

The Editor's Perspective

FOND MEMORIES of the Iowa State Fair—many, many Iowans have them. Mine (I was not an eyewitness to the event as I was laid up with a kidney stone at the time) is of my second daughter winning the baby crawling contest not long after we moved to Iowa. Good parents that my wife and I were in those early days of parenthood, we rarely let our kids have sweets. In this case, Mom promised Ruth that she could have some cola if she would crawl really fast to get it. Mom then sent Older Sister to the finish line with the cup of pop. While other babies dallied, Ruth made a beeline for her sister—and the pop—and won the contest.

The Iowa State Fair generates such memories. My family, of course, visited some of the agricultural exhibits that still reflect the original, educational purpose of the fair, but our memories have much more to do with rides, contests, food, photographic exhibits, talent shows, and the State Fair Singers than with the latest farm implements or the best livestock.

The Iowa State Fair, however, has not only been a source of personal memories, but also the creator and bearer of public memories as well, as Chris Rasmussen's fascinating article in this issue makes clear. Visitors to the fair have often been instructed in history, sometimes through serious historical exhibits, but often through bizarre entertainments as well. Among those were the disaster spectacles of the early twentieth century that Rasmussen describes so vividly.

The State Historical Society plays a role in maintaining public memory of the fair—and sometimes private ones as well, in diaries and reminiscences that tell about visits to the fair. Our libraries hold agricultural society reports, premium books, and other publications that make it possible to trace the history of the fair; and the special collections department has a large collection of photographs that provide visual documentation of events at the fair (a couple of those appear in this issue).

At the 2005 State Fair, one of the Society's items was used to recreate an event from the fair's history. Film footage from the State Historical Society of Iowa's audio-visual collection was featured in a display recreating a staged locomotive collision that had thrilled fairgoers in 1932. The short clip, captured on 16mm film by fair employee Frank Burns, shows the head-on charge and explosive impact of the two locomotives—aptly named *Hoover* and *Roosevelt* in that election year.

Build on your own memories of the Iowa State Fair or participate vicariously in the public memories created by fair officials as you enjoy Chris Rasmussen's article in this issue.

—Marvin Bergman, editor

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