

## THE COUNTY, DISTRICT, AND STATE AGRICULTURAL SOCIETIES OF IOWA

BY MYRTLE BEINHAUER

As every student knows, wealth was measured in terms of land in the olden days and it is little wonder that a milling swarm of people rushed westward and into Iowa to stake claims when that territory was officially opened for settlement on June 1, 1833. Doctors, lawyers, merchants, farmers all joined the caravans in search of what to them was the most valuable of all resources, land, and it was only natural that they immediately began to improve modes of cultivation and methods of marketing their products.

Almost as soon as Iowa Territory was created, the attention of the landowner was turned to the problem of improving his status. The first hint of agricultural organization in Iowa came on December 19, 1838, when the First Legislative Assembly enacted a law entitled "An Act to provide for the Incorporation of Agricultural Societies." This statute provided that twenty or more persons of a county might incorporate as an agricultural society to encourage agriculture and stock raising by awarding prizes for "articles, animals, modes of husbandry or other improvements of any kind connected with agriculture or domestic mechanism." It further stated that these societies could hold real estate to the amount of \$1,000 for a period of six months and that the proceeds from the sale of the real estate were to be used in awarding premiums.<sup>1</sup>

However, the inhabitants of Iowa did not take advantage of the privilege of organizing under this law, so four years later the Legislative Assembly provided for the formation of a territorial society with the same duties, privileges, and organization as the county societies. This same statute authorized the establishment of township societies under the same conditions. It further provided for an appropriation of \$1,200 to be divided among the county societies in the following manner:

<sup>1</sup>*Laws of Iowa Territory, 1838-1839, pp. 241-43.*

Clayton, \$30; Clinton, \$20; Cedar, \$30; Dubuque, \$70; Des Moines, \$140; Henry, \$80; Jones, \$20; Jackson, \$35; Van Buren, \$140; Johnson, \$35; Linn, \$30; Lee, \$140; Louisa, \$45; Muscatine, \$45; Scott, \$55; Washington, \$35; Jefferson, \$60; and the Iowa Territorial Agricultural Society, \$200.<sup>2</sup>

However, even this appropriation and the legislation permitting the organization of such societies did not seem sufficient to promote their growth. At least organizations did not come into existence at this time. Consequently, the Legislative Assembly on January 13, 1843, in a third attempt to entice the tillers of the soil to organize, enacted a measure entitled "An Act for the encouragement of Agricultural and Domestic Manufacturing." Following the general plan of the preceding laws, this statute likewise provided that twenty or more persons of a county could form an agricultural society with annual dues of five dollars. It also specified that the business of organization was to be in the hands of a president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and five directors. According to this act, the society was permitted to own land, not exceeding \$1,000 in value, for a period of twelve months of less and, in return for this privilege, it was to offer annual premiums for the improvement of the breed of animals, for the introduction, raising, and preserving of trees, and for promoting agricultural and household manufacturing. The money derived from the real estate could be used only in paying these premiums.<sup>3</sup>

This law was first taken advantage of approximately nine years later when, on January 24, 1852, the Jefferson County Agricultural Society was founded. This organization was followed in rapid succession by the creation of a large number of similar societies. The following table shows the rapidity of organization of county societies to the close of the year 1857.<sup>4</sup>

County	Date of organization
Jefferson .....	January 24, 1852
Wapello .....	January 24, 1852
Van Buren .....	March 9, 1852
Mahaska .....	March 15, 1852
Lee .....	Summer, 1852

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 1842, Ch. 126.

<sup>3</sup>*Revised Statutes of the Territory of Iowa*, Ch. 6.

<sup>4</sup>Iowa State Agricultural Society, *Annual Report*, 1857, pp. 101-458.

Henry .....	October 13, 1852
Des Moines .....	October, 1852
Monroe .....	1853
Washington .....	1853
Polk .....	May 28, 1853
Davis .....	July 9, 1853
Allamakee .....	July 20, 1853
Scott .....	August, 1853
Poweshiek .....	1855
Warren .....	1855
Delaware .....	June 10, 1855
Linn .....	Summer, 1855
Jasper .....	September 3, 1855
Iowa .....	1856
Dallas .....	April 9, 1856
Marion .....	June 14, 1856
Mills .....	September 20, 1856
Hardin .....	April 11, 1857
Jones .....	April 11, 1857
Keokuk .....	April 11, 1857
Decatur .....	May 4, 1857
Clinton .....	May 7, 1857
Boone .....	October 31, 1857
Black Hawk	} All had an Agricultural Society by 1857, but the exact date of organization is not given in the annual report which these societies sent to the state society.
Bremer	
Cedar Valley	
Clark	
Clayton	
Dubuque	
Lucas	
Madison	
Marshall	

As this chart indicates, by 1857 thirty-five county societies had been organized. It is interesting to notice that the societies were located in all parts of the state and were not confined to any particular vicinity. From the above table it would seem that Wapello and Jefferson Counties were organized simultaneously, and the report of 1857 states that they were created on the same day, but Jefferson County claims the honor of having the oldest organization and its claim is recognized by sister societies.

As has already been seen, the Legislative Assembly encouraged the creation of these societies and, even before they were organized, appropriated \$1,200 for their use. Therefore, it does not seem strange that these county agricultural societies were given

state aid within a very short time after their organization. In January, 1853, a legislative act enabled any county society organized in accordance with the law of 1843 to draw \$200 from the state.<sup>5</sup> In 1855 "An Act to Encourage Agriculture in Johnson County" was passed. This statute permitted the county judge to draw from the state an amount equal to one-third of the 1853 poll tax of that county for the use of the Johnson County Agricultural Society, provided that society held an annual fair.<sup>6</sup> However, this law was repealed in 1866.<sup>7</sup> By 1857 any society offering annual premiums for the improvement of stock, tillage of crops, implements, and mechanical fabrics and regulating the premiums so that the small as well as the large farmer could compete was entitled to a state appropriation equal to any sum it raised less than \$200.<sup>8</sup> Again in 1868 a law was enacted stating that, when a county or district agricultural society, composed of one or more counties, raised any sum through membership fees, it should be entitled to an equal amount, not to exceed \$200, from the state.<sup>9</sup> These state appropriations were continued, with alterations, from time to time until by 1919 any society filing a report with the secretary of agriculture was allowed 70% of the first \$1,000 and 60% of all subsequent amounts in excess of \$1,000 paid for premiums, but no single society was to be given over \$1,500.<sup>10</sup> In 1921 the percentage was changed to 80% of the first \$1,000, 70% of the second \$1,000, 60% of the third \$1,000, and 40% of all over the third \$1,000 worth of premiums awarded, with a maximum appropriation of \$2,000.<sup>11</sup> By 1929 the state legislature appropriated, for each year of the biennium beginning July 1, \$160,000<sup>12</sup> to be used as aid in staging county fairs which these societies held annually offering premiums for the best grain, livestock, and implements exhibited.

A good example of the early fairs can be found in the following account of the Louisa County Fair of 1853: "The fourth annual exhibition was held at Wapello October 5 and 6. The

<sup>5</sup>*Laws of Iowa*, 1852-54, Ch. 45.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 1855, Ch. 41.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 1864-66, Ch. 40.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 1856-1857, Ch. 188.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 1868, Ch. 136.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 1919, Ch. 175, Sec. 3.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 1921, Ch. 264, Sec. 3.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 1929, Ch. 287, Sec. 16.

first day witnessed the exhibition of livestock; the second, fruits, vegetables, and farm produce.

"The horses were superior to those shown at Burlington the week before. Not a sheep was shown. One would think the present high price would stimulate wool growing in this State, especially in Louisa County, where range is so large."<sup>13</sup>

This report gives an idea of the type of information disseminated by the societies. They compared the breeds of livestock shown at the various fairs and made comments and suggestions for improving the status of the farmer.

An idea of the premiums offered might also be gleaned from the following list offered that same year at Wapello:

Product	First Prize	Second Prize	Third Prize
Stallion .....	\$5.00	\$3.00	\$1.00
Brood Mare .....	5.00	3.00	1.00
Saddle Horse .....	5.00	3.00	1.00
Colt .....	5.00	3.00	1.00
Bull .....	4.00	3.00	2.00
Cow .....	4.00	3.00	2.00
Calf .....	2.00	1.00	None
Hogs .....	4.00	None	None
Corn .....	5.00 for the greatest yield per acre. <sup>14</sup>		

From the time of the founding of the first county society in 1852, these organizations were well received by the people of Iowa and were very popular. From 1852 to 1900, the date at which the State Agricultural Society ceased functioning, reports show that the number of these societies steadily increased except during the Civil War period when there was a decided decline. However, shortly after the close of the war, the societies were stronger and more numerous than ever. Interest in the activities of these organizations grew along with their enhanced numbers. More people attended the annual fairs and more premiums were offered. It is interesting to note that during a period of depression, as that of 1873, the number of societies increased while the total membership and the receipts diminished, but the amount of premiums awarded was greater. The following chart shows the development of the county societies in number, receipts, and premiums offered:

<sup>13</sup>*Iowa Farmer and Horticulturist*, 1853, pp. 123-24.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 1853, p. 125.

Year	No. Reporting	Members	Receipts	Premiums
1852	7			
1857	35			
1861	54			
1867	45	11,333	\$ 25,477	\$ 18,180
1871	82	34,582	120,270	67,597
1875	86	20,101	106,581	75,934
1879	94	27,664	118,351	85,864
1883	93	47,386	155,152	
1887	101	37,645	176,956	130,295
1890	111	36,173	240,148	160,462
1893	115	32,778	237,539	164,285
1896	109		237,340	135,260
1899	101		279,996	141,299 <sup>15</sup>

A short time after the launching of the county societies the people of Iowa felt the need of a state organization. Accordingly, October 13, 1853, the Jefferson County Agricultural Society, upon motion of C. W. Slagle, passed a resolution to take "immediate steps to effect the organization of a state agricultural society, and try to have said society hold its first annual exhibition at Fairfield in October, 1854."<sup>16</sup>

In issuing the call for other societies to join the project, the Jefferson officials stated that "There is no free state in the Union save Iowa, in which there is not a state agricultural society organized and in successful operation and they have recently been organized in most of the Southern States."<sup>17</sup>

The proposal attracted favorable public comment and, in response to the suggestion offered, it was arranged to hold a meeting at Fairfield to consider the proposition. An extract from one of the Iowa papers of that period illustrates the interest shown in the proposal: "A number of counties have appointed delegates to attend the Fairfield meeting. No doubt the State will support the Society."<sup>18</sup>

A meeting to form such an organization was held at the Fairfield Courthouse December 28, 1853. Five counties were represented at this time: Henry, Van Buren, Wapello, Lee, and Jefferson. The delegates elected D. P. Inskeep of Wapello County

<sup>15</sup>It is impossible to make this chart complete because information contained in the annual reports is incomplete. However, the table is as full as existing data permit.

<sup>16</sup>Iowa State Agricultural Society, *Annual Report*, 1854, p. 485.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 1854, p. 486.

<sup>18</sup>*Iowa Farmer and Horticulturist*, 1853, p. 171.

chairman of the meeting and D. Sheward of Jefferson County secretary.<sup>19</sup>

The first work of the convention was the drafting of a constitution. A motion was made and adopted stating that a committee consisting of one person from each of the county societies represented undertake this task, but, in spite of this resolution, Henry County had two men, Thomas Siveter and J. W. Frazier, on the committee along with D. L. Huyett of Jefferson County, Josiah Hinkle of Lee County, and Timothy Day of Van Buren County. This group of men chose J. M. Shaffer of Jefferson County as their secretary.<sup>20</sup>

This committee succeeded in framing a constitution which served the society without amendment during its lifetime of forty-six years. The constitution was very brief. It provided for naming the organization the "Iowa State Agricultural Society." Any person interested in the improvement of agriculture and paying an annual due of one dollar was eligible to membership. The constitution further provided for the five ordinary officers: a president; a vice president; a treasurer, whose duties were to keep the funds, report the financial conditions of the society at least once a year, and who was to give a bond of \$3,000; a corresponding secretary, who was to carry on communication with the various county organizations, state societies, and individuals; and a recording secretary.

The general management of the society was vested in a board of control, consisting of the president and vice president of the State Society and three directors from each county society. In addition to shaping the policies of the State Society, this board was to have charge of the distribution of seed, books, and plants. It was also to publish and disseminate any information which it considered of value to the farmers of Iowa.

The third group of executives, as provided by the constitution of the Iowa State Agricultural Society, was the managers. This body was composed of three representatives from each county organization. The managers assisted in the management of the State Society and were the medium of communication between the Board of Control and other state and county societies, that

<sup>19</sup>Iowa State Agricultural Society. *Annual Report*, 1854, p. 488.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 1854, p. 488.

is, it was through this group that the various state and county organizations exchanged ideas. For the year October 1853 to October 1854 the managers were:

- Lee County—Arthur Bridgman, R. Brackett, and J. Hinkle.  
 Van Buren County—Timothy Day, Dr. [John D.] Elbert, William Campbell.  
 Henry County—Thomas Siveter, A. Lapham, J. W. Frazier.  
 Jefferson County—P. L. Huyett, John Andrews, B. B. Tuttle.  
 Wapello County—Richard Warden, General Ramsey, Uriah Biggs.  
 Mahaska County—Wm. McKinley, Sr., Jno. White, M. T. Williams.  
 Polk County—Dr. [Thomas K.] Brooks, Thomas Mitchell, Wm. McKay.  
 Des Moines County—J. F. Tallant, A. K. Avery, G. Nerly.  
 Louisa County—Geo. Key, Francis Springer, J. Marshall.  
 Muscatine County—J. H. Wallace, James Weed, John A. Parvin.  
 Dubuque County—W. Y. Lovill, V. McCraney, L. Langworthy.  
 Johnson County—R. H. Sylvester, LeGrand Byington, C. Saunders.  
 Scott County—J. A. Burchard, J. Thorington, L. Summers.<sup>21</sup>

The final article of the constitution provided for its amendment. This document could be altered by a two-thirds vote of the members attending the annual meeting of the State Society, but, before any action could be taken, a two months' notice of the proposed amendment had to be given through the newspapers of Iowa.<sup>22</sup>

The election of officers for the coming year was the next important task of the convention. Thomas Clagett, Lee County, was chosen president; D. P. Inskeep, Wapello County, vice president; J. M. Shaffer, Jefferson county, recording secretary; C. W. Slagle, Jefferson County, corresponding secretary; and W. B. Chamberlain, Des Moines County, treasurer.<sup>23</sup> There was a variety of occupations represented in this group of men who were chosen to guide the State Agricultural Society through its first year of life. The president was a lawyer and journalist, the vice president and treasurer were merchants, and the recording secretary was a physician, while the corresponding secretary was a lawyer.<sup>24</sup> This shows that not only were the farmers themselves interested in promoting their own welfare, but that all the people of Iowa were anxious to further the chief industry of the

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 1854, p. 491.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 1854, pp. 489-90 (Constitution of Iowa State Agricultural Society).

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 1854, p. 491.

<sup>24</sup>Ross, "Origin of the State Fair" in the *Palimpsest*, Vol. X, p. 277.



state and so increase its wealth and offer better advantages to its citizens. In fact, it shows the absence of farmers in the position of leadership of a society which really belonged to them and was created for their benefit. The only justification for the choice of men engaged in other occupations to the executive positions of an organization for the benefit of a vast number of persons engaged in agricultural pursuits is that these men were products of the farm and knew the needs of the farmers as well as those actively engaged in farming.

Before the convention adjourned it passed a resolution "to memorialize the legislature for pecuniary aid to further permanent establishment of the State Agricultural Society."<sup>25</sup> Apparently, however, this resolution was never presented to the General Assembly because neither the journals of the House nor the Senate reveal the reception of such a petition.

It was stated in the constitution that the first fair was to be held at Fairfield October 25-27, 1854.<sup>26</sup> Later there was no thought of changing this decision nor did interest in the plan lag. Consequently when, early in 1854, President Clagett requested all officers of the organization to meet at Fairfield June 6 to arrange a list of premiums, all responded and they decided upon awards totaling \$1,100. The first Iowa State Fair was held as scheduled. The fairground consisted of a six-acre tract surrounded by a ten-foot board fence. The attendance was between seven and ten thousand persons. The first day the stock was exhibited; the second day, birds, machinery, and produce. The feature of the second day was the show of the equestriennes. It was a very spectacular exhibition with the ladies doing their most daring stunts of side riding, bareback riding, and straight riding. The spectators were very enthusiastic. However, the judges failed to give the prize to the favorite of the day and, after the decision was made known, the audience expressed its disapproval by presenting an impromptu purse to the rider of its choice.

On the third day a business meeting was held. Officers were elected for the ensuing year and the treasurer reported on the financial condition of the society. This report showed that the

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<sup>25</sup>Iowa State Agricultural Society, *Annual Report*, 1854, p. 9.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 1854, p. 491.

fair cost \$320 plus \$1,100 for premiums, making a total of \$1,420. The balance for the year showed a deficit of \$288.

The society held a fair every year thereafter until it ceased to exist. It first followed the policy of holding the fair in one city two years, then choosing some other site for an equal length of time. This policy was adopted because it was considered more just than any other could have been under the existing conditions. During the early years of the society's existence, transportation facilities were poor and consequently it was difficult for people to attend fairs far from home and still more difficult for them to take produce for exhibition. Because of this the officials decided to shift the fair to different sections of the state and this practice was rigidly followed for more than a decade. The first departure from this policy came in 1866, for said President Melendy in opening the fair that year, "This is the third successive fair held at Burlington, which is a departure from custom."<sup>27</sup>

Although it was first thought that this was the best method of procedure and in spite of the fact that Secretary Shaffer stated in his annual report of 1876 that a permanent location was not desirable,<sup>28</sup> by 1883 the members of the society had memorialized the legislature for appropriations to provide a permanent location for the fair. The bill was introduced by Senator Logan and championed by such men as Larrabee, Caldwell, Eastman, Sutton, Rothert, Russell, Smith, Donnan, Boyless and Nichols. It passed the Senate with only five dissenting votes; and the House by a vote of 61 to 31, a two to one majority.<sup>29</sup>

The law, as passed, was signed by the governor April 14, 1884. It appropriated \$50,000 for the purchase of not less than 200 and not more than 400 acres of land to be used by the society for holding annual fairs and for whatever other purposes it saw fit. One half of the amount allowed was to be drawn in 1884 and the remainder by June 1, 1885. The land was to be selected by the society and conveyed to and held by the state of Iowa for the use of the former. The state reserved the right to take possession of and dispose of the land at any time the society abandoned it or did not use it for the purpose designated by the

<sup>27</sup>*ibid.*, 1866, p. 49.

<sup>28</sup>*ibid.*, 1876, p. 40.

<sup>29</sup>*ibid.*, 1884, p. 254.

law.<sup>30</sup> This latter provision served to insure the people of Iowa that the State Agricultural Society would hold an annual fair.

A committee was then appointed to select a permanent home for the Iowa State Fair. By 1885, this group had purchased 262.91 acres at \$175 per acre and an additional three acres for \$1,000, which gave them a total of 265.91 acres at a cost of \$47,088.42. The land which they had chosen was known as the Calvin Thornton farm,<sup>31</sup> located in what is now East Des Moines. Thus the state fair was permanently located and has been held annually at that site ever since. However, the size of the grounds has increased. From the time of the original purchases in 1884 and 1885, there have been several additional purchases until at present the State Fairgrounds consist of 378 acres.<sup>32</sup>

Under the guidance of the Iowa State Agricultural Society, the fair steadily improved and grew. From the time of the first fair in 1854, the people of Iowa were intensely interested in it and supported it whole-heartedly. Not only was the attendance greater each year, but the number of articles for exhibit increased. Of course, there have been years when both attendance and entries have decreased, but these declines have been only temporary and the general trend has been upward. For five years the people of Iowa were content to display only articles pertaining to agriculture, but gradually new divisions were added. By 1859, the Natural History, the Bookbinding, and the Painting and Drawing departments were included in the exhibition. Seven years later displays of leather goods, photography, and jewelry could be seen and by 1878 the handwork of boys and girls under fourteen years of age attracted attention. This constant expansion created new interest and, as a result, the project continued to grow larger and larger until today it includes exhibits of almost every field, not only agricultural implements and products, but also fish, game, automobiles, radios, electrical appliances for the home, embroidery, and many others. Besides displaying these articles, amusements of every description can now be found on the fairground.

The following chart shows the growth of the Iowa State Fair by the number of entries. It is interesting to note the entry

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<sup>30</sup>*Laws of Iowa*, 1884, Ch. 199.

<sup>31</sup>Iowa State Agricultural Society, *Annual Report*, 1885, pp. 60-61.

<sup>32</sup>Interview A. K. Corey, secretary Iowa State Fair Board, August, 1931.

"others." Its growth shows the rate at which goods other than purely farm produce were added to the fair exhibits.

Entry	1856	1859	1863	1866	1869	1872	1875	1878
Cattle .....	145	125	84	79	129	353	209	268
Horses .....	182	156	129	176	278	218	242	267
Mules .....	14	24	28	30	34	46	26	10
Sheep .....	22	37	78	159	31	149	48	53
Swine .....	27	38	47	217	164	161	258	249
Produce .....	106	190	128	139	415	758	708	539
Implements .....	113	26	126	205	333	350	366	329
Others .....	247	673	487	519	1,261	1,410	2,498	2,982

Entry		1881	1884	1887	1890	1893 <sup>33</sup>
Cattle .....		373	450	481	590	293
Horses .....		330	362	443	520	345
Mules .....		3	17	10	23	17
Sheep .....		122	159	250	272	143
Swine .....		371	402	343	443	448
Produce .....		610	1,183	2,250	3,373	1,754
Implements .....		362	638	663	823	220
Others .....		3,374	4,174	2,971	3,862	7,365
Poultry .....			265	381	278	1,032

At an early date, the society began communicating and exchanging ideas on the operation and management of fairs with other state societies. At first this was done through an interchange of annual reports, but later committees were sent to other state fairs, which reported on and compared the various exhibitions with those of Iowa. The first report of this kind was made in 1863, when E. R. Shankland, Peter Melendy, and E. Smith reported on the Illinois State Fair.<sup>34</sup> From that time on the Iowa Agricultural Society was represented at a number of fairs. For example, by 1869 it sent committees to the Illinois State Fair, the St. Louis Fair, the Mississippi Valley Fair, the Georgia State Fair, and the Louisiana State Fair.<sup>35</sup> Before long it was represented at national exhibitions such as the Centennial Celebration and the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, and by 1878 it participated for the first time in an international fair, the Exposition of Paris.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup>The number of entries in the fairs of 1896 and 1899 could not be found. About this time P. L. Fowler became secretary of the organization and he did not include this information in his annual report.

<sup>34</sup>Iowa State Agricultural Society, *Annual Report*, 1863, p. 32.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 1869, p. 92.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 1878, p. 903.

While Iowa was sending committees to other states, those states were being represented at the Iowa Fair. By 1870 Illinois, Missouri, Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, New York, Indiana, Connecticut, and Maryland had exhibits at the Iowa Fair. Even two foreign countries, France and England, were present.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to the displays of other states, other organizations within Iowa were taking part in the annual fair. By 1866 the Iowa State Horticultural Society, which had been organized that year, asked permission to exhibit with the Agricultural Society in its fair of 1867.<sup>38</sup> This request was granted and the first joint exhibition of the two organizations was held at Clinton. From that date until the Agricultural Society was legislated out of existence in 1900 this policy was continued. Later, the State College at Ames was asked to participate in the fair and gladly agreed provided the society would supply ample space for its exhibition and pay all transportation charges. This offer was accepted<sup>39</sup> and the State College presented its first display in 1881.

Not only were the members of the society interested in exhibitions and displays of the various products of Iowa, but they were also interested in solving farm problems as they arose. In an attempt to do this, competent men were called in to discuss various subjects of interest. At one time papers might be read on drainage and irrigation; while at another, fencing might be discussed. Particularly was the subject of fencing emphasized after the state legislature passed an act "Restraining Animals from Running at Large."<sup>40</sup> The best types and methods of constructing fences were thoroughly debated. Was it more advisable to use a sod fence, a hedge, or a rail fence? A sod fence was not very lasting. Weeds grew along with the hedge and were difficult to destroy. A rail fence, then, appeared the most satisfactory and was used extensively for years. The care and breeding of livestock also came up for its share of consideration. In fact, scarcely any produce raised on the farm was omitted from the general discussion. Again, the methods of farming were considered. At one time the question of using horses and oxen was

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 1870, pp. 38-39.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 1866, pp. 56-57.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 1880, p. 54.

<sup>40</sup>*Laws of Iowa*, 1855, Ch. 135.

debated. Oxen were strong but slow. Horses were faster, but could they endure as long as oxen? Which were best adapted to the Iowa farm? It was finally decided that horses were as strong as oxen and could be used more efficiently, so the use of the latter was gradually discontinued. Later, as machinery was invented, the question of its use and adaptation to the Iowa farm were the leading topics for discussion. In fact, it was the duty and purpose of the society to aid the farmer in solving his problems, in improving his produce, and in increasing his production and this it was doing effectively through two definite media: first, the annual fair; and second, the discussion of current problems.

The society, however, would not have been able to accomplish so much had it not been for the hearty support of the state government. Within two years after its organization the state legislature provided, for an indefinite period, an annual appropriation for the use of the society. One hundred dollars of the first year's appropriation was to be used in liquidating a part of the deficit of the fair of 1854.<sup>41</sup> The lands leased by the society for exhibition purposes prior to the securing of a permanent location were exempt from taxation during the term of the lease.<sup>42</sup> In 1876 and again in 1877, the society received \$2,000 from the state treasury.<sup>43</sup>

After the purchase of the Calvin Thornton farm numerous appropriations were made for improving it. On April 11, 1888, a law was enacted which permitted the society to draw \$9,500 for improvements before May 1, 1889.<sup>44</sup> Five years later the state legislature made possible the holding of the fair. It happened this way. The society suffered a loss of approximately \$25,000 when its amphitheater and other buildings were destroyed by a windstorm. It could not borrow money on the grounds as they belonged to the state and, for a time, it seemed that the exhibition of 1894 would have to be abandoned. However, the state legislature, declaring that the "fairs are of inestimable benefit to the state," appropriated \$20,000 to apply on the indebtedness of the society.<sup>45</sup> Today the Iowa State Fair

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 1855, Ch. 166.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 1862, Ch. 31.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 1876, Ch. 31.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 1888, Ch. 127.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 1894, Ch. 184.

has become self-supporting and the General Assembly does not regularly appropriate money for its use. The law provides that "all expenses incurred in maintaining the State Fairgrounds and in conducting the annual fair thereon, including the compensation and expenses of the officers, members, and employees of the board, shall be recorded by the secretary and paid from the state fair receipts, unless a specific appropriation has been provided for such purposes, but in the absence of any such appropriation the state shall not be liable for any expenses or liabilities incurred by the board."<sup>46</sup>

After forty-six years of service the Iowa State Agricultural Society passed out of existence, doomed by the hand which in bygone years had created it and had assisted it in its development and activity. Under the law cited in Chapter 58 of the Twenty-eighth General Assembly, 1900, the State Agricultural Society was abolished and the Department of Agriculture took its place.<sup>47</sup>

According to this statute, the new department embraced the district and county agricultural societies and was entitled to receive \$2,400 annually from the state. This department was to be managed by the State Board of Agriculture composed of a president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and one director from each congressional district. The governor of the state, the president of the State Agricultural College, the state dairy commissioner, and the state veterinary were to be ex officio members of the board. Its duties were to supervise branch bureaus of the Department of Agriculture, to promote agriculture and agricultural education, to investigate and to report on methods of farming, agricultural machinery, diversification of crops and disease among stock and grains. The board was also to manage the annual fair and to regulate improvements upon the fairgrounds.

The law of 1900 further provided that an agricultural convention was to be held annually on the second Wednesday of December, which was to consist of the State Board of Agriculture, the president or secretary of each county or district society

<sup>46</sup>*Code of Iowa*, 1927, Section 2888.

<sup>47</sup>Iowa State Agricultural Society, *Annual Report*, 1900, p. 98.

entitled to state aid, and a representative of the Iowa State Horticultural Society, the State Dairy Association, the Improved Stock Breeders' Association, and the Swine Breeders' Association. Anyone who wished might attend these meetings. The officers of the convention were a president, vice president, secretary and treasurer who were to be elected annually. It was the special duty of the secretary to compile the *Iowa Year Book of Agriculture*, including reports of the dairy commissioner, the State Dairy Association, the Iowa Agricultural Experiment Station, the state veterinary, the Iowa Weather and Crop Service, the Iowa Improved Stock Breeders' Association, and any other organization that the board might demand.<sup>48</sup>

It is evident that the character of the work of the new department was the same as that of the old Agricultural Society, but the scope was wider.<sup>49</sup> After the department took over the work of the society, it naturally followed that it took over the cash assets which amounted to \$28,000.<sup>50</sup> Consequently, the new organization started life with a credit of \$28,000 instead of a deficit as the old Agricultural Society had done nearly a half century earlier.

In accordance with the statute of 1900, the State Board of Agriculture carried on the work of the Agricultural Society, holding annual exhibitions and annual conventions. It continued awarding premiums to encourage the improvement of produce and enlarged the fair. It also persisted in discussing agricultural problems. For twenty-three years this organization did its bit in aiding the farmer to increase his wealth and enhance his life by giving him information which he could not have obtained otherwise. Then, in 1923<sup>51</sup> the Department of Agriculture, as it exists today, was created. With the creation of this department, the State Board of Agriculture became the present Iowa State Fair Board, which has since had charge of the Iowa State Fair. Under its supervision the fair has succeeded and grown until the seventy-fifth annual fair, that of 1929, claimed the largest attendance and the most impressive array of educational, agricul-

<sup>48</sup>*Laws of Iowa*, 1900, Ch. 58.

<sup>49</sup>Iowa State Agricultural Society, *Annual Report*, 1900, p. 99.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 1900, p. 171.

<sup>51</sup>*Laws of Iowa*, 1923, Ch. 46.



tural, and livestock exhibits in the entire three-quarters of a century of its eventful history.<sup>52</sup>

Since 1929 the state fair has been held annually, but it has not been as successful as previously. It has been said that the Iowa State Fair is a barometer of the economic conditions of Iowa and this statement seems to be borne out by the reports on the state fair. In 1930 the attendance was larger than it had been in 1928 but not as large as in 1929 and the fair made a profit of \$3,836.91,<sup>53</sup> but in 1931 the attendance and receipts had materially decreased. That year the deficit of the fair was \$63,450.48, which is only the second loss the state fair has sustained in the past thirty years.<sup>54</sup> By 1933 the attendance had begun to increase. The reports show that while the attendance in 1932 was 256,411, in 1933 it was 290,268<sup>55</sup> and that financially the fair was also more successful, for in that year all operating expenses were paid from receipts.<sup>56</sup> Due to the drouth and financial conditions of the farmers of Iowa, the attendance decreased approximately 29,000 and the fair operated at a deficit of about \$16,000,<sup>57</sup> but there were sufficient funds on hand to pay all expenses.

In spite of the economic depression and the decrease in attendance and premiums during the past few years, the number of entries seem to be keeping up to normal and in some cases even increasing. For example, in 1930 the number of swine shown increased 252 and the number of sheep 150 over 1929.<sup>58</sup> In 1931 the poultry department surpassed all other years with 2,700 entries.<sup>59</sup> Again the State Fair Board claims an increase in the entries in the farm produce department from 905 in 1931 to 1,064 in 1932 and in the culinary department from 3,647 to 3,715 in the same period.<sup>60</sup> The drouth in 1934 seriously affected the exhibits in the agricultural and horticultural departments, but

<sup>52</sup>Iowa State Department of Agriculture, *Iowa Year Book of Agriculture*, 1929, p. 445.

<sup>53</sup>Iowa State Department of Agriculture, *Iowa Year Book of Agriculture*, 1930, p. 432.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 1931, p. 277.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 1933, p. 196.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 1933, p. 205.

<sup>57</sup>Corey, *Report of the Iowa State Fair Board, 1934*, p. 30-31.

<sup>58</sup>Iowa State Department of Agriculture, *Iowa Year Book of Agriculture*, 1930, p. 433.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 1931, p. 269.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 1932, p. 151.

the livestock, textile, educational, and 4 H Club departments showed an increase in the number of entries.<sup>61</sup>

While the fair board was laboring under financial difficulties, they maintained a high standard of educational features at the fair. Probably the most outstanding of these was the 4 H Club activities. Every county is now represented in this department where the boys and girls give canning, baking, sewing, and livestock raising demonstrations. Greater emphasis is being placed on this feature and each year it is becoming more important.

The amusements of recent years have been lessened due to the reduced expenditures of the fair board. However, a new type of entertainment in the form of a state fair rodeo has been introduced for the night show in front of the amphitheater. This performance proved to be very popular with the public and the attendance at the night shows increased 135% over 1932.<sup>62</sup> On five of the seven nights on which this performance was given the seats in the grandstand were entirely sold out and on the other two nights they were well filled.

An added attraction at the Iowa State Fair in 1932 was the filming of the motion picture "State Fair" based upon Phil Stong's novel of that name. Under the direction of Henry King a number of cameramen and sound crews spent eight days at the Iowa State Fairgrounds photographing scenes of interest to provide atmosphere for the picture. This activity created a great deal of interest among the public as well as among fair officials.

There is no doubt that the early agricultural societies performed a valuable service to the people of Iowa in disseminating knowledge and in bringing the farmers together on a common ground. The county fairs served as a means of bringing the people of their respective communities together while the state fair brought people from all sections of the state into closer contact. In this manner, new ideas spread from one person to another, from one community to another, until every farmer in Iowa had heard of and discussed them. Not only were better methods of cultivating crops and caring for livestock debated, but attempts were made to improve methods of making butter

<sup>61</sup>Corey, *Report of the Iowa State Fair Board*, 1934, pp. 4-5.

<sup>62</sup>Iowa State Department of Agriculture, *Iowa Year Book of Agriculture*, 1933, p. 198.

and ways of preserving fruits. All activities about the house were included in the discussions. In short, an effort was made to lighten household duties and to remove the drudgery too often associated with the work of a farmer's wife.

The fairs, especially in the early stages, were days of recreation, a vacation for the busy and more or less isolated farmer and his family. There were few diversions for these hard working people and it was impossible, because of transportation facilities and work, to leave the farm often or to travel far. At the fairs neighbors, friends, and relatives met, discussed problems, played, and gossiped far into the night, and departed with a happier outlook on life, probably not to meet again until the next fair.

The fair, as it was first organized, was almost purely for educational purposes. The only entertainment of the first state fair was the exhibit of the equestriennes on the second day. However, bit by bit, more and more amusements were added until today many people consider the fair an entertainment and do not connect it in any way with education. Perhaps the earliest form of sport at the fairs was horse racing. Enthusiastic spectators cheered their favorite and bet heavily on him. Soon there was added bicycle racing, much to the delight of the people of Iowa. Many a spill was taken on the high-wheeled bicycles amid the gleeful shouts of the onlookers. Finally, automobile and aeroplane racing and stunting were added. A trip down Midway reveals sideshows of every description. The meager Japanese day fireworks of 1884, costing \$500, have developed into the elaborate displays of today, which include pieces featuring everything from animals and leading products of the state to busts of famous men.

With the increased number of entertainments came the lengthening of the fair period. It became customary to hold the fair from the middle of one week to the middle of the next week, that is, from Tuesday or Wednesday of one week to Tuesday or Wednesday of the following week, thus including Sunday in the "fair days." With this practice came the idea of holding Sunday services on the fairground for the visitors. Thus, the Sunday meeting of 1891 found B. O. Aylesworth of Drake University

conducting these services. The policy of quietly observing Sunday on the fairground has continued. At present, musical concerts for the entertainment of the visitors may be found, but on Sunday all the glamor is removed. Midway and the race track are silent and peace and quiet reign supreme.

On the other hand, it is only just to say that the fair, as it exists today, though offering more entertainments than ever before, also presents more educational features if one only looks for them. For example, members of farm organizations such as the Farm Bureau, the Farmers' Union, and the Iowa Grange present papers on current problems; demonstrations are given by enthusiastic 4 H Club members; and new and improved machinery is shown. Competitive exhibits are educational because they encourage the participants to study and improve their product so it will win the premium. While many attend the fair only for a holiday, anyone who is interested may take advantage of the educational features of the program and benefit by them. Beyond question many farmers of today, as did the farmers of Iowa seventy-five years ago, carry home valuable ideas obtained from this source.

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#### FIRE IN THE CAPITOL.

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At about half past nine yesterday morning while the legislature was in session an alarm of fire was sounded in the Capitol Building, causing the greatest fear and excitement imaginable. It was discovered immediately that the fire had communicated by some means from one of the chimneys on the west side to some boards in the attic. It was extinguished without damage.—*Daily Iowa State Register*, Des Moines, February 10, 1860. (In the Newspaper Division of the Historical, Memorial and Art Department of Iowa.)

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