

**Sandwich fair**  
*an Oral History*

Gladys Brady, Interviewee  
Of Sandwich, Illinois

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Narrator's Name: GLADYS BRADY  
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Q: I'm Joanne Johnson and I'm interviewing Gladys Brady from Sandwich, Illinois and Gladys is a native of Sandwich. She was born and has lived her all her life and she was born in 1897. And we are going to talk to her mostly about the Sandwich Fair which she has been actively associated with for a good many years. Now what is your earliest recollection of the fair?

A: Well, when I was ten years old my grandfather lived on the farm that is across from the fair grounds which the restaurant, The Barn, is located now. And my earliest remembrance is running back and forth across from his house to the fair grounds, innumerable times and never being charged because I always took cookies to the gatemen. And that is really my earliest -- I must have gone before I was ten, but I don't remember what I did.

Q: How much did they charge you when you went to the fair in those days?

A: As I say, mine was paid in cookies, so I don't know. But -- and usually some member of my family was associated with the fair. My father was through the store he worked for and later my husband -- and I don't remember paying a gate fee.

Q: You may not have. Did they usually just charge by the car, do you remember that? Of course they didn't have cars back when you first. . .

A: No, by the horse and buggy or by the buggy-full, I don't know. I really don't remember. My son could tell you.

Q: Well, we'll have to ask him later on.

A: Okay

Q: What are your first recollections of the fair. As a child, what did you enjoy doing the most?

A: Oh, of course the merry-go-round, that always is -- I was rather timid in -- I don't believe they had like the big ferris wheel and the rides they have now. They were rather limited as to a form of entertainment. They had horse races back in those days.

Q: Did they?

A: Oh yes, and. . .

Q: Did the bet on the races?

A: Probably.

Q: Just side bets?

A: Oh yes. Just those who watched from the grandstand would you know, among themselves they would make bets. But there was no regular betting schedule or betting place. And they trained horses at the fair grounds ever since I can remember. Because there was a man who lived in Chicago part of the year and then he came out and was a professional horse trainer and he lived at my grandparent's home while he was out here, for the time that he was training. So they have trained ever since. . .

Q: Do you remember what his name is?

A: Yes, Kentz, K-E-N-T-Z.

Q: K-E-N-T-Z. Did they have many exhibits?

A: Again it was a different type. Where the what is the Woman's Building now and used to be the Floral Hall. Our one big store that had so many different departments, Warner's Department Store, and I think they, well they had shoes, men's clothing, women's clothing, ready-to-wear, dry-goods, and a grocery store -- that, my father was

A: manager of the grocery department. And at fair time where the canned good is exhibited now, was a raised platform and the different departments in the store would make a display and my father put in the grocery display. And later my husband put in the dry-goods and ready-to-wear, he had training in window display and show-card writing. And he put in that display. I think the other part of the building probably was used for exhibits, but again I can't remember that.

Q: You don't remember the pies and the. . .

A: No.

Q: . . .jellies and the. . .

A: That wasn't interesting. (laughs)

Q: How about the food stands? Have they always had those?

A: Yes, but years ago they had -- was a dining hall in the area of the grounds where the Catholic food stand is now, only it was across the road to the north, but in that area of the fair ground, and it was a big building, quite a good sized building. Not a stand at all. And that they called the Dining Hall and as I remember the church groups served from that. I don't remember church stands there until later years. And then where the rest area is near the concession office, you know where all the benches, the Federated Church used to have a stand. And what is the bandstand now, the Methodists used to have, and of course that is not too many years ago that they gave that up. They did run that stand and the log cabin both, and then of course up until this year, the Yorkville stand. That is more recent years, I don't remember way back. I think they served from the Dining Hall, I think most of the, aside from the concession people who came in and had the hot dog stands and things like that. I think the main

A: meals were served from this dining hall.

Q: Who prepared the food?

A: Again I can't tell you, I suppose solicited like it was, is now, but I'm not sure.

Q: You don't remember if they paid all the help that worked on the fair, like they do now?

A: No. I'm not a very good rememberer. But -- and I do remember playing in this dining hall, there was a sort of a caretaker for the fair ground and he was associated with the horses too. He and his wife and daughter lived in one part of this dining hall during the year. The daughter was about my age, and I used to go over there and play in this building, when it wasn't fair time. But otherwise, I don't. . . I suppose they must have paid them something, but I mean the people who worked. Even those who work now do not get a going, what the unions would consider good wages. Most people do it, they like to be associated with the fair.

Q: You don't remember how many people used to work in the secretary's office?

A: Not more than three or four, I would say.

Q: How many do you have now?

A: Seven or eight, in the office, the secretary's office. And then we have two down in the livestock office. That's been a change in the way it's been done. It used to be all handled at the secretary's office, the livestock and everything. Within the last five years it's been handled down at the livestock office, the pay off and the entries come to the main secretary's office, but after that everything is handled through the livestock office.

Q: When did your husband first <sup>look</sup> state to work for the fair?

A: He took Mr. Stinson's place, Lorene Stinson's father was secretary for, I would say 40 years I think the paper said, and my husband took over from him. And I figured he had been secretary for 30 years, that was in I think in 1940. And then my son has helped his father for the last few years and then he took over when \_\_\_\_\_ wasn't able to do it anymore.

Q: When did he give it up?

A: Actually to give it up, it was just the year before he died, but our son was the main, did the main part of it.

Q: How much time during the year did he have to work on it?

A: It goes from one fair to the next with the convention in January that they have to go to. There they meet different entertainers and different people from all over the state, well farther than all over the state, too. But they sort of choose, then, or get an idea of what they want for entertainment. And the Board of Directors is divided into different committees and there is an entertainment committee, my husband was on that when he was secretary, he and Carl Scent were the ones I remember recently.

Q: What's the first recollection you have of entertainment?

A: Again, I think mine was spent mainly on the grounds, running around and taking in the rides and the shows, I don't remember going to the grandstand until, well until I was well grown. And it used to be WLS was the Barn Dance, was the main attraction every year. The man who was president before Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ was president was very involved with that. I mean he liked, that was the type of entertainment he liked. They used to have quite what I would call extravagant stage shows, especially on Thursday night. When it was a three day fair,

A: Thursday was the big day, everyone wanted to go Thursday, and that was the biggest night in entertainment and they usually have a line of chorus, and they'd have people who told jokes, you know, a regular vaudeville entertainment. They used to have a horse show here a number of years ago. The tractor pulls have taken over.

Q: When did they start, do you remember?

A: The horse shows?

Q: Yes.

A: Oh, I would say at least fifteen years ago, possibly twenty. And they had them for several years, and then they, well they got to lasting so long and the people got rather tired of them, it was more or less the same. They don't seem to tire of tractor pulls, though. You know, this reserved seats were sold out this year, I think they said before noon of the day they were put on sale. So that's. . .

Q: They just have them one night don't they?

A: Yes, that's all. And I can't -- I was trying to think of some of the other things. Why, where they have to park cars now, my grandfather I know used to park the buggies and the horses over there. He had a parking lot for those that couldn't get in the fair grounds or didn't want to pay the price to get their horse. . .

Q: What would they do with their horses all the time they were in there, if they came in a horse and buggy. Did they just leave them tied up?

A: I think they just left them hitched and probably took the check rein off. As I say, my memories are -- jump from this to that and some of the important things I don't remember. Like I do remember he had the park, he parked the buggies but what he did with the horses I don't know. I imagine they just, he couldn't sort them out otherwise. They

A: would just have to stay attached to their own conveyance I would say. Another thing I do remember was we used to have trains and there was a train 10:30, always came through here at 10:30, and if it was at fair time a lot of people would come in on that train. And there was a plainclothes detective would be here to see if he could spot whether pickpockets got off. That was, oh probably 40 years ago though.

Q: Did he ever catch any?

A: I don't think so. (laughs) I don't know whether, but we was one who was acquainted, he was the same one, I think he name was Cudmore.

Q: Was he from here?

A: No, I think he was from Chicago.

Q: Now is this where all these people came from?

A: Yes, they would come in on this train and he would be at the station to see that no pickpockets had come in on the train.

Q: I wonder how he could spot them?

A: Well, apparently he was one who was well acquainted, I mean had been around. . .

Q: With the lower element.

A: Yes. Had been detective or policeman enough so that he thought he could spot the ones that were. And there used to be a, I don't know what they called it, a carry-all, it was, nowadays we would call it a bus I suppose. But it was horse-drawn and you could take it from the corner there in Sandwich where they -- the tavern and the pants factory -- from that corner, and ride out to the fair grounds.

Q: Would people bring their lunches with them?

A: Oh yes, that was really a big deal and then you'd see people take their card tables out and sit under the trees with their lunch.



Q: Now you lived real close to the fair grounds when you were a child, didn't you?

A: Not -- I was out at my grandparents a great deal and as I say he lived across the road from there. But no, I always lived right in town here. But it wasn't too far from any point in town then to the fair grounds.

Q: So usually at fair time you would spend most of your time down there?

A: Yes.

Q: How about when you were married and had small children?

A: Well, then is when my husband was doing the putting in the displays and associated with the fair. When my older children were, oh I would say sixth or seventh graders, they always went out and they had one stand, one concession, that had little cars that ran around a track and had monkeys in the little cars, and then of course the attendant would press. I was trying to remember whether it was a type of bingo, but one of my daughters, I couldn't, we couldn't keep her in money, she just loved to play this game of chance because the little monkeys rode in the cars. There must have been, I would say, eight or ten in these little cars.

Q: What did they win?

A: Probably nothing of value you may be sure, it wasn't like a money game of bingo. I can remember though when we did have bingo games out there and then they were outlawed. And I guess they could have them back now, couldn't they?

Q: I think so.

A: I think it has been -- but they -- and of course there is no liquor sold on the grounds. Some fairs I think can have, I think they'd lose

A: their state aid if they sold liquor on the grounds. That doesn't say it isn't there sometimes, but it isn't sold, no.

Q: Well now, they used to have sideshows, didn't they?

A: Oh yes.

Q: Now did they come with the carnival people?

A: Girlie shows. Yes. And there was a lot of separate concessions in but the rides, regular carnival rides, the same company has been coming I would say for 20 years probably. It has changed, the son has taken over from the father, but it has enlarged a lot. But there are, a lot of the concession people come back year after year. As they leave one year they'll say "Save my spot for next year," because it is considered one of the best fairs in this part of the country.

Q: Now when you say they say, "Save my spot," now they actually. . .

A: Then there is. . .

Q: . . .do this so that it is saved for them?

A: Yes, they have a map of the grounds.....

Q: Contract?

A: They will say, "Save it," and then I think in March, anyway the first part of the year the man who is in charge of the concessions, and that's Kenny Klatz, will drop them a card to see if they still want their spot. And if they do, then it is kept, but it has to be confirmed then or it is sold to someone else. And they usually have more people wanting to come than they have space to put them so. . .

Q: How much did they used to charge, do you remember, for the spots?

A: No, I don't even know what they charge now. I tell you, you should have asked my son for this interview because ~~he~~ he would have had all those things. . .

Q: \_\_\_\_\_.

A: You do that.

Q: Have they always had what they call date night? Now you know Friday night is supposed to be the night when everybody gets a date, this is high school young people, college.

A: I know Saturday night now is, out at the fair it's all young people come. I don't believe any specific one, maybe they, maybe they did and I was just not aware of it.

Q: You don't remember when your children were about that age?

A: No, I don't think they made any point of any special night to go, or I'm trying to think even whether they were, I know they were there, but whether they went as dates or not, with dates or not. . .

Q: Can you think of any disasters that ever took place during the fair?

A: Oh, of course there have been pile-ups on the racetrack when they were racing but I don't think, I don't remember of there being any fatal, fatalities.

Q: Any bad weather or. . .

A: Oh yes. I would say maybe twelve years maybe -- they -- it rained so badly that the tractors that were on display there, some of them helped and they pulled I don't know how many cars, they just spent practically all of that one night pulling cars out of the mud that had been parked there at the fair. That was before there was quite as much gravel ground or parking area, good parking area.

Q: Did this cut into the proceeds quite a bit that year?

A: Yes, it does, and if you have one day of rain your, it does, it cuts down, yes. Last year we were very fortunate, didn't have any rain

A: at all and this year Friday was not so good, but it was I don't think too disastrous. One -- there was, I guess they called it a tornado that went through here probably ten or more years ago and took so many trees down. . .

Q: During the. . .

A: No. It was before the fair, about I think it must have been in June maybe or July because people from the surrounding areas came and helped, cleared, to clear it up, so that they could hold the fair. There were so many trees down and so much damage done and we had lots of local help. I mean people just offered to come in with their groups and they did get it cleared up enough so they had the fair. Again my son could tell you the date of that. Now much good on dates, I'm afraid. I haven't too much, I don't remember too much else. My husband's father used to sell tickets so you see, even way back then when he was a little boy he was associated to a degree, \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ sell at the gate.

Q: Have they ever lost money on the fair?

A: I'm sure they have, yes. But of course the state, they do get state aid, a certain percent is paid toward the premiums that would be in there. But the payroll is so big now and the stockholders of course don't get any dividends or anything like that. Everything is just put right back into improving the grounds. This year I know they built one new building that I know and maybe more. But they always every year, they try to add something. The grounds have been extended a lot, too. They bought quite a bit of acreage since it began.

Q: How many acres did they have to begin with?

A: I didn't read my homework, Joanne. It was in our News Press, you know, the history of it. I know it started in 1888 and then it was reorganized shortly after that. But the part to the west from the, they've added to the west from the Horsemen's Gate, they added that I know and they added some between where the new entrance is, was added after the fair was \_\_\_\_\_.

Q: How far away did people come from way back, if you remember?

A: Well of course way back they didn't come from as far because they weren't able to, I mean transportation wasn't as good. Now we have people that come from Chicago and they come from surrounding areas -- they can travel so much farther, so much better. Louis Wagner could tell you the farthest away, he keeps in his building which is the horticulture, he has a map in there and he asks and then keeps a record, asks people to put a pin who have come from a great distance, you know, the people who come and he could tell you those who have come from the farthest distance.

Q: Since he'd been keeping it?

A: Since he's been keeping it. I don't think it extended as far when we were younger, I mean it was more a local area deal and it has gotten so now it is really quite a big thing, it takes in a lot of the territory and we have even some exhibitors from out of state.

Q: I didn't know that.

A: The Junior Fair can't, it has to be in state to be Junior Fair. But the open show can come from anywhere as long as they pay their entry fees. Mainly livestock that comes from out of state.

Q: Can you think of any outstanding year for the fair, anything stand out in your mind?

A: I'm sorry, no. Last year was the biggest fair in the history of the fair. But that was no -- due to the weather and much cooperation from people and everything, but otherwise no main event. I'm trying to think of some of the big politicians who had been here, I can't even do that. Maybe I'd better not say.

Q: Earl Butz was here last year.

A: Yes, that's -- he was here. And they have had some political figures that would come out, and in recent years, I mean not. . .

Q: I think Percy was here.

A: Yes.

Q: Can you remember way back when whether any governors or senators or anybody of note? (laughter) You were too busy on the merry-go-round.

A: I'm afraid that I'm not very good at remembering. What interested me, yes I could remember, but and about when I was young I didn't care whether there were political figures coming or what.

Q: What type of sideshows did they have?

A: They had some girlie sideshows and some freak sideshows and I would say that was -- I never went into the sideshows even, so how do I know. I'm afraid I'm not much help to you.

Q: Well, I think you've done very well. Is there anything else you can think of that you wanted to add?

A: No, I don't believe so. Oh, I do remember one thing -- these displays, one year we had models that modeled clothes from Warner's Ready-To-Wear. They paraded across the front of this display and back and they showed furs and different dressy clothes. I think there were, there were five or six, I was one so I remember it. And I probably was one because my husband was the one who planned it.

A: But there were, they were all local young women that, they had this style show every day of the fair, probably last half an hour maybe.

Q: When was that?

A: Probably in the 1920's, early 1920's.

Q: What affect did the wars have on the fair?

A: They held them, but I suppose, I suppose they had them but there weren't so many there. But again, I was involved with a family and my

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Q: I just wondered if they still did carry on?

A: Yes, they still had the fair. For a number of years they had Veteran's Day, afterward, after World War II, the veterans would get in free. Now it's all senior citizens that get in. They don't get in free though, do they. I think they get in for half.

Q: And the children get in. . .

A: Under twelve get in free. That is ever since I can remember, they had Children's Day.

Q: Where they had the rides for half price?

A: I don't remember whether, all I remember is that it was free to get in, but whether the rides were in those days. . .

Q: You don't remember what the rides cost when you were little?

A: Probably 5¢ for a merry-go-round ride, but I wouldn't say for sure.

Q: You don't remember say how much you spent in a day?

A: I know I always spent more than I had and I'd run back and ask my grandfather for me and usually I got it. Then they had the glass

A: that is so much in demand now, the red, it isn't carnival glass, it's a red, and they had toothpick holders and mugs. . .

Q: Ruby glass?

A: Sort of. And they'd inscribe your name on whatever you bought. I know I bought a toothpick holder in 1909, the date is on it. And they had little mugs and, you know what I mean.

Q: Oh, I've seen them., they're the souvenir glass. Were those made right here in town?

A: I don't think so, I think the concessions brought them in and you bought it and they'd inscribe whatever you wanted to have. I have one mug with my name on it and a little toothpick holder that says "To Mamma" on it. And that's the one that said 1909 so I can pinpoint one date. I know they're in great demand now as antiques. I think Louis \_\_\_\_\_ is quite a collector of those. I think I've rambled enough.

Q: Well, I thank you very much.

A: I'm sorry I haven't been able to remember more specific things, but. . .

Q: Well, I'm sure they will find this very interesting.

END OF TAPE



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(INTERVIEWEE)

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DATE Sept. 23, 1975

Gladys Brady  
(Interviewee)

(for \_\_\_\_\_)