

JOHN OLIVER'S BALLOON ASCENSIONS AT THE COLUMBIANA COUNTY FAIR

A grand tradition of the Columbiana County Fair in the mid-20th century was the thrilling hot air balloon ascensions of Lisbon's own daredevil, John Oliver. John Oliver was a jeweler and watch repairman in downtown Lisbon and resided west of town on Canton Hill. He was well known as an aerialist from his youth and continuing in the years after World War I.

He became a featured attraction at the fair continuing until 1958 when he retired from active jumping at age 71. Ten years later, at age 81, John Oliver came out of retirement to make one more appearance at the 1969 fair. He was scheduled to make three jumps that year during the fair but because of an injury he suffered on the first night's jump, the remaining performances were cancelled and John Oliver's years of entertaining fair audiences came to an end.

Thanks to the cooperation and memory of Lisbon resident, Charles Senenafes, the fair has obtained home movies of John Oliver in action at the fair circa 1958.

In the film, John is the white-haired gentleman in the red shirt overseeing the preparations for the ascension. First, he watches the building of the fire on the fairgrounds infield that was used to heat and fill the air in the balloon. Local residents, all of whom remember the excitement of being called upon to help, held the ropes that held down the balloon until the moment of the launch.

The short film also depicts John Oliver carrying the parachute and attaching it to the bottom of the balloon. A trapeze bar was all that John Oliver had to sit on, without safety harness, as the balloon ascended. At the height of the ascent, the parachute was cut away from the balloon by Mr. Oliver and he descended back to earth.