

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 98001594

Date Listed: 1/8/99

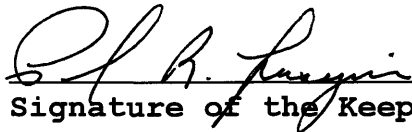
Kittitas County Fairgrounds
Property Name

Kittitas
County

WA
State

N/A
Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.


Signature of the Keeper

1/8/99
Date of Action

=====
Amended Items in Nomination:

Resource Count:

The count is revised to read: two contributing structures--grandstand & racing oval with no contributing sites.

Significance:

Criterion C is deleted from the nomination. [The significance of the property in association with community development and boosterism (as addressed in the current nomination) is more appropriately considered under Criterion A.]

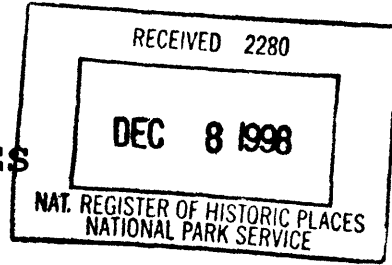
This information was confirmed with the Washington SHPO.

DISTRIBUTION:

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**



1594

1. Name of Property

historic name KITTITAS COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS

other names/site number KITTITAS COUNTY FAIR & RODEO GROUNDS HISTORIC DISTRICT

2. Location

street & number 512 N. Poplar Street not for publication

city or town Ellensburg vicinity

state Washington code WA county Kittitas code 037

zip code 98926

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

 ACTING SAPO 11.24.98
Signature of certifying official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register
- See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register

 other (explain):
 Signature of Keeper 11/8/99 Date of Action

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5. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<u>7</u>	<u>5</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object		<u> </u> objects
		<u>9</u>	<u>8</u> total

Name of related multiple property listing NA Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: RECREATION & CULTURE Sub: Fair
Sports facility

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: RECREATION & CULTURE Sub: Fair
Sports facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH & EARLY 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN:
Bungalow/Craftsman

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE
roof METAL: aluminum
walls WOOD: weatherboard
shingle
other _____

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

X A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

X C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

B removed from its original location.

C a birthplace or a grave.

D a cemetery.

E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

F a commemorative property.

G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

AGRICULTURE

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

Period of Significance

1923-1948

Significant Dates 1923

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

NA

Architect/Builder

various

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
 previously listed in the National Register
 previously determined eligible by the National Register
 designated a National Historic Landmark
 recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

- State Historic Preservation Office
 Other State agency
 Federal agency
 Local government
 University
 Other

Name of repository: Kittitas County Fair Office, Ellensburg, WA

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property c. 18

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing	
1	10	687510	5207900	3	10	687530	5207520
2	10	687880	5207900	4	_____	_____	_____

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Florence K. Lentz, based on information submitted by Historic Ellensburg, for

organization Office of Archaeology & Historic Preservation date August, 1998

street & number 107 E. 17th Ave., WA telephone 509-925-3944

city or town Ellensburg state WA zip code 98926

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Additional Documentation

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Kittitas County Board of Commissioners

street & number 205 W. Fifth Avenue telephone 509-962-7508

city or town Ellensburg state WA zip code 98926

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7. Narrative Description

The Kittitas County Fairgrounds is a complex of simple, wood-frame structures and informal landscaping situated in the heart of Ellensburg, Washington, the county seat. The site is bordered to the east and southeast by the sandy slope of Craig's Hill, and to the west by the grassy open space of the city's Memorial Park. Tree-lined streets of surrounding, older residential neighborhoods abut the irregular property line of the fairgrounds on the north and west.

The original eighteen acres acquired by Kittitas County lay just outside the eastern city limits of Ellensburg. A portion of the tract had been platted in early 1890s, but the land remained undeveloped. Sagebrush, riverine vegetation, and a winding, flood-prone stream, characterized the site. In earlier times, native peoples reportedly used this protected location to corral and pasture horses during their annual gatherings in the Kittitas Valley.

The historic district includes all of the original eighteen-acre tract, as well as some of the additional parcels of land acquired by the County in later years along the western and northern perimeters of the site. The district encompasses the historic core features of the Kittitas County Fair, the northeastern barn complex associated with the management of the Ellensburg Rodeo, and present and previous Yakama "teepee village" areas related to the annual fair and rodeo. There are nine contributing features, and eight non-contributing features. Five of the latter are visually compatible, but were constructed within the last fifty years, thus falling outside the historic period.

Natural Setting

The initial development of the Kittitas County Fairgrounds in the summer of 1923 took advantage of some of the natural features of the site, and transformed others. The alluvium bank of Craig's Hill - some fifty to sixty feet in height - formed a natural amphitheater for the rodeo arena below. This hillside still creates an intimate scale for which the fairgrounds are well-known today. The natural course of Wilson Creek was re-channeled closer to the base of the hill to allow construction of the horse-racing oval. Several rustic bridges were built across the stream at that time. Wilson Creek is still visible at the northeast and southwest corners of the fairgrounds, but the stream now flows

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largely underground. A quarter-mile "scenic driveway" was cut all along the face of Craig's Hill, and is still partially in use today as a dramatic entry into the rodeo arena.

In 1923, workers graded and leveled the race track, infield, and sites for the exhibit buildings. The sparse natural vegetation was pruned and trimmed. Today, mature maple, birch, cedar, and fir trees stand in clusters, particularly near the main entrance to the fairgrounds at the foot of Sixth Avenue. Open, green grassy areas link the entire complex. During fair and rodeo days, the open greens are alive with patrons, concessions, and outdoor events.

An important visual complement to the fairgrounds setting is the City of Ellensburg's Memorial Park. The park occupies more than a half city block along the western edge of the fairgrounds, between Sixth and Seventh Avenues. A portion of the park was in fact planned, acquired, and developed at the same time as the fairgrounds. In the early years of the fair and rodeo, Yakama Indians annually camped in the park in a large "teepee village." Today, with the traditional Indian Village situated further to the east and north, the carnival rides spread out amongst the trees and play areas of the park. Then as now, the mature stands of maples and the green open spaces create a park-like setting and buffered gateway to the fairgrounds from the neighborhoods to the west.

General Layout and Structural Character

The essential design of the Kittitas County Fairgrounds reflects the layout established in 1923 by the Kittitas County engineer, W.T. Bowman. The defining feature remains the rodeo arena, with its oval race track, infield, and covered wooden grandstand oriented to the north. A second core cluster of historic period structures is situated just behind the grandstand to the south. Here, two original wood-frame exhibition buildings face a row of three handsome livestock barns across a broad green. This triangular space, hemmed in by the slope of Craig's Hill running southwest to northeast, and bordered by the grandstand, barns, and exhibit halls, is the heart of the historic district.

Through this triangular open space runs the straightened channel of Wilson Creek, now underground. Historic photos indicate that this green served as the fair's first midway, where simple concessions and later small carnival rides were set up. A second axis was established along the open green west of the exhibit buildings and racing oval, adjacent to the city park. Here larger

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carnival rides such as the ferris wheel were located. Today, both of these greens act as circulation routes and concession areas during fair and rodeo.

The simple bungalow-era character of the wooden fair buildings, put up in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, sets the tone for the entire fairgrounds. Although various alterations have been made to individual buildings, traditional forms and materials are still visible in the gable roofs, bracketed overhanging eaves, ridge ventilators, continuous roof monitors, rustic drop siding, and the familiar paint schemes of barn red with white trim. In all three of the early livestock barns, sturdy timber framing members of lengthy, clear-grained fir are visible.

A few minor features of the fairgrounds' historic core have been removed, according to Sanborn Co. fire insurance maps from 1928 and 1949. Small temporary barns, a "wild life cage," tool sheds, and early restrooms have disappeared. Historic maps and photos show a series of open wooden bleachers set into the slope of Craig's Hill at the east end of the rodeo arena. These remained in place for several decades, but have since been removed owing to the continuing erosion of the hillside. A seven-foot high board fence enclosed the north and west sides of the racing oval through the 1940s.

New construction has occurred fairly steadily over the years around the periphery of the historic core, most of it traditional and non-intrusive in character. Two small, gable-roofed post-1950s barns now flank either end of barn row. At the base of Craig's Hill, a cluster of simple pioneer structures moved in from around the Kittitas Valley has been assembled in a wood-fenced enclosure. "Frontier Village" is a popular attraction during fair and rodeo. To the west of the historic core, toward the main gate, three buildings have been added since 1972, including the fair office and public restrooms, a large indoor riding arena called "Bloom Pavilion," and a wooden gazebo which serves as a bandstand and outdoor stage.

Changes have occurred over time in the rodeo arena as well. By 1946, corrals, additional bleacher seating, and a bandstand had been built in the infield. In the 1950s, 1960s, and again in 1992, new grandstands and bleachers were added to accommodate ever-increasing crowds at the Ellensburg Rodeo. All of the additional seating takes the form of metal grandstands, some of them covered, some open. North of the arena out of general public view, two older wood-framed horse barns with unpainted board-and-batten siding are used by the Rodeo Directors. One of these barns appears to date back at least to 1946.

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Contributing and Non-Contributing Features

Contributing Features Contributing features were present during the fairgrounds' period of significance (1923 through 1948), relate to its documented significance, and retain historic integrity.

1. Racing Oval -

Laid out 1923. One-third mile-long, dirt race track and infield.

The race track and infield were designed for multiple use, the first being the 1923 "Wild West Rodeo" at the Kittitas County Fair. For some years, the infield was planted in grass and served as a football field for the local high school and State Normal School. Historic photos reveal a series of wooden announcer and timers' stands placed in front of the main grandstand. By the mid-1940s, corrals, a bandstand, seating over the bucking chutes, and bleachers began to appear in the infield. In addition to the annual Ellensburg Rodeo, the track and infield still receive year-around use by community equestrian groups.

2. Main Grandstand -

Constructed 1923, 1924, and 1935. Heavy timber and wood frame construction, with gabled canopy roof, drop siding. 300.5 feet by 35 feet. Original clear fir beams, columns, wood plank tread and riser seating intact. Finished and unfinished exhibit spaces below seating.

The original grandstand was built for the community's first organized rodeo, the main attraction at the 1923 Kittitas County Fair. It was situated at the home stretch on the south side of the track, measured 120 feet in length, and provided seating for 1400. The local newspaper called it "a very pretentious affair." The size of the grandstand was doubled to the west the following year. In 1935, a third and final addition was made, again to the west end, this one distinguishable by its trussed canopy structural design.

Exhibit areas underneath the seating evolved through the years. In the 1950s, the rear of the grandstand was faced with western storefronts. These have been removed, and the three primary structural openings providing access through to the bleachers are the dominant feature of that elevation. The space under the 1935 addition has been finished to house fine arts exhibits during

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fair and rodeo time, and to provide heated social space during the off-season. Restrooms, a beer hall, and unfinished storage space occupy the remainder of the backside of the grandstand.

3. Home Arts Building -

Constructed 1923. Wood frame, with gabled roof, bracketed eaves and two roof ventilators. 69 feet by 121 feet. Temporarily sheathed with vertical seamed siding.

The annual report of the county extension agent described this as a "fine, modern, permanent exhibition building." Historic photos show the original exterior appearance unaltered through the 1950s. The building was faced with a combination of drop siding and, at the upper levels, wood shingled siding. All around its perimeter were groupings of three and four small casement windows with multiple-pane sash. Descriptions of the time noted the "English cottage" character of the building, and its rustic bungalow design. Along the east side was an open, shed-roofed overhang. Inside, the space was left unfinished and open to the rafters.

Today, the building has applied metal sheathing on the exterior, and the overhang has been enclosed to create more interior floor space. All window openings remain in place behind the sheathing, and some of the multi-paned casement sash remains on site. This building is used for domestic arts and commercial exhibits during fair and rodeo.

4. 4-H and FFA Building -

Constructed 1924. Wood frame, with gabled roof, bracketed eaves and two roof ventilators. 60.5 feet by 133 feet. Temporarily sheathed with vertical seamed metal siding.

In June of 1924, the local newspaper reported that "work on the construction of the exhibit building, of similar architecture and size as the one built last year has reached the preliminary stage, the foundation has been prepared and concrete for the pillars poured." The second exhibit building was identical in form, materials, and fenestration. This building, its earlier twin, or perhaps both were constructed by prolific local builder William O. Ames, whose name appears as "designer" on one partial and undated set of original drawings. Agricultural exhibits of 4-H and FFA children are housed here during the fair.

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5. Cattle and Swine Barn -

Constructed 1926. Heavy timber and wood frame construction, with bracketed eaves and continuous roof monitor. 200' by 50.5'. Drop siding, and hatch style windows along either side. Metal over wood shingle roof. All original framing intact and visible.

This large, double-aisle barn was the first permanent barn for exhibition livestock at the new fairgrounds. According to the newspaper, the contract was let to Earnest W. Ames, son and partner of the successful local builder W.O. Ames. The barn has received little change over the years, and now serves to house cattle and swine during the fair.

6. Draft Horse Barn -

Constructed c. 1930. Wood frame, with bracketed eaves and a raised, continuous roof monitor, hatch style windows along either side. 186 feet by 44.5 feet. Drop siding, metal over wood shingle roof.

County Commissioner minutes from 1930 report the purchase of \$997 worth of lumber for a new horse barn from Tum-A-Lum Lumber Co. Minutes from 1936 note a major addition to the rear of the barn, still visible today, for hog exhibits. The Draft Horse Barn is the third oldest at the fairgrounds, and has changed little. It still serves as a horse stable.

7. Light Horse Barn -

Constructed c. 1928. Wood frame, with bracketed eaves and a raised, continuous roof monitor. 80 feet by 40 feet. Drop siding, metal over wood shingle roof.

This barn is described thought to have been built for use as a poultry barn in 1928. Its completion and exact dimensions are given in a newspaper article of that date. It is labeled on the 1949 Sanborn Co. fire insurance map as "poultry exhibits," but now serves as a stable for horses. The Light Horse Barn is the second oldest livestock barn at the fairgrounds, and is little altered.

8. Directors' Barn #1 -

Constructed by 1946. Wood-frame horse barn with board-and-batten siding, gabled metal-clad roof, no detail. Unpainted.

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A barn of these dimensions in this precise location appears on a 1946 county fairgrounds map, and again on the 1949 Sanborn Co. insurance map. It may have been rebuilt in 1950 after a documented fire that destroyed what were then called the Posse Barns.

9. Directors' Barn #2 -

Construction date unknown. Wood-frame horse barn with board-and-batten siding, gabled metal-clad roof, no detail. Unpainted.

This barn is nearly identical in form, dimension, and materials to Directors' Barn #1.

Non-Contributing Features Non-contributing features were not present during the fairgrounds' period of historic significance (1923 through 1948). Features #10 through 14 are nonetheless visually compatible with the character of the district.

10. Gazebo -

Built 1988. Wood construction, with bungalow detailing, on raised concrete pad. Octagonal footprint.

11. Frontier Village -

Assembly began in early 1980s. Includes the following seven endangered log and frame structures moved in from around the Kittitas Valley and surrounding hills for preservation purposes: Rollinger Cabin, Cooke Cabin, a scale house for weighing logs, District 11 Menastash School House, a riders' cabin that belonged to the Menastash Grazing Association, the Robbins Cabin, and a fire hall. One newly-constructed building is used as a blacksmith shop.

12. Dog and Cat Barn -

Built in the 1950s. Wood-frame, gabled roof, compatible barn detailing and paint.

13. First Aid Building -

Construction date unknown, post-1949. Simple wood-frame, gabled roof office. Built in three sections with compatible barn detailing and paint.

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-
- 14. Swine Barn -**
Construction date unknown, post-1949. Narrow wood-frame barn hidden from view behind First Aid Building. Rear of building has open pens. Compatible barn detailing and paint.
- 15. Bloom Pavilion -**
Built in 1979. Large concrete shed with steel truss roof. Used as year-around horse arena. Murals of historic Kittitas Valley scenes cover the exterior.
- 16. Fairgrounds Administration Building -**
Built in 1972. Single-story, L-shaped, dressed masonry block office building with cement block restroom addition. Surrounded by vegetation.
- 17. Infield Grandstands and Bleachers -**
Northwest and northeast bleachers, 1950s. West grandstand, covered, 1960s. Buckaroo Stand, covered (opposite Main Grandstand), 1992. All metal construction.

Current Plans

Kittitas County is currently planning for long-range improvements to the fairgrounds. These plans include retention of the historic core, and rehabilitation of the main grandstand, early exhibition buildings, and livestock barns. The County recently applied for grant funding from the Capital Projects for Washington's Heritage program. The project has been highly rated by the grants review panel, or now moves on for consideration by the Washington State Legislature. All work will be guided by the Secretary of the Interior's Standards.

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8. Narrative Statement of Significance

The Kittitas County Fairgrounds in Ellensburg, Washington, were established in 1923 as a permanent setting for the community's annual agricultural fair and first-ever "Wild West Rodeo." The fairgrounds embodies an important aspect of community development as demonstrated in the emerging towns of the post-Frontier American west. Here the progressive spirit of boosterism merged with agrarian tradition and nostalgia for a vanishing way of life. The result was a cooperative community effort of remarkable proportions. At the Kittitas County Fair, native Yakama Indians, local farmers and ranchers, and townspeople have gathered for over 75 years to celebrate, socialize, and compete through annual exhibits and events. One of these contests, the Ellensburg Rodeo, is now a sporting event of world-wide stature.

Within the context of the community, the fairgrounds is a significant and distinguishable place. The site of the fairgrounds is linked by strong oral tradition to annual gatherings of the Kittitas band of the Yakama Indians. With its unusual in-town setting, and its defining natural features of stream, hillside, and open green space, the fairgrounds have been consistently described over the years as picturesque. The property influenced other aspects of the Ellensburg's physical planning, including the development of Memorial Park, the Armory, Reed Park, and the American Legion Hall at the crest of Craig's Hill. Despite some alteration of individual structures over time, a core complex of sturdy timber and wood-frame, bungalow-era fair buildings survives.

Community Planning: Boosterism, Cooperation, and Volunteerism

The Kittitas County Fairgrounds sprang from a modern desire to stimulate commerce and promote the Kittitas Valley around the Northwest. Although the idea emerged from the office of the county extension agent, it garnered immediate support from the business community of Ellensburg. A permanent county fairgrounds, it was argued, would showcase the valley's agricultural economy, and attract attention to its potential. Furthermore, the addition of a "Wild West Rodeo" would enhance the quality of the fair, increase attendance, and generate tourist revenue.

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A wide variety of community leaders became active partners in the planning, from early discussion stages in the late fall of 1922, to the communal labor at field days in the summer of 1923. Local organizations joined with government entities in an unprecedented show of cooperation. The participating groups included: the Board of County Commissioners, the County Fair Board, the Ellensburg Chamber of Commerce, the City Park Commission, the Rotary, the Kiwanis, women's clubs, the Farm Bureau, the Ellensburg Park and Playground Association, the State Normal School, Ellensburg High School, the Elks Lodge, and the County Extension Office. A steering committee was formed consisting of county extension agent W. Leonard Davis, Ellensburg Chamber of Commerce president (and publisher of the Evening Record newspaper) Clifford Kaynor, and State Senator J.C. McCauley. An important and well-documented aspect of the organizing effort was the collaboration of both rural residents and townspeople.

One of the most difficult tasks facing the project planners was the acquisition of land. The steering committee looked into the matter and identified an available tract at the base of Craig's Hill, just outside city limits. It was soon determined that co-operative ownership of the land presented insurmountable legal problems, and that the County should hold title to the property. Senator McCauley introduced a bill in the State Senate - the "Pig and Pumpkin Fair" bill - allowing counties to spend up to \$10,000 for fair improvements. In June of 1923, Kittitas County Commissioners resolved to appropriate \$10,000 from the highway fund for the development of a fairgrounds. Eighteen acres were acquired through purchase, tax forfeitures, and gift. Only \$6,450 went toward the purchase of land, and the rest was allocated for planned improvements.

The improvement of the Kittitas County Fairgrounds relied heavily on community volunteerism. Donations of money, labor, and materials were required to finish the job. The steering committee made plans for a Field Day on June 14, 1923, with the hope of bringing out both farmers and businessmen to donate a day's work. The *Ellensburg Evening Record* urged all able-bodied men and women to come forward as "a civic responsibility by choice." Lou Richards, a local cattleman who would become the rodeo arena director, organized the work crews to accomplish the plans as laid out by county extension agent Davis, and county engineer W.T. Bowman.

On the appointed day, five-hundred men arrived with over two hundred horses and "Fresno" scrapers. Businesses closed down, as bankers and shop clerks worked side by side with ranch hands to get the job done. Through a very organized system of superintendents, foremen, straw bosses, and fifteen-man crews, eight major tasks were accomplished or begun. These included the following: fencing of the grounds, re-routing Wilson creek, grading the race track and field, leveling

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ground for the exhibition buildings, constructing the quarter-mile driveway down the hillside into the grounds, trimming and pruning the natural vegetation, and building three rustic bridges across the stream. One-hundred farm and town women gathered to feed the crews at lunch time, with hot-dogs, ice-cream, and coffee. So efficiently organized were the women that all five-hundred men were served in exactly twelve minutes. Although much work remained to be done over the course of the summer - including the construction of the grandstand, the first exhibition building, and the women's' restroom - Field Day was a widely-acclaimed success. In his annual report, the county extension agent noted:

The fine spirit of enthusiasm and co-operation that prevailed could not have been improved upon....It has been conservatively estimated that the result of the volunteer work was a saving of at least \$5,000.00 in actual money. In addition to the cash saving the Field Day made every man who helped feel that he was a part owner in the Fair Grounds, and made of him an enthusiastic booster of the project.

The first Kittitas County Fair to be held in the new facility, and its main attraction, the Wild West Rodeo, took place over three days, from September 13 through 15, 1923. Overflow crowds resulted in immediate expansion of fairgrounds structures the following year. The spirit of boosterism, cooperation, and volunteerism had accomplished a critical step in development of the community.

Agricultural Tradition

County agricultural fairs in America began in 1811, with an event organized by gentleman farmer Elkanah Watson in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. In Washington, such fairs date back to territorial times, with the King County Fair claiming the earliest birth date of 1863. County fairs have long held agrarian education as their primary purpose. Indeed, fair associations are often incorporated with the stated purpose of promoting the social and educational welfare of citizens involved in agriculture and all its varied branches. Traditionally, American county fairs serve as occasions of celebration, competition, and social interaction.

Early Ellensburg newspapers record the sporadic beginnings of the annual Kittitas County Fair. The first fair was reportedly held in 1885 in conjunction with a veterans' reunion. Through the 1890s, these informal events occurred on an irregular basis in various rural locations. Beginning in 1906,

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the fair took the form of a downtown street fair with exhibits housed in storefront windows. Again in 1914, a rather sizable event with a parade and horse competitions took place. After World War One, citizens revived the notion of an annual fair. For three years, from 1920 through 1922, an old brick woolen mill adjacent to the downtown held displays, with a carnival set up in the streets.

In the 1920s, agriculture in the Kittitas Valley was a diversified combination of dairying, irrigated farming, and ranching. Crops included grains, hay, potatoes, apples, pears, and berries. Valley ranchers specialized in cattle, sheep, and horses. The economy of the entire valley, and of the town of Ellensburg, was firmly rooted in agriculture. It is not surprising that the county extension agent Leonard Davis was the catalyst for creation of a permanent fairgrounds. His motives were grounded in his belief in the value of agrarian education. In his report of 1923 he noted:

Last October the County Agent spoke before the local Rotary Club on the importance of a County Fair and pointed out the need of a permanent fair in this county as an important educational industry and as a stimulus to agriculture as a whole and to Boys' and Girls' Club work in particular.

To ensure greater participation in the educational exhibits at the fair, the Fair Board promised handsome premiums in the new venue. It was to guarantee sufficient gate receipts to pay these increased premiums, that the Fair Board sought a new entertainment attraction and endorsed the notion of a Wild West Rodeo.

The agricultural component of the 1923 Kittitas County Fair proved so successful, that a second exhibition building of equal size was put up the following year. By 1926, the first of the permanent livestock exhibit barns was in place. There remains even today strong community support for continuing emphasis on the county's agricultural heritage at the fair.

Rodeo as Sport and Recreation

Rodeo emerged in the last quarter of the 19th Century as the open ranges of the West gave way to settlement. The earliest rodeos were informal contests of skill in riding, roping, and bulldogging held among cow-hands during annual cattle roundups. Because western townspeople harbored a

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nostalgia for the fading frontier, these impromptu gatherings on ranches soon gathered spectators. The new sport of rodeo grew rapidly in popularity in early 20th Century.

Kittitas County lies in the heart of a once-thriving cattle region. Thousands of cattle and horses still grazed the slopes of the valley's semi-arid hills in the early 1920s. Kittitas had its share of roundups and informal rodeos. At least two valley ranches were hosting regular "Sunday rodeos" when planning for Ellensburg's first Wild West Rodeo got underway.

The proposal for a Wild West Rodeo to attract big crowds to the Kittitas County Fair was made by Dr. Hubert E. Pfenning, a member of the Fair Board's Entertainment Committee. Pfenning's idea met with the Board's approval for several reasons. First, this activity had none of the objectionable aspects of carnivals or gambling. Rodeos were a proven crowd-pleaser, as the Pendleton, Lewiston, and smaller Ephrata and Okanogan roundups had already demonstrated. Fair Board members recognized the idea's potential to draw in visitors from west of the Cascades, exposing them to enlightening displays and exhibits, while at the same time putting Ellensburg on the map. Further, the valley had no lack of willing riders, wild horses, and steers. All in all, the rodeo idea blended well with the valley's history and traditions.

Dr. Pfenning and his rodeo committee began by inviting the entire Yakama Indian nation to attend and participate. The Yakama came, in numbers that increased in the coming decades. Each year they pitched a teepee village, dried fish and meat in the trees, cooked over campfires, participated in the parade, and competed in rodeo events. In 1929, the Indian Village was expanded. Spokane, Colville, Wenatchee, and coastal tribes joined in the gathering. Although now reduced in numbers, that participation continues even today.

The first Ellensburg Rodeo drew a standing-room only crowd. Cars lined the top of Craig's Hill, as they do today, to view the event. Eighty-five contestants entered the rodeo, most of them local cowboys. Wild horses were rounded up from the surrounding hills especially for the three-day show. Eighteen events were planned, although the steer wrestling was dropped at the last moment due to public concern for the animals. The majority of those were classic western rodeo events and are still a part of today's Ellensburg Rodeo program.

Over time, the renown of the local rodeo grew. Although there are a few older roundups in Washington, none are larger in terms of purse, or numbers of contestants. The Ellensburg Rodeo is the 14th largest in the nation, and the largest professional rodeo in the world on Labor Day weekend.

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The event draws over five-hundred top-ranked cowboys from around the country. Now, as in the inaugural year of 1923, the Ellensburg Rodeo involves an annual western parade, the crowning of "royalty," a visit from the Yakama Indian nation, and the participation of hundreds of volunteers.

Significance as Place in the Community

On several levels, the Kittitas County Fairgrounds is significant as a distinct place within the community. Its role as a sheltered camp site for native peoples and their horses is coupled with a continuing tradition of their participation in the annual fair and rodeo.

The choice of this site for a permanent fairgrounds was fortuitous. The availability of the land, its situation at the edge of town, and its natural advantages all played a part. One of the critical factors, according to accounts of the time, was its suitability for multiple uses, year around. According to the county extension agent's report of 1923,

It was pointed out that in addition to a fair ground a city park, children's play ground, and athletic field were needed, and that, if possible, sufficient ground suitably located should be secured to take care of all of these needs.

The resultant park-like, in-town setting now contributes greatly to the character and the statewide reputation of the fairgrounds.

The fairgrounds significantly influenced the surrounding development of the city. The creation of Memorial Park to the west was part and parcel of the initial planning effort. From the early 1920s through the 1950s, the park's central attraction was an "open air plunge" or wading pool. The plunge has now been replaced with an indoor municipal swimming and fitness facility, situated just next to the main gate to the fairgrounds. North of the park, with access to its open space and to the rodeo arena infield, the National Guard Armory was built in the early 1950s. At the same time as his donation of hillside lots to the County for a fairgrounds, businessman B.F. Reed donated land to the City for Reed Park on the crest of Craig's Hill. In the late 1940s, the American Legion built its castle-like Vista House in Reed Park, overlooking the rodeo arena and fairgrounds below.

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One curious local newspaper account from June of 1923 suggests the possibility of professional involvement in the site planning of the fairgrounds. The article stated:

The site has been pronounced by experts to be an ideal one for such a purpose and Dean James Gould of the University of Washington, famous landscape artist, has been secured to draw up plans for the ground.

The founder and head of the University of Washington's Department of Architecture at the time was renowned Seattle architect Carl Gould. His participation in any aspect of the planning of the Kittitas County Fairgrounds is unsubstantiated as of yet, but Gould's papers at the University indicate that he did design both a hospital and a bank building in Ellensburg during that period.

More certain is the known involvement of County Engineer W. T. Bowman in the layout of the grounds, and the documented role of local builder William O. Ames and his son Earnest. Ames had sash and door factory in Ellensburg in the late 19th Century, and later a lumber yard. He and his son were prolific builders of houses throughout the city from 1880s through the 1940s. A good number of commercial and institutional buildings can be attributed to them as well. The consistent, rustic, bungalow styles of the early fairgrounds barns and exhibit buildings may well be due to even wider, as yet un-documented participation by W.O. Ames and son.

Archaeological Potential

The entire acreage of the fairgrounds is believed to have high archaeological potential. There is documented evidence of native peoples gathering in great numbers annually in the Kittitas Valley, and a strong oral tradition regarding the use of this particular protected location for the pasturing and coralling of horses. Further, there exists the recent 75-year tradition of Yakama "teepee village" encampments in conjunction with fair and rodeo. No specific archaeological site locations have yet been determined. However, preliminary soils testing suggests potential for cultural remains in areas along the original stream course, at the base of Craig's Hill, and elsewhere around the fairgrounds in areas never graded or leveled. In the future, further testing may identify archeological sites which could be eligible under Criterion D.

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10. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

The Kittitas County Fairgrounds lies in the northwest quarter of Section 1, Township 17N, Range 18E, Willamette Meridian, in Ellensburg, Washington.

The Historic District boundary begins at the northwest corner of the fairgrounds property on 8th Avenue; continues south along the fairgrounds property line to the north edge of the 5th Avenue right-of-way; turns east to the eastern fairgrounds property line along Craig's Hill; runs northeast along said property line to the northeast corner of the fairgrounds property on 8th Avenue; turns west along the south edge of the 8th Avenue right-of-way; jogs to the south, west, and north following the fairgrounds property line around a privately-owned parcel on 8th Avenue; and continues along the south edge of the 8th Avenue right-of-way to point of beginning.

Boundary Justification

The historic district conforms to current property boundaries of the Kittitas County Fairgrounds proper, as defined by the slope of Craig's Hill and neighboring residential streets. It encompasses all of the original eighteen acres acquired by Kittitas County in 1923, as well as a small number of additional parcels acquired in later years along the west and north perimeters. Outside of the historic district are several recently acquired appendages of land to the north, northeast, and south of the fairgrounds proper. These appendages have recently-constructed, non-contributing buildings, or are undeveloped.

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Photographs

Kittitas County Fairgrounds
Ellensburg, WA

Photographer: Florence K. Lentz

Date: April, 1998

Negatives in possession of Florence K. Lentz, Cultural Resource Consulting

1. **Overview, Ellensburg Rodeo Arena, facing southwest.** Original grandstand and racing oval at center. Craig's Hill, American Legion Hall (outside district) to left. Fairgrounds barns beyond grandstand, exhibition buildings to right of grandstand.
2. **Overview, Fairgrounds Barns and Gazebo, facing east.** Frontier Village at left, Craig's Hill and American Legion Hall (outside district) in distance.
3. **Rodeo Grandstand (1923, 1924, and 1935), facing southwest.** Racing oval in foreground.
4. **Rodeo Grandstand Seating (1923, 1924), facing east.** View from 1924 addition toward original 1923 section.
5. **Rodeo Grandstand (1923, 1924, 1935), facing north.** Underneath spaces partially enclosed for exhibition, retail, and beer hall use.
6. **Kittitas County Fairgrounds Livestock Barns (1928, c.1930, and 1926), facing south.** Left to right, Light Horse Barn, Draft Horse Barn, and Cattle Barn.

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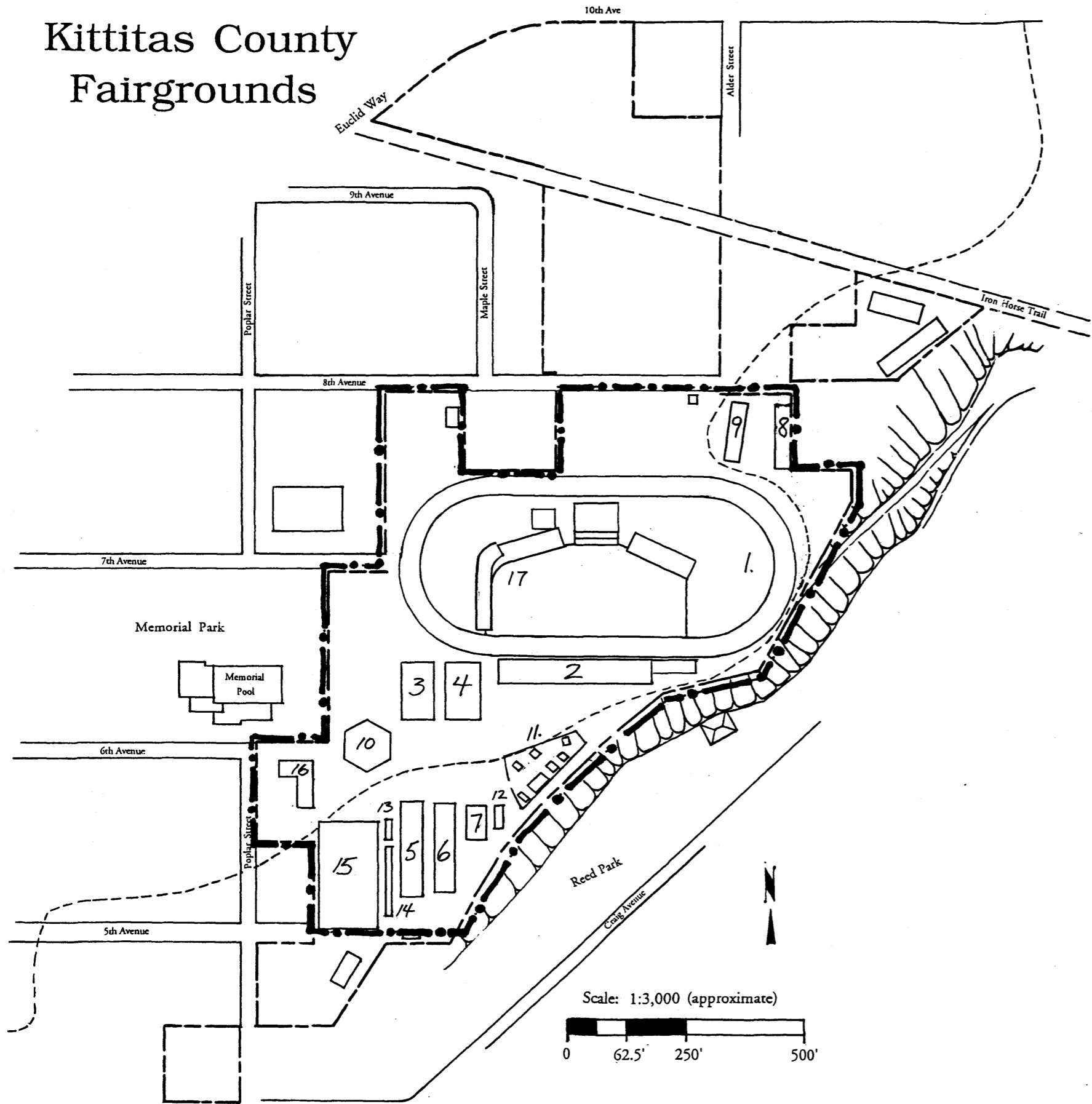
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7. **Home Arts Exhibition Building (1923), facing northwest.** Building faces open picnic green and barn row. Identical 4-H/FFA Exhibition Building (1924) stands to immediate right.
 8. **Open Picnic Green and Frontier Village, facing east.** Craig's Hill and American Legion Hall (outside district) in background.
 9. **Frontier Village, facing east.** Left to right, Rollinger Cabin (used as Robber's Roost Trading Post), Cooke Cabin, recently-constructed blacksmith's shop, a logging scale house (used as Hunt's General Store), Menastash District 11 Schoolhouse, Menastash Grazing Association riders' cabin, and Robbins Cabin.

Kittitas County Fairgrounds



LEGEND

- Historic District Boundary
- Fairgrounds Property Line
- Wilson Creek

CONTRIBUTING FEATURES

1. Racing Oval
2. Main Grandstand
3. Home Arts Building
4. 4-H and FFA Building
5. Cattle and Swine Barn
6. Draft Horse Barn
7. Light Horse Barn
8. Directors' Barn #1
9. Directors' Barn #2

NON-CONTRIBUTING FEATURES

10. Gazebo
11. Frontier Village
12. Dog and Cat Barn
13. First Aid Building
14. Swine Barn
15. Bloom Pavilion
16. Fairgrounds Administration Building
17. Infield Grandstands and Bleachers

