

# Bigger, Better Farm Show Complex

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The Farm Show Complex was used for many other things. The National Horse Show exhibited there in 1947, the Shrine Circus in 1948, Pennsylvania Livestock Exhibition in 1957 (now the Keystone International Livestock Exposition), and the All-American Dairy Show in 1964.

Basketball games were played in the 7,639-seat arena in 1958. Other exhibits: the Harrisburg Builders' Show, the Sportsmen's Show since 1956, Mobilehome Show in 1957, and lots of other events, many of which have new names and attract various crowds today.

## 75th Farm Show

Dan Cupper assembled another Farm Show history with "75th Farm Show: A History of Pennsylvania's Annual Agricultural Exposition," for the 1991 Farm Show.

Governor Robert P. Casey noted in the introduction that the Farm Show had evolved, going from the 1917 exposition of \$1,430 for six departments of competition to the 75th show, with record premiums totaling \$196,000 in 30 departments.

A new roof was installed over the Large Arena. A new livestock exhibition hall at the complex included a two-story building between the Large Arena and the East Building.

In the book, Cupper points out that in 1965, a long-range planning study was done to help determine the future of the Farm Show Complex. In April 1966, Ag Secretary Leland Bull called a press conference to announce the

commission was considering replacing, over a six-year period, all of the buildings on the site except the Large Arena. Cost: \$13 million.

Between 1968-1972, show officials discussed the future of the statewide show. In 1968, new facilities planning was under way, including the possibility of looking toward another site.

Eventually the plan was submitted to the General State Authority board. It included two options: Site A and Site B.

Site A was a plan to expand existing facilities from 69.7 to 129 acres, offering room, with offsite parking, for 7,000 cars.

Site B involved building a new Farm Show Complex on a 293.3-acre tract in Susquehanna Township, less than a mile northeast of the existing location, according to Cupper. It had plenty of room, with an arena equipped with 15,000 seats, along with parking for 30,000 cars.

The Capital City Development Committee voted for Site A. The plan went back and forth through various administrations, from Gov. Raymond P. Shafer to Gov. Milton J. Shapp, but with Tropical Storm Agnes in 1972 and major flooding of complex during the All-American Dairy Show in 1975, along with other issues, the plan was put on hold.

Senate Bill 1188 in 1973-74 contained \$150 million for a new complex and site, but floundered in the legislation process, according to Cupper. With the Oil Crisis looming, and with renovations desperately needed, focus was placed on the \$10 million appropriation measure passed for necessary renovations.

Was a new site necessary? Officials considered a number of

sites, including one in Lancaster County, one in Hershey, one on the West Shore, one along Elmer-ton Avenue, and one at a "race-track" site.

Renovations to the Rt. 22 bypass were conducted April-September 1974. At the 1975 show, Pennsylvania Livestock Association joined the commodity food area.

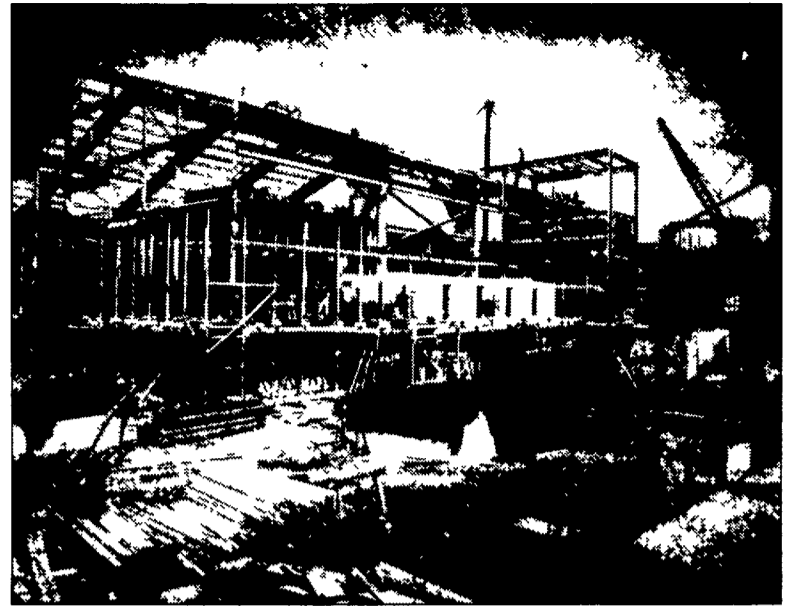
In November 1978, two long-awaited highway connections were completed in time for the 1979 show. The four-lane River Relief Route, linking Cameron Street with River Road (Rt. 22), was completed. The other was a section of Rt. 81 connecting with the River Relief Route, opening Nov. 24.

In mid-March 1979, the Agriculture Department sponsored the first of two Farm Equipment Expos, according to Cupper, designed to give "farm equipment dealers a chance to display new and used products that they were unable to display at the Farm Show because of space limitations." The expo was discontinued in 1980, noted Cupper, for "lack of interest."

In the 1980s, a sheep-to-shawl contest was added. The show was open on Sunday in 1980.

At that time, 311 exhibitors remained on a waiting list. Clearly, noted Cupper, more space was needed — all this more than two decades ago.

At that time, plans were drawn up and state funding sought, noted Cupper, for a 72,000-square-foot structure to cost \$2.3 million. The building included livestock exhibition space on the ground floor and a cafeteria and dormitories on the upper floors. It had been scheduled for construction since 1957 but never



More of the Large Arena from 1938. Notice the lack of hardhats on the workers.

built.

In those years, the Large Arena was host to rock music concerts, a boxing match (live broadcast to 3,000 paying fans in the Large Arena), and other events.

Through the 1980s, traditions stayed. Though there was only a single turkey queen named in 1930, there were about 30 queens — and some kings, noted Cupper — in the 1980s. They "promote everything from strawberries to evergreens to honey to draft horses and mules."

In 1990, the Farm Show generated more than \$500,000 in revenue and \$7.6 million worth of direct and indirect spending. Attendance has fallen through the years, however, from a high of 690,000 in 1963 to only 217,000 in 1990.

In 1991, more than 8,000 exhibits competed for cash premiums totaling \$195,000 — according to Cupper, a "vast leap" over the

\$735 offered in 1917.

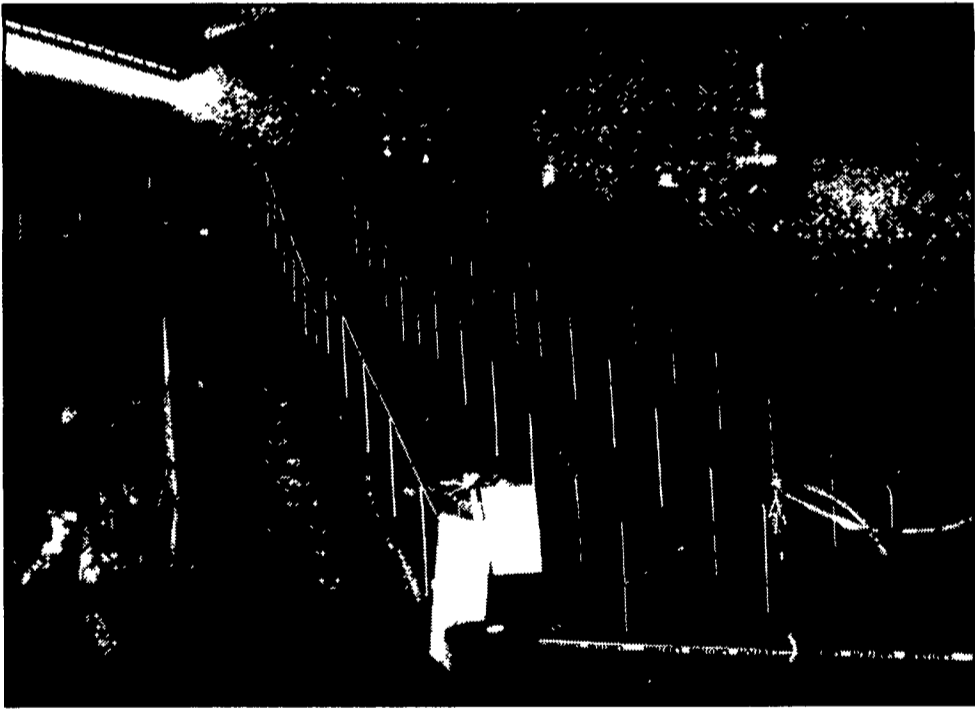
(About 400,000 people were expected to return to Farm Show last year. A record \$315,000 was offered in premiums.)

In the 1980s, no major expansion was occurring, even though it was needed. Other states expanded and improved their facilities to accommodate exhibit space, parking, and other visitor needs — but little or nothing at the Pennsylvania Farm Show.

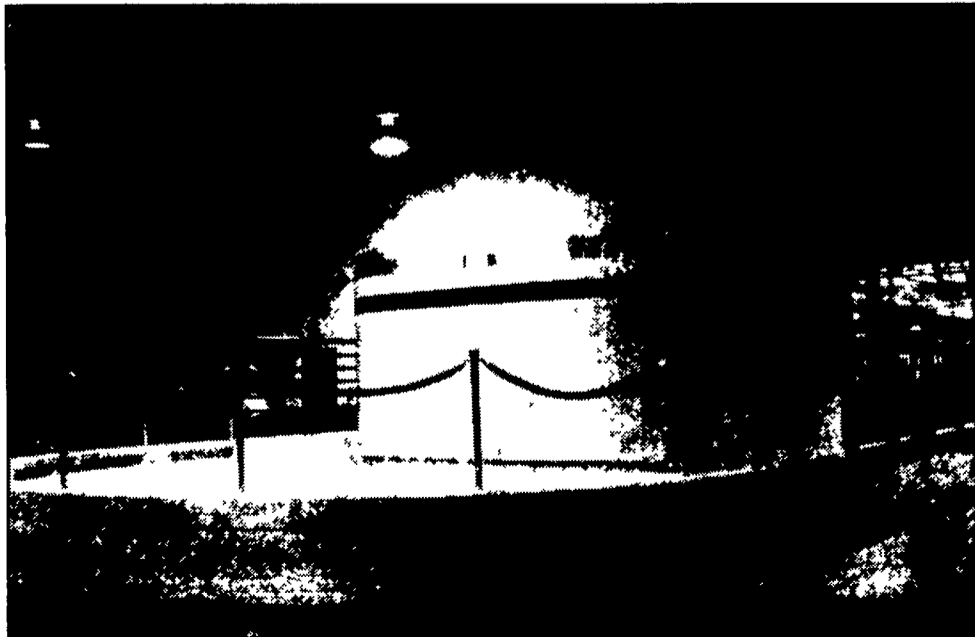
In 1990, some renovations did occur. That includes the previously approved (1957) decision to construct a two-story, 82,000 square foot building between the East Building and the Large Arena for \$3.22 million; \$2.7 million for a new roof; \$1.6 million for a heating system; \$483,000 for a new lighting system; and \$35,000 for a sound system.

Long Overdue


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Work on the escalators to the spine and Farm Show offices took place throughout late summer and fall last year.



The Small Arena has a new auction booth with track and floor lighting. The arena has entered the modern age!



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