

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.

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