

## FRANZ KLINGENDER

Review of

Scott, Guy. 2006. *Country Fairs in Canada*. Markham: Fitzhenry & Whiteside.

Pp. 232. \$34.95, ISBN 1-55041-121-7.

Early in my career I learned about the role of agricultural fairs in Canada's history. Such fairs often served as the vehicle through which new technology was introduced, demonstrated and promoted. It was likely at country fairs that many people got their first glimpse of new technologies, from internal combustion tractors to moving images. In addition to that important role, country fairs also provided an opportunity for the less mechanically or technologically inclined to present their creations to the community. As an aficionado of the numerous products featured at country fairs, I have witnessed the intense rivalry among entrants as they compete for ribbons in categories ranging from chocolate cake, to quilts or arrangements of gladioli.

In *Country Fairs in Canada*, Guy Scott traces the origins of the North American country fair back to the trade, cloth, horse and livestock fairs of 11th-century England. He follows their development in Canada from the first fair held at Windsor, Nova Scotia, in 1765, to the beginning of their decline in the 1940s. He points out that in 19th-century Ontario, implement manufacturers took advantage of local fairs to show potential customers the newest piece of technology and how it would save both labour and time. In the early-20th century, western Canadians watched the first Winnipeg Tractor Trials at Winnipeg's 1908 country fair.

In this book Guy Scott accurately details the reasons for the rise and decline of country fairs throughout Canada. More importantly he highlights changes to the profiles of the fairs and the people who attend them. In the early 19th century, for example, Fair Boards focused mainly on the needs of the rural community with educational exhibits intended to promote improvement and scientific development. Changing demographics, however, called for changes to meet the needs of Canada's growing urban centres. Over time the success of the country fair came to be measured less by the size of the farm equipment display and more by the size of the midway. In that regard, Scott takes us past the spieler and behind the curtain to shed light on the lives of the sideshow denizens. Noting the impact of the electric light bulb on the operation and appeal of fairs, he points to the allure of the multi-coloured

lights on the Ferris wheel and flashing lights on the various games of chance. Today, country fair organizers focus on attracting urban dwellers to the countryside to introduce them to the origins of their food; the required entertainment sweetens the deal.

Country fairs have changed in other ways as well. Competition from other forms of entertainment with much better funding is decidedly a factor in whether or not country fairs continue to operate. While the volunteer has always played a role in the local fair, Scott advises that volunteers now figure more prominently than ever as they assume responsibility for organizing country fairs of all sizes. Throughout the years the success of the country fair has often depended on assistance from the various levels of government, particularly in the face of economic disasters such as the 1930s Depression; time will tell if that will continue. Sadly, Scott points out that when country fairs fail to measure up, organizers often watch their fairgrounds become development lands (as was the case in my hometown when a condominium building was erected on the grounds where the fair was once held).

Fairs have always been about "looking at stuff." The extensive use of photographs in his publication enables Scott to maintain this notion of looking at "stuff." A wide-ranging selection of photographs from public and private collections across the country document all facets of the technology associated with the country fair's operation, including the midway equipment and the staff responsible for transporting equipment from one fairground to another. Other photographs highlight the Crystal Palace-style architecture that was adopted by some of the provincial fairs in the 1880s. A snapshot of a group of 1920s young people in bathing suits, sitting astride a bull in British Columbia, has appeal for this reviewer. As a public historian who is frequently called upon to select images to illustrate interpretive products, I was particularly pleased to find the sources for the images used in the book to be thoroughly footnoted.

Although the author's popular writing style might have been out of place for some topics,

it works in this instance. Even his occasional humorous side comments are perfectly suitable. I do, however, have concerns about this book; I take issue with some of the facts presented by Scott. For example, he suggests that threshing machines were not used until 1878 whereas they were already being shown at country fairs in Upper Canada in the 1850s. Second, the point of the Winnipeg Tractor Trials was to pit the established steam traction engine against the newcomer kerosene and, despite his assertion otherwise, archival records show both were demonstrated at 1908's inaugural event. Third, given its pivotal role in Canadian agricultural development, most historians of cereal crop breeding would accord Marquis wheat much more

stature than simply being "an offshoot of Red Fife." Fourth, although Scott touches upon the popularity among urbanites of automobile demolition derbies, such as that shown in the foreground of an image taken at the Brandon Fair, he fails to mention the preparations underway in the background for the "combine crunch" that was equally important to many farmers.

Having said that, Scott's book should appeal equally to historians of material history and to those wishing to use it as a reminder of their youthful excursions to the local country fair. Should the day come when country fairs no longer exist, *Country Fairs in Canada* will provide future generations with an understanding of what they have missed.

## S. HOLYCK HUNCHUCK

Review of

Calloway, Stephen, Elizabeth Cromley et al. 2005. *The Elements of Style: An Encyclopaedia of Domestic Architectural Detail*, 3rd ed. Revised and updated by Alan Powers. Richmond Hill: Firefly Books.

Pp. 592, illus., index, bibliography, glossary, biographies of designers, restoration and maintenance guide and lists of suppliers. Cloth \$75.00, ISBN 1-55407-079-1.

The *Elements of Style* is described on its inside flyleaf as "the most comprehensive visual survey of architectural styles ever produced," but these claims are exaggerated. The book was first published in a smaller version in 1991 by Octopus in the United Kingdom, and by Simon and Schuster in the USA with the more accurate subtitle, "A Practical Encyclopaedia of Interior Architectural Details of 1485 to the Present." Stephen Calloway, curator of Prints and Books at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and general editor of this third, 2005 edition under the Canadian imprint Firefly, narrows the field even further by noting that it is a "sourcebook for those who care about our heritage of architecture in Britain and the United States" (9). Within its limitations of geography, chronology and subject matter, *The Elements of Style* is an exhaustive large-format visual dictionary of architectural details from the history of British housing of the past 500 years, with reference to some American examples. However, in part it still reads as a work-in-progress.

Thirteen authors have contributed to *The Elements of Style*. Its seventeen main chapters are arranged in roughly chronological order and are organized by architectural style, feature by feature,

according to a simple template: a dense, two-page textual summary of a given architectural style is followed by a visual breakdown of its details by component. The narrative begins with the chapter "Tudor and Jacobean, 1485 to 1625," by Simon Thurley, a British architectural historian and chief executive of English Heritage, and concludes with three chapters that discuss the 20th century: "The Modern Movement (1920-1950)," "Beyond Modern (1950-1975)" and "Contemporary Era (1975-present day)," all by Alan Powers. He is Senior Lecturer at the University of Greenwich School of Architecture and Landscape, London, co-editor of *The Elements* and a particularly thoughtful writer. As with *The Twentieth Century House in Britain: From the Archives of Country Life* (2004), Powers's chapters are dense but highly-readable discussions of one of the most complex eras in architectural history. Also included in this lengthy volume are separate chapters on British and American vernacular architectures, a glossary of architectural terms and biographies of architects, designers and illustrators, as well as practical guidelines for proper restoration techniques and lists of suppliers of building parts in the U.K. and North America.