On October 7, 1944, G. W. (Buck) Mann, Jr., stood talking with a representative of Hon. Nathan Mayo, Commissioner of Agriculture, and on that day the hoping and thinking that had been going on about an agricultural show pavilion in this area of Florida turned into activity which has culminated in the facilities, not yet completed, but which are being used for the first time to stage the Polk County Youth Fair.

Following the October 7th meeting, the Livestock Committee of the Bartow Chamber of Commerce headed by W. H. Stuart, Chairman, met with Mr. Mayo in Winter Haven on November 18, 1944. Mr. Mayo made a proposal in which he asked the committee to help make the project a state, county and city effort in keeping with his state-wide plan for similar areas surrounding such other points as Quincy, Ocala, Orlando and Belle Glade.

The City of Bartow responded, immediately by donating the Pavilion site and a cash contribution to the building fund. The County of Polk heartily endorsed the project and backed it with the financial assistance requested. Individual citizens - cattlemen, merchants, fruit growers and others have likewise contributed generously.

On December 5, 1944, Joe Taylor, hardworking Secretary of the Bartow Chamber of Commerce helped arrange a meeting between the livestock committee and Mr. W. L. Wilson, Director of State Markets, and Col. M. B. Hawkins, Construction Engineer. The title to the Pavilion site is held by the Florida Agricultural Marketing Board of which Mr. Wilson is secretary. On this occasion the building site was approved and Mr. Wilson made the first public announcement regarding this project. He has cooperated fully, and Col. Hawkins has worked many hours on the building plans. As the building has progressed toward completion, E. S. Rydholm, Supervisor of Construction for State Markets has given much assistance.

During the time of the introductory conferences, sketches and blue prints of show pavilions and exhibit buildings from all over the country were being accumulated for study and guidance.

On January 11, 1945, the committee met with Mr. L. H. Lewis, Livestock & Field Crops Specialist, Florida State Marketing Bureau. As he was Mr. Mayo’s representative with whom we had our first talk, he has from the beginning worked with us in every way to help make these facilities adequately serve the needs of this area of the State. Mr. Lewis suggested that before drawing any plans he would like for the committee to see the new pavilion then being completed in Valdosta, Georgia. Consequently, on February 21, 1945, twenty-nine enthusiastic citizens went to Valdosta. Practically every man on the trip made a written report and suggestions which were studied by the building committee.

A building and planning committee composed of Buck Mann, Chairman, Sam Clark, C. E. (Tiny) Williams, Paul Hayman, L. G. Carlton and W. H. Stuart, ex-officio member, went to work on plans. A. Alex Hatton, a former Bartow boy now located in Orlando, was engaged as architect.

Many sketches were drawn and much time has elapsed since plans were started, but scarcity of materials, priorities, gray market prices, lack of funds and many other obstacles have not been able to diminish enthusiasm or stop the project.

In November 1947, W. H. Stuart took Clay Gardenhire to Tallahassee where the basic contract for the barn and arena were awarded to Gardenhire Brothers. The members of this Bartow firm have manifested the same interest in the project as the building committee and by doing many seemingly impossible things have brought the building to its present stage of completion.

We are not celebrating the completion of the project, but possibly only its beginning, and as Mr. Mayo turns the key to the pavilion over to the people of this area of Florida, may its inaugural use by our young citizens be symbolic of the use and growth of these facilities through the coming years.

We can be thankful for a State, a County, a City and a Citizenship that march forward together.
This study was respectfully submitted by Mr. W. H. Stuart June 1, 1978.

A genuine self-study of the Polk County Youth fair will include a study of its origin, its original objectives and their place in the growth and development of the Fair.

A basic understanding of its history and purpose appears to be essential to a proper understanding of the Fair as it exists today.

In Polk County, as early as 1944 (earlier in some regions of the state) plans were being initiated by the late Honorable Nathan B. Mayo, State Commissioner of Agriculture, for a regional livestock and crops pavilion. The response of the Polk County agricultural interest, supported by the Board of County Commissioners, the County School Board, the City of Bartow, and interested citizens was so wholehearted that plans moved rapidly toward the reality of such a facility located in Bartow.

The need for a place to hold fairs, shows, sales, and meetings for people in agriculture was becoming more and more urgent. The cattle industry was thriving, the number of registered herds was growing, 4-H Club activities were expanding. Future Farmers of America and Future Homemakers of America chapters were being organized in a number of high schools.

The facility to provide offices for the agricultural services of the county and to meet the requirements for adult and youth activities in agriculture and home economics was being built at the same time that the activities were being developed. The original contract for the barn and part of the arena of the present facility was awarded in November 1947.

By coincidence, the Annual Polk County Youth Fair had its beginning on November 7, 1947. The proposed pavilion was only on a blueprint in the hands of a building contractor at that time and consequently the first Fair was held on the site of what was then Hughes Field Armory on North Broadway in Bartow.

Plans for the first Fair, which was called “Polk County Youth Agricultural Show” has been in the making for months prior to the one-day show held on November 7.

Because of his involvement and his guidance and management of the Polk County Youth Fair through the 17th Annual Fair, W. Paul Hayman, Polk County Agricultural Agent from February 1933 to July 1963, has been credited with originating the idea of having a youth fair. It does not detract from the importance of the part he played when he will quickly and quietly tell you that he was only one of those nearest to it to whom such an idea appealed. He always includes the names of the late Harper Kendrick, who was Assistant County Agent, and Grover Howell, who was Vocational Agricultural Counselor at the Bartow High School, among the founders.

The full history of the Fair is an important story. All of the people who have been involved and who
have been responsible are a part of the Fair story. It is hoped that a full history can be written and periodically updated, not only as a record of achievement and recognition of those who have guided its course and executed its program, but as a guide and inspiration to those on whom the future of the Fair depends.

The conclusion has to be drawn that the original idea of having a youth fair and its implementation through thirty-one Annual Polk County Youth Fairs has been good. It should be noted the first Fair was held in November, the next twelve were held in early December, and now for the last eighteen years the dates for the Fair have been in March.

From the beginning the concept of the Fair has been to provide a means for the youth of Polk County, in boys’ and girls’ 4-H Clubs and in chapters of Future Farmers of America and Future Homemakers of America, to display exhibits of their work in agricultural and home economics projects, and to compete as individuals with one another and against the highest standards of perfection in a program “serving to promote the educational development of the youth of the county.” Participation has been expanded to include all home economics classes in the schools. Youth of the county are eligible to participate in the Fair only as an extension of the educational program of the particular youth activity in which they are enrolled. The Fair has been the test time. A time of measurement. A time of comparison. A time of recognition.

Stress has been placed on competition with perfection rather than with another competitor. To this end, the Fair has tried to hold consistently to the principle of the Danish System of judging. While there have been variations of it and some deviation from it, this system is considered appropriate as an educational tool toward the attainment of excellence.

From the experience of the very earliest Fairs and from observation of fairs in other counties, it was decided that competition in the Fair would be on an individual basis rather than on an organization basis. This means competition between chapters of Future Farmers of America, between 4-H Clubs and the like, has been avoided. Each of these organizations has been essential to the Fair but focus has been on their members rather than on them. This plan not only has heightened competition for the young people, but has created an atmosphere which appeals to the interest of spectators and others who give personal and financial support to the Fair.

In furtherance of its educational objectives, the Fair has consistently resisted any inclination to allow a commercial carnival to be one of the attractions at the Fair. It has been considered that no financial benefit to the Fair from a permit fee could compensate for the distraction from the main educational purpose and the risk of introducing an unsavory element to the fairgrounds. For the purpose of providing entertainment for young people attending the Fair but not occupied with participation in some other activity, Fun Day provides wholesome activities with the purpose of the Fair.

Historically, some of the major objectives of the Fair for the youth of Polk County have included the following:

1. To encourage and foster an understanding and appreciation of quality and excellence in workmanship and in products.
2. To instill a sense of fairness and honesty in the Fair activities of entering and competing with others.
3. To develop personal responsibility and dependability in all Fair Participants.

These and similar objectives have required the formulation of standards of eligibility and rules and regulations governing participation in the Fair.

In determining standards, the Fair has relied heavily on the selection of knowledgeable judges believed to
be competent. In the carrying out of rules and regulations, the Fair has sought the cooperation and support of parents, teachers and advisors.

The question has been asked: “How can the Polk County Youth Fair involve so many adults and serve so many of our young people on such a low budget?” The operating budget in the last six years has gradually increased from $9,342 in 1973 to approximately $20,000 in 1978.

There are perhaps two answers to this question. On is that the funds available have been carefully managed. Sacrifices have been made in order to stay within the budget. Through the years this has been true and now, after thirty-one Fairs, there is no deficit or debt and, on the contrary, there is a small surplus retained as a contingency reserve. The other answer is that literally hundreds of leaders, teachers, counselors, agents, judges, parents, students and interested citizens give generously of their time and talents.

Through the years the Fair has received funds from a number of sources. The principal regular sources are as follows:

1. Board of County Commissioners
2. State Department of Agriculture
3. Rotary Club Concession Stand
4. Official Program Advertising
5. Booster Program

In addition there have been special gifts, primarily for capital needs.

Historically, the financing of the Fair has been successful, but the uncertainty of government grants, the certainty of inflation, and the normal growth requirements of the Fair suggest a consideration of alternate sources and greater amounts of income.

Due to the extreme variation in the exhibits and activities of the Fair, there has always been a concern to achieve a measure of balance so that one type of project or activity will not be overemphasized to the neglect of another. This has been difficult due to a number of reasons, such as the difference between animate and inanimate exhibits, the difference between products of hand skills and products of land cultivation, and the difference in spectator appeal. Considering these and other operating factors, it is believed that the consensus would conclude that the Fair is run in a very acceptable manner.

However, each Fair is a new experience and vigilance will have to be exercised to enable the Fair to live up to its reputation and to its own standards.

The strengths of the Fair appear very definitely to outweigh its weaknesses, and the cumulative good that it has done for thousands of young people since it began is almost immeasurable.

With dedication on the part of every person responsible, the Fair can be made more and more valuable to the community it serves.

In these times of permissiveness and lack of discipline, the Fair should have a message and provide an experience for the youth of Polk County at a time of greatest need. It is hoped that the historical purposes and objectives of the Fair can be more clearly articulated and more effectively achieved.

It is recommended:

That the Fair be continued with aggressive plans for its improvement
That achievement in quality and excellence be the prevailing spirit in every activity of the Fair;
That each activity be designed or redesigned within the framework of the expressed purposes and
objectives of the Fair.