

# *The Circus and Fair: A Summertime Delight*



Circus parade, St. Johnsbury, circa 1870

You can imagine the excitement when the circus or county fair came to town. After all, it wasn't every day that elephants marched through the streets of small towns like Poultney. The coming of the summertime fair and circus was a delight to both young and old. Wally Hunt, born in Orleans, Vermont, in 1910, remembers his mother telling him that when she was a girl she spent the only nickel she had at the fair for the first orange she ever ate. She also told him that a grey horse, not electric machinery, powered the circus's merry-go-round.



Posters on the sides of barns advertised these grand events. People from miles around came to see the circus's strange animals, clowns, jugglers, and gypsies. To the fairs they brought their prize pigs, horses, and cows, a dozen of their largest eggs, their tastiest pies, largest pumpkins, and loveliest quilts. Best of all the circus and fair brought people together.

Of course, circuses and county, agricultural, and town fairs are not a thing of the past. You can still go to them today if you are lucky. The Tunbridge Fair is a yearly tradition in Vermont. Back in 1761 King George III of England granted a charter to the tiny village of Tunbridge. The charter gave settlers the right to have two fairs a year once fifty families had settled there. But it was not until October 2, 1867, that the fair we know today first began. It was sponsored by the Tunbridge Agricultural Society and was referred to from the start as a "Little World's Fair." The name has stuck for these past 140 years. Originally the fair lasted only one day. Now it is spread over four. Today if you go you can see examples of old-time crafts and skills that were a part of everyday life in Tunbridge and other towns in Vermont when the fair first started. Side by side with the old are the modern fair attractions.



View of the Caledonia City Fairgrounds, St. Johnsbury, 1890s