

Plowing Matches and Farm Progress

For more than two centuries plowing matches have helped dramatize agricultural achievement. The first contests date back to the 1700's when "Plowing competitions," as they were called, started on the British Isles. Bearded and booted English farmers, using crude and cumbersome wooden walking plows drawn by oxen, participated in those early contests. It was of such sturdy souls that Thomas Gray wrote in 1751:

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herds wind slowly o'er the lea,
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

In the ensuing 200 years plowing contests have spread to many other parts of the world. Western Europe, the Scandinavian countries, Australia, Canada, the United States, and even Communist Russia have conducted matches. In addition to emphasis on plowing skill and mechanical progress, better land use has also been encouraged through the medium of plowing events. Soil conservation practices (contour plowing and terrace building) have been stressed in recent years.

Scotland followed Britain's lead in plowing

matches. The following excerpts were taken from a copy of *The History Of The Highland Agricultural Society Of Scotland* printed more than 150 years ago.

We find that at the General Meeting of the Society held the 13th of January, 1801, it was resolved to offer premiums to plowmen. . . . The first plowing match took place upon the 7th day of November, 1801. . . . The committee chose three practical farmers of character and skill to be judges, who immediately withdrew into a house at some distance. . . . The judges were then brought on the ground, and decided the lots entitled to the prizes. . . . The society's medal was presented to the winner on the spot. . . . Afterwards, the success of the Society was drunk with great sincerity.

In 1802 the Society reported another match:

Two of the plows were drawn by cattle, to wit,: one by two Galloway heifers, and the other by a Galloway bull and ox, yoked in the same manner as horses. The other nineteen plows were drawn by two horses each. The heifers finished the quantity allotted to them in three minutes less than the time of any of the horses.

Scotland's plowing events increased in popularity, and in 1818 the society decided to award medals to successful plowmen. The medals are still offered after nearly 140 years of continuous matches.

The Royal Agricultural Society of England also gave plowing matches much emphasis, pointing out that virtually every shire (county) in Britain had a plowing society. Ireland and Wales like-

wise have conducted matches for well over a century.

Canadian farmers, many of whom came to the New World from England, Scotland, Ireland, or Wales, were quick to adopt plowing competitions. Canada has had contests for over 100 years, and in many respects has developed greater competitive interest than any other country. Nova Scotia, Quebec, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and other Canadian provinces all staged contests for many years. Ontario plowmen annually hold what is known as the International Plowing Match, with as many as 700 entrants in the various tractor and horse-drawn divisions.

Plowing contests have been held in the United States for some 75 years. Plowmen in the Wheatland and Big Rock areas of northeastern Illinois were the first to hold contests in America. Matches have continued in Illinois ever since.

Iowa was the second state to hold plowing events. Warren County's Wick Field Meet has held contests since the turn of the century. Matches were started in the Cherokee area a few years later. The Cherokee event, commonly known as the Pilot Rock Match, has produced a number of the nation's top plowmen.

Millions of people have attended plowing contests since their inception some two centuries ago. During the past decade plowing contests in the United States have become one of the nation's

most popular agricultural and sporting events. Crowds up to one hundred thousand persons attended the 1948 National Plowing Matches in Iowa, and the 1952 event in Minnesota.

Speakers at these National Field Days have included such personalities as President Dwight D. Eisenhower, former President Harry Truman, Vice President Richard Nixon, former Governor Adlai Stevenson, Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson, and others. Thus top national leaders along with progressive farmers and their urban neighbors have found plowing events living demonstrations of the advances in agriculture.

In 1956 Iowa will again be host to the nation's best plowmen when the National Field Days are held in Jasper County, September 20, 21, and 22.

HERB PLAMBECK