



THE OLDEN DAYS AT CHERRY PARK FAIRGROUNDS

Before the terminus of Lovely Street heading north toward Canton, was an area of Avon formerly known as Cherry Park. There existed a legend of an old Indian chief who liked cherry rum and was rumored to live on the rock bluff and hence called Chief Cherry. When the land was purchased by the Farmington Valley Agricultural Corporation in 1882, it is thought Cherry Park was chosen as the name of the fairgrounds based on this legend.

The 126 acre fairgrounds operated during the late summer in different incarnations from about 1883 through the latter part of the 1950s. It was a destination for both exposition and entertainment. During the early years of its operation, the fairgrounds of Cherry Park were like a country fair where farmers showcased their produce and prized livestock. Farmer's wives competed for best in show with their homemade pies, culinary creations, flowers and handicrafts. Even children could exhibit their pets to compete for ribbons.

In addition to the agricultural aspects, entertainment features began to be added over the years. There were competitions in driving and trotting horses known as 'trials of speed' and in 1898 an 'exhibition of strength' where oxen pulled stone boats. People could pay to take a hot air balloon ride and there was a daredevil act where a parachutist leaped from the basket of the balloon and landed on the infield, hopefully!

Historic newspaper articles reference The Cherry Park Fair which was a two-three day event in late September. Schools were closed for one of the days to allow school children and their families to attend and estimates were that eight to ten thousand people visited over the course of the event. Just before 1900 a grandstand was built from which people could view all the events. Admission to the park in the early days was 25 cents for adults and 15 cents for kids under the age of 12. For an extra charge of 20 cents folks were allowed to sit in the grandstands.

As the years progressed, the look of the Fair changed to resemble more of a carnival-type atmosphere complete with booths selling food and games of chance run by "fakirs" or in modern parlance, "carnies". By the year 1909 Cherry Park became known for horse racing as a loam track was added for trotting and pacing races. The park was listed on the Hartford County Circuit for the Great Stakes Races. Unfortunately there was a track accident with a resulting lawsuit that forced Cherry Park to close in 1911. The Farmington Valley Agricultural Association went out of business and the property was sold.



Under new ownership the Park eventually re-opened in 1920 keeping harness racing but also adding cattle and horse auctions, airplane exhibits, and a midway. The Park prospered until the Great Depression of the 1930s when it then became primarily used by the 4H Clubs and the Boy Scouts. After that more modern day racing in the form of midget cars and motorcycles competed at Cherry Park, but the glory days were definitely over. Eventually the property was sold to a residential real estate developer for a housing subdivision in the 1960s. Longtime locals recall tales of the golden, olden days of the Fairgrounds with its' lovely maple tree-lined entrance and of the fun times had by all at Cherry Park.