



*“On the Battle Field, In the Hospital,
In the Parlor, At the Fair”*

Sanitary fairs were one method used to gather supplies and funds for Civil War soldiers. In 1864, encouraged by the success of sanitary fairs in other states, Iowans staged at least three fairs.

In Dubuque, a committee of eight men and eight women organized the Northern Iowa Sanitary Fair, aiming for state-wide participation. Long before opening day on June 21, hospital goods worth \$25,000 had already been gathered from Iowa communities and forwarded to soldiers and military hospitals.

City Hall, the site of the fair, was decorated with flags, evergreens, and flowers. Besides evening entertainments of plays and pantomimes, and exhibits of “curi-

osities and battle relics,” the sanitary fair operated as an enormous bazaar. For the cost of a ticket (50¢ a day or \$2 for all eight days), visitors strolled by various booths run by counties, clubs, and organizations, where they could purchase items that had been donated. Farm implements and household equipment were popular items at the Dubuque fair, but far more “fancy articles” were donated than could find buyers. Unsold items were auctioned, converted to hospital supplies, or donated to other fairs.

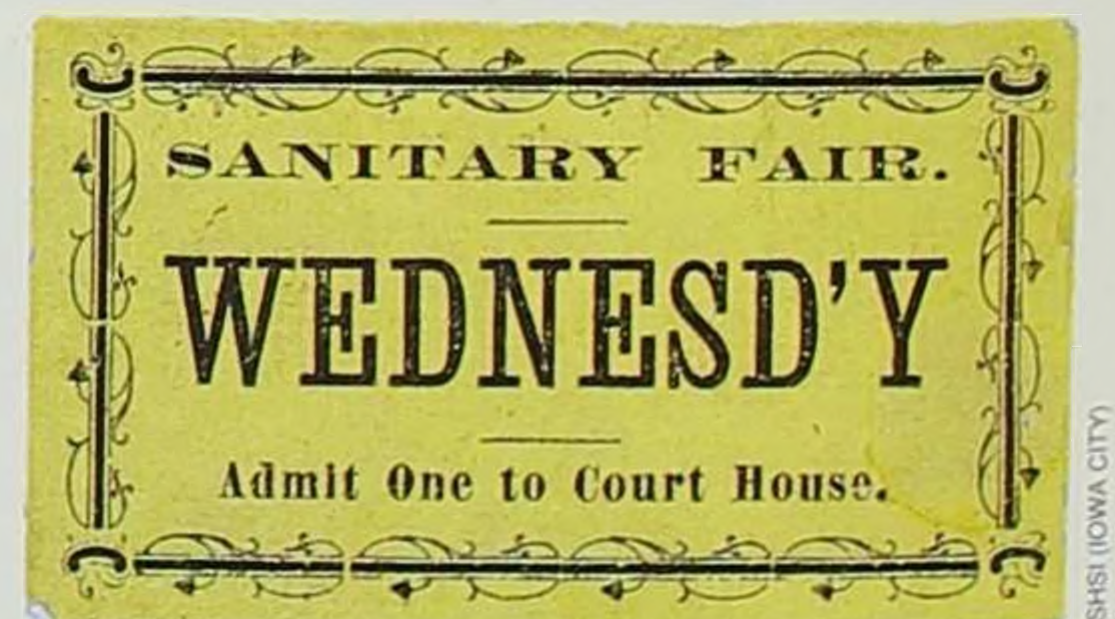
Businesses offered prizes for the “best gentleman’s shirt,” “the largest donation of flour,” “the best three gallon crock of butter,” or “the largest amount of hospital clothing.”

The Dubuque fair received do-

The circular illustrations used here and in the previous article are from *Harper’s Weekly* coverage of the April 1864 Metropolitan [Sanitary] Fair in New York for the United States Sanitary Commission. Artist Thomas Nast labeled the drawings “On the Battle Field,” “In the Hospital,” “In the Parlor,” and (see left) “At the Fair,” reflecting the arenas in which women (“Our Heroines”) were performing. The scene in *Gone with the Wind* in which widowed Scarlett O’Hara Hamilton dances impatiently behind her booth is set at Atlanta’s benefit bazaar for its military hospital, and was probably based on wartime fundraisers like sanitary fairs.

nations from 300 Iowa communities in 62 counties. Total receipts reached nearly \$90,000. The fair is documented in detail in the 1864 treasurer’s report, and similar donation lists are found in the Annie Turner Wittenmyer Papers at the State Historical Society. But these tell only part of the story. Behind these inventories lay countless hours in which Iowa women sewed shirts, knitted socks, canned foodstuffs, rolled bandages, scraped lint, and boxed up supplies—all this while operating farms and businesses in the absence of men taken by the war. Like all wars, this one, too, was fought on the home front.

—The Editor



This ticket, labeled “Sept 64” on the back, may be from the Iowa Central Fair in Muscatine or the Southern Iowa Fair in Burlington. Both were held in September; each raised \$20,000 or more for soldiers’ aid.