

FIRST EN KA FAIR

By Ellen Knight¹

“Today is the Day!” the En Ka Society announced in 1935. “The members of The En Ka Society and the many, many persons who have helped plan the Street Fair, to make it a great community success, urge you to come to the Town Hall grounds and join in the fun. How festive it all is! Such a Gala Day, Winchester has not had for a long time. Colored lights, balloons, pretty girls, booths that are cleverly constructed, street musicians, ponies to ride, and so much more to do and see.”

Though the attractions may have changed, the En Ka Fair is still a gala day continuing an annual tradition which began during the Great Depression as a benefit for Winchester Hospital.

The En Ka Society² originated as a high school sorority. After the sorority disbanded, a reunion was held in 1932 at which former sorority sisters determined to reorganize as an adult women’s charitable group. Its first major charity was Winchester Hospital. As a sorority, En Ka had helped the Visiting Nurse Association, the cottage hospital which the Association opened in 1912, and then the new permanent hospital building which opened in 1917.



*Mary Flinn Smith
who proposed the
first street fair*



Nurses' Home

During the Depression, the hospital had to take extraordinary steps to survive. Money was tight. The hospital had to devote what money it had to operating and maintaining the hospital. Yet the hospital had a second building, a nurses’ home. Helping that home was the impetus for the first street fair. In fact, the proceeds from the first three En Ka Society fairs were devoted to the nurses’ home. Thereafter, the Society has divided the proceeds from its fairs and other activities among a wide variety of Winchester charities and organizations.

AT THE FAIR

The first fair was a novelty to Winchester and was a huge success, attracting thousands. It was held on Saturday, May 11, 1935, in the parking space in the rear of Town Hall, running from Washington Street to the island in Mill Pond. Brightly painted posts, balloons, and a sign marked the entrance to the “street.”³





The emphasis then was on booths and entertainments rather than rides, although there were pony rides. Each “shop” had its own street number and décor and was devoted to a different sale. An “Apron Shop” was made up to look like a kitchen, where alumnae of the Hospital School sold aprons, hot pads, and towels. An “Attic” house held a collection of “interesting and valuable treasures.” It was cleaned out by 10 o’clock. Cherokee pottery and other hand-made articles were displayed at the “Gift Box,” decorated as a red box with white bow. Another shop (pictured) was the “Knit Shop,” decorated with a thatched roof, ivy covered trellis, pink curtains, and window boxes filled with knitted flowers. Raffles were held for a knit dress and sweater.



The attractions were varied. “Madame Zara” read fortunes. A games booth was set up to entertain children. Wandering musicians, “Tony and Pedro,” entertained with violin and accordion. There was art for sale and art to enjoy. Lillian Clarke of Somerville was reportedly surrounded every minute while she cuts silhouettes. Wesley Dennis drew pencil portrait sketches. An exhibit of artworks by members of the Winchester Art Association was enjoyed at the library pergola.



There were other raffles and drawings. A corner was reserved under a beach umbrella for selling the permanent wave prize. At a booth decorated as a doll house, a raffle was held for a miniature doll house. At the end of the day, one lucky boy won a bicycle, which he reportedly rode until 2 a.m.

Of course there was food, including a popcorn stand sponsored by nurses, the Alice in Wonderland Candy Shop, an ice cream truck, a sandwich bar, hot dog stand (tended by the “Masters of the Hounds”), and a doughnut machine which reportedly attracted attention all day. The island, decorated with colored lights, Japanese lanterns, and flowers was transformed into a Japanese Tea Garden.

At the end of the day, there was street dancing and a bean supper, a tradition which continued for decades. In addition to the members of the En Ka Society, men, nurses, and high school students helped out at the fair, which reportedly cleared \$1,963 to be used for the Nurses' Home.

Over time the fair outgrew the Town Hall parking lot, and its attractions have changed. The parade did not begin until about 1951. But, whatever has changed, the fair's popularity and purpose remain the same. The funds raised go back to the community through En Ka's gift program. And, every year, everyone has a lot of fun while helping the En Ka Society help the town.

¹ This article © 2018 is a revision of earlier articles by the author, Ellen Knight, published in the *Daily Times Chronicle* on May 18, 2007 and May 17, 2012. This revision supersedes all previous articles. For more on the En Ka Society, see Ellen Knight, *En Ka: From Sorority to Society Dedicated through Service to Our Community*, En Ka Society, 2015.

² The name was fashioned in the style of Greek letters as used by other sororities and fraternities, such as Sigma Beta, Phi Delta, and Gamma Eta, but the letters were invented from the initial letters of the girls' German motto, "N" and "K" (or "En" and "Ka"). The motto was originally "Nachmachen den Knaben" ("to imitate the boys"), but the girls changed it to "Nachleben die Klösterlichengenossenschaft," which they translated as "to live up to the sisterhood" (literally, to live up to a cloister-like fellowship).

³ A description of the fair filled several columns of the May 17, 1935 issue of *The Winchester Star* from which this synopsis was made.