

I Remember Old Tuscaloosa

By Fred Maxwell

One of the losses that time has inflicted on Tuscaloosa County was the abandonment of the old West Alabama Fair Grounds.

These fairgrounds were located in the area which now includes Capstone Court and some of the adjacent property. It was bounded on the east by Hackberry Lane, and the present 13th St. would just about bisect the fairgrounds.

The fair was served by the old "Dummy Line" — a street car system propelled by steam locomotives. About the only evidence of the whereabouts of the street car route is on a corner where the line made a 90 degree turn. It cut off the corner of a lot which resulted in the residence on this corner being erected on a 45 degree angle with the streets.

In addition to the usual exhibits from farm and factory, livestock and the white way (row of concession stalls and sideshows), was a half-mile track for horse races. There were no "running" races with a jockey astride and

the horses galloping at maximum speed. The races were for "trotters" and "pacers" with the driver riding in a small lightweight sulky. There were several race horse farms within the state where the horses were raised and trained. There were several competitors from neighboring states most of the time. These races were a highlight of the fair's program.

On a few occasions a motorcycle race was staged with local riders only. Since the riders were fairly well known there was a great deal of interest and cheering from the grandstand.

The first airplane flight in Tuscaloosa was staged from the fairgrounds. The takeoff was east to west across the inside of the race track. The plane was of the type similar to that of the original Wright Brothers. The plane took off and cleared the fence around the track and also the one around the fairgrounds. But the land sloped upward toward 10th Ave. and when the pilot tried to climb over the residence in its path the plane had insufficient power to gain the necessary altitude.

The plane stalled and crashed in the backyard of the residence. The pilot escaped serious injury but the plane was demolished.

Note: I have the propeller hub from this crash and have mounted an automobile clock on its center.

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