, which tended to see all things cultural as fixed objects or nouns. Instead, Buttimer believed that dwellings are verbs: a mode of positive connection between a people in their world. This consideration extends to my study of fairs. My research model built from collecting interviews with fair participants and using their insights as the cornerstone of my analysis. Another, county fairs exhibit characteristics as both an activity and a place by their very nature, but they also exist in process form as the relationship between people and the county fair continues to change. Under this consideration, Relph (1976) might think of county fairs as an example of Gabriel Marcel's considerations of place. Like all places, county fairs exist because "an individual is not distinct from his place; he is that place" (p. 38).

Aside from the work of Tuan, Relph, and Buttimer in the late 1970s and early 1980s, other examples stress similar humanistic themes. Entrikin (1991) argued for the need to have a more holistic approach to academic studies that includes insider narratives to explore how place lies between objective and subjective understandings of geography. More insider narratives often yield information about places that cannot be deciphered through common empirical research means. If humanistic geography focuses on documenting interpretations of landscape, then including those who generate those interpretations as partners in the research process is vital. Daniels (1987) similarly contended, "The meaning of a place is inseparable from the

consciousness of those who inhabit it" (p. 151). In a more recent study on an unincorporated area of southern California, Sowers (2010) applied existential phenomenology to a discussion of place-identity. Pulling from Relph (1970), Sowers contended that all places are based on experiential knowledge. In an effort to show how multiple definitions of community can overlap, Relph noted,

> Place . . . is only one phenomenological vantage point from which to clarify the person-world relationship, but it is a crucial starting point for the human sciences, since people are physical, bodily beings who must establish and identify themselves spatially and environmentally. (as cited in Sowers, 2010, p. 131)

Place-identity affects the physical or spatial features of a setting (such as structure, spatial features, built form, landscape, and furniture), activities carried out in it (such as movement, flow, and behavior patterns), and its meaning (such as cultural relations, legibility, and semiotics). All of these considerations contribute to one of two ways to think about place. Place has a physical or tangible setting (buildings, parks, infrastructures of transport and communication, signs, memorials, etc.) and gains definition by intangible factors commonly associated with the phrase *sense of place*. Sense of place refers to the meanings, both individual and shared, associated with a place, which Buttimer and Seamon (1980) contended puts more emphasis on the experiences in place-identity and less on the objectification of place.

One of the most important concepts to consider in understanding the subjective nature of place concerning county fairs is the term *topophilia*, which means love of place and comes from the Greek *topos* and *–philia*. The origins of this term are widely believed to come from the poet W. H. Auden in his 1948 introduction to John Betjeman's poetry *Slick but Not Streamlined* (Tobin, 2007,

p. 50; A. Watts, 1973). He used the term as an endearment or description of Betjeman's work. In geography, the term is most closely aligned with Tuan's (1974) seminal book of the same name: *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values*. The term relates to having a strong sense of place, which often mixes with a sense of cultural identity and having a strong or emotional relationship to a place. To illustrate, Bale (1989) explored the relationships between sport, place, location, and landscape in *Sports Geography*. Places, for example, are the means of identifying most sports teams' location and field, stadium, court, or rink, while sports teams both affect, and are affected by, the physical environment and emotional landscape associated with place. Bale elevated the relationship between sports teams and geography by citing five characteristics that make professional or collegiate stadiums particularly good examples of topophilia. They are sacred spaces for their followers (fans); they often have scenic qualities; and as a home to the team and fans, they have psychological advantages too. Stadiums are often tourist attractions to visitors or must-see venues, and they have strong ties to local pride. The same kind of connection occurs between county fairs and their participants. This relationship, like other topophilia, is deep, affectionate, and profound in the minds of fair participants. To certain members of the community, fairs ignite pride and garner a common community identity that ties to the fair itself.

Humanistic geographers concentrate on the association between people and the world through experiences. Leading humanistic geographer Tuan

(1977) wrote, “The given cannot be known in itself. What can be known is a reality that is a construct of experience, a creation of feeling and thought” (p. 9) Focusing on place is about looking at the creative process humans engage in as they define their presence in their lifeworld, or in other words, how people relate to their environment and make it into places. This study of county fairs represented an effort to look at the creation of place as a continual process. As suggested above, outside influences put weight on this process, but much of Proshansky’s five functions of place-identity are about local, individual, or inside influences on the place-making process. Recent geographic examples, some of which are highlighted below under geographic studies of festivals, emphasize the need to understand place-making through local design, exchange of ideas, and cooperative fieldwork. Phillips (2012) provided a starting point for reviewing these different types of place-making studies through a list and review of formal and informal geographic documentation efforts that strive to understand the unique elements and the local experiences of people who associate with a particular place.

Although fundamental descriptions often attained through empirical observations are an important starting point for humanistic and phenomenological studies, the ultimate aim for the researcher is to use these descriptions as evidence from which to discover underlying commonalities that mark some of the important qualities of the phenomenon. However, unlike the old structuralist perspective, this discovery is no longer an essentialist process. Rather, scholars use research to make suggestions and draw attention to

considerations and possibilities. In the case of my study, the experiences associated with county fairs were the phenomenon, and my analysis was nothing more than an informed perspective. Phenomenology was not the exclusive analytical method used in this study, but work completed under this banner shares much in common with the research objectives I proposed. Phenomenology "asks if from the variety of ways which men and women behave in and experience their everyday world there are particular patterns which transcend specific empirical contexts and point to the essential human condition" (Seamon, 1979, p. 21). This research project involved exploring place as a lived connection by investigating place-identities, attachments, meanings, and senses of place.

Humanistic geographers have not been the only ones looking at the concept of place in new ways. Other thoughts inspired by Marxism, feminism, and poststructuralism developed a critical approach to human geography, which brought into question both the inhuman world of spatial science and the subjectivity of humanism (D. Harvey, 1989; Keith & Pile, 1993; Rose, 1993). Place, under these critical views, is not just about a positive sense of attachment and rootedness but also driven by power. Places are created, and they reflect the society that produces them. Just as a child may create a favorite place in his or her bedroom, so businesses, governments, and those in positions of power create their own places. Marxists point out that capital needs to circulate through places that are relatively fixed forms of investment. Towns and cities compete as places to attract investment. The symbolism of

place similarly reflects the kinds of images that the relatively powerful in society wish to project. Consider a village or neighborhood in a city. The kinds of material structure that make it unique, such as buildings, retailers, and parks, are the products of a particular class of people with certain interests: broadly speaking, the power of business and the smooth circulation of capital (A. Smith, 1991). Similarly, the projected meanings of this place are the preferred meanings of dominant groups. The kinds of things people do there make it the kind of place it is. This combination of material, meaning, and practice make a very different concept of place from the one it was decades ago, when it was perhaps known for a different demographic profile of people or when place was more rural than today.

Many of the previously mentioned works are critical of both humanistic and phenomenological geographic studies. Peet (1996, 1998) and Cresswell (2004) echoed comments made by well-known geographers such as D. Harvey, Wiley, and Rose that humanism and phenomenology approaches from the past are too abstracted and generalized for use in contemporary geographic studies. This means they do not consider the importance of political economy in exploring how the logics of capitalism in particular and the market in general shape people's experience and perception of place. Despite the critique, empirical case studies have emerged that provide a more grounded consideration of place studies through a humanistic view. Some examples include Hufford's (1986) research on the relationship between the natural and built environment in a New Jersey national park. Chaffin (1989) studied how a

river in Louisiana integrated community togetherness physically and experientially, Lane (1998) examined how mountain and desert environments serve as therapeutic landscapes, and Quinney (1991) linked Eastern philosophy and country music as a means to describe rural places in Northern Illinois.

For many humanist geographers, place is an encouraging element in cultural identity, but place can just as easily be seen as discouraging, segregationist, and exclusionary. Places may seem natural, but in fact, they are not. The material structure of a place is often the result of decisions made by those with power or authority, decisions that put place at the service of their own political and economic ends. Fairs, for example, are constructed places that occur once a year. Decisions on what to include and how to include activities and elements at the fair are deliberate. D. Harvey (1993) wrote, “The first step down the road is to insist that place, in whatever guise, is, like space and time, a social construct. The only interesting question that can be asked is, by what social process(es) is place constructed” (p. 5)? This perspective is a much different view of place than found in the texts of early geographic humanism. To early humanistic geographers, place was a universal and transcendent imperative. D. Harvey, in contrast, insisted that place is often reactionary; it can just as easily be a point of inclusion as one of exclusion for others who do not belong.

Contemplations of this nature gave rise to critical cultural geography that provided for a series of interesting explorations on how places were implicated

in processes of exclusion in the 1990s (Cresswell, 1996; Sibley, 1995). In designing my fieldwork approach to county fairs, I considered ways certain groups with strong ties to the fair might be exclusionary in their engagement with the fair. Positionality within a group can influence how definitions of place form. The connection between place and particular meanings, practices, and identities leads to the construction of normative places where it is possible to be either in or out of place. Objects, practices, and people labeled as out of place, or deviant, are said to have transgressed boundaries that define what is appropriate. These unspoken rules exist in the world of common sense. The very commonsense nature of place-based norms makes them a powerful ideological tool.

The process of identifying how normative constructions of place exclude others both physically and existentially has been noted across a whole range of identities, including class, race, sexuality, and gender (Kitchin, 1998; May, 2000; Valentine, 1993). Kitchin (1998) explored themes of limitation and imposed limitations with disabled individuals managing a lifeworld controlled by authorities who often do not understand or appreciate the issue of limitation. May (2000) examined the definition of home as both real and imagined among transient, homeless populations. Valentine (1993) considered the challenge that typical heterosexual concepts of identity impose on lesbians with regard to trying to make connections to certain places, such as common social institutions. Each example also revealed how the excluded contest, disobey, and resist the social constructions of place. These works on place have tended

to emphasize the way place is not fixed or unchanging but open and in a constant state of construction by the people, ideas, and things that pass in and out of them. Massey (1993, 2004) labeled this approach to place as progressive or global, but Massey also validated the essential use of phenomenology in the humanistic approach to place-identity studies. Whether the discussion involves disabilities, homelessness, or sexual identity, each works toward a larger understanding about experience observable beyond the limitations of the study itself. The advantage of phenomenology is the way scholars can work toward capturing the essence of a particular group as well as implicate that group and the greater society in the phenomenon. Massey in particular noted that if researchers think of place as clearly bounded and rooted in singular histories, then people tend to associate ownership with places (an us-versus-them or a mine-and-theirs perspective). This forms the basis for a xenophobic perspective. If individuals think of place as progressive, then understanding rests in a concept of place constantly made and remade by their fluid interactions with the world beyond. Thus, this idea that place is fluid presents a definition that is more welcoming (Massey, 2004).

Studies of Agricultural Fairs in the United States

Studies of fairs divide into a few key groups based on common characteristics. A review of early writings on fairs revealed the overall lack of historic context for the existence and influence on these events. Earlier works promote fairs as a burgeoning movement in material authored in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Fairs were revered as the vanguard and the showcase of

things to come and as innovations common to or iconic of a developing modernist era (Kelly, 1997). Researchers took for granted the role of small family farmers (yeoman farmers) in agriculture during this time or the growing degree of mechanized farming practices, particularly with cash crops such as cotton, wheat, and tobacco that emerged after the Civil War. Materials and publications promoted the role fairs play within the industrializing complex, even in those that contained some reference to the historic context of agricultural fairs in the United States (see Cottman, 1907; Holmes, 1913).

The best source that chronicled these early writings is Neely's book *The Agricultural Fair* (1935), which is a text thick with various citations about state and county fairs.[7] Neely highlighted academic sources, as well as various other materials published prior to the 1930s. His meticulous work provided the nexus for agricultural fair writings. In particular, the earliest reference to an agricultural fair in the United States is an 1820 pamphlet by the father of the modern county fair in the United States, Elkanah Watson, which provided details on how to run an agricultural exposition. Neely chronicled the development of fairs in tandem with the modernization and expansion of agriculture. Fairs are a lifeline for educating farmers about new techniques, new crops, and better technology. In this regard, fairs are more of a modernist movement than an expression of nostalgia for an agrarian past. Avery (2000) supported this early view of fairs and the writings about fairs. In general, the older the study, the less historic the information or reflections provided. The aim was to validate and present

[7] Rather than chronicle all the writings from this period, I refer those interested to Neely's book directly, which contains some 30 pages of sources from across the United States. These examples cover state, regional, and county fairs.

strategies geared toward promoting and organizing these kinds of events (Holmes, 1913; Lemmer, 1943). Laning (1881) dedicated his life to promoting standards and continuity in the production of agricultural fairs. His book *How to Manage Agricultural Fairs, Industrial Institutes, and Similar Exhibits* was widely referenced by fair organizers even after his death in 1941.

The assessment of older literature led to a different picture about agricultural fairs in the United States than what some historians have asserted. The agricultural fair movement is an extension of a long history of similar events dating back to the High Middle Ages. However, the growth of fairs in the United States actually had little to do with tradition or heritage inherited from European ancestry, which began as trading fairs in villages along major roads (Avery, 2000, p. 11). Agricultural fairs in the United States share something in common with these older forms as an event strategy familiar to postcolonial America, but the overt aims of Watson and other leaders during the 19th century were quite new and different. The spirit of fairs may have roots in western European practices (Allix, 1922), but fairs today grew out of a rapidly industrializing 19th-century America that saw fairs as a vehicle or venue to support broader implications related to attaining, cultivating, and using land. If yeoman farmers were the backbone of the American economy, then their small family farms needed to become the most efficient and productive operation possible. In the context of this America, individuals from various social, economic, and cultural positions viewed the rise of agriculture with fairs as a necessary element to educate farmers and ranchers about ways to improve their business as well as

to have political and economic advantages (W. J. Gates, 1984; T. Watts, 2002). However, fairs in this context are not necessarily the central catalyst of a modernizing agricultural society, but rather a footnote or piece of a larger picture that illustrates the development of agriculture in the United States.

Neely (1935), and others that he cited, play up the importance of fairs as political and economic arenas across history. Politically, they were part of a move in the 19th century (especially in the North) toward self-sufficiency and local reliance. Economically, they were a part of a drive toward educating people about the efficient and sustainable practice of family-scale farming to which the fairs were relied upon in the absence of the land-grant colleges and agricultural extension agencies on which farmers currently rely. Hence, fairs in this context were about professionalizing or streamlining the yeoman farm profession, which was vital to the success of a fabled westward expansion across the United States. Agricultural fairs are thought of in terms of how they helped develop better practices in agriculture and animal husbandry (W. J. Gates, 1984; Laurin, 1982). Neely mentioned these points to communicate what drives agriculture in general and to illustrate how fairs helped propel agriculture as a movement and not just a profession.[8]

Since the mid-20th century, the number of scholarly views of agricultural fairs has decreased. During this time, writers began to focus less on the role of fairs as keys to building a better agricultural tomorrow and more on how fairs relate to an agricultural tomorrow that was idealized in the past. Starting in the

[8] The Grange movement and similar labor movements helped organize farmers as a collective workforce through unionization, professional associations, and farmer-owned cooperatives.

1950s and 1960s, scholars reflected upon the value of fairs in society. Fairs are an institution that illustrates in real time the history of agriculture and its influence on local culture. Kniffen's (1949, 1951) articles on modern agricultural fairs and expositions illustrated this perspective. Kniffen set out to establish a pattern or archetype for agricultural fairs in the United States in 1949 and to document their geographic distribution and expansion in history. In the second article, Kniffen looked at the seasonal timing and placement for the fairs. Kniffen also mapped the location of county fairs across the United States. Although dated, these two articles have some relevancy. The studies provide a historic context for examining the change in the production of fairs. When interviewing fair participants, they provide a reference point for conversations with older individuals. These studies also are a rare geographic examination of agricultural fairs and festivals in the United States, which helped provide some guidance on conducting this study.

Marti (1986), similar to Neely (1935), discussed the broad status and importance of fairs in the United States. Picking up where Neely left off, Marti focused on fairs and literature about fairs from the 1930s to the mid-1980s. While overly indebted to Neely, Marti relied heavily on surveys and discussions with fair managers, cooperative extension agents, and other people connected with fairs for a great deal of information. Marti looked at fairs as destinations and cultural events ripe for experience by visitors not associated with the agricultural industry. Unlike Neely, Marti did not provide a comprehensive list of fairs or studies of fairs. Rather, Marti provided a selection of a few hundred

events and two dozen additional sources to support his review. This view of fairs highlighted a differing perspective between earlier material and the material produced more recently. As agriculture has become a less prominent profession for most people in the United States, the outlook on fairs has changed. Instead of viewing fairs as events common to most people's lives, they become cultural anomalies worth studying from outsider perspectives or enjoying as some form of heritage tourism by individuals not associated with these events.[9]

Neely (1935), Marti (1986), and Kniffen (1949, 1951) presented their research on fairs through a common academic lens of the last century whereby a deliberate distancing is established between the researcher and the subject under review. This vantage point sets the stage for comments that try analyzing and drawing conclusions about fairs through generalities. Thus, the researchers suggested that fairs function through established archetypes based on key, observable elements such as the organization and management of fairs. Archetyping is the process of finding universal patterns, processes, or symbols in cultural expressions. It is most often associated with literature (including folklore), but has been applied to other areas of cultural study such as vernacular architecture and basket weaving. Kniffen (1951) introduced the notion that fairs are a part of community identity and ritual calendars, but did not articulate the ways community identity is created or maintained; Kniffen only

[9] This is Marti's (1986) vantage point without any reflexive consideration of his methodology, which is a necessary field research strategy introduced by Myerhoff in 1974. Hokanson and Kratz (2008) also had this vantage point, though they were more conscious of the perspective they assumed in their research.

assumed it existed due to the big crowds and regular attendees. Ritual calendars are a cultural expression that is mainly but not exclusively religious through the way practitioners prepare, observe, and complete the act of participating in an event over time. Other scholars have echoed these sentiments in their writings on agricultural fairs, including Braithwaite's lifetime photographic work on fairs and carnivals in England in the 1950s. With each of these inquiries, scholars have discussed the nuances and expectations of these events with little thought behind motivation or meaning.

Other historical scholars have analyzed how the importance of agricultural fairs evolved over time. Within the scholarship, similarities exist to the earlier modernist works but the difference is that there is latent acknowledgment of the importance of fairs and that the value of these events, so well-articulated in Neely (1935) and essays prior, no longer needs to be justified. Instead, these examples work toward positioning agricultural fairs within an established context and then proceed to inventory elements inside that context. This kind of study continues; however, it has moved beyond objective reflection and critique toward a more personal view of fairs that has a hint of a nostalgic gaze embedded in the context.[10]

Personal interest or fascination is a major motivator behind many scholarly studies and books on fairs. Three main categories define personal interest in fairs: fairs as entertainment, fairs in agricultural history, and fairs as social-political influence. However, not all studies fit neatly into just one of these categories. The reason for this is the changing role, popularity, and

[10] See Nelson's *The American State Fair* (2003) and Aley's *The Time of Your Life* (1971).

importance of fairs in the United States. During the height of agricultural fairs, which is commonly considered the 1850s-1910s,[11] most authors discussed fairs in relation to industrial development. Fairs continued to enjoy some mid-century prominence, but decline was inevitable given the economic turmoil to agriculture in the 1930s, particularly small family-operated farms, and overall social and economic changes that came about following both world wars. Rural populations overall, not just the agricultural sector, declined between 1930 and 1970, which also contributed to the change. Academic writing on fairs from Neely (1935) and prior supported the relevancy of fairs to agriculture. The waning of farm ownership brought changes to the focus of most agricultural fairs. Writings from the 1960s supported this change. The layout of fairs and the draw to these events became less about the home-craft competitions and livestock shows and more about carnival rides, food, and other forms of entertainment not attached to the agricultural elements of the fair (Avery, 2000; Hokanson & Kratz, 2008; Marti, 1986).

When modern agricultural fairs began in the early 19th century, they were extensively motivated by agriculture in both content and display. This continued into the 20th century for many county fairs. It was not until after the Civil War, which was 50 years after Watson's first fair in 1811, that entertainment (i.e., horse racing, sporting events, nonagricultural expositions, and the midway) became socially acceptable parts of the fair. These elements eventually became equal to and now are arguably more important than the

[11] Avery (2008) asserted that the golden age of agricultural fairs was 1850-1870, but from all other sources, fairs continued to occupy a central role in community social networks past the turn of the 20th century.

agricultural activities at the fair, or at least that is the perception of many recent studies. Changing interest in fairs happens in the content and contexts of more recent publications on fairs. Authors tend to focus on the entertainment value of fairs or rather the popular culture angles such as in Nelson's previously mentioned book, along with Per's America Goes to the Fair (1974), Fish's *Blue Ribbons and Burlesque: A Book of Country Fairs* (1998) and Grace's picturesque book *State Fair* (2006). McCarry's *County Fairs: Where America Meets* (1997) and Hokanson and Kratz's *Purebred and Homegrown: America's County Fairs* (2008) extend beyond the entertainment or novelty of these events in an effort to understand the community connections that fairs offer. These author's intent was not unlike the intent at the basis of this study, which was to learn why fairs continue despite changes in agriculture that no longer align with most agricultural fair activities. McCarry and Hokanson and Kratz provided an update on the value of these events to a broader perspective on American cultural identity as they travel the United States visiting several county, regional, and state fairs through several states.

Another angle to personal interest is the historic review. The authors of several articles related to the agricultural history of the United States mention fairs and their role in American industrialization and sociopolitical advancements. W. J. Gates (1984) and Kelly (1997) provided the most extensive examples of how yeoman farmers became part of organized labor and used county fairs and other common social gatherings to build a movement. Fite (1964, 1966, 1984) also wrote about the development of

American agriculture and the role of fairs in this process. In Oklahoma, D. E. Green (1977, 1990) and Olson (1977) explained how organizations such as 4-H and FFA play a role producing agricultural fairs. Feature articles published in 4-H newsletters and magazines and newspapers such as the *Daily Oklahoman* (now *The Oklahoman*) have useful information and details about the progression of county and state fairs since the 1960s.

The move away from studying the agricultural elements of a fair toward emphasizing the entertainment or popular culture factors is representative of the times. It is telling about the shifting role of fairs within society and culture. The American agricultural fair was a central element to the U.S. agrarian identity and might still be according to what I have found through my fieldwork. Fairs are part of contemporary agricultural modernization and development as defined throughout various times in history. However, this perspective also creates a potential dichotomy of meaning and perception given that they also are intrinsically part of an older folk tradition or experience. For many in the public, as well as some scholars, terms such as modern and folk are not often used in the same context. However, reviews of fairs in the literature illustrate the way these events are both modern and folk in the same context. Fairs continue to be both a point of nostalgia and tradition in the minds of some and one of the main showcases (a trade show of sorts) for the latest in contemporary farming. This particular paradigm is descriptive of most scholarship about fairs since the 1960s.

Aside from the academic literature, several nonacademic histories and other writings for general audiences exist. These sources, regardless of when they were published tend to talk about specific fairs in detail. Such examples include Roger's "The Alabama State Fair, 1865-1900" (1951), *A Commemorative History of the Buffalo County Fair, 1872-1982* (1982), and "The Indian International Fair at Muskogee" (1971).[12] In my assessment, there is one publication (whether for scholastic or popular consumption) for every state fair and most county events across the country. Although a study of all the ways fairs are presented and discussed in these publications might be an interesting academic exercise, the materials are hard to access, as single-edition manuscripts are only found in the community near their source. These few copies survive in the archives of local history museums or libraries.

It is important for scholars to use nonacademic materials as resources to gain insight about these events. Covering the period of the 19th and 20th centuries, there were less than 100 dedicated sources from across the academic spectrum addressing this subject. Fortunately, nonacademic sources can be more than just insightful critiques and analysis. They can also serve as a kind of autoethnographic data source. Journalism about fairs is of particular value. Newspapers in communities where fairs are important serve as repositories of local pride and often cover the events in exhaustive detail. For example, according to Marti (1986), "In 1984 the Ionia, Michigan, Free Fair got 3,766 column inches in the town's *Sentinel-Standard"* (p. 36), which dwarfed

[12] As with Neely (1935), I defer to Marti's (1986) book, which contains numerous sources and a representative list of the most common kinds of fairs brought into consideration in this part of the chapter.

the coverage of any other single community event. In 1962, *The Daily Oklahoman*, the largest paper in the state, ran an extensive series of articles in a special section of the paper for an entire week about county fairs across Oklahoma and about the upcoming state fair that year. Urban newspapers and national magazines are also good sources. These publications cover local and state fairs thousands of miles from the areas they serve. The *Washington Post* and *New York Times* run seasonal articles about fairs in their regions, and both papers have run articles on fairs as far away as Texas and Iowa, especially every 4 years when the presidential circus comes to the state. My review of newspaper articles, vertical files, and county histories at the Oklahoma Historical Society revealed several of these articles, as well as less extensive items about local fairs. Local writings and collections of photographs are abundant.

Aside from the examples highlighted thus far, a few authors considered the implication and importance of fairs from a personal context. While none of the authors looked at fairs through the context of place-identity explicitly, some recent authors have learned more about fairs through the experiences of people who host and participate in these events. Avery (2000) and Hokanson and Kratz (2008) have already been cited. Avery's book includes an essay by journalist Fred Howes who recounts the stories and experiences he collected working with participants and organizers at the Newaygo County Fair in Michigan. Hokanson and Kratz intermittently retold the personal experience narratives of people they encountered within their travelogue approach to field

studies of county fairs. Prosterman (1995), McCarry (1997), Paulsen (2000a, 2000b), and Corbin (2002a, 2002b) represented alternatives to the scholarship previously mentioned. Agricultural fairs are complex arenas that function as events wholly separate from everyday life, yet fairs interconnect aspects of the everyday through the content and rationality that support these events. Prosterman in particular was interested in examining these complexities. Her book is an ethnographic account of fair competitions and exhibitions. She had a new focal point not previously reviewed by scholars: the role of fairs in defining and reinforcing a community's sense of aesthetics. She also employed a pluralistic methodology by gathering a wide range of views to provide a more nuanced view of these events and the attraction people have to them. Prosterman described in detail the kinds of activities that different people engage in while attending fairs and how that engagement defines their experience, understanding, and appreciation for fairs. Her main thesis was that individuals develop their own interpretations of fairs while maintaining the aesthetic values germane to the particular places. Prosterman did this by examining contexts within the fair that have been internally and externally characterized as female-dominant, such as the home craft exhibitions and competitions. She did this to give voice to the various kinds of audiences attracted to fairs rather than to generalize about interest in these events. McCarry provided an extensive collection of photographs and a set of considerations about how fairs continue to operate as important social arenas for many community interests, particularly in the rural United States. Ambler

(1996), Paulsen and Staggs (2005), and Corbin (2002a, 2002b) reinforced similar considerations with a keen focus on critiquing elements of fairs as a way to describe the role each plays in the greater design of these events. Paulsen and Staggs followed a similar direction to Prosterman by looking at the cultural politics of craft art events. Ambler and Corbin looked at the architecture and visual cues present in fairground imagery as a source for learning about community attachment and expectations associated with these events. In a second article on agricultural fairs, Paulsen (2000a, 2000b) analyzed the presence and background of conflict in a couple of agricultural fairs she studied. As a sociologist, Paulsen was interested in the application of conflict theory in various community settings.

Although Kniffen's articles from the 1949 and 1951 are rare examples of direct geographic studies of agricultural fairs, geographic studies of festivals and other special events do exist. In fact, festivals have received increasing attention from geographers since the 1980s (De Bres & Davies 2001; Jackson, 1988; Jarvis, 1994; Lewis & Pile, 1996; Marston, 1989; Quinn, 2005; Ragaz, 1997; S. J. Smith, 1996; Waterman, 1998a, 1998b; Willems-Braun, 1994). Fairs and festivals have a lot in common. Both are events defined by a place-making process tied to a particular locale but only occur for finite period, usually a few days and rarely more than a week.

Several reasons exist for why festivals have become interesting to the discipline of geography. One reason is the rise in festivals as forms of community expression and economic interest in recent decades (Manning,

1983). This revival is associated with the integrationist tendencies of the global economy that encourage places to recreate and reproduce themselves with the sole intention of attracting flows of capital; economic development is an important motivating factor for community relations. County fairs differ slightly from the way many festivals originate or operate, and they provide an alternative perception about community festivities than what appears in most geographic studies. Quinn (2005) contended,

> For a long time festivals have been understood to be cultural expressions of people living in particular places, but in addition, they have always had an overt outward orientation which saw communities of people generate cultural meanings expressly to be read by the outside world. (p. 4)

County fairs exist foremost as community-oriented events. The main agricultural elements or activities at a fair focus on participation by county residents. Interaction or attendance by outside visitors is a by-product of the core function of a fair. The participatory opportunities for those not signed up for competitions are limited to the carnival if one is present or to other forms of outside entertainment scheduled in conjunction with the fair. In effect, fairs provide a dual purpose, but they do function like festival under the premise of movement; interaction; and the exchange of people, ideas, and money as flows circulating within the festival landscape itself and between the festival site and elsewhere. The cultural meanings produced at a fair or festival site have always displayed the influence of forces prevailing both locally and in other geographic spheres. Thus, although they are located in specific places, these festive events are meeting points for those in and outside of a community.

These geographic studies of festivals included interesting questions applicable to my study of county fairs. Some questions considered in the geographic literature are as follows: If festivals represent a forum through which a version of community identity is formed, then what and who are the formative interests shaping the version of community identity presented during these events? When expanding the audience or reach of a festival is a unique sense of place able to be managed? How does one control competing interests, including the internal or external links that emerge over time? These are important questions for geographers because festivals constitute a vehicle for expressing the close relationship between identity and place (Quinn, 2005, p. 238). In creating opportunities for drawing on shared histories, shared cultural practices, and ideals, and creating settings for social interactions, festivals (and in this instances also fairs) engender local continuity. They are arenas in which local knowledge is produced and reproduced, where the history, cultural inheritance, and social structures that distinguish one place from another are revised, rejected, or recreated. To borrow Geertz's (1973) terminology, fairs and festivals are an example of a cultural text and one of the many ensembles of texts that comprise a people's culture. Analyzing these settings yields insights into how people's sense of their own identity is closely bound to their attachment to place.

In the wider social sciences literature on festivals, a strong emphasis is placed on the role that festivals play in promoting social cohesion and reproducing social relations. Bahktin's (1984) interpretation of carnival as a

form of resistance where people are given the freedom to turn the world upside down to escape from the routine and structures imposed by society in a time diametrically opposed to ordinary time is frequently cited. Bahktin's work closely follows Turner's (1969) concept of liminal experiences and places, which is discussed more in the last chapter of this study. The release offered is temporary, and as Hughes (1999), Ravenscroft and Matteucci (2003), and others have pointed out, the liberation apparent therein is illusory, with festivities being socially sanctioned affairs designed to allow people to put aside social norms and expectations. This interpretation puts festivals "firmly within the sphere of social regulation and control" (Ravenscroft & Matteucci, 2003, p. 2). However, at the micro level, much of the literature on festivals supports the idea that very little about these events is natural or spontaneous. A key contribution of the literature has been the use of festival practices to demonstrate how human populations are culturally and socially structured such that access to power is a constant source of struggle, as Paulsen (2000a) found in her fieldwork on fairs. Festivals are sites where certain individuals and groups promote particular sets of values; attach specific meanings to place; and attempt, with varying degrees of success, to reproduce hegemonic meanings (Jackson, 1988; Marston, 1989; S. J. Smith, 1996). The decision-making process at festival sites, as elsewhere, varies greatly depending on who is in control, whose interests are best served, and who stands to gain or lose in the process. The reproduction of difference does not proceed without issue, and the meanings and practices reproduced in festival settings are usually resisted

and negotiated by those who do not automatically understand or accept them (G. L. Green, 2002; Quinn, 2003).

Creating events from within the locale are powerful human agents. However, the freedom of human agents to manipulate the festival production process according to their own agenda is at all times constrained and modified by social structures and competing forms of agency. Beyond the festival organization, in and beyond the festival place, key influences such as organizing and sponsoring institutions (e.g., financial sponsors, public authorities, government agencies, and the media) promote the acceptability of particular norms, greatly affect the advancement of particular ideas and initiatives, and generally inform the unfolding festival landscape. This also occurs at county fairs. The fair continues as an event promoting a particular view of agricultural heritage. As introduced, this heritage is tied to perceptions of independent farming during the 19th century. However, various interests in preserving this tradition as well as in the value of the fair as a social and economic crossroad can put strain on the content and integrity of the event. In the context of festivals, Waterman (1998a) noted how event managers have come to challenge the authority of artistic directors in steering the course of arts festivals, while Quinn (1996) wrote about the constraints that commercial sponsorship can place on the artistic policies of arts festivals. Fair sponsors also have expectations and challenges that can affect fair organization. When completing fieldwork on the Oklahoma County Free Fair, I learned that the event occurs over two weekends at different sites. One site serves the interest

of craft arts and family programming objectives, while the other supports youth livestock events. Neither set of organizers prefers this arrangement, but neither sees an alternative.

In the closely related work on carnivals and public rituals, questions about culture, authenticity, and commodification predominate. Philips (1998) wrote about the carnivalesque becoming increasingly commodified through contact with outsiders. The relationship between the festival and tourist markets was critical. Ravenscroft and Matteucci (2003) and Ragaz (1997) contended that the presence of outsiders "shifts the construct of the festival from celebration to spectacle, from production to consumption" (p. 5). In this interpretation, tourists in their role as consumers are held responsible for eroding the ritual and promoting the spectacle dimensions of festival. Local people, meanwhile, can become disempowered, as the social functions of the festival discussed above become superseded by economic prerogatives (Philips, 1998).

One of the most widely cited pieces of research pursuing this line of argument is Greenwood's (1989) study of the Alarde in Fuenterrabia, Spain. Drawing on Marx, Greenwood's work represented a harsh critique of the commodification of a village's public ritual. He concludes that public intervention to develop the festival's tourism potential monetized the performance and violated local traditions in the first place (Greenwood, 1989, p. 178). In a similar vein, Crain (1996) concluded that tourism development promoted commercialization and privatization at a Spanish place of pilgrimage,

which was a change that alienated villagers from their traditional Pentecost rituals.

More recently, however, some analyses have become further nuanced, which has indicated that festivals and public rituals have always absorbed outside influences (G. L. Green, 2002) and thus have been continuously reproduced through a combination of internal and external factors and interactions. These research examples reflected a growing awareness that local factors and agencies play an important role in mediating global forces (Oakes, 1993).

The preceding literature review influenced my study in a couple of ways. First, it illustrated interests and limitations to the articles, research, and examinations previously conducted. Second, it allowed me to establish a point of departure on what I intended to analyze and discuss in my research and writing. Existing works related to fairs are full of insightful details and nuggets of information useful to understanding how fairs play a particular role in American culture and society. I saw opportunities to weave these insights into my research and analysis.

Fairs in the past as well as today are an unacknowledged duality. They serve both to reinforce common heritage while pushing for change and technological advancement, particularly within agricultural production. However, this duality is almost never discussed or analyzed by fair participants or attendees. Moreover, fairs operate within a particular context that is described well in preceding works, but this context is not necessarily analyzed

very well. The aim of authors in previous research tended to focus on providing a justification for a fair's existence or chronicling their history. My interest was in pushing interpretation and analysis further. Such analysis provided an opportunity to take a step back and think about how fairs are important in understanding cultural landscape and identity, at least for those who attend and participate in these events.

Chapter 3: Methods

When reviewing potential methods that might inform my work, I weighed various factors that each bring to the project. The background or perspective of the researcher was also considered, along with the context that various sources provide, consideration of what sources to research, and other mitigating factors that influence the kind of research that can be attained.[13] The first factor in my research method, which was no less important than the rest, was my own experiences with fairs. The foundation of this study began while growing up in Oklahoma. I have attended numerous state and county fairs, as well as other agricultural pageants and shows over the years. An appreciation for the importance of county fairs has been ongoing. While not from a farm family or a rural community, I am still never too far removed from the state's agricultural industry or the state's agrarian roots, like many urban Oklahomans. Not only do tangible elements throughout the landscape reinforce this, such as the farming of winter wheat inside the city limits of Oklahoma City or the horse trailers parked in the front yards of suburban homes, but the language and symbolism employed by Oklahomans in a popular culture context support this assertion.

Examining the audience of both state fairs (Oklahoma City and Tulsa) illustrates this point. The combined annual attendance at both events equals

[13] To elaborate, I discuss several concerns throughout this chapter, but the focus here is to draw attention to three major considerations. First, how has my background influenced the way I collect and interpret material? This includes how I went about selecting and conducting interviews with respondents. Second, how will my relationships with respondents guide my study? Third, other factors that I allude to include considerations such as geography and demography associated with the source material.

over a third of the state's population[14]. In contrast, about one in three Oklahomans live in a non-MSA or rural area as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau.[15] While other states such as Texas and Minnesota often boast higher overall or daily attendance rates at their state fairs, few can say the influence is as pervasive across such a range of communities and social groups as in Oklahoma.

As a humanist research project, this study was informed through different layers of information coming from two kinds of research: library or archival investigation and ethnography. The history of agricultural fairs in Oklahoma represented the second factor that influenced my research method. In advance of my field research, I read numerous books and journal articles on agricultural fairs in the United States. More important to working in Oklahoma, I reviewed a host of archival materials. Most of this material did not become a direct citation in this study, as it related to local advertisements or objective accounts of fair activity, but it did provide a backup to my field studies and site-based ethnographic descriptions. Using newspaper clippings, biographical files, development plans, and historic photographs, I uncovered information about the rise and decline of public interest in county fairs in the state, the changing role

[14] According to an October 9, 2014 press release by the State Fair of Oklahoma in Oklahoma City, 900,000 people attended that year. This number combined with Tulsa State Fair's claim that over a million people visit the fair each year supports the assertion that at least a third if not half the population of the state visits one or both fairs annually. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, 3.8 million people live in Oklahoma.

[15] The U.S. Census Bureau's definition of rural includes all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area. An urban area represents densely developed territory and encompasses residential, commercial, and other nonresidential urban land uses. Two types of urban areas are recognized by the U.S. Census Bureau. The first type includes areas with more than 50,000 people, and the second type is urban clusters of at least 2,500 people but less than 50,000.

of such events in community life, and the way in which organizational leaders have collaborated to produce these events year after year. Such documentation was easily attained from collections at the Oklahoma Historic Society, the Western History Collections at the University of Oklahoma, county/municipal libraries, and Oklahoma Historic Society-affiliated community museums and historic sites such as the Five Tribes Museum in Muskogee, Greater Southwest History Museum in Ardmore, and the Museum of the Cherokee Strip in Perry. Other sources for documentation were the county-based Oklahoma Agricultural Extension Services and the county fair boards. These resources maintained historical documents, including financial and attendance records.

Much of the information in Chapter 2 went beyond being just an academic literature review; it was also part of a summary of information gained from the library or archival stage of my research methodology. In addition to what I reported in Chapter 2, information from this stage of my research also appears in subsequent chapters. This research informed an understanding of the structure, production, and process of county fairs in the United States, specifically Oklahoma, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 and parts of Chapters 5 and 6. From the library and archival notes collected, I moved forward with contacting local county fair boards and the county extension offices[16] that partner with the boards to produce each fair. These agencies opened their records, which included premium books, which is a booklet used as both the rulebook for fair competitions and the event program; photographs;

[16] In Oklahoma, employees of Oklahoma State University operate this.

video recordings; brochures; board minutes; informal writings; press releases and newspaper articles; and other nuggets of material that come from people attending and participating in fair-related community activities and events. Of particular interest and usefulness, each 4-H and many OHCE chapters produce a yearbook of activities that they send to the national offices as records of local accomplishments and as a part of a competition judged for their creativity and organization. To supplement this print material, I created a database of digital sources, such as those found on the Internet or through social networking sites like Facebook, to create a collection of information developed by participants and attendees of county fairs. These combined outlets helped support a local understanding of how county fairs operate in Oklahoma in comparison to similar events around the country. These outlets also provided a set of autobiographic representations (i.e., material created by a group that represents how the group sees itself and its activities) that are not necessarily accessible or attainable through interviews or my participant observations. These written and visual forms of material culture are a vital element to studying any cultural phenomenon or the people who are part of it.

The library and archive research helped determine what sites might be ideal focal points for this study. I attended several fairs over a 3-year period, including those in Alfalfa, Canadian, Garfield, Noble, Pottawatomi, Pontotoc, McClain, Seminole, Hughes, Logan, Mayes, Muskogee, Major, Creek, Okmulgee, Cleveland, Oklahoma, Rogers, Tulsa, and Kay Counties (see Figure 2). At each fair, the objective was to see the entire event, including competitive

exhibits, entertainment, carnival areas if present, and commercial vendors. To get a sense of how these events might be examined ethnographically, I studied how each component of a fair is central to the event as a whole. This preliminary study was critical when returning to do formal field research at my three focus sites. I concentrated my analysis on essential elements including capturing examples that support the relationship between people and places. In my preliminary observations, these components often consisted of youth activities: home arts, floriculture, science and civic exhibits, and livestock competition. All these observations provided an ideal lead for the second type of investigation used in this dissertation, which was ethnography. Marcus and Fischer (1986) noted, “Ethnography is a research process in which the [researcher] carefully observes, records, and engages in the daily life of another culture . . . and then writes accounts of this culture, emphasizing descriptive detail” (p. 18). The preliminary steps I have described are part of this ethnographic process, but moving to more detailed and structured research, I expanded my ethnography at critical locations that I determined to be representational of the county fair experience throughout the state. This focused ethnography included vigorous participant-observations of these fair sites, the activities, and the people participating followed by interviews with fair participants about their experiences, emotions, and connection to place.

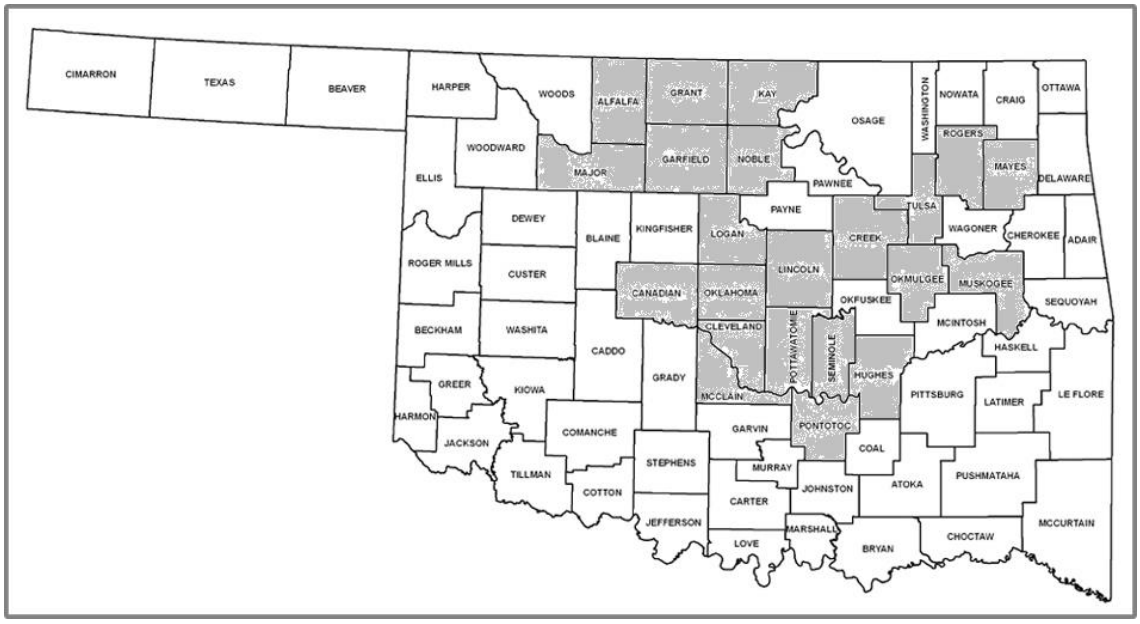


Figure 2. Map of county fairs visited.

Ethnography

Five factors influenced the development of the ethnography research method (previous literature on the subject and my background with county fairs growing up in Oklahoma). Aside from the two already discussed, the third factor is the context of information sources provided. As I conducted my qualitative fieldwork, I began considering what shapes an ethnographic study, particularly in the setting of county fairs. I found many scholars who used ethnography as a research strategy pondered the same factors that I confronted. Ethnography, which began as a signature research strategy for anthropologists, has become a widely used method in the humanities and social sciences. Dwyer and Limb (2001) contended that qualitative methods "are increasingly used by geographers to explore some of the complexities of everyday life in order to gain a deeper insight into the processes shaping our social worlds" (p. 6). Dwyer and Limb added that methods such as "interviews,

discussions or participant observation" help with investigations of "the feelings, understandings and knowledges of others" (p. 1). Examples of ethnography used in the discipline of geography abound (Dowler, 2001; Everts, 2010; Kingsbury, 2011; Rogalsky, 2010) and combine to form methodological influence that both contextualize the work of others using a similar research method and set a precedence that frames these similar works through a common epistemology.

Geertz (1973) emphasized the value of knowledge production attained through ethnography, which he described as an "intellectual effort" that generates perceptive examination through the process of "establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, taking genealogies, mapping fields, keeping a diary, and so on" (p. 6). Geertz supported the use of ethnography because it provides breadth (i.e., studying a broad range of human activities and interactions regardless of the research questions) and depth (i.e., spending significant time at a location) for the study of most social and cultural subjects. Herbert (2000) spoke of the extensive application of ethnography and noted that it helps uncover "the processes and meanings that undergird sociospatial life" (p. 550). Herbert also noted that ethnography is both "macrological and micrological" (p. 554). Therefore, this attention to scale or levels of engagement deepens the relevance of ethnography within geography. Ethnography is multiscalar because it promotes considering how microspatial (intimate and personal) and macroscale (group and community ties) processes interrelate. County fairs operate on both levels as public spaces and as

social/cultural events. Ethnography supports studying the interplay between different scales. Studying county fairs as places requires an appreciation for how this interplay works when it comes to place-making and place-identity. As Quinn (2005) noted, place constitutes the merging of many interests from individual perception to broader community associations.

From another perspective, ethnography is a multimethodological approach used to gain insight and meaning within the parameters of language (Willis, 2000). Language studies have grown in importance outside the fields of linguistics and semiotics as scholars contend with understanding (even "reading" like text) the symbolic expression of individuals embedded within social-cultural environments. Such symbols in my research included material examples (some of which can be seen in the Figures below), including clothing or other forms of personal decoration, actions, or particular kinds of vocabulary or documentation of space via visual ethnography. To make sense of language and symbols, several issues relating to connectivity and positionality influenced my participant-observations and the interviewing of fair participants including insider/outsider positioning and reflexive review of the information collected from fair participants.

The ethnography that I deployed in this study moves from personal experience and library/archive research to initial visits at county fairs around the state as background research to more fair visits at the sites that I narrowed my focus. The material included in chapter 5 of this study represent a combination of participant-observations from these various visits to fairs (mostly

at the principle research sites) and the preliminary library/archive and field research. The preliminary research served as an important source to verify my assessment of the event organization and activities. This material was further used during my interview with fair participants. , However, interviews with fair participants provide their own unique vantage as well. These interviews not only pushed participants to articulate their own perspectives on their lived experiences with fairs, they also provided insight that helped clarify my participant-observations. These interviews open up a dialog between me, the outside researcher, and fair participants, the inside view.

Figure 3. Crocheted work, adult open class, Oklahoma County Free Fair, 2013.

Figure 4. Sheep shearing before open-class competition, Alfalfa County Fair, 2013.

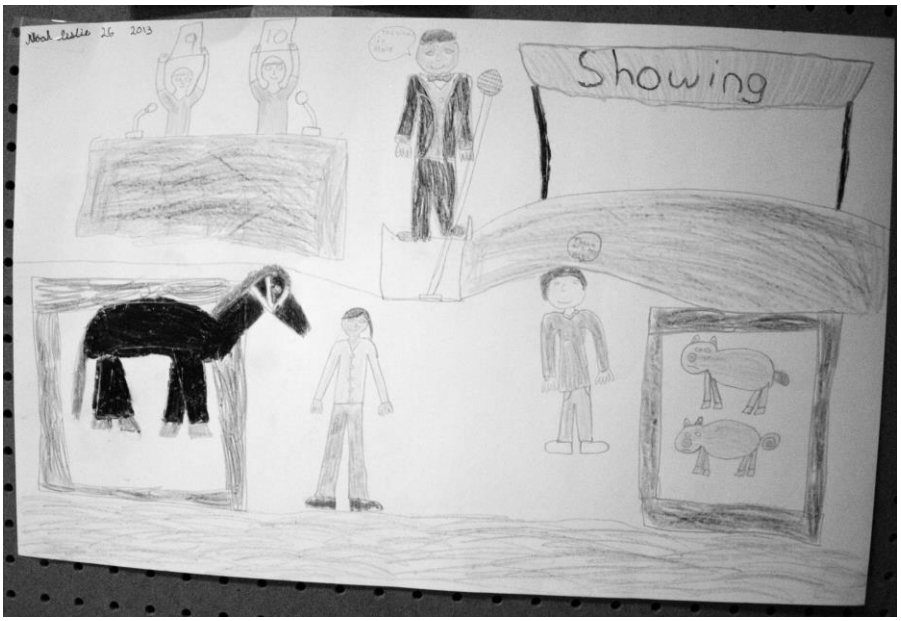


Figure 5. Youth entry for 4-H drawing competition themed around agriculture in the community, Alfalfa County Fair, 2013.

Insider–Outsider Perspectives

One of the most important and most difficult locations through which I approached this research was as a peripheral member of the communities from which I draw knowledge. Mohammad (2001) supported the need to understand how to factor this issue into the method for conducting research as well as the analysis and presentation of that research. Although my background is not agricultural, I have strong intergenerational roots in rural Oklahoma. Having studied American agricultural communities in past projects (Roberts, 1997, 1998), I am familiar with some of the communication nuances associated with the social and economic aspects of rural communities. Responding in part to Bennett's (2002) discussion of the value of critically assessing the concept of insider knowledge as a methodological tool, I anticipated that my role as an insider–outsider within this research process might allow me to encounter the culture of the everyday for members of these communities.

The term *insider* has long been problematic, since people shift from insider to outsider status and back again depending on the context or maintain both at the same time when situations are viewed from different angles. Various groups may attain insider status by factors such as age, class, ethnicity, profession, gender, ability or disability, nationality, race, sexual orientation, religion, conformity to standards of appearance (Headland, Pike, & Harris, 1990), social confidence, or particular skills. However, there has been an attempt during the last couple of decades of anthropological work to address some of the issues associated with outsider ethnography popular in the 20th

century. Clifford (1986) explained, “Ethnography decodes and records, telling the grounds of collective order and diversity, inclusion, and exclusion” (p. 2). In this study, I emphasized how “processes and meanings vary across space and are central to the construction and transformation of landscapes; they are both place-bound and place-making” (Herbert, 2000, p. 550). In this ethnography, I delved into how personal and group narratives produce knowledge about one’s articulates and actualizes visions of place relative to the production of county fairs. I also etch divisions of engagement that define group participation in official and unofficial ways.

For almost a century, cultural anthropologists and folklorists have tried different ways to strike a balance between insider and outsider observer perspectives. Stoeltje, Fox, and Olbrys (1999) wrote a historical overview of the shifts in authorial positions in anthropological and folklore texts from the beginning to the end of the 20th century. With rare exceptions such as Hurston (1942), early fieldworkers tended to write as though they were invisible, objective, and irrelevant to their texts. Stoeltje et al. showed how this changed after the 1970s in folklore studies and changed more rapidly in the 1980s in both folklore and anthropology. Geertz (1973) and Marcus and Fischer (1986) addressed authorial invisibility, and feminist scholars helped precipitate the changes, since gender and race have often been awkwardly absent among research participants and in the academy, which has been predominantly White and male (see Epstein, 1999; Nájera-Ramírez, 1999; Said, 1978; Spivak, 1996). Within geography, contemplations have emerged about the

relationships between authors and the people they are studying; the effects their writing has on others; and the relative power, privilege, or lack thereof that emerges from field research (Domosh, 1996).

Supporting this view, Georgiou and Carspecken (1996) noted that a level of responsibility exists within the relationship between truth and power that cannot be ignored when scholars engage in ethnographic research. Connections operate on many levels. Authority, for example, is culturally constructed and aspects of identity (race, age, accent, gender, official position) may lend more weight to or invite more consent from statements emanating from speakers from more dominant groups. This consideration has relevance first for the ethnographer to the extent he or she listens and gives credence to various individuals' interpretations of their community. Second, relevance occurs for research participants and their comfort level with expressing themselves. Third, the audience has relevancy too. Consciously or unconsciously, "unequal power distorts truth claims" (Georgiou & Carspecken, 1996, p. 21). To some extent, distortion is inevitable, as the act of conducting qualitative research puts ethnographers in a position of power (i.e., the power of defining and representing others) whether they are insiders or outsiders.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity has dominated critical, feminist, and postcolonial methodological approaches, including influencing my work and that of others (Britzman, 1995; Easterby-Smith & Malina, 1999; Lather, 2001). Scholarship

that includes reflexivity and incorporates situational knowledge[17] draws to the forefront the process of knowledge production or to what extent a full documentation of an event is even possible (Haraway, 1991; Rose, 1997). Reflexivity is an intentional practice designed to respond to the concerns of critical, feminist, and postcolonial scholars about the importance of revealing one's own position in the ethically troubling process of collecting and presenting people's thoughts and perspectives. Even as Rose (1997) contended, no scholar can ever fully present or realize all the facts that influence a researcher's position in a study. I am explicit about my central role in this dissertation, but this study of county fairs relied on the information attained from respondents about their connection and interest in fairs and not on what I thought their connection should be. As the researcher, I had influence over the information provided by virtue of being the collector of the information. However, how this information was used in the pages of this dissertation was critical. Thus, I was open to how subjective this research process was and about how subjective the information collected was as well. I joined others who asked "'which truth?' or 'whose truth?' is being told" (Mohammad, 2001, p. 113). In applying reflexive strategies to my methodology, my goal was to report the information shared by individuals and to be forthcoming when connections between information between individuals were generated. This kind of awareness and reflexive engagement helps draw attention to the relations

[17] Some methods of generating knowledge, such as trial and error or learning from experience, tend to create highly situational knowledge. Situational knowledge is often embedded in language, culture, or traditions. This integration of situational knowledge is an allusion to the community and its attempts at collecting subjective perspectives into an embodiment "of views from somewhere" (Haraway, 1988, p. 24).

associated with the performative aspects of personal and group narratives. They also provide for a more robust discussion about people's concerns and interests in the creation of place.

In *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992; see also Wacquant, 2004) described the role of reflexivity to be much more than simply placing the researcher within social relations with individuals or materials under study, often referred to as participant observations. Rather, they considered reflexivity something that must move beyond social relations toward an understanding of how the researcher's position, as a researcher, influences the interpretation of data. Willis (2000) noted, "I have long argued for a form of reflexivity, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a sense of the investigator's history, subjectivity and theoretical positioning as a vital resource for the understanding of, and respect for, those under study" (p. 113). Consequently, prior to this section, I provided a brief personal background that highlighted how my personal experiences were a part of the research process. As can be seen in this and through other biographic commentary, my own embodiment played an integral role in the research, whether it was because of my appearance and what this meant for how others responded to me or because of my emotions and how this affected my capacity to carry out elements of the research. Both of these elements were inseparable from the research process. As a result, each found its way into the data analysis and was relevant to the discussion.

To facilitate this process, I intend to make my research as accessible as possible throughout and after the research period. In addition to being as transparent as possible within the interview process, I sent participants interested in the research a copy of my manuscript and encouraged them to provide feedback germane to the project and the final development of this dissertation. One way to ground my own reflexivity was to ensure that my research was read or heard by the participants and others in the communities under review, which forced me to be sure that my claims were accurate and defensible. I welcomed this kind of participant feedback, as it was a rigorous review process. If my research did not resonate with the people to whom my work was about, then I missed an opportunity to affect the community from whence the material I collected had originated. Individual participants did not have the final say over the product I created; the work is mine and was filtered through my particular set of experiences, perspectives, and interests. However, a compelling ethnography ought to, at the least, make sense to the people who lived it.

Who to Interview?

In coming to terms with insider–outsider perspectives and reflexivity in my research, the fourth factor influencing my research method was the personal connections between fairs and most of my interview-based sources. I have already highlighted the use of library and archival research and the participant-observation side of ethnography, but a third set of sources was direct interviews with county fair participants. I have previously discussed the factors that

mitigate the subjectivity of the information collected from respondents, but the other sides to this are the factors used in selecting respondents for this study and the development of questions to ask them. Sixty-four individuals from three counties answered questions for this research project. Their experience, age, and other demographic nuances varied at each research site. Identifying appropriate sources was difficult without the assistance of official fair organizers.

All the individuals identified in these interviews actively participated in or organized county fairs. These individuals worked with the state and county agriculture youth programs such as 4-H and FFA, were county agriculture extension representatives, or members of municipal or county fair boards. While I strived to gather information from a variety of sources within the community, I was particularly interested in sources that had an intimate connection with fairs. I generally consider such individuals to be those who have a long-term connection or strong commitment to county fairs as participants and not simply attendees of these events. I made efforts to interview respondents with diverse backgrounds. When it came to cultivating sources with a variety of experiences and a range of ages, the task was manageable. However, participation among various racial and ethnic groups does not correspond with county demographics. Instead, it more closely represents the demographics of fair participants. A demographic characteristics summary of the individuals interviewed is provided below in table form and

further discussion about their experience with fairs dominates the pages of chapter 6 of this study.

Table 1. Demographics of Interview Respondents

Respondents by Experience			
(Total for County)	Alfalfa Co. (22)	Mayes Co. (24)	Oklahoma Co. (18)
15 years or more	6	7	4
10-14 years	2	5	4
5-9 years	8	5	7
4 years or less	6	7	3
Respondents by Age			
Under 18 years old	5	4	3
18-30 years old	0	3	0
31-50 years old	11	10	5
Over 51 years old	6	7	10
Respondents by Racial/Ethnic Categories (Percentages relative to the 64 individuals interviewed)			
Black or African American	0%	0%	3%
American Indian and Alaska Native	2%	8%	4%
Asian	0%	0%	1%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0%	0%	0%
Two or More Races	2%	6%	3%
Hispanic or Latino	1%	1%	3%
White (not Hispanic or Latino)	29%	22%	20%

The roots of my research rested on illustrating how fairs as a created place support the cultural identities of certain people. In Chapter 7, I propose one kind of cultural identity present in these places and describe how, between interviews and ethnography, fairs are places that support this concept of identity. Regular and sustained engagement with preparations and activities associated with county fairs is important to document in terms of how this contact influences personal perception and attachment to fairs, as well as how contact influences the perceptions of one's self in relation to these events.

Connections to fairs are highly individualized, as illustrated in Chapter 6, but one important consideration is the familiarity or longevity people have with these events. To provide a range of perspectives, I talked to people who had varying experiences with fairs from a young age or in some cases were still active members of a youth organization associated with fairs. The geography of young people is a major part of the county fair experience and is why fairs continue. Although I paid particular attention to interviewing these core members of the fair organizing groups, inside this circle of interest are more casual participants at fairs. These less involved or more informally involved individuals have a different take on why fairs are important, what within a fair is significant, and how they benefit the community. To reach this group, I sought out people at the fair and outside of the fair and asked them to talk about their fair experiences. Using a similar set of questions (see Table 1), I was able to gain insight from a broad range of perspectives.

I first approached these sources with a semi-structured interview. All participants answered questions based on three themes: personal relationship to fairs, community interest in fairs, and the influence of fairs on these two perspectives. These questions provided an understanding of what attracts and sustains interest in agricultural fairs, specifically county fairs. They also provided documentation that informed and contextualized my library or archive research and my site-based observations of fair organization, production, and engagement, which is described in length in Chapter 5. This set of questions helped establish respondents' positionality within a fair too, both through time

(e.g., number of years involved in fairs) and through community and family ties (e.g., current involvement of others in fairs).

The second emerging theme was community interest. Responses from participants helped provide insight into the kinds of community interests that shape the fair. Most of the information underscored the importance of fairs as group or community activities, despite the fact that every individual attends the fair on his or her own terms. For example, an elderly respondent from Mayes County talked about her interest in quilting and noted her involvement in OHCE connects her to the fair through personal interest in the craft and her social interest in the group, which organizes the quilting exhibition and competition. Such groups act as electrons floating around the nucleus of the event, which in this case was the county fair. Groups promote certain activities into the center of fair action for a time. In sequence, these various activities form the fair into a coherent whole.

Table 2. Standard Interview Questions

No.	Question
1	How long have you been involved in the county fair?
2	What other kinds of agriculture events or expos do you attend or participate?
3	Describe how you got involved in these events.
4	How have county fairs changed since you first got started?
5	How have your family and other relatives been involved in the county fair over the years?
6	What is your favorite part of the county fair?
7	What kinds of people participate in county fairs?
8	What attracts audiences to the fair?
9	What kinds of racial or ethnic diversity can be seen among fair participants and fair attendees at your local fair?
10	How are youth organizations (like FFA and 4-H) involved in fairs?
11	Describe the groups or organizations that help produce or organize the fair each year.
12	How have changes in agricultural industries (farming and herding, for

	example) affected the content and participation of fairs?
13	How does your local demography (urban, rural, suburban, exurban) determine fair content and programming?
14	How is the fair important to your community?
15	How important is the location of the fair?
16	Describe the layout or organization of the event?
17	What is the purpose of a county fair?
18	Describe the events or activities at your local county fair?
19	What is the relationship between county and statewide events?
20	If the county fair was discontinued, what other event(s) in the community could fill the same purpose?
21	Fairs were started as agricultural expos and educational events, is that still the main reason why fairs are hosted?
22	How do you think your local fair compares to other county fairs around the state?
23	How will the county fairs change decades from now?

The third theme refers to how the fair itself influences these personal and community interests. Local participants certainly play a major role in developing fair programming and defining its objectives and outcomes, but this engagement is not just concerned with the way individuals define fairs through their involvement. Fairs are products that illuminate individual and community social and cultural objectives and, in turn, become the influence that reflects back onto individuals and communities who produce them. Thus, county fairs operate like mirrors reflecting the ideas and behavior associated with individual and group contributions back at the participants, thereby heightening their sense of enjoyment. A major influence on this reflexive relationship is the state laws that establish prohibitions and other guidelines for the operation of county fairs. County fairs have an obvious formulaic quality needed not only to meet these statewide standards but to ensure the fair experience meets the expectations of participants as well. An interesting social tension can arise from

the influence of creative individuals and groups mixing with the more formulaic institutional influences during the production of the fair.

Alongside this community-level fieldwork, I considered perception or ideas integral to the events I was profiling. Generally, activities at a fair relate to agricultural interests, as highlighted in my literature review, but with the rising interest in communication technology and the expansion of nonagricultural activities by organizations such as 4-H and vendors who use fairs to showcase their products and services, county fairs are not simply showcases for future farmers or agricultural industry leaders. Recent fairs that I attended included youth exhibitions that resemble science fair projects or displays of civic pride and exhibit halls similar to trade shows. To learn more about this changing role of fairs, I talked to people involved in larger organizational contexts, such as statewide associations for fairs, agricultural expo organizers, and state and national leaders of the 4-H and FFA youth organizations about how fair programming and content has changed and diversified. Organizational leaders of the International Association of Fairs and Expositions and 4-H now track these trends.

Having conducted many interviews in the past as part of other fieldwork, my interviewing style works toward collecting the information for the answers I seek while working on a line of inquiry in a way that is most comfortable for the interviewees. All interviews in this study occurred at a county fair or a few weeks following the main event. Due to time constraints at the event itself, I was only able to interview half the respondents. Each interview was

anonymous. By choosing to include teenagers (or minors) in this study, certain constraints by the university's Institutional Review Board required that I protect their identity. Therefore, I applied the same criteria of anonymity to all respondents in the study. This requirement, however, did not overtly affect the quality of information I gathered. If anything, respondents felt more at ease knowing their information would not be tied to them directly. I also did not record the interviews. Using a qualitative questionnaire, I took notes on what each respondent said. Like keeping each source anonymous, not keeping a recording of the interview helped establish a rapport. I often find that interviews create a sense of intimacy, which is particularly noticeable when I am interviewing someone with whom I have no prior history. This intimacy is both welcoming and troubling, as I recognize it to be one-sided. The intimacy I am referring to is based on the nature of the interview process combined with the personal details an interviewee has shared with me; the one-sided aspect is a result of focusing on the interviewee and not sharing much of my own experiences in return. I was happy to share pieces of my own experience when the opportunity arose or when I was asked and felt an ethical obligation to do so due to this intimacy or need to build trust and connectivity. Interviews I conducted in the past have often ended without a two-way exchange, which I anticipated would happen here as well.

Upon concluding these interviews, I shadowed respondents at fair-related events. I attended meetings, organizing sessions, and preliminary activities related to the county fair. I was interested in attending any occasion

that interviewees felt would help expand my understanding of their relationship to the county fair. The result was an array of events and activities. This shadowing process was the means whereby I gathered the ethnographic observations included in Chapter 5. Attendance at these meetings and peripheral events and activities to the fair (such as 4-H chapter meetings and activities in preparation for an exhibition) were as critical as attending the fair itself. These additional connections with respondents also provided an opportunity to review my initial interview notes with the respondents, which provided a way to engage them in the reflexive aspects of my research method. These additional ethnographic opportunities with actual fair activities were not unlike the work of other ethnographers who studied events involving the community and youth groups such as in schools (e.g., Bettie, 2003; Willis, 1977) or music clubs (e.g., Thornton, 1996). I created this ethnographic field research for contextual reasons, but it was also useful in explaining how individuals' activities create place-identity. While interviews provide direct information from informants, ethnography provides indirect or more subtle understandings of particular events and of the ways people establish, reinforce, or perform their connection to place. As I mentioned in the opening of this study, fairs are liminal settings. These settings require direct interaction on the part of a researcher to understand the particulars of the event, participants' roles during these events, and the actions that garner meaning and significance for these events (Schechner, 1977; Turner, 1986). Engagement in these events also tells something about one's culture identity away from these events

or how group dynamics play out as a result of associations made with these events (Goffman, 1959). County fair participation is not a once-a-year commitment. Those involved in the formal groups associated with fairs like the fair board or 4-H work all year on an administrative timeline for certain activities that culminate at the fair.

The questions I posed in my dissertation rest on understanding the geography of individual and group activity and the reasons behind it. While I spent considerable time combing records and written accounts, ethnography helped put a face on the research. It was one of the best ways to capture the personal insights embedded in my work. Willis (2000) discussed the way ethnography functions as a methodological approach that can encounter and record a range of sense-making practices in a convention that draws on the interpretive nature of the social world and the ways in which individuals try to articulate, express, and comprehend their experiences in relation to those around them. Attempting to make sense of the world is both a conscious and a subconscious effort. In geography, the study of sense making tends to focus on its connection to place-making. This connection means that the process of inquiry through which I interpret my respondents' activities related to county fairs is always mediated by a shared existence within society and culture. In other words, an ethnographic imagination (Willis, 2000) is central to understanding the geographies and contexts of those I interviewed. Willis (2000) wrote, "Of fundamental importance to the ethnographic imagination is comprehending creativities of the everyday as indissolubly connected to,

dialectically and intrinsically, wider social structures, structural relations, and structurally provided conditions of existence" (p. 34).

Principal Research Locations

Based on preliminary fieldwork, I took into account various considerations, most of which are highlighted throughout this chapter. However, choosing appropriate locations was a core consideration in this study. It is the fifth factor in organizing my research method, and it includes other aspects of human geography including demography. While I garnered a variety of experiences leading into this project, I narrowed the scope to three county fairs in Oklahoma. For geographic and cultural variation, I selected Alfalfa, Mayes, and Oklahoma Counties (see Figure 1). This selection of fairs was based on important distinctions in the kind of fairs produced in these counties and on community population and demography. The sites represent a cross-section of Oklahoma: a state peppered with urban and suburban cities, exurban towns in moderately populated counties, and vast rural areas with small populations.[18] These factors influence the state's MSA: Tulsa, Oklahoma City, and Lawton. The factors also consider that most large towns in the state are bedroom communities or economic hubs for these urban centers. The remaining areas of the state are remotely populated and reliant on exurban communities for many essential needs, including grocery stories, retailers, restaurants, and entertainment. The three sites represent a three-tier

[18] Most states have a similar mix of urban, suburban, and rural population areas, except the heavily populated states in the Northeast and parts of California. This similarity adds to the appeal and relevancy of this study to a greater understanding about agricultural fairs beyond those in Oklahoma.

community analysis that provides for a broad perspective on how place-identity is valued in different geographic contexts. They are geographically dispersed across the state: northwestern (Alfalfa), eastern (Mayes), and central (Oklahoma). Although the southern half of the state is not represented in this study, my preliminary research of county fairs at additional sites in this part of the state indicated that the additional rural sites would not have added significantly to the main objectives of this project. Counties fairs in the southeastern and southwestern quadrants of the state exhibit sufficiently similar characteristics to those observed in Alfalfa and Mayes Counties. These issues included local demography, the size of the local fairs, and the range of support for these events.

Alfalfa County

Using the 2014 online U.S. Census Bureau and Oklahoma Department of Commerce databases, records indicated that Alfalfa County is the most remote site of the three used in this study, with 6.5 persons per square mile and 5,600 residents in the county (see Table 2). Situated in north-central Oklahoma in the state's northernmost tiers of counties, Alfalfa County lies in a wheat-producing region. The county's name reflects the crops of alfalfa hay once produced there and references Governor William "Alfalfa Bill" Murray, who was instrumental in dividing territorial Woods County into three counties, one of which was Alfalfa. The land has rolling hills, meandering rivers, and grassy prairie plains, also called the Red Bed Plains. Land and water area in the county comprise 881.46 square miles. Bordered by Kansas on the north, the

county abuts Woods County on the west, Major County on the south, and Grant and Garfield counties on the east. Near the county's center is the Great Salt Plains, which is a federal wildlife refuge and state park. The county also lies in the drainage of the Salt Fork of the Arkansas River, which crosses the county from west to east, with the two being the county's major surface features. Southern Alfalfa County drains south into the Cimarron River ("Alfalfa County," Vertical files, Oklahoma Historical Society). The county seat is the small town of Cherokee, which only represents 20% of the population. Alfalfa has predominantly an agricultural economy, with the majority of families living and working on family-owned farms. There are few if any minority-owned businesses. The number of individuals living at or below the poverty level is in keeping with the state average of 16%. The median income per household is $38,000, which is 9% below the state average of $41,700. Nearly 86% of residents declare themselves White.

Table 3. U.S. Census Bureau Data for Alfalfa County

Categories	Value
Population, 2010	5,642
Persons under 5 years, 2012	5.2%
Persons under 18 years, 2012	17.4%
Persons 65 years and over, 2012	19.4%
Female persons, 2012	40.4%
Black or African American, 2012	4.3%
American Indian and Alaska Native, 2012	3.6%
Asian, 2012	0.3%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, 2012	0.1%
Two or more races, 2012	2.2%
Hispanic or Latino, 2012	5.0%
White (not Hispanic or Latino), 2012	85.4%
Living in same house 1 year or more, 2008-2012	82.2%
Foreign-born persons, 2008-2012	1.8%
Language other than English spoken at home (over age	5.3%

5+), 2008-2012	
High school graduate or higher, 2008-2012	86.0%
Bachelor's degree or higher, 2008-2012	20.5%
Mean travel time to work (minutes), workers age 16+, 2008-2012	18
Housing units, 2012	2,752
Homeownership rate, 2008-2012	78.4%
Median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2008-2012	$62,100
Households, 2008-2012	2,047
Median household income, 2008-2012	$41,943
Persons below poverty level, 2008-2012	12.0%
Land area in square miles, 2010	866.46
Persons per square mile, 2010	6.5
Metropolitan or micropolitan statistical area	None

Mayes County

Mayes County is a rural and exurban site that is 45 minutes from Tulsa (see Table 3). It is located near the northeastern corner of Oklahoma. Surrounding counties include Craig to the north, Delaware to the east, Cherokee and Wagoner to the south, and Rogers to the west. The topography of the county's 683.51 square miles is divided by the Grand River, and 27.37 square miles of the total area is surface water. The eastern half lies on the edge of the Ozark Plateau, or Ozark Uplift, characterized by flat areas divided by deep, V-shaped stream valleys. The western half of the county lies in the Prairie Plains. The incorporated towns include Adair, Chouteau, Disney, Grand Lake, Langley, Locust Grove, Pensacola, Pryor Creek, Salina, Spavinaw, Sportsmen Acres, and Strang. The county seat is Pryor Creek, though residents, most maps, and the U.S. Postal Service refer to it simply as Pryor ("Mayes County," Vertical files, Oklahoma Historical Society). Pryor represents 23% of the population. The rest live throughout the county, particularly on the northern side, which lies on the shores of Grand Lake, a major recreation

destination and retirement area. Mayes County has 63 persons per square mile and a county population of 41,000. Economically, Mayes has no predominant industry, but more than half the population works in retail and recreation-affiliated industries. The number of individuals living at or below the poverty level is below the state average at 14%. The median income per household is $39,000. Sixty-six percent of the residents are White and 22% are Native American, which is three times the state average.

Table 4. U.S. Census Bureau Data for Mayes County

Categories	Value
Population, 2010	41,259
Persons under 5 years, 2012	6.6%
Persons under 18 years, 2012	25.5%
Persons 65 years and over, 2012	16.2%
Female persons, 2012	50.3%
Black or African American, 2012	0.5%
American Indian and Alaska Native, 2012	21.7%
Asian, 2012	0.4%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, 2012	0.1%
Two or more races, 2012	9.3%
Hispanic or Latino, 2012	3.0%
White (not Hispanic or Latino), 2012	66.0%
Living in same house 1 year or more, 2008-2012	85.2%
Foreign-born persons, 2008-2012	0.9%
Language other than English spoken at home (over age 5+), 2008-2012	3.9%
High school graduate or higher, 2008-2012	84.8%
Bachelor's degree or higher, 2008-2012	13.9%
Mean travel time to work (minutes), workers age 16+, 2008-2012	24.8
Housing units, 2012	19,239
Homeownership rate, 2008-2012	72.7%
Median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2008-2012	$94,400
Households, 2008-2012	16,199
Median household income, 2008-2012	$41,475
Persons below poverty level, 2008-2012	19.3%
Land area in square miles, 2010	655.39

Persons per square mile, 2010	63
Metropolitan or micropolitan statistical area	None

Oklahoma County

Oklahoma County was the third site and is the largest urban or suburban county in Oklahoma (see Table 4). It has just over 1,000 people per square mile and a county population of 718,633 (over 1 million live in the Oklahoma City MSA). Located in central Oklahoma, the county is bordered by Logan County on the north, Lincoln and Pottawatomie counties on the east, Cleveland County on the south, and Canadian County on the west. Formed from the Unassigned Lands and designated as County Two in 1890, Oklahoma County is drained by the Deep Fork and the North Canadian Rivers. Named for Oklahoma City, the county includes 718.31 square miles of land and water and is located in the Red Bed Plains physiographic region. Incorporated towns include Arcadia, Bethany, Choctaw, Del City, Edmond, Forest Park, Harrah, Jones, Lake Aluma, Luther, Midwest City, Nichols Hills, Nicoma Park, Smith Village, Spencer, Valley Brook, The Village, Warr Acres, Woodlawn Park, and Oklahoma City, the county seat and state capital ("Oklahoma County," Vertical files, Oklahoma Historical Society). Economically, Oklahoma County has no predominant industry. Typical professions include light industry, health care, banking and finance, oil- and gas-related corporations, retail, transportation, and state and federal government. The number of individuals living at or below the poverty level is just above the state average at 17%. The median income per household matches the state average at $41,000. Forty-five percent of the

residents are of one or more minority population, particular Latino and African American.

Completing Analysis

Commenting about his work as a scriptwriter, film director, writer, and actor, Mel Brooks said, “Every human being has hundreds of separate people living under his skin. The talent of a writer is his ability to give them their separate names, identities, personalities and as they relate to other characters living within him”. Brooks’s comments echoed the subjective nature of most research methods in the social sciences. Like a scriptwriter, a researcher collects information under the guidance of a certain set of methods, but the end product only offers a limited view of the available information, a kind of character or illustration emerges not unlike those found in interesting and vibrant fictional landscapes.

Table 5. U.S. Census Bureau Data for Oklahoma County

Categories	Value
Population, 2010	718,633
Persons under 5 years, 2012	7.7%
Persons under 18 years, 2012	25.4%
Persons 65 years and over, 2012	12.2%
Female persons, 2012	51.0%
Black or African American, 2012	15.7%
American Indian and Alaska Native, 2012	4.1%
Asian, 2012	3.2%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, 2012	0.2%
Two or more races, 2012	5.0%
Hispanic or Latino, 2012	15.8%
White (not Hispanic or Latino), 2012	58.5%
Living in same house 1 year or more, 2008-2012	79.5%
Foreign-born persons, 2008-2012	10.3%
Language other than English spoken at home (over age 5+), 2008-2012	15.8%

High school graduate or higher, 2008-2012	85.9%
Bachelor's degree or higher, 2008-2012	29.3%
Mean travel time to work (minutes), workers age 16+, 2008-2012	20.1
Housing units, 2012	322,550
Homeownership rate, 2008-2012	60.6%
Median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2008-2012	$124,100
Households, 2008-2012	283,168
Median household income, 2008-2012	$45,082
Persons below poverty level, 2008-2012	17.8%
Land area in square miles, 2010	708.82
Persons per square mile, 2010	1,013.8
Metropolitan or micropolitan statistical area	Oklahoma City

These comments can relate to how scholars document, analyze, and present material related to a community and to the social experience of humanity. Scholars should not turn all their fieldwork and interview notes into caricatures of the real people that they encountered but should be aware of how one-sided the reporting of fieldwork can potentially be in the context of a thesis, dissertation, or academic essay and work to present a sincere representation of the given information respondents from a community provide.

The information reported in this research project pulls together various perspectives derived from secondary sources initially and primary sources further along in the research method. The initial phase of the research developed into a passive approach to studying county fairs. Library/archive research and participant-observations formed an indirect method for collecting data, but also allowed me to formulate themes and solidify research questions, which guided my interviews with fair participants. As I introduced with my research questions, trying to understand how or why fairs exist despite changes to the agricultural sector in the US guided my interest. Between the initial

phase of research and the interviews I conducted with fair participants, I concentrated on understanding how fairs support place-identity for certain individuals emerged. I used this notion as a guide to reviewing and analyzing my field notes from participant-observations at county fair events and cataloging interview responses. The sum of my research includes copious notes. As I mentioned, none of the interviews were recorded and each of the individuals interviewed were anonymous. The written record, including summaries of experiences and paraphrasing of comments, steered my analysis and ultimately the write-up for this study. Therefore, the remaining chapters in this study incorporate and encapsulate the method used and material collected in this research project. The focus of the qualitative data presented here serves only to support the ideas and themes introduced in chapter 1.

The following chapters signify the collective research or data that fuel this study. Chapter 4 includes the background information or historical information that informs the contemporary framework for county fairs. Chapter 5 highlights my experience in the field observing the production of county fairs and interviewing participants about fair organization and implementation. Chapter 6 includes a summary of how respondents stated their perceptions per my interview questions of their local fair as well as other comments specific to their experience and interest in fair-related activities. In Chapter 7, I tie my ethnographic research to the research questions posed in the introduction.

Chapter 4: Agriculture and Fairs in Oklahoma

Oklahoma has a broad agricultural history that predates statehood. This history provides context for understanding the place-identity that is Oklahoma. As discussed in Chapter 2, place-identity includes continual recognition, development of connotation, expression, mediation, and support of values assigned to a place by individuals and groups. Oklahoma has many identities based on the nuances of individual and group interests. In this study, the place-identity under consideration was Oklahoma's agricultural identity; however, even that context varied depending on whether the discussion involved the current state of agriculture or farming and ranching in the past. In addition, variations occurred with regard to understanding the difference between recorded history and remembered history. The opening half of this chapter includes a summary of the recorded history of Oklahoma agriculture. This serves as a good backdrop for understanding the remembered history, which is where the mythology of Oklahoma farming and ranching resides. This past provides context for understanding the yeoman farmer icon as an important myth. Small, sustaining family farmers dominated the state when it was still Indian land and unincorporated territory. The yeoman farmers continued to be a vital part of the Oklahoma economy and population boom until the 1930s and continued to be an important symbol of determination and self-reliance even as agriculture gradual changed during the mid- to late 20th century. Alongside this history of agriculture, state and county fairs offered an important rallying place

for the farmers and ranchers. These places would continue a legacy related to farming that no longer existed.

As discussed further in Chapter 7, the agrarian heritage of Oklahoma is about actual farming practices as well as the created identity people, not necessarily commercial farmers, support within the context of this tradition. In Chapter 5, I describe the actions that come with producing a county fair, but in this chapter, I talk briefly about Oklahoma's agrarian past. To understand agricultural fairs in Oklahoma, it is important to know how these events parallel agriculture in the state. With regard to place-identity, fairs are events that supported changes in Oklahoma agriculture since the end of the 19th century. Together with those changes, interest, value, and structure of agricultural fairs changed too. The changes can be observed in county fairs, but even the state fair is an institution that operates under a different set of focuses and expectations than in the past.

Oklahoma agriculture has historically included staple crops (wheat, corn, soybean, hay, and peanuts) and commodities (mostly cotton). Farmers also raise chickens, dairy, eggs, and an assortment of vegetables and fruits. Cattle and swine tend to be the most dominant forms of livestock on Oklahoma farms. The number of farms and farm families in Oklahoma has decreased over time. This number peaked at a quarter million in 1935 and dropped to below a hundred thousand in 1980. Oklahoma currently has approximately 86,000 farms, according to Oklahoma State University Agricultural Extension. In 1920, half the state residents lived on farms. That number dropped to 25% in the

1950s. By the turn of the 21st century, just over 33,000 listed agriculture as their income source. Over half who live on farms today in Oklahoma earn their main primary income outside the farm (U.S. Census Bureau, 1997; Fite, 1966). Since the 1990s, businesses rather than independent farmers manage most farming enterprises.

Oklahoma lands were famously settled between 1889 and 1906, first through a series of dramatic land runs and then by lottery and other means. For decades, American Indian tribes experienced aggressive efforts to move them from various parts of the United States and its landholdings to Indian Territory, which was an area that included most of Oklahoma. Each tribe engaged in varying degrees of farming, with more migratory groups from the west, like the Kiowa and Comanche, not accustomed to farming and more settled groups from the east, like the Choctaw and Creek, engaging in individual and community subsistence farming, with commercial farming beginning in the 1870s as the railroads began moving into the area. After the land was distributed to non-Indians, agriculture for primarily economic purposes developed quickly (Fite, 1966). Although the Indians in the eastern half of the state had been farmers, most farming for financial gain occurred through annual leases to White tenants. With the first land run in April 1889, agriculture moved toward becoming the basis of the Oklahoma economy (D. E. Green, 1977; Olson, 1977).

Early farming by mostly White and African American families on free or cheap land was difficult. Periodic droughts, low market prices, limited financial

resources, and other problems plagued this group of farmers. Then, as today, most farmers follow an annual cycle that matches the regional seasons (spring, summer, and fall vary depending on different parts of the United States) as they plow, fertilize, plant, prepare, and harvest their crops. Harvest is the once-a-year paycheck that cannot be counted on until the cash crop is in the grain elevator or the cotton gin. Many farmers initially lived in sod houses or dugouts, living off their subsistence gardens and the livestock they raised for food. Despite this hardship, the U.S. Census reported an increase in farms in the territory between 1890 and 1900 from 8,800 to 108,000. By 1910, the number of farms had jumped to over 190,000. Of this number, African American farmers operated 13,200. After 1910, the number of farms in Oklahoma remained constant for a generation, between 190,000 and 210,000 (Olson, 1977; U.S. Census Bureau, 1890-1910).

Cotton was Oklahoma's leading money crop, and production increased rapidly after 1900. Cotton growing was concentrated in central and southwestern counties. In 1910, Oklahoma ranked sixth among cotton-producing states (Fite, 1984). Wheat was on the rise, and the growing emphasis on wheat and cotton raised serious questions among some of the state's leaders because of the system's effect on farm families. Cotton was particularly problematic as 54% of Oklahoma cotton growers in 1910 were tenant farmers. The rate was highest among African Americans. Experts from Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical (now Oklahoma State University), directors of the Agricultural Experiment Stations, and editors of farm

publications were among those who urged farmers to diversify their operations. Some farmers attended conferences and institutes based on this instance to gain a better knowledge of how they might improve their income, and how the family as whole could increase their contributions. These efforts are not unlike those provided in other states under different circumstances to support the need for self-sustaining (yeoman) farming. This educational effort used the newly established network of county fairs and other agricultural meetings and expos to deliver their message. Focus on educating farmers at this point provided for a different kind of agricultural structure in Oklahoma. Older farming regions and communities in the United States had relied upon local educational networks (farmer-to-farmer communication) and simple trial and error to manage a successful farm. Oklahoma was different. The formalization of youth activities at county and state fairs around the country occurred around the time of Oklahoma statehood. The national 4-H organization formed in 1914, when the U.S. Congress created the Cooperative Extension Service of the USDA by passing the Smith-Lever Act. Unlike other states with longer fair traditions, Oklahoma's support of 4-H and the cooperative extensions occurred at inception, and fairs have always been associated with these institutions.

Despite the effort to better educate farmers and improve life on yeoman family farms, many farmers were either unwilling or unable to make the recommended changes. Cotton farming was especially resistant to change due to both the price of this commodity and the high number of sharecroppers (Fite, 1984; D. E. Green, 1977; Olson, 1977). Farming from 1920 to the 1950s

experienced turmoil and radical changes to the social and cultural context for farmers. The deflation and severe drop in farm prices that began in 1920 dramatically affected agriculture across the United States, especially for wheat, cotton, and livestock in Oklahoma. Corn was not as affected by price because farmers tended to rely on it for livestock feed and food for families. Wheat became the more promoted crop in the western half of the state after 1920. Poor economic conditions intensified political unrest and led to a brief radicalization of Oklahoma farmers who believed that large corporate and financial institutions were behind their economic woes. Some of the farmers even joined the Socialist Party, which advocated state-operated enterprises across the agricultural production process. With this background of protest, farmers helped elect leftist governor Jack Walton in 1923, who with the help of the Oklahoma Farmer-Labor Reconstruction League tried to implement a slate of agricultural reforms, including the controversial implementation of state-owned enterprises. However, Walton was unable to push any of the league's programs through the legislature, and the legislature successfully impeached Walton within a year of taking office. Farmers received no assistance from the state government. Better prices by 1923 and 1924 for both wheat and cotton temporarily reduced farm discontent, though life for thousands of Oklahoma farm families was a struggle (Fite, 1964). By 1930, 61% of Oklahoma's farmers had become tenants, and in some counties, tenancy was as high as 70% (Olson, 1977).

The start of the Great Depression created even worse conditions for Oklahoma farmers. By 1932, farm commodity prices bottomed out. The farm price for cotton and wheat in 1931 fell to 60% of its market high a decade prior. Prices for other crops and livestock also dropped. The gross income of all Oklahoma farm production, both crops and livestock, dropped from $314 million in 1929 to $115 million in 1932 (Olson, 1977). In 1933, the Roosevelt administration's New Deal established the Agricultural Adjustment Administration. Believing that huge agricultural surpluses were responsible for low prices, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration provided Oklahoma's cotton and wheat farmers with cash benefits in return for reducing their acreage. Producers of other crops also received federal benefits like direct financial assistance to hog and cattle raisers (Fite, 1964). Drought cut wheat production, but farmers still received payments if they promised to reduce acreage in the following years. Federal programs also included better farm credit facilities and payment for certain soil conservation practices. The programs significantly helped Oklahoma farmers get through the Great Depression, but their support was not uniform. Cash payments began in the 1930s and continue in the 21st century. Because cash payments to farmers for their main crops reduced the total planted acreage, larger operators benefited most from direct government payments. Small farmers, especially sharecroppers, most of whom were African American, received little to no help. Thousands of small family farmers struggled to survive, which contributed to the

ultimate downfall of small farms in Oklahoma including the once thriving yeoman farming community.

Federal farm programs helped farmers receive better prices for their products, but nothing could stop the drought and severe dust storms that struck western Oklahoma between 1933 and 1937. The western and northwestern counties all suffered, but conditions were worst in the Panhandle. The economic catastrophe created by wind, drought, and poor prices caused such distress and financial hardship that thousands abandoned their farms and migrated to California and elsewhere. Many migrants left the eastern part of the state as well. The Dust Bowl exodus was most dramatic between 1935 and 1940 when the number of farms decreased by 16% or 33,600 individual farms (Worster, 1979). With most of the migration occurring among economically disadvantaged farmers, those left became more politically conservative. The remaining farmers tended to thrive on acreage twice the average. In 1920, the average Oklahoma farm was 166 acres. However, there were huge variations in size. Medium-size farms ranged from 100 to 174 acres.[19] Conversely, thousands of sharecroppers farmed less than 50 acres. The largest farms, those more than 260 acres, comprised only a small percentage of the agricultural industry. In the 1940s, this last group represented the majority. By 1950, it was clear that a major restructuring was occurring in Oklahoma agriculture. Farms were becoming fewer and larger as the better capitalized and more efficient producers expanded by renting or buying more land from departing neighbors.

[19] Most traditional homesteads from the time of the land run were 160 acres.

Even though during World War II both crops and prices were favorable to farmers, by 1950 Oklahoma had lost half its farm families. Even those who stayed after the Dust Bowl concluded that they could not make a living farming, or they found opportunities that were more lucrative in nonfarm employment. Economics was not the only factor affecting the downturn in the number of farm families. The Rural Electrification Administration began a major transformation in the living conditions of rural populations. By 1950, two thirds of Oklahoma's farmers had electricity. In addition to electric lights, many farm families began to enjoy running water, bathroom facilities, home freezers, refrigerators, electric washing machines, and other conveniences. By midcentury, prosperous farmers had about the same home conveniences and standard of living as those living in towns or cities. Only a decade had passed since most farms were family enterprises that used horse or mule power to pull plows, cultivators, and other machinery.

From the mid-1950s through the 1980s, farming operations continued to decline in numbers, while the median size farm doubled to 400 acres, which is where it has remained (U.S. Census Bureau, 1997). By the 1997 federal agricultural census, Oklahoma reported an increase from the mid-1980s low, but the cause was largely a change in the definition of a farm. The increase in large corporate farms in the 1980s has led to greater efficiency and productivity in all sectors of agriculture in Oklahoma. Highly capitalized with huge investments in equipment such as tractors, trucks, grain combines, mechanical cotton pickers, hay balers, and other expensive machines, these operations

dominate the rural landscape. However, thousands of small farmers have returned to their upbringing by becoming part-time farmers who derived their main income from off-farm work (Hewes, 1973; Ramirez-Ferrero, 2005). Of the 74,200 farms reported in 1997, over half of the operators listed their main occupation as something other than farming. Despite a growing degree of concentration in agriculture or the corporatization of farming, most farms continued to be family owned.

While the number of farms and the farm population declined sharply after World War II, agriculture continues to be a major factor in Oklahoma's economy. Though the yeoman family farm is no longer a thriving economic base, farming does continue to cultivate a similar array of food and commodities but with a much larger implication for state, national, and international needs. The persistence of similar agricultural endeavors from the past is a source of pride for current farmers. Though on a larger scale and through current technology, the idea that farmers continue a legacy provides a powerful source that reinforces values and establishes legitimacy for one's efforts. More about values and legitimacy in connection to Oklahoma's farming past appears in Chapter 7. Oklahoma is currently one of the top producers of key agricultural commodities in the United States.[20] These points of success in agriculture are a reason that interest in and support of agriculture continue, even among Oklahomans who are not directly part of the market and why some people continue to farm part-time or for supplemental income.

[20] Oklahoma is fifth in the nation in the production of winter wheat, fifth in pecans, first in the production of rye, fifth in grain sorghum, sixth in peanuts, fifth in cattle and calf production, eighth in hogs production, and 17th in broiler (chicken) production (OSU Extension, 2014).

Rise of Agricultural Fairs in the United States That Influence Oklahoma's Fairs

In essence, a county or state fair is a public event that includes equipment displays, animals, sports, and recreation associated with agriculture and animal husbandry. Fairs also comprise a livestock show, which is a judged event or display in which breeding stock is exhibited; a trade fair; competitions; and entertainment. The work and practices of farmers, animal enthusiasts, cowboys or herders, and zoologists are often displayed. County fairs as agricultural shows are an important part of the cultural life of a small town and are a popular event in larger towns and cities. They range in size from short, 2-day events to longer 3-day events. Larger statewide events happen over 2 weeks and include amusement park entertainment alongside the agricultural show. Although increasingly under pressure due to finances and insurance concerns, nearly all counties in the United States have a county fair as part of a network of statewide competitions and exhibitions. Larger shows often include live entertainment and fireworks.

The first agricultural fairs in the early 1800s gave rural families an opportunity to see firsthand the latest in agricultural techniques, equipment, crops, and livestock. Over the course of the 19th century, fairs also added a wide range of educational, recreational, competitive, and social activities into their programs. Before there were state and federally subsidized county fairs, most were held by private individuals and organizations or agricultural societies. In 1807, Elkanah Watson of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, held one of the first

agricultural fairs by holding sheep-shearing demonstrations in conjunction with a traditional market fair. In less than a decade, other events accompanied sheep shearing as what became known as the Berkshire County Fair evolved to include thousands of animals, a local industrial display, artisan demonstrations, and a band. In addition to featuring agriculture, Watson also took careful steps to attract women by offering premiums (or prize money) on domestic products and by holding an annual ball (Marti, 1986; Neely, 1935).

To understand the role that county fairs play in history, one must understand what influenced the development of agriculture in the United States. Watson's efforts were not an isolated interest. He believed in the success of self-sufficient farming across the United States and its western territories. County fairs fit well into his broader interests in western land development on the other side of the Appalachians. Watson was a major supporter of new transportation systems designed to deliver raw materials and agricultural goods cultivated in the West back to eastern cities. These included manmade canals and modified natural waterways that were critical to U.S. commerce prior to the advent of railroads. Watson was a leader in the emerging agricultural movement in the early United States. To comprehend his aim and that of others in the movement is to understand the importance of land ownership and use during the 19th and early 20th centuries (McCarry, 1997). Land acquisition and use were a central part of the U.S. domestic and foreign policy in the 19th century. Starting with America's colonial history, land in the New World provided colonists with the basis for survival. It allowed individuals to provide

necessities (i.e., agricultural production), acquire wealth, and thus achieve higher social status. European influence in the new colonies can best be seen through the culture that rose connecting land ownership to social rights, including the right to vote (Neely, 1935).

With the British American colonies and later the emerging United States dominated by settlers intent on farming, the land policy provided methods by which they obtained land and established a system of tenure. Under the previous British rule, the land was seen as a commodity under the control of the Crown. The American Revolution served as a mechanism for shaping a new kind of land policy. After much debate, the acquisition of land became standardized, and the sale and documentation of ownership continue to function much the same.

However, during the early years of the United States, debate over the nation's land acquisition and distribution policy ensued between the Federalist and Anti-Federalist positions. Federalists such as Alexander Hamilton called for a policy that favored high land prices to deepen the national treasury. They also sought the sale of large parcels of land to speculators rather than the sale of small parcels to individual settlers (P. W. Gates, 1979; Hibbard, 1924). Anti-Federalists such as Thomas Jefferson envisioned an agrarian nation built upon the idea of individual land ownership: the yeoman farmer (Foust, 1975). This vision called for the disposal of the public domain at modest prices, if not free, to individual settlers. The Anti-Federalists argued that an economically stable nation would develop with the transfer of the public domain into private

individual ownership. Fairs became a vehicle to promote the sustainability of this private ownership.

Agricultural societies eagerly adopted Watson's model for agricultural fairs, but often faced financial difficulties. During the 1820s and 1830s, local agricultural exhibitions floundered because private donations fell short of the money required for premiums, fairgrounds, judges, transportation, publicity, and entertainment. Beginning in 1840, state legislatures across the country formed agricultural boards and allocated funds to agricultural societies, which in turn allowed for larger, more regular exhibitions. In 1841, the first state fair took place in Syracuse, New York. Sponsored by the New York Agricultural Society, the 3-day event attracted more than 15,000 people (Neely, 1935, p. 97).

Fairs quickly became anticipated events across the country. Many farm families adjusted their work schedules as far as a month in advance of the big events to earn a few work-free days at the fair. For many people, the fair would mark the first time they saw electric lights and airplanes, and it helped farm families adapt to change by accepting new forms of popular entertainment, such as vaudeville. Horseracing, including women's horseracing, emerged as one of the most popular and controversial activities (Marti, 1986). At the 1854 Iowa State Fair, prizes for women's horseracing included a gold watch and a premium of $165 or a scholarship to study at a nearby seminary for three terms (Neely, 1935, p. 196). Critics decried the immorality of the sport and the immodesty of female riders. By the late 1860s, fair boards and legislatures across the country limited, or even banned, women's equestrian events.

The Civil War brought to the surface numerous areas of tension in the United States, including land tenure and use. The secession of the Southern states created a power shift in Washington, DC, that allowed Congress to pass a more relaxed land disposal policy. The 1862 Homestead Act enabled any White head of a household, male or female, 21 years or older, to file a claim on 160 acres of the public domain as long as he or she was a citizen (Neely, 1935).[21] Restrictions applied, including a requirement that the individual had to live on the land for 5 years and make improvements upon it. These improvements included clearing the land, establishing fields, and building a home, barns, and other outbuildings. This rise in small family farms dotting the American landscape and led to a sharp rise in agricultural fairs and other events. During the Civil War, the military used state fairgrounds in the Midwest to train soldiers, which forced agricultural societies to either relocate or cancel annual events. Following the war, fairs enjoyed a renewed popularity as states increased funding to construct permanent fairgrounds, some complete with buildings and a midway. These fairs continued to be sources of both education and entertainment.

Politics and community organizing increasingly played a role in county fair activities. The Granger movement was a sign that farming and herding were not as benign and quaint as the myth of the yeoman farmer had indicated. As trade unions were increasing in urban or industrialized settings, followers of the Granger movement sought to protect the rights of farmers who fought

[21] This expanded to African Americans or freemen following passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

monopolistic grain transport practices (Marti, 1986; Neely, 1935). The movement began with Oliver Hudson Kelley, an employee of the USDA, who while touring the South in 1866, became alarmed at how unaware farmers were about what he considered sound agricultural practices. County and state agricultural fairs were institutions found throughout the Northeast and the Midwest but not in the southeastern United States until after the war. Kelley in 1867 began an organization, Patrons of Husbandry, which would bring farmers together for educational discussions and social purposes. They quickly became a major part of county fair organization. The group, while also associated with secret ritual, was divided into local units called granges. Minnesota was the first state to organize, but by 1870, nine states had granges. Within 5 years, nearly every state had at least one grange, and national membership reached close to 800,000 (W. J. Gates, 1984). What drew most farmers to the Granger movement was the need for a unified action against the monopolistic railroads and grain elevator owners, who were often the same person and charged exorbitant rates for handling and transporting farmers' crops and other agricultural products. County fairs became a big part of the Grangers' political efforts because they were excellent sites for recruiting farmers and for meeting politicians there to stump. Although the granges declined in popularity after state legislature began passing laws to curb price gouging, other movements in the 20th century illustrated the value of fairs as political venues. After 1870, political speeches, carnival games, vaudevillian performances, and enticing edibles were a mainstay of the fair-going experience.

History of Agricultural Fairs in Oklahoma

In Oklahoma, the development of fairs also began in the 19th century. Fairs in eastern Oklahoma or Indian Nations were held in the late summer or early autumn. The Indian Nations' primary economic activities involved agriculture. Farmers among the southeastern Indian nations (Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Seminole, and Muscogee-Creek), removed west in the 1830s, formed agricultural organizations. The Cherokee Agricultural Society in 1845 held the first collective nations fair. It was revived by the Cherokee Farmers' Club in October 1870, when both men and women exhibited home work.[22] The success of smaller gatherings spurred the Indian International Fair in the autumn of 1874 (Denson, 2003). Creek and Cherokee leaders also held an intertribal agricultural exposition at Muskogee in the Creek Nation. The event included competitions, edifying exhibits, horseracing, and a ladies' saddle-horse contest. Through the century, the Muskogee fair continued, and other Indian fairs occurred irregularly in the territory. The Cherokees decided to hold their event at Fort Gibson in 1876. The National Council formed a Fair and Agricultural Association as a corporation that sold shares, set up the fair, provided the premiums, and charged admission. Board members of territorial fairs included prominent leadership from within the tribes. In 1882, Vinita businesspersons established the territory's first town-and-county fair (Denson, 2003; Wright, 1971).

[22] The term *home work* refers to activities common in rural society in the United States during the 19th and early 20th centuries that were necessary for all families to thrive outside urban areas. These activities included home gardens, food preservation, clothing, home improvements, and sanitation. They also included craft arts such as furniture making, quilting, basket weaving, beading, tanning, and leather works.

In western Oklahoma outside Indian Territory, county fairs began following the development of Oklahoma Territory in 1889. Oklahoma City held the first of these activities in 1889, 5 months after the first land run. By 1892, a formal Oklahoma Territorial Fair Association was established that sponsored the annual Oklahoma Territorial Fair, which was the de facto state fair before 1907. Influential Oklahoma City business leaders were active in the association. Under their direction, the organization purchased a parcel of land and erected, among other structures, a half-mile horse racetrack. However, with an early setback in the region's economy leading to Oklahoma City's population decline, the territorial fair discontinued after 1894. In 1898, as the agriculture markets improved, the city hosted a street fair as an alternative, which was repeated in 1899. In 1902, organizers moved to host an Oklahoma City Fair and Race Meeting (Blackburn & Strasbaugh, 1994).

The same Oklahoma City leadership organized a state fair association. The organization located a new fairground on the city's east side and held the first State Fair of Oklahoma in early October 1907, a month before official statehood day on November 16. Agriculture remained at the forefront, with prizes offered for crop and livestock competition as well as several farm and ranching exhibits. Horseracing served as the biggest draw, and the grandstand at the half-mile track accommodated 15,000 fans for the Oklahoma Derby. The first fair also held the usual carnival attractions, including a midway and vaudeville acts. In November 1907, efforts were made to sustain the new state fair. The association was in debt, and principal business leaders were needed

to guide the organization through the next 5 years. During this period, expansion and improvements abounded, including the construction of several buildings, new rides, telephone and electric connections, and a large Livestock and Horse Show Pavilion. In 1913, the state legislature banned gambling on horse races, which was the most popular event, but the public's interest in automobiles and air flight was exploding as the fair held car races, sponsored hot air balloons, and hosted an air show (Blackburn & Strasbaugh, 1994; Everett, 2007).

In addition to Oklahoma City, other areas of the state experienced a rising interest in the role fairs could play in economic and community development. As Midwesterners moved into Oklahoma Territory with the land runs, agricultural fairs became regular autumn events, similar to the tradition of hosting fairs throughout the northeastern parts of the United States. Beaver County, in the Panhandle, claimed to be holding the territory's first county fair when residents gathered in mid-September 1891. During this time, commercial clubs often organized fairs, which were little more than trade carnivals, to bring customers to town. Cleveland County held its first annual fair in Norman in November 1893, which was widely attended by those living in rural and newly formed towns in the area. Towns and counties following suit in the 1890s included El Reno (1894), Newkirk (1896), Cloud Chief (1897), Payne County (1893) and G County (at Arapaho, 1895; "Fairs and Carnivals," 2012). County fair associations gradually developed, and as with Oklahoma City, they usually consisted of businesspersons who raised money for premiums, sited the event

on land purchased or leased for the purpose, and advertised. Contestants' entry fees and general gate admissions paid the expenses. In 1895, Kingfisher charged fairgoers $0.25 to enter the grounds. As with Oklahoma City and fairs in Indian Territory, Oklahoma Territory fairs also included horseracing with wagering (Blackburn & Strasbaugh, 1994; Everett, 2007).

In early 20th-century communities, crop carnivals proved popular too but should not be confused with actual agricultural fairs. These carnivals celebrated the corn, cotton, or wheat harvest. Often the real purpose was to promote a town or a county at a time when populations in the territory fluctuated due to settler migration. In contrast to more established events in the northern United States, many of the early fairs in the territory did not share information on horticulture or homemaking. The agricultural exhibits sometimes focused more on agricultural oddities such as the biggest, not necessarily the best, ear of corn, bolt of cotton, and variety of pumpkin or on specimens of livestock such as a three-legged chicken. Traveling amusement shows provided the midway (Everett, 2007).

In recognizing agriculture's importance to the economy, Oklahoma's territorial and state government tried to modernize farming through educational programs, many of which were hosted at fairs. Laws passed by the territorial legislature in March 1901 and by the state legislature in 1909 required all county commissioners to conduct regular farmers' institutes. Tax revenue could provide premiums in countywide competitions of experimental work in livestock breeding and domestic science or home economics. At the turn of the 20th

century, the federal government became involved in adult and youth vocational education, and the USDA's county agents encouraged county fairs. After statehood in 1907, the agents worked with Oklahoma Farmers' Institutes and rural boys and girls' clubs, including 4-H, to prepare crop exhibits and livestock for county fairs and the state fair (Blackburn & Strasbaugh, 1994; Everett, 2007).

The 1914 federal Smith-Lever Act established the Cooperative Extension Service (the vocational-education arm of the USDA) within each state's land-grant colleges, including Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical (now Oklahoma State University) and Colored Agricultural & Normal (now Langston University). The idea was to give agricultural research information directly to farmers and their families through interaction with county extension agents. By that time, many agents already served as judges at fairs and livestock competitions ("Fairs and Carnivals," 2012). The 1917 Smith-Hughes Act provided funding for Extension Service personnel to work more closely with 4-H clubs (and later, Future Farmers of America and Future Homemakers of America). As a result, fairs increased in importance as an educational tool for rural youth (Hopkins, 1928).

With all the newly established state and federal support, fairs (particularly the state fairs, of which there were three in Oklahoma: Muskogee, Oklahoma City, and Tulsa) faced increasing debt and competition by 1917. The one in the greatest financial trouble was the Muskogee State Fair, which the legislature had endorsed as the official state fair that year. Evolving from the Indian

territorial fair, the Muskogee New State Fair opened in 1906 (before statehood). It grew into the Oklahoma Free State Fair in 1916, and eventually taking on the title Muskogee Free State Fair. It continued as a state fair for some time, but as Oklahoma City and Tulsa emerged as important economic centers, Muskogee's fair became a regional fair over time, particularly after World War II (Denson, 2003; Wright, 1971). Oklahoma City and Tulsa leaders looked for ways to legitimize and financially stabilize their events. For example, to continue the Oklahoma City venue, civic leaders proposed to sell the fairgrounds to the city, which would in return rent the grounds to the fair board for 30 days each fall.[23] In May 1917, Oklahoma City voters approved a bond to fund the purchase. Tulsa's Community Free Fair began in 1903 and evolved into the Tulsa State Fair by 1915. Like Oklahoma City, it charged admission, but both Tulsa and Oklahoma counties still held county fairs that fed into the emerging fair organizational network that placed state fairs on top (Hopkins, 1928).

Until 1915, the operation of county fairs in Oklahoma was impeded by the profit motive. Most fair associations collected entry fees from competitors and gate admission from fairgoers. Therefore, in poorer, less populated counties, farm families could not afford to participate, and those areas were underrepresented at the state fairs. In spring 1915, legislation was offered to allow county commissions to operate free fairs and use tax money to pay the event's expenses. Approved in June 1915, the Free Fair Law directed each

[23] This rental agreement is also known as the Dallas Plan after the State Fair of Texas sold its property to the City of Dallas. Since 1903, the municipality has managed the fairgrounds that the state fair leases. Many counties around the United States have since adopted similar models that allow city leaders to open the property to other vendors and event organizers outside of fair season.

county agent to hold a meeting, select two fair directors, and ask the commission to collect $0.25 cents on each $1,000 of assessed property value. Each county could draw $100 of state money to send its winning exhibits to a state fair. Twenty-two counties immediately announced fair dates for autumn 1915, and 49 counties participated 2 years later (Everett, 2007; “Fairs and Carnivals,” 2012).

The 1915 law provided a long-term solution to funding county fair activities and established a competitive relationship between local, county, and state fairs. Township fair winners competed at the county fair, and county fair winners competed at a state fair. Every county held several free township fairs and one county fair. Most municipalities voted for bonds to build fairgrounds. In the 1920s, over 300 fairs were hosted across the state at each of the levels (“Fairs and Carnivals,” 2012). In the 1930s with the depressed economy, most township fairs ceased due to lack of funds. County and state fairs thrived.

With harsh segregation across Oklahoma between statehood and the 1950s, African American communities hosted their own fairs, somewhat under the leadership of White communities. In 1915, Black businesspersons established a Negro State Fair at the insistence of White community leaders. Muskogee hosted the first event, but then it moved to Boley and Wewoka. African American county demonstration agents[24] eventually organized all-Black events in places such as Luther in Oklahoma County. Winners moved up in the competition pool and competed at the segregated Oklahoma State Fair in the city (Everett, 2007).

[24] Agricultural advisors were similar to agricultural extension agents.

The mid-20th century offered a host of challenges for county and state fairs. The decline of township fairs put greater emphasis on countywide events. A decline in rural population and the bottoming of tax revenue due to farm foreclosures during the Depression reduced the production size of even bigger, well-funded events, including statewide fairs. However, fairs were not entirely lost. Even as early as the 1930s, Oklahoma City and Tulsa secured private investment to support infrastructure. In return, investors received either a portion of gate proceeds or other revenue from the fair or gained unlimited access to fair patrons through advertising and other commercial promotions. Many communities also used the 1930s federal Works Progress Administration to build new fairgrounds and grandstands. During World War II, many state fairs, including Texas, suspended activities, but fairs continued to operate in Oklahoma. The wartime fairs worked toward educating the public about rationing and alternative food sources. They helped raise civilian morale, and they included exhibits from various branches of the armed forces (“Fairs and Carnivals,” 2012).

After the war, county fairs thrived in Oklahoma. Although dramatic reductions in rural populations continue to threaten counties across the state, all still maintain an annual fair at a county or municipal-owned fairground. The fairgrounds flourish as rental facilities for both fair activities as well as other events such as rodeos, horse and livestock shows, auction stockyards, and arts and craft shows. County fairs continue to be inexpensive to attend with little or no gate fees and modest ticket prices for special events and shows.

Oklahoma's Free Fair Law has been amended four times to expand and refine the system's funding methods (Everett, 2007). The state fairs in Oklahoma City and Tulsa, in contrast, have grown in popularity. In many states across the Midwest and the Northeast, county fairs flourish as significant local events. In Oklahoma, the emphasis has been on promoting the state fairs. County fairs function as local events that feed the significance of the state fairs. To illustrate this rise, state attendance in both Oklahoma City and Tulsa doubled, from approximately half a million attendees in the mid-1950s to over a million by the mid-1970s (Blackburn & Strasbaugh, 1994). These attendance expectations continue. Organizers of both state fairs have also worked to expand fair facilities and infrastructure. For Tulsa, this occurred in 1957 with Oklahoma's Golden Anniversary Exposition and in 1966 with the building of Expo Square, which was once the largest building by the square foot in the United States. For Oklahoma City, it was the new fairgrounds built for the 1957 Semi-Centennial Exposition, the addition of several other buildings and construction projects in 1965, and the Metropolitan Area Projects investment ("Fairs and Carnivals," 2012).

In Chapter 2, the literature review, a critique of previous studies related to agricultural fairs in the United States provided a variety of considerations and avenues for study. I drew attention to particular studies relevant to the work completed in this dissertation. The focus of that chapter was on previous studies of place-identity and studies related to agricultural fairs in the United States. Chapter 4 established a context for studying agricultural fairs in

Oklahoma. The context included a history of Oklahoma's agriculture as it related to the background of fairs in the state. Chapter 4 also included a description of mitigating forces that influence farming and ranching in Oklahoma, which will be useful in the understanding the particular activities and cultural process discussed in later chapters of this study. My research includes reflections about the nuances of county fairs in Oklahoma. The last two chapters of this study connect the interests and perceptions of fairs by participants with inceptions of identity that come from an association with fairs as places.

Chapter 5: Empirical Description of Fair Landscapes, Structure, and Organization

> Well, the county fair left quite a mess in the county yard
> Kids with eyes as big as dollars rode all the rides
> Strip artists and con artists put on quite a show
> And, made some money then left town
> Where they went I don't know?
>
> John Mellencamp, "County Fair" (2008)

The perception of county and state fairs is often that of organizations run by strangers from out of town affectionately and disdainfully called carnies.[25] Those who are casual participants from the community or individuals not from the community that is hosting the fair share this perception. In reality, county fairs are locally produced events with a few outside vendors. Generally, these vendors are limited to food service, entertainment such as concerts or rodeos, or amusement rides. However, not all fairs, particularly in Oklahoma, contract with these outside interests. Therefore, this study of county fairs was not an exercise in analyzing the influence of interests from outside the community, but rather it involved examining local influences as they relate to group- and place-identity within a community.

Like any other special event, county fairs continue for a designated period and occur at a designated location: the fairgrounds. To understand place-identity in the context of Oklahoma county fairs, a few considerations

[25] Carnie is a slang term used in North America for a carnival employee and the language they use. While unsubstantiated, the term carny is believed to have become popularized around 1930s in North America. Matthew Barr discussed the history and traditions related to carnivals in the United States in the documentary *Carnival Train* (1999).

must be taken into account. In addition to those discussed in the previous chapter, the considerations include a rationale for why people get involved in fairs and what value people gain from participating in and organizing county fairs, which are two concerns addressed in Chapter 6. This chapter includes a discussion on how groups define their involvement in organizing and contributing to county fairs. The chapter also touches upon how the production and participation in fair activities actually occur.

Cultural and Social Groups of the Fair

The culture and geography of a fair is as much about the location as about the people who create and operate in that location. Several groups support the vigor of these events through their dedication to education and youth-based activities while others work to promote the fair to the community. Certain associations support adult activities while others handle the finances and logistics of the event. Most organizations involved in fairs are charter members of larger institutions, such as local chapters or clubs embedded within a state or national affiliation such as 4-H, FFA, and OCHE. Other groups of participants are loosely affiliated with the fair (such as a friend-of-the-fair group) or have no affiliation. While nearly all youth involved in fairs are part of a formal organization, several adults support and participate in the fair independently or are unassociated. For example, adults can participate in exhibitions and livestock shows in the open class, with no affiliation necessary. However, if adults decide to expand their involvement in the fair, their independent association with the event is lost. With more engagement with fair

arrangements and activities comes inclusion in a group of organized officials as a division coordinator or as a member of the fair board.

Organization, Setup, and Structure of County Fairs

Although they vary in details and subtleties, the historical production of county fairs across the United States and the way they are produced in the 21st century are remarkably similar (Avery, 2000; Hokanson & Kratz, 2008; McCarry, 1997) and can be seen in nearly every county in Oklahoma annually between late July and mid-September. As highlighted in the previous chapter, communities have hosted agricultural fairs in Oklahoma since before the Civil War when various American Indian nations held the entire area (Blackburn & Strasbaugh, 1994). The administrative structure of these events has been surprisingly consistent for over a century, even in comparison to their European rural agricultural fairs and festivals (Marti, 1986; Neely, 1935). In every fair, the basis of organization is an assembly of dedicated volunteers who are members of one or more groups highlighted above. These people constitute a voting bloc that elects a board of directors and officers.

Through my research and observations of several fairs, I have constructed a description of county fair operations in Oklahoma. This description originates from my assessment and consultation with county extension agents and the fair board staff of five counties.[26] Ethnographic documentation and the same interview process discussed in Chapter 6 informed my descriptions in this chapter. Research into public records on the

[26] My principal research sites were Alfalfa, Mayes, and Oklahoma Counties, as well as Pontotoc and Noble Counties.

county and state level was also important, in addition to my reviews of the legal requirements that govern these events and their organizational structure. Most county fair offices reside in the office of the local Oklahoma State University County Extension. These offices maintain a variety of records related to producing fairs, fair board meetings, and other materials collected over time. Legal and other regulatory requirements imposed on state and county fairs since 1915 have standardized much of how fair organizers manage their record-keeping and production activities (Blackburn & Strasbaugh, 1994).[27] Thus, this description of county fairs serves as a composite of fairs around the state, with differences provided when relevant to the three principal research sites at the core of this study.

The organization of county fairs begins with the board of directors and their meetings. Board member elections take place at a general meeting hosted in the late fall, well after the end of the local county and the state fairs. Regular volunteers attend and work these meetings, but they are public meetings that anyone can attend. County residents of legal voting age can vote by their assigned district, with three such districts in each county. Board members are not term limited. However, incumbent members often rotate out of their posts to allow others in the community to participate. If current board members see a person they think would be a good worker, they ask that person to run for a position. Each county varies slightly with regard to how the fair is managed, but the boards are organized the same. Local volunteers mostly

[27] Fair boards for each county are elected county positions; therefore, they are required to abide by all laws and regulations and are overseen by the Oklahoma Ethics Commission and the Oklahoma Attorney General's Office (Oklahoma Department of Libraries, 2014).

base such variances on subjective and highly personal levels of involvement. The basic arrangement is based on demonstrated commitment. All office holders must demonstrate commitment to the value and logistics related to the fair, which allows interested persons to tailor their participation around increasing levels of responsibility. Someone with a long-standing tie to fairs usually has an automatic inside track to higher levels of responsibility and leadership, but there is always room for sincere, hardworking outsiders.

Fairs are comprised of a clearly defined group of involved individuals. In all cases, the most dedicated officials maintain control over the system. However, they remain flexible to recruit new interests into the fair process. Long-time fair organizers and participants, particularly those from fair families,[28] are realistic about the situation. Organizers and dedicated volunteers believe county fairs are dying institutions that might be saved only if others willing to invest time in these events are included ("Fairs and Carnivals," 2012). Yet, family members inherit many of the positions on the boards or in management. This does not mean that children automatically take the position with no apprenticeship or work, but if children show interest and make an effort, they have a higher chance of receiving position appointment than someone without a family background in fair organization or participation.

In Oklahoma, the board of directors appoints its officers following the board elections. State law requires this, but there is also precedence and a set

[28] A fair family refers to a particular family in a community with a long-standing commitment to the local fair and other related activities such as an annual livestock show or sale. This association can vary in terms of interest in particular events or involvement with the production of the fair. The commitment to fairs in these families usually includes multiple generations and extended family members.

of standards enforced through the partnership between the county and the agricultural extension agents. All meetings are subject to the same regulations under Oklahoma's Open Meetings Act (Oklahoma Department of Libraries, 2014). A board includes nine members from three districts in a given county. The officer positions are usually treasurer, secretary, vice president, and president of the fair. Other designated positions exist but do not have to be official, so committee chairs and ad hoc leadership roles exist as needed. The board members of each fair most often earn a living as farmers, small-business owners, sales associates, and managers for agricultural companies, or they are self-employed workers who can manage their schedules according to the irregular demands of fair preparation. Some educators and state or county employees take their annual vacation at fair season and work on fair business during their leisure time throughout the year.

Some boards are more active than others are. In one fair, each board member officiates as a superintendent of at least one part of the fair. In another, only non-board members work as superintendents. Some boards meet regularly four times a year, apart from other business, while other boards have one perfunctory meeting each year. Due to the Open Meetings Act, all meeting dates and times must be advertised and agendas posted well in advance (Oklahoma Department of Libraries, 2014), primarily because the board members take responsibility for the financial aspects of the fair, which include state, county, and sometimes municipal support. All financial transactions related to the county fair are subject to state auditing, like every

other local governmental entity. The board also oversees building projects, obtaining entertainment, negotiating with traveling and local commercial groups, public relations, initiation of new attractions, year-round maintenance of the physical plant, relations with other fairs, relations with federal and state agencies, and the organization of help. One of the major duties in accomplishing everything is appointing suitable superintendents who oversee specific sections of the fair.

Board members choose superintendents, based on demonstrated commitment, skill and knowledge, and often family or neighbor relationships. It is possible for an outsider to enter the organizational structure without family ties. Superintendents select assistants according to their willingness to help and their interest. Most superintendents commit to serving their post for several years; they manifest reluctance to leave unless they have identified and trained a replacement. For the most part, the relationship between these board and superintendent hierarchies functions without conflict. A family connection is a natural source for help. Supervisors appoint official and unofficial assistants among their neighbors and family. In many rural counties, neighbors are often family. Superintendent categories include domestic arts, livestock, horticulture, floriculture, and the grandstand or arena. At the fair, the superintendents prepare and manage the activities assigned to their section of the fair. They must work closely with the fair board on a schedule and outline of activities. Once they have board approval for their section plan, superintendents prepare the description of section activities for public promotion in the premium book,

which might include designation of categories and rules for participants. Superintendents for the carnival, commercial and civic exhibitors, and people who show agricultural products also devise a registration process and a fee system. Superintendents watch over all activity in their section leading up to and during fair time. During the months and weeks when the fair is not in session, superintendents track needed changes to the fair site or within the fair schedule in advance of the next year's event, such as building repairs and modification and revisions to the schedules and categories in the premium book.

The board handles finances of the county fair, but it is the responsibility of everyone involved with the fair to consider sources of income and expenditures. One of the largest expenditures of the fair is insurance. This is an ongoing headache for fair boards, as the cost of event insurances has increased dramatically since the 1990s. Another expenditure is utilities, which recently have fluctuated dramatically, making it difficult to plan budgets. Though most fair workers volunteer, the fair board employs some help for maintenance, security, and special secretarial duties. The vast majority of fair expenditures occur during 1 week of fair season. During that week, the fair board must have enough funds to pay premiums, employ special help for the fair, pay judges' fees, cover the sound system, rent tents, and pay any special performers. Fair organizers must pay all these expenditures before the end of the fair. Items such as office expenses, mailings, and general maintenance are costs met during the year.

Many sources of revenue combine to support the production of county fairs. County fairs in Oklahoma are free fairs, which mean fair organizers cannot charge gate admission or fees (Blackburn & Strasbaugh, 1994). In some parts of the United States and for the two state fairs in Oklahoma, general admission supplies over half the revenue (Hokanson & Kratz, 2008; Prosterman, 1995). County fairs rely on a combination of sources depending on the relationship between that county and the fair board. Carnival and concession rentals can boost revenue. Indoor and outdoor space for exhibits and utility rentals bring in more. Charges for special grandstand or arena events can be a lucrative draw. Entrance fees for participants in open categories and some livestock or horse shows can help, but the core activities of the fair (the youth livestock show supported by 4-H and FFA and the domestic arts, horticulture, floriculture, and youth service learning project displays) are funded by state, county, and federal allocations. These activities are the foundation of every fair's premium book. Book printing usually is funded through advertising and local merchants' support, just as local merchants also in the interest of advertising and community support usually donate the ribbons and trophies. Off-season rental of the fairgrounds and buildings is another means of funding the physical plant and upkeep of the fair. The State of Oklahoma via the county commissioners sometimes gives some matching funds for some building rehabilitation.

State and local relations involve more than money. Lobbying and information exchange with state agencies and legislatures occupy the attention

of county fair officials. To this end, concerned fair officials formed the Oklahoma Association of Fairs and Festivals (OAFF) in 1948 (OAFF, 2013). The OAFF holds annual meetings where members hire talent for the midway, give papers, and trade accounts and solutions to problems through the year. The legislature and lobbying section of the OAFF pays close attention to legislation, regulation, and political measures emanating from the state government and particularly to those measures with budgetary impact. If other agencies try to infringe on funding or other county fair prerogatives, the legislative liaison of OAFF lets its membership and the government agency in question know its position.

The state mostly ties its support of county fairs to the issuance of the premium or prize money and to logistical support by way of the network of county extension offices, which allows the state to keep watch over the fair boards and provide for the establishment of certain standards, including prize payments and categories. The fairs may fund anything they want, but to get the government to add funds, they have to make a good case, preferably in partnership with other county fairs. Each fair board must make an annual report to the State Department of Agriculture with a statement of past expenditures and fiscal plans for the following summer. Then the state officials figure out how much money they will need to allot for premiums. Finally, the state government has established rules to which the local agencies acquiesce. These rules concern health inspection, especially of livestock; limitations on

competitions; and the prohibition of alcohol and gambling on the fairgrounds with exception of the Oklahoma and Tulsa State Fairs that can serve 3.2 beer.[29]

Fair organization includes three major administrative areas. The superintendents are responsible for the entertainment and midway section, the commercial and civic section, and the judging and exhibition section. One person, with the aid of assistants, commonly organizes the first two sections. The judging and exhibition section, however, is subdivided into classifications; for each separate classification, there is usually a superintendent with an assistant. Arranging entertainment for the fair is primarily, though not exclusively, a matter of the grandstand, arena, or carnival superintendents depending on the site. The grandstand or arena fulfills two important functions. First, events here provide their own crowd and allow the fair organizers to charge admission for an event. Second, they serve as an attraction for people aside from the judging and exhibition or the midway. Larger county fairgrounds have a grandstand and an arena while smaller ones have one or the other; some of these are covered and some not. The grandstand presents a perpetual problem because some acts must be paid for in advance, particularly circuit rodeos. For this reason, small fairs have moved away from this kind of entertainment and have started to focus instead on locally produced activities and options. While the draw many be less, the tradeoff is a more community-festival-type atmosphere. For the sites that do book grandstand entertainment, the success of the acts depends on the perspicacity of the superintendent's

[29] Low-alcohol beer, also called 3.2 in Oklahoma, is beer with low alcohol content by volume, which aims to reproduce the taste of beer without the inebriating effects of standard alcoholic brews.

judgment in choosing 6 months prior to the event the acts that an audience wants to see for one or two nights in the summer or fall. Success also depends on weather. One night of storms can wipe out whatever income the fair hoped to make from a music group and put the fair into deficit. Since the advent of television and large recording contracts, the prices for the musicians and their sound systems have become quite high. Demolition derbies, motorcycle races, and tractor pulls are preferred because though tickets cost less, they are a certain draw. They also have the advantage of not requiring payment unless they perform. The main costs for those events are usually prize money and liability insurance, which cost much less than the $10,000 to $60,000 demanded by better known country music stars that headline at state fairs.

Entertainment superintendents arrange bands, clowns, traveling rodeos, old-time medicine shows, magicians, or other acts that seem likely to enhance the festive aspect of the fair. These groups of individuals perform at strategic locations around the fairgrounds. They charm the tired patrons and cranky children and contribute to the unusual atmosphere of the event. Superintendents of this area also coordinate charity events and local talent shows. A strong belief exists that civic and charitable organizations such as Lions Club, Kiwanis, Masons, Knights of Columbus, and the Oklahoma Farm Bureau are essential to the county fair because it is a community institution. County fairs establish their community identity and value through constant, enthusiastic support of community priorities and interests.

The final major responsibility of people in charge of entertainment is arranging for the midway and carnival. Of the fairs that I have attended in Oklahoma, less than half still have a contract with a midway or carnival provider. Like grandstand entertainment, many less populated counties have moved away from this kind of entertainment and focus instead on activities that support local opportunities, which has resulted in overall reduced attendance, but fair organizers believe the hassle of negotiating with outside vendors and the support of more intimate activities that emphasize building family and community ties is important. If fair organizers do organize a carnival, they usually begin when a carnival manager, which is a superintendent position, who contacts a group of ride operators and games owners who travel as a unit during the summer and early fall. The carnival manager negotiates on behalf of the fair board for the temporary construction of a midway area. This part of the fair is one of the only outside contributors. Only a few local merchants and food vendors participate in the midway. Each vendor must negotiate a separate agreement with the fair office to be part of the midway area. Most midways are completely independent but adjacent to the rest of the fair for logistic reasons, audience cultivation, and liability.

The commercial and civic section of the fair is an important component of the attractions. Like the local trading populace of earlier fairs, merchants and exhibitors in these categories attract much interest and find the fairs beneficial. People spend time at these sections investigating the latest developments in agricultural equipment and technology. There are also vendors that target a

broader audience through the sale of home and personal items such as kitchen appliances, cleaning supplies, home furnishings, clothing, and personal electronics. In other sectors or areas of the U.S. economy, these displays would be cultivated and presented during trade shows, home and garden shows, or professional conferences. The commercial and civic section includes two types of vendors: traveling and local. The traveling vendors are usually commercial; they have a regional and seasonal circuit and sell or demonstrate products. They reserve and pay for their spaces about 6 weeks in advance of each fair. The local booths include area merchants, civic and political groups, and people who set up a food or merchandise stand only for the fair. The superintendent or official in charge of this area often donates space to civic or nonprofit organizations, yet this donated space is not usually the most desired as it tends to be the odd or out-of-the-way locations.

The last major section of the fair is judging and exhibition. As previously mentioned, this section is the backbone of the fair, particular the youth categories. State and national organizations such as 4-H, FFA, and the OHCE rely on county fairs to solicit participants into their association to become judges and exhibitors. In this regard, county fairs serve as a required local competition hub for participants interested in having their work qualify for statewide competition at one of the state fairs. The main divisions are livestock, agriculture, and home or domestic arts. A general superintendent usually manages each of these, and then a superintendent looks after each subsection. In livestock, there are subsections for goats, sheep, swine, dairy cattle, beef

cattle, and special events. Poultry, rabbits, horses, dogs, and cats, if included at all, occupy an ambiguous space between pets and livestock. The agricultural part includes seed corn, other grains, grasses, and fruits and vegetables. Domestic arts often include everything else, from culinary and needlework to floriculture, woodworking, art, photography, and collections. Each subsection divides into categories for which there is no special superintendent.

The superintendents assemble ribbons and trophies; supervise the entries and the judging procedure; corral the judges; record results; and award the ribbons. They also organize the displays after the judging is complete. In addition, the superintendents look after the physical space where animate and inanimate exhibits are housed. Sometimes they act as chaperones for the junior exhibitors and sometimes as mentors (particularly for 4-H, which is the primary organization involved). During the year, they recommend judges and they examine and alter the information in the premium book.

The premium book is the critical guide for the fair and the basis for action. The annual release of the premium book to the community is usually the first official announcement and advertisement about the upcoming county fair that year. It contains the schedule of the fair, local merchants' advertisements, rules for entry in the fair, lists of classes and categories to enter for competitors, and amounts of premium or prize payments for each. Judging and exhibition are based on this book.

Fairs Put in Motion

Fair organizers orchestrate activities around limitations and particular needs of the community that they represent and serve. They provide an opportunity for the formal convergence of different interests in the community, which is the county, to come together. This basic service is the first step to understanding place-identity of county fairs. The subsequent steps are more nuanced, as I will discuss in upcoming sections of this study. At this opening stage, the physical and temporal structures of the fair reflect and reinforce a set of values and priorities that appears not just in the organization of this event and space but also in the activities that take place inside. Fairs are lauded spaces for many. Reinforcing this space is about defining its community ties and about protecting the values and emotions associated with it. These associations are often positive ones and imagined values become dominant over people's perception of it historically and through the ongoing participation in this event.

Annual county fairs begin with the release of the premium book. Signs, banners, bumper stickers, and posters also alert the public of the impending events. These signs pack information into small spaces with the aid of boldface printing, bright colors, and pictures. Merchants display cardboard advertising for the fair in windows or on their properties. These items sometimes display lists of attractions and the times of the events. Small towns sometimes stretch banners across Main Street showing the name and dates of the fair. Some fairgrounds have obtained permission and resources to post road signs

directing passers-by to the fair. The signs range from regular highway signs to municipal markers to more unassuming, homemade arrows leading to the fairgrounds. All the fair organizers try for some form of advertising in the immediate vicinity. Closer to the place and date of the fair, more signs appear. Gates are marked too. At times, there are welcome banners and yard signs directing traffic and designating parking.[30]

Fences made of barbed wire, steel or plastic mesh, wooden slats, post-and-rail, or other materials surround nearly all fairs. A road winds around the perimeter connecting parking lots or empty fields with event activities. In some way, every fair uses a boundary or intermediary space that divides festive from nonfestive locations. From the entrance gates, several dirt, sand, gravel, or grass lanes spread out into the fair. One of these is generally wider and cleaner than the rest, and it draws the crowd through the fair. In some places, this paved road is used for normal traffic in and out of the fairgrounds the rest of the year. If present, it delineates the midway area, and it guides people to the stock barns and exhibition halls. More urban or suburban fairgrounds may have a paved space (sometimes an area of the parking lot) used by midway trucks to set up their mobile rides, which are essentially converted flatbed trailers. Authorities, who are mostly volunteer groups such as the Lions Club or Boy Scouts and off-duty sheriff deputies and police, confine vehicular traffic to the margins, presumably in the interests of safety, tranquility, and cleanliness. The smaller lanes lead to out-of-the-way attractions and act as arteries to the main

[30] Prosterman (1995) used the start of fair promotion as a key point in her seasonal round for county fairs, and Hokanson and Carol (2008) commented on the importance of these public markers in their field research.

road. They are normally muddier and more rutted than the main road. Some of these meander through the livestock area, in and out of the midway, or past the food booths. They halt in front of the exhibit buildings or end in fields; they act as natural boundary markers and ad hoc meeting places for the different sections on the fairgrounds; and they function as paths to attractions and as casual borders marking off all categories of the fair. Livestock and their trailers are seldom on this main road. They remain on the lesser lanes, possibly out of deference to pedestrians' sensibilities. Conversely, livestock barns, arenas, and other spaces are more prominent at a county fairground than at the state level or similar venues. The principle use of fairgrounds outside annual fair activities is for livestock shows and sales. Therefore, these facilities are the centerpiece of most fairgrounds in Oklahoma.[31]

The section categories at a county fair are not just delineated activities but translate into real spaces and structures on the fairgrounds. Thus, material reasons join cognitive reasons for why the fairgrounds are divided in this way, which is why a relationship exists between the premium book, the fair program, and the layout of the event. To understand this, it is necessary to look at the way organizers divide activities and spaces as a whole. Some activities occupy indoor spaces: domestic arts, horticulture, youth exhibits, the entire commercial and civic section, and other outdoor spaces. All or partly outdoors sections include the livestock portion with the indoor and outdoor show rings, a grandstand or arena, and the midway or carnival (if present). Between these

[31] Kniffen (1949) and Prosterman (1995) observed a similar delineation of place in the layout of fairgrounds in the Southeastern and Midwestern parts of the United States.

key sections are indiscriminate displays of machinery, some food vendors, and tents scattered over the landscape. The structures that support these indoor–outdoor spaces on the grounds are both permanent and temporary. Structures are assembled from varying materials, including canvas, wood, metal, cement block, and sometimes brick. Some have been present since the beginning of the fair perhaps 100 years ago. Oklahoma received tremendous infrastructure support in the 1930s through the Works Progress Administration. Most of the older fair buildings were from that era.

The kinds of structures found on the fairgrounds during the fair include livestock barns, show rings and bleachers, the grandstand or arena, the exhibit halls, commercial booths and tents, carnival booths, thrill rides, the fair office, bathrooms, security headquarters and miscellaneous machinery, fences, and objects dotted about the landscape (Blackburn & Strasbaugh, 1994). While delineation of these sections and activities is important, each section is not clearly defined. Elements tend to blend into one another at the margins; the edges are blurred. The only limitations to this relate to the carnival. The carnival usually originates from a contracted, outside vendor. It travels as a complete unit, taking on a few stringers along the way who will negotiate their carnival stay and operation directly with the manager of the carnival. The carnival sets up in an oval, horseshoe, or alley formation, according to the tradition and crowd sense of the manager. All the rides and games are distributed according to a prearranged plan. Incursions by fair organizers and community interests into the center of this arrangement would violate a series of

preexisting plans and commercial agreements. Nonetheless, the midway and every other section have an identifiable core that establishes the nature of each section and helps fairgoers organize their spatial relationship and understand the timing or process of the activities. The biggest section that might encroach on other sections is the commercial vendors and food booths. Fair organizers sometimes break prescribed and implied rules to allow them to make incursions into the carnival or into crafts and domestic arts areas. Other incursions might include the grandstand, which sometimes houses crafts and midway food at one end and leads to the stables at the other. Entrepreneurs locate machinery or seed displays around the edges of the animal barns, the car parks, the commercial buildings, and other spaces. The 4-H, FFA, or OHCE leaders might position their food stand next to the livestock show ring or use one of the concession stands or commercial kitchen facilities in the exhibit halls or the grandstand.

The food booths and tents range from the relatively stable structures of wooden or cement block huts, some inside other buildings and some freestanding, to local efforts under tents or wooden stands with an awning, to trucks and edifices built with gleaming metal. These, paradoxically, are built of sturdy permanent materials but are temporary vehicles that will leave the fair. The fair food stands run by people on the fair circuit never set up near the livestock barns. These locations tacitly are reserved for the agricultural community; when food is sold in that area, it is by local entrepreneurs or agricultural civic groups such as 4-H or Oklahoma Farm Bureau. The exhibit

halls provide a middle ground or a bridge between agriculture or local business and the outside lifeworld. The carnival core consists almost exclusively of flashy fast-food stands.

The newer buildings, especially for showing animals and domestic arts, usually are made of cement block or metal siding because these materials are inexpensive and fireproof, though officials conceded they are not as picturesque as the old frame buildings. The grandstand or arena usually abuts on the periphery of the fair and helps form a boundary marker or corner because of its great height and breadth. The livestock barns lie at another edge of the fairgrounds, allowing easy access for animal trailers and movement of the animals in and out of the stalls. This location also helps confine livestock dirt and odors away from the traffic of other fair attendees. The indoor exhibit halls tend to cluster near each other, though occasionally some areas may occupy spaces along the boundary of this section. The fair office sits either on the periphery or in the center of the fairground.

Exhibitors house livestock in buildings consisting of a roofed series of pens. The typical livestock barn is wood and contains several rows of stalls or pens made of horizontal slats of wood or iron framing about a yard and half high off the ground; two or three longitudinal aisles dividing these series of enclosures; and rafters, beams, and posts that support the corrugated metal or wood roof. From the top of the stalls to the roof, the barns are often open to the weather and fair patrons inside and out of the building. The floors are dirt and straw but some have concrete walkways. In the center or at one of the ends of

these barns, the builders leave a large space. Typically circular, this space usually extends the width of the whole barn and is surrounded by benches or bleachers around its circumference. This space serves as a show ring, especially for the dairy goats, sheep, and swine. In some fairs, the beef and dairy cows show here as well. Some fairs include horse shows in their schedule; the horses are kept in barns that are entirely enclosed on the outside. In rare cases, the pavilions for other livestock are made of brick and enclosed on the outside.

Formal show rings are not usually in the livestock barns themselves. Some of these rings or arenas are indoors and others are outdoors. If indoors, they stable in buildings made of metal siding or cinder block with few if any windows. These buildings have wide doors at the gable ends to permit the animals to enter and leave with ease. Outdoors, wooden rails, stakes, thin metal fencing, or the bleachers themselves mark the arena. All arenas have sawdust or other wood shavings over earth in the middle and some kind of seating arrangement around the edge. A grandstand is a notable feature on fairgrounds. The grandstand raises high over the fairgrounds and accommodates a lot of people, which is why these facilities exist in larger rural and suburban counties in Oklahoma. Like other buildings on the fairgrounds, older versions are made of wood, stone, or cinder block with wooden or cement block seats. Newer versions are metal-sided buildings, which is due largely to the cost of such buildings. The space under the grandstand serves as an additional resource for exhibits, food stands, and other miscellaneous booths.

The exhibit halls have four high walls, a roof, and doorways. They rarely include windows because every available vertical space needs to be used for exhibition purposes. Again, wood, tin, or cement block are the usual construction materials; walls are painted white or another light color, sometimes with dark trim. Most often rectangular, some mid-20th-century buildings are hexagonal, octagonal, or round. Inside are banks of tiers or rows of tables that display the accumulated produce, flowers, culinary items, crafts, 4-H exhibits, and needlework. Every inch of wall space is used; superintendents usually accept more entries than they have space to display them. Organizers have definite ideas about displaying the entries, but pride themselves on a high participation rate. When commercial displays are enclosed, they are housed either in buildings similar to or even inside those that contain the competitive exhibits. They could also be in tents and booths. If in tents, either a group or individual merchants will set up smaller tents for their own wares. The fair often rents large, white event tents from a local supplier such as the local funeral home operator.

The carnival booths vary. The games are small shacks of wood, open in front with a counter bisecting the space parallel to the ground. A carny works in the interior cavity of the shack. Usually the back of the booth or the counter separates the customer from the game or booth display. These stands are commonly arranged in rows fronted by an alley. They are similar to semidetached townhouses. Other booths are freestanding structures in the center of the midway. They form wooden parallelograms open from waist

height and with a counter running all the way around the square. Carnies operate games either on the counter or in the center. Many times these booths sport roofs and flaps of dirty but bright-colored, gaily striped canvas. Often metal trucks open into booths. Sometimes the booths are merely indicated by a wooden or metal frame and possibly chicken wire, as in the Trial of Strength or the Dunker. Occasionally there is a large trailer constructed as an interior booth for the purposes of viewing or experiencing oddities like Elvis Presley's effigy, a fun or haunted house, or another natural anomaly like a deformed creature or pygmy animal.

Carnival rides are another kind of structure on the fairgrounds. As temporary structures, they are large edifices of metal and plastic. Carnivals operate as multimedia experiences with blaring, emotionally charged music, bright-colored designs with pictures painted on the surface, and rapid movement in a direction contrary to nature's intent. The designers and operators take pride in how the assemblage of the pieces enhances the action of the riders and the riders' emotional perception of their experience.[32] As noted in the Chapter 2 literature review, this aspect of the fair is often the most written about and thus intoxicating for writers and fairgoers.

In addition to the event structures, other kinds of spaces are important to note. Structures that most fairgoers overlook are the official and quasi-official buildings, including the fair office. Most visitors recognize they are one of the few places to visit a bathroom that is not a portable toilet, which can play an

[32] Barr's (1999) documentary on carnivals along the East Coast detailed this aspect of local, regional, and state fairs. While discussed on a larger scale, similarities between the games and the activities, as well as the layout and operations, exist with my own fieldwork.

unobtrusively vital role in the successful performance of the fair. Sometimes the offices are independent buildings and sometimes they are located within other pavilions. When standing alone, they are cement block or tin. Other spaces not widely acknowledged but also vital are found in both the livestock barns and the exhibition halls. Exhibitors and superintendents create spaces for relaxation and social interaction away from the rest of the fairgoers. Each fair is a way of life and is as much a social gathering as a business enterprise. People carve out backrooms in the exhibit halls or designate barn stalls by stacking bales of hay, providing chairs and mattresses, and arranging personal effects to indicate the temporary use of space for socializing and for sleeping during the fair. The FFA and 4-H leaders dispense awards to groups based on how they set up and maintain these kinds of spaces at the fair. People invite each other to their spaces for drinks, to visit, or to eat their meals.

Fair participants do not require hardline boundaries but rather general categories that they can use to manipulate their space and time. It is not a major conceptual upheaval to find elements of one category at the margins of another, but it would be disconcerting to find a vendor or activity not in its proper place. In her conceptualization of county fairs in Illinois, Prosterman (1995) ordered the section, activities, and interests of a county fair into metaphorical islands and causeways. Each of these described elements, and their geographic and architectural elements are islands unto themselves, but around their core are booths, displays, signs, or other indicators serving as bridges from one core area to the next. The elements serve as a locator for

identification and examination; they also serve as sources of discovery and travel between spaces (Marti, 1986; McCarry, 1997). Initial impressions would support that these islands and causeways are a series of apparently random elements, but under closer examination, the elements send fairgoers along a route or journey through the event.

Within these areas and the arrangements of these spaces, some sections or activities confront challenges and require accommodations more than others do. For example, particular problems can arise regarding livestock. Animal traffic patterns require empty space between barns and near show rings. There must be no obstructions to free movement. Safety hazards to the animals or reviewers must be minimized. Complicated machinery cannot be placed next to small children watching a ride or standing in line to play a game. Midway activity is too loud and raucous for the livestock to be near. Further, not just environmental issues divide the sheep from the lamb chops. Everyone who goes to the fair or who participates in the organization of the fair has some part of the fair that they identify with the most. Combined all these people form an entity, which provide for the complete experience or community of the fair. People are aware of the interstices but describe the cores. The divisions that exist at the fair and in people's minds are significant. The sections reflect areas of interest and priority. People organize a potentially confusing event in a coherent fashion to reinforce patterns or connect to notions about ideal culture and relationships between community interests, which the fair has supported for years and organizers value. People shape their concept of the world through

the formation of recognizable entities; then they can apply this recognition back to their own lives. In this regard, the identity and purpose of a county fair is wrapped around the belief that a good fair should be a microcosm of the larger community. This structure allows for the shading of boundaries that provides an easier passage from one entity to the next, both conceptually and logistically.

In the temporal structure of the fair, broad community concerns occur alongside, and sometimes they intermingle. As in the physical structure, the activity in each time segment reveals clear understanding of the nature of those concerns. People cross at the boundaries of the allocated times. The structure of the week of the fair parallels the structure of the day. Periods of intense excitement alternate with periods of intense calm. The norm reveals a gentle rise and fall of activity throughout the day and week. County fairs in Oklahoma can last anywhere from 3 to 7 days. Fairs usually begin on Wednesday and end on Saturday. The fair season usually begins around July 20 and ends the first week in October. More than half happen during the weeks following Labor Day and are often scheduled around Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University home football games. The week before the Oklahoma State Fair in Oklahoma City signals the end of the county fair circuit across the state. County fairs in the northeastern part of the state tend to be later than in the west because the Tulsa State Fair is the week following Oklahoma City. Prior to the 1960s, county fairs tended to begin in mid-August and go through October (Everett, 2007), but a combination of factors led to a shift in the timetable for the fair

circuit. The factors include troubling weather (rain and cold) in the fall, a concentration of small fairs on livestock judging, an increase in organizing events around family schedules, and a change in the farming schedule that puts the farming hiatus at the end of the summer instead of the beginning of the fall.

Community and carnival workers begin setting up the fair in tandem at the beginning of the fair week. This work often begins the night before the official opening and continues through the next day in an organized flurry of confusion. Frenzied or quiet intensification of the normal pace adds to the excitement of the fair. Superintendents spend hours making charts, preparing paperwork, directing the possible placement of tents and booths, and settling crises in preparation for the beginning of judging and exhibition. The morning of the opening of the fair sees the commercial vendors setting up and the carnies nailing their booths together and opening the midway trucks. Carnies and those coming in from out of town are more relaxed since their active period comes later and they are used to the stress of setting up a fair (Barr, 1999).

Early in the week, the fair is primarily about judging exhibition and preparing for the livestock events. Some visitors come, but it is mostly those participating in some event who frequent the food vendors with a perfunctory cruise through the commercial tents and the midway attention. The judging sessions are a definite action for which a certain group of people takes off time specifically to attend the fair. The judging and exhibitions peak in excitement and intensity the first couple of days of the fair. A few items are judged over the weekend, but the beginning of the fair features the judging of livestock, home

arts, horticulture, agriculture, and arts and crafts. This is the time set for intense involvement in these particular activities. People wander through the buildings, but during the period of judging, the atmosphere is thick and the concentration is palpable.

The beginning and middle of the typical 5-day fair tend to involve community-oriented events. Locally produced concerts and variety shows draw audiences and midway players. Fashion shows and 4-H or home extension demonstrations involve similar constituencies as the judging does. Children's beauty competitions and other contests are popular as a kind of presentation of the community back to the community. These are more publicly promoted events than the judging, which is often open to the general public but sometimes is not and is rarely attended, and they involve the active participation of the local community.[33]

By the end of the week, most judging is over. There are a few demonstrations and local events, but the weekend really belongs to the midway and the people who have not participated in fair competitions and events through the week. During the weekend, the gaudy spectacles are presented and the majority of the concerts, tractor pulls, races, and rodeos are performed. The horse shows are also scheduled and, in a few cases, youth livestock sales, though most sales take place in the spring. Sunday might include a church

[33] Kniffen (1951) completed a study looking at fair dates and activity schedules. Prosterman (1995) also discussed timing over the course of a week and throughout the days during the county fairs she observed. While Midwestern county fairs tend to be hosted earlier in the year than those in Oklahoma, similarities exist when looking at the weekly calendar and daily schedule. Emphasis in scheduling mostly depends on the general availability of the widest group of participants. Youth activities usually occur during the day, when participants visit the fair as a school-sanctioned activity. Adult activities occur at night or on the weekend to account for conflicts in the normal workday.

service or special event, but it is usually when people take home their exhibits and pick up their premiums. Fairgoers now take a less active part in the end of the grounds where the exhibits are; at this time, they go there to visit with friends and neighbors. At the midway, people play the games, eat junk food, and watch spectacles. The midway is open during the whole week, as are the exhibition halls and the livestock barns, but the intensity of activity focuses at either one or the other at different times of the day or week.

The day recapitulates the week in many ways. The early part of the day is reserved strictly for viewing and judging, which starts at 8 a.m. The midway does not open until noon. This late start gives the carnies some rest after their late nights, and some people attend the judging in the morning because other than eating, visiting, wandering, or transacting administrative fair business, little else is happening. Exhibitors break for lunch and then the judging continues until 4 or 5 p.m. Between 12 and 5 p.m., the community events transpire. The productions mentioned earlier jostle barbecues or potlucks groups of fair participants, charitable auctions to support a local or state organization or the junior livestock section of the fair. In the late afternoon, people relax, visit, and eat. People from different sections of the fair investigate each other and the other sections. This is an intermediate period when boundaries are crossed and roles are suspended. This is a slow time, a calm period where carnies, commercial exhibitors, and agricultural exhibitors sit and gossip, exchange news, and visit across categories. In the evening, people throng the midway and attend spectacles like the rodeo, a live concert, a community dance, or the

tractor pull. People will often come only for the evening, just as some will only attend in the morning. Most take in the whole fair, even while protesting that they never attend the midway or look at the commercial section. The carnies test the site and determine where the crowd will flow. This engagement by the carnies with the crowd makes a pluralistic scene with patrons and workers from the county, local, and neighboring cities and around the state or region. The midway provides an arena for sanctioned restlessness loud, bold actions; movement from one game to the next; and dislocating rides. There is no particular time or place for stopping. The only time people in the crowd halt is when they focus their attention straight ahead on a spectacle rather than side by side on neighbors.

Time progresses on a continuum from more intimate, locally known, and appreciated participatory activities to more public, cosmopolitan events that are audience and performer related. In the middle of the day and the middle of the week, categories mingle and people circulate from end to end past barriers. These periods allow for meal times and idle viewing of the sights of the fair. People and events move from private and intimate to public and more standardized forms of interaction. Time moves from formalized, individualized events to informal, anonymous activities. In the middle lies a liminal time, when and where the two forms meet and then separate again. The level of activity maintains momentum, but the focus of action shifts from local to broad-based.

Intimate control over the shape of the fairground, its buildings, and its temporal schedule is a form of community building and definition of space for

those connected with the fair. The fair is a composite lifeworld that fuses elements that they experience in diluted form throughout the year in a concentrated experience. The fair that people create is a world apart, and is a distillation of the everyday lifeworld. The streets; the little houses, barns, and huts; and the meal times and places to obtain food reorder a larger world into a unique microcosm of that lifeworld experience. The judging and exhibition section generally includes sober, useful, schematized re-creations of farm buildings. The midway is the re-creation of city streets and crescents. The ambiguous and the fantastic hold a place here as they do in the lifeworld. The midway is the place for peculiar shapes and sounds and behavior. The judging section is the location for heightened experiences of everyday activity. Ambiguous mottled places joined clearly defined areas, just as in the lifeworld outside. However, at the fair, all these sections serve as representations of a particular focus or interest, such as raising livestock, preparing food items, or engaging in entertainment outlets. The community world establishes itself in one area of the fair and the everyday lifeworld in another. The layout allows for change, strangeness, and bewilderment, but the heart of the system is apparent.

Time is another factor in creating a rendition of the liminal state or alternative lifeworld that Turner (1969) described. Like the physical aspects of the fair's environment, the temporal aspect can be manipulated to form a reordering of real time. Those who produce the fair retain greater control over the structure of time in this framework than they do in many areas of their year-

round life. In describing the value and participant elements of liminal states through ceremonies and rituals, Turner (1969) noted, “In this interim of ‘liminality,’ the possibility of standing aside not only from one’s own social position but also from all social positions and of formulating a potentially unlimited series of alternative social arrangements” (pp. 13-14).

The various officials can make up schedules and estimate proper allotments of periods in concert with participants. These blocks of time are arranged to accommodate the needs of different sections of the fair. Organizers embroider the texture of these times until they become densely concentrated spans of significant activity. In turn, this denseness liberates the participant or viewer from a dimly perceived routine (how many of us can stand back from our lives just enough to perceive the nature of them) into a new perception of that activity in daily life. Showing animals, viewing exhibits, chatting with neighbors, and playing on the midway are connected in some way to the everyday lives of fair participants and visitors to the fair to some degree as well. Marshaling time in an orderly fashion outside of everyday life, and intensifying it, is an ability granted to the small group planning the fair.

This chapter has highlighted ways county fairs in Oklahoma are developed, managed, and produced by various interests. County fairs host a myriad of activities from staple agricultural competitions to youth-centered activities to vendors selling food and various forms of entertainment. This chapter indicated how the production and participation in fairs is a process that extends beyond the scheduled weeks. As a series of empirical descriptions

attained through my library and archival research and my field notes during county fairs, this chapter conspicuously left out the voices of fair participants. The aim of this chapter was to provide context for understanding the insights provided by those interviewed for this study and whose comments appear in Chapter 6. Under the methodology section of this dissertation, I drew attention to considerations about my ethnographic work that were not yet applied to this study. Reflexivity and my outsider positionality are factors that influenced the way I conducted interviews and prepared my analysis. Most of the information in this chapter about hosting fairs became the starting point for my interviews with fair participants. Although information presented in this chapter provided a context for the rest of my study, it also provided an invitation to those interviewed to comment on my research and analysis. This included redirecting my perspectives or enhancing my understanding.

Chapter 6: Ethnography of Fair Participant Perspectives

The empirical review of county fairs presented in the previous chapter consolidates information attained from library/archive research, the participant-observation phase of my ethnography based on my attendance at county fairs across Oklahoma, and interviews with fair organizers. This material supports further insight gained through the interview process provided in this chapter. The previous material presented provides a backdrop for the remarks I collected interviewing fair participants about their interest in these events. Interviews about personal experiences with county fairs took place in each of the focus counties for this study: Alfalfa, Mayes, and Oklahoma. Sixty-four respondents answered a similar series of qualitative questions individualized to specific interests, associations, and understandings about county fairs based on their experiences. Each interview was anonymous and not recorded. Notes were collected as interviews followed the natural course of conversation and flow of information from each respondent. The only real deviation between respondents was the order I posed the questions based on the information they provided. By the end, each individual provided feedback on the same material at the core of this study. Upon completing all the interviews, I sent a draft copy of this chapter and Chapter 5 to respondents who had expressed an interest in reviewing this work. Ten respondents opted to review the material. I condensed their questions, corrections, and elaborations about my field notes and the other information collected through my ethnography. This chapter includes information produced from the reflexive part of research method.

Rather than reporting it as a separate section, the “edits” from the ten respondents were folded into the final draft of these chapters.

As introduced in Chapter 3, the interview questions covered the personal relationship participants have with their local county fair, community interests in the local fair, and the influence the fair has on the development of identity and sense of place for individuals and community. Several of the questions focused on an each respondent’s personal experience with fairs and what attracts them to fairs. These questions also helped document the activities or aspects of the fair in which respondents participate. This set of questions helped establish a respondent’s positionality within a fair too, both through time (e.g., number of years involved in fairs) and through community and family ties (e.g., current involvement of others in fairs).

The second emerging theme was community interest. Responses from participants helped provide insight into the kinds of community interests that shape the fair. Most of the information underscored the importance of fairs as group or community activities despite the fact that every individual attends the fair on his or her own terms. One respondent from Mayes County said, “These ag[ricultural] kids live for county fairs. Having the opportunity to compete and show off their project is so rewarding. Making premium sale [the sale of the youth-raised livestock] is the ultimate reward!” Youth and youth groups bond through the process of raising high-quality livestock for sale to members of the larger community, which is an activity that has continued since Watson’s original inception of a county fair nearly two centuries ago. Such groups act as

electrons floating around the nucleus of the event or fair. Groups promote certain activities into the center of fair action for a time. In sequence, these various activities form the fair into a coherent whole.

The third theme refers to how the fair influences these personal and community interests. Local participants certainly play a major role in developing fair programming and defining its objectives and outcomes, but this engagement is not just concerned with the way individuals define fairs through their involvement. Fairs are products that illuminate individual and community social and cultural objectives and, in turn, become the influence that reflects back onto the individuals and communities who produce them. One fair organizer said,

> The purpose of the Oklahoma County Fair [is] to the bring families together, especially the children and young adults. This is an opportunity for country or rural kids and city kids to see what each other are doing. This is somewhat of a family affair.

Thus, county fairs operate like mirrors reflecting the ideas and behavior associated with individual and group contributions back at the participants, thereby heightening their senses of enjoyment. A major influence on this reflexive relationship is the state laws that establish prohibitions and other guidelines for the operation of county fairs. County fairs have an obvious formulaic quality needed not only to meet these statewide standards but to ensure the fair experience meets the expectations of participants as well. An interesting social tension can arise from the influence of creative individuals and groups mixing with the more formulaic institutional influences during the production of the fair.

Alfalfa County

Twenty-two respondents answered questions in Alfalfa County. In this group, six individuals had over 15 years of experience with fairs. Two had been involved for over a decade. Eight had been a part of fair-associated organizations for less than 10 years, and six had been a part of the local fair for less than 5 years. Age differences provided much of the justification for the length of association with fairs. Of the six involved in fairs less than 5 years, five were under 18. All of those having extensive experiences with fairs were more than 50 years old. The remaining individuals were over 30. Not represented in this group were individuals 18-30 years old, which supported a widely held belief that fairs are for youth, adults with children or grandchildren, and seniors. Fair organizers said that young adults tended to become less involved in the fair after high school graduation, but if they stayed or returned to the community when having children, they regularly become involved in fair activities again after their children sign up for youth programs such as 4-H.

Alfalfa County respondents were particularly astute at articulating distinctions and highlighting characteristics associated with their community. A wider association with neighboring agricultural events helped solidify their thoughts on this event. Their responses to the questions illustrated awareness about the value of fairs as a principal community activity. Many respondents mentioned other community events as important festivals for bringing the population together (e.g., the town of Cherokee hosts a major fireworks display on the Fourth of July each year), but all believed that the county fair was unique

because of the specific activities and the cross-section of community involvement.

As indicated in the demographic outline of this county, Alfalfa was the most remote of the three counties. Therefore, options for participant activities on a community level are fewer. Many people across the county regularly attend high school football, basketball, and baseball games, but for most people these are only spectator activities. People at the county fair have more opportunities to participate, not just observe, and are invited to do so during many activities, even if not formally registered for the event. Thus, the formal lines of participation at this fair often blur, as most audience members participate. Organizers cherish this important characteristic of their county fairs. While participation in various organized events is a cornerstone of all county fairs, the frequency it occurred at this event was notable.

A review of the schedule of activities at any fair reveals that many opportunities exist to engage the fair beyond simply watching. However, the fair in Alfalfa clouds these lines in particular ways because individuals not registered or assigned to a particular event are often encouraged to step in as participants or to aid in the organization and production of an event or activity. This happened to me as I participated at the Alfalfa County fair, and I observed two other occasions where observers were drawn into participating in a particular event. This characteristic was not common at the other two county fairs, where participation clearly relied on the printed schedule and audience initiative.

The Alfalfa County Fair is part of a cycle of agricultural events throughout the year, and many of the respondents mentioned other events they attend. Beyond other county fairs and the regional state fairs in Oklahoma City or Tulsa, all other events mentioned were specialized affairs featuring particular crafts or specific agricultural interests. For example, members from the OHCE clubs in Alfalfa County provided examples of quilting and other sewing shows at which they feature their work. County extension agents, parents of youth, and 4-H members interviewed talked about the importance of the spring livestock auction and the Youth Livestock Expo in Oklahoma City. Auctions and expos in the spring and fall fairs serve as bracketing events for raising and showing most large and small livestock breeds. Respondents cited specialized shows for particular kinds of livestock, including those specifically for quarter horses, pygmy goats, and Angora rabbits. Not all fair participants who mentioned these events were committed to attending or participating in them, but among those involved in the county fairs, these examples represented other outlets for their interests and those of their peers.

Flower and vegetable gardening were major exhibits at this county fair but were not referred to as an activity respondents engage in outside of the fair show. As I learned from other events, this is an indication that gardening is not seen so much as an optional recreational activity as it is a requirement of association with certain fair groups, namely OHCE and 4-H, although it is more self-imposed than enforced.

Respondents supported my preliminary research that indicated most people become involved in county fairs through youth activities. All respondents mentioned 4-H or FFA as the point of introduction to becoming active in the fair. However, long-term participation in fairs was based on a deep personal interest aside from their experience as a child. Middle-aged adult respondents talked fondly of their connection to fairs via 4-H or FFA as a teenager. Only one respondent did not have an experience with 4-H as a child, but she had grown up in small towns across Kansas and appreciated the value of programs among her adolescent peers. This appreciation translated into a desire to volunteer with 4-H prior to having children, and it continued as her children had grown. Other adults had found that fair exhibits and competitions that had attracted them to the fair supported their hobby interests.[34]

When asked about how the fair has changed since the respondent first got involved, responses varied widely depending on the age of the individual. Youth respondents could see no change in the fair during the past 5 years or less. Those 30 to 50 years old talked about an ebb and flow of fair participants. One individual described it as a drought of participants about every 4 years. This drought correlated with youth and family interest in 4-H and FFA. Senior respondents reminisced about the old fairground buildings but were quick to indicate that the new buildings were much nicer. Older respondents also noted a change in livestock entries. Large breed entries had decreased in comparison to 20 and 30 years ago. They attributed this to the rising price of

[34] For some gentlemen farmers, running cattle or raising other livestock is a hobby.

livestock feed and the fact that many families are no longer involved full-time in farming.

Farming interest in Alfalfa County was divided between two groups. A small group of farmers managed many hundreds or thousands of acres with several head of cattle, and a larger group of individuals farmed a few hundred acres and several dozen head of cattle for supplemental income. No commercial swine or poultry operations were thriving in Alfalfa County at the time of the study. These had been a part of the agricultural landscape in the past but were no longer an option given the impact of large-scale operations elsewhere. The lack of a carnival or midway at the Alfalfa County Fair was not mentioned as a major change. No respondent could identify a specific year, but it appears the county had not had a carnival at the fair since the late 1970s.

The Alfalfa County Fair self-generates its audience by virtue of the activities in which audience members participate. In other words, individuals attend the fair as a participant in one context but as an audience member in another. Community ties were strong among fair participants. Youth participants in particular talked about attending the fair all weekend so they could be with their friends and support their particular efforts at the fair. OHCE club members all attend and even volunteer at the fair for the social benefits and to support friends. Parents of youth and adult children of seniors relish fair days as a positive social event. Many respondents also acknowledged that their fair participation linked into a larger family interest. One individual active in

OHCE named 15 relatives participating in the fair, including grandchildren, children, two sisters, and a cousin.

When asked about their favorite part of the county fair, each respondent mentioned the livestock show, even if they were not directly involved. Cattle and swine were the central livestock exhibition classes, and most respondents highlighted these animals first. However, the largest numbers of entries were sheep and goats followed by poultry and rabbits. Individuals with children and members of OHCE also talked about the exhibits as a particular favorite. The Saturday horse show at this fair received wide support as an important part of the respondents' fair experience.

Respondents then answered questions about what kinds of people participate in county fairs. Several described fair participants based on demographic information similar to the cross-section of respondents interviewed. Two main groups of participants exist based on age group: older youth along with their parents and older adults, mostly seniors. Respondents saw this gap in age groups as a positive condition, there being little mention of concern about the low number of young adults 18-30 years old as fair participants.

Respondents also focused on describing fair participants in terms of their activities. This led to follow-up questions regarding audiences' attractions to the fair. Respondents made no direct distinction between participants and audiences. They assumed they were the same. "A county fair is more than an exhibit or wares and goods; it's what the people of a county think, do, and

accomplish in a way of life the whole year," said one senior fair participant. Again, at the Alfalfa County Fair, nearly all who come out for the fair are either exhibitors or family members of exhibitors at the fair, but even those who do not formally enter an event participate anyway. Respondents felt that the fair was an event open to anyone in the county or anyone visiting the county. Not surprisingly, attendees are mostly White in a county where more than 80% of the total population is White.

Regardless of their connections, each respondent talked about the role of youth organizations such as FFA and 4-H, and most recognized the critical role these organizations play in the vitality and longevity of the county fair. Youth respondents acknowledged that most fair activities from the exhibits to the livestock competitions centered on youth participation. Adults, particularly those in a leadership role on the board such as superintendents or volunteer coordinators, articulated the essential role youth organizations play in orchestrating fair activities, gathering entries and registering participants, and managing the important connections between local fairs and the statewide events. Consensus among organizers interviewed was that without 4-H and FFA involvement, the county fair might not be sustainable.

Aside from discussions about youth organizations, respondents described other groups or organizations that helped produce the fair each year. Youth and parents of youth were less aware of the logistics behind organizing the fair each year unless the parents were also part of the leadership circle. Although respondents had varying degrees of knowledge about the groups

involved with fairs, each could name most that had formal organizational ties or that are a part of a larger institution, including 4-H, FFA, and OHCE. Those with a longer-term connection to the fair talked about other individuals who have a loose affiliation or no formal affiliation with any of the structured groups. Although nearly all youth involved in fairs are part of a formal group, several adults supported or participated in the fair independent of a group. Older participants talked about how unaffiliated participants used to be more involved in fair activities. One former fair board president said it was more common 30 years ago for individuals to simply enter the exhibits or competitions without going through OHCE or other clubs. A handful of adults, mostly parents of 4-H and FFA students, participated in livestock shows in the open class.

Respondents did not generally think that the agricultural industry had affected the content of the county fair. The basic structure for exhibits involving sample produce and field crops as well as the livestock show have not changed since the mid-20th century. The changes that do occur come from the experiences judges and participants encounter through competition. These changes do not match current farming techniques or the selection of plant varieties found in the field today. Heirloom and noncommercial varieties of plants dominated the entries. Showing livestock like cattle and poultry has never conformed to agricultural norms. One farmer who was a longtime fair organizer joked that the livestock show was never supposed to be about the best representation of your average chicken or cow. It was about showing the oddity that was a little too big or fat to sell for commercial stock. One can liken

this to another common fair class: exhibiting the largest pumpkin, watermelon, or other produce. One cannot sell the largest pumpkin at a supermarket, but some still find it fun to see who can grow the largest one.

In addition, details of the judging and of the specific varieties and breeds have changed as agriculture has changed. For example, 40 years ago, one might have seen half a dozen varieties of tomato, each with its own class. Now it is more common to compare the quality of the sample as a whole to other samples presented that year. On the livestock side, shows have become more stringent about what animals can be fed, what hormones or other supplements can be used, and how the animals may be groomed prior to the show. At one time, it was acceptable to spray paint the hooves and certain patches of fur on cattle to make the animal display a uniform appearance. Since that time, fair organizers annually revise the rules for the livestock show to level the competition requirements and eliminate ethically questionable show practices.

Within the context of these activities, organizers and longtime fair participants thought participation in fairs had slowly declined since the 1960s, but they also said that the level of participation had leveled off since the late 1980s. One middle-aged farmer said that fairs had not changed since he was a youth, but he attributed this to the fact that the agricultural side of fairs had little to do with developments in the industry. In other words, fairs are separate events with activities themed around an agricultural ethos but not directly related to changing commercial farming practices today. For example, commercial farming often focuses on how local production fits the

macroeconomic factors of production at other scales. Even organic farmers consider the viability of their production on a macro level. Only a handful of farm-to-table producers who sell through cooperatives, to farmers markets, and to specialty restaurants operate outside of this macro level. Such trans-scalar concerns stand in marked contrast to the current focus of fairs in presenting agricultural activity solely from a local perspective. Whereas some of the participants may make their living as part of the agribusiness complex, their engagement at the fair is through personal, recreational interest with entries in classes or products that are not part of their commercial interests. Therefore, the aims and criteria for judging a successful fair entry are not the same as those used in assessing the products of commercial farming. The rules and criteria outlined in the fair's premium book have little to do with commercial production, wholesale distribution, or retail consumption.

To understand fairs further as a microagricultural venue, respondents answered questions about how they thought the local character of the county influenced fair content and programming. Parents, youth, and youth organizers challenged the framing of this question by reporting that they did not see how local disposition affected programming. Although some adults, particularly those in a leadership role, could provide insight into how fairs are different from commercial agriculture, they conceded that most of the activities at this fair happen in other counties around the region. They said this was because youth organizations worked to find activities that appealed to every child, which creates a sense of continuity between participants and the programming from

year to year. An OHCE club leader remarked that members have a variety of areas where they can cultivate their interests.

Respondents also commented about the importance of location. The location of fairs came up again in answers about how important the fair is to the community. Respondents made no distinction between the county population and the fair community. Many respondents reiterated throughout their interview that fairs were inclusive events, not exclusive. Everyone in the county is encouraged to participate, even if a person has not registered for a formal event. Although Alfalfa County has several small towns or unincorporated communities, fair organizers strive to temporarily erase those place distinctions in favor of supporting community allegiance across the county as a whole. The only attempt at distinction was to draw attention to subtle differences in programmatic support and youth activities in the three county schools located in Cherokee, Burlington, and Timberlake. Even these distinctions were minor. Rather than community or school rivalries, fair participants looked forward to seeing friends from across the county at the fair, which is a process crucial to cementing place-identity by maintaining social networks specifically located in the county. The Alfalfa County Fair provides an opportunity for everyone to take a participatory role, even those not signed up to exhibit or compete in the more structured activities like the livestock and horse shows. Fair organizers saw the fair as a kind of countywide homecoming inasmuch as the event promotes inclusive engagement with the audience rather than establishing a

segregated relationship between those who attend the fair as observers and those who register for competitions.

All respondents described the layout or organization of the event. They addressed this question in two ways. First, they talked about the size and structure of buildings and the use of buildings for particular activities. Alfalfa County Fairgrounds has two main exposition halls: one that is an arena for livestock shows and one that is a meeting hall. Fair participants felt fortunate to have these facilities, as nearby county fairgrounds were not as clean or versatile. Second, when commenting on the organization of the event, respondents described the value of volunteers in putting the event together. Youth participants were appreciative of their parents and teachers who completed the bulk of youth organization functions. Adults complimented the work of specific individuals who either served as part of the organizing committee or assisted with the construction and dismantling of fair activities without any association with a particular committee or outside of a leadership role at the fair. This effort to draw attention to specific individuals was revolving. On four occasions, respondents who had been complimentary of another fair organizer or volunteer received similar compliments from the recipient of their admiration. Since each interview transpired privately, these were all unsolicited comments and not provided in response to each other.

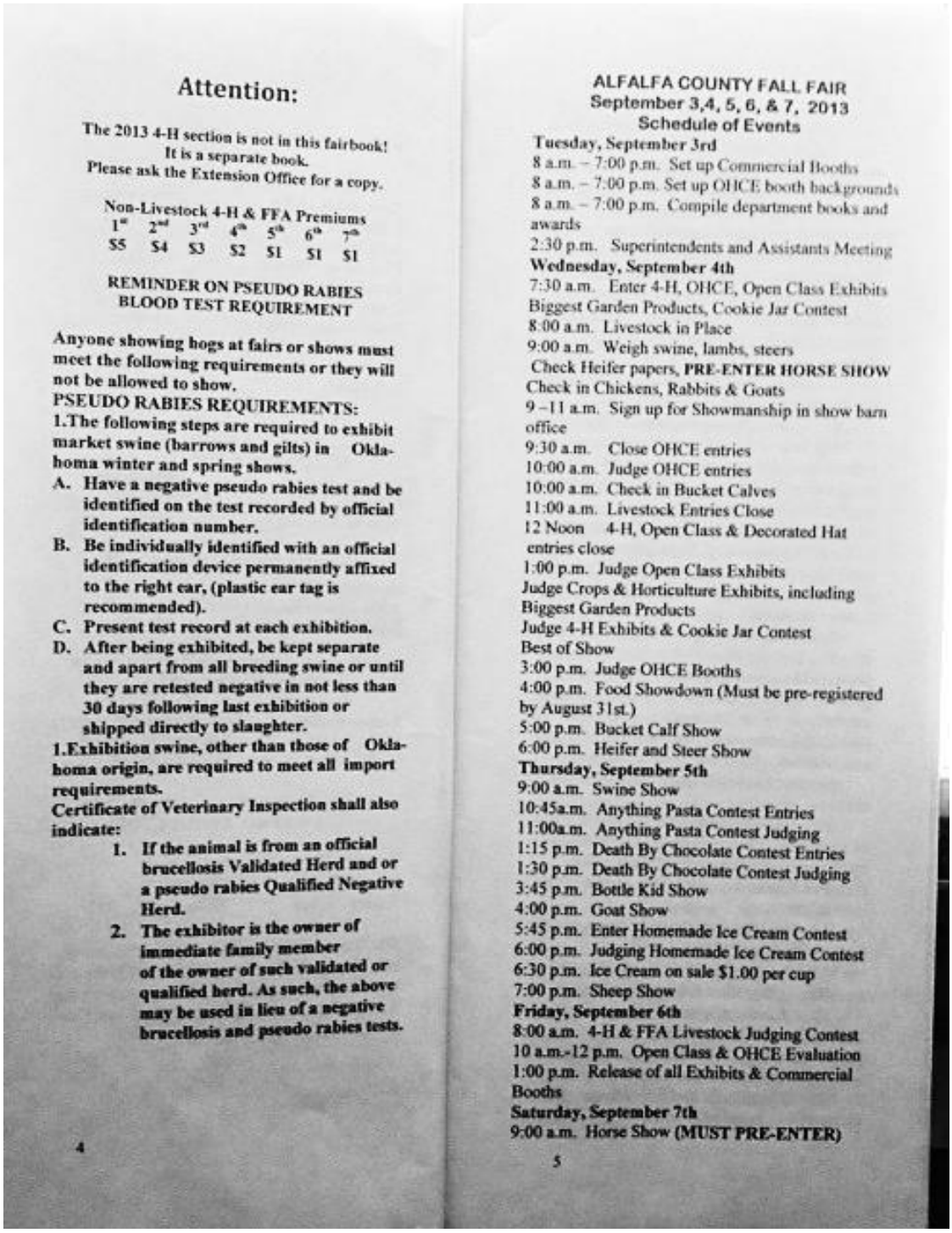
The question, “What is the purpose of a county fair?” was the foundation of this study and was the question that unified most of the information attained from the interviews. Respondents believed that fairs serve a mission, which is

to bring community members together. One county official involved in fair organization for many years said,

> Fairs are the only event of its kind in our area. The county fair here brings all kinds of people to town who come to see other they may not have seen for months or only see each other once a year, at the fair, when people gather, play catch-up, tell stories.

This single mission was the most important, as nearly all respondents incorporated this concept into their comments. Respondents also said that the fair was about youth activities, it supported local agriculture even if only peripherally related to commercial agriculture, and it helped to boost the local economy. With the absence of a carnival or other outside entertainment, most of the described activities were either youth or related to agriculture. When asked to describe the events or activities at the county fair, most respondents reeled off highlights from the premium book, which contains a schedule of daily activities.

County fairs have a strong tie to state fairs in Oklahoma, and respondents were asked how they see the relationship between these events. Youths involved in competitions talked about the need to do well at the county fair to move on to the state fair. The 4-H clubs require members to place first in the exhibition competitions to compete at the state fair. Livestock show participants can move on to state even if they do not place at the county fair, but the county fair served as an important preliminary competition in preparation for state as well as larger regional competitions (see Figure 6 for a sample county fair schedule and Figure 7 and 8 for pictures of Alfalfa County Fair activities).



Attention:

The 2013 4-H section is not in this fairbook!
It is a separate book.
Please ask the Extension Office for a copy.

Non-Livestock 4-H & FFA Premiums

1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th
$5	$4	$3	$2	$1	$1	$1

REMINDER ON PSEUDO RABIES BLOOD TEST REQUIREMENT

Anyone showing hogs at fairs or shows must meet the following requirements or they will not be allowed to show.

PSEUDO RABIES REQUIREMENTS:

1.The following steps are required to exhibit market swine (barrows and gilts) in Oklahoma winter and spring shows.

A. Have a negative pseudo rabies test and be identified on the test recorded by official identification number.

B. Be individually identified with an official identification device permanently affixed to the right ear, (plastic ear tag is recommended).

C. Present test record at each exhibition.

D. After being exhibited, be kept separate and apart from all breeding swine or until they are retested negative in not less than 30 days following last exhibition or shipped directly to slaughter.

1.Exhibition swine, other than those of Oklahoma origin, are required to meet all import requirements.

Certificate of Veterinary Inspection shall also indicate:

1. **If the animal is from an official brucellosis Validated Herd and or a pseudo rabies Qualified Negative Herd.**
2. **The exhibitor is the owner of immediate family member of the owner of such validated or qualified herd. As such, the above may be used in lieu of a negative brucellosis and pseudo rabies tests.**

4

ALFALFA COUNTY FALL FAIR
September 3,4, 5, 6, & 7, 2013
Schedule of Events

Tuesday, September 3rd
8 a.m. – 7:00 p.m. Set up Commercial Booths
8 a.m. – 7:00 p.m. Set up OHCE booth backgrounds
8 a.m. – 7:00 p.m. Compile department books and awards
2:30 p.m. Superintendents and Assistants Meeting

Wednesday, September 4th
7:30 a.m. Enter 4-H, OHCE, Open Class Exhibits Biggest Garden Products, Cookie Jar Contest
8:00 a.m. Livestock in Place
9:00 a.m. Weigh swine, lambs, steers
Check Heifer papers, **PRE-ENTER HORSE SHOW**
Check in Chickens, Rabbits & Goats
9 –11 a.m. Sign up for Showmanship in show barn office
9:30 a.m. Close OHCE entries
10:00 a.m. Judge OHCE entries
10:00 a.m. Check in Bucket Calves
11:00 a.m. Livestock Entries Close
12 Noon 4-H, Open Class & Decorated Hat entries close
1:00 p.m. Judge Open Class Exhibits
Judge Crops & Horticulture Exhibits, including Biggest Garden Products
Judge 4-H Exhibits & Cookie Jar Contest
Best of Show
3:00 p.m. Judge OHCE Booths
4:00 p.m. Food Showdown (Must be pre-registered by August 31st.)
5:00 p.m. Bucket Calf Show
6:00 p.m. Heifer and Steer Show

Thursday, September 5th
9:00 a.m. Swine Show
10:45a.m. Anything Pasta Contest Entries
11:00a.m. Anything Pasta Contest Judging
1:15 p.m. Death By Chocolate Contest Entries
1:30 p.m. Death By Chocolate Contest Judging
3:45 p.m. Bottle Kid Show
4:00 p.m. Goat Show
5:45 p.m. Enter Homemade Ice Cream Contest
6:00 p.m. Judging Homemade Ice Cream Contest
6:30 p.m. Ice Cream on sale $1.00 per cup
7:00 p.m. Sheep Show

Friday, September 6th
8:00 a.m. 4-H & FFA Livestock Judging Contest
10 a.m.-12 p.m. Open Class & OHCE Evaluation
1:00 p.m. Release of all Exhibits & Commercial Booths

Saturday, September 7th
9:00 a.m. Horse Show **(MUST PRE-ENTER)**

5

Figure 6. Part of the fair schedule for Alfalfa County.

Figure 7. Grandfather and grandson during a noncompetitive livestock showing, Alfalfa County Fair, 2013.

Figure 8. Judging canned okra and beets, Alfalfa County Fair, 2009.

Respondents discussed their feelings about their local fair compared to other county fairs around the state. While Alfalfa County is a small event relative to other counties, each respondent was fiercely loyal to the local fair. Many noted some of the comments and affirmations about the value of their fair in terms of creating group bonding opportunities and a stronger community affiliation. The foremost value of the fair was widely considered educational, closely followed by entertainment, which holds true to the notion that fairs began as agricultural expos designed to educate rural populations. While the educational objectives might have changed, the perceived valued has not. With education and fairs, Oklahoma is a little different from other states. The formalization of youth activities at county and state fairs around the country coincided with Oklahoma statehood. The national 4-H organization was formed shortly after statehood, along with the Cooperative Extension Service of the USDA through the Smith-Lever Act. Unlike other states with longer fair traditions, Oklahoma has always had both an organized 4-H and a cooperative extension presence at its fairs. This defined the attachments I documented for each site I visited. Thus, with such loyalty, most respondents could not imagine a county fair existing outside of their county. In other words, the value of the fair as a community event relies heavily on the location of the fair and ties to the community that hosts it. Only one individual who had a leadership role in the fair warned against the possible discontinuing or consolidation of county fairs around Oklahoma. He said that precedence existed. A decade ago, 4-H took a temporary budget cut from the state, which resulted in some counties

combining personnel (Alfalfa, for example, collaborated with Grant County). This temporary cut in funding for local fairs ignited some concerns among organizers about the longevity of county fairs in counties with a low population. With such a reliance on youth programs at the fair, less populated counties may have a dramatic effect on the sustainability of county fairs if the state imposes similar cuts again.

To end each interview, respondents were asked how they thought county fairs might change decades from now. Respondents gave a variety of answers, but mostly they fit into one of two perspectives. The first perspective was that fairs are unlikely to change. Sentiments lay in the ability of the community to retain its current county population and its economic position in the region. Therefore, if agriculture and population stay constant, then institutions like their county fair should stay the same as well. This group saw fairs as a necessary institution to support the county's deep agrarian heritage. Supporters of the second perspective forecasted a dramatic change in the fair. Alfalfa County is moving in two directions economically and socially. The agricultural industry is stable and growing, but growth is toward continual farm consolidation as older farmers sell their interest to younger producers. These younger producers tend to work in partnerships with strong financial backing. This change may not lead to much change in the activities at the fair, but they do amount to a change in the county population. Moreover, the largest growth in Alfalfa County's population derives from newcomers associated with oil and gas production. Many of these individuals do not have intimate ties or interest in community

heritage and it may be that their impact lasts only as long as local fossil-fuel production thrives. Nonetheless, there is a fear that this change, however temporary, may affect participation in the fair as well.

Mayes County

Working with the Mayes County Agricultural Extension office and the County Fair Board office across the hall, I interviewed 24 respondents. This turnout was the highest among the three sites. Unlike the very rural areas of the state and more urban and suburban places, county officials do not struggle to generate support for the county fair. Mayes County has the advantage of being neither too remote nor too urban. Its relatively high rural population connects to the nearest metropolitan area, Tulsa, by way of two different turnpikes running east–west and north–south through the county. Most individuals interviewed here had a long history with this fair and others in the region. The interview group included seven individuals with more than 15 years of experience with fairs. Five had been involved in fairs for over a decade. They were the most knowledgeable and forthcoming about changes to the Mayes County Fair and how it compared to other fairs in surrounding communities. Five individuals had been a part of the fair for less than 10 years, and seven had been a part of their local fair for less than 5 years. Four of the seven involved in fairs less than 5 years were youth under 18 years of age. A handful of those with extensive experience were senior retirees. A large number of individuals interviewed were parents of youth with varying degrees of fair experience as a youth and as an adult.

The Mayes County Fair is as distinctive as the one in Alfalfa County, but it appears closest to the stereotypical image of county fairs many outside of the community would expect because it includes traveling food vendors, a carnival, and grandstand entertainment. Its location in an exurban environment leads to advantages and challenges as well. Respondents articulated these elements and offered distinctions that made this county fair vibrant. Responses to the questions illustrated a desire to sustain this fair at its current interest level, which is broad and deep. This fair draws participation not just from major towns and other areas around the county, including Pryor, Locust Grove, Chouteau, and Adair, but from outside the county as well. The respondents interviewed saw the Mayes County Fair as a unique event because of the specific activities it includes, its relationship with participants, and the characteristics of the people drawn from across the county who enjoy the event. A former county fair board member and longtime fair superintendent commented that the county fair provides an opportunity for people to be actively engaged in an event, which is unusual because so many entertainment events involving music or sports that people attend are purely spectator events.

Like the other two fairs, this county fair is a part of a cycle of agricultural events throughout the year, and it has strong ties to youth programming. Respondents mentioned other events they attended too. Outside of the Tulsa State Fair, all other events mentioned specialized in a particular craft or set of agricultural interests. Many attended annual shows such as quilting, basket making, or knitting in nearby cities like Tulsa. Those involved in livestock often

travel to specialized shows as far away as Kansas City and Denver. Nearly all respondents mentioned 4-H or FFA as the point of introduction to becoming active in the fair. Six adults noted their children had been active in youth programs, even though they had not been themselves. Operating in a largely exurban environment, county residents are split between those who grew up in mostly suburban communities and those who moved to Mayes County from more distant rural settings to be near Tulsa. Aside from youth engagement, adult participation in this fair is more likely to be about a hobby or an affinity for canning, gardening, quilting, or woodcarving.

Respondents associated with this fair were asked the same set of questions as respondents at the other two fair sites. After establishing levels of experience, questions turned to how the fair had changed since they first became involved. In this case, age was the determining factor in the answers provided. Youth respondents saw no real change but did say differences exist between those involved in 4-H and those who continued into FFA in high school. These youth recognized varying degrees of interest in fair-related activities as their peers got older. A countywide 4-H organizer said that participation in fair-related activities, especially raising livestock, had much to do with the success of the local FFA programs around the county. Respondents highlighted particularly strong educators as success stories for retaining youth interest into high school. Three adult respondents talked about the variation in fair participants too, although they responded from a broader community perspective. While attendance was sound, sentiments leaned toward seeing a

slow decline in participation. As with the Alfalfa County Fair, nearly all respondents felt like large breed entries were declining. Most farming in Mayes County involves livestock herds of small to medium size.

Two thirds of respondents noted that their fair participation related to a larger family interest. On two occasions, multiple members of a family participated in this interview process. Like other fairs, the main groups of participants are families with active youth in 4-H or FFA and older adults, mostly women, active in OHCE. These groups provide a built-in audience by virtue of family associations swelling the ranks of audience members. In other words, individuals typically attend the fair as participants and as audience members. One participant said, “It gets people out and brings them together. For the 4-H and FFA, it gives them opportunities to display, show, and share, which is helpful in their training and leadership.” While other reasons and connections that draw people to this fair exist, respondents highlighted the value of sense of community as a common theme among all fair participants. Youth participants in particular believed attending the various fair activities was important and allowed them to connect with friends and support family. Older fair participants indicated that their social circle centered on fair-related activities, which is what brought them to the event. This seemed to indicate that if OHCE or other organizations no longer supported their creative interests, they would unlikely continue to be part of the fair.

When asked about their favorite part of the county fair, respondents focused on the livestock show as a unique draw to the fair not found at other

community events. Many of the younger respondents and their parents described their experience with the livestock show as a competition. In other words, livestock showings shared much in common with other competitive sports that attract youth interest. A variety of respondents talked about the importance of food at the fair. While they enjoyed cooking competitions like baking and ice cream making, food service was something they enjoyed. Local individuals provide freshly made plates of food daily for lunch and dinner. Outside food vendors also offer popular state-fair favorites found in Oklahoma and other festivals and fairs throughout the central United States, such as Indian tacos (essentially a taco salad served on deep-fried bread dough) and funnel cakes (waffle batter drizzled in a vat of hot oil served with powder sugar). In understanding the value and attraction to the fair, the variety of perspectives indicated a more individualized interest in fairs that complemented a community-centered view as well.

Respondents discussed the kind of people who participate in the county fair. Most talked about fair participants based on their ages, not on race or ethnicity. Respondents discussed race and ethnicity only when I broached the subject directly.[35] The focus on age rather than race or ethnicity was an interesting detail because the county is more ethnically diverse than Alfalfa County. People who are at least partly Cherokee comprise 22% of the county population, which is more than twice the statewide average for those claiming Indian ancestry. Immediate racialized distinctions based on appearance are not

[35] In rural Oklahoma, questions about race and ethnicity are interpreted as questions about the African American, Native American, and Latino (presumed to be Mexican) populations.

always apparent. In addition, White–Cherokee integration has been a social norm for well over a century. Therefore, age is a more reliably visible distinction. However, these distinctions do not come across as drawbacks or a way to compartmentalize interests. Rather, older participants valued youth engagement at the fair and younger individuals often saw interactions with older adults as an opportunity.

Aside from age, individuals also grouped fair participation by activities such as quilting, baking, and showing horses and sheep, which led to follow-up questions regarding audiences' attractions to the fair. Respondents at this fair established a distinction between participants and audiences that was not drawn so clearly in Alfalfa County. A participant was described as someone who either fit into one of the formal clubs or groups involved in the fair or formally registered in one of the competitions. The audience consisted of everyone else. However, nearly all who attend the fair are exhibitors, participants, or family members, with the exception of those who come in the evening to attend the carnival.

As with the other two sites, each respondent was asked about the role of youth organizations such as FFA and 4-H in fairs. Respondents recognized the critical role these organizations played in the vitality and longevity of the county fair. Youth and adults described the role youth organizations played in arranging several fair activities. They also gave credit to groups like OHCE as an essential part of this event's success. Fair activities were widely youth related, but a large number of exhibitors were adults too. The organizers

interviewed supported what respondents at other sites had said, which was without youth involvement, the county fair would not be sustainable.

Apart from commenting on youth organizations, respondents talked about other groups that aid in producing the fair each year. Youth and parents of youth were less aware of the logistics behind organizing the fair each year unless the parents were also part of the leadership circle. Although respondents had varying degrees of knowledge about the groups involved with fairs, each could name most cultural groups with formal organizational ties or that are a part of a larger institution. These groups are local chapters or clubs with a state and national affiliation. Those with longer, more intimate connection to the fair spoke about other individuals with a loose affiliation or structured fair groups. All youth involved in this fair were part of a formal group, but a range of adults participated in the fair independent of a group in what is termed open-class competition. Older participants talked about how these unaffiliated participants used to be more active in the fair.

Each respondent discussed how changes in agriculture might affect the county fair. Mayes County is a rural county with stable economic growth, including low unemployment, within the agricultural and nonagricultural sectors. Whereas the recreation and vacation-home developments at a large nearby reservoir called Grand Lake have grown in recent decades, and towns throughout the county are rapidly becoming exurban bedroom communities attached to the Tulsa metropolitan area, the county still lies in a non-MSA according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Moreover, agriculture is still an important

part of life in the area. Adult respondents commented on this urban growth in positive terms, but they were not aware of how these economic changes affected the content of the county fair. For example, few farmers in the area raise field crops for a living anymore. Most farming operations support beef cattle, and those involved in 4-H and FFA seemed committed to caring for their animals even if this activity did not derive from managing commercial livestock operations.

Respondents commented on the significance of location. Answers varied but supported the value of fairs as a community-wide event. The Mayes County Fair draws a crowd from towns and hamlets across the area, including neighboring counties, and it has a reputation for providing more than just educational exhibits and livestock shows. Respondents acknowledged that there were essentially two types of fair participants. One type signs up for the exhibits and livestock competition. Another type attends fairs to watch the competitions and ride carnival rides. However, when asked, more than half the respondents thought both groups embody the spirit of the fair. "It provides opportunities for likeminded individuals and families to get together," commented one parent with over 5 years' experience with fair organizing. This pluralistic view may be attributed to county fair organizers who promote the fair to a wide range of individuals who live within 40 miles of the fairgrounds. The organizers also provide an opportunity for anyone to take a participatory role, even if the exhibits or the livestock show are not their interest.

Respondents described the layout and organization of the Mayes County Fair (see Figure 9-11 for pictures of Mayes County Fair activities and Figure 12 for a sample county fair schedule). They each provided a description of the fairgrounds, including its location or proximity to the town of Pryor and to surrounding towns. Central to their descriptions were the two exhibit halls on the front side of the fairgrounds and the livestock complex in the center. All fair participants felt fortunate to have these facilities, but the adults included in the survey recognized the need to update many building in the coming years. The exhibit halls were particularly old and in need of significant attention. Respondents said the organization of the event was heavily reliant on volunteers, most of whom have ties to specific organizations charged with different aspects of fair programming. Board members, club leaders such as those for 4-H and OHCE, and county extension staff were singled out for their efforts in seeing that all fair-related logistical concerns were addressed.

Figure 9. FFA competitor wrangling her hog after bathing it for show, Mayes County Fair, 2013.

Figure 10. 4-Her walking her red heifer the morning before show in front of the carnival rides, Mayes County Fair, 2013.

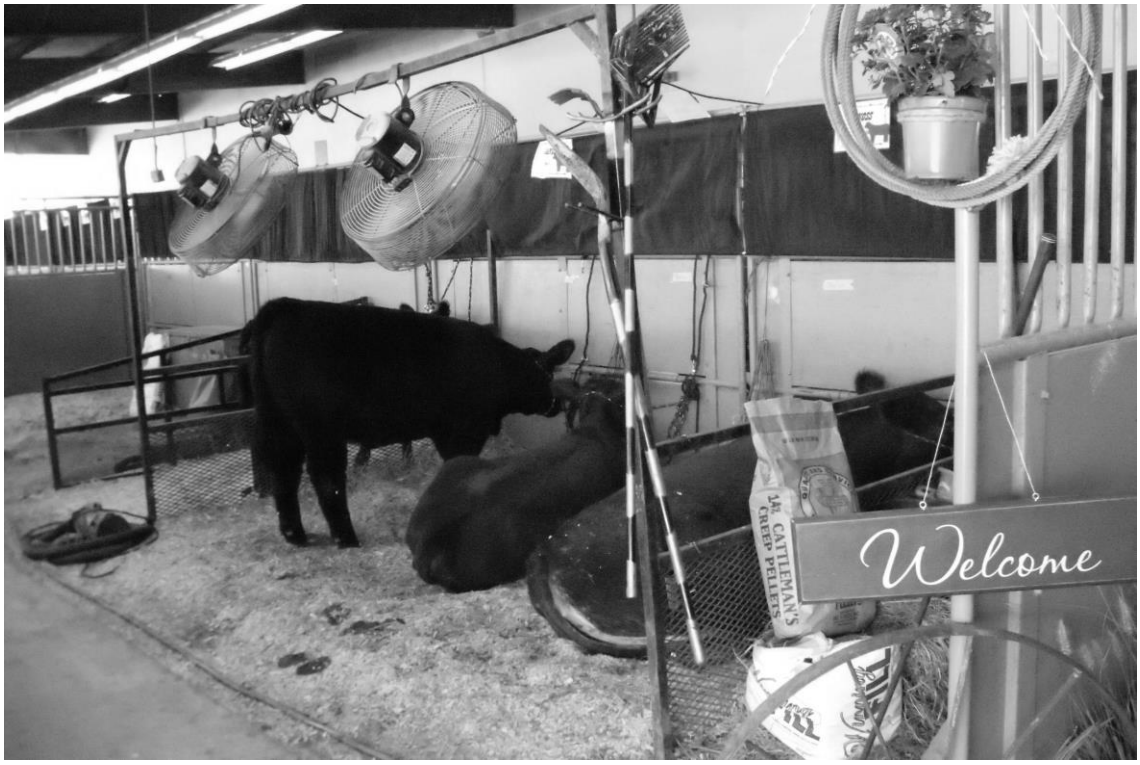
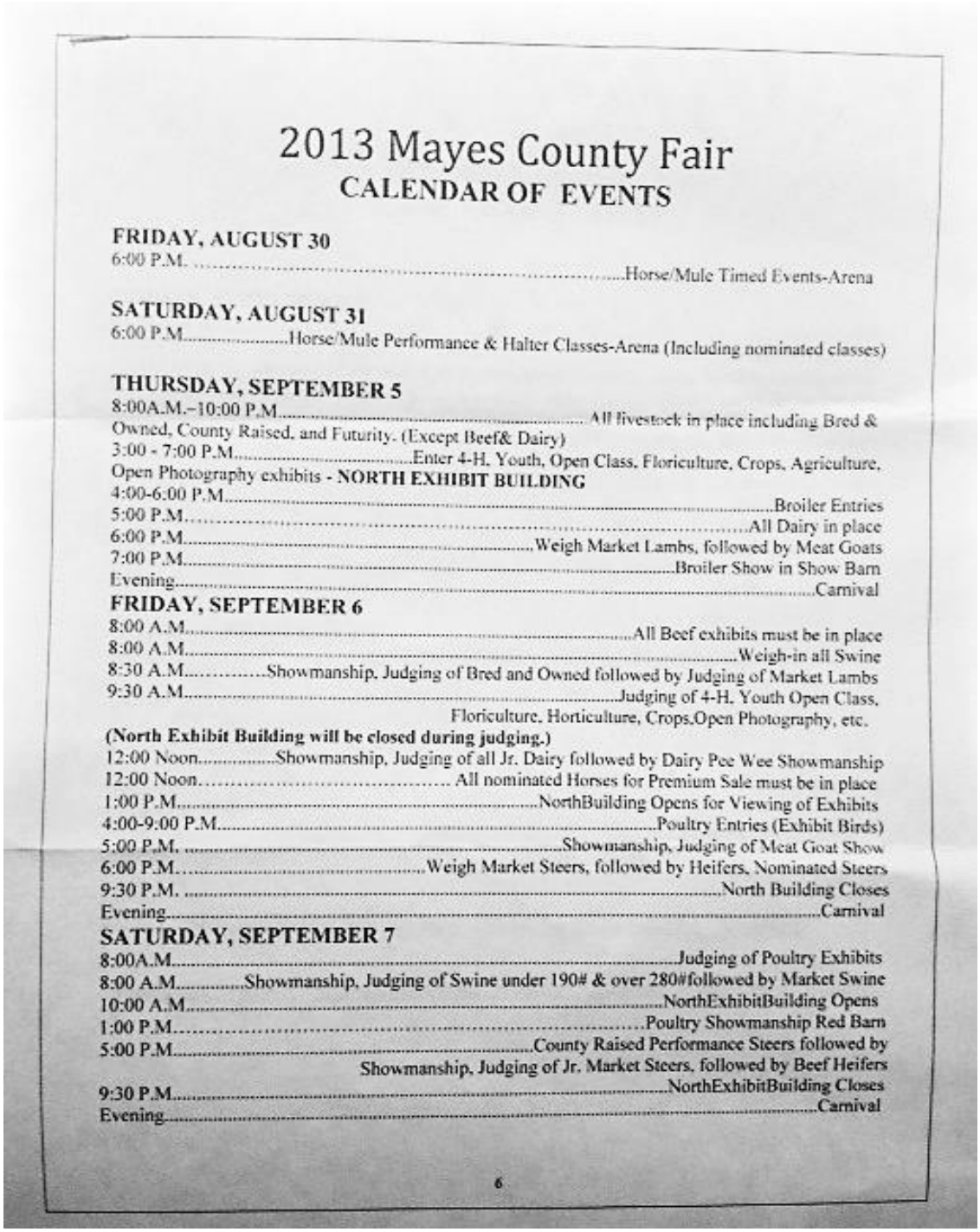


Figure 11. Cows waiting for show after being groomed, Mayes County Fair, 2009.



2013 Mayes County Fair
CALENDAR OF EVENTS

FRIDAY, AUGUST 30
6:00 P.M. .....Horse/Mule Timed Events-Arena

SATURDAY, AUGUST 31
6:00 P.M.....Horse/Mule Performance & Halter Classes-Arena (Including nominated classes)

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 5
8:00A.M.–10:00 P.M.....All livestock in place including Bred & Owned, County Raised, and Futurity. (Except Beef& Dairy)
3:00 - 7:00 P.M.....Enter 4-H, Youth, Open Class, Floriculture, Crops, Agriculture, Open Photography exhibits - **NORTH EXHIBIT BUILDING**
4:00-6:00 P.M.....Broiler Entries
5:00 P.M.....All Dairy in place
6:00 P.M.....Weigh Market Lambs, followed by Meat Goats
7:00 P.M.....Broiler Show in Show Barn
Evening.....Carnival

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 6
8:00 A.M.....All Beef exhibits must be in place
8:00 A.M.....Weigh-in all Swine
8:30 A.M.....Showmanship, Judging of Bred and Owned followed by Judging of Market Lambs
9:30 A.M.....Judging of 4-H, Youth Open Class, Floriculture, Horticulture, Crops,Open Photography, etc.
(North Exhibit Building will be closed during judging.)
12:00 Noon.....Showmanship, Judging of all Jr. Dairy followed by Dairy Pee Wee Showmanship
12:00 Noon.....All nominated Horses for Premium Sale must be in place
1:00 P.M.....NorthBuilding Opens for Viewing of Exhibits
4:00-9:00 P.M.....Poultry Entries (Exhibit Birds)
5:00 P.M. .....Showmanship, Judging of Meat Goat Show
6:00 P.M.....Weigh Market Steers, followed by Heifers, Nominated Steers
9:30 P.M. .....North Building Closes
Evening.....Carnival

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 7
8:00A.M.....Judging of Poultry Exhibits
8:00 A.M.....Showmanship, Judging of Swine under 190# & over 280#followed by Market Swine
10:00 A.M.....NorthExhibitBuilding Opens
1:00 P.M.....Poultry Showmanship Red Barn
5:00 P.M.....County Raised Performance Steers followed by Showmanship, Judging of Jr. Market Steers, followed by Beef Heifers
9:30 P.M.....NorthExhibitBuilding Closes
Evening.....Carnival

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Figure 12. Part of the fair schedule for Mayes County.

As with other fair sites, this group of respondents was also asked what they thought was the purpose of a county fair. Respondents emphasized that fairs serve to bring community members together. Two youth leaders and an older OHCE member made similar comments about how fairs allow individuals to cultivate a personal identity around their particular interests. The social value of fairs was undeniable and valuable for similar reasons among teenagers and retired adults. Parents and youth leaders also valued fairs in terms of teaching youth about properly managing obligation. These values include accountability and are critical to managing most 4-H and FFA requirements such as raising livestock. Respondents associated with this fair site also talked about the entertainment value of the fair. Unlike the other two sites featured in this study, Mayes County includes a traveling carnival and provides nightly entertainment aside from the livestock show. Most described the nonagricultural activities as youth- or family-related. Two older participants indicated that after dark the fair was not for them. Most livestock judging ends by 6 p.m. The only activities available after that are associated with the carnival. The carnival was one of the few draws the fair had in attracting individuals from other counties.

Respondents replied to questions about how they felt their local fair compared to other county fairs around the state. The Mayes County fair is a well-attended, average-size event compared to other counties. Respondents noted that locally this fair was better than all others in the surrounding counties were. Five respondents used the Rogers and Craig County fairs as evidence. Although the towns of Claremore and Vinita in those counties are larger towns,

each has struggled to sustain community interest in its county fair. Respondents repeated many comments about the value of their fair in terms of supporting group attachments and stronger community affiliation. Unlike the other two fair sites, this event included a healthy level of competition between OHCE, 4-H, and FFA club sites, which were strong in the major towns around the county. The fair brings like interests together from across the county in a fun and educational setting. The educational elements originating with early agricultural expos from the inception of 4-H and the county extension office are still in place a century later. With such loyalty, respondents seemed puzzled why I would ask about whether the county fair could continue outside of their county.

When asked about how the county fairs might change in future decades, all respondents were hopeful that the fair would be relatively unchanged. This group was uniform in the responses to this question because the diminishing participation at other sites is not a problem in Mayes County. Respondents were not negative about the future of their county fair. Rather, they thought strategically about how they could do a better job with what was already working. The only major change suggested by some was the need to work more assertively to recruit younger adults into OHCE. Although the OHCE in Mayes County was not lacking in members at its clubs, members felt that it would benefit from younger participants.

Oklahoma County

Working through the Oklahoma County Agricultural Extension office, 18 respondents were interviewed from Oklahoma County, which was a lower number than in the other two counties. Oklahoma County fair supporters struggle to maintain support for the county fair in all the communities throughout this metropolitan county. Few individuals involved with the fair had long-term connections to it. Older individuals said their experience with fairs came mostly from growing up in rural Oklahoma or in other states. They were unfamiliar with other urban county fairs. Four individuals had over 15 years of experience with fairs, but each had a conglomeration of experiences from various fairs hosted in other counties. Four had been involved in fairs for over a decade, but these individuals had grown up in rural areas along the far eastern side of the county near towns like Jones, Harrah, and Choctaw. They were the most knowledgeable about changes in the fair through time. Seven had been a part of this event for less than 10 years, and three had been a part of the fair for less than 5 years. Age differences provided much of the justification for the length of association with fairs. The three involved in fairs less than 5 years were all youth under 18. Over half of those interviewed were either retired or nearing retirement. The remaining individuals were parents over the age of 35. As with Alfalfa County, no one 18-30 years old participated in the interview process.

The Oklahoma County Free Fair is a different experience compared to the other two fairs. As discussed in Chapter 5, all county fairs in Oklahoma are free fairs by legal statute. Some around the state accept the no-cost

admissions policy as implicit to all in the community. Oklahoma County maintains the original title because it struggles to build a bigger audience and wants to emphasize the no-cost distinction as an advantage. Use of the term also alleviates confusion between this event and the Oklahoma State Fair, although state fair organizers were more concerned about the similarities in title for these two events than county organizers were. Of the three fairs in this study, this is the only one serving an urban or suburban area and is in the largest MSA in the state. Respondents were particularly interested in talking about the differences associated with this fair compared to others in Oklahoma. They were also forthcoming about working on promoting groups such as 4-H and OHCE throughout the county because these groups are active in the fair.

Organizers and participants struggle to make this event relevant and interesting to many people in the area. Essentially, they try to determine how to promote an event that is historically about supporting agriculture in a nonagrarian setting. This issue is particularly challenging given that during any weekend in the fall, a half dozen festivals or other social events take place in the Greater Oklahoma City area, which is an area spanning eight counties and comprising 1.3 million people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Competition for audience interest is fierce, but respondents see the Oklahoma County Free Fair as a unique event because of the intimate relationship between participants and the variety of people who participate. Although respondents believe in the importance of this event, the premium book shows that activities at this fair occur at other activities across the city. What makes the county fair in

Oklahoma County different from other social outlets is not one event but the way the fair combines many interests and activities in one location. Putting aside all other potential competitions for audience to this event, fair organizers believe their greatest rival is the State Fair of Oklahoma.

Competition with the state fair is not direct. The county fair and the state fair are several weeks apart. The size and focus of the events are dramatically different too. For example, the state fair is nearly 2 weeks long and encompasses the kind of agrarian, domestic, and youth activities found at the county fairs, alongside numerous carnival rides and food vendors rivaling an actual amusement park. The state fair also schedules concerts, circuses and other spectacles, trade shows, and international exhibitors. Although the Oklahoma County Free Fair follows the same guidelines and organizational requirements as other counties, the state fair is a nonprofit agency heavily subsidized through state and municipal support alongside private sponsorship and investment. The county fair rents the state fairgrounds but uses only a few buildings for its weekend event. Regardless of the differences, respondents remarked on challenges that occur hosting the two events. Whereas respondents from the other two fair sites saw their relationship with the state fairs in Oklahoma City and Tulsa as partnerships, respondents at this county fair longed for such support and cooperation with the state fairgrounds staff. Organizers of the county event do not intend to compete with the state event, yet restrictions and requirements imposed on the county event by fairgrounds management hamper the ability of those in charge of the county fair to develop

event ideas. For example, the county fair is not allowed to contract with a carnival ride operator over concerns by the fairgrounds that the county event might weaken attendance at the state event; however, the lack of a carnival or midway at the Oklahoma County Free Fair was declared a major reason why the fair is smaller and attendance low.

Like the other two fairs, this county fair is a part of a cycle of agricultural events throughout the year. Respondents mentioned other events they attended. Outside of other county fairs and the regional state fairs, the focus of all other events mentioned was particular crafts or agricultural interests. The group interviewed was more likely to participate in a variety of craft and livestock shows. Many of these shows, such as quilting, knitting, and crochet, take place at the state fairgrounds in Oklahoma City too. Monthly horse and livestock breed shows, the spring livestock auction, and the Youth Livestock Expo take place in Oklahoma City. Though participation in the fair may be light, the engagement among participant is more saturated for those in Oklahoma County.

Another notable difference is that this county fair also has a strong flower and vegetable gardening exhibition. Unlike the other sites, older individuals actively participate in other gardening shows throughout the year. In addition to OHCE, Oklahoma County Master Gardeners provides may activities throughout the year that align well with the county fair.

All respondents mentioned 4-H or FFA as the point of introduction to becoming active in the fair. This was either direct or indirect. Two adult

respondents mentioned their children had been active in youth programs even though they had not been. The strongest 4-H and FFA programs in the county are along the east side of the county in the neighboring towns of Jones, Harrah, Luther, and Choctaw. Adult participation in fairs tends to be about hobby or personal interest in an activity featured at the fair. Some examples of outside interests that draw adults to fair activities include photography, canning, quilting, and gardening. In other words, nonagricultural interests become the main reasons for fair participation. These interests existed at other sites but served as secondary reasons to the youth and agriculturally related activities.

When asked about how the fair has changed since the respondent first got involved, responses varied widely depending on the age of the individual. Youth respondents noted no real change had occurred. However, one significant change to this fair is the decision of the fair board to host the livestock show on a separate weekend and location from the rest of the fair events. For decades, the Oklahoma County Free Fair had been hosted entirely at State Fair Park using a handful of buildings, including the Centennial Exposition Hall and a couple of the barns. In 2011, the county fair board, led by a cluster of parents, superintendents in the livestock divisions, and FFA educators working at high schools in the county, moved the livestock portion of the fair to the newly renovated barns near Jones High School, which is 22 miles east of the fairgrounds on the edge of the county. This move did not affect the horse show, just the shows of cattle, swine, sheep, goats, rabbits, and poultry. Although the youth did not recognize this as a change, adults talked about the

issue of split location. Consensus among adult participants interviewed was that this change could be harmful to the county fair.

Six of the adult respondents talked about the variation in fair participants each year. Although overall attendance was considered good, the past 5 years had seemed to have lower turnout, although no one cited specific data to support this assertion. Because the fair is free, no mechanism is in place to count gate attendance.

As with other fair sites, respondents reported fewer large breed entries compared to 20 years ago. In Oklahoma County, large breed interest is mostly associated with horse training rather than raising cattle and swine. Nearly all farming in this county is livestock-related and limited to individuals who farm no more than 200 acres.

Half the respondents recognized that their fair participation related to a larger family interest. One respondent said, “[The fair is] good family fun. Livestock projects provide many months of work and family bonding while the youth learn important livestock and leadership skills.” This fair relies heavily on two factions: families with active youth in 4-H or FFA and older adults active in OHCE and Master Gardeners. Like Alfalfa County, these groups provide for a self-generating audience by virtue of the activities where audience members are also participants. Thus, individuals attend the fair as a participant in one context but stay to be the audience for another. However, a couple of fair organizers said that interactive programs organized for families on Saturday

morning draw more people to the event than just the group members registered for the exhibits.

Regardless of the draw, respondents highlighted a sense of community among fair participants. Youth participants in particular talked about attending all fair activities regardless of the split weekend schedule. All elements of the fair are a social outlet. They also dovetail with preparation and participation in the state fair. While moving the livestock show to Jones has fractured the continuity of the fair, some respondents appreciated the change of venue from the past because the youth and parents are already spending several days at the fairgrounds during the state fair. Contrasting the connection between family ties and fair engagement, older fair participants did not see their participation as part of this family bond. They acknowledged that their social circle centered on certain fair activities, but unlike those in rural areas, most elder individuals engaged in fairs separate from family ties. Older respondents hoped to find ways to engage younger individuals in their activities and interests. OHCE has a reputation of being more of an older social group across the state, but this perception may be more strongly represented in Oklahoma County.

When asked about their favorite part of the county fair, respondents focused less on the livestock show. Instead, they provided a range of answers. Six respondents mentioned livestock but described it less as a show and more as a competition. Other respondents enjoyed the cooking competitions such as salsa and ice cream making, the evening concerts and potluck dinners, and the awards ceremony for youth and adult exhibitors. In understanding the value or

attraction to this fair, the variety of perspectives indicate a more individualized interest in fairs that contrasts with the more community-centered interest found in the other two counties. With this notion of individual interest, one respondent said her interest in the fair was based on a hope that it "teaches younger generations the value of promoting the arts, protecting the environment, and learning about sustainable practices in order to become better stewards."

Respondents then commented on the type of people who participate in county fairs. Several described fair participants based on demographic information similar to the cross-section of respondents interviewed. Most participants are older youth arriving with their parents or older adults, mostly seniors, which was similar to the findings for the other two county fairs in this study. Moreover, as in the other two fair sites, respondents saw this as a positive distinction. Older adults relish the opportunity to engage youths, and youths said they were interested in the contributions of older participants.

Respondents also focused on describing fair participants in terms of activities in which they participated. Each fair participant has a signature activity, such as gardening, photography, cooking, painting, horses, or sheep, but also participates in one or two other activities or classes. This led to follow-up questions regarding audiences' attractions to the fair. Respondents at this fair established a distinction between participants and audiences. A participant was someone who belonged to one of the formal clubs or groups involved in the fair or had formally registered in one of the competitions. The audience

consists of everyone else. Nearly all who come out for the fair are either exhibitors or their family members.

Fair organizers arrange various activities that do not require registration in formal competition class or a formal association with a group. Food tasting, relay games, arts and crafts demonstrations, and performances all provide some level of interaction for the respondents considered part of the audience. Respondents in this group were more astute about racial or ethnic diversity among fair participants and attendees. Other counties did not acknowledge the presence or lack of diversity unless asked directly, but over half the respondents in this county shared perspectives on the kinds of people who come to the county fair. Although they recognized that a few of the participants were African American and American Indian and that a smaller percent were Latino or Asian American, respondents felt that the fair was an event open to anyone and that racial or ethnic groups did not matter.

As with the other two sites, each respondent discussed the role of youth organizations such as FFA and 4-H in fairs. Respondents recognized the critical role these organizations played in the vitality and longevity of the county fair. Both youth and adults articulated the essential role youth organizations played in terms of orchestrating certain fair activities. However, this group also gave credit to groups such as OHCE and Master Gardeners as an essential part of this event's success. Fair activities are widely youth-related, but a healthy number of exhibitors are adults. The organizers interviewed supported what respondents at other sites had said: without 4-H and FFA involvement, the

county fair may not be sustainable. Sustainability was also an issue for groups such as OHCE. As mentioned, they have growing concerns that the county chapter and local clubs may fold due to their aging population.

Respondents indicated the urban environment of this county fair meant changes in agricultural industries would be less critical to the future of the event. Although the production of food and other agricultural products always affects the population at large, participants at this fair are less involved in commercial agriculture. Only a handful of parents with children involved in the livestock show earn any income from farming or ranching. Therefore, respondents commented on the changes to agriculture in general but did not think that the industry had affected the content of the county fair in recent years. Such perceived changes may be limited to the way they judge livestock, as was found at the Alfalfa County Fair. However, this county fair dedicates less time to agriculture than the other fairs. More youth and adults at this fair are interested in showing their flowers and other ornamental plants, visual art projects, photography, and handy crafts than at the other sites.

In effect, the fair in Oklahoma County has become a venue for amateur art interests and backyard gardeners, which indicates a new role for the agricultural county fair. Respondents punctuated this possible turn through their thoughts on local interests. In Oklahoma County, 4-H and OHCE leaders organize membership as themed clubs rather than site chapters. For example, in Alfalfa and Mayes Counties, these two organizations rely on chapters based at schools and in small towns. In Oklahoma County, few school systems

sponsor 4-H so the county extension office, which manages 4-H, has established clubs themed around particular interests like gardening, photography, and STEM (extra-curricular activities focused on science, technology, engineering, and math that support classes in computers and robotics). The same occurs for OHCE. The success of these clubs relies primarily on attendance, which depend on parent and non-school-related sources for recruitment. However, something else influences the attendance and programming objectives in these clubs, specifically 4-H. A much larger educational agenda provides a latent influence on the activities provided to youth. Across the United States, common education and higher educational institutions support an aggressive effort to increase the exposure students have to science and math. Although 4-H has historically tethered itself to agricultural education, it increasingly looks for ways to promote its relevancy through current educational trends. Therefore, local interests in this case follow that of formally organized national institutions that dominate the current educational debate. As a result, county fairs become sites for these non-agriculture-related programs.

Respondent responses to the question about the importance of location relate to answers about how important the fair is to the community. Respondents in this county defined the fair community in more narrow terms than those at the previous sites. Adult respondents hoped that this event could be more appealing to all county residents, but low attendance is an indication that not all county residents see the county fair as a major part of their

community or social group. Respondents defined the current fair community as those who become involved in or seek activities and groups that have ties to the fair. While this may sound like an exclusive perspective on fairs, county fair organizers promote the fair and provide an opportunity for anyone to take a participatory role, as indicated by some of the activities highlighted by the respondents.

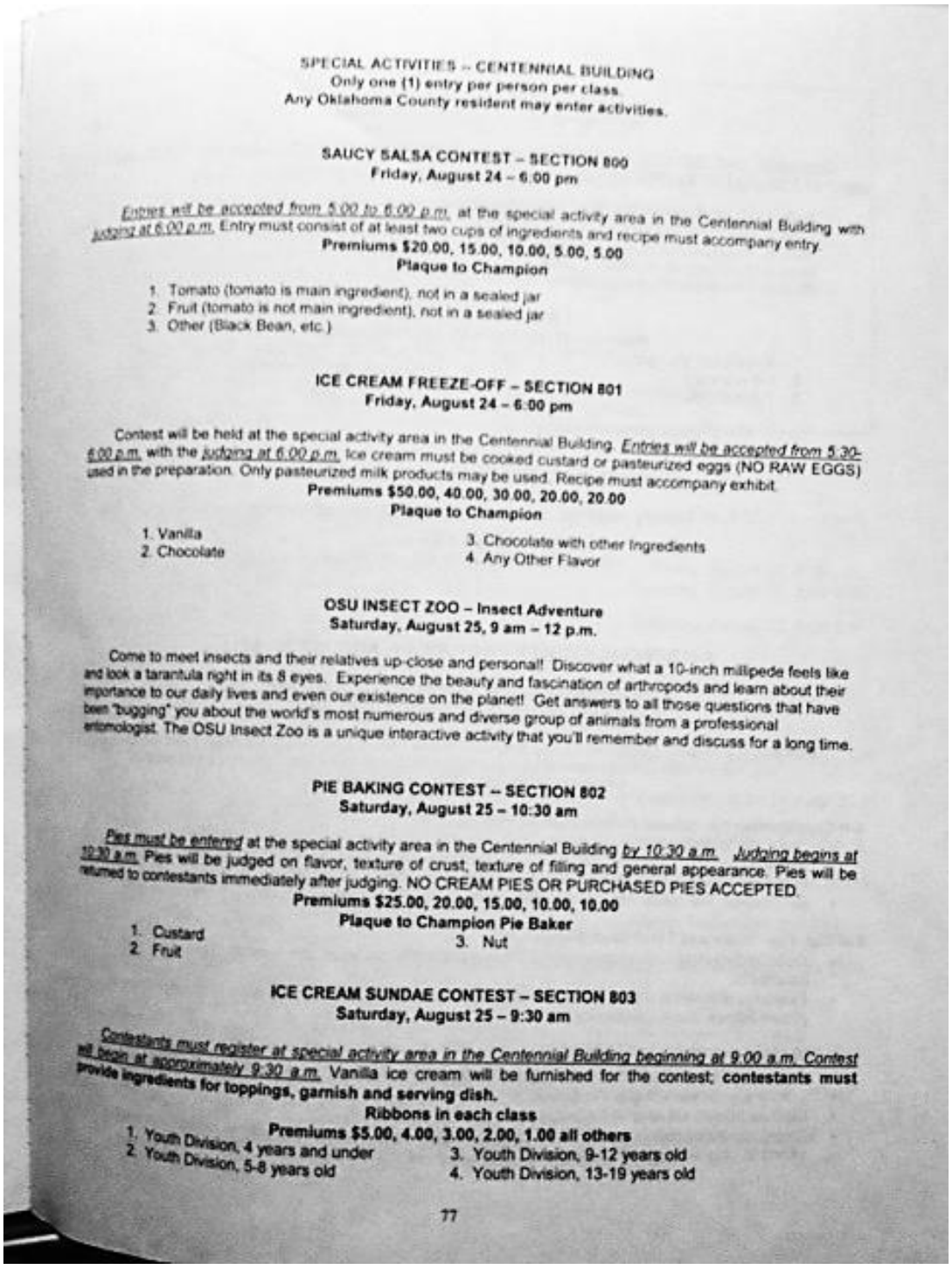
Each respondent described the layout or organization of the event. They described the use of the State Fair Park and the advantages of hosting the event under one roof: the Centennial Building. The proximity between the exhibition building and the barns used during the horse show was also emphasized. Absent from many descriptions was the use of FFA barns in Jones for the livestock show. Only those involved in the livestock show directly mentioned their use. All fair participants felt fortunate to have the facilities provided to them for these activities. Aside from the split location, this county fair has some of the best buildings at their disposal of any county fair in the state. Comments about the organization of the event focused on the value of individual volunteers and the support of specific organizations committed to producing quality fair programming. Youth participants were appreciative of their 4-H and FFA teachers and volunteer instructors. These individuals organized most of the youth activities. Adults praised the work of specific individuals in the organizational structure. Board members, club leaders such as OHCE and Master Gardeners, and county extension staff were singled out for their efforts in seeing that all fair activities ran smoothly.

The initial question, “what is the purpose of a county fair?” was the foundation of this study and the unifying element that connects most of the respondents to their local fair. Respondents believed that fairs served a mission, which was to bring community members together. County fairs are places that allow individuals to cultivate a personal identity. Adult respondents were keen on the value of fair activities in teaching youth about commitment, responsibility, and organization, which are three traits vital to tending animals and producing many of the projects assigned through 4-H. With the absence of a carnival or other outside entertainment, most of the activities described by respondents connect back to youth activities; however, a review of the premium book schedule showed a range of activities that could appeal to all ages. Even though the Oklahoma County Free Fair organizers host the event in the same location as the State Fair of Oklahoma, it has the same ties to the state fair as any other county fair. Youths involved in competitions talked about the need to do well at the county fair to move on to the state fair. The county fair still serves as an important preliminary step in preparation for state.

Respondents discussed their feelings about the local fair compared to other county fairs around the state. Although Oklahoma County Free Fair is a small event relative to other counties, respondents are proud of their local efforts (see Figure 13 and 15 for pictures of Oklahoma County Free Fair activities and Figure 14 for a sample county fair schedule). Many reiterated some of the comments and affirmations about the value of their fair in terms of creating group bonding opportunities and a stronger community affiliation. The

value of the fair was widely considered foremost to be educational, with entertaining closely following. While the educational objectives might have changed, the perceived valued had not. With such allegiance, nearly no respondents could imagine a county fair thriving outside their county. In other words, the value of the fair as a community event relies heavily on the location of the fair and continued ties to the community that hosts it.

Figure 13. Contestants for the ice cream making competition, Oklahoma County Free Fair, 2013.



SPECIAL ACTIVITIES – CENTENNIAL BUILDING
Only one (1) entry per person per class.
Any Oklahoma County resident may enter activities.

SAUCY SALSA CONTEST – SECTION 800
Friday, August 24 – 6:00 pm

Entries will be accepted from 5:00 to 6:00 p.m. at the special activity area in the Centennial Building with judging at 6:00 p.m. Entry must consist of at least two cups of ingredients and recipe must accompany entry.
Premiums $20.00, 15.00, 10.00, 5.00, 5.00
Plaque to Champion

1. Tomato (tomato is main ingredient), not in a sealed jar
2. Fruit (tomato is not main ingredient), not in a sealed jar
3. Other (Black Bean, etc.)

ICE CREAM FREEZE-OFF – SECTION 801
Friday, August 24 – 6:00 pm

Contest will be held at the special activity area in the Centennial Building. Entries will be accepted from 5:30-6:00 p.m. with the judging at 6:00 p.m. Ice cream must be cooked custard or pasteurized eggs (NO RAW EGGS) used in the preparation. Only pasteurized milk products may be used. Recipe must accompany exhibit.
Premiums $50.00, 40.00, 30.00, 20.00, 20.00
Plaque to Champion

1. Vanilla
2. Chocolate
3. Chocolate with other Ingredients
4. Any Other Flavor

OSU INSECT ZOO – Insect Adventure
Saturday, August 25, 9 am – 12 p.m.

Come to meet insects and their relatives up-close and personal! Discover what a 10-inch millipede feels like and look a tarantula right in its 8 eyes. Experience the beauty and fascination of arthropods and learn about their importance to our daily lives and even our existence on the planet! Get answers to all those questions that have been "bugging" you about the world's most numerous and diverse group of animals from a professional entomologist. The OSU Insect Zoo is a unique interactive activity that you'll remember and discuss for a long time.

PIE BAKING CONTEST – SECTION 802
Saturday, August 25 – 10:30 am

Pies must be entered at the special activity area in the Centennial Building by 10:30 a.m. Judging begins at 10:30 a.m. Pies will be judged on flavor, texture of crust, texture of filling and general appearance. Pies will be returned to contestants immediately after judging. NO CREAM PIES OR PURCHASED PIES ACCEPTED.
Premiums $25.00, 20.00, 15.00, 10.00, 10.00
Plaque to Champion Pie Baker

1. Custard
2. Fruit
3. Nut

ICE CREAM SUNDAE CONTEST – SECTION 803
Saturday, August 25 – 9:30 am

Contestants must register at special activity area in the Centennial Building beginning at 9:00 a.m. Contest will begin at approximately 9:30 a.m. Vanilla ice cream will be furnished for the contest; **contestants must provide ingredients for toppings, garnish and serving dish.**
Ribbons in each class
Premiums $5.00, 4.00, 3.00, 2.00, 1.00 all others

1. Youth Division, 4 years and under
2. Youth Division, 5-8 years old
3. Youth Division, 9-12 years old
4. Youth Division, 13-19 years old

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Figure 14. Part of the fair schedule for Oklahoma County.

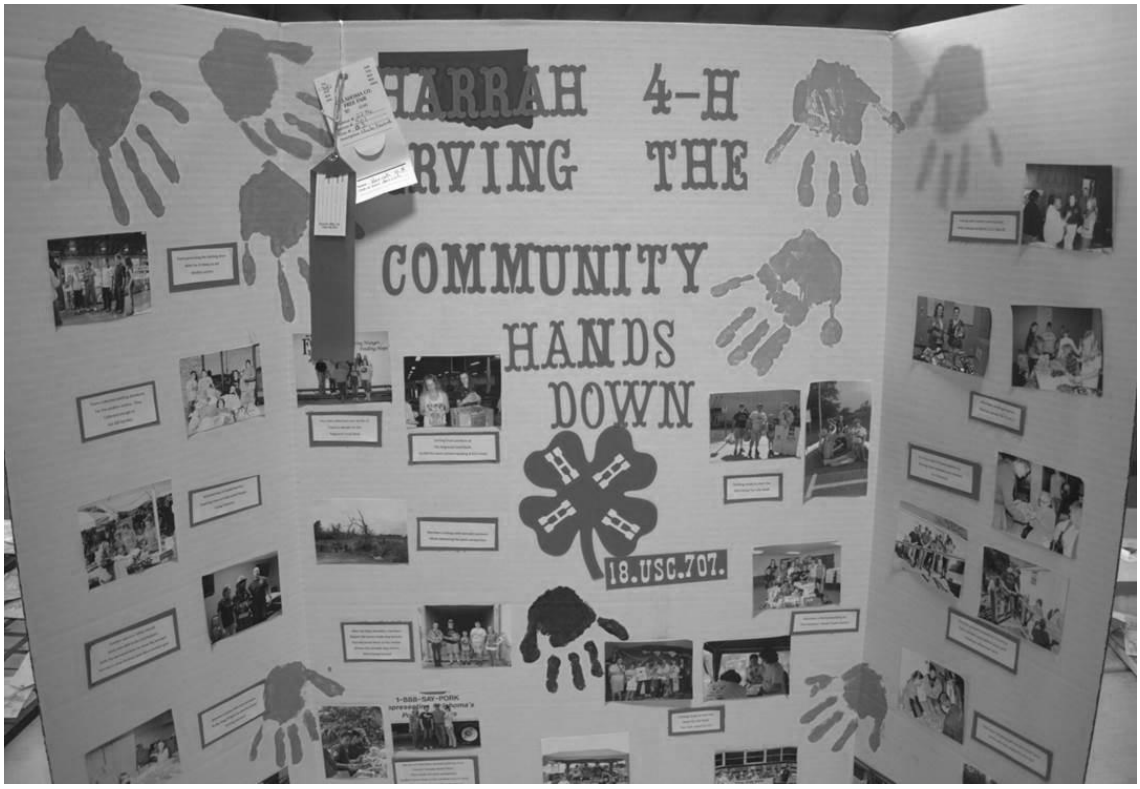

Figure 15. 4-H class project, Oklahoma County Free Fair, 2013.

When speculating how the county fairs might change in future decades, most respondents were hopeful that the fair would be relatively unchanged with perhaps more participation and a reunification of fair activities. The second perspective projected a time when the fair may not exist because of diminishing participation as older individuals passed away and fewer youth joined 4-H and FFA. Respondents who articulated this second perspective were not entirely pessimistic about the future of this county fair. Rather, they were frustrated that the current efforts put into organizing the fair may lapse. They argued for an aggressive effort to recruit more young adults into OHCE, including those in their 30s and 40s. Although OHCE may be suffering in terms of recruiting members, the county extension official was quick to point out that 4-H

participation was on the rise among specialty groups and that the Master Gardener program was expanding.

Emerging Themes from the Interviews

This chapter included a summary and review of information attained from respondents interviewed for this study. The goal was to collect perspectives about county fairs that relate to how fairs connect community interests and reinforce values and perspectives important at the fair and in the lifeworld beyond the fair. The aim centered on current interests, participation, and vitality of county fairs. Responses included targeted information about experiences and perspectives. The information gleaned related only to the experience respondents had with fairs; their ties to fairs, such as membership in groups and areas of participation; the process that goes into hosting a fair; the location and importance of the fair as an event; and the future of fairs in Oklahoma. The personal nature of this information supported the humanistic view of county fairs that underlined this study. Other information related to fair activities and agriculture, which was traditionally an important theme fundamental to why fairs take place. Through all my interviews and accompanying fieldwork summarized in Chapter 5, I collected a range of perspectives about county fairs in Oklahoma and interesting findings emerged from the collected material, particularly through the interview process.

The first finding observed throughout the various interviews related to the boundaries between participants and audience. Respondents in Alfalfa County in particular believed that such boundaries did not exist or were often blurred.

Everyone was part of the fair as both a participant and a member of the audience. Unlike county fairs in metropolitan areas, respondents in more sparsely populated counties saw fairs as providing an eagerly anticipated annual opportunity for county residents to maintain social networks, thereby helping to cement individual identity with the county.

A contrasting finding highlighted a difference between rural and urban fairs. Organizers of county fairs in densely populated counties such as Oklahoma County sustained the fair by focusing more on nonagricultural activities such as art and photography and less on livestock, with the exception of the horse show. However, even horse shows seem to be less important than the general livestock show at rural county fairs. Another finding was that older fair participants tended to engage in fairs in metropolitan counties separately from other family members. Most fair participants in rural areas came from a multigenerational family base of participation. Participants in metropolitan fairs are far more likely to pursue their own individual interests as opposed to the interests of the broader community, as occurred in the rural fair sites. Even well-established youth groups with a history in promoting agriculture like 4-H decrease the focus on agriculture in Oklahoma County and opt instead for specialty clubs and greater emphasis on the broader category of environmental science. Despite the difference in these site-based findings, an underlying set of values and considerations about the importance of fairs in communities persists.

These findings inform the analysis and conclusions drawn in the final chapter of this study. Each of these points provided distinct insight and supported the notion that individual connections to events such as county fairs support people's need to sustain personal relationships with places, even if those relationships manifest in different ways depending on the geographic context. Common themes and similar responses to questions backed the concept that individual perspectives linked to particular places also connect people to interest groups that share similar views on the value that relationships and activities have in the cultivation of community. Fairs operate outside of normal, daily life as a special event, or as Turner (1969) described, a liminal context set up to support a particular set of activities that tie to a defined set of values and conditions. In Chapter 7, I discuss how these values and conditions relate to a mythic view of the yeoman farmer and to a rationale for sustaining these events despite a growing disconnect between fair activities and contemporary farming practices. The concluding chapter includes more suggestions for ways to interpret this research material. I consider four distinct concepts that join ideas about perspectives with considerations about cultural geography. Comments outlined in this chapter establish a foundation for understanding how county fairs, participants, and locations exemplify an understanding of place-identity. If place-identity is about defining dimensions of identity in relation to physical environment, then the interviews and fieldwork presented in Chapters 5 and 6 are dissected in Chapter 7 in order to illuminate

the patterns of emotion, values, goals, skills, and behavior that connect humans to place.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

> The fair brings together the best of everything, entertainment, 4-H Displays, Food, Music, Great Rides and more animals than anywhere else; we truly have something for everyone.
>
> Washington County Fair (2013)

The purpose of this project was to understand why county fairs continue to be an important institution in a postagrarian American society and why people continue to be drawn to these events. On the surface, this was a study of Oklahoma county fairs, but studying fairs helps teach the crucial importance of relationships between places and personal and group identities. County fairs are especially intriguing because they are not germane to current farming practices. The vast majority of people in the United States lives an urban lifestyle and earns income from professions not associated with agriculture. Even people living in rural communities such as Alfalfa County are not necessarily earning a living directly from farming or through industries associated with farming such as food processing and the transportation of commodities.

In the opening chapter, I outlined three research objectives. The first objective related to collecting information about the structure and value of contemporary versions of county fairs in Oklahoma. Chapter 3 included the questions used in the interview portion of this study and the findings gathered from fair participants. Each of the interview questions approached the theme of event structure and perceived value of these events from different angles. In Chapters 4 and 5, I discussed the background to these findings, including a

brief history of Oklahoma agriculture that emphasized changes to farming since the late 19th century, a history of agricultural fairs in the state, and a snapshot of how fairs operate today. These contextual elements, which informed my ethnography, draw attention to mitigating factors that influence the content and participation of fairs.

The second objective concerned the paradoxical function of fairs today. Fairs provide a nostalgic view of agriculture while promoting innovation in this sector. No clear outcome for this objective was realized. Fairs are multifaceted events that serve the interests of different groups who participate in a variety of activities from youth agricultural education to arts and craft competitions to concerts and thrill rides, all dependent upon the fair organizers and the reoccurring interest of fair attendees. County fair organizers and supporters do not see this variety as paradoxical. County fairs do not need to be thought of as one or the other. Rather, they serve to celebrate agriculture interests, artistic expression, and comradery in the community regardless of the activities and themes presented. In this regard, county fair organizers deploy a host of programmatic tactics to bolster the success of their event. For example, in Alfalfa County, respondents mentioned that obscuring participant boundaries made for a successful event each year. All attendees need to feel welcome as participators on some level, not as observers. For this smaller fair, participation drives the vitality of the fair. Through interviews and field notes on the Oklahoma County Free Fair, the hallmark of this event comes from a balance between individual and group interests in the various competitions. As the most

urban environment of the three research sites, less emphasis on agricultural activities, including a complete separation between the livestock show and the rest of the fair, also contributes to the strength of this event. In Mayes County, civic engagement ensures the fair's success. Outside vendor and carnival ride operators support economic development and draw people throughout the region to their community. Business sponsorships fund the folk craft competitions and free educational activities. Trade booth displays from vendors such as John Deere, Monsanto, and the local horse tack and supply shop also support the value of the fair as a venue for promoting innovation in modern agriculture and as a way to ensure sponsorship.

The third research objective involved documenting the ways participation in events such as county fairs sustain personal connections and attachments to place. Establishing a relationship between fair participants and place occurred in the interview process. Respondents answered questions about their interest in fairs and questions about why they believed fairs to be valuable cultural institutions. Their answers provided a strong relationship to group activities and supported an articulation of fairs as institutions with significant moral and ethical value. Most respondents cherished their involvement with county fairs and saw them as events that ground their sense of place in the community that they live in, as well as their sense of identity in the society. As an American icon, the image of independent farmer ignites passion and a sense of purpose for many, even if farming does not represent their principle source of income.

Recapitulating the Yeoman Farmer Myth at County Fairs

A particular kind of aura seems to surround agricultural fairs in the United States. In Chapter 1, I suggested that the emotional attachment to county fairs continues because of the persistence of the yeoman farmer myth. Agricultural fairs historically served to educate farmers and their family about the essentials for maintaining productive farming operation. Though these essentials have changed, many activities at the fair remind participants of the skills associated with successful farming prior to the overly industrialized farming practices that now dominate. These skills and corresponding fair activities include livestock breeding and raising; crop production aside from the genetically engineered varieties; craft arts such as quilting and sewing, which used to be vital to family survival in rural settings; and food preparation and preservation. Mastery of these skills at one time contributed to an ideal about what constituted a successful yeoman farm. These activities developed into idolizations for a sustainable family-farming operation in an increasingly populated rural landscape. The influence of this myth began during the Jeffersonian era of U.S. history but continued as an important model into the 20th century. The University of Oklahoma, for example, appropriated this in the design of the institutional seal in 1895 (see Figure 9). The lone farmer spreading seed across an open field is unmistakably symbolic of the popular yeoman farmer image and represents an association between the hard-working farmer and hard work in an educational setting. University literature says,

> President [David Ross] Boyd, OU's first president, wanted an official seal. The idea came from a chapel talk he made on the parable of the

man sowing seeds. George Bucklin drew the design, a sketch of a sower with his bag of seeds. (University of Oklahoma, 2015)

Figure 16. Seal for the University of Oklahoma, 1895-present.

As recently as the 1930s, when mass foreclosures of farms occurred throughout the United States, the yeoman farmer was still an important part of the mythos in American cultural and economic identity. Painters such as Thomas Hart Benton (see Figure 10), Grant Wood, and others in the Regionalist school of American art and illustrators such as Norman Rockwell and Robert Riggs celebrated this myth on canvas in many high-profile public art projects and national publications.[36] Hofstadter (1955) explained, "Like any complex of ideas the agrarian myth cannot be defined in a phrase, but its component themes form a clear pattern" (p. 23). Those themes, Hofstadter

[36] Support for art of this nature came largely from the Works Progress Administration during the 1930s and early 1940s. After World War II, these artists continued to thrive as their work was widely collected through private and institutional purchases. Illustrators such as Rockwell and Riggs regularly created original works of art that depicted various cultural scenes common in the United States, including images of agriculture, which most people during the middle part of the last century associated with the independent farmer.

continued, cast the yeoman farmer as a hero, “the ideal man, and the ideal citizen” (p. 24). Hofstadter noted,

> The yeoman, who owned a small farm and worked it with the aid of his family, was the incarnation of the simple, honest, independent, healthy, happy human being. Because he lived in close communion with beneficent nature, his life was believed to have a wholesomeness and integrity impossible for the depraved populations of cities. . . . Since he had a secure propertied stake in society in the form of his own land, he was held to be the best and most reliable sort of citizen. (pp. 24-25)

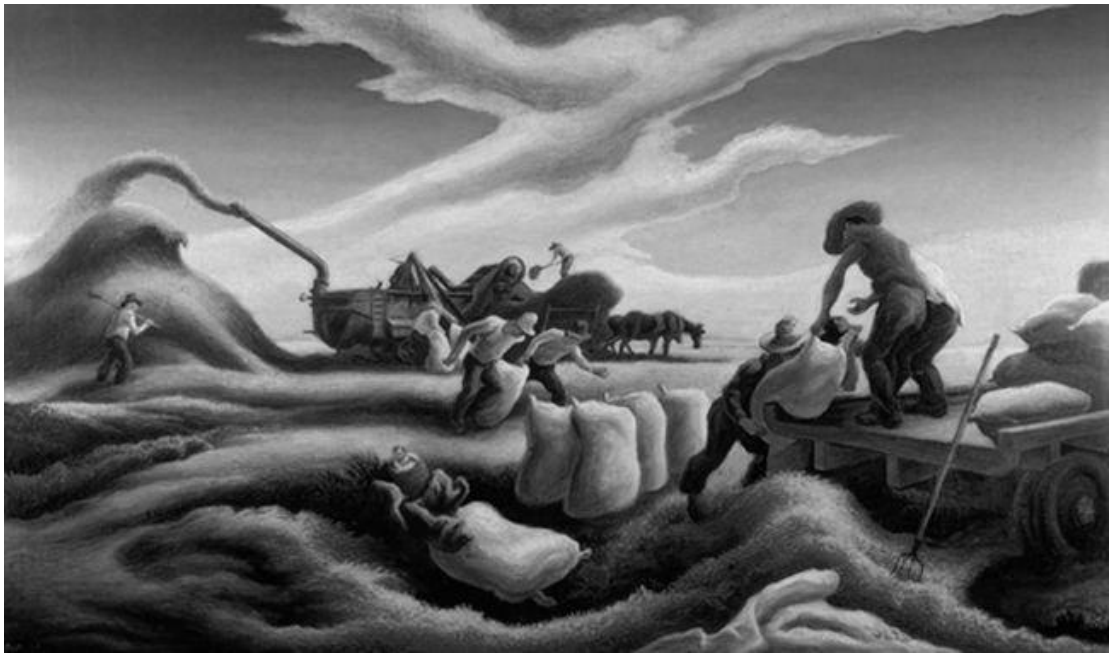

Figure 17. *Rice threshing* (Benton, 1945).

The true economic importance of the yeoman farmer began to diminish even in the 19th century when increasing numbers of immigrants and freed slaves swelled the demand for free or cheap land. That the agrarian myth no longer provided an accurate description of American life, or even of life in the American West, is of little consequence for the enthusiasm for some over county fair production. However, as industry began to dominant the U.S. economy in the middle of the 20th century, county fair participation began to

subside. As more people joined the urban workforce, many people's belief in the myth of the yeoman farmer turned into a belief in the myth of the middle class. In the agricultural sector, mechanization helped significantly increase productivity. Railroads and commercial trucking opened vast new markets for agricultural products. The remote, rural lifestyle no longer existed. These factors, combined with growing financial dependence on lending institutions, have long since destroyed the simple and self-sufficient life of the mythic yeoman, but the associated values persist.

The Value of Fairs in Contemporary Society

In 2013, the Chrysler Corporation broadcasted a television commercial during the Super Bowl for Dodge trucks. The advertisement showed still images of farms and farmers at work while playing audio of Paul Harvey's infamous speech "So God Made a Farmer." Harvey, a well-known radio personality, originally gave the speech at a 1978 FFA convention. The content of the speech came from a 1975 article written by Harvey in the *Gadsden Times*, which was a variation on a 1940 article about dirt farmers published in *The Farmer-Stockman* by an uncredited source (see "Dirt Farmers," 1982). The speech used the biblical creation narrative in the Book of Genesis as a backdrop to refer to what God did on the eighth day of creation.[37] Harvey described the characteristics of a farmer through several phrases, ending each time with "So God Made a Farmer," which is not unlike how the creation

[37] In most English translations of the Christian Bible in the United States, the Book of Genesis opens with a series of creative acts that occurred over the period of a week (7 days). The eighth-day reference from Paul Harvey's essay and speech draws from this common cultural reference while applying a humorous but reverent connection between the work of a divine spirit and the work of a farmer.

passages include the phrase, “And God saw that it was good.” The popular speech encapsulates the mythic persona of the yeoman farmer: someone with a strong work ethic, including a tireless commitment to his or her livelihood, community, and family.

Other aspects of the myth include the perception that individualism should be subordinate to the needs of the family and the farming enterprise.[38] The myth also presents the yeoman hero as someone stoic and helpful in times of crisis such as a fire or flood. The yeoman farmer is someone who not only strives for independence and economic sustainability in his or her own life but also strives to help others do the same (Stein, 2007). This character, and his or her family, also exerts mastery of the environment through the aid of the latest farm technology, which the yeoman embraces. However, some representations present the yeoman as cautionary, or even fatalistic, toward nature and natural disasters including flood, drought, tornado, and blight that can devastate or end life. A moral and sacred connection to land is a common characteristic of the yeoman, who regards land less as a commodity and more as sacred dirt, something to be worked as a trust and passed on to the next generation. While traditional gender divisions are associated with yeoman farming, the total division of labor is seen as equal. The success of an independent farming operation, under this belief system, comes from a full commitment by parents as well as children. Although long-held gender stereotypes about work expectations once applied to this myth, such as the notion that a man’s domain

[38] Including from its inception in 1938 the suspension of the Fair Labor Standards Act requirements for children under the age of 16 working on a family (or legal guardian) owned farm (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015).

is largely outside the house and a woman's, though not entirely, is within the house, recent incarnations of this myth no longer emphasize these gender labor distinctions. A more pluralistic, gender-neutral version of the myth comes from educational programs such as 4-H and FFA that revel in the value of traditionally female farming activities such as milking cows, raising chickens, and tending a family garden as a lucrative future for small-scale agriculture. In addition, the farmwife, an equally heroic figure in the yeoman myth, is celebrated as an active part of the yeoman farmer's traditional success (Stein, 2007).

This mythos falls close to Weber's (1905) Protestant work ethic, which contends that the values associated with a strong labor force rest in Christian teachings about work and family. References to work and commitment to community have a biblical influence. Ministers from all Christian denominations frequently teach these through sermons and Bible studies. As an example, the website BibleClassBooks.com illustrates the way Biblical teachings are woven to support and to justify the need to labor at some profession (Asher, 2014).

> While some think work is an evil to be avoided if at all possible, God has ordained it because it is good (Ephesians 4:28). The man that works is to be held in honor and esteem by his fellows (I Thessalonians 4:12); whereas, the idle man is worse than an unbeliever (I Timothy 5:8; cf. John 3:18; II Peter 2:20). God has ruled that the man who will not work should not eat (II Thessalonians 3:10). Such a man is not worthy of the fellowship of the saved (3:11–12). The sluggard is contemned in the Scripture (Proverbs 10:26) and consigned a place with those whom the Lord hates (Ezekiel 16:49). God does not condone idleness knowing it breeds wickedness (Proverbs 18:9; 21:25; II Thessalonians 3:11; I Timothy 5:13; Ephesians 4:28).

Reoccurring themes or core values related to work in this framework include self-reliance, independence, satisfaction, and self-worth (Asher, 2014). These are the same values or principles attributed to the yeoman farmer ideal. In a 1990 article “Jefferson’s Yeoman Farmer as Frontier Hero: A Self Defeating Mythic Structure,” Peterson highlighted similar constructs of the yeoman farmer, though she did not relate them back to their biblical origins. Peterson was concerned with the damage the concept of the yeoman farmer ideals has on American society and the environment. She grounded her assertions using a well-conceived understanding of myth. Citing Livingstone and Harrison, she noted, “Myths express the collective mentality of any given age and provide patterns for human action” (p. 12). Referring to Turbayne, Peterson also noted, “Myth [is] a peculiar case of metaphor, one which has a basis in the facts that the myth explains” (p. 12). Thus, human relationship with myth is based on use rather than on truth.

The value of truth in understanding a mythic figure often takes a turn away from empirical definitions of truth usually associated with scientific studies. Truth can also be based on impressions or on the creation of a metaphor. This is a key point toward talking about the yeoman farmer as a hero or as an ideal. Respondents interviewed in this study did not explicitly say they see themselves as a continuation of the yeoman farmer nor could they (or would they) identify a real person as exemplifying the yeoman ideal. Rather, the yeoman is an ideal and an icon they believe worth emulating, although they did equate the values associated with this yeoman to their perspectives on what

constitutes a good person. They also made associations to how groups and activities connected to county fairs relate to their ideals. Although little empirical evidence exists to support all the values and characteristics attributed to the mythic yeoman, this detail is not as relevant as one might think to my research. The perception and opinions of participants directly engaged in these events and what they think are the important points. In this regard, this study leans toward understanding county fair participation through phenomenology.

Throughout Chapter 6, the word *value* connected participants to the fair. Respondents from all three focus-sites valued the role of fairs in the lives and education of adolescents, they valued the role of fairs in supporting group bonds, and they valued fairs as community-led events with strong local ties. The term and meaning of value has different connotations depending on context. Fairs are valued for their function in the community, but they are also valued for the principles instilled in the community. Fairs provide a sense of community to those who are participants. This community tie is not limited to a group connection or a collective sense of identity. Fairs provide an opportunity to engage this value from an individualistic level via the choice of activities one participates in or attends. Although fairs do not relate to the realities of commercial agriculture or the necessities required to live in rural America today, they do relate inexplicably to the values many fair participants hold concerning how they live their lives and how they express themselves through the guiding principles that have been mentioned. These principles are profound. They include influences on an individual level and within a Christian context.

Reviewing the national website for 4-H, an organization heavily involved in nearly all agricultural fairs and expositions in the United States revealed elements of these yeoman farmers' ideals in the foundation of their organization. As part of their mission statement, the website says the following:

> At National 4-H Council, we believe: every child should have the skills to thrive in life, community and career; too many kids today are growing up unprepared for a complicated world; 4-H provides experiences that grow confident kids with the skills to take on life today and thrive in career tomorrow. (4-H, n.d., para. 1)

"4-H" stands for head, heart, hands, and health. These terms translate into values: "Head = Managing, Thinking; Heart = Relating, Caring; Hands = Giving, Working; Health = Being, Living" (4-H, n.d., para. 2). The pledge, which every member recites at formal meetings and other gatherings, follows: "I pledge my head to clearer thinking; My heart to greater loyalty; My hands to larger service; and my health to better living, for my club, my community, my country, and my world" (4-H, n.d., para. 3). Respondents in my research, particularly parents and youth leaders, discussed the need to teach younger generations about leadership and responsibility. One 4-H student said, "The county fair atmosphere is a fun way of putting our talents out in the public, and the competition is to show how we are doing a good job or to know we need to improve our skills." These individuals see organizations such as 4-H and participation in events such as the fair as ways to teach adolescents project management skills and the value of accountability. These values are critical to satisfying most 4-H and FFA requirements, including raising livestock and completing the project-based learning objectives central to these organizations.

The value of fairs is about character building and exercising mental and physical commitment to a task. These activities also align with a set of principles closely associated with the yeoman farmer ideals. People express their values and principles in varying ways throughout everyday life, but fairs provide a unique setting where people express core values without justification or ramification in a lifeworld context. Important to many cultural groups are places where individuals practice cultural values outside of daily requirements. Some formal educational settings serve as this kind of place, but the county fair provides a context open to the community at large. Fairs are a welcoming place for like-minded individuals to congregate. If churches and other religious institutions exist as sacred places used to back morals and values supported by a particular faith, then county fairs do the same from a secular setting.

Attraction to Liminal Places

In their seminal anthology *Secular Ritual*, Moore and Myerhoff (1977) challenged others to explore the presence and importance of sacred actions in secular contexts. Pulling from the work of Turner (1977) on ritual process, Moore and Myerhoff illustrated ways that ritual is a kind of narrative exercise and is part of many facets of society and culture, not just religious circumstances. County fairs as events qualify as an example of secular ritual. In addition, fairs exist as a particular kind of ritual in that they function as liminal experiences: interludes set apart from everyday normative experience. As I noted in the discussion on the value of county fairs today, this segregation does not occur in isolation, but it does occur separate from reality for the purpose of

drawing attention to activities and reinforcing values shared by participants at the fair. These events are an integral part of a common cultural context that stand as places where multiple experiences happen and where participants with varying backgrounds congregate to share a similar experience, which ultimately relates to personal and group identity.

Ritual process occurs in many settings. Scholars historically studied them as part of religious cultures, but most fairs are secular rather than religious. Working with Native Americans and Jewish Americans, Myerhoff (1975) provided some initial examples of how ritual transcends religious cultures. However, Turner (1967, 1974, 1977) is the one who created the vocabulary for discussing ritual process and the way social and cultural norms occur, as well as deviations within this process. The initial term that Turner used to define the different contexts between everyday activities and those activities that take place in ritual form was a *liminality*. The term liminal in the adjective form pertains to the threshold or initial stage of a process. Both liminal and liminality are derived from the Latin *limen*, which means threshold, that is, the bottom part of a doorway that must be crossed when entering a building. The word first appeared in publication in the 19th century, although Van Gennep introduced the idea to a broader academic context in his work *Les rites de passage* (Van Gennep, Vizedom, Caffe, & Kimball, 1960). The Van Gennep book provides many rites of passage examples such as coming-of-age rituals and marriage. These passages, he contended, contain three parts: separation, liminal period, and reassimilation. Turner expanded Van Gennep's

concept of liminality, ensuring widespread usage of the concept. Rituals operate in arenas where social change may emerge and be absorbed into social practice. Various authors have written about liminality, but Turner continues to be highly relevant. Much of Turner's work focused on further defining liminality to other social statuses such as marginality, inferiority, and the difference between structured and unstructured social realms. Liminality is considered unstructured as participants in this state of ritual process tend to forfeit, if only temporarily, their normal social status to take part in ritual activities.

A significant element to Turner's (1967) concept of liminality is the status or role of people within this context of the ritual process. Turner noted, "The subject of passage ritual is, in the liminal period, structurally, if not physically, 'invisible'" (p. 95). The status of liminal individuals is socially and structurally ambiguous. Turner developed this idea further in a concise definition of liminality, noting,

> Liminality may perhaps be regarded as the nay to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense the source of them all, and, more than that, as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise. (p. 97)

Liminal individuals have nothing: "no status, insignia, secular clothing, rank, or kinship position, nothing to demarcate them structurally from their fellows" (Turner, 1967, p. 98). A group of liminal individuals is not a typical social hierarchy but a communal group in which all are equal. The equality in itself relates back to the influence of the yeoman farmer myth. Volunteerism and

selfless support of a community event like the county fair falls well within the core value of the yeoman ideals.

For some, the relationship between ritual process and county fairs might be difficult to support. Rather than equate them to ritual process, county fairs could also be a form of communitas, which Turner (1977) described as a kind of liminality outside a ritual process. However, the calendrical nature of fairs makes them a good example of a secular holiday. Holiday celebrations often occur in a *betwixt and between* context parallel to reality. The roles of participants who celebrate suspend during associative activities. In the case of fairs, participants take on new roles as volunteers, judges, superintendents, competitors, and other essential personnel. Although a clear line of leadership and designation of authority figures exists, such as the fair board, county extension staff, and various superintendents of fair activities, participation is voluntary. Roles of authority tend to fall on the shoulders of different individuals, many of whom do not serve in a leadership capacity outside of organizing the fair. In addition to the voluntary aspects of fair participation, the respondents interviewed also highlighted moves by participants to be inclusive at many levels. Individuals attending the fair participate regularly in competitions and showcase as ad hoc contestants, demonstrators, assistants, or engaged audience members. The desire to be inclusive instead of exclusive can be a strategy for ritual celebration.

However, the critical elements that define fairs as liminality do not come from the level or extent of participation. They come from participants'

relationship to and belief of the ideals vested in the event itself. The agricultural elements of fairs are largely a reenactment of romanticized yeoman farming activities or an expression of social values aligned with the yeoman farming ideals. Any fair-related activity that gives participants the opportunity to demonstrate their mastery of certain farm-related skills or to exhibit the value of self-reliance and determination is an activity that supports fairs as ritual processes. Raising and breeding livestock, preserving and preparing certain foods, quilting and sewing, and other activities previously highlighted support this connection between people and place. The process of raising a prize-winning cow or canning peaches in a home kitchen is no longer necessary but the activities reinforce the ideals even in certain instances where the criteria and procedures for judging have changed over time, such as in the livestock shows.

Alongside this understanding of ritual process is the longevity of the events themselves. Fairs are good places to support these liminal states because they have a historic connection the yeoman ideal. The activities and competitions at county fairs were necessary at one time. Some competitions or activities do not have a direct correlation to the yeoman farmer, such as photography and other 4-H programs, but there is still a connection. The organizations that sponsor these events maintain the same principles from over a century ago. These principles guide the curriculum supporting these activities, which support yeoman values at the core.

Turner (1969) defined liminality as a state of being. While in the liminal state, human beings strip away anything that might differentiate them from their fellow human beings. They are in between the social structures. Yet, liminality is a midpoint between a starting point and an ending point within a rite of passage, and as such, it is a temporary state that ends when the initiate is reincorporated into the social structure. The fair is a liminal space where participants can explore their relationship between their perception of self and their perception of the yeoman ideals. Some then allow themselves to be judged based on a set of criteria that originate from the yeoman ideals. The rite of passage is an annual process that ends with the fair. Participants, in their normal structured social context, prepare their entries or prepare to be challenged through their chosen fair activities. As the fair is a liminal state, participants engage their perception of the yeoman ideals. During the point of engagement, participants have an opportunity to assess their level of competency against the yeoman ideal, both through personal evaluation and through formal competition. At the conclusion of the fair, most participants start talking about changes and improvements in their skills and entries for next year's event or the upcoming state fair that they may be participating in as well.

In Turner's (1968) original concept of ritual process, he referred to these concepts as a kind of place, but his reference to place is more metaphysical than tangible. He recognized through other aspects of his ethnographic work, particularly his fieldwork among the Ndembu of Zambia, the importance of location to certain examples of ritual process. Setting and location are factors

for most forms of cultural expression. Events such as county fairs often provide a necessary setting and location so that liminality can occur for certain forms of ritual process. Native American powwows, for example, are events that require specialized settings and a designated location for the ritual process to occur. County fairs are events that include agriculturally related activities that require a specific kind of location and that rely on setting to help contain these activities. This connection between specified locations and settings and the activities framed within the liminal state of the ritual process illustrates the significance of physical place to liminality, which is essentially a metaphysical place. The connection between liminality and place begins a discussion about the connection between people and place-identity.

Attributes of County Fairs That Support Identity

The development of meaning advances through the process of participation in fairs and should be thought of as an integral part of the annual cycle of fair organization. People involved in fairs value community identity and use fairs to reinforce community ties as well as teach the value of such ties to others. Examples of these values surface throughout this study, but more should be said about the relationship between these values and concepts of identity. Identity in the context of my research has a profound connection to place. The importance of place relative to the values highlighted takes an interesting turn. Place, which in this case is county fairs, is entirely about the fair specifically. Fairs are placeholders for a bigger consideration about values. Fairs become a microcosm for a broader connection to community. They are

that liminal state, a kind of retreat, where community ties and affection for place become honored and celebrated through group interaction with like-minded individuals and activities that signify the values that tie the group together.

In Chapter 2, I introduced the idea that county fairs exemplify Tuan's (1974) topophilia. The term relates to having a strong sense of place intertwined with cultural identity. The relationship between the two confirms the metaphysical connection between people and place. Questions of who we are closely relate to questions of where we are, which is the essence of place-identity. The importance of this calls attention to the relationship between location, positionality, and subjectivity. Research about these factors is valuable to supporting the role places play in how people create and sustain a sense of self. Psychologists engaged in this area of study have done the best job at constructing an understanding of place-identity flanked by the influences of social and environmental issues. Their studies have looked at how perceived identity is influenced by personal relationships to location. In other words, their conception of identity is fluid and is largely based on personal perception, not prescribed perception. According to Proshansky and Fabian (1987),

> Place-identity is defined as those dimensions of self that define the individual's personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, feelings, values, goals, preferences, skills, and behavioral tendencies relevant to a specific environment. (p. 30)

Points I made in Chapter 5 supported this perspective. I highlighted how county fairs operate as a tangible place where cultural activities can take place as part of a particular geographic context. Chapter 6 included an outline of how

important participants at the fair perceive these activities. This chapter includes an intangible view of fairs as part of a particular geographic context.

Place-making is a process that illustrates humanity's desire to form a bond and to claim ownership to spaces. These bonds can help individuals define their sense of self or identity. If place-identity is an individual's incorporation of place into the larger concept of self, then in certain contexts place-identity and self-identity could be the same. County fairs have long included core groups that practice varying degrees of participation, including 4-H, FFA, and OHCE. However, other people not part of a structured group can still practice the same degree of participation. Thus, place-identity is not exclusive to particular groups of people at the fair. Anyone can potentially be part of the fair as a ritual process. As the core values of the yeoman farmer ideal are still popular among many Americans, continued use of the iconic small farmer becomes a powerful image in popular culture, hence its use in the Super Bowl advertisement as well as the marketing of country music and other consumer products (see Eyerman & Jamison, 1998).

Though fairs do not relate to the realities of commercial agriculture today, they do provide elements and connectivity to rural life that can provide much needed reinforcement for a more positive view of one's identity. In a recent study, a group of family counselors studied Native American adolescents in California. They found based on a large statewide sample that participation in cultural practices was associated with a stronger ethnic identity (Schweigman, Soto, Wright, & Unger, 2011). Although ethnic identity was not under

consideration in my study of county fairs, the role of events as influential places that reinforce definitions of identity was under consideration. In the California study, respondents who participated in cultural activities including powwows, sweat lodges, drum groups, and roundhouse dances reported a significantly higher Native American ethnic identity than their counterparts who did not take part in cultural activities. This was true across the study but most pronounced among urban youth with limited access to other culture activities that support tribal or community ties. Thus, the study advocated that cultural-based practices to enhance Native identity could help to improve mental and behavioral health among Native American youth. This supports the importance of events, also known as temporary places, as significant contributors to definitions of identity.

A strong understanding of one's identity, or rather a celebration of a chosen identity, is important for many people. This is another point where location and identity can engage. Based on responses by my interview respondents, county fairs happen as celebratory events. For some participants, they could be likened to a homecoming or reunion atmosphere. In urban areas such as Oklahoma City and Tulsa, fairs are also reminders for people of their childhood or their parents' upbringing in a small town or other rural settings, which could represent a type of mental homecoming. This kind of celebratory perspective can be important. Many Oklahomans perceive urban life as being less a part of a social core or hub for cultural connectivity. They see this lifestyle as a marginal position to the rural surrounds, which increasingly offer

few economic options for people. County fairs might best be understood as a topophilic gateway that bridges ideals, longing, and place. Oklahomans, even in the MSA counties, are still fond of their agrarian roots and rural identity. Images and icons associated with the state, such as wooden windmills, covered wagons, and buffalo, support that collective perspective, but even in Oklahoma City, it was not long ago that this MSA was defined nationally as a small city surrounded by independent communities rather than a unified metropolitan area. In 1970, half of Oklahomans lived outside of a designated metropolitan area. In 1980, the Oklahoma City metropolitan area was half the area it is today and just two-thirds the current population (U.S. Census, 2014). Communities along the east side of the county such as Jones, Choctaw, and Harrah still have some of the same characteristics of small-town life and have the most active fair participants.

In the case of county fairs, interviewing various participants and attendees illustrates the individual connection or definition of space. The spatial imagery of the fair by individuals is the foundation of place-identity. It is a process through which place-making occurs and group identity is established. Although many people have an opinion regarding why fairs are important, the comments made tended to center on a common set of themes. These themes start with an understanding that county fairs are important to the community. From there, one can categorize or compartmentalize explanations regarding why fairs are an important institution. Identity is dynamic. The relationship to place is undeniable, but core cultural values and attitudes can transcend a

physical place. The principles associated with the yeoman farmer ideals are both related to physical locales as well as fictional ones. Values such as hard work, personal and family self-reliance and self-sufficiency, friendliness, and local control of civic affairs and others are not exclusive to county fair participation. In fact, these ideals often spread across everyday life.

Recommendations and Where This May Lead

In the opening to Chapter 2, I drew attention to Casakin's (2011) desire to see more considerations and research on place-identity. Casakin lamented the fractured perceptions of this term and the way it is deployed in various disciplines. Although I did not overtly attempt to resolve the discrepancies Casakin loathes, this study does serve as another context for understanding place-identity. From a humanist and phenomenological perspective, place-identity must be thought of as a highly personal relation between a person and a place. However, as a cultural phenomenon, place also has group ties that help link a collection of individual place-identities into a community.

Following Casakin and Bernardo (2011) and geographers studying identity and place over the past two decades, I would like to see a continuation of studies on various geographic contexts related to place-identity. Scholars should consider ways that humanistic geography and phenomenology might serve as a reasonable foundation toward analyzing humanity's relationship to places. Concerning county fairs, Hokanson and Kratz (2008) offered promising opportunities to look at the interrelationship between county fairs and communities across the United States. In their concluding observations, they

highlighted similarities throughout the United States in what attracts and retains interest in county fairs and other agricultural venues. I observed similar opportunities conducting this study. At the 2014 American Folklore Society panel on agriculture, I discussed my preliminary findings to my research while other presenters discussed their involvement supporting small-scale agribusiness and organic farming, assisting community gardening, and promoting sustainable models for local farmers' markets and cooperatives. Behind each of these efforts is a rationale and a set of perspectives not unlike what draws people to county fairs. These perspectives could be a distinct phenomenon in their own right and an interesting next step for further research and consideration.

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