



Historic Bakersfield & Kern County, California  
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# Origins of the Kern County Fair

## 1892-1912

v2

by Gilbert P. Gia

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***The town was vibrant in October 1892. "Never before in the history of Bakersfield has there been such hustle and excitement... Walking along Nineteenth Street in the business quarter you encounter he who runs the shooting gallery, the street fakir, the patent medicine man, the organ grinder and his monkey-- all of the same inclinations, as are the rest of us, striving for the mighty dollar. The tin-horn gambler with his***

*paste sparklers<sup>1</sup> and checker-board trousers is seen on the corners buttonholing his confiding, good-natured friend from the mountains, and giving him a tip on the right horses. ”<sup>2</sup>*

All that fuss in 1892 was about the first Kern county fair. It certainly was historically late in coming to Bakersfield. Thomas Baker had laid out the town streets nearly 30 years earlier, and the railroad arrived just eight years after that. So the problem was not transportation.

It was population. Even by 1880 less than 6,000 people lived in all of Kern County, and the Haggin vs. Lux lawsuit that started in the late 1870s was the reason. When it was resolved in the Supreme Court in 1888, and when the details were worked out about who who would get Kern River water, when, and how much, then Miller & Lux and Haggin & Carr started selling small parcels and encouraging colonization.<sup>3</sup> Population growth over the next decade made a county fair possible.

The local fair was modeled after state fairs and national expositions. Back 1854 the California legislature established

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1 costume jewelry

2 *Sumner* [Kern County] *Standard*, Oct 27, 1892

3 The California Bureau of Immigration and Colonization met as early as 1879 to coordinate immigration to California counties, [*Courier-Californian* (Bakersfield), May 8, 1879]

**the State Agricultural Society, which produced a State Fair that October at San Francisco.<sup>4</sup> Its purpose was to promote California products to the world, and each county fairs after that did the same job. Visalia, a major population hub, soon received State funding for a Tulare county fair.<sup>5</sup>**

**But early fairs also had entertainment. A visitor to an early state fair wrote, "*A noticeable feature of the fair was the gambling. Besides the usual sideshows of live snakes, big cows, fat hogs, fat women, etc., there were hundreds of fan, monte, and other gaming tables, each with their piles of silver and gold, often to the value of hundreds and even thousands of dollars, in full blast, with the crowds around. Music, females singing or dealing cards to draw the customer, liquor, noise, swearing, etc., were the accompaniments. Yet the whole fair was orderly. I never saw a fair in the East where the crowds were more orderly or so well dressed as at this.*"<sup>6</sup>**

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<sup>4</sup> Held at Music Hall at Bush and Montgomery Streets. Because roads were poor in that era, later expositions were held in Sacramento (1855), San Jose (1856), Stockton (1857), Marysville (1858), and in 1859 in Sacramento, where a six-block site was acquired that remained the site of the state fair for the next 50 years.

<sup>5</sup> Tulare County was formed in 1852. On Jun 1, 1866 Kern County was formed from portions of both Tulare Co and Los Angeles Co. Industrial exhibitions of the Mechanics' Institute at San Francisco was also a model for Kern county's first fair.

<sup>6</sup> *Up and down California in 1860-1864; the journal of William H. Brewer* (Yale U Press, 1930)

**From 1857 to 1888 the state fair went through 22 manifestations. That year Kern County sent agricultural products for the first time to the fair at San Francisco. Assisting in the Kern county exhibit were Herman Hirshfeld, Alonzo Coons, Richard Hudnut, Celsus Brower, E.M. Roberts, and Mrs. L.S. Rogers, who was pavilion manager. The giant peaches, the fiber, yarn, and ramie fabric attracted as much attention as the "admirable collection of 600 photograms by Watkins, illustrative of Kern scenery and industries."**<sup>7</sup>

**In November 1888 Kern county supervisors set aside \$500 to establish a board of trade,<sup>8</sup> and about the same time California Governor Robert Waterman appointed Bakersfield representatives to the Visalia-based, 15th Agricultural District fair. They were H. H. Fish and H. A. Blodget.<sup>9</sup>**

**In spring 1890 a Kern county fair and race track were in the planning,<sup>10</sup> and a month later a newspaper provided directions to the public on how to lay out half- and one-mile race tracks.**

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<sup>7</sup> *Kern County* [Bakersfield] *Courier*, Feb 11, 1888; *Pacific Rural Press*, Sep 22, 1888. Haggin & Carr ranches represented more than half the Kern exhibits. The corporation retained Carlton Watkins to create promotional images of Kern County to encourage immigration.

<sup>8</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, Nov 20, 1888, "Kern County Waking Up"

<sup>9</sup> Lynn Hay Rudy. *Granddad: Hugh A. Blodget in Early Bakersfield*. 1999. Jenner, California, p 114

<sup>10</sup> *Kern County* [Bakersfield] *Californian*, Apr 22, 1890

**<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, local leaders connected to Haggin & Carr agreed to put together a Kern county pavilion for the 1893 Chicago World's Fair.<sup>12</sup>**

**In fall 1890 Kern county took an exhibit to the 15th District Agricultural Association Fair at Visalia,<sup>13</sup> and that peaked interest in the upcoming California State Fair of 1891 at Sacramento. A Bakersfield newspaper wrote, "*Kern County must not be behind in the contest. Every resident can assist in some way. Whoever has fruits, minerals, handiwork or any other object of interest to show the resources of the County can add to the display. L. C. McAfee is the Kern County representative appointed by the Board of Supervisors.*"<sup>14</sup>**

**Meanwhile, the newly-established Fair Grounds Association solicited funds for construction of a race course and an exhibition hall.<sup>15</sup> The *Californian* advised, "*Kern needs to have a***

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**11 *Kern County Californian*, May 10, 1890**

**12 *Los Angeles Times*, May 7, 1890, (dated Bakersfield, May 6). The Fair was also known as the World's Colombian Exposition. Representatives included C. Brower, H.A. Jastro, A. Weill, H.A. Blodgett, W.B. Carr, H.C. Stark, A.C. Maude, W.E. Houghton, H. Hirschfield.**

**13 *Daily [Bakersfield] Californian*, Sep 6, 1890**

**14 *Daily Californian*, Jan 21, 1891**

**15 *Daily Californian*, Jan 5, 1892; the Feb 27, 1892 *Daily Californian* named the fair grounds site committee: HA Blodget, JM Reuck and E E Elliott; The association incorporated on March 2, 1892. The \$300, five year lease was recorded Oct 10, 1892 between the Kern Co Land Co and the Kern Co Fair Grounds Assn. The site was "approx. 109.61 acres" near "Levee Canal Reservation." Option to buy was \$10,964. Signing for the Kern Co Land was president Lloyd Tevis. For the Kern Co Fair Grounds Assn., president Sol Jewett and**

***share of Visalia's state money for its own fair. Bakersfield should have as good a race track as does any other city in the state. Local premiums are already coming in on subscriptions for a Kern county fair.***<sup>16</sup>

**In February 1892 the association leased, on "favorable terms," 100-plus acres of Kern County Land Company property west of Chester Avenue between the river and the SP railroad tracks.<sup>17</sup> Construction started in June for a Kern county fair, and in August the racing program and premium list went to the printer.<sup>18</sup> Tulare county was invited to this fair, but it was up to Kern county to prove it could stage a successful one on its own.<sup>19</sup>**

**In the second week of October a shipment of horses arrived,<sup>20</sup> and the Sumner Standard tooted, "ELEVEN MORE DAYS TO THE COUNTY FAIR. TRACK TO GET FINISHING TOUCH THIS WEEK."**

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secretary JM Reuck. Witness G.J. Planz. (Kern Co Hall of Records, *Lease 0002-0202*, Jun 1, 1892); The Dec 13, 1892 *Daily Californian* named other corporate officers: Hugh A. Blodget, Henry A. Jastro and Louis V. Olcese; *Daily Californian*, Jan 7, 1892

<sup>16</sup> *Daily Californian*, Feb 16, 1892

<sup>17</sup> To avoid inheritance taxes, the interests of Haggin, Tevis and Carr incorporated in Sep 1890 as the Kern County Land Company. The land is occupied today by the Kern County Museum and the sports fields north of it.

<sup>18</sup> *Daily Californian*, Aug 4, 1892. Maps from 1892 indicate the oval track as oriented northwest-southeast. Called Agricultural Park, the site was originally owned by the Jewetts.

<sup>19</sup> *Sumner Standard* [Kern County], Sep 1, 1892

<sup>20</sup> *Daily Californian*, Oct 11, 1892

Eager voices predicted that the stock show was going to be the largest of any county fair in the state. As for racing, nearly two-dozen private stables were expected to compete.<sup>21</sup>

New grandstands and a stock-show building went up, but the domestic arts had no building at the track.<sup>22</sup> Niederaur's Hall downtown had been a consideration, but it was passed over in favor of Railroad Avenue School.<sup>23</sup> There, Mrs. Dr. L.S Rogers<sup>24</sup> "with characteristic energy and executive ability" and experience gained at the state fair managed the domestic show.<sup>25</sup>

Displayed with quilts and sewing were shelves of fresh and canned and dried fruits,<sup>26</sup> and the display of school work shared a wall with beer and peach brandy. A baby show was

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21 *Sumner Standard*, Oct 13, 1892

22 The building, grandstand, judges' stand, and stables were valued at \$6,000, or the equivalent of about \$400,000 today. [*Daily Californian*, May 12, 1893]

23 Railroad Ave School became Emerson school [on Truxtun Avenue] in 1904. The site today is occupied by the county courts building.

24 *Sumner Standard* [Kern County], Oct 13, 1892; The school was on today's Truxtun Avenue between K and L. When plans were announced for a Kern Guards armory at 19<sup>th</sup> and F Streets, a newspaper wrote that it could "be utilized by the Kern County Fairgrounds Association as a pavilion in which to make their annual fair exhibits." [*Weekly (Bakersfield) Californian*, Sep 3, 1892]

25 *Sumner Standard*, Sep 1, 1892. Mrs. D. B. Rogers [of the Fair committee] has "as much executive ability as half a dozen ordinary men." [*Daily Californian*, Mar 2, 1893]. For the fair of 1892 Mrs. Doris Rogers was assisted by Mrs. SS Hunter with "home work," Mr. WE Houghton with flower exhibits, and Mrs. FA Langdon with canning arts. [*Daily Californian*, Sep 6, 1892].

26 *Daily Californian*, Nov 2, Nov 14, 1892

also planned.<sup>27</sup> In the third week of September Kern county's first fair was close to opening day when President Solomon Jewett accepted applications for the bar, lunch counter, and wheel of fortune concession.<sup>28</sup>

The opening day at the racetrack was a gala spectacle. *"The bright, clashing colors of the fair maids and matrons with their beaming countenances making the grandstand a thing of beauty. Many stylish equipages are seen, as are also some exceedingly seedy-looking rattletraps of delivery stableman turning their laid-by vehicles into use. The racing as yet amounts to level or nothing; pool selling, that make team and bookmakers all quiet. A sandstorm swept over the grounds Wednesday afternoon followed by a slight sprinkle of rain, which threatened to suspend today's program. After a short time though it had spent itself, and the clouds rolled by. The track is reported heavy, the best time recorded being two minutes thirty-two seconds."*<sup>29</sup>

The first 15th District Fair at Bakersfield, the "best on earth," electrified the town. *"Lodging houses are overcrowded,*

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<sup>27</sup> *Daily Californian*, Sep 8, 1892

<sup>28</sup> *Daily Californian*, Sep 19, 1892

<sup>29</sup> *Sumner Standard*, Oct 27, 1892

***and enterprising hotel keepers are making hay while the sun shines, and turning all possible space into remunerative use, charging therefore their most exorbitant prices. Some of our visitors tell of being compelled to walk the streets all night. The hobo, too, reports business booming. Columbus Day came and went and is entirely forgotten in the more interesting attractions of the fair. Everything is heart and soul the county fair.***<sup>30</sup>

**The domestic show in town at Railroad Avenue School was equally successful. Inside the school, behind lighted windows, Taylor's Military Band played, but there was some activity, too, under the tent was erected behind the school house. It sheltered a water fountain set in the midst of beds of flowers,<sup>31</sup> and that evening young couples tarried there. In front of the school crowds milled about as "*chattering damsels and their attractive swains*" waited to enter the exhibit."**

***[Inside]" ... to the left [is] a large square room, wherein you find a bedroom set with some exquisite needlework on exhibition. Very neatly-crocheted bedspreads covered the bed,***

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<sup>30</sup> *Sumner Standard*, Oct 27, 1892

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

***with dainty pillow shams to show to advantage the pale green coloring of the furniture. Here you also will see ... a marvel of the finest needlework coming from the deft fingers of Mrs. Robichaux in the shape of a child's white dress of the finest white mull with a deep border of Spanish drawn work interlaced with baby ribbon. It shows patient, skillful labor on the part of the worker.<sup>32</sup> You now undertake to ascend the wide old staircase amid the tuneful strains of the band seated in the hallway, and find yourself confronting the display of woodwork of A.J McLeod. Turning to the right you enter the room wherein you find on the walls the praiseworthy efforts of our 'wielders of the lavish...' The most notable feature here is the unique and original exhibition of Leet and Lang. On and around a high circular railing forming an enclosure about eight feet in diameter are arranged ... bottles of good, refreshing Buffalo Beer, which the genial Ben Leet and his jolly partner dispense with their usual good cheer to the thirsty.<sup>33</sup> The public schools of the county had one side of the room occupied with all exhibition of the penmanship and drawing of the rising***

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32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

***generation of Kern County. By the way I saw some very fine work by the Sumner school.”<sup>34</sup>***

***“In the next room ... the first work you see is that of H. Corday, the leading tailor of Bakersfield. Here you will find as fine a display of material for gentlemen's wearing apparel as can be found anywhere in the state. Judging from this exhibit of Mr. Corday's, it is entirely unnecessary for any of our citizens to send away for their attire. Nelson also has a very agreeable display of the art of photography.”<sup>35</sup>***

**In the center of the largest room the Kern County Land Company displayed the county's choicest fruits, while in an adjacent nook visitors lingered to complement Mrs. George W. Wear for her needlework. It was a banner that would accompany Charlie Maul's peaches to the World's Fair. The piece was a finely embroidered cluster of peaches and leaves on a black satin background.<sup>36</sup>**

**Separated from the other exhibits by rich, heavy curtains was an elegantly-appointed table spread with beautiful dishes painted by Mrs. George Carr. Mrs. John C. Moore's heavy**

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

silverware added to the richness, and all glimmered under the soft glow of *"various colored fairy lamps."*<sup>37</sup>

Tehachapi products occupied space across the hall. *"Here are seen some extremely large potatoes, natural salt, fine wheat, barley and oats. In the center of this room is a large pyramid of built-up sacks of flour ranging from the ordinary size to the salt-bag size from the Kern River Mills. On the north side, George Tou & Co, our Japanese merchants, have installed themselves with a gorgeous exhibition from the Orient. A very novel contrivance is suspended from the ceiling which revolves around and around. With its sea green light and pretty gold fish it presents quite an attraction."*<sup>38</sup>

Miss Jesse Shottenkirk and Miss Myrtle Walker watched over the fancy work nearby. *"These charming young ladies will show you the richly embroidered shawl worn by a maid of honor at the coronation of Mary, Queen of Scots. Here also are exhibited a set of white satin royalties painted by the Duchess of Teek. All these beautiful things, together with a magnificent Goldenberg-spread, are in the possession of Mrs. G.A Kapper.*

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

***They are indeed a treat to the sight of all lovers of fancy work.***<sup>39</sup>



Safety bicycle of 1892

**The 1892 county fair set the standard for future Kern county fairs. In 1893, the 11th Annual, 15th District Agricultural Fair at Bakersfield again was held north of town at the Kern County Land Company's racetrack on the river.<sup>40</sup> The new driving club raced their horses there, but the public also enjoyed bicycle racing.<sup>41</sup> In 1894 the fair's slogan was "Fiesta and Fair."<sup>42</sup>**

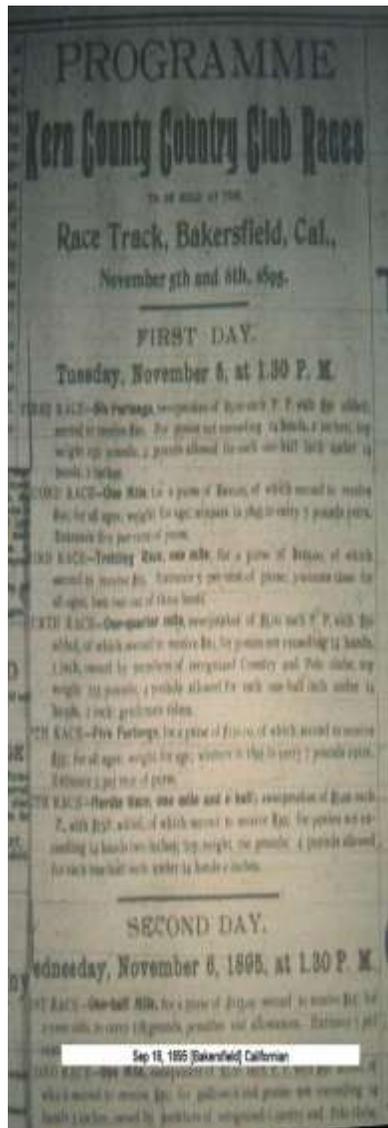
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39 *Sumner Standard*, Oct 27, 1892

40 *Daily Californian*, Oct 24, 1893

41 *Daily Californian*, May 3, 1893. Bakersfield had a bicycle club as early as 1892. [*Daily Californian*, Feb 17, 1892]

42 *Daily Californian*, Aug 16, 1894. The fair probably was held at the same venue.



**Work.” Like the earlier fairs they were not shown at the racetrack, but were set up in town, this time on the second floor and in the basement of the land company's office at 1712-19<sup>th</sup>.<sup>43</sup>**



1896

### **A Break in County Fairs**

**No fairs were held in 1896 and 1897, but a circus was in town in 1896. In spring 1897 five days of horse racing was held at the land company's track,<sup>44</sup> and in fall, excitement rose with news that Forepaugh & Sells Brothers Circus would be town.**

43 *Daily Californian*, Apr 22, 1895

44 *Daily Californian*, Mar 12, 1897

In September, however, the town council set the circus's fees so high that it canceled its Bakersfield show. The *Californian* wrote, "*...The melodious calliope will not awaken the echoes,*<sup>45</sup> *and the roaring lion will vociferate elsewhere. ...Life without an annual circus don't amount to much, and any boy will tell you that there is no joy in heaven quite so sweet as that which we have lost this year.*" The paper agreed that local coin would remain in local purses, but it pondered the pros and cons on the loss of the circus: "We shall as a community be the better off, for the circus leaves as black a trail as a prairie fire. In that much we shall be benefited, but does that compensate for what we miss?"<sup>46</sup>

Merchants had another view. Money spent during circus week did leave town with the circus, but not all of it. There was no chance for a county fair in 1897, but could local businesses afford to give up the trade they would gain from circus visitors? On the morning of September 22, clowns and riders,

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45 Possibly an allusion to *Quentin Durward* [1823] and Sir Walter Scott's character Oliver who feared to "awaken the echoes" (spirits of the past) that lurked in his apartment.

46 *Daily Californian*, Sep 4, 1897

**horses and elephants, and the animal wagons of the Forepaugh & Sells Brothers Circus paraded along Bakersfield streets.<sup>47</sup>**

**In 1898 downtown Bakersfield was destroyed by fire.<sup>48</sup> Much rebuilding followed, and perhaps for that reason the next Kern County fair did not take place until 1900.<sup>49</sup>**

**The county fairs of 1892 and 1893 featured commercial stock shows and horse racing, but not the talents of private citizens.<sup>50</sup> In fall 1900, the Kern County Land Company gave free use of its racetrack and land just south of the river for a county agricultural fair.<sup>51</sup> Committees organized. The behavior of visitors at earlier fairs might have caused problems because the 1900 fair served only "*cold temperance drinks*" at the bar and on the grandstand.<sup>52</sup>**

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**47** *Daily Californian*, Sep 21, 1897. This circus, like later ones, probably unloaded from Southern Pacific cars at Kentucky street just east of Union avenue.

**48** *Daily Californian*, Jul 14, 1898

**49** Lynn Hay Rudy private database, "Aug 4, 1899: There will not be an agricultural fair this year: only \$1400 in the account, to be saved for next year."

**50** On Oct 9, 1908 the *Bakersfield Californian* wrote, " It has been many years since anything like a fair, especially for the exhibition of the products and wealth of the county, has been held."

**51** *Daily Californian*, Aug 11, 1900. The Sears, Roebuck catalog of 1900 has no auto accessories. Sundays were reserved exclusively for bicycle and horse races.

**52** *Daily Californian*, Sep 5, 1900. Beer was considered to be a temperance drink.

**Ringling Brothers Circus played for the fair of 1901.<sup>53</sup> The fair might or might not have served alcohol, but the fair of 1902 probably did because that the summer local liquor distributors donated more than \$1,000 to the fair committee.<sup>54</sup> On October 9, 1902 the Kern County Land Company opened its improved track. It was the newest on the state racing circuit.<sup>55</sup>**

**At Indiana State Fairgrounds in 1903 Barney Oldfield was the first driver to break 60-miles an hour on a one-mile, dirt oval track.<sup>56</sup> That story must have raised local interest in automobile racing, although in spring 1905 the Bakersfield Driving Club was not yet conducting auto racing.<sup>57</sup> However, Bakersfield was not far behind the automobile craze. In October, Frank S. Snell took possession of a “genuine horseless buggy.” Its gasoline engine was a head-turner.<sup>58</sup>**

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53 Lynn Hay Rudy private database, Sep 7, 1901

54 Lynn Hay Rudy private database, Jul 2, 1902. The \$1,000 gift was equivalent to about \$30,000 today.

55 Lynn Hay Rudy private database, Jul 2, 1902

56 *Bakersfield Californian*, Jun 20, 1903. Bernard Eli Oldfield

57 *Bakersfield Californian*, May 30, 1905, “Horse Races Today”

58 *Bakersfield Californian*, Oct 4, 1905



**Richard Hudnut died in summer 1903,<sup>62</sup> and by then the property occupied only about 25 acres.**

**No information about Kern county fairs was found for the period 1903 to 1905, and in 1906 there was no fair, either.<sup>63</sup> In 1906 the Driving Association bought Hudnut's place and built a half-mile race track<sup>64</sup> and completed it by early 1907. The club announced it would be willing to host a Kern county fair on the property in October,<sup>65</sup> and it collected fees, but in the meantime the club conducted auto and horse racing.<sup>66</sup> In September the county said it would not fund a Kern county fair at Hudnut Park or anywhere else. The association reimbursed entry fees.<sup>67</sup>**

**Auto racing happened at Hudnut Park in March 1908,<sup>68</sup> but in May a weekend show included foot races, butcher-cart races<sup>69</sup>**

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**62** Jun 15, 1903 *Daily Californian*; *Morning Echo*, Jun 20, 1903; Herbert B. Hudnut, Jr. *The Life of Richard Hudnut (1828-1903), The Findings of an Historical Search*. Glens Falls Printing, 2004. (No ISBN), Kern Co Library, McGuire Local History Room.

**63** *Bakersfield Californian*, Sep 1, 1906

**64** From Lynn Hay Rudy's personal database, Sep 28, 1906, Feb 20, 1907

**65** *Bakersfield Californian*, Apr 6, 1907

**66** Lynn Hay Rudy private database, June 28, 1907; *Bakersfield Californian*, Mar 3, 1937, "Local Garage Man M.T. Debolt Recalls Racing Days Of Old Bakersfield 1907."; *Bakersfield Californian*, July 4, 1907

**67** Lynn Hay Rudy private database, Sep 17-18, 1907

**68** *Bakersfield Californian*, Mar 21, 1908, May 25, 1908

**69** Carts used in the meat business were entered by Bakersfield Market, California Market, Opera Market, and Estribou Market of Kern.

and harness racing "*by high class-horse flesh.*"<sup>70</sup> The same weekend the Automobile Dealers' Association sponsored races that attracted almost two-dozen cars.<sup>71</sup> Motor racing continued unabated,<sup>72</sup> and although newspapers still referred to Hudnut Park as "Agricultural Park,"<sup>73</sup> the site had little to do with agriculture anymore.

E.M. Roberts,<sup>74</sup> a manager of the driving club's track, thanked the Kern county board of supervisors in 1908 for favoring a county fair.<sup>75</sup> Roberts noted that neighboring farm districts had conducted their own, individual farm shows in recent years, but an all-county, week-long county fair with dances and a "good fireworks display" in the cool of the evening would benefit all residents, including local merchants. Roberts also noted that many new, county settlers had come in the past 18 months, and if they did not have much to show at the fair they could at least gain from talking to others about farming issues.<sup>76</sup>

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70 *Bakersfield Californian*, May 30, 1908

71 Dr. West's Reo and AH Dixon's Tourist took silver trophies. There was also motorcycle racing. [*Bakersfield Californian*, May 25, May 30, 1908]

72 See *Bakersfield Californian*, Jul 23, 25 and Aug 2, 1908

73 *Bakersfield Californian*, May 25, 1908

74 Roberts was a influential land owner and friend of Henry A. Jastro.

75 *Bakersfield Californian*, May 30, 1908

76 *Bakersfield Californian*, May 30, 1908

**After Robert's letter, Hudnut Park took on a larger prominence as a site for a Kern county fair. *"Looking over the track from the grandstand the view is already pleasing... Behind the park fence and the railroad, which passes just the other side, are Chinese gardens, stacks of hay and big cottonwood trees, and back of that are the Kern bluffs and a portion of the Kern river oil fields."*<sup>77</sup>**

**In September 1908 Hudnut Park Association (née the Driving Club) transferred Hudnut Park to the Kern County Agricultural Association,<sup>78</sup> and preparations for the 1908 Kern county fair at Hudnut Park were already underway. Ticket offices appeared at the entrance as well as merchant display booths of eight- and ten-foot frontage.<sup>79</sup> Horses were in new stalls and were being readied for harness races, and more horses were expected to arrive from north of town.<sup>80</sup> On the west side of the track, workmen were constructing 40 additional stalls.<sup>81</sup> Newly**

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<sup>77</sup> *Bakersfield Morning Echo*, Jul 25, 1908. Area is shown in *Index Atlas of Kern County, 1901* (Beale Library, McGuire Local History Room); The grandstand faced north-east; It is possible that the Kern Co Land Company racetrack was no longer an option as a site for the Kern county fair.

<sup>78</sup> Lynn Hay Rudy private database, Sep 18, 1908: "Driving Association to become the Kern County Agricultural Association."

<sup>79</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, Sep 15, 1908; Oct 7, 1908; *Bakersfield Californian*, Oct 9, 1908

<sup>80</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, Sep 23, 1908

<sup>81</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, Sep 15, 1908; Wealthy supporters like E.M Roberts probably provided seed money. This fair was designed to be self-funded through ticket sales and business contributions. The role of the County of Kern is not known.

designated as race-starter was the city recorder, W.H. Thomas, who had applied for credentials with the National Trotting Association.<sup>82</sup>

*The Californian* wrote, "The Santa Fe is to have special round-trip rate for the fair for all stations between Johannesburg and Fresno to Bakersfield and return. The SP might follow with same offer. With gate receipts, an extremely good fair can be given."<sup>83</sup>

Three canvas-covered pavilions were brought in from Los Angeles to house domestic exhibits. One sheltered tables of home arts such as needle work, drawings, painting, and the ledgers and spaces along the walls of the tent held pictures and fancy work. One wall was devoted to quilts.<sup>84</sup> In another tent were boxes of "monster" pears from the Tehachapi farm of J.W. Lovejoy, and next to them was an operating, miniature electric mill. Mr. Eardly of the Kern River Flour Mills ground wheat into

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82 *Bakersfield Californian*, Sep 18, 1908. FB Fussell, advertising agent and secretary for the races, assisted W.G. Lutz.

83 *Bakersfield Californian*, Sep 19, 1908. The adult ticket was fifty-cents, the equivalent of about \$12 today. "Season ticket for ladies \$2; men \$3.50. Evening tickets 25-cents. Family season ticket, \$3.50." Admission was free for children aged eight and under "when accompanied by parents or guardian." [*Bakersfield Californian*, Oct 7, 1908]

84 *Bakersfield Californian*, Oct 9, 1908

**flour, made dough, and baked bread in ovens nearby the pavilion.<sup>85</sup>**

**The Tracy Stock and Ostrich farm near Buttonwillow displayed live ostriches and demonstrated the preparation of feathers for marketing.<sup>86</sup> A newspaper wrote, "*It has been many years since anything like a fair, especially for the exhibition of the products and wealth of the county has been held....*"<sup>87</sup>**

**Another tent held a complete line of Fairbanks-Morse gasoline engines and pumps, some from the Weed Pump & Engine Company of Porterville and others Morton Gas Engine of Fresno.<sup>88</sup> Just on the right of the main entrance was a pavilion containing general ranch products and merchandise from local businesses.<sup>89</sup>**

**Some of the livestock were blue-ribbon horses and cattle that had been winners at other fairs.<sup>90</sup> Dairy cows chewed placidly next to their butterfat awards, and onlookers nearby marveled**

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**85** *Bakersfield Californian*, Sep 28, 1908

**86** *Bakersfield Californian*, Oct 7, 1908; Oct 9, 1908: "According to Mr. William Tracy, ostrich farming is one of the county's industries now."

**87** *Bakersfield Californian*, Oct 9, 1908

**88** *Ibid.*

**89** *Ibid.*

**90** *Ibid.*

at a prize, 2,300-pound black Percheron.<sup>91</sup> Other animals included prize-winning sheep, goats, and swine,<sup>92</sup> and the poultry pens boasted many popular varieties.<sup>93</sup> A number of small boys exhibited their pigeons.<sup>94</sup>

Planning for the midway started back on October 1st when G. Lute, A.W. MacRae and Ed Fussel arrived from Fresno and reported to veteran amusement-man Steve Woods of Oakland, "the greatest show-man on earth since the demise of PT Barnum."<sup>95</sup> By opening day, 20 sideshows occupied both sides of the access road between the ticket gate and the grandstand. The effervescent pike simmered with lion tamers, snake charmers, palmists, coon shouters,<sup>96</sup> knife games, the Salome dance, a Ferris wheel, merry-go-round and "*all the other side shows of a modern circus.*"<sup>97</sup> Weddings took place in what was called the lion's den, and well-known Bakersfield couples lined up for that honor.<sup>98</sup>

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91 *Bakersfield Californian*, Sep 28, 1908. A draft horse

92 *Bakersfield Californian*, Oct 9, 1908

93 *Ibid.*

94 *Ibid.*

95 *Bakersfield Californian*, Oct 7, 1908

96 A genre of music in the United States from 1880 to 1920 that presented a racist and stereotyped image of Blacks. [Wikipedia]

97 *Bakersfield Californian*, Oct 1, 1908

98 *Bakersfield Californian*, Oct 9, 1908

Each afternoon a Fresno aeronaut made a balloon ascension, performed comical aerial acts and made a parachute drop. Wrote the newspaper, "*Not a single unsuccessful attempt has yet been made.*" At night, visitors watched "*the slide for life through fire,*" and delighted at the antics of Madame Wanda's troop of trained dogs.<sup>99</sup>

Out on the track, long-distance bicycle races and horse racing were favorites, but on Friday, October 16th, motorcycles and automobiles drew huge crowds.<sup>100</sup> E.P. Brinegar, Pacific Coast agent for Chalmers Automobile Company of Detroit, assisted his driver in a double-round-trip road race from Hudnut park to Famoso and back.<sup>101</sup>

In one race, motorcycle riders roared around the half-mile Hudnut track for fully 20 minutes until a gun was fired to actually start the race.<sup>102</sup> In interims between races Mr. Tilton's Sixth Regiment Band played, and when the races ended at 9 pm, the band played on for dancing 'til midnight.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, Sep 23, 1908

<sup>101</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, Sep 29, 1908

<sup>102</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, Sep 25, 1908

<sup>103</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, Oct 1, 1908

The 1908 Kern county fair at Hudnut Park ended, but auto and motorcycle racing continued there through December. Some of them were innovative. "For the motorcycle event, riders will stop at the end of each lap, dismount their machines, eat a half a pie, and then ride on for another lap. The race will be for two miles, which will mean the consumption of two pies per rider."<sup>104</sup>

The image shows a newspaper clipping with the title "Race Records for 16 Years" and an illustration of a vintage open-top automobile. Below the title is a table with the following columns: Year, Race, Distance, Car, and Miles per hour. The table lists various races from 1901 to 1916, including Santa Fe race, Florida Cup, Vanderbilt, and Times Herald.

Year	Race	Distance	Car	Miles per hour
1901	Santa Fe race	200 mi.	National	50.00
1902	Florida Cup	100 mi.	National	50.00
1903	Santa Fe race	200 mi.	Lezier	50.00
1904	Florida Cup	100 mi.	Lezier	50.00
1905	Florida Cup	100 mi.	Lezier	50.00
1906	Florida Cup	100 mi.	Lezier	50.00
1907	Florida Cup	100 mi.	Lezier	50.00
1908	Florida Cup	100 mi.	Lezier	50.00
1909	Florida Cup	100 mi.	Lezier	50.00
1910	Florida Cup	100 mi.	Lezier	50.00
1911	Florida Cup	100 mi.	Lezier	50.00
1912	Florida Cup	100 mi.	Lezier	50.00
1913	Florida Cup	100 mi.	Lezier	50.00
1914	Florida Cup	100 mi.	Lezier	50.00
1915	Florida Cup	100 mi.	Lezier	50.00
1916	Florida Cup	100 mi.	Lezier	50.00

Race records, *Morning Echo*, May 2, 1912

Advances in auto technology eventually made Hudnut Park an obsolete track. Average race speeds between 1895 and 1908 increased from 7 to 70 mph, and a local writer observed, "The track at Hudnut park is considered a good one, but, being only a half-mile track with rather sharp turns, the element of danger is regarded as too great to permit speed. This winter an effort

<sup>104</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, Nov 27, 1908

***may be made to organize an automobile club...and efforts to build a suitable racecourse will immediately be considered.*"<sup>105</sup>**

**In 1909 much of Hudnut Park was surrounded by city lots and streets, but reasonably-priced land with ample space for the building of a new, modern racetrack was not far away. <sup>106</sup>**

**Automobile enthusiasts and merchants agreed that such a track would make Bakersfield a "*high-class automobile racing center.*"<sup>107</sup> The land in mind was the Kern County Land Company's old racetrack on Chester Avenue, the facing and stock show site of the 1892 Kern county fair.**

**Action at Hudnut Park continued, nevertheless, and its future as a site for the county fair seemed assured. On July Fourth 1909, reporter Donald McGregor made a parachute jump from a balloon suspended over the half-mile track,<sup>108</sup> and a few days later the agricultural association announced construction of new buildings there.<sup>109</sup> The 1909 Kern county fair at Hudnut Park was elaborate and successful. <sup>110</sup>**

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**105 *San Francisco Call*, 25 Dec 1908**

**106 *Ibid.***

**107 *Ibid.***

**108 *Historic Kern*, Dec 1954, [Quarterly of the Kern County Historical Society]**

**109 *Bakersfield Californian*, July 21, 1909**

**110 See *Bakersfield Californian*, Sept 8-9, 1909**



1948 aerial of Bakersfield. Fair sites noted

**In December, Barney Oldfield brought his car to Hudnut Park and set a world's record on a half-mile, oval track: 51 miles an hour.<sup>111</sup> In 1910 the first aviation meet ever in the San Joaquin Valley occurred at Bakersfield, and Charles K. Hamilton flew his Curtis biplane over the Hudnut Park grandstand to the "*delight and vociferous applause of 8,000 enthusiastic spectators.*"<sup>112</sup> Horse races there in February 1910 included another balloon ascension and a fireworks show.<sup>113</sup>**

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111 *Bakersfield Californian*, Dec 29, 1909

112 San Francisco Call, Jan 31, 1910

113 Lynn Hay Rudy, op cit. *Bakersfield Californian*, Feb 23, 1910

**Hudnut Park was busy, but it could never be a major racing site. When the Driving Association built the track in 1908, few suspected the enormous, public appeal of motor racing and its associated, debilitating effect on the sport of horse racing.**

**If the association had built a one-mile track, an easy transition to high-speed auto racing might have been possible,<sup>114</sup> but other factors also were working against the park. The state highway from the north was building toward Bakersfield, and it would enter Bakersfield by way of Roberts Lane and North Chester Avenue. None of that traffic would pass Hudnut Park.**

**Sometime between February and June 1910 the County of Kern bought Hudnut Park, the pavilions, stables and the old Hudnut house from the Agricultural Association. The land became an experimental farm for Kern County High School.<sup>115</sup> Four-horse scraper teams plowed and leveled the track, removed the fencing, and tore down the sheds and stalls. Only the Hudnut house and the machinery pavilion remained.<sup>116</sup>**

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**114 *Bakersfield Californian*, Aug 2, 1910**

**115 *Bakersfield Californian*, Jun 8-9, 1910**

**116 *Morning Echo*, Sep 28, 1910; *Bakersfield Californian*, Sep 29, 1910. In summer 1935 State Div. of Forestry buildings were completed the grounds of old Hudnut Park. The buildings were later occupied by the Californian Highway Patrol and by the Kern County Fire Dept. [*History of the Kern Co Fire Department 1927-1974*, [Kern Co Fire**



KC Fire Department-Forestry Office on the old Hudnut Park grounds, Golden State Highway and O Street

**Bakersfield merchants were responsible for the town being added to the California auto-racing circuit. On the July Fourth 1911, about a year after Hudnut Park disappeared, the Kern County Merchants Association sponsored a 150-mile, cross-county race.<sup>117</sup> The round-trip from downtown followed Chester avenue north and ascended China Grade before returning to the center of town.<sup>118</sup>**

**Organizers predicted that 15 - 20,000 fans would line the 14-lap route, but watching the race was not the only activity. Although wagering on horse races was illegal, wagering on cars was not, and the day of the race "*...several thousand dollars changed hands on the result of the races from the crowds around the Judge's stands alone, while betting was brisk all along the course.*"<sup>119</sup> The race was followed by another big one in 1912, and it was even better attended.<sup>120</sup>**

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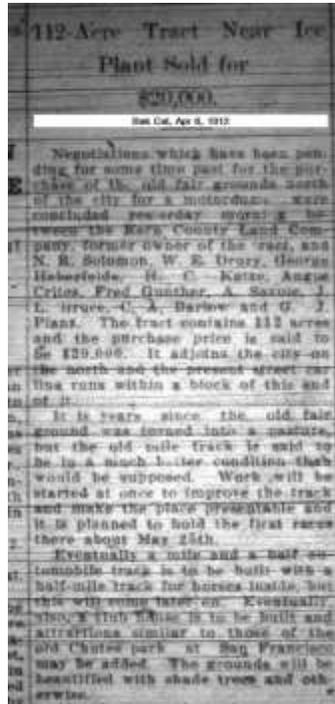
Dept., 1974]; Today that area is occupied by the Kern County Engineering and Surveying Services building at 2700 M St.

117 *Official Program, First Annual Celebration*, Jul 4, 1911, [Kern County Museum, pamphlet file "Bakersfield Sports"]

118 *Bakersfield Californian*, May 4, 1911

119 *Bakersfield Californian*, Jul 4-5, 1911

120 The race is described in detail in "The Washington's Birthday Road Race," the first chapter of *Oildorado* by William Rintoul [Valley Publishers, Fresno, 1978]



Old fairgrounds sold, 1912

## A New Fairground by the River

Word on the street said a new automobile race track would be built. In April, Bakersfield Development Company bought 112-acres of Kern County Land Company property west of Chester Avenue and south of the river. The fair's race track would be transformed into a modern motordrome. The *Californian* wrote, *"It is years since the old fairgrounds was turned into a pasture, but the old mile-track is said to be in much better condition than would be supposed."*<sup>121</sup> The next step occurred when the development company leased the property to the Kern County

121 *Bakersfield Californian*, Apr 5-6, 1912

**Automobile Racing Association, and the association immediately opened the one-mile track for auto racing. It had been the scene of many hard-fought horse races, but it would soon enough be extended to a mile and three-quarters for serious auto racing. Grand stands were constructed in May 1912.** <sup>122</sup>

**On Chester Avenue north of the tracks a reinforced concrete bridge at the river was nearly finished, and Supervisor Henry Jastro assured everyone that the new State highway soon would pass over it.** <sup>123</sup> **The basics were in place for a permanent home for racing and the Kern county fair.**



Mercer racecar, Bakersfield 1916. From the author's Dutch Holloway image collection

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122 *Bakersfield Californian*, Apr 5-6, 1912. A half-mile horse racing track would be built inside the one-mile track. [Apr 5-6, 1912]

123 *Morning Echo*, Jun 29, 1912, pg 6, col 4