

## The Seventh Iowa State Fair

The autumn of 1860 found Iowans engaged in a vigorous political campaign. Republican newspapers carried a woodcut portrait of Abraham Lincoln at the top of the editorial page while Democratic sheets invariably flaunted a portrait of the "Little Giant". Indeed, William H. Seward himself, late aspirant for the presidential nomination, had spoken eloquently in behalf of his successful rival at a Republican rally in Dubuque, and Stephen A. Douglas had agreed to speak at Iowa City and Cedar Rapids in October. While the political campaign was perhaps the outstanding feature in Iowa during the fall of 1860, another event, the seventh annual Iowa State Fair, caught and held the attention of Iowans during the first week in October of that year.

The first and second fairs of the Iowa State Agricultural Society had been held at Fairfield in 1854 and 1855, the third and fourth at Muscatine in 1856 and 1857, and the fifth and sixth at Oskaloosa in 1858 and 1859. Iowa City, which until three years before had been the capital of the State, was selected as the place for the seventh annual exhibition, to be held from Tuesday, October 2nd, to Friday, October 5th.

The fair-ground was situated on a level tract of land on the west bank of the Iowa River, about a

mile southwest of the city, near the site of the present aviation field used by the transcontinental air mail. "No more charming location could have been chosen", wrote a local editor. "With the river winding through a rich bottom in front, and hills gracefully swelling in the rear of the enclosure, and the railroad, leading westward, in full view, the scene was little short of enchanting."

The enclosure covered an area of twenty-five acres with a substantial, tight board fence surrounding the whole. On the east side were the entrances for carriages and foot visitors together with the offices of the secretary and treasurer of the State Agricultural Society. On the south of the enclosure was an entrance gate for goods designed for exhibition, while an exit gate for carriages on the west made it possible to avoid confusion in handling the crowds. Inside the enclosure two large halls for the horticultural and fine arts departments, quarters for the president of the Society and awarding committees, pens for sheep and swine, stalls for horses and mules, and sheds for cattle indicated the care and thoroughness with which the local committee had "discharged their arduous duty of fitting up these grounds for the use of the State exhibition." Nearly in the center of the grounds was the race-track, elliptical in shape and a half mile in circumference. A judges' stand three decks high, located at the southeast inside corner of the track, furnished strategic accommodations for the band, the representa-

tives of the press, and judges and officers of the Society. Across the track south of the judges' stand an amphitheater afforded seats for some fifteen hundred or two thousand persons, provided too many of the occupants were not ladies "with crinoline of immoderate dimensions". Eating halls and refreshment stands were established in convenient locations, and wells furnished an abundance of water both for the stock and the visitors.

For several days before the date set for the opening of the exhibition the weather had been cool and cloudy, and on Sunday of fair week a heavy and continuous rain lasted throughout the day and night. All day Monday the clouds, heavily charged, hung over the earth "like a leaden curtain, awakening anxious fears in the minds of all who were entertaining high expectations respecting the Fair". Toward noon, however, the sky cleared, and the sun shone brightly over the busy scene inside and around the fair-ground. All day long exhibitors arrived with stock, but the state of the roads which, owing to the recent rain, were heavy and slippery delayed the arrival of many who were on their way to Iowa City with cattle, hogs, mules, and horses.

Early on Tuesday morning a long snake-like procession began to move from the city toward the fair-ground and its trail was visible from that time until late in the evening. At nine o'clock George G. Wright, the president of the State Agricultural Society, and other officers were escorted to the grounds

by the Iowa City Dragoons and by Hohman's Brass Band also mounted. The band dispensed "strains of delicious music" which "augmented the tide" already en route to the fair-ground. The dragoons presented a fine appearance, and upon their arrival within the enclosure performed several evolutions which "attracted general attention and commendation."

This first day of the fair was occupied by the officials in receiving entries, arranging articles for exhibition, and in committee work. Visitors "devoted themselves assiduously to the examination of the already well filled halls and the fine display of cattle and horses and farm machinery and the many other articles of merit and interest." At three o'clock Judge Wright delivered his presidential address from the judges' stand to a relatively small but appreciative audience. He pointed out the value and importance of State and county fairs to people in Iowa, traced briefly the history of the State Agricultural Society and its annual exhibition since 1854, and in conclusion appealed to his hearers for the preservation of order during the Fair. He extended a cordial welcome to citizens of other States who were present and hoped that such interchange of visits might "foster the spirit of union and fraternity." The address, which was delivered with much feeling and force, "was listened to with closest attention, and greeted with cordial applause." Secretary J. H. Wallace then addressed the committees

on premiums as to their duties and responsibilities. By six o'clock the crowd within the enclosure had departed, but outside the fair-ground people were busily engaged in testing the "Flying Horses" or in seeing how near to the skies the "Celestial Railroad" would carry them.

That evening a meeting was held in the courthouse for the discussion of topics of interest to agriculturalists, a feature of the Iowa State Fair which had been inaugurated in 1858. Judge Wright presided. The first topic for consideration was, "What breed of sheep are best adapted to Iowa". While those who spoke voiced a difference of opinion on this problem, all were agreed upon the damage inflicted upon sheep by dogs. William Duane Wilson offered the following resolution which was adopted unanimously:

*"Resolved*, that some action should be taken by our State Legislature to encourage the raising of sheep and wool in this State, by discouraging the breeding and keeping of dogs."

A second question "What breed of hogs is best adapted to Iowa" occupied the remainder of the evening session.

The second day of the Fair opened with a rush of visitors and many new entries. Hacks, omnibuses, buggies, wagons, and "every conceivable sort of vehicle" were brought into requisition to convey the crowd from the city to the fair-ground. "Never did the Sun behave more handsomely toward any Fair",

declared a local reporter. "The sky was stripped of every cloud, and the bracing air sent everybody's spirits to the uppermost attainable atmosphere."

Upon their arrival at the fair-ground visitors invariably pushed their way into the "Fine Arts" Hall or to "its plainer and more practical compeer of the Vegetable realm". At the south end of the former building "raised upon terrace and stone work" was a magnificent display of flowers with a fountain in the center "continually playing, sprinkling its moisture where most needed, and seemingly as charming to the continued throng, as some cool grotto or sibyl's cave."

Visitors to the "Fine Arts" Hall found many exhibits to arouse their interest and admiration. Hot house plants and cut flowers in profusion vied with paintings and ambrotypes in arresting the attention of the crowd. Two large paintings, made in Paris by George H. Yewell, especially called forth many expressions of appreciation. Architectural designs and drawings of Griswold College at Davenport, of the Cedar County Courthouse, and of two proposed high schools ranged alongside a display of lithographs and wood and copper engravings. The Davenport *Gazette* had on exhibit a file of its newspapers from 1841 to 1859. Chirographers displayed many samples of their skill and talent.

Among objects particularly admired by lady visitors were woolens, socks, mittens, embroidery, paper flowers, fancy knitting, bead work, calico dresses,

boxes ornamented with coral beads, shell work, and glass what-nots "all very handsome", crocheting, worsted chair seats, pictures in worsted, hair work, silk embroidered ottomans with leather work sides, wax fruit, wax flowers, and French tissue flowers, quilts of various patterns, home-made jeans and yarns, flannels, counterpanes, and a "full sett" each of oak and mahogany furniture. Some of the fancy work had been made by inmates of the Asylum for the Blind then located at Iowa City.

Men, doubtless, took greater interest in the display of farm machinery at the west end of the fair-ground. A novelty "in the way of a carriage plow" mounted upon three wheels two forward and one behind, a potato digger, corn planters, a horse rake, fanning mills, grist mills, horse-powers, and the five exhibits of combination reapers and mowers ("Kirby's, Ball's, Buckeye, McCormick's and Badger State") — all these were carefully examined and their merits discussed by crowds of men. An ingenious affair called Wheeler's water drawer, a device by which water could be raised from the deepest wells with great ease and the buckets emptied without so much as touching the hand, was shown in actual operation. Sherwood's grain binder to be attached to a reaper and using wire to bind bundles of grain was also a center of interest.

Nor was the display of products of the farm, orchard, and garden, although somewhat limited in quantity, any less attractive than other exhibits at

the Fair. Squashes, pumpkins, melons, potatoes, carrots, turnips, tomatoes, sweet potatoes, beets, beans, egg plant, and onions were conspicuous at frequent intervals in the exhibition hall for fruits, vegetables, and seeds. The showing of fruit was rather small, apples and grapes comprising practically the only varieties exhibited. But a very alluring display of bottles well filled with the juice of the grape graced this department, and the Cedar Rapids Eagle Brewery had sent a keg of "Amber Ale" to the Fair, which the committee on awards tasted to their entire satisfaction and pronounced "good". Sorghum products, preserved fruits, jellies, and pickles too made an attractive exhibit, "the very sight of them setting on edge the sweet tooth of the admiring passerby". Samples of "yeast bread" and cakes, crackers, butter, "salt-rising" bread, and brown bread established the skill and taste of busy Iowa housewives. The display of hard and soft soap and candles attracted considerable attention.

In the late afternoon of this second day of the fair marshals began to clear the grounds and by six o'clock nearly all except those who were officially connected with the exhibition or who lodged within the enclosure had departed. At the discussion meeting held at the courthouse that evening Judge Wright again presided. An extended discussion of the topic, "Fruits, and their adaption to the soil of Iowa" was brought to an end by LeGrand Byington of Iowa City who declared that more definite infor-



mation on fruit growing was demanded by Iowans. He and many others wanted to know "what to plant, when to plant, how to plant, and how to cultivate." He had utterly failed in his efforts, but wanted fruit and wanted to know how to grow it. Therefore he moved that the chair should appoint a committee of five to prepare for insertion in the Society's transactions, an essay upon these points. His motion was adopted unanimously.

The third day of the State Fair undoubtedly marked the peak of the exhibition both in attendance and interesting events. "The shower of the night before", said a reporter, "seemed to have no other perceptible effect than to wash the face of old Sol to a more intense brightness". Early in the morning, he added, "the tide of humanity began to set toward the fair grounds, and for hours every road leading to the city, was crowded with vehicles with men, women, and children."

From nine o'clock in the morning until one in the afternoon the time was occupied with the showing of stock. But the outstanding feature of the day and perhaps of the whole Fair occurred at half past one. Ten entries in the roadster class of thoroughbreds formed in a ring before the judges' stand. They were then driven twice around the race-track, once slowly and once at good speed. At the second round three stallions led the field, and they were awarded the track for a "trial of speed". These three animals were "Young Bashaw", a beautiful

five year old black; "Tom Hyer", a well-known winner that had been having "things his own way for some time" throughout the State; and "Dan Rice", a large bay horse and a good "goer". The trial was for five heats, best three in five.

A great crowd watched the event. Fully eight thousand people, it was estimated, crowded the amphitheater and the ropes around the track. After going up the home stretch part way, the three horses turned and came thundering past the judges' stand. Not being together, however, they were called back for a new start. This time they came up well-together and were given the word, "Go". Tom Hyer soon took the lead and finished the first half mile several lengths ahead. But on the second half mile Bashaw trotted beautifully and though he gained fast on Tom Hyer was beaten by a length. Time, 2:46. Dan Rice was then withdrawn leaving the other two to fight it out.

The two horses got a fine start in the second heat, rounded the turn, and speeded up the back stretch with Tom Hyer leading to near the end of the half mile. Bashaw soon passed his rival on the back stretch and trotted home ten to twelve lengths ahead, "amid tremendous cheers". Time 2:45.

In the third heat Tom led off at a tremendous gait, too rapid to hold, and at the first turn broke, and was passed by Bashaw. The latter trotted the whole mile without breaking once and came home six lengths ahead. Time, 2:44.

The fourth heat was a repetition of the third, Bashaw winning in 2:43, and Tom Hyer, the well-known favorite, met defeat.

A plowing match at four o'clock in the afternoon attracted eleven entries and a good attendance of practical men. Less interest, however, was displayed by the crowd in the efforts made "to speed the plow" as in efforts just previously made "to speed the horse".

The fourth and last day of the Fair opened very unpropitiously, as far as the weather was concerned. A dense fog hung over the country and a chilly wind added to the discomfort of visitors. The morning was occupied in awarding premiums and at one o'clock a grand procession of winning animals entered the show ring. With this exhibition the seventh annual Fair of the Iowa State Agricultural Society came to an end.

The Fair had been a thorough success. Hohman's Saxe Horn Band of seven pieces had enlivened the "routine of promenading, chatting and visiting" with "excellent music". The "Union Guards" of Columbus City, gaily bedecked in grey frock coats, white pants, and black hats with white plumes had paid a visit to the Fair, and exhibited their skill as a well-drilled organization. In company with the Union Guards and the German Artillery of Iowa City with their large cannon drawn by four prancing horses these volunteer soldiers gave a distinctive military touch to the show.

Toward the close of the Fair the issuance of spurious admission tickets by some person or persons unknown led to the arrest of several suspects; while the unceremonious ejection from the enclosure of some young men who had attempted to sneak into the fair-ground by scaling the high board fence furnished the crowd with considerable amusement.

In a pecuniary way, too, the Fair was a success, the money receipts greatly exceeding those of previous meetings. Officers and promoters alike looked forward with confidence to the Fair of 1861, little realizing that within six months war clouds would gather which for four long years would interfere to a considerable extent with this apparently established institution.

BRUCE E. MAHAN