

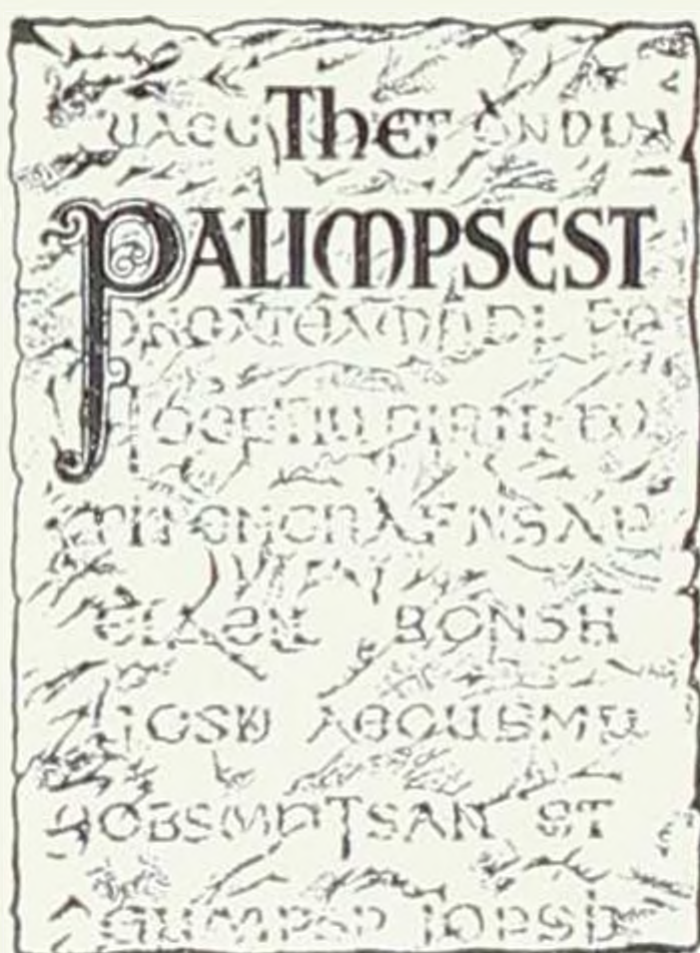
The
PALIMPSEST



THE IOWA STATE FAIR IN 1904

Published Monthly by
The State Historical Society of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa

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The Meaning of Palimpsest

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the record of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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EARLE D. ROSS

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Cover

Front — View of State Fair Around 1904-1909.

Back — Inside: A Typical Crowd at the 1951 Fair.

Outside: Airview of the Iowa State Fair.

All pictures courtesy Iowa State Fair Board.

Authors

Earle D. Ross is Professor of History at Iowa State College. His story of the Iowa State Fair appeared in *The Palimpsest* for August, 1929, and has been reprinted with a new chapter, A Dynamic Quarter Century, bringing it up to date.

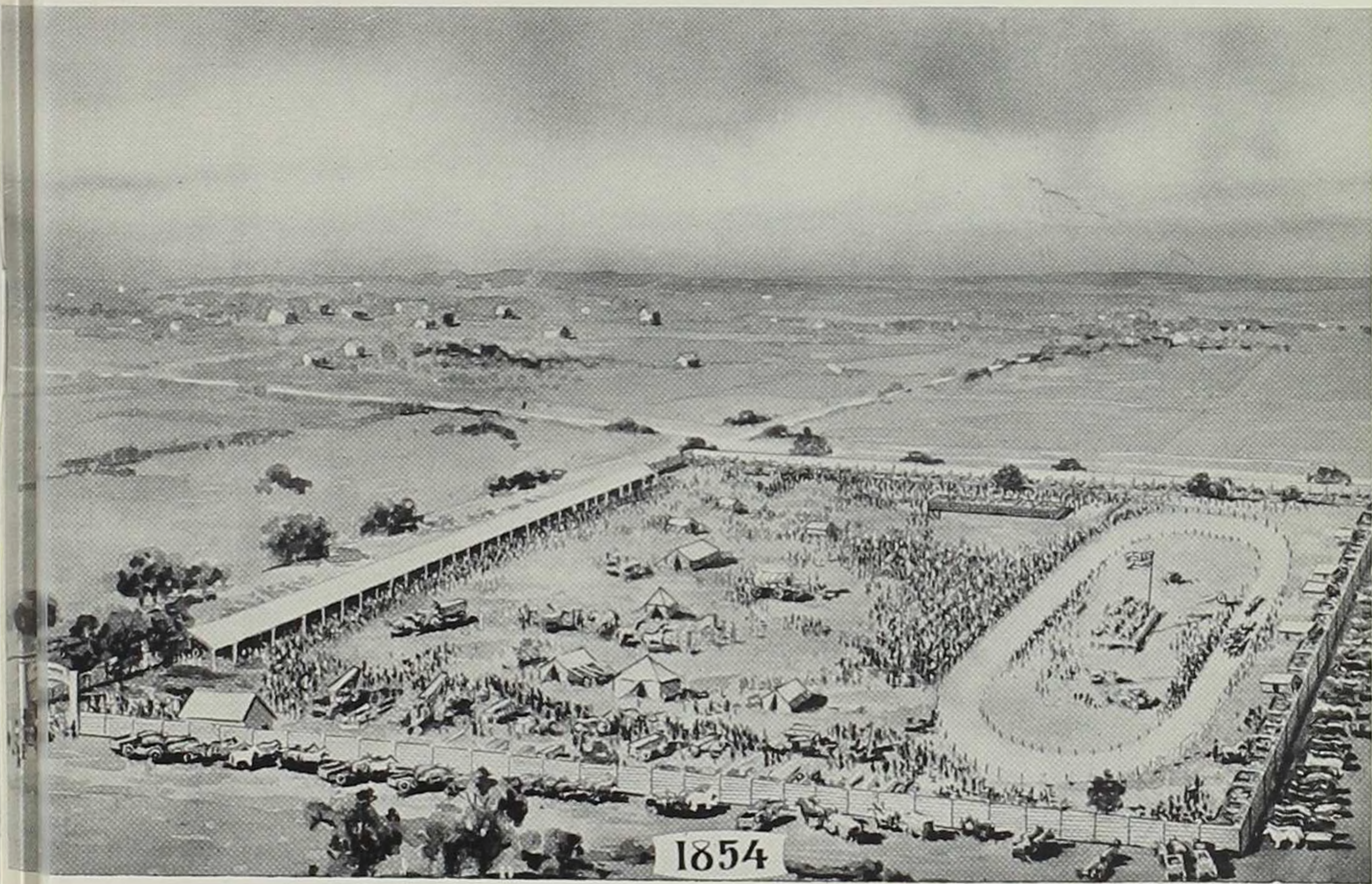
William J. Petersen is Superintendent of the State Historical Society.

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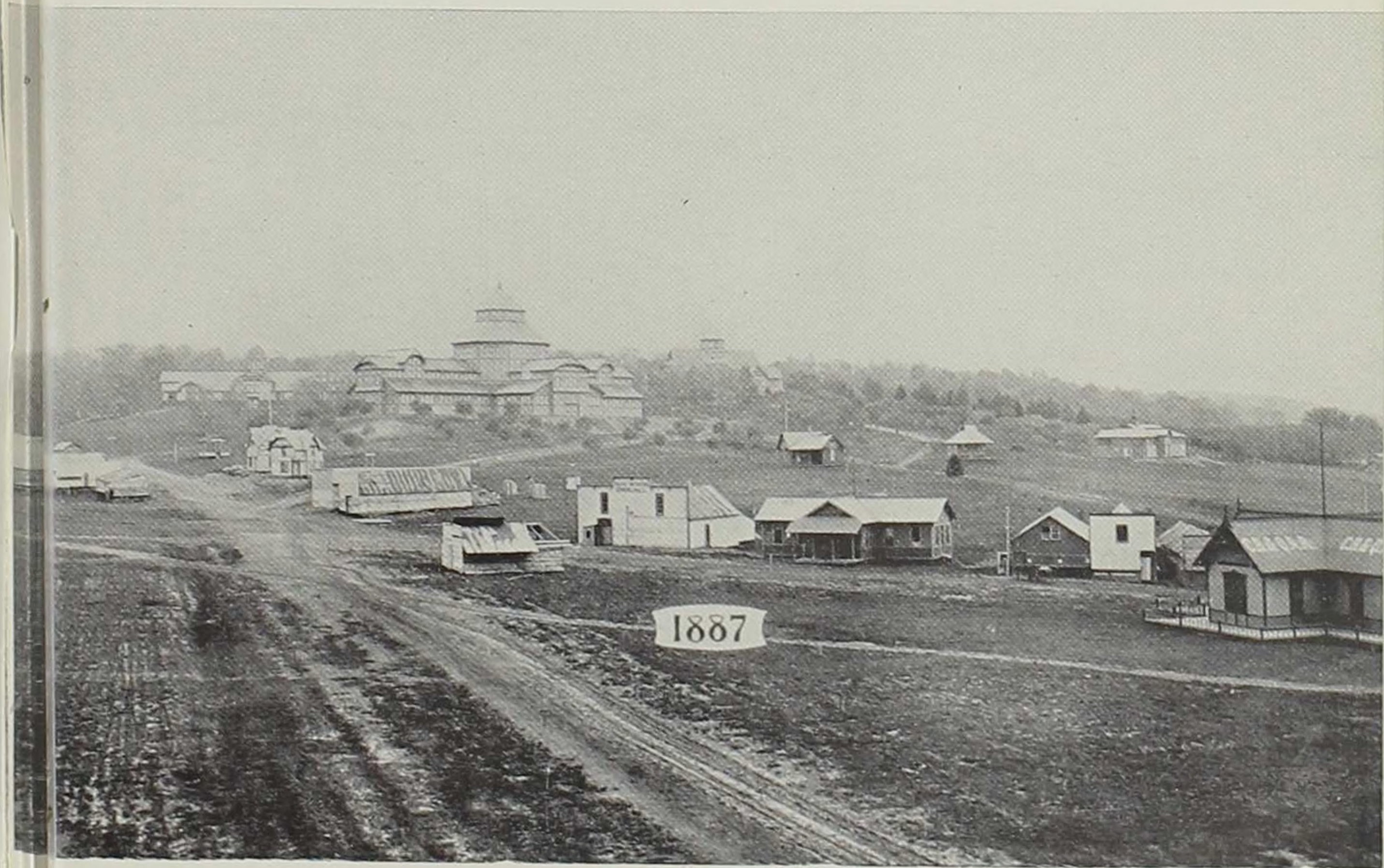
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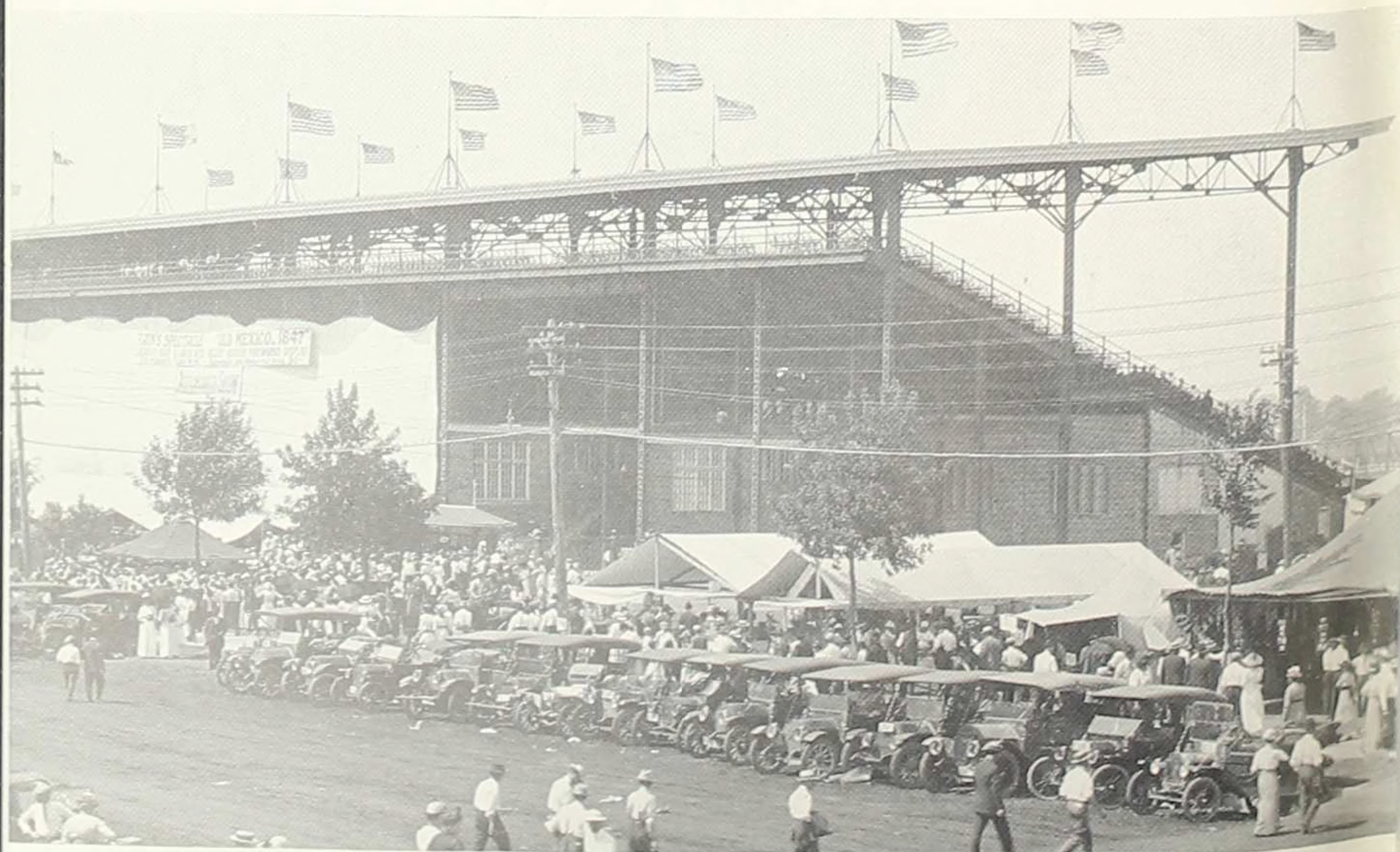
An Artist's Sketch of the First Iowa State Fair at Fairfield (1854)



The Permanent State Fair Grounds Two Years Old (1887)



Parking in the Grove (1910)



Rear Corner of the Amphitheater (1913)

THE PALIMPSEST

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Signs of the Times

"There is no better barometer of agricultural conditions in the corn belt than the Iowa State Fair," declared an agricultural journal back in 1911. In a still broader sense the progress of the State fair from the simple stock show in Fairfield one hundred years ago to the present industrial and artistic exhibition reflects, to an unusual degree, the course of development of the State.

Visitors at the first Iowa State Fair in the fall of 1854, during the intervals between viewing exhibits and listening to addresses, should have been at no loss for topics of conversation with their neighbors concerning the state of the nation and of their own Commonwealth.

The year 1854 stands double-starred in American history — one of those years in which great events seem to crowd and powerful forces culminate. Particularly the conflict between union and disunion reached a fateful turning-point. The

completion of the continental domain during the previous year, the development of trunk railroad lines to the Middle West, the projection of Pacific railroads, and the beginning of the final dispossession of the western Indians, all, in themselves, favored the realization of the Union, one and inseparable. But western expansion, which was to be the most potent influence in nation-making, was also to be the most direct occasion of nation-testing. The Kansas-Nebraska Act, designed to promote unification, set in train hopelessly divisive events, inaugurated by the disintegration of political parties — the abortive Know Nothing demonstration and the formation of a new inclusive free-soil combination (whose diamond jubilee is also celebrated the present year). Public land disposal, hitherto an issue between the older and newer regions, now became a contention between free and slave interests. The Ostend Manifesto for Cuban annexation was another evidence of sectional cleavage.

Social agitation found outlet in the first widespread experiment with prohibition. Internationally the opening of trade relations with Japan marked the extension of Far Eastern interests. Prosperity during this eventful year was manifested in trade expansion, the beginning of an "agricultural boom," especially in the wheat market, and the attainment of the high point in immigration before the seventies.

The year was no less vital and dynamic in the history of the new State of Iowa. It marked the "political revolution" by which future party control was to be determined, the beginning of the movement to revise and modernize the State Constitution, the election of a legislature which was to provide for the removal of the State capital, the establishment of an insane asylum, and the prohibition of the manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquor.

The same year witnessed the beginning of the great trans-Mississippi migration of which Iowa was to be the chief destination. For the year ending in June, 1855, some three and a quarter million acres of the public domain within the State passed into the hands of prospective farmers, and within two years nearly two hundred thousand people had been added to the producers and consumers of Iowa.

Still more conclusive evidence of progress in this momentous year was to be seen in educational developments. In December, Governor Grimes recommended a drastic reorganization of the public school system and opened the battle for a technical college with the declaration that the State wanted "educated farmers and mechanics, engineers, architects, chemists, metallurgists and geologists" who could be supplied only "by the establishment of a school of applied science." The State University was opened at Iowa City in the following

March and already some half dozen denominational colleges were struggling for their places in the academic sun. A marked increase in the number of newspapers began in 1854. Culturally speaking, an appreciative traveller declared that Iowa was no longer "way out west," and various others at least meant to be complimentary in calling attention to evidence of eastern sophistication.

At the same time there were plenty of reminders that the Hawkeye State was still in the pioneer stage. Waterloo, Fort Dodge, and Sioux City were outlying frontier communities with unsettled country to the north and south. Indian troubles were brewing which were to burst forth three years later in the Spirit Lake massacre. The first locomotive in Iowa, ferried over the river at Davenport in May, was to haul the first passenger train west from that city a year from the following August. Agricultural machinery was just coming to have a practical application in the older portions of the Northwest and still had comparatively small utilization west of the Mississippi. Iowa alone of the free States had held no State-wide exhibition and demonstration for improved agriculture, though local societies had been functioning for a dozen years. It was this latter need which, unlike most of the others, seemed immediately remediable, that led to the initial steps in the fall of 1853 for the launching of the first State Fair in 1854.

EARLE D. ROSS

Origin of the State Fair

The agricultural fair, as it is known in this country, is a peculiarly American product. It is in no way related to the Old World market fair, which provided one of the main agencies of trade in the Middle Ages, continued to flourish through the eighteenth century, and still survives among the institutional anachronisms of Russia.

Modelled at the beginning somewhat upon the English cattle show, the American "fair" in its combination of exhibit, instruction, and amusement developed along different lines. As a permanent and distinctive institution it dates from the promotive effort of Elkanah Watson, who included among his numerous services for American agriculture that of being the "father of the agricultural fair." After founding his Berkshire society for the holding of cattle shows, this tireless "agricultural missionary" helped to secure similar institutions, not only in New England but in States as far west as Ohio. Local fairs were started in the Old Northwest during the twenties, and State organizations were launched and fairs held between 1849 and 1853. Far away California, not to be outdone in anything, even at this early day, had unofficial State fairs from 1851 to

1853, though the regular organization was not formed until the next year.

So to progressively-minded Hawkeyes it may well have seemed high time that their State should join the better farming procession. The initial move was made by the Jefferson County Agricultural Society at its annual meeting in October, 1853, when a call was issued for a State convention at Fairfield the coming December, composed of delegates from the various county societies, to form a State organization and provide for a fair. The facts as set forth in the circular were both a justification and an exhortation.

"There is no free State in the Union save Iowa, in which there is not a State Agricultural Society . . . Is it not time for the farmers of Iowa to be aroused to the importance of such an organization in this State? Shall we be laggards in the race of improvement? Shall the resources of other States be developed, their wealth increased and their people elevated in the scale of intellectual being, and ours stand still?

"Farmers are not the only persons interested in this subject. Every citizen of the State has a deep interest in her prosperity and reputation." Large delegations of "farmers, mechanics, merchants and professional men" were expected at the convention. "Come up gentlemen and do your duty to yourselves and to the State."

In spite of such an inclusive and appealing invi-

tation the attendance at that historic gathering was disappointing. There were only fifteen delegates from five counties — Henry, Van Buren, Wapello, Jefferson, and Lee. Governor-elect James W. Grimes wrote that the meeting should go ahead and organize if not more than two were on hand and this the faithful few proceeded to do. The constitution was based upon that of Illinois and, in the apologetic phrase of one of its drafters, "though abounding in imperfections" was as good "as could have been expected considering the hastiness of its preparation." Following the election of officers a committee was named to petition the legislature "for the passage of a bill rendering pecuniary aid to the furtherance of a permanent establishment of a State Agricultural Society in this State." At the close of the convention, the delegates became charter members of the Society.

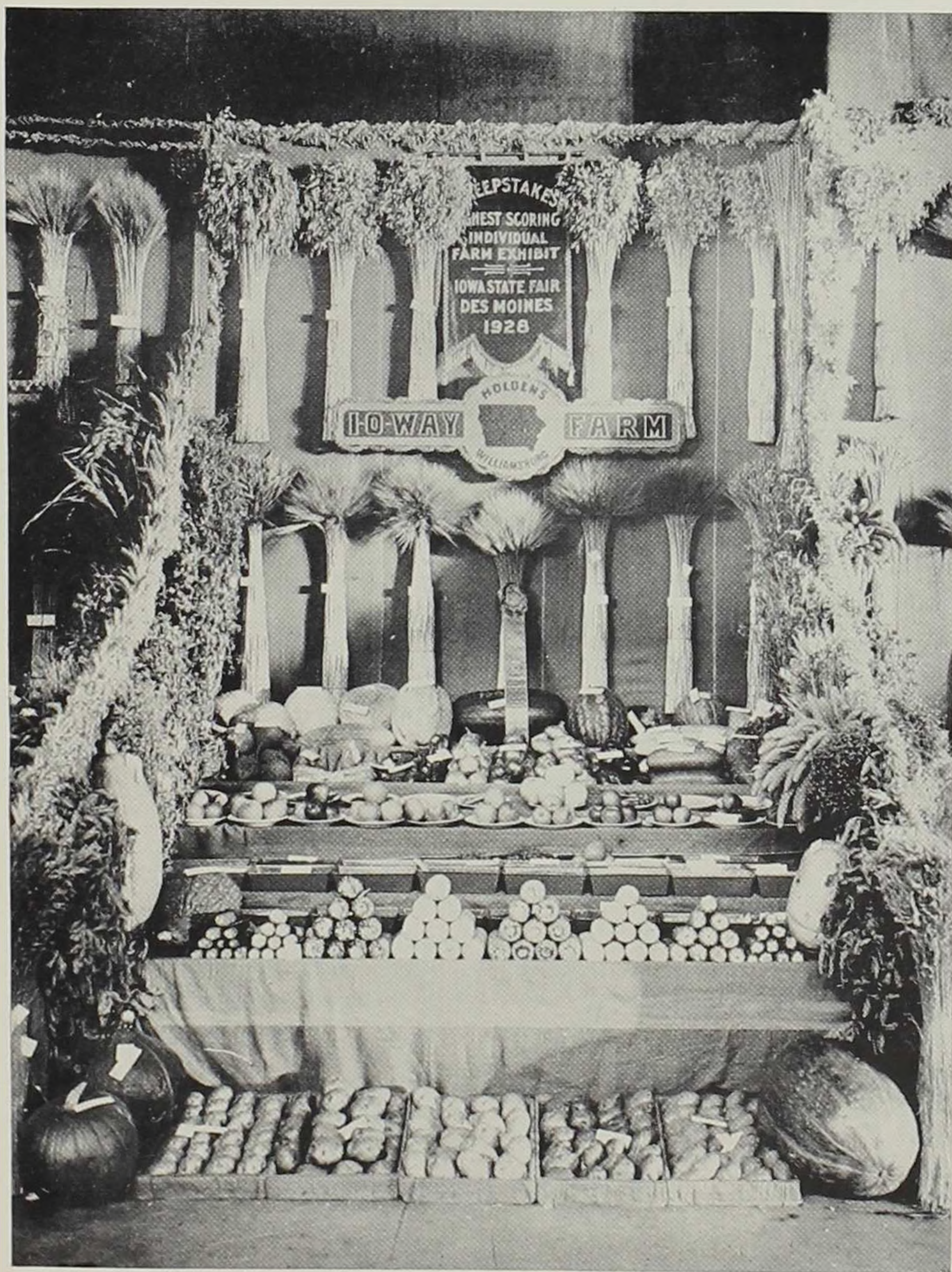
The convention decided appropriately that the first annual fair should be held at Fairfield, October 25-27, 1854, and in February the new president, Judge Thomas W. Clagett, sent out an urgent appeal for memberships to provide the preliminary funds. "Nowhere in this Union does the farmer enjoy greater natural advantages than in Iowa; notwithstanding we too often see a want of the application of science and well regulated labor to the development of this most important interest in the State. Experience has proven that the best and surest mode of bringing agriculture to a high

state of perfection, is by stimulating emulation among farmers, by annual fairs, and the awarding of premiums to meritorious exertion." He besought the farmers not to allow this beneficent undertaking to fail for lack of financial support. "I hope you take too much pride in your profession to suffer so great a *disgrace to fall upon you.*"

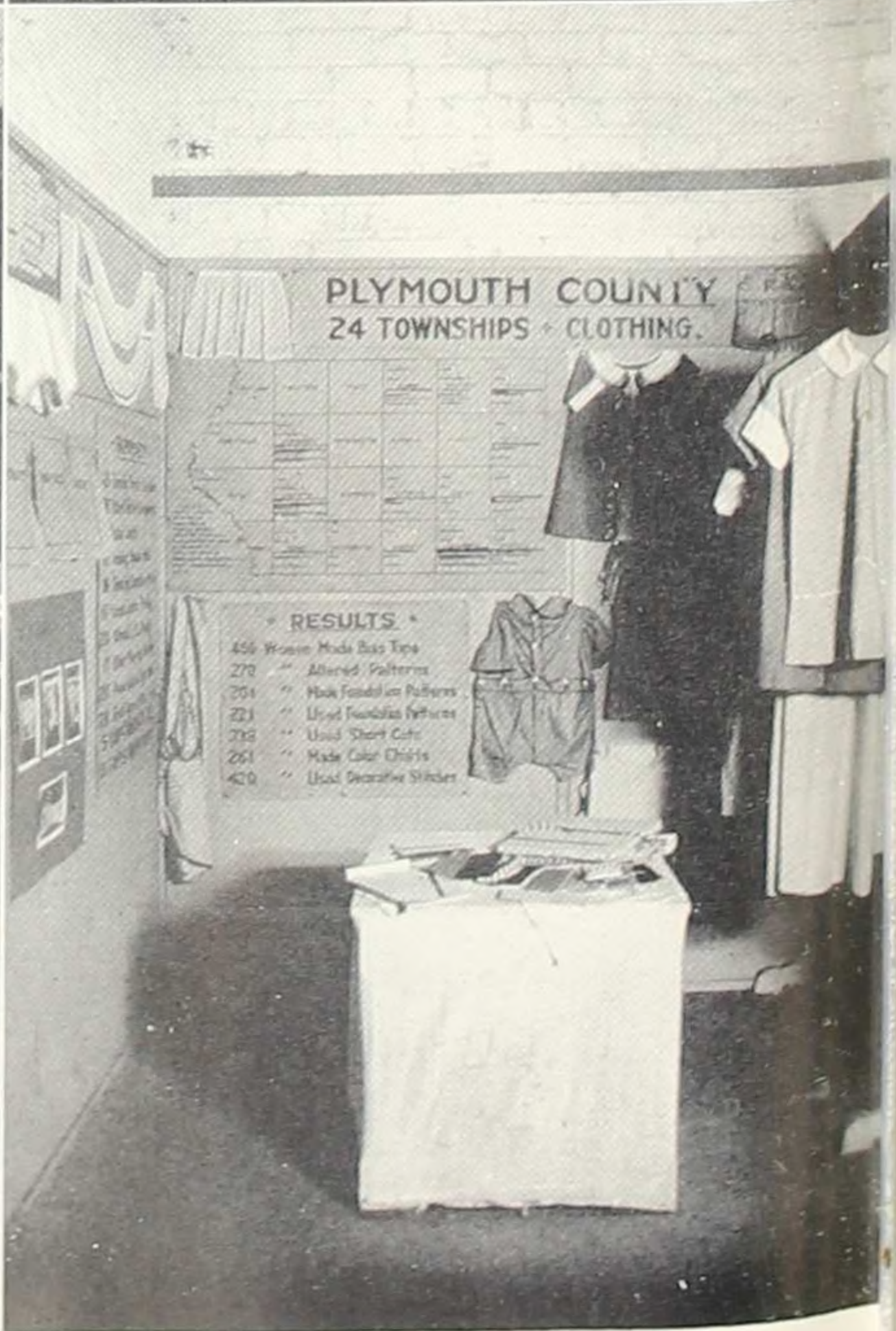
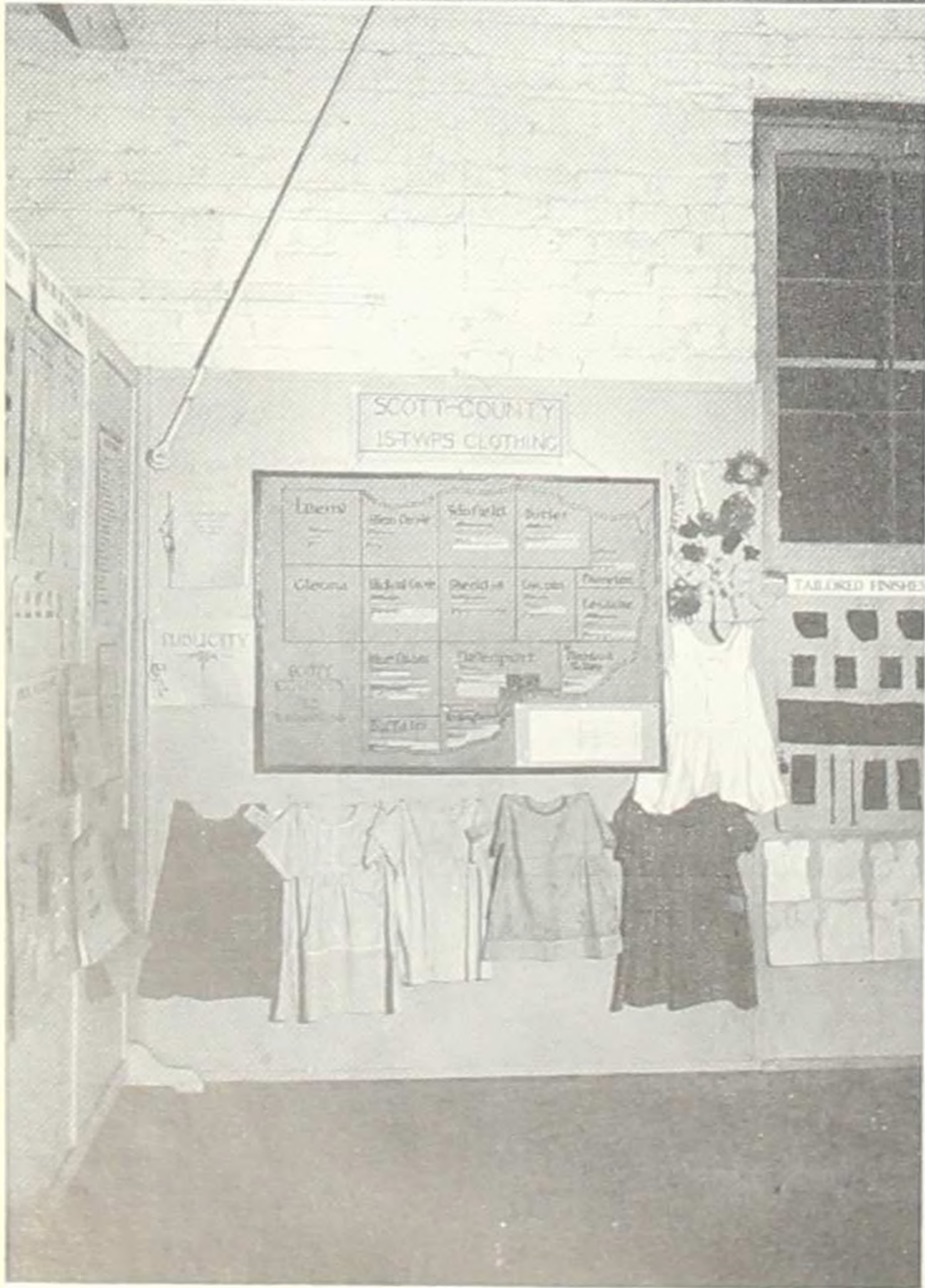
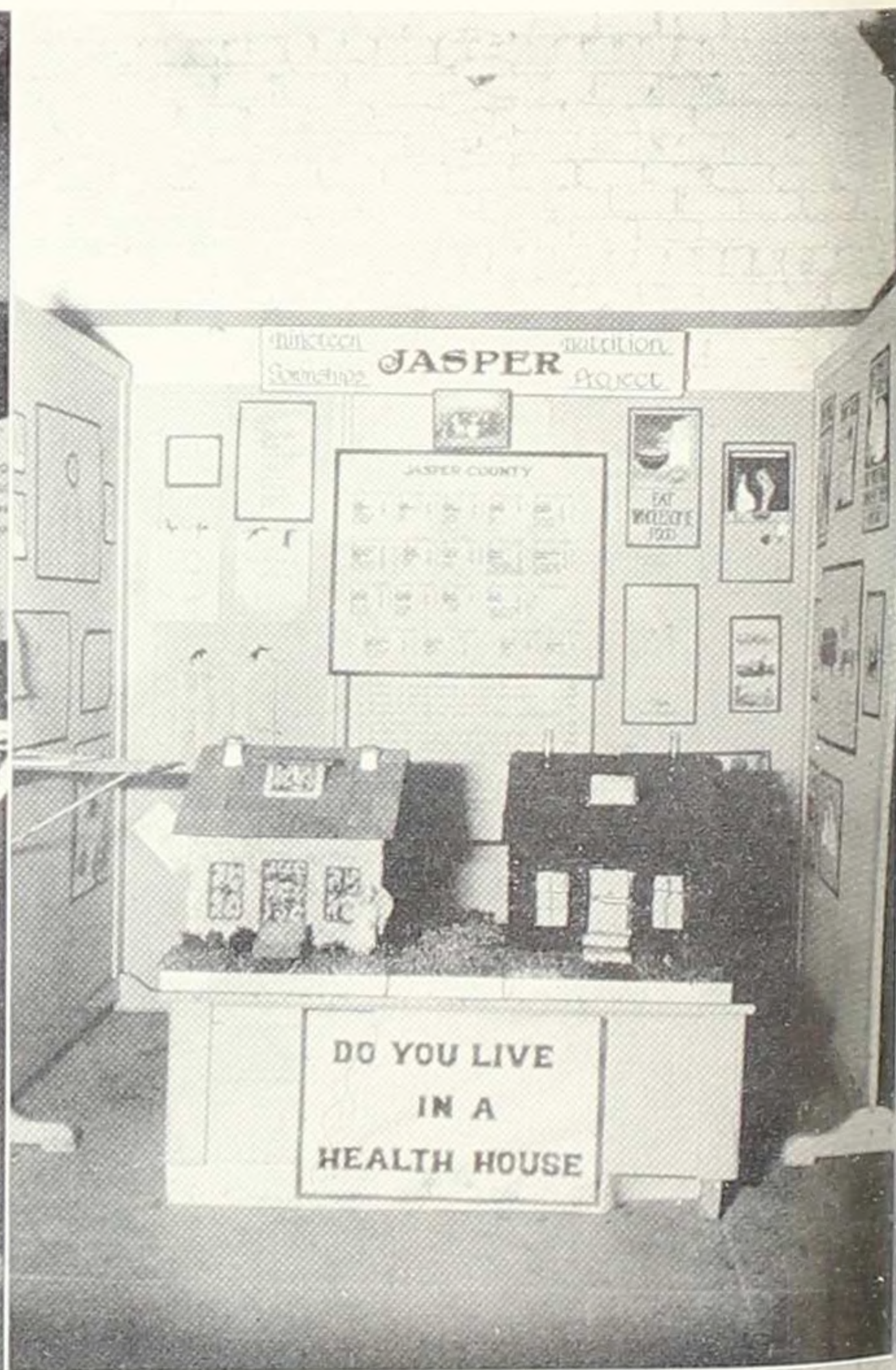
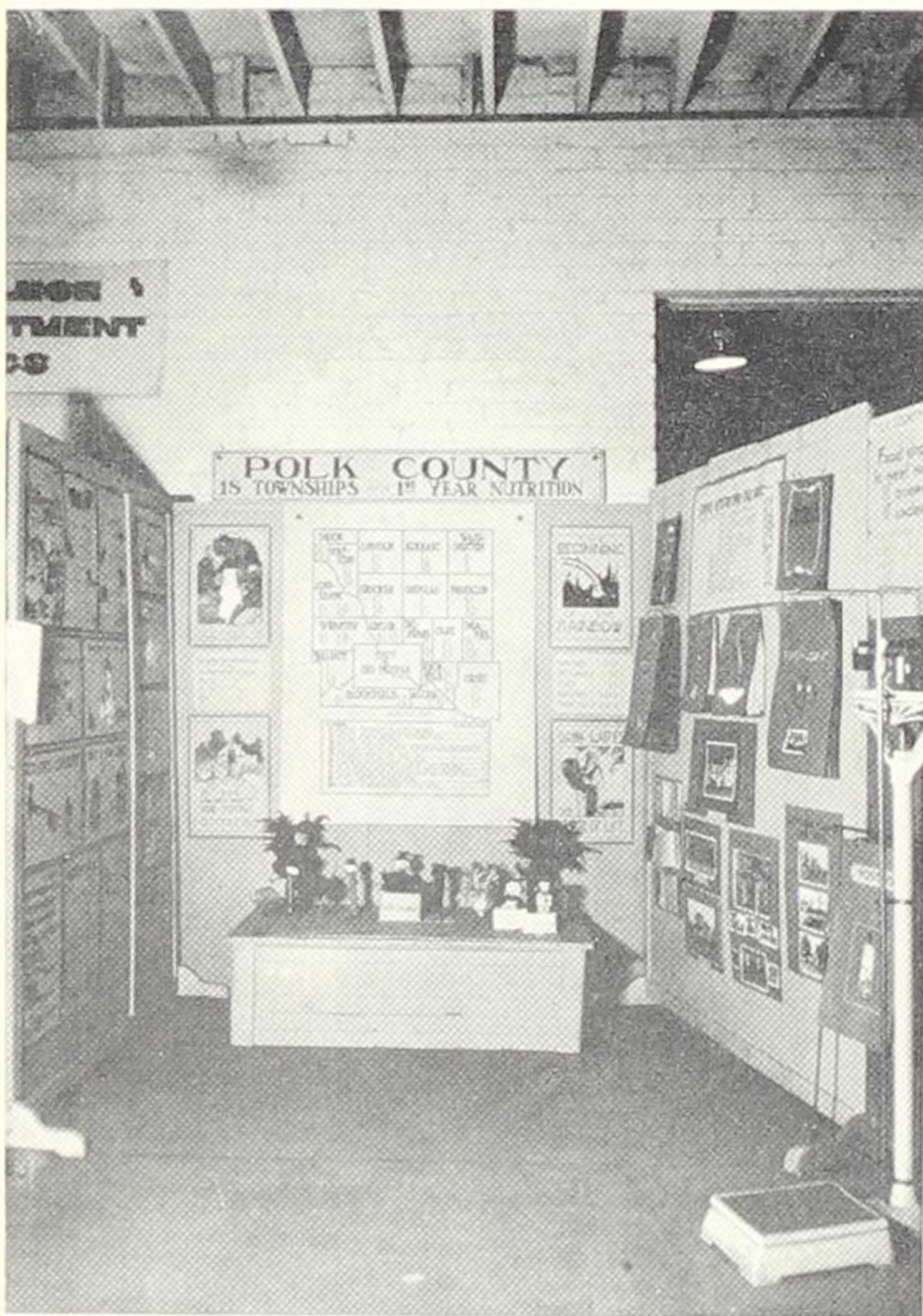
Two months later the secretary issued a call for a meeting of the board in June to make arrangements for the fair and invited suggestions for their use in making up the premium list. Few such suggestions came in, however, and the list was finally taken from that of the Pennsylvania society. Some four hundred items were included with premiums totaling more than \$1100, a reasonably generous provision "in view of the fact that the board had no assurance that a single dollar would be collected aside from their individual exertions to raise subscription fees."

It now remained only for the president to issue an appeal through the *Iowa Farmer and Horticulturist* for the fullest support in attendance and in the exhibition of all available products, and for the local committee, without funds and upon its own responsibility, to prepare the exhibition grounds.

The launching of this, like all other enterprises of common interest, depended largely upon the efforts of a small group of public-spirited, far-visioned individuals. Most prominent of the "founding fathers" were Christian Slagle, Dr.



A Typical Farm Exhibit (1928)



4-H Club Exhibits by Counties

J. M. Shaffer, Peter Huyett, and Caleb Baldwin. Forty years later, Peter Melendy declared, "I knew all of the early fathers, pioneers of our Society. They were men calculated to promote the welfare of any institution or interest." The general interest in the new institution for promoting the State's basic industry was shown in the distribution of occupations among the first officials. According to an approximate classification of later years, the president was a lawyer and journalist, the vice-president, a merchant, the recording secretary, a physician, the corresponding secretary, a lawyer, the treasurer, a merchant; while on the board of managers there were eleven farmers, three nurserymen, three doctors, three merchants, one carpenter, one banker, one hotel-keeper, four lawyers, three educators, four politicians, and four whose occupation is unknown.

Among the presidents of the pioneer period were such prominent figures as Judge Thomas W. Clagett, Judge George G. Wright, Peter Melendy, and Colonel John Scott. During the formative years the Society was especially fortunate in its secretaries to whom the success of fairs and other activities was largely due. Of the first forty years, John H. Wallace served seven, J. M. Shaffer, thirteen, and his successor, J. R. Shaffer, twenty. In ability, faithfulness, and general efficiency these men were outstanding agricultural leaders.

EARLE D. ROSS

The First Iowa State Fair

The first State fair of Iowa, held at Fairfield, October 25-27, 1854, offered as great a contrast to a present day exhibition of the same name as Iowa of 1854 differed from the modern Commonwealth. Grounds and equipment were meager and simple. The report of the committee on arrangements was eloquent of the lingering frontier.

They had "procured six acres . . . and enclosed the same with a substantial straight rail fence, ten feet high . . . erected a shed on the north side of the enclosure, two hundred and fifty feet in length and twenty feet in width, with a table under the same, the full length of the shed, and about five feet wide . . . erected stalls upon all sides of the enclosure . . . built about sixty rail pens . . . made a track in the enclosure, 1500 feet in length and twenty feet wide, with a substantial rope guard around the same, leaving a space around said track from thirty to one hundred and fifty feet in width for visitors . . . erected an office for the board of managers . . . and a stand in the center of the enclosure for the speakers, chief marshal, and committees."

The total expenditure for staging this State-wide exhibition was about three hundred and

twenty dollars. To economize space in the limited enclosure, no horses "attached to any vehicle whatever" were to be admitted except for judging purposes. The grounds were policed by a "chief marshal and five assistant marshals, and a number of policemen," who were made conspicuous by wearing a "blue sash around the body."

Transportation was still in the primitive stage. "They came on foot, on horseback or in two-wheeled carts, jogging along behind slow-moving, ponderous oxen." A favorite means of conveyance was the covered wagon in which the family might camp on the road and at the fair. From outlying regions appeared hardy frontiersmen with long pistols stuck in their belts, both for protection and ornament. The dashing young bloods of '54 — with high-mettled steeds instead of high-powered sport cars — were probably more self-conscious and certainly more envied than their modern type.

Considering limitations of travel and sparseness of settlement, the attendance, variously estimated from 7000 to 10,000 on the "bid day," was remarkably good. "For several days before the Fair," commented a local paper, "strangers commenced pouring into Fairfield by scores; the day before the Fair commenced they came by hundreds; and on the first and second days of the Fair they crowded in by thousands. Such a concourse of people never before assembled in Iowa. Every

portion of the State was represented; and all seemed deeply interested in this first great organized struggle of the agricultural interests of Iowa." Local accommodations were taxed to the utmost to provide for such an unprecedented throng. "Arriving early in the morning of the first day," a visitor recounted, "we found every avenue of the town crowded with people, horses, and every manner of vehicle, and all the hotels crowded to overflowing. The good citizens of the place, however, determined to make themselves equal to the emergency, lost no time in providing comfortable quarters for the rapidly ingathering comers, so that by noon every man upon the ground knew where to find an excellent 'eating and sleeping place'."

The leading entertainment feature for this large and representative gathering, and the one that, to judge from contemporary and reminiscent accounts, made the greatest impression upon the spectators, was the exhibition of horseback riding by women, or, to use the official designation, "female equestrianism." Ten such performers, distinguished by varicolored ribbons, competed for a "lady's superior gold hunting watch," offered by President Clagett in response to an appeal which his "gallantry could not allow to go unanswered." According to the elaborate rules of the contest, each lady in order of number accompanied by her "cavalier" was to "ride once round the circle,

when the cavalier will retire to the center, keeping within convenient distance of the lady to render any service she may require." The lady was then to ride four times about the circle at any speed she might choose. And finally the contestants, accompanied by their cavaliers, would "have leave to make the circuit of the ring six times at a gait not exceeding that of an easy canter."

The Lady of the Barred Red Ribbon, Miss Maria Minton, was the first to enter the lists. She was a "fair rider, but unfavorably mounted." And then, "mounted upon a magnificent blood bay, all action and full of power and spirit," came the Lady of the Broad Blue Ribbon — Miss Eliza Jane Hodges of Iowa City, a little girl, only thirteen years old. Under "the instinctive tact" of his mistress, the dashing charger was made to "keep the track and gauge his gait to suit the rider's pleasure." From a headlong gallop at the start, Miss Hodges brought her mount to a trot, from which he rose to a canter, then to a "lively charge," and finally performed his "prettiest tricks" which were "fearfully swift but evidently suited himself and his fearless rider." "A long, loud shout greeted the daring little equestrian as she completed her last round and wheeled with the rapidity of lightning from the course."

Quite in contrast was Miss Belle Turner of Keokuk, the Lady of the Pink Ribbon. "An easy, self-possessed, and graceful rider," finely mount-

ed, she "showed consummate skill in the management of her horse." Her "elegant form, fine face, and soft blue eyes also rather seemed to heighten the effect than otherwise."

Miss Louise Parks, the Lady of the White Ribbon, proved to be a "handsome rider, full of courage, and well accomplished in the management of reins and whip." The Lady of the Yellow Ribbon, Mrs. Ann Eckert, attracted "universal admiration" by her perfect riding, but unfortunately "her horse, though a fine one, was not gaited for such an occasion." Mrs. Green, the Lady of the Barred Green Ribbon, was likewise badly mounted, but she "rode like a queen," spirited, graceful, and confident. Everybody was on the side of Miss Kate Pope, the Lady of the Light Blue Ribbon, "and about the same majority against her horse." She appeared to be an "all-fired fine young lady, full of life, full of spirit, full of fun, and full of ambition."

The eighth contestant was Miss Emma Porter, "a lovely little miss of fifteen," who wore the white and green ribbon. Tastefully arrayed, beautifully mounted, and gracefully natural, she won general applause and commendation. Two sisters, H. and Cynthia Ball, rode last. They were both much admired — the one for her skill and self-possession, and the other for her modest though fearless manner. But their performance was marred by tame or otherwise unfavorable steeds.

In response to a "universal desire" the exhibition of female equestrianism was repeated the next day with much the same results. Miss Hodges, the popular favorite, went through "the most dashing, terrific and perfectly dare-devil performance ever witnessed on horseback. The scene was thrilling, fearful, magnificent. The boldest held their breath as, mounted on her proud and untameable charger, she flew around the course with the rapidity of lightning and with the sweeping force of a whirlwind, and all this with a childlike smile upon her countenance and her whip in full play, thus imparting to all a more than half assurance that the daring little rider was equal to the emergency and abundantly able to take care of herself. At the completion of the fourth round, and still at full and fearful speed, she wheeled gloriously from the track, and was greeted with an earthquake of cheers as she brought in her bounding animal to a graceful halt in front of the committee's stand."

This daring example "excited a lively ambition among all the ribbons." Their riding was more spirited and "much more pleasing" than on the first day. Each seemed determined to prove herself worthy of the prize. When the last round had been accomplished all the ladies with their cavaliers reined up before the judges, and the prize was awarded to the Lady of the Pink Ribbon, Miss Belle Turner, whose gracefulness rendered

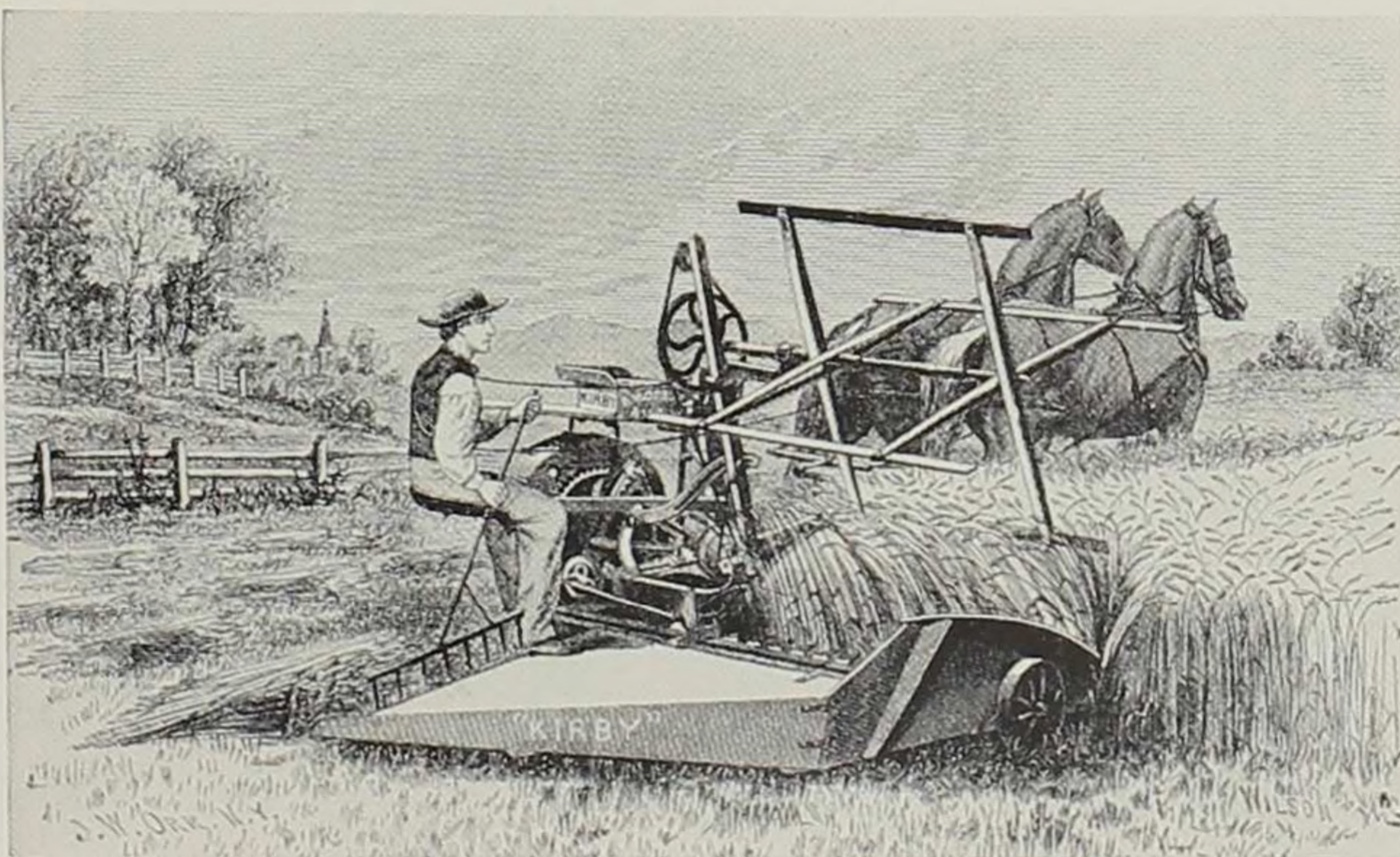
insignificant what she may have lacked in boldness. But the decision of the judges was not in accord with the opinion of the spectators, who were determined that the Iowa City girl, she of the Broad Blue Ribbon, should not go unrewarded. "Spontaneously, and as if by concert, men sprang up in all quarters of the field, and in less than five minutes" a hundred and sixty-five dollars were contributed, for the "poor and unlettered" child, together with provisions for her attendance, "free of all charge, for three terms at the Female Seminary" at Fairfield and one term at the embryo college at Mount Pleasant. A reporter who had been "spellbound and overwhelmed at the daring exhibition of the little favorite," was reconciled to the judges' decision by the "sober, second thought" which "teaches us, as it must all, that if we would encourage a tasteful, correct, and lady-like school of female equestrianism, such as we should be willing our misses and daughters should imitate, the decision of the Committee was based upon correct grounds."

On the first day, as "a sort of side affair, and not connected legitimately with the fair proper," Lee County admirers presented Governor Grimes an enormous "Denmark cheese" weighing three hundred and sixty pounds. James B. Howell made an appropriate speech of presentation to which the Governor-elect responded felicitously.

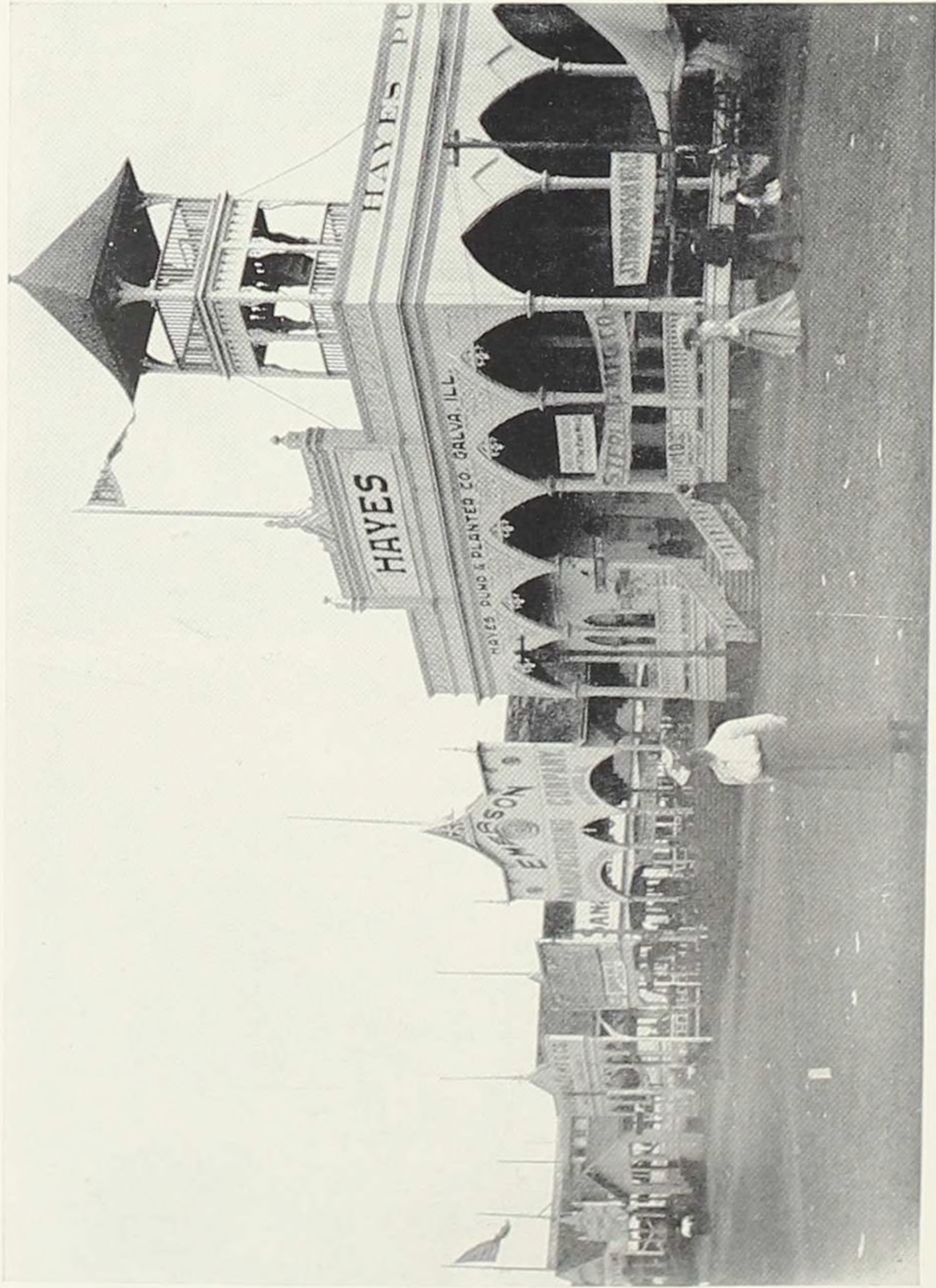
In general, however, the exhibition was serious



A Marsh Harvester Exhibited in 1867
Two Hundred Were Sold in Iowa That Year



A Kirby Harvester Exhibited in 1867
Five Hundred and Fifty Were Sold in Iowa That Year



MACHINERY ROW

When the Manufacturers Owned the Buildings — And the Women Wore Shirtwaists

in tone and instructive in content from the address of Attorney George C. Dixon, which required over an hour for delivery and twenty-five pages for printing, to the judging of exhibits. For the period, the showing of stock and grains seems to have been most commendable. In the not wholly critical judgment of a local reporter, "there were many animals" that would "attract attention at any State Fair in the Union." Durham cattle outnumbered all other kinds of fine stock, while no less than one hundred head of thoroughbred and light horses were exhibited. Due partly to the difficulties of transportation, there were only eleven entries of swine, which was regretted because "the raising of swine is a source of immense revenue."

The editor of the *Fairfield Ledger* thought that some specimens of wheat were "superior," while "as to corn it is useless to talk of finding any better. One sample of oats was the best we ever saw." In the grain yield competition, Hezekiah Fagan of Polk County won first prize for the best five acres of Indian corn with a production of one hundred and thirty-nine and one-half bushels, shelled, to the acre! The prize fall wheat yield was twenty-six bushels per acre, while H. G. and J. Stuart of Lee County raised sixty-six bushels of spring wheat on two acres.

The implement display included "plows, harrows, corn-planters, reapers, threshing machines, fanning mills, corn crushers, and, in fact, nearly

everything that the farmer could wish for" — but in many cases could not obtain as the article was not yet produced for the market. Atkin's Self Raker and Reaper attracted particular attention as one of the greatest improvements exhibited.

Prison-made goods were in evidence. The warden of the penitentiary took the prize for the "best collection of agricultural implements" which "consisted of hoes, rakes, forks, scythes, snaths, &c., all of superior material and workmanship."

The miscellaneous class had such varied exhibits as a "monochromatic painting," "a floral painting," "a collection of snakes," "best paper hanging," "a fur hat," and a "new style of artificial teeth," ingeniously devised "for restoring the natural contour of the face." Secretary Shaffer brought his museum which contained a curious assortment of more than a hundred varieties of snakes and lizards preserved in alcohol. A Dubuque photographer showed some remarkable "mezzographs" or daguerreotypes on paper. Having copied a person's countenance he could make "any number of pictures without the person having to sit for them."

Lingering pioneer conditions were evidenced in premiums for such entries as "team of oxen, not less than three yoke," native or "dunghill" fowl, ox yoke, and grain cradle.

The most unsatisfactory aspect of this first State exhibition was the inadequate financial returns.

The receipts, after excluding "about fifty dollars of counterfeit, or otherwise worthless money," were insufficient to pay expenses, so the generous and enthusiastic president of the State Agricultural Society made up the deficit. Financially the outlook was not bright but officials and friends, after the enthusiasm and enterprise manifested in the first exhibition, had high hopes of the future. "We have, therefore," the treasurer's report concluded, "no tangible means for the progress of the next Fair; but, trusting to the energy and enterprise of our farmers and mechanics; trusting to the diligence of the committee to memorialize our next legislature, and trusting to the zeal and industry of the officers of the Society, we promise abundant aid; and we insure to all a Fair in 1855 far superior in all respects to that which has just passed."

EARLE D. ROSS

The Pioneer Period

"The First Fair was an experiment — derided by some — passed by with indifference, or openly discountenanced by others," according to the secretary of the State Agricultural Society; but the second fair established the fact "that a State Society for the Promotion of Agriculture and Mechanics can and will be sustained by the people of Iowa." From such an auspicious, if humble beginning, despite all difficulties and distractions of wars, panics, and competing "world" expositions, the Iowa State Fair has been held every year with the exception of 1898. Because of "the feeling existing over the state adverse to holding a fair" that year, the Iowa Society cooperated with the Trans-Mississippi Exposition at Omaha.

In the pioneer years down to the seventies, while the organization and activities of the annual exhibition remained simple and primitive, the agricultural fair probably was relatively more influential than at any other time. In this "golden age" of the fair, before the rise of the Grange and the development of the agricultural colleges or other systematized governmental activities, the agricultural societies, functioning mainly through their public demonstrations, had the field to themselves. They

were rudimentary colleges, experiment stations, and extension demonstrators. Rather incidentally, they also anticipated some of the recreational features that have been emphasized by the Grange and the Farm Bureau.

From 1854 to 1879 the fair was "on wheels," moving around from one section of the State to another. Not over three consecutive exhibitions were held in any city. Inaugurated at Fairfield in 1854 and 1855, the third and fourth fairs were in Muscatine in 1856 and 1857, Oskaloosa entertained in 1858 and 1859, then Iowa City in 1860 and 1861, Dubuque in 1862 and 1863, Burlington in 1864, 1865, and 1866, Clinton in 1867 and 1868, Keokuk in 1869 and 1870 and again in 1874 and 1875, while Cedar Rapids seems to have been the favorite location with a record of six years, in 1871, 1872, 1873, 1876, 1877, and 1878. As a rule the grounds and equipment of the county or district agricultural societies were utilized, though the area usually had to be extended, old buildings altered and new ones erected, and a race track constructed or improved. Inevitably there was more or less inter-city and regional rivalry and jealousy over the location, but it never became as bitter as in some neighboring States. The Iowa Society did not follow the practice of some of its contemporaries of deliberately fostering such rivalry by a system of competitive bidding.

Unquestionably the itinerant system of exhibi-

tion best met pioneer needs and insured to the Society the largest support. The report for 1869 concluded that the experience of Iowa, as well as other western States, indicated that the "true policy of such societies is to give each portion of the state, in its turn, the benefits of the annual exhibition." These benefits were held to be inducements to breeders of fine stock to exhibit and find a market; a comparison and competitive examination of implements; the opportunity for exhibitors to reach a new group of people every two or three years; the opportunity for people of each region to exhibit their local products; and, finally, provision of amusement and recreation for a larger number than if the fair were located permanently in one place.

The pioneer fairs were primarily instructional and only incidentally recreational. In many ways the State exhibition was much more akin to a farmers institute or a farm and home week than to a modern State fair. Based upon the old cattle show, the exhibition and judging of stock was the central feature; whatever else was done, the show was *the thing*. The chief obstacle to this most essential part of the exhibition was in securing competent men for the judging committees. For the fair of 1857 it was reported that many of the judges selected did not appear and several hours delay was caused by filling vacancies from bystanders. In the secretary's opinion a decided re-

form was necessary: "*The standing if not the very existence of the Society depends upon it; and whether any improvement can be effected till our system of Railroads shall bring the Annual Exhibition almost to every Committee-Man's doors remains to be seen.*"

Evening sessions, held in a city hall or church, were regular features of the early fairs. Farmers and agricultural experts exchanged experiences and discussed best breeds of animals, varieties of grain, grasses, fruits, and vegetables, systems of rotation, the use of machinery, and marketing opportunities. According to the consensus of opinion at the seventh State fair, Spanish Merino sheep were best adapted to Iowa, though prairie hay was bad for any kind. Suffolk swine were generally preferred, but a few farmers favored Chester Whites.

The annual addresses had a prominent place on the program of all early western State fairs. Each fair was officially opened by the president of the State Agricultural Society in a talk, usually of considerable length, reviewing existing economic and social conditions of the State. This was sometimes supplemented by more formal addresses by visiting celebrities, though Iowa indulged less in this high-priced talent than her neighbors. The serious purpose of the spectators and their thirst for information and inspiration was conclusively demonstrated by the not only patient but enthusiastic

hearing which they gave to these extended discourses.

Even newspaper reports were made the object of competitive emulation by premiums for the best "history" of the exposition. The resulting stories, in an age of lingering exuberant and ornate style, provided some remarkable displays of journalistic rhetoric. "Early in the morning," wrote a reporter in the *Burlington Daily Telegraph*, "an enlivening scene was presented in the ladies' department, or that devoted to domestic manufactures. The ringing of merry voices, the flitting about of fairy forms, the glances of bright eyes, and the busy play of pretty hands, all denoted that womandom had entered the lists in earnest." In 1860 the editor of the *Iowa City Republican* regretted that he could not do justice to the grand procession of prize-winning live stock, but his supply of adjectives had already been seriously impaired and he needed a "whole dictionary of them" to express his admiration. "Suffice it to say that the procession filled the half-mile track completely, and its appearance was enough to fill a stock grower's heart with joy. If our readers are not satisfied with this description, let them set their imagination on a 'high horse' and after exhausting its capacity write the results just before the characters we now print — !!!!!"

Amusement features were strictly subordinated to the serious purpose in hand. Such entertain-

ment as was provided was made to contribute wherever possible to the ends of instruction. Plowing matches, for instance, were dignified by careful supervision and regulation. In the first plowing contest under the auspices of the State Agricultural Society in 1857, each of the seven contestants plowed a "land" of one-fourth acre in "old, loose and sandy" soil, turning a furrow at least six inches deep. The shortest time required was forty-eight minutes and the longest sixty-one minutes.

The next year one of the most interesting and "important features of the whole Exhibition was the Plowing Match." The prize was actually awarded to the slowest plower on the principle that it is "vastly more important that the plowing be *well done*, than that it be *speedily* done. Every experienced farmer would prefer that his team should plow one acre *well*, than to skim over, 'cut and cover,' three acres, in the same length of time." But the chief reason why J. H. Sherrol of Black Hawk County won the match was because he used an improved John Deere plow with a revolving coulter. Thus "the great lesson taught" by this contest was "the importance of procuring the most perfect implements."

Throughout these years there was much opposition, both on grounds of economy and moral propriety, to horse racing, and, as a result, this part of the program was restricted and denatured.

At times the "trials of speed" were restricted to judging of animals, one at a time, for speed and other driving qualities. An effort was made in any case to time this superfluity so as not to distract the attention of the spectators unduly from the serious portions of the exhibition. Although a man "may be examining a specimen of his favorite short-horns with almost infinite delight," wrote the secretary in 1856, "the moment he is informed 'the horses are trotting,' he drops his short-horn, and rushes for the ring."

Meager reports of these "trials" do not indicate particularly sportive propensities, either on the part of the managers or their constituency. The best official time at the Muscatine fair in 1857 was 2:58, 2:59, 3:03, and 3:05. In 1865 a county fair offered as its complete "speed" program, \$1 to the fastest walking horse, and similar purses to the fastest trotter, and the fastest "horse under the saddle." It is reported that the management regarded these as extravagant expenditures.

From 1857 to 1863 Tom Hyer, a Black Hawk Morgan trotting stallion owned by John S. Wolf of Cedar Rapids, regularly won first prize for the best roadster over four years old, except in 1860 when he was beaten by Young Bashaw. But the following year he was not only rated first in his class but carried off the sweepstakes ribbon also.

Even the chaste "female equestrianism," which an emotional reporter at the first fair pronounced

"the most thrillingly interesting and sublimely beautiful spectacle which has ever been presented within our borders," did not escape the puritanical censor. Of such a display at Dubuque in 1862, which was promoted by local citizens and not an official part of the fair, the official "historian" observed that "fast riding seemed to attract the most applause, but one or two who rode at a slower pace" apparently considered that "horse racing, as such, was scarcely an appropriate amusement for their sex, even if done to amuse the public." In the judicious opinion of this critical observer these performances were both distracting and improper. "Woman's place" at the State Fair, as he saw it, was to be far less conspicuous. "Horseback riding by ladies is highly commendable as a graceful, healthful, and beautiful exercise, when not done entirely for display; but it is questionable whether 'female equestrianism' is essential to a good horse show, and we believe the Agricultural Society very properly discourages such exhibitions. Specimens of the skill and handiwork of true women are more appropriately seen in the Hall of Domestic Arts, than associated with a show of fast horses on the race track." In a neighboring State in the fifties these contests of the "fairer sex" were defended as socially expedient on the ground that if women were to ride through the crowded streets of cities "they must become adepts in the art, or they become liable to many accidents."

During this period the problem of policing the grounds was not onerous. With rare exceptions the early exhibitions were orderly and circumspect in every way. People came for a serious purpose and the rowdy and predatory elements were not in evidence. Outside vendors and showmen, not directly under the jurisdiction of the management, at times created some disturbance, but they were later suppressed or regulated. During the entire three days of the fair in 1856, "not the slightest disturbance occurred on the grounds. All was harmony and good order, except that at one time, after the gray horse from Dubuque was ruled out, for running for money, the people, with whom he was a universal favorite, demanded his admission to the course, and for some time stopped all business by clamorous shouts for 'the gray!' 'the gray!' — even threatening to 'tear things to pieces' if their sovereign will was not complied with."

The lack of disorder and friction on the grounds was attributed not only to the "moral character of our people" but to the tact and efficiency of the marshals and their assistants. There was certainly no highhanded interference with "personal liberty." At a board meeting during the fair at Keokuk in 1874, a director "reported a contumacious negro, the negro hostler of one of the exhibitors, and moved that he be ejected from the grounds, and forbidden to enter them again." The motion was duly carried and, after this due process, "the Chief

Marshal was authorized to execute the order at once."

When attendance at the fair mounted to more than ten thousand the problem of housing accommodations became rather acute. "Let every man bring his blanket or buffalo robe, and then in case he can do no better, he has a bed of his own," suggested the secretary in 1856. Two years later farmers were advised to bring their families and stock, their wagons and tents, and plenty of provisions, "and camp out both on the way and at the Fair." A considerable number of the "very best ladies in the State" who attended the fair in Oskaloosa "were not inside of a house from the time they left home till they returned."

Special arrangements were made for campers at the Dubuque fair in 1863. The camping ground was near the river, "in a good, healthy location," and a "trusty guard" was paid by the Society "to look after it and preserve order" both day and night. "Do not be afraid to bring your wives and daughters," urged the secretary. "Parties having ladies in company will receive special consideration from the Superintendent of the camp." Solicitude for the ladies seemed to be a prevalent characteristic of managers of the early fairs. At Cedar Rapids in 1872 a "ladies' saloon" was listed as one of the conveniences.

Hotels usually conformed to regular published rates, but occasionally exorbitant charges were re-

ported. One Muscatine hotel "did extort by charging a dollar for a bed," which, in the opinion of Secretary Wallace, deserved "as severe reprehension as any of the indignant occupants of the miserable 'straw beds' may feel inclined to give it."

During this formative period the policy of low membership and concession fees, with an unduly generous complimentary list, made normal revenues inadequate and these were rendered uncertain by unfavorable weather and by periods of depression, such as that of 'fifty-seven and 'sixty-one. State aid, therefore, was essential to the regular functioning of the fairs. From 1856 to 1872, \$2000 was appropriated annually and the State Agricultural Society thus became a semi-public institution. That these subventions made manifold returns to the State there is abundant evidence.

In the transformation of middle western agriculture, the effects of which were felt on the "Middle Border" before the seventies, the fair, State and local, had an effective part. These exhibitions took the lead as agencies in the improvement of live stock, in the dissemination of information regarding new varieties of plants and better methods of cultivation, in the stimulation of the invention and the extension of the use of new machinery, and in the advertisement of the products and the productive possibilities of the State.

By 1860, under the influence of effective private

leadership joined with public aid, Iowa fairs, both State and local, were becoming well established. The secretary reported in 1858 that each of the five State exhibitions had been an improvement in some respects upon its predecessors. The following report stated that it was "now nearly as much to be expected that each county will have her Agricultural Society as that she will have a municipal organization."

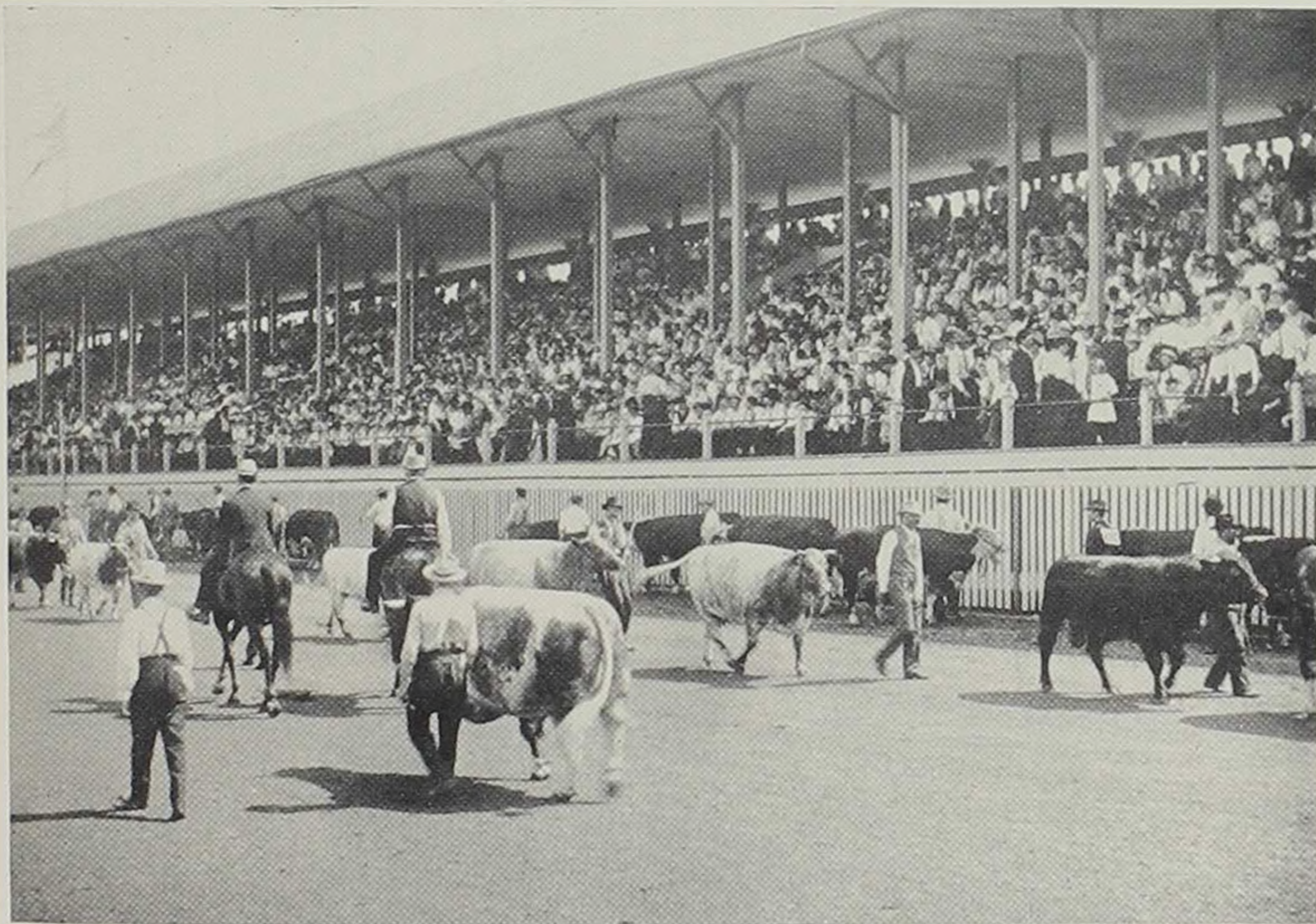
The Civil War at the beginning had an unsettling effect upon the State fair; but, unlike the situation in neighboring Commonwealths, did not seriously hamper its work or check its progress. In 1861 the Johnson County fair grounds at Iowa City, upon which the State fair was scheduled, was the site of Camp Fremont and was occupied by a volunteer company until within three days of the fair. "Military necessity" had led to the destruction or disarrangement of a large part of the equipment. In Indiana, Wisconsin, and Minnesota similar use of fair grounds for army camps had led to the suspension of the expositions, and there was much sentiment for that course in Iowa. The directors, however, resolved to "carry on" as best they could. The attendance was small and drastic curtailment of expenditures was necessary. The president explained the situation to the successful exhibitors and they agreed to accept fifty per cent of the premiums. Directors' expenses were paid only for the annual meeting, the annual

reports for 1861 and 1862 were bound together, and the secretary's salary and expense account was cut to \$700 — "a less salary than the Secretary of any State Society in the whole West." The military spirit was reflected in the patrolling of the grounds by a company of the First Iowa Volunteers. At the other fairs during the war visiting military companies were among the notable features.

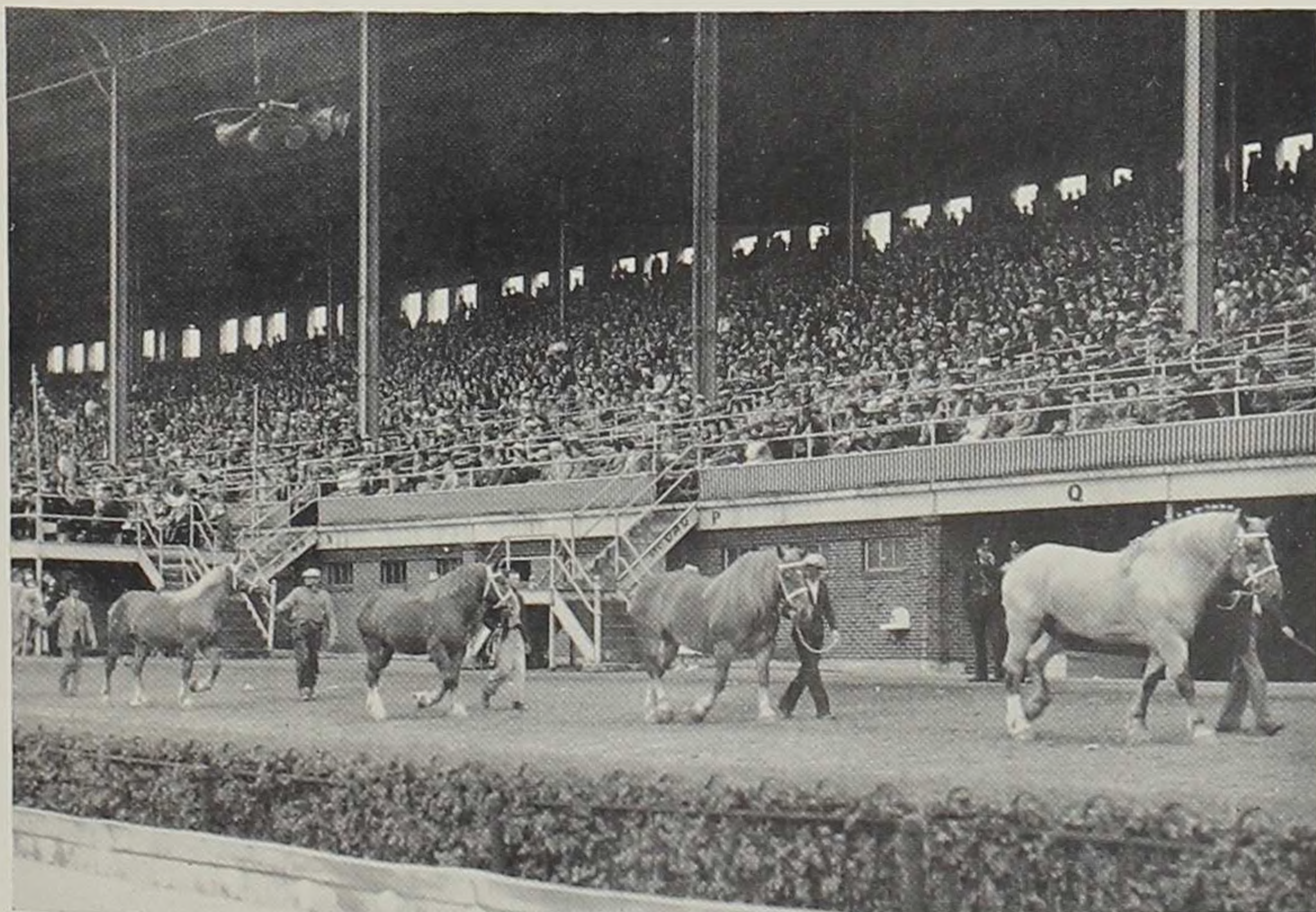
In 1862 Iowa, Ohio, and Indiana held the only State fairs in the Northwest. The Iowa exhibition at Dubuque was highly successful. Stock exhibits were never before equalled and the attendance was sufficient to leave a comfortable balance in the treasury. The secretary was able to make the gratifying report that the Society had never before paid so large a percentage of its funds in premiums and that it was "in every sense of the word in a flourishing condition." The "agricultural boom" that came to Iowa in the sixties insured the success of its State fair.

EARLE D. ROSS

MILLION DOLLAR LIVE STOCK PARADE

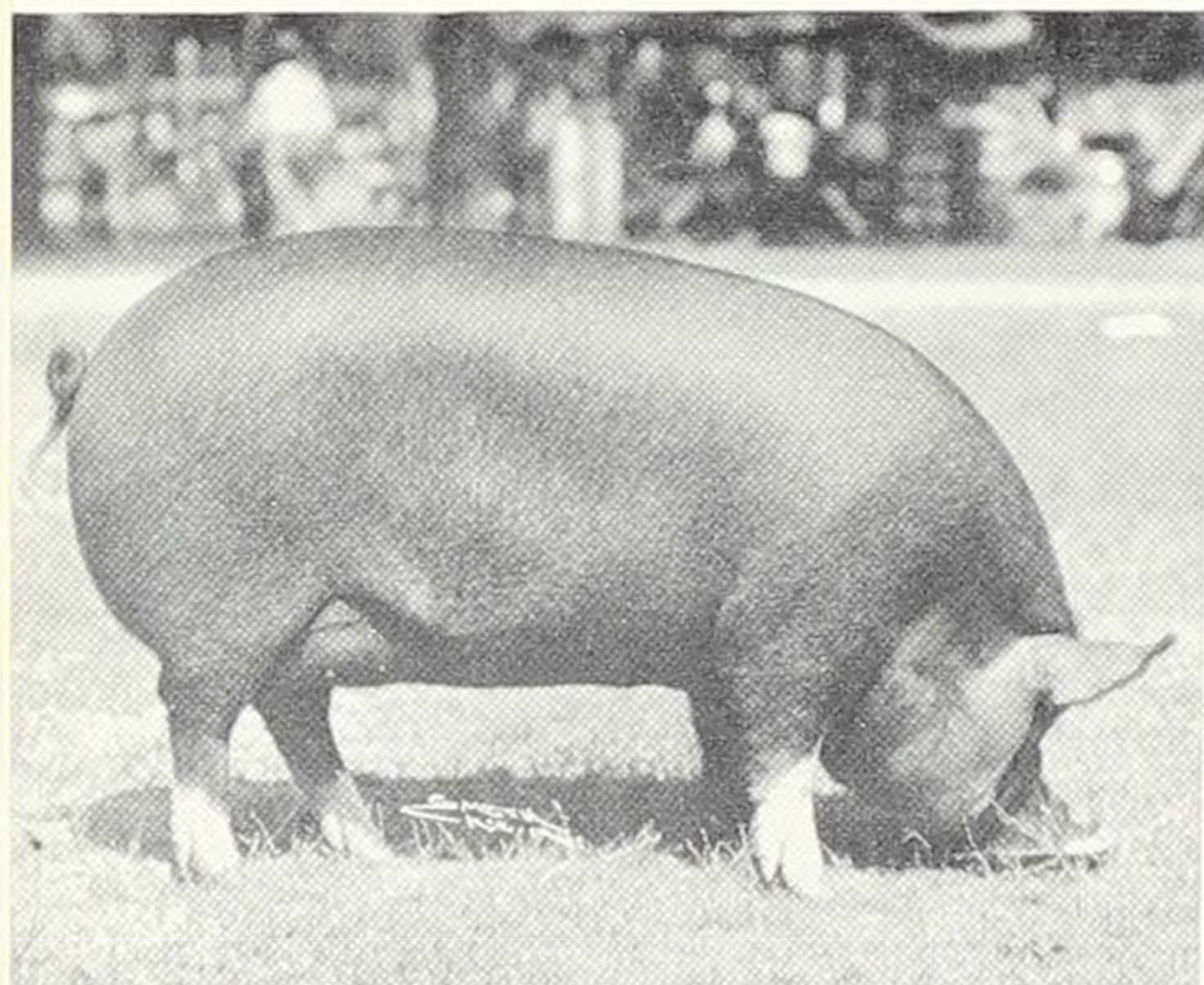


Live Stock Show (1907)



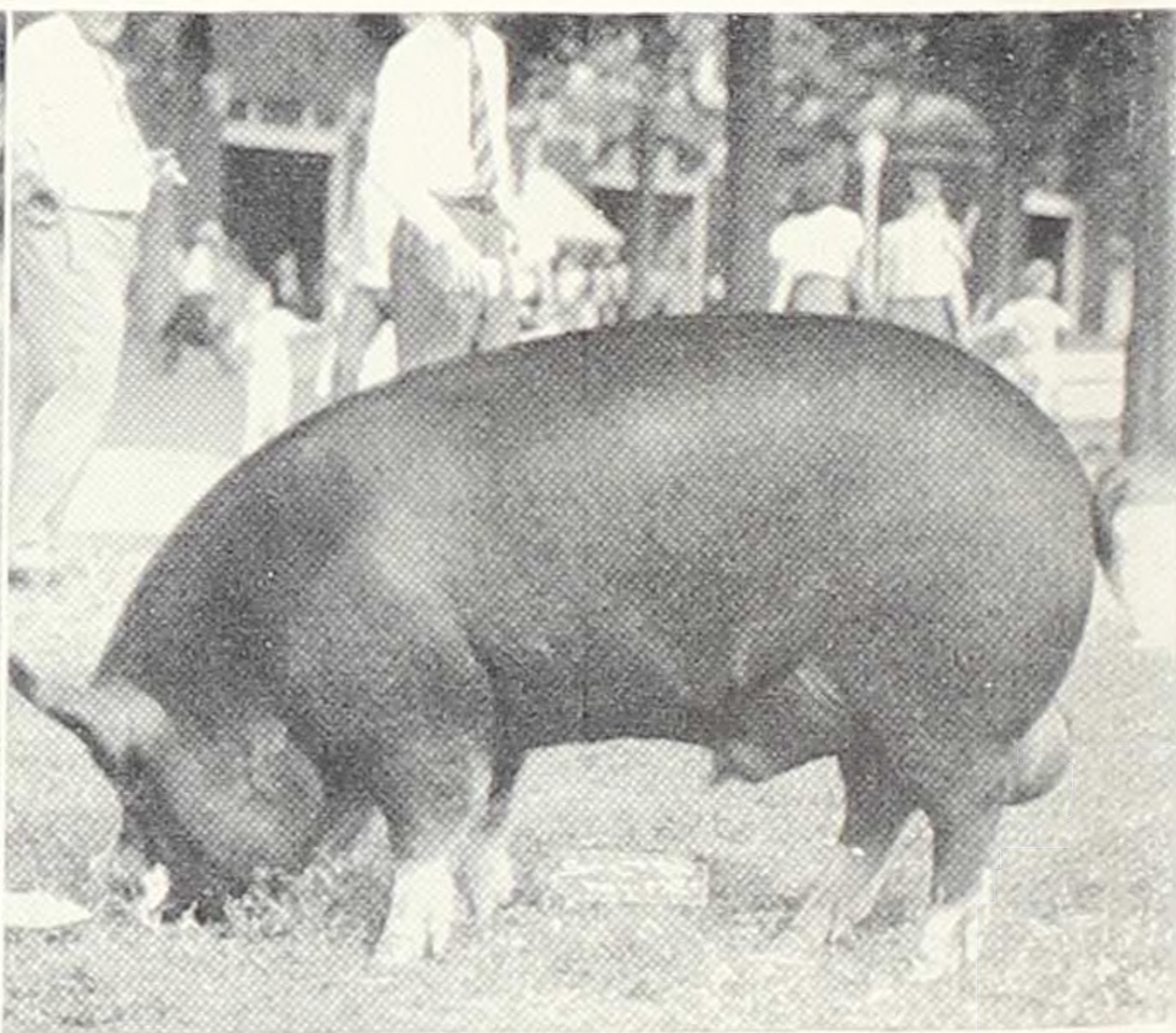
Horse Show (1935)

BERKSHIRE



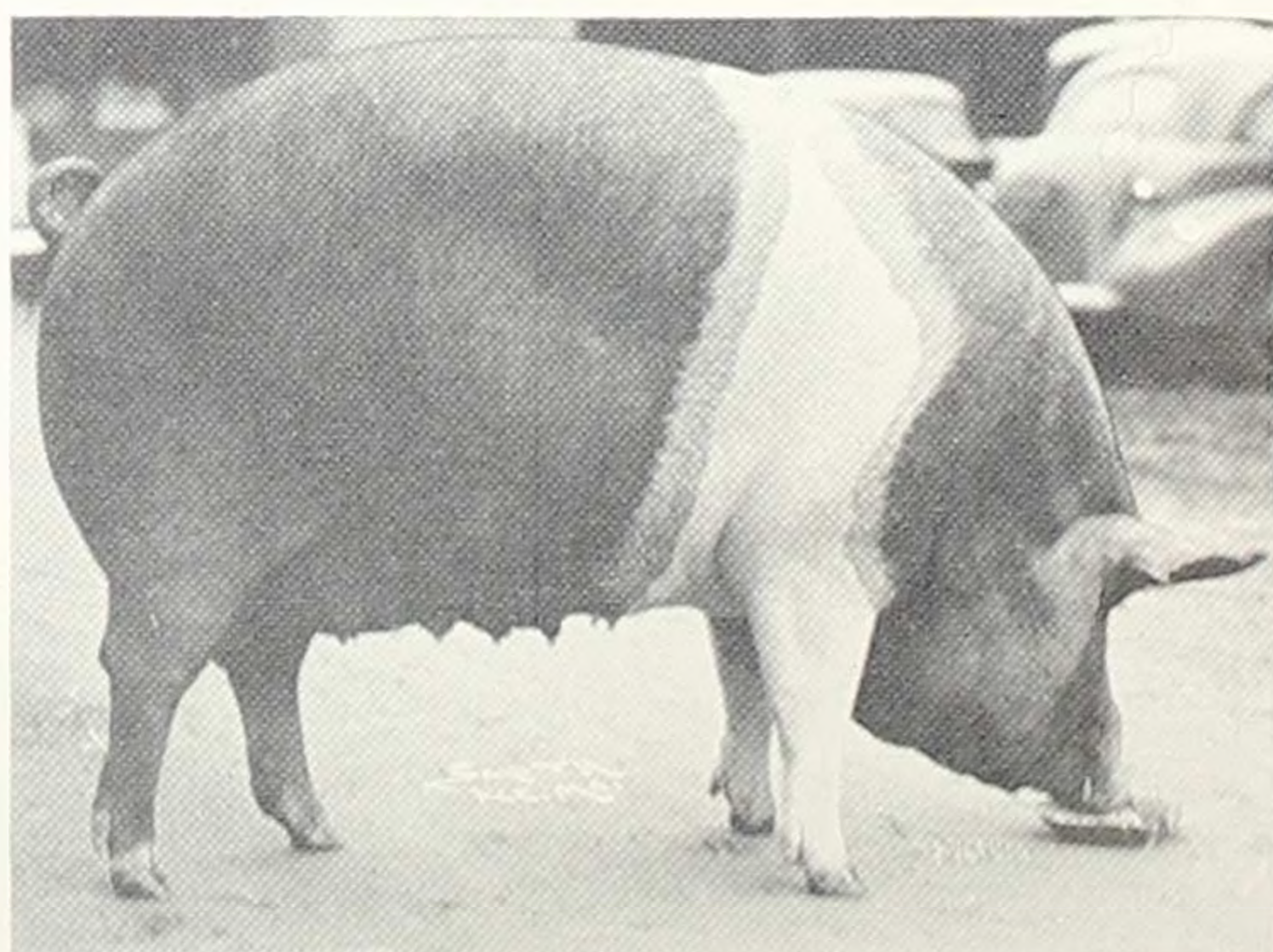
Miss Modern Charmer (1947)

BERKSHIRE



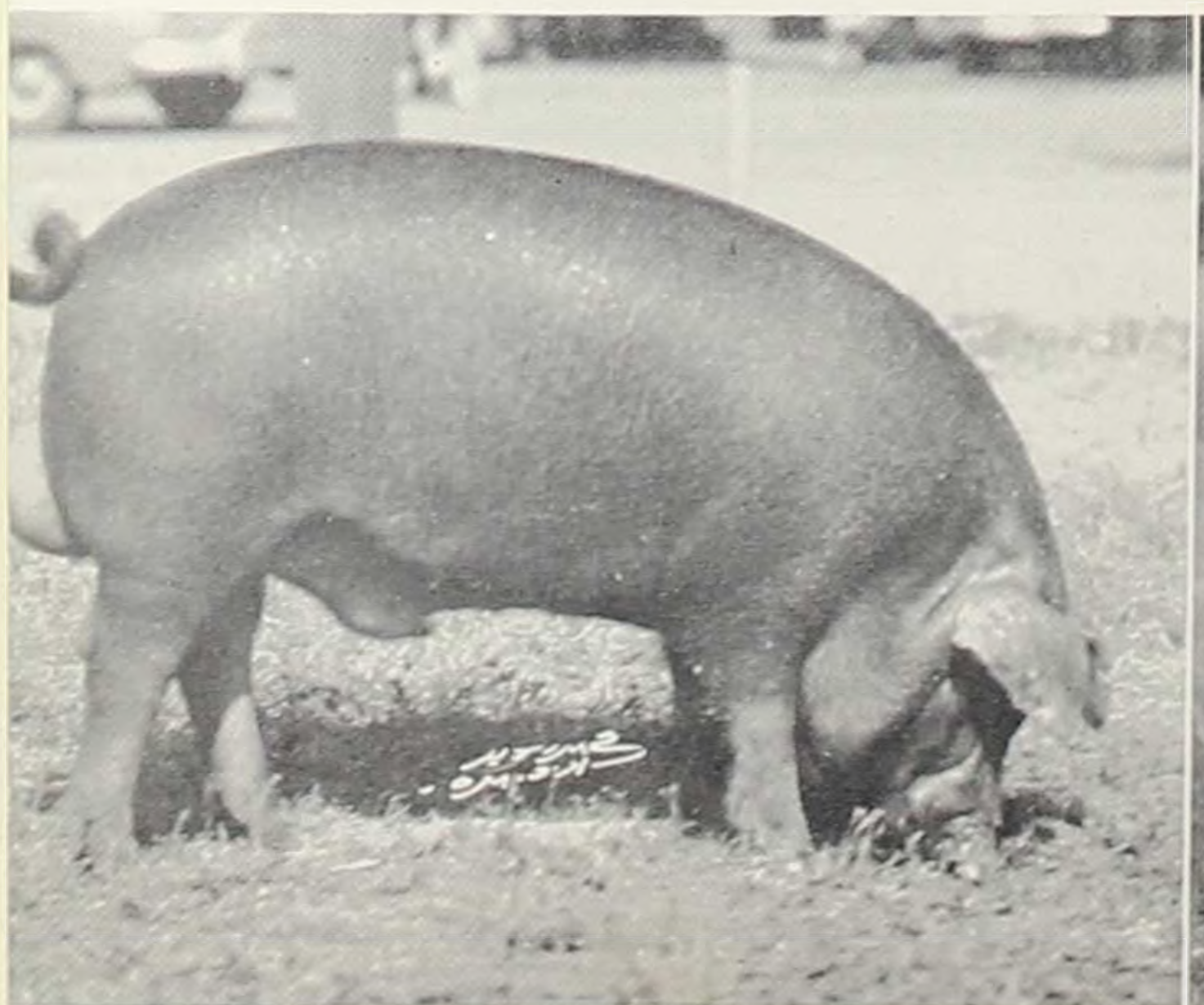
Modern Charmer 2nd (1947)

HAMPSHIRE



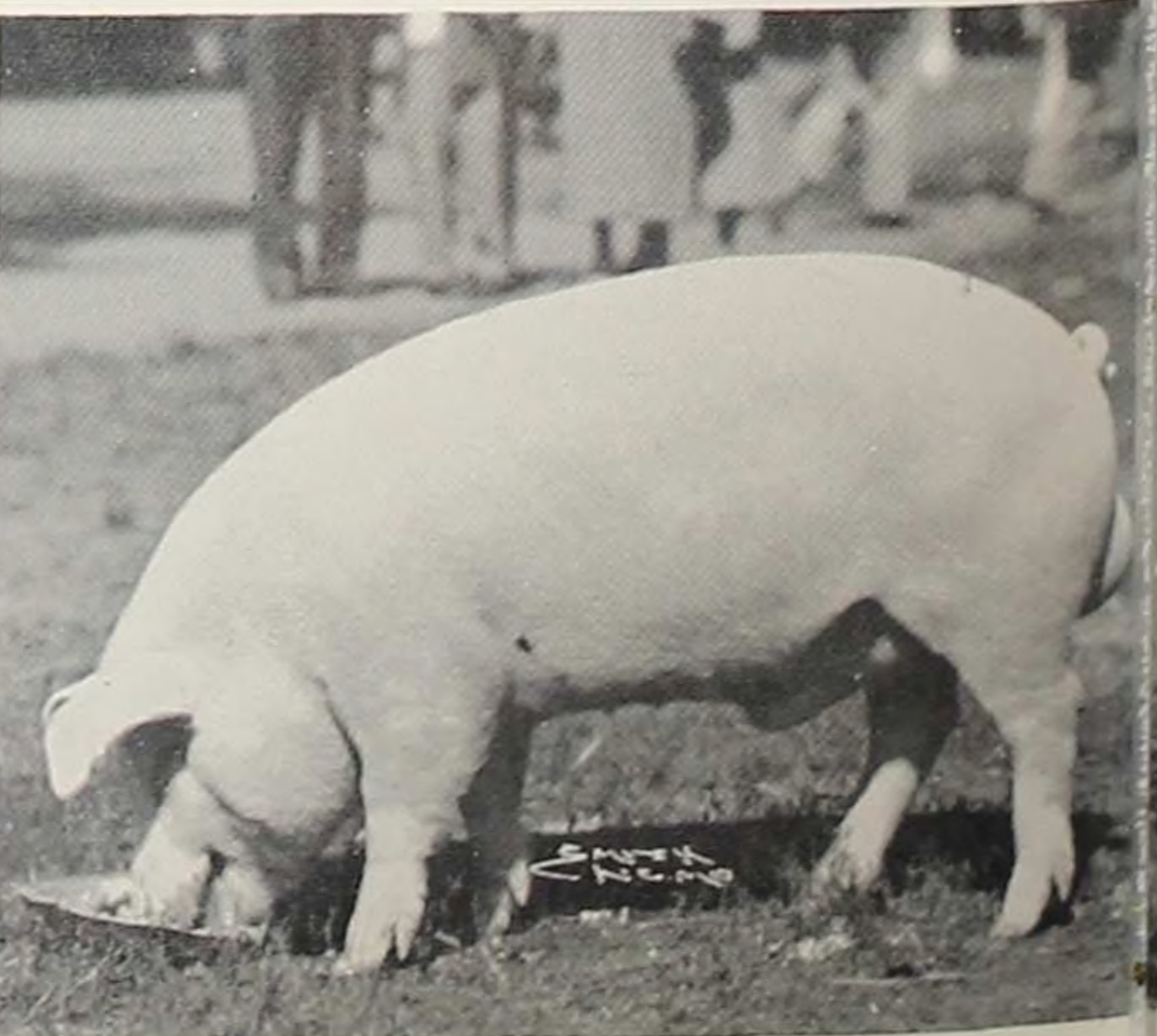
Maizie (1940)

DUROC



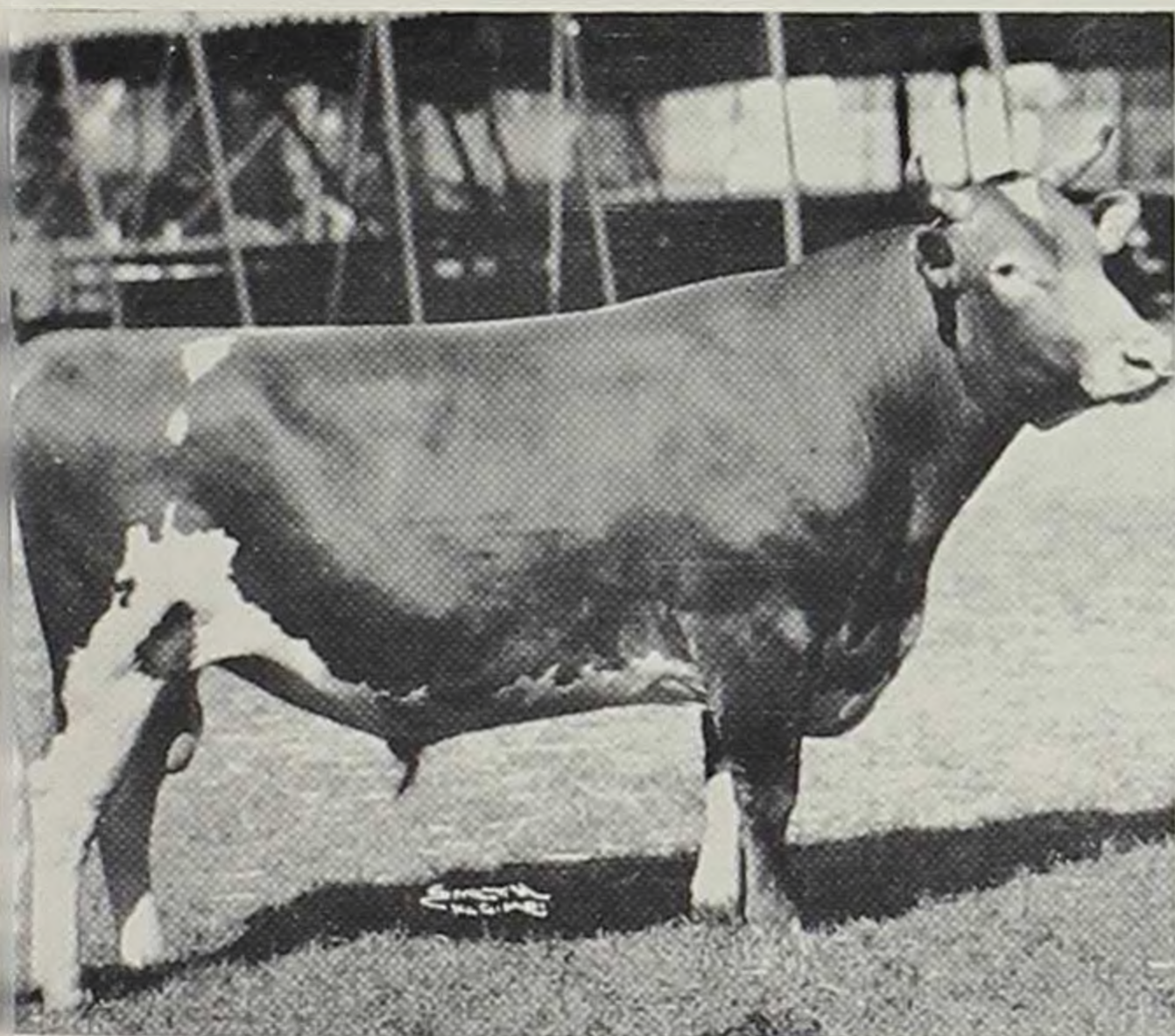
Fleetline (1947)

CHESTER WHITE



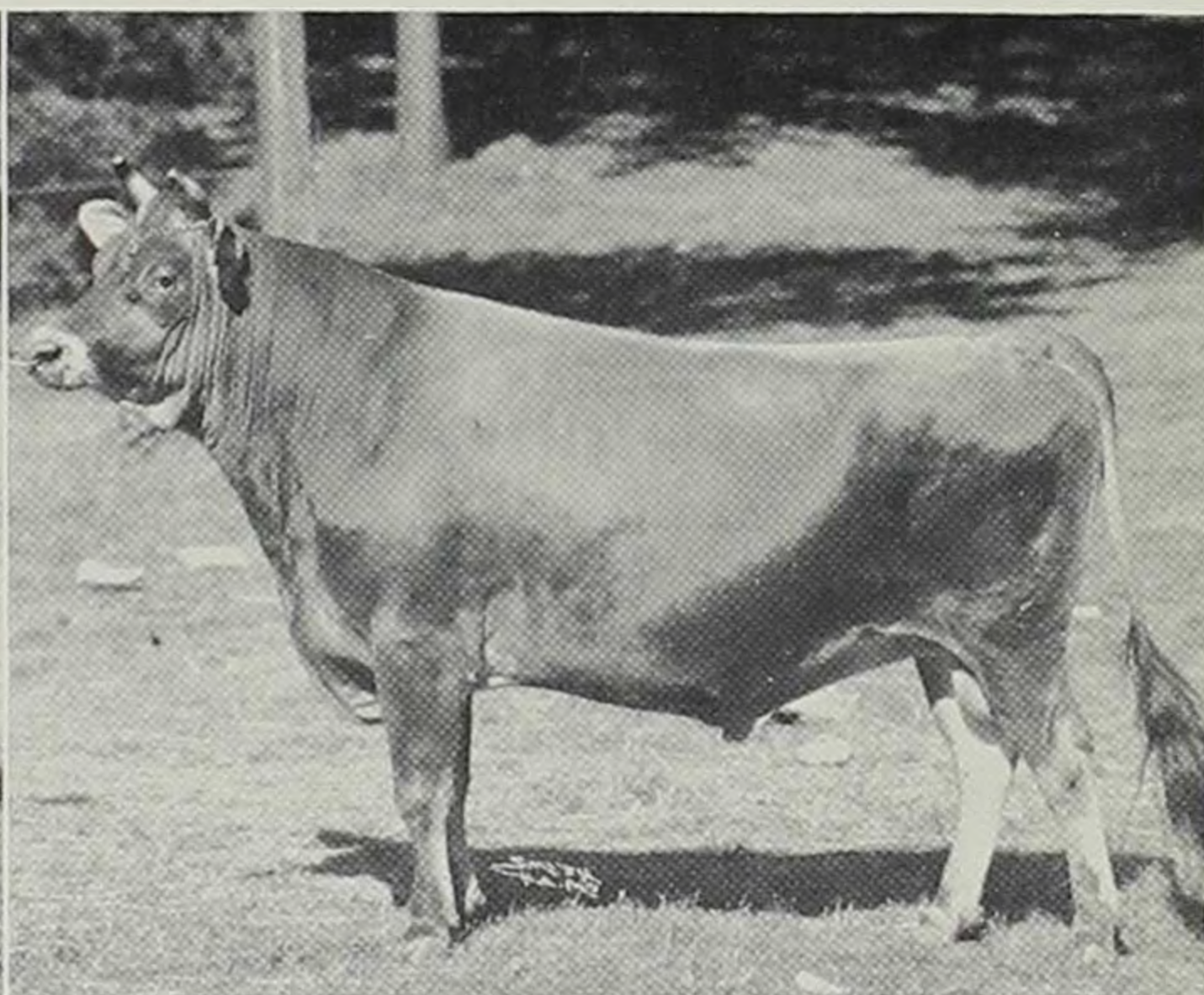
Promoter's Echo (1949)

GUERNSEY



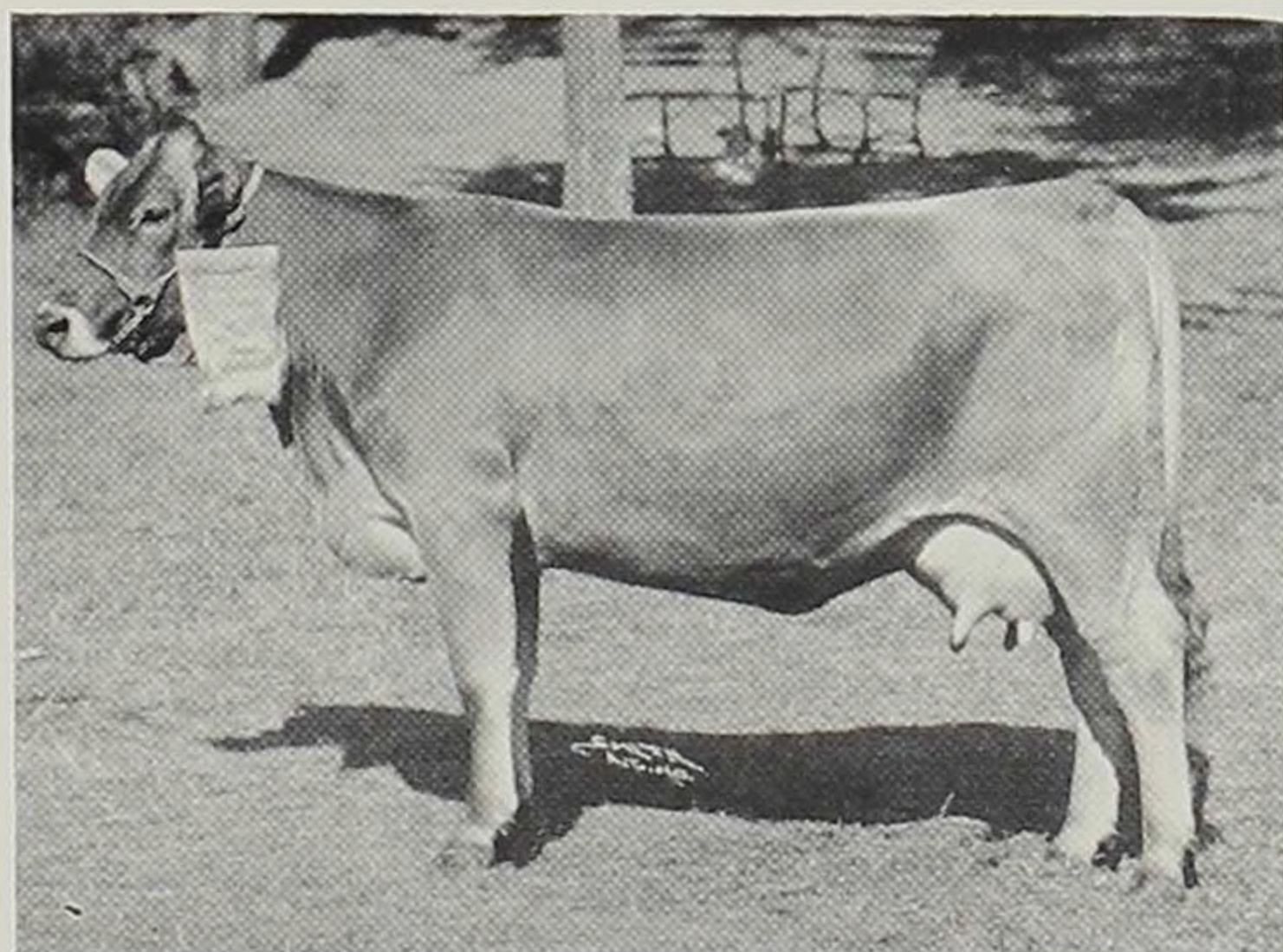
Argilla General Lee (1940)

JERSEY



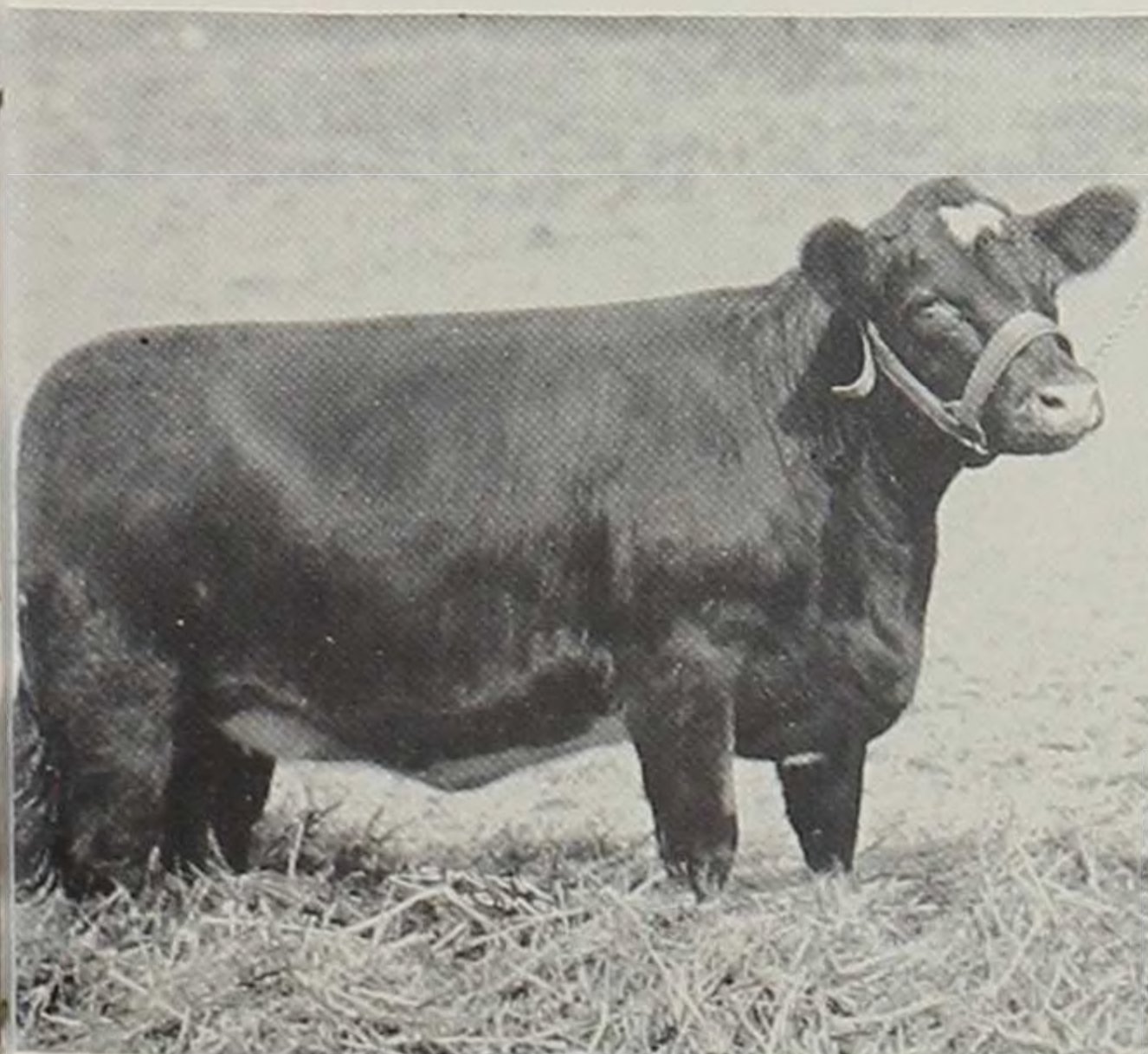
Muriel's Masterstroke (1949)

BROWN SWISS



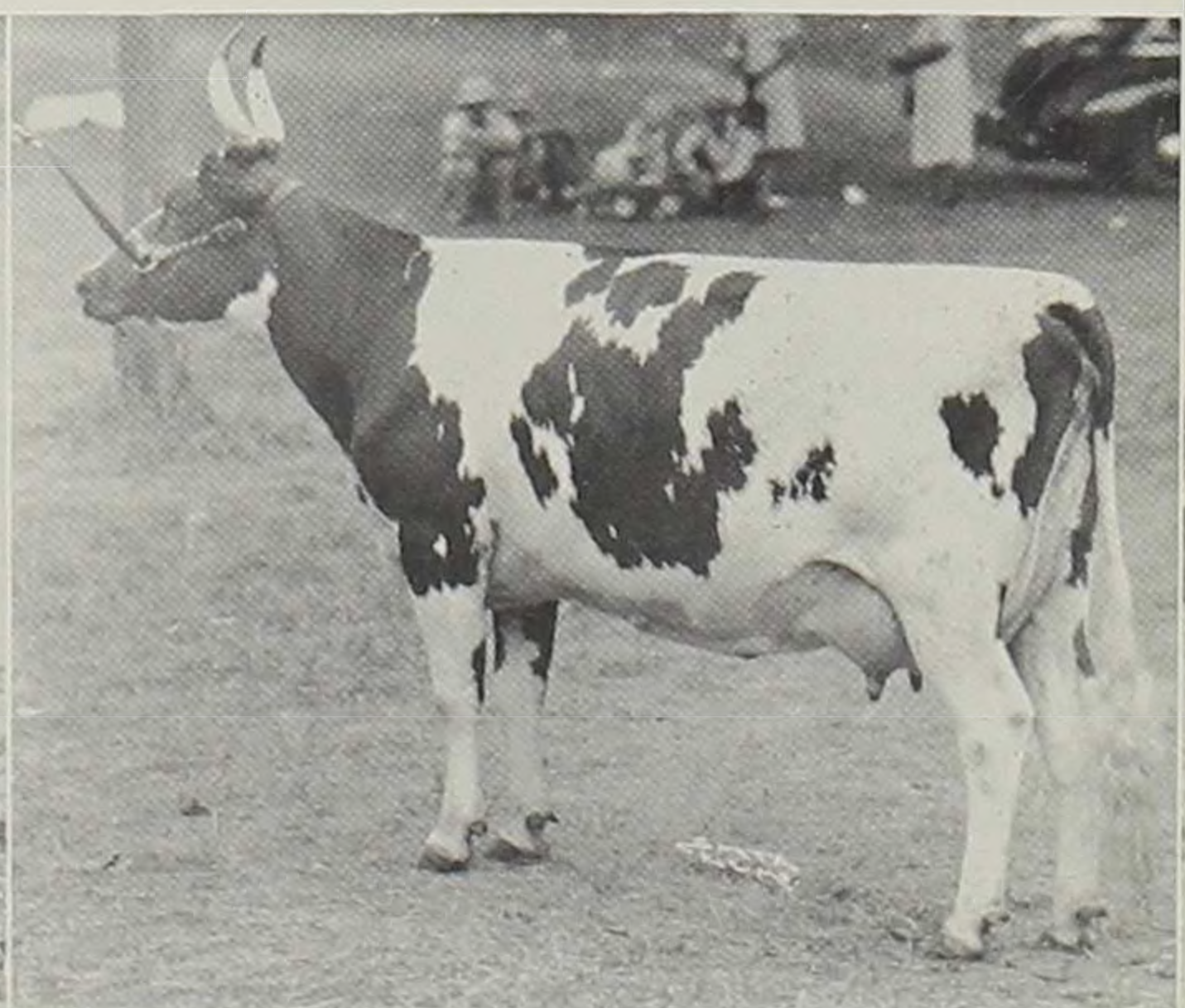
Bon Ray Rosalyn's Lindy (1948)

POLLED SHORTHORN



Highland Lavender (1948)

AYRESHIRE



Clover Gold Canadian Gem (1948)



HEREFORDS
(1953)

left:
Queen Betty
right:
Queen Carol

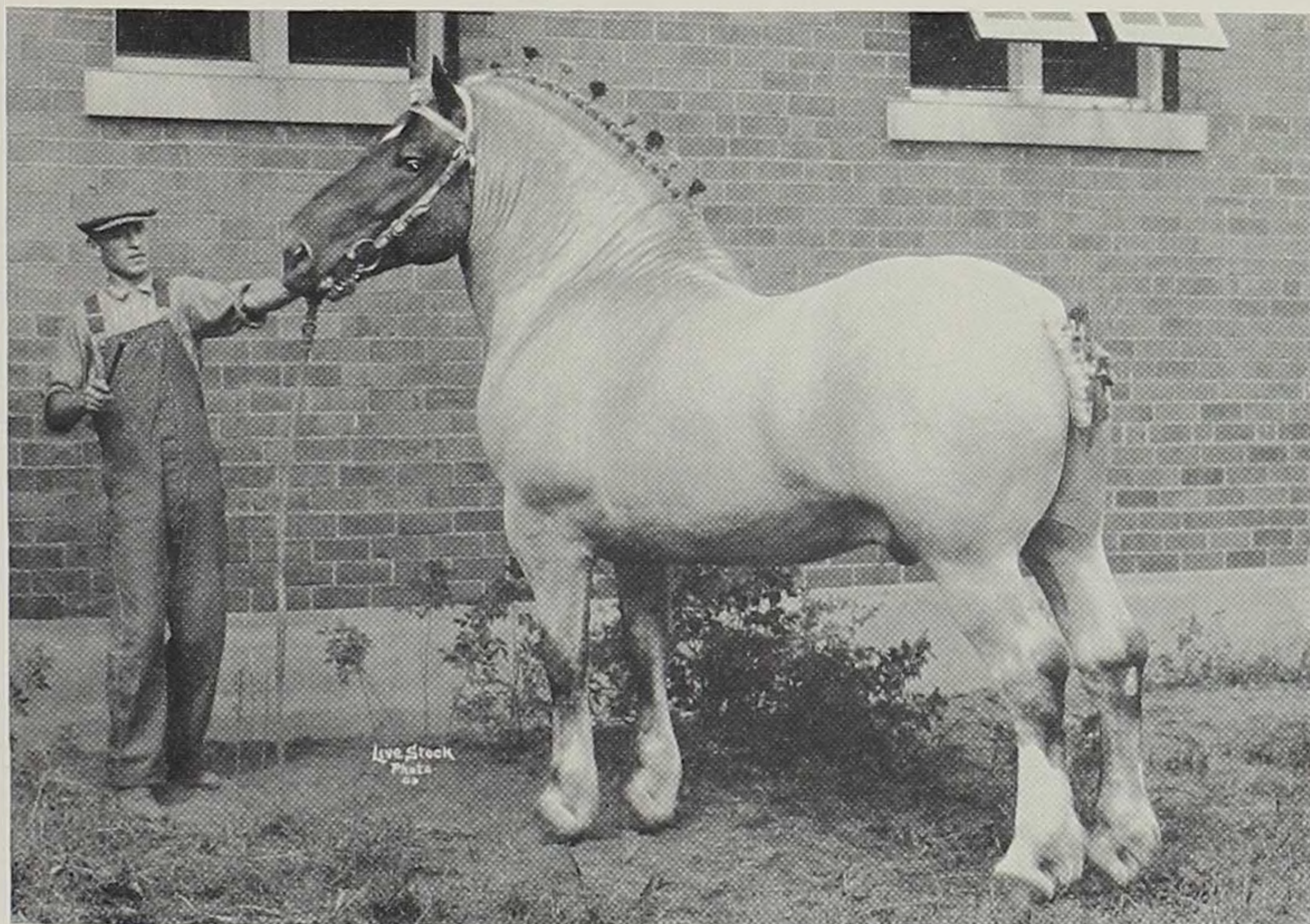


BLACK
ANGUS
STEER
(1953)

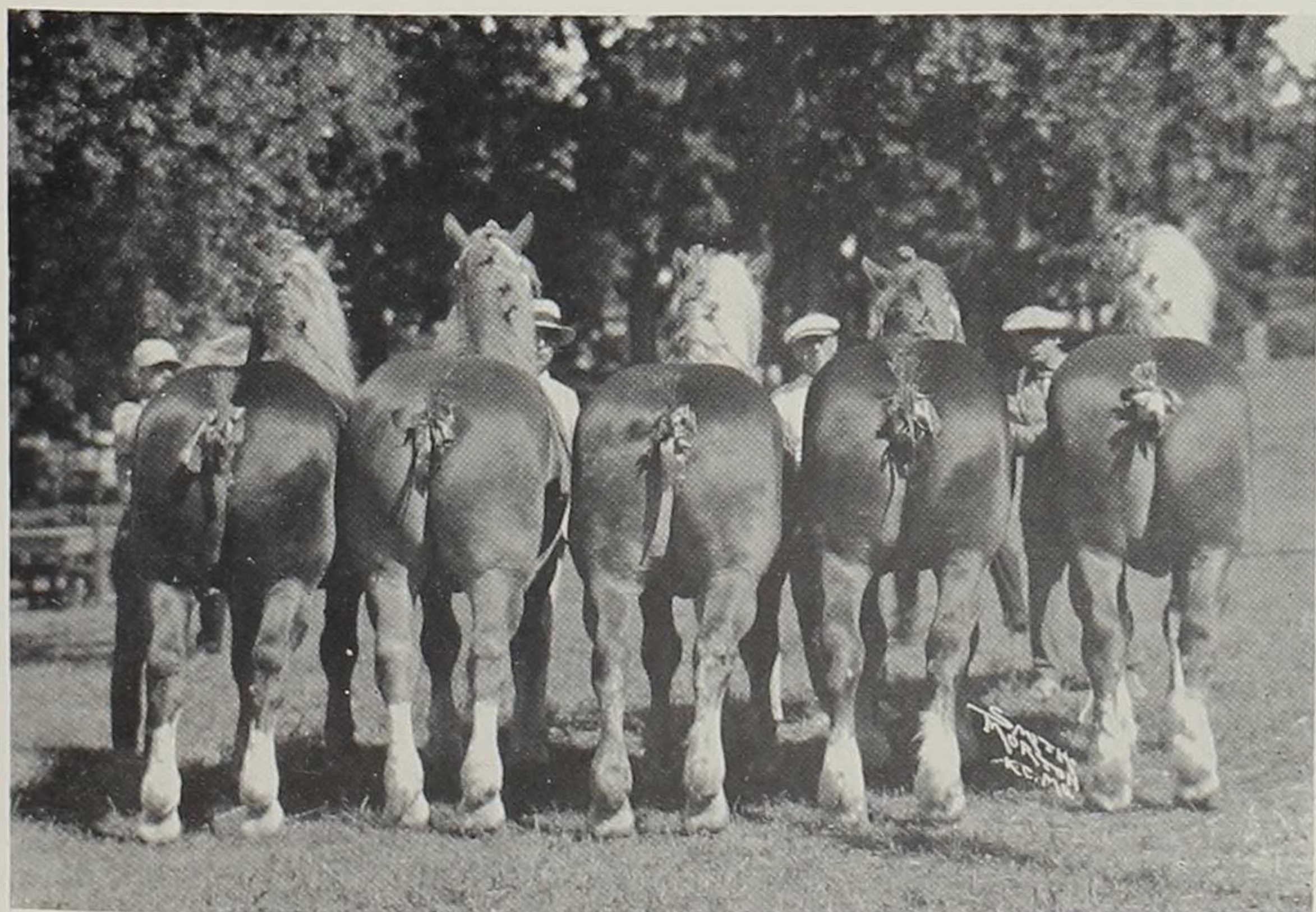


HAMPSHIRE
EWE
(1953)

BELGIAN



Maple Home Farceur (1925)
C. G. Good & Son Ogden



Group Five Belgian Stallions (1928)
Holbert Horse Importing Co. Greeley



All Aboard in Funland (1948)



Riding High on the Little Dipper (1950)

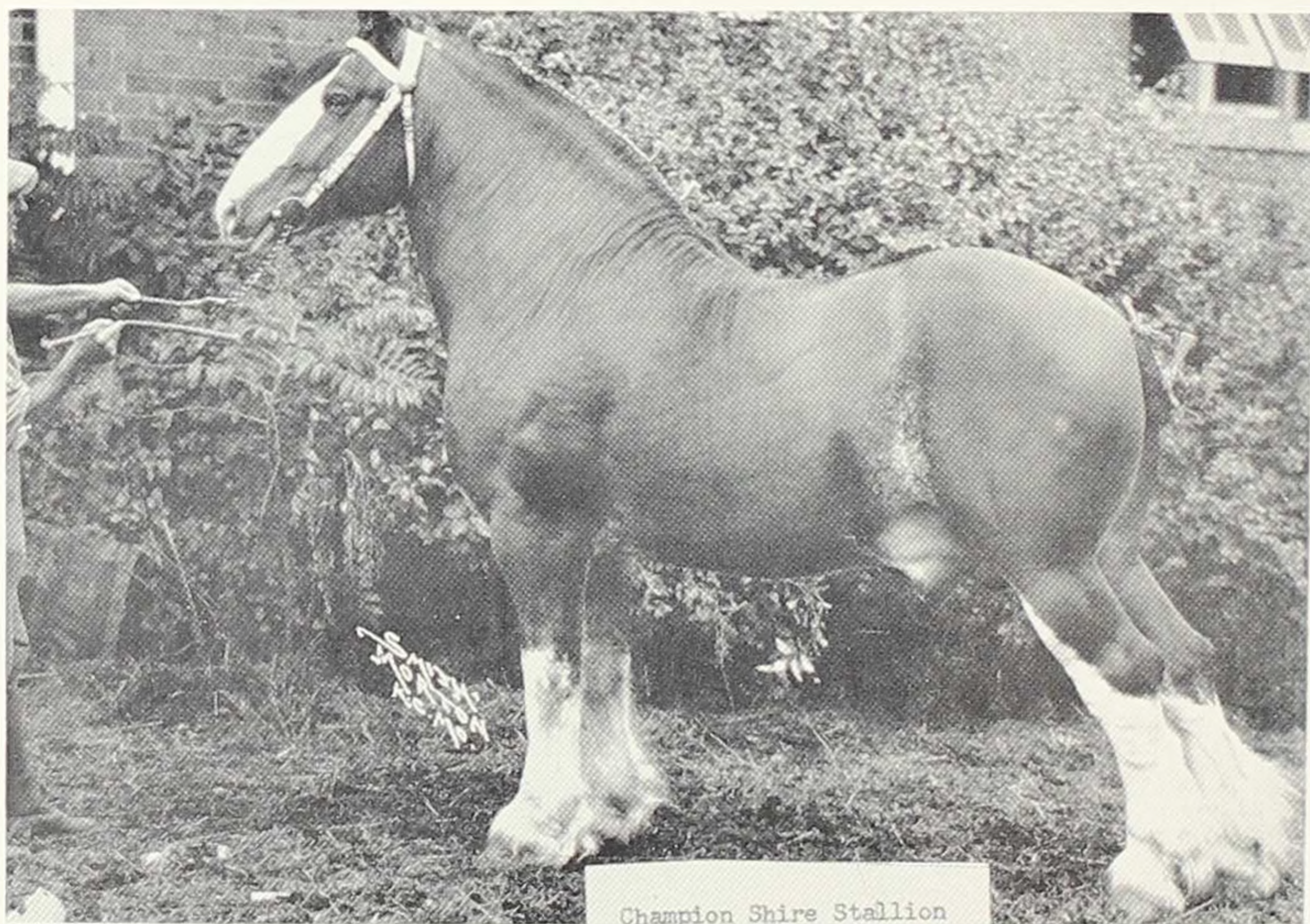


At the Fair — A Young Gal's Fancy (1952)



Food, Frills and Fun (1952)

SHIRES



Champion Shire Stallion

Edgewood Hengist (1928)
F. A. Huddleston Webster City

PERCHERONS



Group Five Percheron Stallions (1936)
J. C. Redman & Son Altoona



First Prize Farm Team
F. A. Huddlestun Webster City

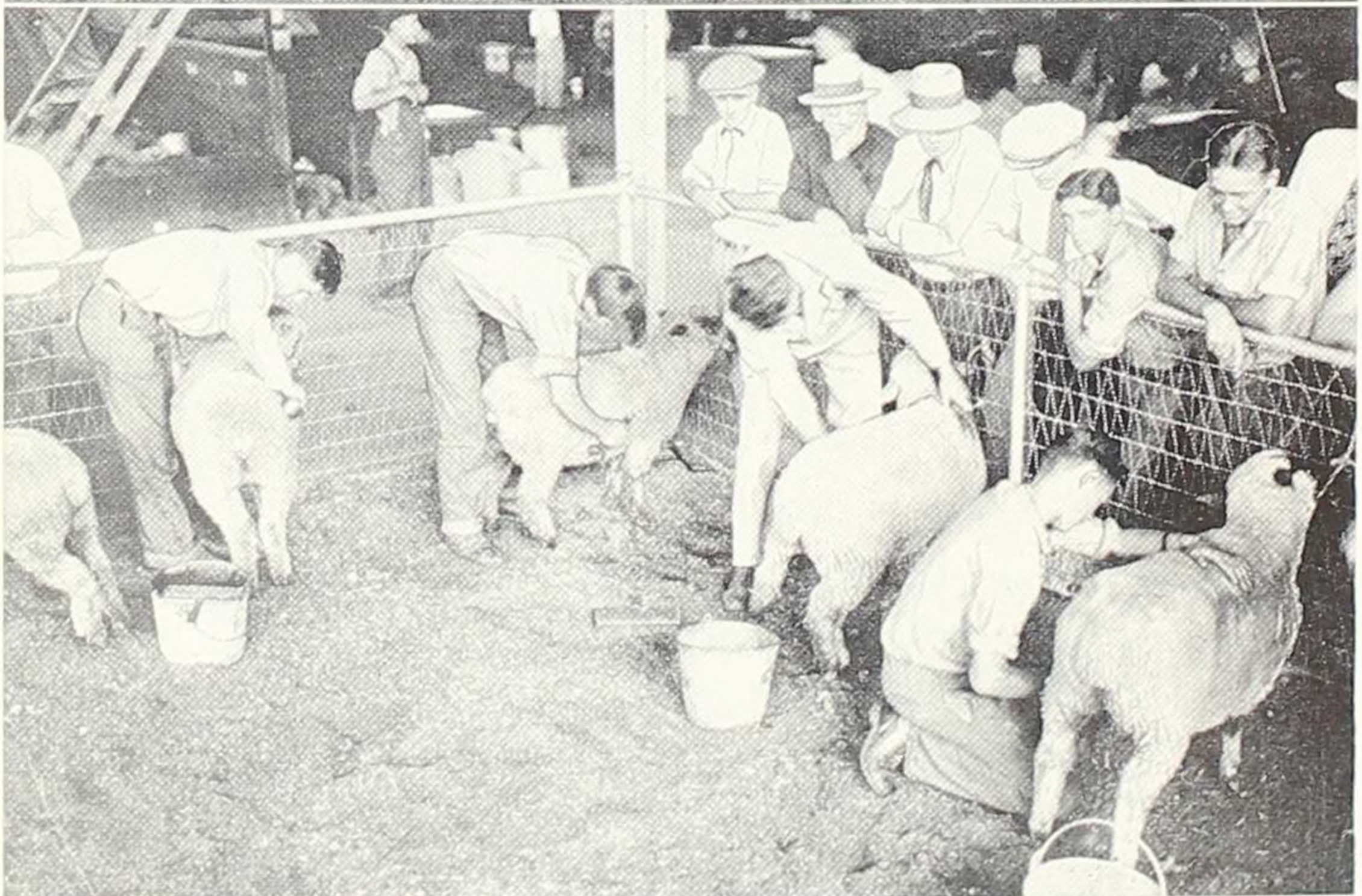


Ten Mule Hitch (1926)



CONTESTS

Hog
Callers
(1927)



Sheep
Shearing
(1931)



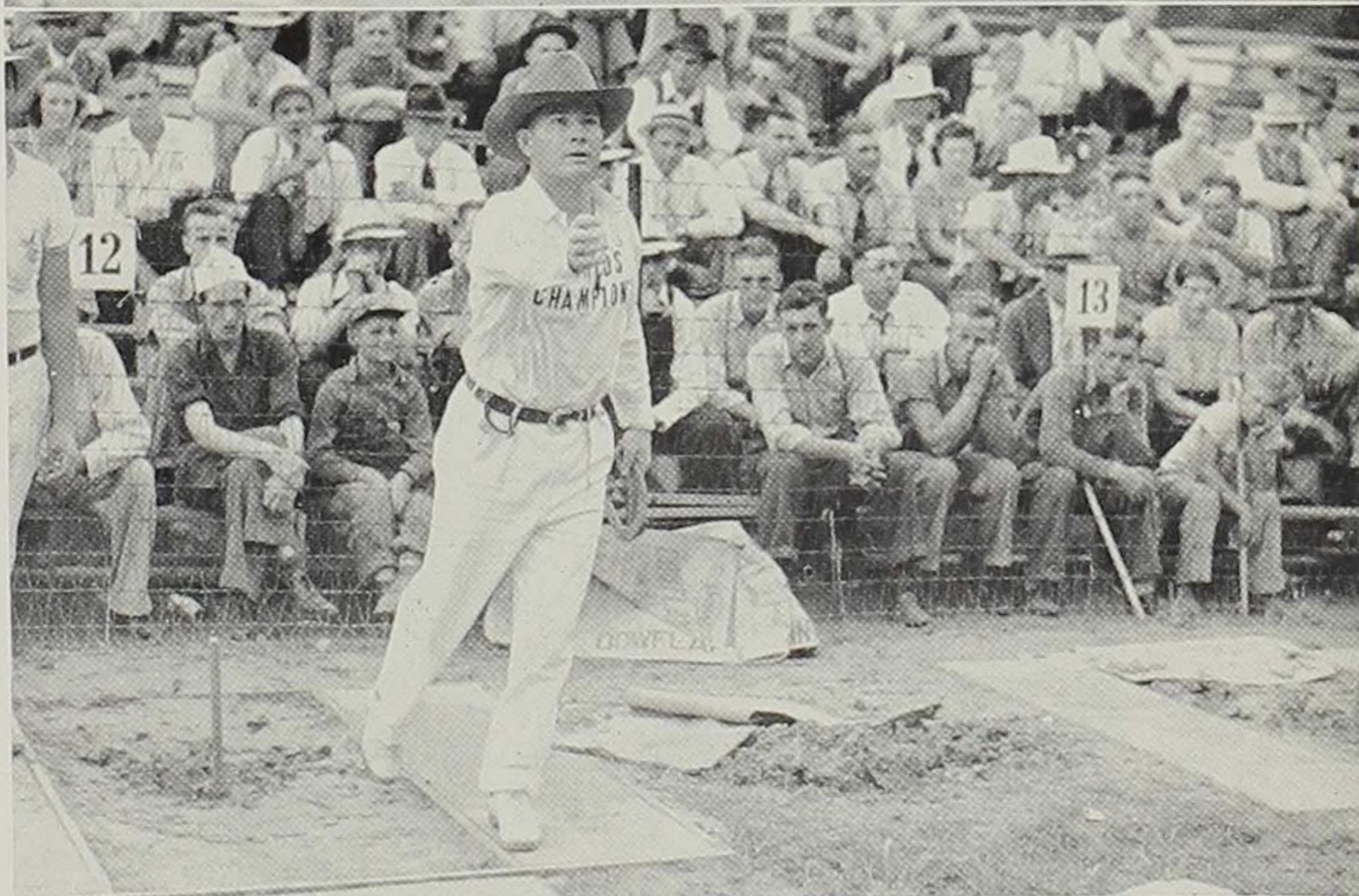
Old Time
Fiddlers
(1931)

CONTESTS

Team
Pulling
(1940)



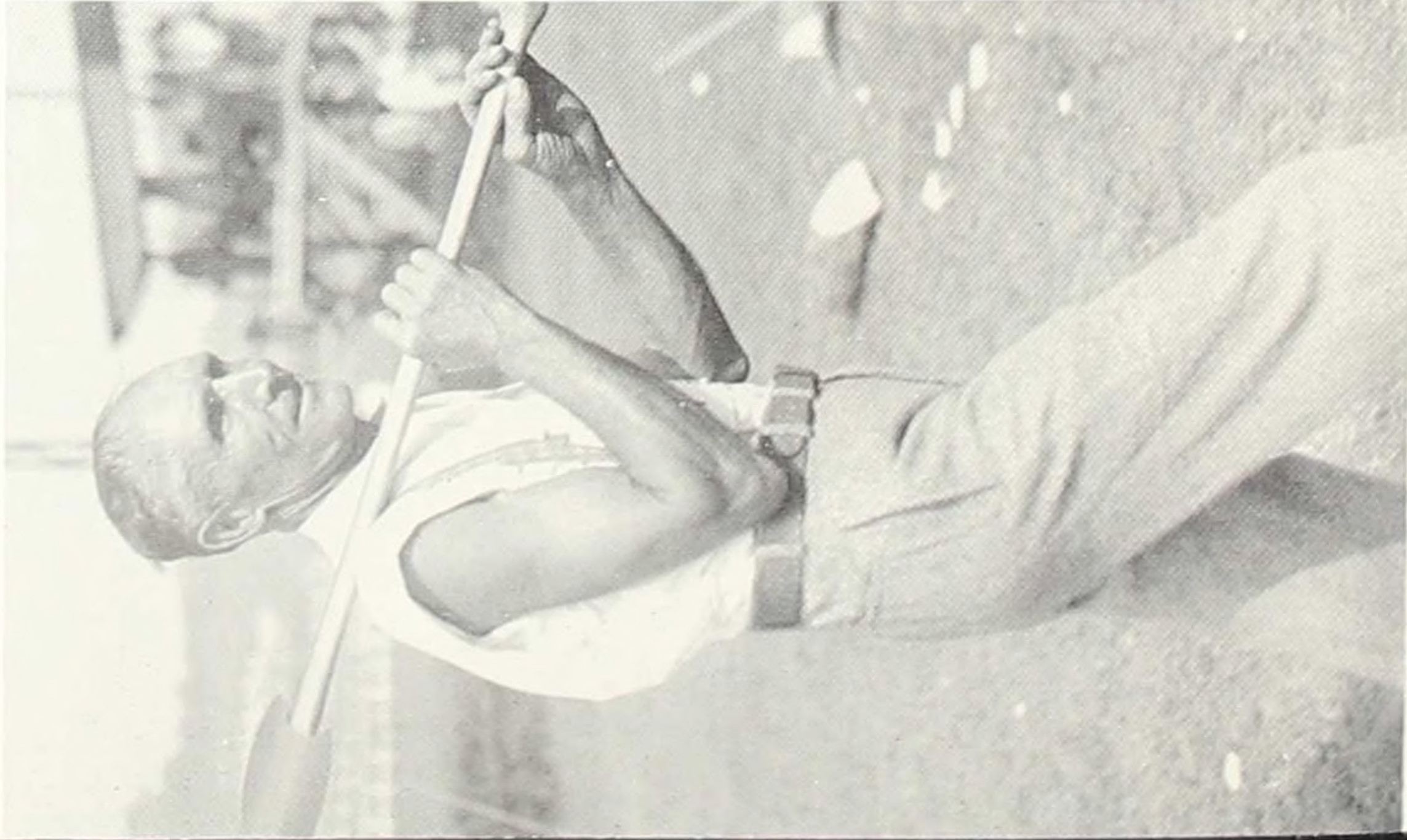
Horse
Shoes
(1940)



Model
Planes
(1934)



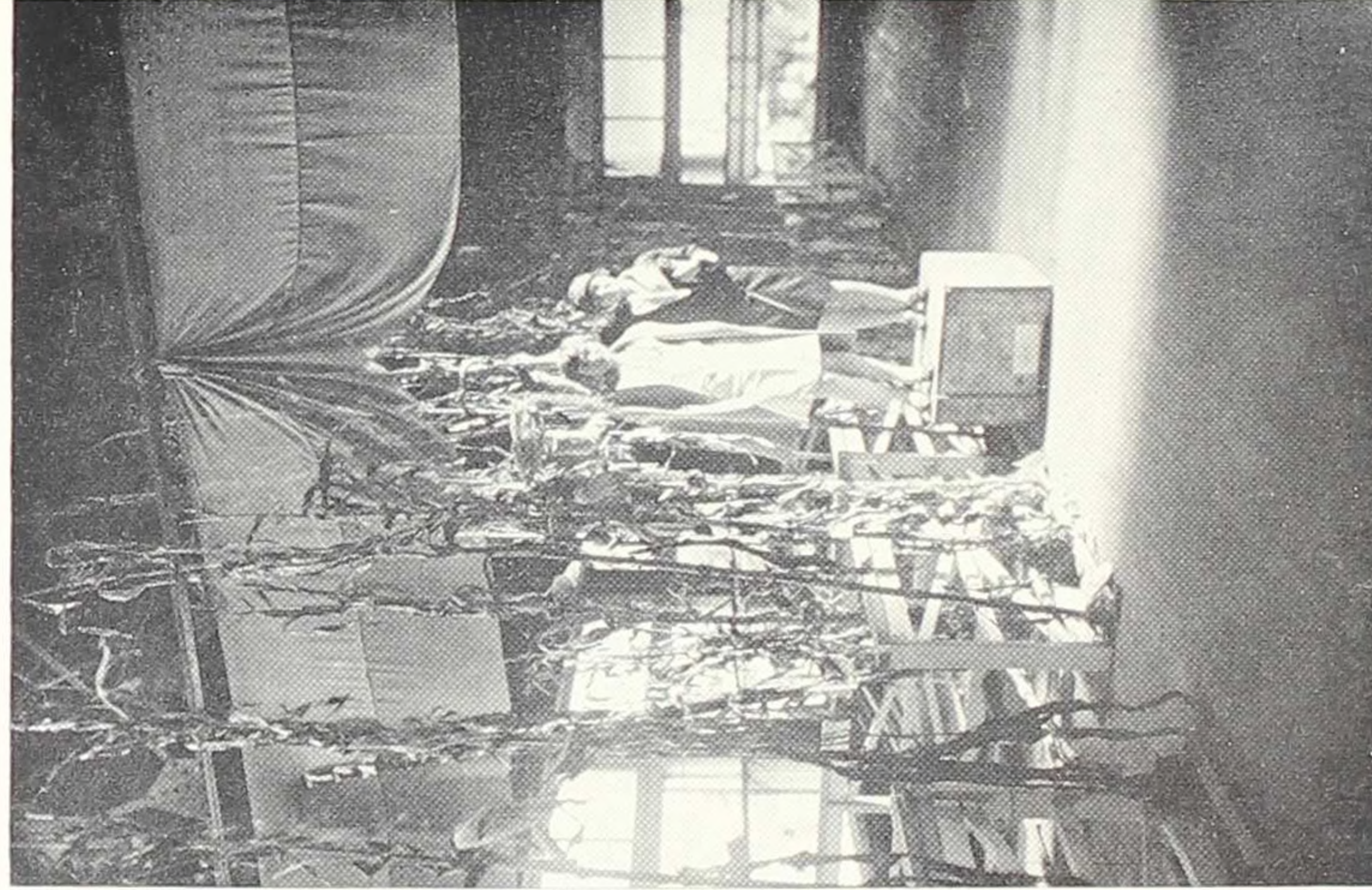
CONTESTS



Wood Chopping (1929)



Checkers (1951)



Tall Corn Contest

The Fair in Transition

For the past half century the State fair, like every other feature of our agriculture, has been in continual readjustment and transition — passing from pioneer conditions to those of the modern business age. New methods and equipment have been revolutionizing production; organization has encouraged cooperative activity; while Federal and State activities in education, experimentation, and regulation have put farming more and more on a scientific, up-to-date basis. The fair no longer has the field to itself; it must find and keep its place in the "new agriculture."

Most immediately pressing have been the problems concerned with material growth and the consequent financial obligations. If the fair was to be abreast of the times it had to be staged in a big way and this took money which during most of the period was hard to get.

To function adequately the Iowa State Fair had to have a permanent home, with ample space and elaborate, specialized equipment. By the end of the seventies the railroad development and hotel and other accommodations suggested the centrally located capital city as the natural abode of the annual exhibition. The fair moved to Des Moines in

1879 and remained there, but it took six years to persuade the legislature to appropriate the purchase money for a home. There were many who still believed that the fair should continue to migrate in order to secure adequate support. But the prevailing view was that the time had come for concentrating agricultural interests of the State at a central point.

There were social as well as economic interests involved. As James Wilson pointed out in 1881, "one of the most valuable effects of the State Fair is the fraternizing, humanizing consequences of bringing our people together. Local self-government, as we enjoy it in Iowa, depends upon the education of the heart as well as the head. No one meets and mingles with twenty thousand Iowa men, women, and children on the fair grounds — the only place where they can be brought together — without growth of sympathy. Class feeling vanishes when people get acquainted. The training of creeds yields to the broader influence of human brotherhood. Sectional feeling retreats from before the presence of the State assembled. Party prejudice hides, when Iowa people shake hands on the fair ground. The State Fair is to us what Mecca is to the Mohammedan, what Jerusalem was to the Crusader, what Paris is to pleasure seekers."

Finally in 1884 the legislature appropriated \$50,000 for the purchase of a location on condition

that the city of Des Moines raise an equal sum for improvements. The new grounds were dedicated on September 7, 1886, with addresses by Peter Melendy, Governor Larrabee, C. F. Clarkson, J. B. Grinnell, and George G. Wright. Iowa was not behind her neighbors in taking this important step. Only one State fair in the Northwest secured a permanent location before the eighties and several waited until the next decade.

This new establishment, essential as it was for the continuing progress of the fair, involved a heavy financial burden during the period of agricultural depression. The fair, like all other activities dependent upon rural support, was hard hit by the cycle of falling prices culminating in the panic of 1893. A combination of poor crops, bad weather, and hard times ruined the fair in 1894 and only specific guarantees from the city made it possible to open the gates the next fall. Uncertain weather was an increasingly risky element with so large an investment at stake. "World fairs" and other special expositions, which came all too frequently in this period, tended to have an unfavorable effect upon the attendance of the State fair, as well as to set unduly high and unsound standards of exhibits and amusements.

Urban patrons, to whom the fair appealed more and more, were somewhat fickle in their support and demanded high priced attractions which often did not make compensating returns. In 1893 citi-

zens of Des Moines contributed ten thousand dollars to secure a display of Pain's fireworks representing the "Fall of Pompeii" — a spectacle which has since become a standard feature of the fair.

State aid was needed as never before, both for temporary relief and permanent improvements. In 1873 the annual subvention was reduced to \$1000 and after 1878 it was dropped entirely because the legislature thought the fair should be a self-sustaining venture. The Agricultural Society felt otherwise; all through the lean years it was urging continued and increased state appropriations. In 1875 a memorial to the law makers set forth the services that the Society was rendering to Iowa agriculture and asked for \$5000 a year. An indebtedness of \$6500 in 1878 was held to be due to the withdrawal of essential aid, and \$2500 yearly was mentioned as the smallest measure of support that would enable the fair to go forward properly. The secretary suggested that candidates for the legislature be pledged accordingly. All in vain — the Society and its great exhibition was left to shift for itself, with the result that by the nadir of hard times in 1894 the indebtedness reached \$25,000. At that juncture the legislature came forward with a partial salvage fund of \$20,000. It was claimed at this time that, of the nine or ten states comprising the Western State Fair Association, Iowa was the only one that did not receive appropriations ranging from \$3000 to \$10,000 annually.

During the early years of the new century the State fair, like all other institutions, had its share in "Our New Prosperity." From 1902 to 1908, \$357,700 was expended for "permanent improvements," of which \$198,700 came directly from the fair receipts and \$159,000 from the legislature. Even so, new buildings and equipment did not keep pace with expanding activities, for in the report of 1908 the secretary enumerated ten building projects of immediate need.

The new age brought not only an expanded and systematized financial program but a modernized method of control. In 1900 the State Agricultural Society was superseded by a Board of Agriculture which, among its other duties, directed the fair. The paid secretary continued to be the real managing head. Finally in 1923, with the creation of a consolidated State Department of Agriculture, a separate State Fair Board was established composed of the Governor, Secretary of Agriculture, and the President of the Agricultural College *ex officio*, and directors from each congressional district selected by an agricultural convention. The secretary remained the technical executive official, in direct charge of the fair.

The integrating trend of the period was shown in the development of cooperating circuits and associations among the State fairs and in the formation of the International Association of Fairs and Expositions in 1894. Inter-regional and State

visitation of fair officials became a regular practice, and the transfer of secretarial managers from one organization to another, as from Iowa to Minnesota in 1911, indicated the establishment of a new specially trained profession.

Educational activities showed broader, if not always deeper, ideas and interests. Plowing matches were long since antiquated. Evening discussion meetings had been superseded by more highly developed extension agencies, while the general-inspiration address was no longer desired, either at the State or county fairs. As early as 1864, "Long John" Wentworth of Chicago said, in declining to appear in such a role, that he was unable "to compete with the animals" which people chiefly came to see; and, with the multiplying of attractions, exhibitional and amusing, even the most noted speakers were at a disadvantage. Hamlin Garland was sadly disillusioned as the official "Speaker of the Day" at a county fair at Osage. It was a real tribute to any speaker who could keep a sizeable audience from the midway and the race track, as did T. De Witt Talmage in 1889 and Carrie Chapman Catt two years later.

In the eighties the lengthening of the fair beyond a week made necessary a special Sunday program. A sermon by a pulpit celebrity — often imported from outside the State — with a special musical program seemed the most fitting solution. Liberati's band "charmed" an unusually large

audience in 1906 "by really the best band music ever heard in Des Moines." But the crescendo of musical entertainment was reached in 1927 when Sousa's famous band attracted the largest Sunday crowd in the history of the exposition.

In general the State fair found its chief instructional opportunity in serving as an exhibitional clearing-house for the various agricultural agencies, Federal and State. The stock-judging, which continued to hold its basic position, was made more scientific by the substitution of expert judges for the old amateur committees. Students from the Agricultural College at Ames engaged in stock-judging contests, and farmers were taught the technique of appraising different breeds of cattle, horses, hogs, sheep, and poultry.

On the borderline between exhibition and pure amusement was horse racing which became an established institution before 1900. But its triumph was not without long-continued protest from those who felt that this sporting feature had no proper place in the agricultural exhibit of a middle western State, that it was distracting, expensive, and tended inevitably to jockeying and gambling.

Defenders maintained that the development of the race horse was a legitimate and essential branch of stock breeding and that the exhibition of these qualities was as appropriate as any others. Furthermore racing made such a unique appeal

that it was essential in maintaining adequate patronage, particularly from the cities. As early as 1881, James Wilson asserted that "the trotting horse pays his way and is almost the only thing that does. Whether the state Fair would be a success without speeding is to be tried. It is a fact that thousands come, pay their fee, and go straight to the amphitheatre to see the trots, without whose fees premiums could not be paid to other classes."

The overwhelming demand for this ever-attendant if not essential part of the State fair on the part of the supporting constituency broke down all opposition. This Corn Belt fair, like the others, joined the racing circuits and bid for the fullest and fastest cards. Abuses had to be suppressed from time to time, but the race track became as much a part of the fair as the judging pavilion — and usually far better patronized.

The general amusement problem, ever changing and expanding, could not be solved so definitely. There was an even greater progression in the development of amusement than of instruction. In the era of the "rise of national sport" and of highly developed mechanical devices for amusement, public taste was exacting if not always discriminating. The "Midway," with its Ferris wheel roller coaster, merry-go-round, and other hilarious and enticing instruments for the promotion of fun, has become one of the indigenous parts of the fair.

World champion race horses have been hired

for princely sums to race against time. The famous Axtel was exhibited in a specially constructed glass stall. In 1904 Dan Patch set a record of 2:06, but this mark was outdistanced in 1918 when Single G paced a mile on the half-mile dirt track in the world-record time of 2:01.

Competing for favor with the fast horses were bicycle and automobile races. During the early nineties, when cycling was fashionable, bicycle races formed a prominent part of the sporting program. In 1895 there were two days of bicycle racing under the management of the Des Moines Wheel Club. Probably the two mile professional race, "wheeled off in 5:45 by F. Marty of Creston," was the most exciting event on the program.

Balloon ascensions with both single and double leaps and, during the first decade of the new century, aeronautical demonstrations brought a thrill, before spectators had become over-sophisticated. In 1906 "men refused to believe their eyes and children stood in amazement" while an airship "winged its flight from the State fair grounds to the Capitol and back again." The ship consisted of a dirigible-shaped gas bag below which a five horse power engine was suspended in a triangular bamboo frame. As the craft ascended the "music ceased and even the ubiquitous peanut fiend stilled his voice. There was a rush to points of vantage and the craning of the necks set in. The ship gracefully but slowly mounted in the air, at times

seeming to stand almost on end as the operator headed its nose in the air, while the whirling ten foot screw in front drew the great gas bag up into the atmosphere. When a height of about 200 feet was reached the operator moved along the triangle to secure an even balance of the machine and then it moved toward the west, whence the operation of the rudder directed." At the Capitol the aviator "alighted on the sward" to let the engine cool, and then twice circling the gilded dome he returned to the fair grounds where the "ship settled to the ground as gently as a cooing dove."

This was so successful that a return engagement was scheduled for the following year, but after one short flight the airship was destroyed during a severe storm. It was not until 1911 that heavier-than-air craft were demonstrated at the State fair. In that year two Wright biplanes were flown each day. Ten years later Ruth Law thrilled the fair ground crowds by transferring from an automobile to an airplane in flight and in 1927 the fair was visited by both Lindbergh and Chamberlin, fresh from their conquests of the Atlantic.

Even in the nineties spectacular acts of the circus and hippodrome were introduced between heats of races and as evening attractions. High diving horses, wire walking, and feats of marksmanship were common. In 1895 a sham battle was fought between Ames cadets and two companies of the Iowa National Guard. This form of excite-

ment did not meet universal approval, however. In a petition to the directors of the fair, the W. C. T. U. objected because sham battles "are not in harmony with the true spirit of Christian civilization, but are corrupting and demoralizing to the youth and the young men of the state and that they hinder the growth of that spirit of peace and amity among the people and among nations which is the duty of every lover of his race to strengthen and promote." The petition was referred to the incoming board of directors.

Bizarre stunts such as locomotive collisions, dangerous sport like auto polo, amusing dog-cart races, old-fashioned fiddling contests, horse-shoe pitching tournaments for both men and women, and hog-calling competition all were employed to beguile additional patrons to the State fair. To attract the city crowd in the evening, the destruction of Pompeii, the burning of Manila, the sieges of Moscow and Port Arthur, the destruction of Tokyo, mystic China, Rome under Nero, and the fall of Troy were reenacted in modern pyrotechnics. This year the "Fall of Pompeii" is to be revived in honor of the fiftieth anniversary of that original spectacle in fireworks.

All of these attractions, however subject to question as to emphasis and appropriateness, were above board morally. But as much can not be said of certain other features, characteristic of the period, which at times eluded the concessions com-

mittee. Most prominent of these questionable or wholly objectionable excrescences were games of chance, lewd side shows and carnivals, and the sale of intoxicants. All of the fairs and exhibitions of the country had these evils to contend with, but on the whole the Iowa fair was relatively clean. "Gambling of every nature and form, as also beer, ale, wine, or other intoxicating liquors, will be excluded from and about the fair grounds," was a regular announcement of the directors. The overwhelming sentiment of the true constituency of the fair was against anything in the great exhibit of the State that tended to be discreditable.

Long before the end of the first quarter of the present century it was evident that the old cattle show, like the pioneer agriculture which it represented, had been relegated to the historical museum. Here and there, to be sure, a voice was raised for restoring the old-time fair in all of its simplicity of purpose and austerity of conduct. Thus, at the dedication of the new grounds, the pioneer leader, Josiah B. Grinnell, registered his protest against the innovations, good and bad alike: "I would bar the gates forever to gamblers, jockeys, whiskey vendors and oleomargarine frauds, and leave reptilian monsters, with acrobats, pigmies, and fat women to the showman, Barnum. Then write over your portals, dedicated to art, animal industry and agriculture." But such voices, insofar as they suggested a narrowing of

the constructive, progressive trends, were of the past.

Before the Iowa State Fair had passed its golden anniversary in 1904, the complaint was prevalent that certain State fairs, especially in the East, were becoming great sporting meets, catering mainly to city crowds and thus failing to perform their true function of representing and furthering the interests of agriculture. Such a criticism could not have been made at any time of the Iowa fair which has been truly agricultural throughout the seventy-five years of its existence, in purpose, organization, and achievement, and has, in its various stages, represented most intimately the life and progress of the heart of the Corn Belt.

EARLE D. ROSS

A Dynamic Quarter Century

In the quarter century between the diamond and centennial anniversaries of the State Fair, Iowa economy and society experienced the greatest stress and strain, alternating from devastating catastrophe to unexampled attainments, of any period since the first Hawkeye Prairie was broken and the first trading center located. These years witnessed the culmination of agricultural deflation and of industrial and financial inflation in the Great Depression, of gradual stimulated recovery, and the insatiable demands of total war on a global scale. Hastened by such emergent involvements, technology in all lines reached unimagined heights. On the farm scientific processes and methods were progressively applied to all aspects of cultivation and husbandry along with a mechanization of all of the operations of farm and home.

Typical Iowa manufacturers, engaged largely in processing agricultural products or in providing equipment for the farmer and his family, reached stabilized localization and national standing.

At the same time improved highways, motorization, air transit, radio, and television facilitated movement and communication of goods, people, and ideas.

Modern business organizations and methods, in appropriate forms, were applied alike to farm, factory, and utility.

The verified findings of Federal and State research agencies were carried to the farms and the industries by systematic extension services. The 4-H clubs gave inspiring incentive to country youth and the Future Farmers of America motivated vocational instruction at the secondary level.

Social changes were reflected in the functionalizing of the public schools in instruction and community services, in the creation of community junior colleges, and in the social emphasis of the churches and fraternal organizations.

As Iowa came of age in this period there was a growing consciousness of state and local scenery, history, folkways, literature, and art. Such appreciation was stimulated and often directly promoted by such organizations as the State Historical Society of Iowa and the local groups which it helped to nourish, the State Department of History and Archives, the State Conservation Commission, the Izaak Walton League, the patriotic societies, the Iowa Federation of Women's Clubs, and varied fraternal organizations. A succession of anniversaries of the State, localities, and institutions gave incentives for special observances.

All of these evidences of the economically and socially maturing Commonwealth found annually reflection and appropriate recognition in the great

agricultural-industrial exhibition known as the Iowa State Fair.

Deflation And Depression Years

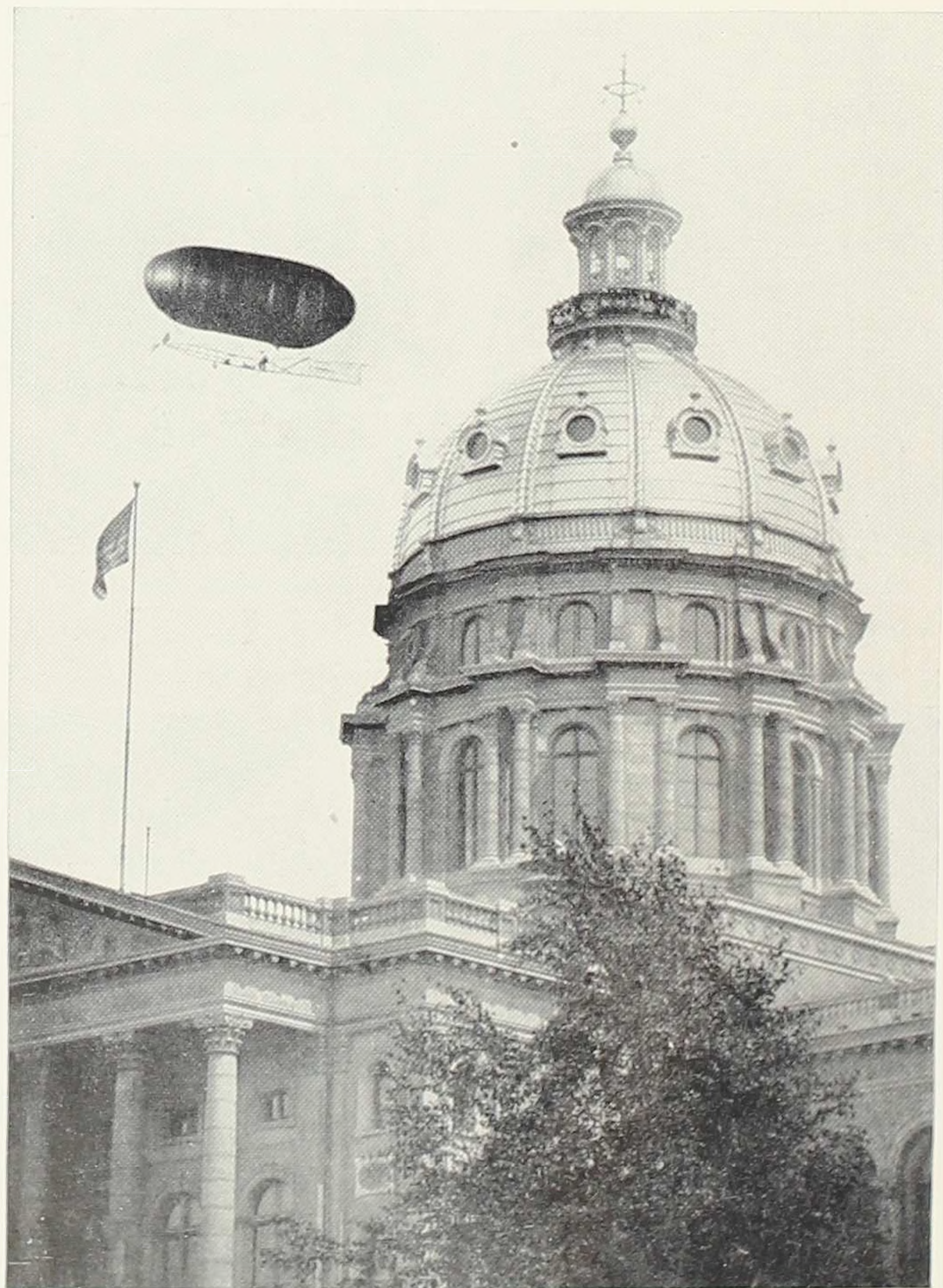
The Diamond Jubilee Fair of 1929 was a fitting recognition and demonstration of the agricultural and industrial changes and achievements of three quarters of a century. While still decidedly at a disparity with other interests, farmers had made a partial recovery and were hopeful of the program of the new administration. Most other businesses, in spite of ominous signs, were still confident of a continuing boom. The weather was ideal and the extending highway improvement facilitated travel, and camping space was enlarged to accommodate some 25,000.

To give proper observance to such an auspicious occasion the State Fair Board had the full cooperation of the historical societies, the colleges, farmers and industrial organizations, and of many other state and local organizations. The result was a banner fair breaking all previous records in attendance, financial returns, and the extent and attractiveness of exhibits.

The livestock of the million dollar parade, and the overflowing riches of field, orchard, and garden all reached new heights in extent and excellence.

Each department by material survivals or models traced the record from the primitive to the





FLYING AROUND THE STATE CAPITOL DOME IN 1906

present. The machinery depictment of the stages of cultivation and harvesting was of especial interest. But no less arresting was the elaborate pageant of transportation from ox-cart to the latest models of streamlining.

Household changes appeared in the period equipment, furnishings, and costumes. Historical plays and pageantry turned back the years for varied themes.

Directly in the spirit of the occasion, the Fairfield Chamber of Commerce reproduced the first State Fair even to the presentation of the big cheese. Adjoining this central feature was a restoration of the birthplace of the first native Iowa President, with his first teacher proudly doing the honors.

In sharp contrast the passing scene and pressing interests were recognized in the first annual radio show and by an address, on Farm Bureau Day, by a member of the Federal Farm Board.

The jubilee fair celebrated marvelous attainments since the elementary trials of the pioneer days, but far greater trials and tests were soon to be experienced. Within a few weeks the spirit of confidence in continuing industrial boom and the prospect of increasing agricultural improvement was to be violently reversed by the stock market crash and the devastating business prostration. For Iowa and the Corn Belt generally the nadir of desperation was reached in the winter of 1932-33, although recovery in the succeeding years was but

gradual and somewhat intermittent. Destructive droughts especially in 1930, 1934, and 1936 added to losses and uncertainties.

The return to the bizarre spectacle of a locomotive smash-up at the 1932 "thrill day" as a desperate means of drawing spectators was ironically symbolic of the state of the economy. The iron horse thus sped on its final journey must have been salvaged from a rolling stock graveyard as funds for mere entertainment were reduced to the minimum for a state exhibition.

With sharply reduced attendance and consequent loss of revenues, the Board reduced expenditures for both operation and upkeep to the bare essentials. In spite of such drastic economies, small deficits were accumulated in the three years, 1931, 1932, and 1934, the first to be recorded since 1914.

Reduction in number and variety of exhibits and attractions by no means involved a lowering of standards. Livestock and agricultural showings that survived for the ring or booth were truly of the fittest. Depression adjustment revived interest in draft horses. At the same time machinery exhibits were materially curtailed. Interest was in implements of immediate utilization, such as the general purpose tractor.

With the curtailment of outside attractions, the state's own resources of entertainment and instruction were drawn upon to the advantage of the true

values of such an exhibition. Schools, colleges, clubs, the State extension services, and the Federal works agencies, all responding valiantly, more than filled the void. A unique feature of the 1932 exhibit was the filming of Phil Stong's "State Fair".

The depression gatherings, for those able to attend, gave opportunity for the discussion of grievances and the interchange of plans and suggestions for organizational and governmental relief. Politicians and journalists found here the truest sounding board of rural opinion. Undoubtedly political as well as economic and social history was made in these informal forums.

From the fair of 1933 the gradual improvement in farming and in the outlook for the future of the occupation was reflected in an increase in attendance, exhibits, and net return. With the perfecting of lighting and pyrotechnic facilities the night shows drew increasingly large city audiences.

The temporary "recession" of 1938 was not in evidence in the exhibition of that year; on the contrary the *Territorial Centennial* gave the theme and incentive for another banner fair. The centennial commission had scheduled the fair as the climactic event, and in preparation the historical consciousness and exhibitional experiences of previous anniversaries could be utilized. Consequently the Board in cooperating with the historical societies, schools, clubs and W.P.A. writers and artists

was enabled to present a realistic and colorful depictment of a century of Iowahood to a near record audience. The evening showing of the historical pageant, the "Calvacade of Iowa," was particularly impressive. The regular agricultural and mechanical exhibits equaled or surpassed the old standards. Such a graphic showing of past difficulties overcome and of achievements made was a good omen of the recovery and future advance of the State's economy.

Recovery And Global War

With the continuing recovery in the fateful years 1939-41, the Fair gained recognition as an exhibition of state, regional, and national standing. In 1939 its National Livestock Show "attracted more horses, cattle, swine, and sheep than had ever before been assembled on the fairgrounds." In 1941 Lloyd B. Cunningham succeeded the veteran Arthur R. Corey in the secretaryship. Mr. Cunningham was a prominent farm leader of Howard County who had been president of his county Farm Bureau and an active and alert director of the State Fair Board. The highly successful fair of that year was a good augury for the new administration and for the future of the exhibitions. Tragically this, like all other servicing institutions, was to be checked suddenly in normal functioning by the world cataclysm.

At the fairs of 1939-41 the defense and pre-

paredness theme had been emphasized in decorations and with artillery and air exhibits and demonstrations, and at their annual meeting at the beginning of 1942 the Board planned to make the campaign for food production the central feature for that year. Early in the spring, however, the Army Air Corps requested the use of the fireproof buildings for the storage of air equipment and, for a token rental, such an agreement was made for the duration. There was still the possibility of limited war-time exhibits. The unoccupied buildings, the grandstand and the track were available. As a stimulus to youth participation in the war effort, it was proposed to hold a 4-H club state-wide demonstration. Plans for such a junior fair were nearly complete when an appeal came from Washington to cancel all state-wide gatherings in the interest of conservation of tires and gasoline. The Board promptly suspended all exhibitions for the war years. This was only the second time that a fair had been cancelled; the previous omission was in the Spanish-American War when the grounds were used for encampment purposes.

Local fairs continued with loyal support as did the state agricultural conventions and the meetings of the fair managers association. So the exhibitional function was maintained at the local level and the Board directly aided the cause as custodian of vital war equipment.

The renewal of the State's great harvest festival

and exhibition came most appropriately in the centennial year of statehood. While farms, cars, highways, fairgrounds, and all other private and public equipment and establishments showed the strain and drain of the war exertion, there was a spontaneous drawing to this material and symbolic panorama of peace and plenty. Crowds rushed in and about regardless of weather. For the first time the attendance rose above the half million mark, putting Iowa in the top bracket. The resulting impressive surplus was hardly adequate to provide repairs, replacements, and necessitated expansion of buildings and equipment. Livestock exhibits were inevitably depleted but of high quality. School and club exhibits indicated husbandry and the practical arts had not languished. On every hand were evidences of a Commonwealth come of age — materially and culturally.

Fin De Siecle

In the closing years of its first century the Iowa State Fair reflects all of the "big changes" that have wrought the present high economy and advanced and complex society. The plant occupying nearly four hundred acres with an investment of well over \$3 million is equipped to provide the best in entertainment along with exhibits that reveal the triumphs of technology in cultivation, husbandry, and domestic science. The increasing emphasis given to 4-H and F.F.A. competition is

significantly characteristic of present-day trends.

Modern transportation has made the exhibitions truly state-wide. To accommodate the largest number, provide a partial hedge against bad weather, and utilize more fully the large investment the period has been extended since 1951 to ten full days.

The latest exhibition (that of 1953) illustrates the great variety of attractions provided by intermingling the old-time proven interests with the most recent. Thus, sheep shearing and team pulling contests, horseshoe pitching tournaments, fiddling and checker competition were scheduled along with stock car races, baton twirling, quiz derbys, and jet plane demonstrations. The old-time Sunday morning Bible schools and worship services were still popular as were the variety of special-gathering days.

Thus, while seeking to preserve the best in past practices and traditions, this public serving institution is pointing the way to future achievement.

Institutions like material remains are always in danger of becoming antiquated and anachronistic as Dr. Holmes reminded:

Little of all we value here
Wakes on the morn of its hundreth year
Without both feeling and looking queer.

The Iowa State Fair as it nears its one hundreth birthday certainly has no feeling or appearance of being queer. On the contrary it is one of the most

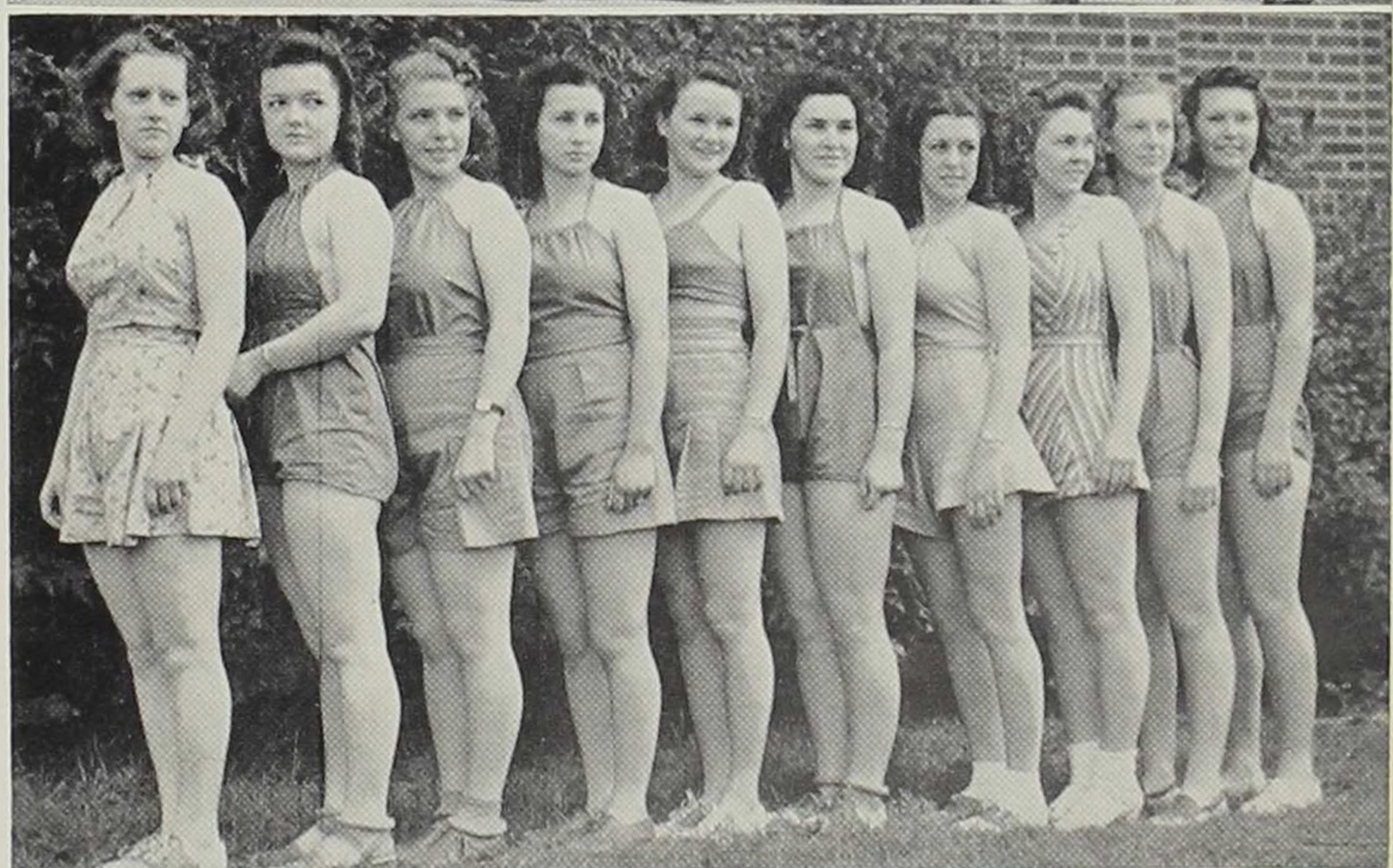
up-to-the-moment of institutions. The enduring strength of the Corn Belt economy and society has always been in its ability to adapt and adjust to changing needs and demands, and this outstanding representative of its servicing agencies has manifested a rare facility for keeping in the vanguard of the passing scene.

EARLE D. ROSS

4-H GIRLS
ON
PARADE



Head
(1947)

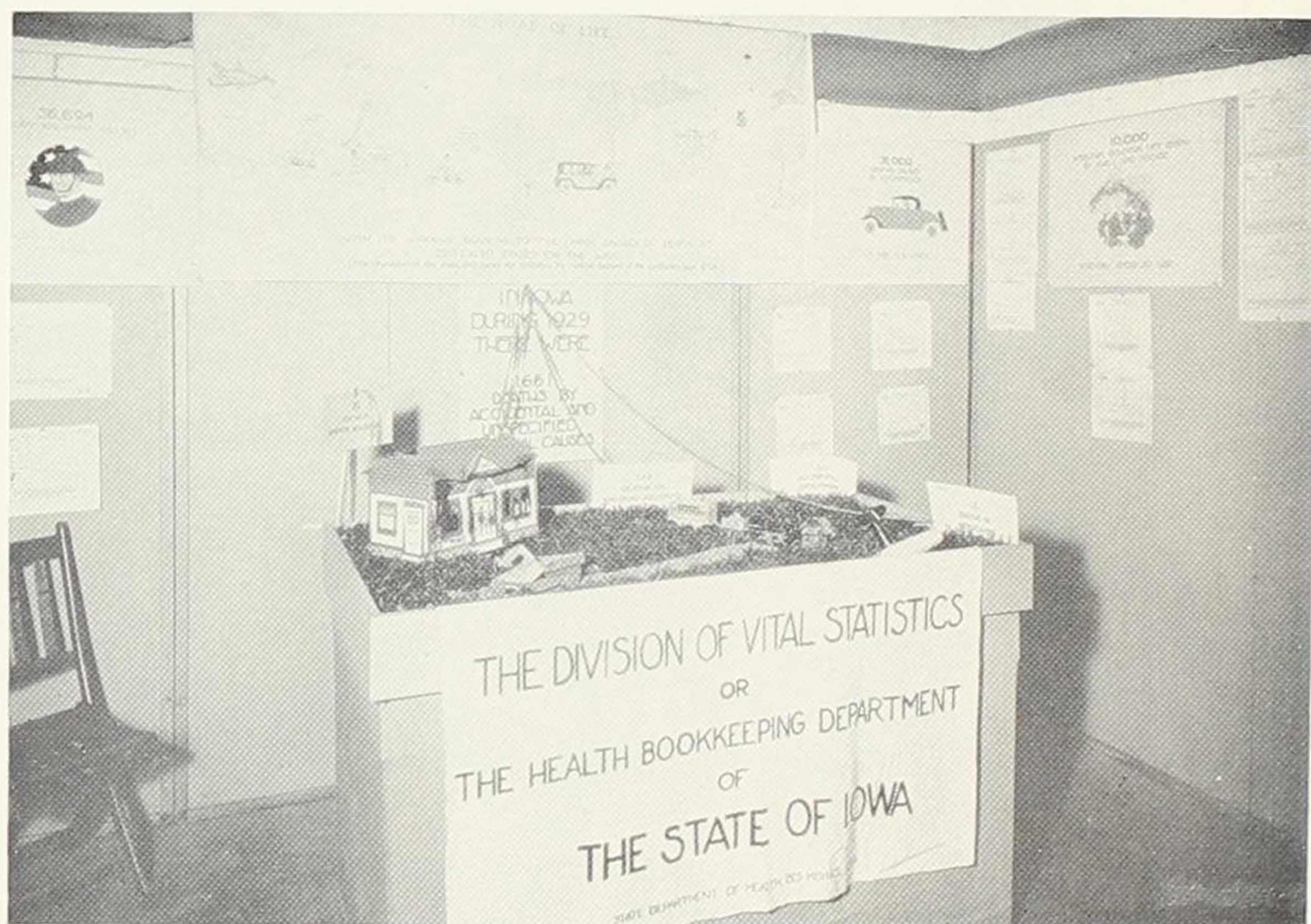


Health
(1940)



Hands
(1938)

EXHIBITS OF TWO STATE DEPARTMENTS



1939 State Fair



1938 State Fair

The State Fair - - Then and Now

The Iowa State Fair will begin its second century in 1954. In the one hundred years that have elapsed since the first fair was held on a six-acre plot at Fairfield, the State Fair has grown and expanded until it now occupies 378 acres of land and represents a capital investment of more than three million dollars. Its fine physical plant, its excellent exhibitions, its exciting races, spectacular pyrotechnics, and colorful shows have annually served as a magnet to thousands of Iowans.

Secretary Lloyd B. Cunningham has compiled the following statistics comparing the 1854 fair with the average figures for those held in 1951 and 1952.

	1854 Total	1951-1952
Area of land	6 acres	378 acres
Attendance	8,500	527,234
Premiums	\$1,171	\$150,622
Livestock shown	275	6,006
Cattle	69	1,970
Horses and mules	148	701
Swine	11	2,556
Sheep	...	779
Poultry	27	3,784
Machinery and implements	43 exhib.	50 acres

In the eight years beginning with 1946 attendance has averaged 498,352, total receipts \$682,

821, net profits \$140,535, and premiums paid \$132,213. These figures indicate that the State Fair is popular, profitable, and the focal point for the exhibition of the best that is produced by Iowa and the Nation. The figures also testify that the State Fair is an "All-Iowa" institution, for young and old, for rich and poor, for farmer, laborer, or professional man.

Since the first fair in 1854 Iowans have witnessed many changes — both at home and abroad. They have witnessed an industrial as well as an agricultural revolution — the telephone, the radio, the automobile, the airplane, and television — to mention a few. The automobile alone has been responsible for such commonplace things as paved roads, filling stations, and garages. The airplane has required the building of scores of airports and introduced a new personality to the Iowa agricultural scene — the Flying Farmer. Even older modes of transportation have been greatly improved. Today sleek streamlined diesel trains speed across Iowa in every direction, bringing all points of the Hawkeye State in swift and easy reach of Des Moines. All these inventions have actually helped, not harmed, the State Fair. Thus, between 1904 and 1954 the population of Iowa increased only 17% while attendance at the State Fair increased 400%. Few institutions can point to a comparable gain!

Back in 1904 S. B. Packard of the Iowa State

Board of Agriculture made a prophecy as to what the State Fair would be like in 1954.

How will the cattle, horses, sheep, hogs and poultry look in fifty years? As much improved as those seen this week will be better than those exhibited at Fairfield in 1854. The reds and roans, the white faces, the doddies, the shaggy blacks, the red polls, the Jerseys and Holsteins will be the perfection of form and in type will fill the master's eye. Who dares to combat my prediction that an interurban railway radiating from Des Moines will traverse every county of the state and that thousands of auto cars will transport the farmers to the centennial fair within a 200-mile radius, and the metropolis of the state that year will number a half million people? John [Simpson, Secretary] will require a forty-acre park for automobile "hitching posts." Will the Standard Oil company supply the gasoline and coal needed to generate electricity for the auto-car mob, or will oil wells and coal mines become the property of the government, necessitated to protect the public from wicked monopoly? Which will be the richer in the year 1954, the Standard Oil Company or the government of the United States? I can't tell, but will answer what is easier. The attendance at the centennial fair will be on the "Wednesday," 500,000.

It would be interesting to speculate as to what the next hundred years holds in store for the Iowa State Fair. The *Farm Digest* of August, 1954, indicates that since prewar days Iowa Agricultural output has gone up 44%, output per man-hour 78%, production per acre 31%, and production per animal 24%. If such phenomenal increases can be registered in less than two decades

the productive possibilities of Iowa could be staggering by 2054.

It is not only in agriculture that such changes will be registered. The decentralization of industry (which is bound to continue at an accelerated pace) is destined to result in an ever-increasing drift of industry to Iowa. Industries that use our basic products will continue to grow; chemistry especially should develop many new products from our unused wasted raw materials. Atomic energy is bound to be harnessed for commercial use. Air transportation, both private and public, should increase, requiring new laws and new ways of living. Fast arterial highways, running both east and west and north and south, will converge on Des Moines, allowing Iowans to attend the State Fair with its rich educational, cultural, and entertaining programs. A century from now this annual summer classic will continue to prove a magnet to Iowans for it represents the finest product of the brains, sinews, and ingenuity of citizens of the Hawkeye State.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

Some Facts and Figures

SECRETARIES OF IOWA STATE FAIR 1854-1954

Iowa State Agricultural Society

Secretary

J. M. Shaffer, Fairfield, 1854-1856

J. H. Wallace, Muscatine, 1856-1863

J. M. Shaffer, Fairfield, 1863-1874

John R. Shaffer, Fairfield, 1874-1894

P. L. Fowler, Des Moines, 1894-1899

G. H. Van Houten, Lenox, 1899-1900

Iowa Board of Agriculture

Secretary

G. H. Van Houten, Lenox, 1901

J. C. Simpson, Des Moines, 1901-1911

Arthur R. Corey, Des Moines, 1911-1923

Iowa State Fair Board

Secretary

Arthur R. Corey, Des Moines, 1923-1941

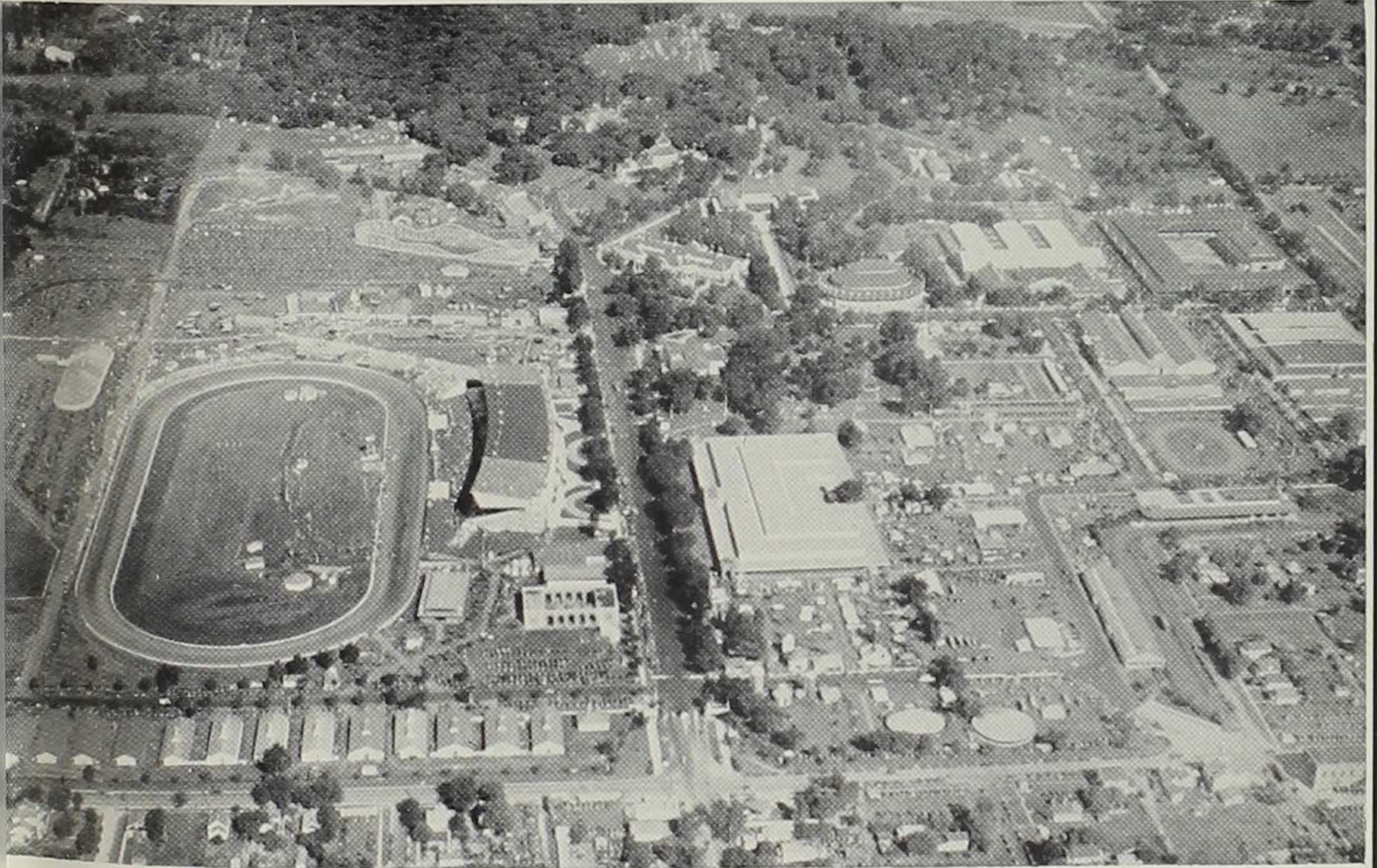
Lloyd B. Cunningham, Des Moines, 1941-

CASH PREMIUMS PAID IN ALL DEPARTMENTS OF THE IOWA STATE FAIR

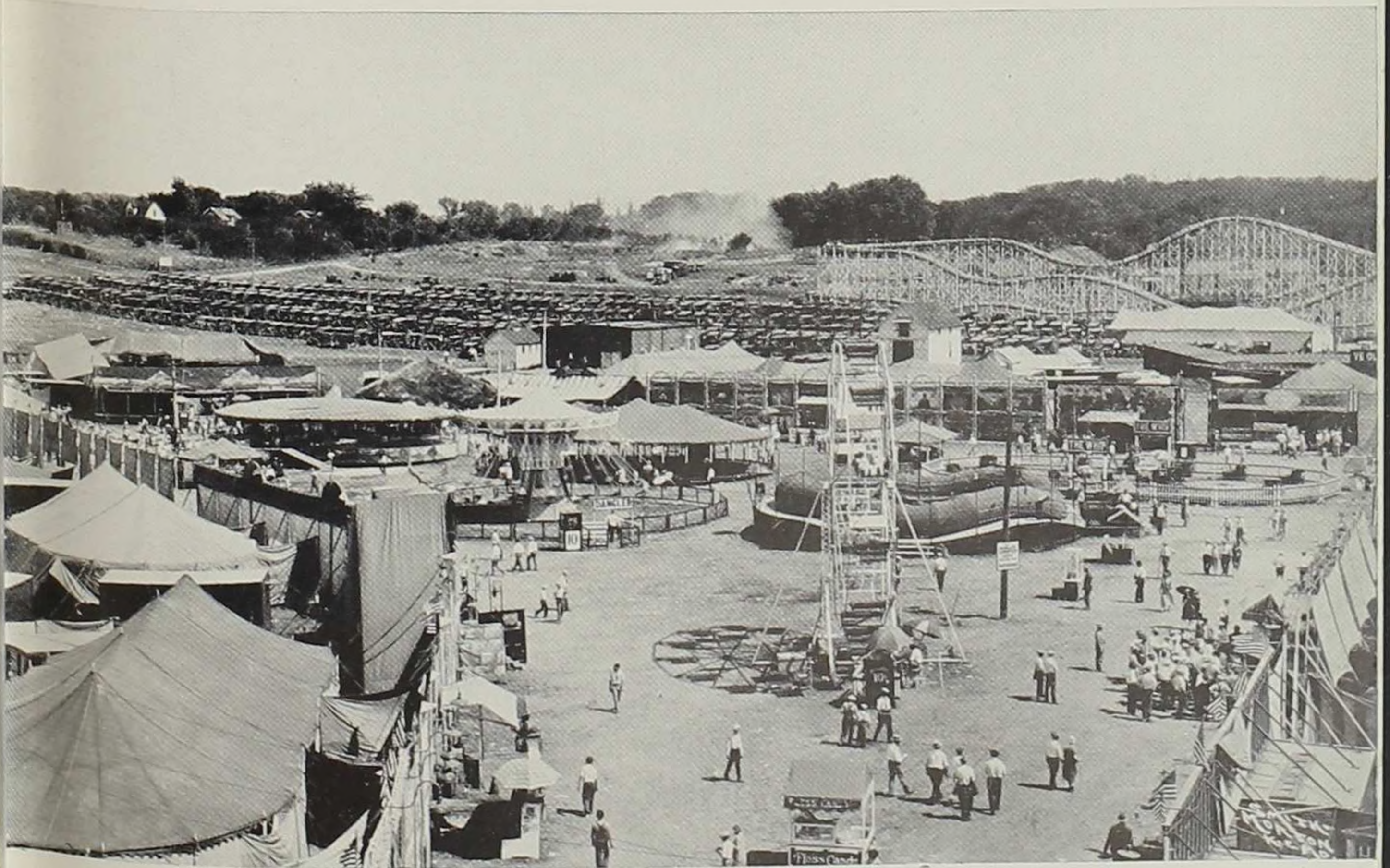
	1904		1953
Horses	\$1,750.00	Horses	\$24,003.58
Speed	6,435.00	Speed	14,099.88
Cattle	5,797.00	Cattle	40,266.00
Swine	1,619.67	Swine	17,441.00
Sheep	1,467.00	Sheep	7,191.00
Poultry	732.50	Poultry	7,598.55
Agriculture	1,796.94	Agriculture	3,141.00
Pantry	681.00	Culinary	1,480.00
Dairy	693.57		
Fruits	546.00	Fruits	1,887.25
Flowers	613.00	Flowers	2,251.50
Fine Arts	2,185.00	Art Salon	750.00
Scholarship Iowa State College	200.00	Educational	2,200.00
Photos	15.00		
		Photography	150.00
		Automobile Races	12,950.00
		Rodeo	8,709.25
		Textile	1,520.00
		Rabbits	543.25
		Apiary	459.00
		Vegetables	1,322.50
		Rural Family Living	1,830.26
		Horseshoe Contest	496.00
		4-H Club	21,995.02
		FFA and Voc. Agr.	4,446.15
		Old Fiddlers' Contest	150.00
		Checker Tournament	135.00
		Quiz Derby	125.00
		Farm Gadget Show	500.00

	<i>Total Attendance</i>	<i>Net Profits</i>	<i>Total Receipts</i>	<i>Premiums Paid</i>
1904	125,000	\$ 12,823.26	\$ 66,100.36	\$ 24,691.68
1905	162,000	21,646.74	84,786.25	28,730.89
1906	188,000	38,470.46	110,929.85	31,703.94
1907	171,000	25,204.76	104,356.75	35,504.79
1908	208,000	44,171.45	138,764.66	38,744.56
1909	216,840	28,081.52	137,307.40	42,262.76
1910	231,233	27,028.59	157,259.77	49,717.50
1911	270,082	41,682.16	179,549.67	56,114.35
1912	272,023	41,732.32	185,701.21	58,139.15
1913	280,462	42,092.08	188,832.10	61,069.90
1914	273,073	16,208.48	188,644.66	66,424.85
1915	245,066	*5,555.73	165,604.40	69,598.75
1916	291,972	32,184.10	201,381.96	67,060.41
1917	349,298	67,589.18	257,122.56	72,442.07
1918	324,377	49,106.86	251,196.62	72,350.13
1919	408,147	72,494.05	321,574.55	85,538.31
1920	383,836	111,689.49	410,976.78	112,620.15
1921	294,023	3,570.98	297,695.25	120,427.60
1922	361,261	46,984.38	313,259.49	104,521.65
1923	365,755	54,984.69	321,405.97	105,886.21
1924	341,147	9,297.05	301,312.99	120,675.91
1925	408,363	60,403.72	343,508.83	112,067.20
1926	362,187	19,094.85	314,767.09	122,958.52
1927	430,176	68,293.71	374,634.40	119,606.19
1928	367,226	15,624.15	324,863.74	122,220.34
1929	435,385	55,584.97	378,363.36	127,943.00
1930	375,353	3,836.91	321,895.13	128,553.34
1931	297,611	*63,450.48	223,401.67	120,013.10
1932	256,411	*67,382.91	167,519.91	93,797.75

	<i>Total Attendance</i>	<i>Net Profits</i>	<i>Total Receipts</i>	<i>Premiums Paid</i>
1933	290,268	\$ 10,105.32	\$191,814.06	\$ 66,723.54
1934	261,147	*15,569.73	181,432.40	70,510.50
1935	343,334	34,185.72	271,651.60	93,582.54
1936	320,339	11,476.17	265,895.60	97,950.23
1937	381,279	57,217.15	331,661.05	98,450.00
1938	430,907	51,199.27	367,480.88	108,668.20
1939	400,477	44,152.61	356,344.12	110,273.11
1940	360,599	*807.07	298,191.52	105,797.82
1941	427,363	78,019.78	391,528.31	109,828.56
1942-45	no fair			
1946	514,036	195,355.73	629,676.62	91,310.84
1947	506,111	187,398.70	654,228.60	113,814.34
1948	478,668	118,951.14	610,142.40	121,788.21
1949	463,933	89,807.26	589,777.65	127,191.34
1950	455,737	92,585.39	622,570.98	124,706.77
1951	543,461	235,945.16	865,373.06	131,403.91
1952	511,008	145,878.79	781,022.97	169,838.95
1953	513,861	58,358.62	709,781.43	177,650.69
1904-8	are estimates	*loss		



An Aerial View of the State Fair Grounds (1928)



The "Midway" (1926)

JUL 11 '58

