

History of the Fair

Long before the towns of Winston and Salem merged, there was a fair in the area. What is now known as the Dixie Classic Fair began as a wheat exhibition in Salem in 1882. The Piedmont Tobacco Fair started 15 years later, and the two fairs joined to become the Winston-Salem Fair.

The first fair, which was a wheat fair, was held at Pace Warehouse on Saturday, August 26, 1882. Mr. F. Fries, Mr. H. Fries, Mr. Hinshaw, and Mr. Bynum were known to have been the ones who were actually thanked for inaugurating the Wheat Fair. The Fair consisted of 28 wheat exhibitors (who received paid premiums), a band, speakers, decorations, and agricultural displays.

The second fair was known as The Wheat and Cattle Fair. It took place on August 30, 1883 at the Pace Warehouse. The Wheat and Cattle Fair was held again in August 1884, this time at the Farmers Warehouse, and a second day was added. This year the Fair not only consisted of wheat and cattle exhibitors, it also included horses, hogs, sheep, hay, fruits, farm products, and tobacco. In addition, the fair officers, exhibitors and visitors were all charged an entry fee to enter the Fair, and any display that was intended to advertise for a business was charged for their display. Nothing else was reported about a fair in Forsyth County until October 21, 1887. That year, the Fair of the Bashavia Farmers' Club of Vienna Township was held at the District School House at Oak Grove. Inside the District School House were displays of tobacco and outside were rows of tables lined with exhibits competing for premiums. These exhibits included vegetables, fruits, jellies, bread, cakes, needlework, grain, wheat and oats. The Fair was considered one of the most successful county Fairs of the period.

In August 1889, the State Fruit Fair was held for two days at Brown's Warehouse, at the corner of Main and Fifth Streets, where Reynolds Plaza is now located. Exhibits, which competed for premiums, consisted of fruits, vegetables, canned fruits and preserves, flowers, wine, and cider. The Salem Cornet Band and the Salem Orchestra provided music. The admission fee was 25 cents, which was used to assist in paying the premiums.

The first Forsyth County Fair was held on October 15, 1896 at Oak Grove School House, Vienna Township. This location served the Fair for two years.

In 1897, the fair in Winston was known as the Winston Tobacco Fair and was held November 3-5. It was mentioned that the Farmers' warehouse was decorated and that county officers decorated the Court House. There was also a flower show held in the new auditorium at the YMCA with prizes offered.

In 1898 the second Tobacco Fair was held November 2-4; that year it was called the Piedmont Tobacco Fair. Brown's Warehouse was set apart for the grand exhibits, Farmers and Piedmont Warehouses for tobacco and Star Warehouse for the entertainment. The Midway was located on the square between Fourth and Fifth and Church and Railroad Streets. The Fair consisted of numerous attractions and amusements for everyone, including music, a balloon ascension, bicycle parades and races, horse and livestock parade, horse running and trotting, football from the local University, free concerts, fireworks, and a tobacco premium sale.

On April 6, 1899, Piedmont Park Company was chartered by the State of North Carolina. The Piedmont Park Company Directors appointed committees for the County Fair, which was held at Piedmont Park.

On October 24-28, 1899, the Winston-Salem Horse Show, Carnival and County Fair was held. There was an admission fee of 25 cents charged to enter the grounds. The entertainment included free Wild West exhibitions, war picture shows, Wild West museum, merry-go-round, Ferris wheel, and a lot more. There were numerous parades, races and exhibits.

The Piedmont Horse Show and Cattle Fair, The County Fair, The Street Fair and Winston's Semi-Centennial Celebration was held October 30 – November 3, 1900 at Piedmont Park and surrounding areas. Festivities included horse racing, a horse show, Piedmont Live Stock and Poultry Exhibits, trapeze performer, bicycle trick riders, International Shooting tournament and bicycle races. At the Court House square, there were band concerts and around the square were business booths. The Fair was labeled another great success.

The next location of the Fair was on Patterson Avenue near where Woodland Cemetery is now located. Each year the Fair grew bigger, and it became necessary to build a new fairground. On May 8, 1908, 28.53 acres of land was purchased. Piedmont Park traded its property, plus 1,500 shares of stock, for the property. The Fair remained at this location for almost half a century. In late fall of 1908, the Winston-Salem Forsyth County Fair was held at the new Piedmont Park location on Liberty Street.

William N. Reynolds helped the Fair expand rapidly in the 1920's and 1930's. He loved racing, particularly harness racing, and he chose the Fair to close out the season every year. His dedication and promotion developed agriculture, and his services to the Fair were considered invaluable and unexcelled. He died in 1951 prior to the first Winston-Salem Fair being held on the present Fairgrounds.

On August 28, 1942, the Board of Directors approved a resolution that gave the net proceeds from the '42 Fair to the American Legion for the benefit of the Army and Navy Emergency Relief Fund and other war relief purposes.

The Winston-Salem (Fair) Foundation was established by W. N. Reynolds on November 7, 1944 with Wachovia Bank & Trust Company as the Trustee. Charles H. Babcock appeared before the Fair Board of Directors on November 7, 1949 to offer, without cost, land for a new fairgrounds on the property adjoining Cherry Street Extension and facing partly on 30th Street. The Fair Board of Directors accepted his very generous offer. Plans began immediately for construction of buildings and improving the new grounds.

In 1950, the name of the Fair was changed to the Fair of Winston-Salem. Then, in 1956, the name was changed to, and remains, the Dixie Classic Fair for Northwest North Carolina. The Fair has been in its present location since 1951. James A. (Jim) Graham was Fair Manager from 1952 until 1955. He was elected and served as North Carolina Commissioner of Agriculture from 1964 until 2000. Neil Bolton was Manager of the Fair from 1956 until his death in 1972, as well as Manager of the Winston-Salem Memorial Coliseum until 1969. W. B. "Bill" Austin, Jr. was Manager from

1972 until retirement in 1993. David L. Sparks served as Fair Director from 1993 until 2018. Cheryle Hartley, who served as Assistant to the Fair Director for 13 years, was promoted to Fair Director in December 2018.

In 1900, the first fair for black residents opened at Piedmont Park north of Winston in Forsyth County on August 20th. From as early as the 1930's until integration took effect in 1963 with the Dixie Classic Fair, blacks and whites in Winston-Salem attended separate fairs. The first fair for black residents was the Western Carolina Colored Fair, followed by the Carolina Colored Fair. The Carolina Colored Fair, which later became the Carolina Fair, was formed in 1953 after the Western Carolina Color Fair dissolved. The Carolina Fair had a successful run from its inception, drawing thousands of patrons from in and around Forsyth County. Promoted as both "educational and agricultural," it featured prize livestock from several of the surrounding counties as well as arts, crafts, and food. In the early years, both fairs were held north of town and later moved to the Dixie Classic's current location off University Parkway. The Winston-Salem Journal noted at the time that attendance at the Carolina Fair started slowing down after 1963, when the Dixie Classic Fair was integrated and black residents started to attend it. In 1968, E.E. Hill, the president of the fair corporation, announced the Carolina Fair was closing.

On December 1, 1969, the Winston-Salem Foundation gave the Fairgrounds, Memorial Coliseum, and \$75,000 to the City of Winston-Salem. Since then, the Fairgrounds has operated as an enterprise system fund that generates sufficient cash to cover all operating expenditures and debt service payments. The current mission of the Winston-Salem Fairgrounds is to plan, promote, and produce the annual Dixie Classic Fair to enhance the quality of life for citizens by providing year-round facilities for agricultural, fraternal, education, social and entertainment activities and events. The Dixie Classic Fair is the second largest Fair in North Carolina and one of the largest in North America.

History of the Use of "Dixie" in the Name of the Fair

The Dixie Classic Fair got its name in 1956 as a culmination of the Dixie Classic Livestock Exposition and the Winston-Salem Fair. At the time, the Dixie Classic Livestock Exposition was attracting exhibitors from all over North Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia. The Exposition was marketed and known nationally as place where everyone could compete fairly and had a chance at top competition premiums. The Fairgrounds operated under private management at the time and, in partnership with the Winston Salem Fair Foundation, agreed to change the name to convey the Fair's new larger regional outlook and agricultural emphasis. The name became the Dixie Classic Fair for Northwest North Carolina, combining the prominence of the Livestock Exposition with the growing regional popularity of the Winston-Salem Fair.

Previously Associated Fair Names (Winston-Salem/Forsyth County)

1882 - The Piedmont Tobacco Fair
1883 – Wheat and Cattle Fair
1887 – Fair of the Bashavia Farmers’ Club of Vienna Township
1889 – State Fruit Fair
1896 – Forsyth County Fair
1897 – Winston Tobacco Fair
1899 – Winston-Salem Horse Show, Carnival and County Fair
1900 – The Piedmont Horse Show and Cattle Fair, The County Fair, The Street Fair and
Winston’s Semi-Centennial Celebration
1908 - Winston-Salem Forsyth County Fair
1950 – The Fair of Winston Salem
1956 – The Dixie Classic Fair for Northwest North Carolina

Names of Other North Carolina Fairs

North Carolina State Fair
Dixie Classic Fair
NC Mountain State Fair
Cherokee Indian Fair
Central Carolina Fair
American Legion Post 76 Agricultural Fair
Hickory American Legion Fair
Wayne Regional Agricultural Fair
Cumberland County Fair
Stanly County Fair
Iredell County Fair
Cabarrus County Fair
Sanford Lions Club Fair
Stokes County Fair
Rowan County Agricultural and Industrial Fair
Davidson County Agricultural Fair
Pitt County Fair
Wilson County Fair
Chatham County Agricultural Fair
Cleveland County Fair
Robeson County Fair
Lenoir County Agricultural Fair
Onslow County Fair
Wilkes Agricultural Fair
Duplin Agribusiness Fair
Cape Fear Fair & Expo
Drexel Community Fair
Haywood County Fair

Union County Farm Show
The Macon County Fair

- The fairs listed above are either a member of the NC Association of Agriculture Fairs, known as larger County Fairs, or are other known fairs by association.
- Note in 2006, the NC Association of Agriculture Fairs listed nearly 50 local or county fairs that were held in the state. The majority of fairs are small community fairs with little to no reach beyond their direct communities.