

# The story of the festival that saved The State Fair for Syracuse

by **Michael Benny**

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SYRACUSE -- Picture it: Central New York, 1903. The State Fair is suffering in every way possible. Attendance is down. Exhibitors have lost interest. The Fair is bleeding money and New York State is considering giving one of the many other cities who want a shot at hosting it a chance to do just that. Syracuse stood to lose The Fair for good. The story of how Central New York saved The Fair, and preserved itself as permanent host begins with the Ka-Noo-No Karnival.

"Like so much of our history over the years, this is just one of those stories that somehow got lost," said Greg Tripoli, the Executive Director of the Onondaga Historical Association. "It was the days of the horse and buggy, and The Fair was mostly a daytime event. It was a long haul for people to come here, and The Fair hadn't gotten very good at nighttime entertainment, so there was no reason to stay the night and attend The Fair for a second day," Tripoli said.

Click [here](#) for an in-depth essay on the Ka-Noo-No Karnival from the Onondaga Historical Association.

In the early 1900's, the captains of business, politics and arts & culture in Syracuse set out to find a way to keep people in town for at least one night, to boost Fair attendance. They traveled the country and were very fond of Mardi Gras in New Orleans. In a nod to Central New York's Native American history, the Ka-Noo-No Karnival was born. Ka-Noo-No means "the territory within the State of New York. "It drew hundreds of thousands of people to Syracuse, and truly saved The State Fair for Central New York," Tripoli said.

There were 11 Ka-Noo-No Karnivals between 1905 and 1917. The parades were massive, a bandstand in Clinton Square would hold some 600 musicians and other performers. Because there were not enough hotel rooms to hold all the people who came, neighbors opened their private homes to out-of-towners. By the final Karnival in 1917, state leaders in Albany had determined The Fair would be held in the Syracuse area permanently. "The great lesson of the Karnival is that the people of Syracuse came together, confronted a problem, and did something for the greater good. That is a lesson we can take from our local history as we confront new challenges," Tripoli said. The organizers of the Karnival also knew when it had run its course: "They didn't beat a dead horse, The Fair was saved, and the Karnival had done its job," Tripoli added.

The images in the video segment of this story are Courtesy of the Onondaga Historical Association.