



A WPA-built rock wall, the rock agricultural building, and the grandstand from the Southwest Fair Association made for a great fairground. In the background is the Army Air Base, and the infield of the racetrack is busy with horses, jockeys and trainers. Photo courtesy Lidia Hook-Gray's book "Liberal and Seward County"

By ROBERT PIERCE

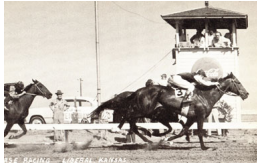
• Leader & Times

It was the early 20th century, and mass production of cars had just begun a decade earlier.

The concept of flight was also in its early stages of perfection, and both cars and planes were quite an uncommon sight in those days in Liberal.

Both brought visitors by the hundreds to Seward County for the early days of what is now known as the Seward County Five State Fair.

With Southwest Kansas being within a short driving distance of four neighboring states, having a fair that invites people from those states seemed only logical.



Along with newly birthed aviation machinery, Seward County's first fair in October 1912 also featured fair buildings, a wooden grandstand, horse stables and a race track.

The event likewise showcased animals such as sheep, hogs, cattle and poultry, along with exhibits in textile education, art, dairy and kitchen and agriculture.

A merry-go-round was provided on the grounds, along with the aviation display, and horse racing was provided with concessions for entertainment.

The fairgrounds were deeded to the Southwest Fair Association in 1915. The association itself was formed in 1913.

The first fair under control of the association would feature ball games, races and fireworks, but despite a great beginning, nearly five years later, the fair was discontinued.

In 1919, all of the fairgrounds buildings were sold except for the grandstand itself, which Seward County purchased along with the land where it now sits for a mere \$2,000.

In 1935, after stockholders voted to do so, the fairgrounds property was officially deeded to the county, with liquidation of the association taking place the following year.

The Five State Fair would later come back as a huge part of Seward County's history. The event attracts guests and artists from nearby Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico and Colorado in addition to Kansas itself.

Though big in size, the Five State Fair retains the simple pleasures of a small town event. While the scope of the fair exceeds the small county fairs most people associate with rural Kansas, the now Seward County Fair Association has attempted to blend good entertainment for the entire family with traditional activities that have always been a part of fair time – well organized livestock shows and sales and plenty of exhibits, both private and commercial.

The heart of the fair is the outstanding competitive exhibits that showcase the efforts and achievements of the residents of the Five State area and which tie the modern-day event to the harvest celebrations observed throughout history, encouraging everyone to bring garments, quilts, garden produce, fine arts and collectibles to enter in the fair.

A variety of entertaining events spice up the fair throughout the week. Ranch Rodeo competitors and fans flood the town to cheer on their favorite riders and ropers.

The Pride of Texas carnival livens things up every afternoon and evening, and a fleet of vendors offer treats such as funnel cakes, fresh lemonade and pizza by the slice.

This year's Five State Fair kicks off July 26 and runs through Aug. 4 at the Seward County Fairgrounds.

