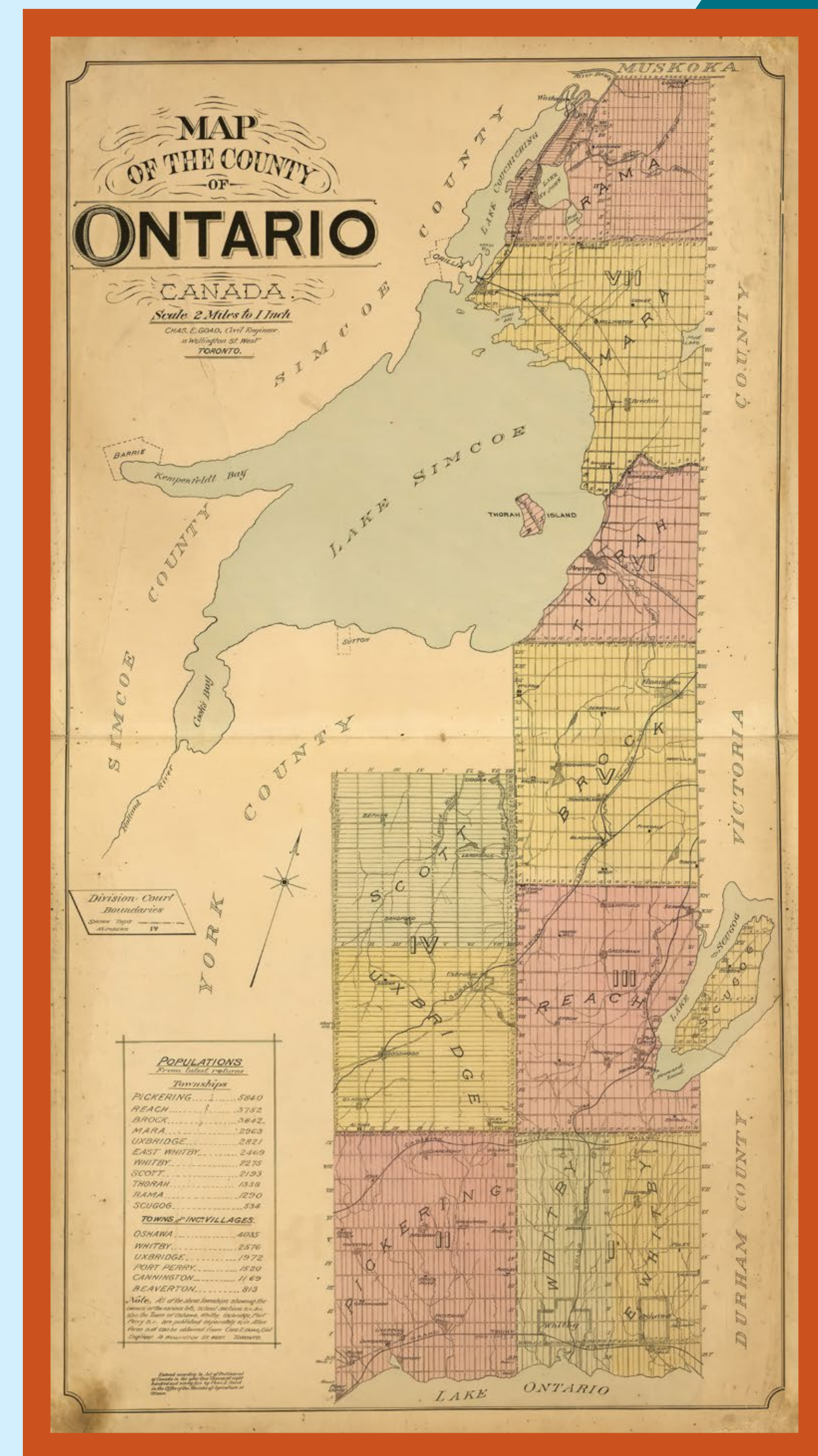




Ontario County was created in 1852 and was the upper-tier municipality where Oshawa was located. This map of Ontario County in 1895 shows Oshawa in the bottom right corner. When county lines were redrawn in the mid-1970s, the Regional Municipality of Durham was created. Source: Illustrated Historical Atlas of the County of Ontario, 1895. J.H. Beers & Co., Oshawa Museum, archival collection.

Oshawa's Agricultural Fair

The concept of agricultural fairs was brought to Canada by British settlers with the creation of agricultural societies, which were organized by counties and townships. While these societies focused on ways to improve rural lifestyle and agriculture, one of their biggest legacies was the establishment of agricultural fairs.

The Agricultural Fair Moves to Oshawa

The first Ontario County fair was held in Whitby in 1853. In 1872, due to significant growth in the region, the agricultural society split into northern and southern divisions. In 1906, the South Ontario County Agricultural Society moved its fair to Oshawa's newly established Alexandra Park.

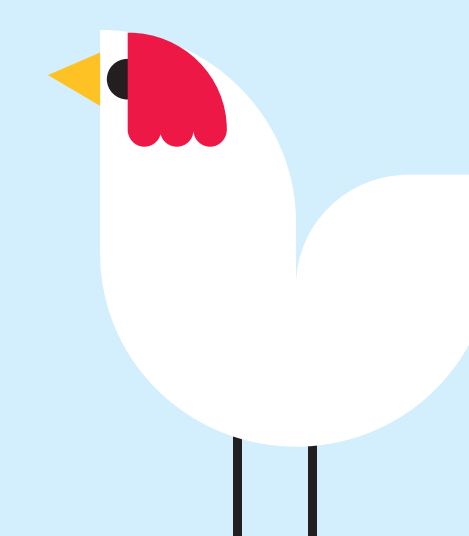
Looking and Learning at the Fair

Agricultural fairs gave farmers an opportunity to celebrate rural life while providing educational opportunities for community members to learn about farming practices and culture.

To support the development of the Fair in Oshawa, dedicated facilities were added across the grounds of Alexandra Park, including six horse and cattle barns to care for the animals, and buildings to house sheep and poultry. Agricultural achievements were highlighted in an exhibition hall, showcasing vegetables, fruits, grains, flowers and dairy products. A special Ladies Building served a dual purpose: presenting items of particular interest to women at this time, such as ladies' fancy work, while serving as the Fair's financial headquarters.



Advertisement for the Fair in the Oshawa Daily Times on August 11, 1928. Did you notice the Fair took place during weekdays? The Fair was a much-loved field trip for local students who would march into the fairgrounds and explore the exhibitions. Source: Oshawa Museum, archival collection.

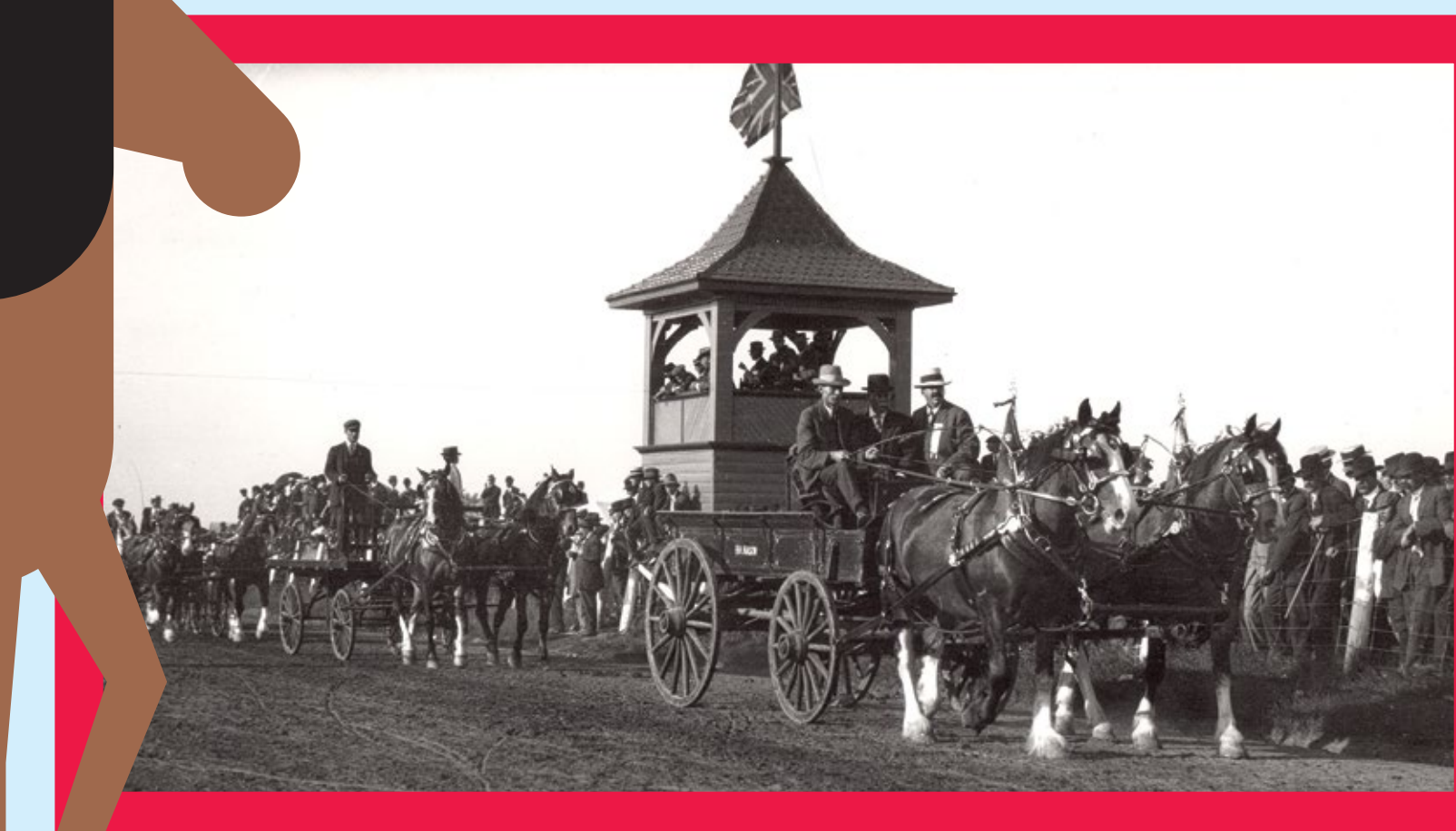


This fair poster was created in 1914 to promote the South Ontario Fair. Source: Oshawa Museum, archival collection.



Did you know ladies' fancy work was a term used to describe decorative needlework and crafts?

Over the years the Fair grew in size and scope, while always maintaining its agricultural roots. In the 1950s regional newspapers advertised the Fair as an event that brought city and country people together.



As the South Ontario Fair closed in August 1914, a parade of prize winners was held. The parade slowly passed in front of the Judge's stand and then the grandstand. Source: Thomas Bouckley Collection, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.



Oshawa's Ideal Dairy exhibiting at the Fair, circa 1935-1936. Ideal Dairy was formed in 1931 as a private company by a group of dairy farmers, who combined their operations and opened a milk processing plant. Source: Oshawa Museum, archival collection.

A Landmark Lost

Around noon on April 27, 1959, disaster struck the Park when the grandstand caught fire and was destroyed. The sudden loss of the grandstand called into question whether the South Ontario Fair would go ahead as usual! Despite the uncertainty, Fair officials decided that the loss of the grandstand would not stop the event and planning continued. The Fair in 1959 once again brought the community together.



Firefighters worked to extinguish the fire at the grandstand on April 27, 1959. Source: Oshawa Museum, archival collection.

The End of an Era

With the city rapidly growing around the Park it was no longer an ideal space for an agricultural fair. In 1974 the Fair was held at Alexandra Park for the final time, bringing to a close nearly 70 years of agricultural tradition at this Park.

Historical information and images provided by the Oshawa Museum



For more information and an accessible PDF, please visit oshawa.ca/Exhibitions.