

CHAPTER 10

COUNTY HISTORY

County Fairs

The first county fair grounds, as far as we are able to learn, were opposite the present Wallner vegetable gardens, 2600 South Minnesota Avenue, on the lower ground. The land was owned by a Mr. Miracle.

The fair consisted of an agricultural exhibit under the management of a group of citizens under the name of Minnehaha County Agricultural Society. Its officers were Artemus Gale, president; G. J. Skinner, secretary and C. K. Howard, treasurer. Porter P. Peck was chief marshal. There were several vice presidents distributed about the county.

The fair was held the 8th and 9th of October, 1874. Prizes amounting to \$77.25 were offered as premiums but only \$21.75 was paid, only 28 premiums being awarded. It was well attended but did not continue to function during the years immediately following.

In 1882, the proposition of a fair began to be discussed and an organization known as the "Sioux Falls Exposition" was perfected. The same grounds used in 1874 were again secured. A race track was made in a field that had been planted to corn. Stalls and pens were built for cattle, horses, hogs, sheep and livestock. An amphitheatre, four halls and other improvements were built, requiring 275,000 feet of lumber. For that period, it was an imposing array of buildings.

The fair was held September 13th to 15th. The attendance described as "good". Willis C. Boyce was secretary and was most active in developing the buildings and grounds. R. F. Pettigrew was elected president but was unable to serve and R. M. Crawford of Brookings was elected in his place. The fair was so much of a success that another was held the next year.

In 1883 the fair was held from September 10th to the 14th. \$6,000 was offered in prizes, and of this amount \$1,000 was offered to the winner of the race. The weather was fair but the attendance was not up to expectations and a deficit of \$2,000 was incurred.

In 1884 a number of farmers in the county met with I. G. Skinner to take steps to organize the Sioux Valley Farmers' and Dairymen's Association and, when organized, M. T. Hogaboom was elected president. The management decided to have an exposition on the driving park in Sioux Falls, as there-to-fore. Extensive preparations were made to make the fair a success. The dates set for it were from September 24th to 26th.

The first day the attendance was only fair, the second was ruined by a gale of wind and dust and on the fourth day there came a down-pour of rain. This tells much of the story of the fair of that year.

The promoters of these events, true to the spirit of the pioneers, were still undaunted. On September 15th to 18th, 1885, another fair was held on the driving park under the management of the Southeastern Dakota Agricultural Society. The weather, attendance, exhibits and the races were highly satisfactory. The management paid all expenses

and premium
fair to emerge

The next
held a fair at
10th streets
race track. T
of a fine que
in by promir
cipal address

Supplan
for the great
and 1895. At
March 19th,
Sioux Falls f
with Clark C
citizens of S
tion for hold

The first
through the
ment and exl

In those
and parachu
Thursday an
bands provic
of Santee In

A banquet
(held on Ser
traveling me
tions were s
the city's gu

A tri-sta
in 1896 to re
success, a ca
Falls. No pro
exhibits and
however, off
tors. Instead
some rare at
a success.

One of t
Wild West S
with his trou
back. At tha
As he rode it
a wide-brimr
hat".

His "Col
feature show
tries from th
of the Czar".
train. This q
old alike, coi
a much later
man closely,
the chestnut

The app

and premiums and had come through with a profit of \$29.99, the first fair to emerge with a "clean slate".

The next year, September 24th to the 26th, 1886, the same society held a fair at the old baseball park on Duluth Avenue, between 9th and 10th streets in Sioux Falls. Buildings were erected but there was no race track. The attendance was good and the exhibits were large and of a fine quality. There was an unusual amount of elocution indulged in by prominent citizens. Judge J. F. Kelley of Ohio delivered the principal address on the last day of the fair.

Supplanting these attempts to hold successful fairs, which resulted for the greater part with a deficit, State Fairs were held in 1891, 1892, and 1895. At a meeting of the State Board of Agriculture at Huron, March 19th, 1895, it was decided to locate the annual State Fair at Sioux Falls for a period of six years. The board entered into a contract with Clark G. Coates for fair grounds southeast of the city, also with citizens of Sioux Falls for annual payments to the board in consideration for holding the fairs in this city.

The first of these fairs was held September 20th, 1895, and lasted through the week. It proved successful from the viewpoint of entertainment and exhibits but the Association came out "in the red".

In those days an interesting attraction was the balloon ascension and parachute leap. One of these was made each day—Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, by Professor W. Z. Love of Indianapolis. Various bands provided music for the daily events including one comprised of Santee Indians in full war regalia.

A banquet for the editors of the state, a barbecue for the farmers, (held on Seney Island), a bicycle tournament, parades of commercial traveling men, Shriners, Knights of Pythias and special street illuminations were some of the features of the fair for the entertainment of the city's guests. This was the last State Fair held in Sioux Falls.

A tri-state fair, (Iowa, Minnesota and South Dakota), was held in 1896 to replace the county and state fairs. To insure the financial success, a cash deposit of \$5,000 was required from the citizens of Sioux Falls. No premiums were offered for anything but purely agricultural exhibits and \$150 for butter and cheese entries. Private individuals, however, offered special premiums but only to a small class of exhibitors. Instead of the usual premiums, the management decided to present some rare attractions to secure a good attendance and make the fair a success.

One of the attractions was the appearance of Buffalo Bill with his Wild West Shows on the opening day of the fair. Buffalo Bill appeared with his troupe and gave exhibitions of his marksmanship from horseback. At that time his long hair was of a light brown chestnut color. As he rode it rose and fell with the movement of his mount from beneath a wide-brimmed white sombrero or, in modern vernacular, a "ten-gallon hat".

His "Congress of Rough Riders", world famed, was a spectacular feature showing the riding peculiarities of horsemen of various countries from the American Indian, cowboys, Turks and "the Wild Cossacks of the Czar". Another feature was an Indian attack on a covered wagon train. This quickly and vividly aroused the imagination of young and old alike, coming as it did in the closing days of the "Old Frontier". At a much later date the writer had occasion to observe the noted frontiersman closely, still wearing a wide sombrero, but under it was no longer the chestnut brown, but a flowing and thinner snow-white head of hair.

The appearance of the show on the first day of the fair was

intended to advertise the fair and to thus encourage a large attendance. The whole countryside was there to see the old Indian fighter—the slayer of Yellow Hand and the famed buffalo hunter who supplied meat to the builders of the Union Pacific railroad.

His contract with the fair management stipulated that the first day's gate receipt should go to him and, consequently, he got the "lion's share" of funds secured thereby. Most of the large crowd was bent on seeing Cody and "forgot" the other days of the fair in spite of some very special features of entertainment.

Some of those in charge of arrangements were bitter in their denunciation of the Wild West Shows, but others blamed only themselves for not bringing the show at the end as a finale, rather than at the beginning of the fair.

The remaining days of the fair were filled with outstanding attractions. The city was gorgeously illuminated at night and various groups were entertained at banquets and by nationally known speakers. The exhibits were described as "fair" to "admirable". The committee worked hard to give the public "its' money's worth" and succeeded remarkably well. The memory of that fair stil lingers in the writer's mind, and from a boy's viewpoint it was a remarkable success.

There was no effort made to hold a fair in 1897, the promoters having outdone themselves the year before. In 1898, however, the Business Men's League sponsored a Fall Festival and the public helped to support the effort. Except for the first day's performance, when it rained, there were large crowds in attendance to witness football games, balloon ascensions and other attractions, including industrial parades. The festival was a success from an entertainment and financial viewpoint. This is believed to have been the most successful Fall Festival ever held in Sioux Falls.

On June 3, 1938, Mrs. Winona A. Lyon deeded to Minnehaha County 49.57 acres of land on the west side of the Sioux River, south of highway 38, near West Sioux Falls for use as a fairground, subject to rigid "exceptions, reservations, restrictions and limitations". Under the terms of the gift, the grounds must be designated as the "William H. Lyon Fair Grounds" and shall be maintained, managed and controlled by the County Commissioners and their successors in office, for use of the public as a County Fair Grounds, wherein generally specified displays of farm produce, livestock and crafts could be exhibited, and 4-H Clubs and Home Extension work could be demonstrated. Provision is also made for the entertainment of the public with amusements of various kinds.

The terms of the gift also stated that, "In event of the failure of the grantee to hold such fairs or exhibitions for five consecutive years, then, in that event, the said premises and title shall immediately revert to the grantor or next of kin to the grantor, with the right of immediate possession.

On February 17, 1940, a deed, supplementary to that of June 3, 1938, was made to "explain and amplify the intention of the grantor", covering the same deed for the former date. In case of fire, flood, tornado or State or National emergency, the five-year stipulation would be waived.

On July 17, 1942, additional land was donated by Mrs. Lyon under the same general terms, plus other conditions as follows: "Providing a highway shall be constructed and maintained extending west of Kiwanis avenue, bridging the Sioux River and entering said fairgrounds as near 3rd Street as possible, and that said highway be designated as Lyon Boulevard, and shall be 100 feet in width throughout its full length",

the bridge
width as t

Entrai
County Au
of Section

Accor
the highw
structed a
memorial
structed a
(N. E. 1/2
(13), Way
bridal path

It was
way "shal
can be obt
1942), exc
emergency

The fi
ings, inclu
A. labor ar

In 194
and took c
year was
features s

H. F.
tion. Despi
and quant
4-H Club :

There
but a two
managem

There
four days
participati
brothers, :

It mig
of the city
racing in
seven (7),
ing enthu
the qualit
not fast o
tion and g

In 188
program v
one follow
not clear :
on the fai
Sioux Fal
of race ho
trotting s

The e
1884, hors

the bridge to be of "ornamental and artistic design" and the same width as the roadway.

Entrance to the fairgrounds was to be made on the east line of County Auditor's Tract One (1) of the Northeast quarter (N. E. 1/4) of Section Thirteen (13), Wayne Township.

According to stipulations of the deed, at a point of entrance from the highway to the fairgrounds a suitable gateway was to be constructed and maintained, and thereto affixed a bronze plaque as a memorial to the late W. H. Lyon. A like entrance was also to be constructed and maintained at the south line of the Northeast one-half (N. E. 1/2) of the Southeast quarter (S. E. 1/4) of Section thirteen (13), Wayne Township. Provision is also made for a highway and bridal path from highway 16 to the south entrance of the grounds.

It was also provided that work on the highway, bridge and gateway "shall be commenced as soon as necessary labor and material can be obtained, and shall be completed in three years (from August 1, 1942), except in case of flood, fire, tornado, epidemic, State or National emergency".

The first fairs held on this fairground were in 1938-39. Some buildings, including the first section of the amphitheater, were built by W. P. A. labor and material.

In 1940, the Sioux Empire Fair Association, Inc., was organized and took over the grounds on a lease from the county. The fair of that year was conducted on a much larger scale and included additional features such as horse racing, out door pageants, comedies and plays.

H. F. Veenker is president and Al Halver secretary of the association. Despite the war years, buildings have been added and the quality and quantity of the exhibits, displays of Home Extension work and 4-H Club activities have materially increased.

There was a let-down in effort during the war years of 1943-44, but a two day 4-H Achievement Program was sponsored by the fair management and prizes were awarded.

There were no full scale fair events held during 1944 and 1945, but four days of rodeo events were held each year with leading riders participating in open competition, including Bill and Bud Linderman, brothers, and Ken and Gerald Roberts.

Horse Racing

It might be properly stated that Frank Forde, owning land west of the city near the town of Ellis, was the "father" of organized horse racing in Minnehaha County. He opened a half-mile track on section seven (7), Wayne Township, in the late 1870's. Occasionally, horse racing enthusiasts would go there for a few hours' sport in exhibiting the qualities of their favorite "piece of horse-flesh." The horses were not fast ones, comparatively speaking, but it was here that classification and grading of race horses was started.

In 1882, the Sioux Falls Exposition was formed and a part of its program was the making of a half-mile race track. That year, and the one following, some good racing was enjoyed. Available records are not clear as to the location of this track, but it is believed to have been on the fairgrounds on South Minnesota Avenue. By its development, Sioux Falls horse lovers were inspired to attempt to improve the class of race horses of various types. Several local men purchased high bred trotting stock, some of which attracted national attention.

The exposition of 1883 was a financial failure, but, on March 5, 1884, horsemen met at the "Cataract House" and organized what was

known as the Sioux City and Dakota Circuit. On the 14th of the same month the Sioux Falls Driving Park Association was formed and capitalized at \$20,000. The old fairgrounds on South Minnesota Avenue were again fitted up for the use of the Association. On June 11th and 12th, 1884, a race meeting was held on these grounds. The attendance and the entertainment was good though no outstanding speed records were made.

In 1885, the racing event took place on June 17th-19th, inclusive. From the public viewpoint, it was a decided success, but financially, it was a failure, and the grounds were disposed of. The highest speed record was but 2:26 1/2.

Clark G. Coats built a half-mile track on his farm, southeast of the city in 1888. It was ready for use by late September. Some good races were held there during the fair that year and again in 1889.

The Sioux Falls Driving Association, organized by local men in 1893, leased the buildings and grounds that year and arranged a big trotting event that was held July 18th to 20th. Some of the fastest horses in the Northwest were brought for the event. The attendance was below expectations and the meet was not a financial success.

In 1894, the association increased its efforts, spending hard work and much money in advertising and offering good prizes. The event occurred July 10 to 14, with good weather and conditions. Again many of the best horses were here but the sponsors again met with a severe deficit. The fastest time made on the occasion was by an unrecorded owner and horse, in 2:09 1/4 minutes.

About this time, several "top notchers" came into prominence. Jesse W. Boyce's young pacing filly, "Prairie Lily", gained a national reputation. "Pinta", Sioux K. Grigsby's pacing colt, was also in the "class of 1895", as were C. G. Coats' "Little Mike", Frank and George Blackman's "Moody" and Nye Phillips' "Skylark". Pinta's record was 2:13 1/4, W. H. and E. W. Nelson's "Almo" took 2:30 minutes to make a mile, Blackman Brothers' "Little Mike" made it in 2:18 and their "King Patchen" took the stride at 2:23 1/2. S. K. Grigsby's "Doc M" took a 2:22 3/4 clip. Dr. J. C. Morgan and others owned fast horses at that time but their records are not at present available.

The records made on the present track at Lyon Fairgrounds have not been learned but with the improved course at that place, local horse fanciers might be expected to attempt to break those of their sires.

In the summer of 1888, Clark G. Coats built a half-mile kite track on his farm, a short distance southeast of the city, as a movement toward promoting horse racing in the community. Some good horse races were held on this track during the season, but it was not until the State Fair was held here in 1891 that it was much used. Mr. Coats spent much money in developing the track during the time fairs were being planned for that year and the next.

Going back into history of horse racing in the county, we find the following list of the horse and names of the owners given by Sioux K. Grigsby, horse fancier, turfman, attorney, legislator and Lieutenant Governor:

Almo, owned by W. H. Nelson, Jesse W. Boyce, and E. W. Nelson. Time 2:30.

King Patchen, owned by George and Frank Blackman. The time 2.23 1/2.

Niles, owned by Dr. J. C. Morgan. No time.

Pinta, owned by Sioux K. Grigsby, (reduced from 2:13 to 2:08).

Doctor M, owned by Sioux K. Grigsby (sired by Niles). Time 2:28 1/2.

Little
Mood
Skyla
Fanch
Later
Lily", a yo
gained a r
figure and
"fast ones
ing his fa
Since
of the fai
fairground
one locall
by John I
standard
year won
world's r
was sold
Fitzgibbon
John Hen
details of
own right
the indivi
and drove
Durin
locally be
cluding tr
removed.
that hors
grounds.
Rega
fully accr
national
appraised
that the c
agement
that city.

Little Mike, owned by Clark G. Coats (time not known).

Moody, owned by Jesse W. Boyce. Time 2:18.

Skylark, owned by Phillips and Jerry Carleton. No time known.

Fanchion, owned by Jesse W. Boyce. No time known.

Later in 1895, Jesse Boyce came to the forefront with his "Prairie Lily", a young pacing filly, bred by him in Sioux Falls. This young mare gained a national reputation that year. The writer often recalls the tall figure and pleasant features of Mr. Boyce in his sulky, behind one of his "fast ones" on the streets of Sioux Falls, proudly exercising and exhibiting his fancy racing stock.

Since those early years, horse racing has been a feature of most of the fairs in Minnehaha County. Since the opening of the present fairgrounds, several such events have taken place. There has been but one locally owned horse entered in these races, "Dorothy Guy", owned by John R. Fitzgibbon, Jr., and his wife, Julia. "Dorothy Guy" was a standard bred trotter. She won two races here in 1941 and the same year won six races in Canada and nine in various states, setting a world's record of seventeen winnings in a single season. The horse was sold at Elkhorn, Wisconsin in 1942, for breeding purposes. The Fitzgibbon's attribute much of the success of the races to Mr. and Mrs. John Henning, who attended to the shoeing, harnessing and sundry details of the event. Mrs. Henning was an expert horse-shoer in her own right, especially skillful in adjusting weight and balance to suit the individual horses' gaits and length of strides. Mr. Henning trained and drove Dorothy Guy in all these contests.

During the last few years, horse racing events have been eliminated locally because of the lack of travelling facilities and equipment, including trucks and gasoline. In the meantime, the old stables have been removed and will be replaced by modern new ones and it is expected that horse racing events will be resumed in future fairs at the fairgrounds.

Regarding the track itself, we will say this is one of the three fully accredited dirt tracks in the nation, so designated by the International Racing Association. So favorably was this half mile track appraised by visitors at the fair which closed Sunday, August 25, 1946, that the city of Peoria, Illinois, immediately telegraphed the fair management here for blueprints of it, for the purpose of duplicating it in that city.

SIOUXLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY 200 W. 4th St. SIOUX FALLS, S.D. 57104

SIouxLAND HERITAGE MUSEUMS
200 West 6th Street
SIoux FALLS, S.D. 57102

A
COMPREHENSIVE HISTORY
of
MINNEHAHA COUNTY,
South Dakota

Its Background, Her Pioneers, Their Record of
Achievement and Development

By

CHARLES A. SMITH

EDUCATOR SUPPLY COMPANY, MITCHELL, S. D. 57030
1949

1949