

## The First Iowa Plowing Match

Oldest of Iowa's plowing matches is the Wick Field Association Meet which started in Warren County as a basket lunch picnic in 1902, and was enlarged to include a plowman's contest the following year. The Wick meet has been held regularly in most years since 1903, and is recognized as the pioneer Iowa plowing exhibition.

Emory Day, now of Des Moines, whose father was a charter member of the association, recalls the early objectives of the Wick project. In a history written for the association's 50th anniversary meeting Day records: "The first thought in the minds of the charter members of the Wick Field Association was a contest for the supremacy in all lines of farming . . . stock raising, fruit growing, cooking, good roads, and plowing."

Sam Yaggy, who had come from Illinois and was familiar with similar activities in his home community, was named the Wick Field Association's first president. Host to the Wick picnic and plow matches the first few years were J. H. Yaggy and George Day. No automobiles were seen, and top buggies with "huroy" wheels and special gears were being offered at the bargain rate of \$40.00.

Competition in the plowing matches in the early 1900's was limited to horse-drawn and mule-drawn walking and riding plows. First winners of the Wick matches were Court Parish and Emory Day. Both men were on hand fifty years later, proudly displaying and comparing their trophies with the 1952 state winners, when the Iowa match formed a part of Wick's 50th anniversary.

Soon after its inception in 1902, the Wick picnic outgrew the Yaggy farm and was moved to the nearby Rock Island crossing. Special railroad rates induced many visitors to come by rail, rather than travel by surrey, wagon, on horseback, or on foot.

That first Iowa plowing match was destined to become very popular, measured by the large turnout for the 1904 contest. Two years later, on August 31, 1906, *Wallaces' Farmer* declared: "This year the plowing match attracted fully one thousand vehicles [all horse drawn] and some 3500 people." The full page article told how the crowd enjoyed the outing, watching competition in classes for walking plows, sulkies and gangs. Each entrant was required to pay a small entry fee and to plow twenty furrows, and was judged on straightness and evenness of furrow, smoothness of crown, weed coverage, soil pulverization, etc. The *Wallaces' Farmer* feature, which included a picture of four good mules on a gang plow, concluded with the following suggestion:

*THE FIRST IOWA PLOWING MATCH* 411

There are hundreds of neighborhoods where such an annual plowing match could be held just as successfully and beneficially as at Wick. . . . It is a striking example of what a few earnest men can do to better farming conditions, and promote farm interest.

Along with fostering Iowa's pioneer plowing contests and displaying farm products, the Wick Field Association also conducted a good roads contest. Only equipment permitted for the feature were plows, harrows, rollers, and split-log drags.

Deserving prominent recognition in this effort were the 17 entrants and a Dr. Porterfield, the first man to drive an automobile to the Wick picnic, whose vehicle was promptly commandeered to help judges determine the good roads competition winners.

Emory Day records in his history that by 1905 moving pictures were a major evening attraction, and that in 1911 Miss Gertrude McCahill was thrown from a buggy when her team bolted after being frightened by the sight of an automobile. Other items in Day's history include moving the event to the newly organized town of Martensdale in 1913, inaugurating a baby contest in 1915, and "not much excitement" in 1921, when there were no fights, accidents, or arrests, and the treasury just managed to break even.

Walter Beam of the Iowa Comptroller's Office, who has attended every Wick Field picnic, reports that many noted speakers have appeared on

the Wick Field platform. Among them have been: Professor P. G. Holden of Iowa State College, "Uncle Henry Wallace," Senators Smith W. Brookhart and George A. Wilson, Attorney General John Mitchell, Judge Hubert Utterback, Governor Warren Garst, and others.

Beam points out, however, that it remained for the fiftieth anniversary event in 1952 to bring a "native son" Governor to the speaker's stand. Governor William Beardsley, whose home was in Warren County, not only was featured as the Golden Anniversary speaker, but also was official starter for the State Level Land Plowing Match held on the Joe Seymour farm.

Representing the home folks in the state contest was Robert Morrison, the 1952 Wick Match winner, and Virgil Bender, also of Warren County, the previous year's state runner-up. The Iowa contest was won, however, by Polk County's Bob Bane, grandson of the man who had won the "old-timers" contest at the first state match.

Memories of the 1952 event, witnessed by 7,000 people, also included a pageant marking a half century of farming progress, a lengthy parade, a Plowmen's Banquet, a ferris wheel, and a heavy evening rain. The Wick Field Association continues to have its annual picnic and, in keeping with its pioneering efforts in agricultural progress, continues to sponsor an annual plowing contest.

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