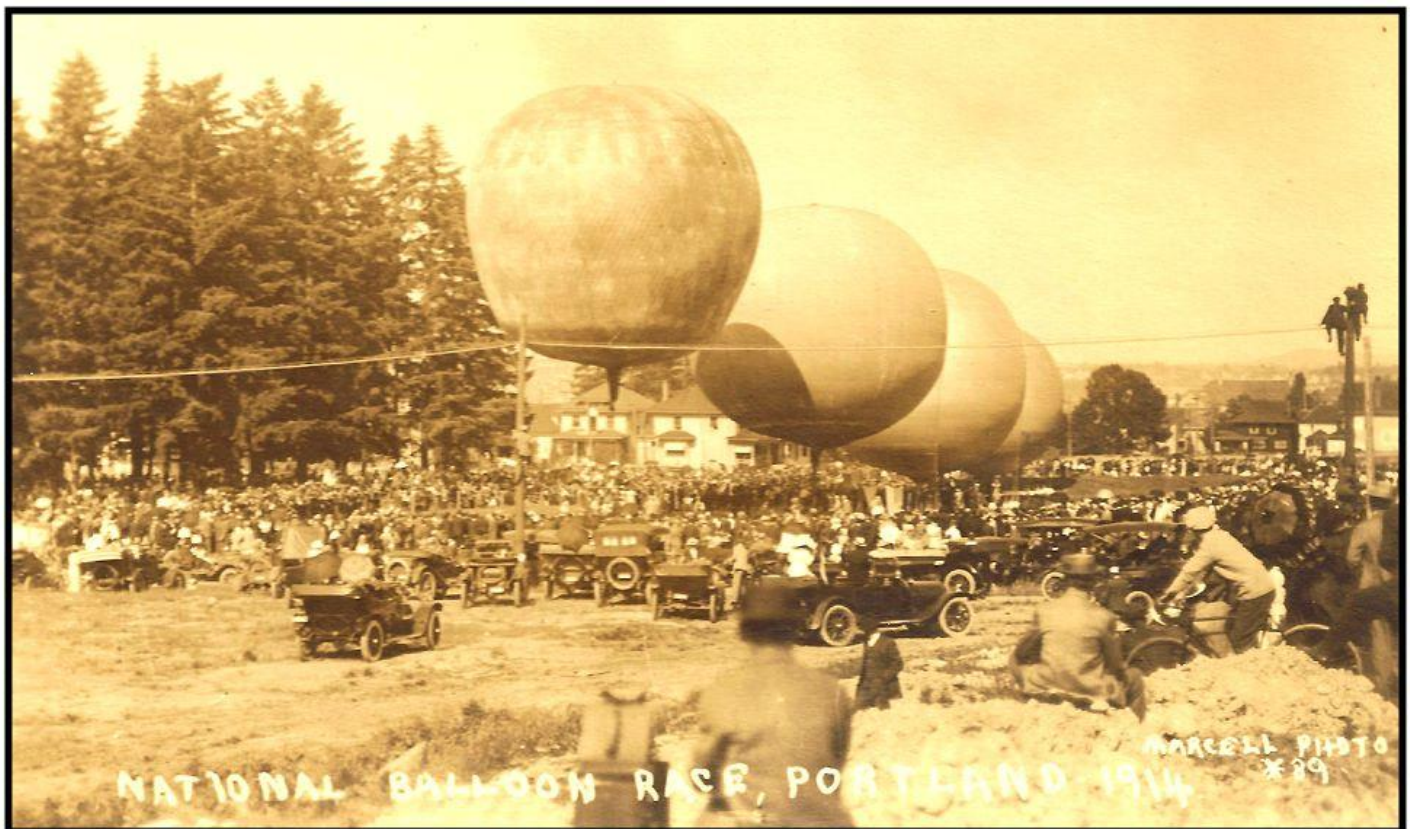




# WEBFOOTER EXTRA

FEBRUARY 2017

## NORTHWEST AVIATION HISTORY



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◆ Northwest Aviation History – see page 4.

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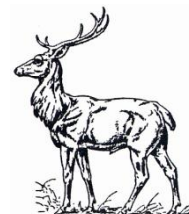
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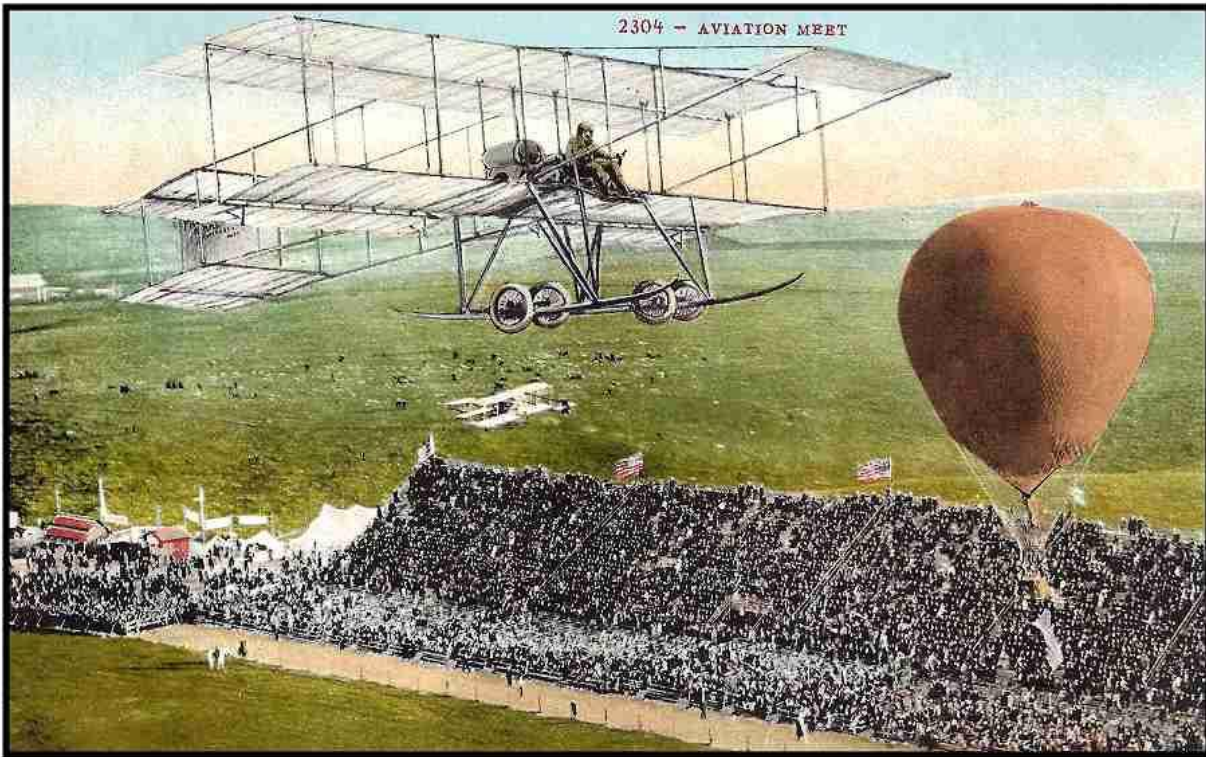
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# NORTHWEST AVIATION HISTORY



A large crowd of more than 50,000 attended the first Aviation Meet in Portland on March 5, 1910.

Portland and the Northwest had their first opportunity to witness an airplane in flight on March 5, 1910 when more than 50,000 spectators gathered in Portland at the Country Club grounds. The three-day Aviation Meet was held under the direction of the Portland Aeronautic Club, by arrangement with the Portland Fair and Livestock Association. In anticipation of large crowds, additional transportation facilities were arranged. Beginning at noon, the Oregon Railway and Navigation Company (ORN), whose tracks ran inside the field, operated special trains to the grounds every 10 minutes. Streetcar companies added extra runs and cars as well.

A break-down of the crowd estimates included 27,000 attendees who arrived via the East Ankeny streetcar line; 2,500 carried by the Montavilla streetcar line filling 18 cars; 1,500 carried by the Mount Tabor streetcar line; 1,500 arrived by automobile; 10,000 people walked to the Country Club; and 5,000 arrived on the ORN on four special trains. In addition, about 3,000 people watched from the slopes of Mt. Tabor.

Performing a feat previously unheard of in heavier-than-air navigation, Charles K. Hamilton, an aviator of international fame, electrified the crowd by darting down on the race course in front of a swiftly-speeding 1909 Buick automobile driven by F.G. Plummer with which he was racing. No sooner had the tricycle runners on which the plane rests struck the ground, when it bounded up again into the air. The crowd cheered the daring feat as Hamilton reached an altitude of 500 feet in the air. The airplane beat the automobile by one lap.

Hamilton, who was said to be the only person making exhibition flights in America, arrived in Portland with two Curtiss biplanes. Other pilots included locals Walter Donnelly and E. Henry Wemme, who owned a Curtiss biplane. Flying a large eight-cylinder Curtiss machine, Hamilton thrilled the crowd by rising into the air in front of the grandstand and circling about the field for 15 minutes. He planned to make ten flights each day.

Also performing his "Hamilton Glide," a feat said to be the most spectacular and daring attempted by any aviator up to this time, consisted of stopping the engine while 500 feet in the air and coming down to the ground in bird-like sweeps. Earlier in the year, Hamilton performed at an international aviation meet in Los Angeles and while he was 700 feet in the air, the plane's crankshaft broke and the engine stopped as he glided safely back to Earth.

Just prior to the aviation show, Portland Mayor Joseph Simon requested that emergency repairs be made to bad places in Sandy Road which led to the Country Club. A force of street workers was dispatched and they were able to improve the road to a passable condition. Portland high school surveying class students were recruited by the Aero Club to operate instruments to measure time and height flown by the aviators.

Another feature of the exhibition was a test of the wireless telephone. Arrangements were made between the Ellsworth Wireless Telephone Company and Hamilton to take one of the instruments up with him to talk to a man standing on the ground.



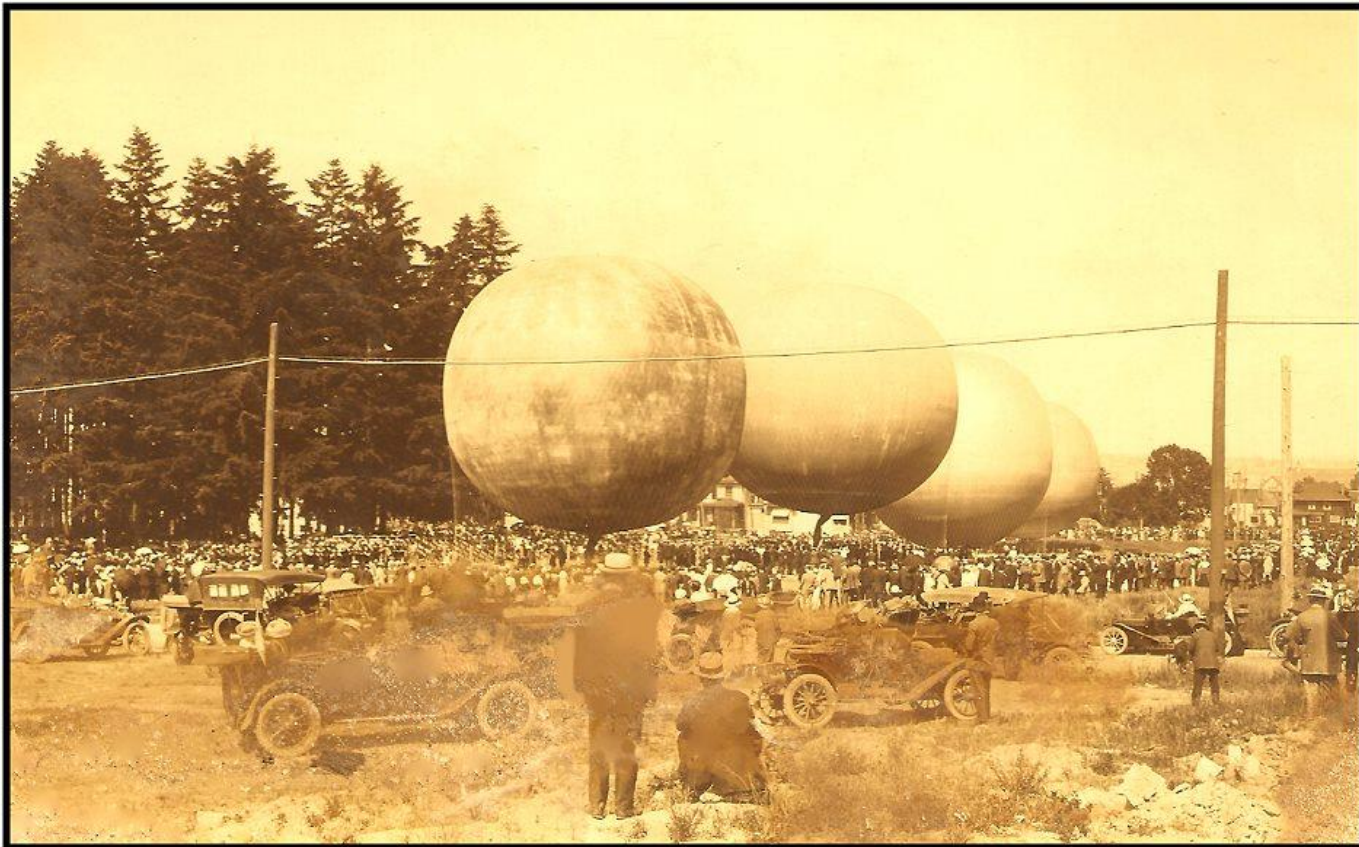
On June 11, 1914 a National Balloon Race was held in northwest Portland at circus square.

Four world-renowned air pilots brought four immense gas bags (rubber balloons) to Portland for the first National Balloon Race ever staged west of the Rockies for the Portland Rose Festival Association on June 11, 1914. The balloons, which lifted off in five-minute intervals, were to be in the air 24 to 48 hours and they were expected to travel a distance of 200 to 1,000 miles, depending on air currents. Three of the large balloons held 80,000 cubic feet of air, while the fourth balloon had a capacity of 40,000 cubic feet. Under the auspices of the Aero Club of America, a \$3,000 purse was divided 50, 25, 15 and 10 percent in the order of distance covered. Persons in neighboring towns and cities were to be on the lookout for the balloons and if they picked up any messages dropped from the balloons were to telephone or telegraph the messages "collect" to The Oregonian.



Sharply at 4:00 pm on June 11, 1914, starter O.C. Leiter gave the starting signal and Captain John Watts of Kansas City, of America's international team, took to the skies in his balloon that he christened "Kansas City III." Five minutes later, H.E. Honeywell of St. Louis, Missouri took flight in his balloon that he called "United States." Going up five minutes later was Roy Donaldson of Springfield, Illinois in his balloon that he named "Springfield." And finally, John Berry, also of St. Louis, lifted off in his balloon that he called the "Million Dollar Club."

Each balloon had a captain and up to two crew members, and each balloon was to carry enough provisions in their basket to last each man for five or six days. Also, each balloon was equipped with aeronautical instruments. Donaldson and Berry also carried barographs, aneroids, statoscopes and compasses which indicate changes in altitude, atmosphere and wind, etc.



The National Balloon Race which was held at 25th & Raleigh streets in Portland in 1914.

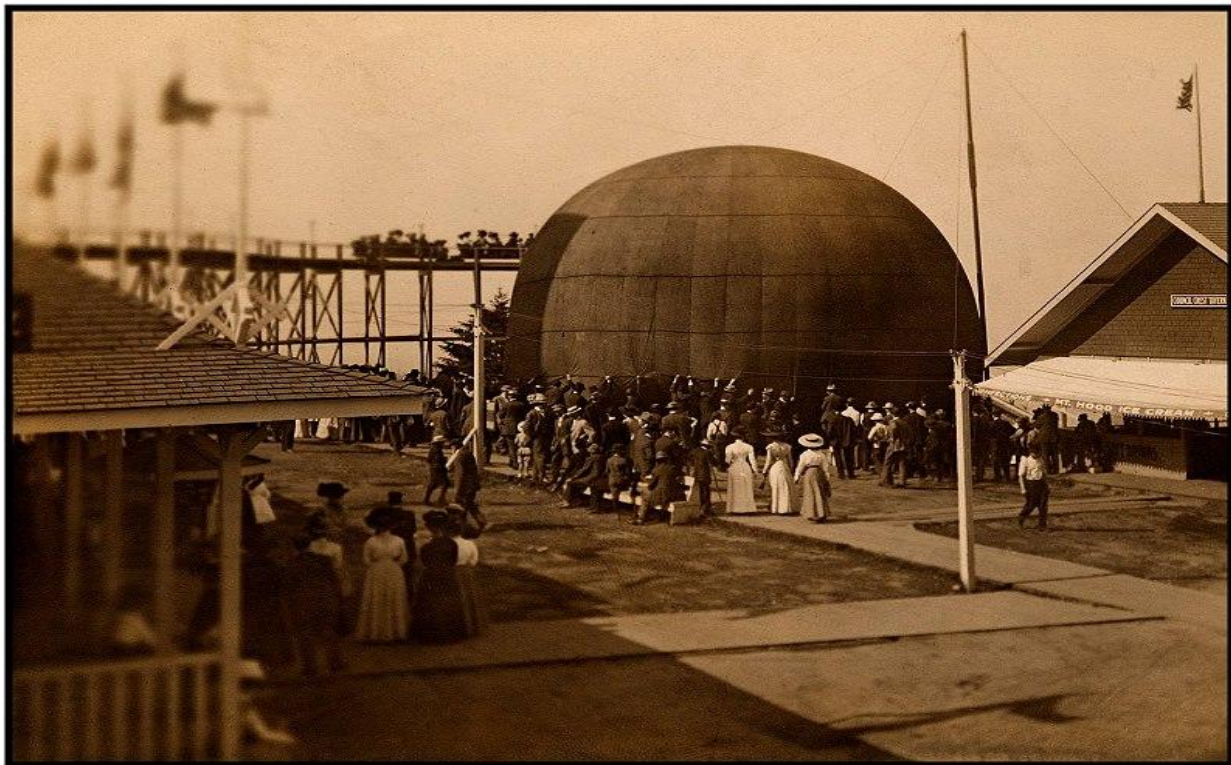
A crowd of 10,000 spectators was expected and they were admonished to "take the "W" car and transfer to Westover at Twenty-fifth and Pettygrove streets. There were three carrier pigeons on each balloon and they were furnished by Ralph Warren of the Oregon Homing Club. Each pigeon had a tiny message carrier tied to a leg with a written message rolled up inside. The first was to be released at 5:30 pm, the second at 7:00 pm and the third at daylight the following morning. Each message was to detail briefly the position, so far as the pilots could tell at the time of sending. The pigeons were to return to their loft in Rose City Park where the rolls were deciphered and transmitted to Rose Festival headquarters.

After more than 100 hours had elapsed since the start of the race, Roy Donaldson and his partner Wilbur Henderson with their balloon "Springfield," were reported missing. Only one meager report transmitted by carrier pigeon was received several hours after they left. Of the four balloons that started the race, the Springfield alone was unaccounted for. Several search parties set out to find the Springfield and its crew.

Persistent reports came from the Bull Run district and from the western slope of Mt. Hood that a balloon was reportedly seen in that vicinity at 4:00 am on Friday morning. One eyewitness, T. Ruther, a local farmer, confirmed to a search party staying at Aschoff's Mountain Home on the Sandy River that "the balloon was up about 500 feet and sailing slowly toward the head of Sandy Canyon. We watched the balloon for about 10 minutes as it went higher into the air and finally passed from view."

Meanwhile, telephone reports from Sweet Home, Oregon gave information that Captain Watts and his "Kansas City III" had crash-landed safely on Friday morning near Cascadia, Oregon. They were rescued and returned to Portland. Captain Berry of the "Million Dollar Population" and Captain Honeywell of the "United States" were driven to earth by an electric storm and crashed within four hours after the race started. Captain Honeywell and his balloon "United States" were located near Beaver Creek, Oregon, about 18 miles from Portland. Berry, who landed in dense woods near Clarkes, Oregon, about 27 miles from Portland, was reportedly injured, but he and Honeywell soon returned to St. Louis where they entered another balloon race. Captain Donaldson and his "Springfield" were found eight days after the race began. After flying about 45 miles from Portland, they crashed near Blue Lake in the Bull Run district. An emaciated Donaldson and his assistant, who were near to the point of collapse, found a ranger's hut east of the Bull Run Reserve and they were taken back to Portland after gaining strength.

Captain Watts and his "Kansas City III" landed about 80 miles from Portland and they were the apparent winners, so he was to receive a \$1,500 prize. Two months later, after a meeting of the contest committee of the Aero Club of America in New York, Watts was disqualified because he failed to observe the rules in entering the event. Apparently, he neglected to pay his \$50 entrance fee on time. The first prize was subsequently awarded to Captain Donaldson and his balloon "Springfield." Watts was so upset that he threatened to sue the Aero Club. Fans in Portland sided with Watts and a controversy brewed. Wanting to lessen their liability as well as negative press, the Rose Festival Association discontinued balloon races.



It was announced on July 31, 1909 that Daredevil Harry Wright would fly on a trapeze and jump with a parachute from a balloon that would ascend a mile above Council Crest every Saturday afternoon.





Tex Rankin operated the oldest and largest aviation institution in the Northwest, moving to Portland in 1922. This view shows Rankin Field at Union & Columbia circa 1928.

In 1920, Tex Rankin returned home to Walla Walla from France where he had directed the assembling of thousands of American airplanes. At the time he started Rankin Flying School, he acquired two relics from World War I: a battered Curtiss "Jenny" and a Standard "J-4." After operating in Walla Walla for two years, Tex moved his operations to Portland. Tex operated his planes at four different airports in Portland. He started on a site owned by the Montgomery Ward Company in Northwest Portland. The City of Portland filled-in this property to make way for factories and manufacturing so Rankin moved to a strip of land lying along the east side of the Willamette River, just east of the Swan Island Airport. After several years, the school moved to Swan Island Airport for several months. In 1928, Tex Rankin moved his Flying School to Union Avenue, opposite the Portland Auto Camp.

In 1928, Portland was the leader of aviation instruction in the Northwest with six schools of flying and Rankin's Flying School was the largest with 190 students and eight of them were women. Rankin's school was the second largest in the country, behind the Curtiss School of New York.

In his 12th year of operation in 1932, Rankin celebrated the training of his 1,000th student to fly and more than 100,000 passengers were carried on sight-seeing and emergency flights without accident. Also, more than 20,000 hours of flying was racked up by his students in the Rankin School without accident. These amateur flyers, who operated without an instructor, covered a total of 1,600,000 miles with an average speed of 80 mph, a distance equal to approximately 650 trips from Portland to New York. In the next few years, Rankin became a movie flier and moved to Los Angeles where he established a flying school.

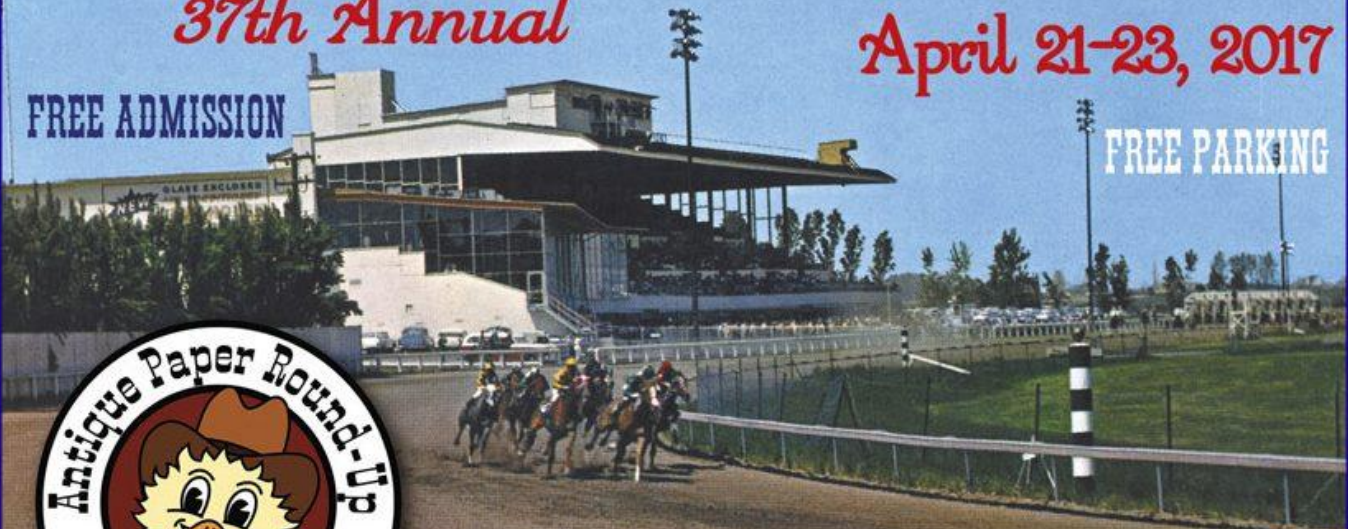





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