

EARLY MINNESOTA AGRICULTURAL SOCIETIES AND FAIRS¹

ONE OF THE INSTITUTIONS deeply ingrained in the pattern of American life is the agricultural fair. Anyone who saw the motion picture "State Fair," starring the late Will Rogers, will appreciate better than through descriptive words how many families anticipate and enjoy the fair. Some people feel that such exhibitions are outmoded, that they are carry-overs from an earlier age, yet the tenacity with which they have hung on to the present day attests their importance even in modern society. Two eminent scholars have asserted that "No institution, perhaps, has exerted greater influence upon American rural life than the agricultural fair."²

In Minnesota fairs are older than the state itself, having "made their appearance . . . in the early 1850's," just at the zenith of the golden age of such institutions in the United States.³ Compared with later exhibitions the early fairs were primitive indeed, yet they more than justified their existence. They gave the isolated pioneer farmer a chance to meet his fellows, to have a good time; and by showing him late developments in machinery, fine livestock, and new techniques in farming, they gave him an incentive to improve his own farming. As one writer has remarked, until about 1870 "the whole burden of agricultural experimentation, instruction, extension and recreation fell upon the agricul-

¹ This is an expanded version of a paper presented before the luncheon session of the nineteenth state historical convention under the auspices of the Minnesota Historical Society at St. Peter on July 26, 1941. *Ed.*

² See H. J. Carman and R. G. Tugwell's foreword in Wayne C. Neely, *The Agricultural Fair*, 2 (New York, 1935).

³ Rodney C. Loehr, ed., *Minnesota Farmers' Diaries*, 24 (St. Paul, 1939); Neely, *Agricultural Fair*, 82.

tural societies whose work was carried on mainly through State and local fairs.”⁴

In the period before 1870 fairs were primarily educational, and amusement features were secondary or were subordinated to the instructional motive. Stock and crop exhibits and judging were the main features of most fairs and the exchange of experiences by dirt farmers and lectures by experts played important parts. Also necessary was the annual address, delivered by the most renowned figure available. These addresses were usually flowery, elevating agriculture to a lofty pinnacle and praising it as the noblest of pursuits. Such discourses might not have helped a farmer earn more money or raise better crops, but they probably made his chest swell with pride when he thought about his calling.⁵

But early fairs were not “all work and no play.” Concerning the medieval counterparts of later fairs, it has been written: “If the booths of the foreign merchants were of interest, even more so were the minstrels and jongleurs, the acrobats and trained animals, the magicians and human freaks, all for the amazement and amusement of the public.” And it may be logically surmised that Minnesota farmers of the 1850’s and 1860’s attended fairs to have a good time as well as to learn. Plowing matches, reaper trials, and ladies’ riding exhibitions were popular, and, although frowned upon by many, the horse race was a regular feature of many fairs. At the Washington County Fair of 1875 persons interested in amusement features could witness a pigeon shoot, a walking contest, a foot race, a baseball game, and a boat race.⁶ But whether primarily educational

⁴ Earle D. Ross, “The Evolution of the Agricultural Fair in the Northwest,” in *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, 24:454 (July, 1926).

⁵ Ross, in *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, 24:453-458; James E. Child, *History of Waseca County*, 233 (Owatonna, 1905). William Brisbane delivered the address at the Waseca County Fair of 1870, dwelling upon the wholesome and honorable calling of the farmer.

⁶ Louis L. Snyder, *A Survey of European Civilization*, 1:483 (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 1941); *Stillwater Messenger*, October 1, 1875.

or recreational, most fairs seemed to have a common feature—financial stringency. In fact, state aid for local agricultural societies, the sponsors of the fairs, was not made available until 1868.

There is some difference of opinion as to when the first agricultural society was organized in Minnesota. Some authorities and at least one early newspaper agree that the first move toward the organization of such a society was made in the winter of 1852 in Benton County, mainly near Watab.⁷ An agricultural society existed as early as 1849, however, for in that year the Saint Anthony Agricultural Association offered prizes in cash or implements for the best crops raised during the ensuing season. For the best crop of Indian corn in a quantity of not less than ten acres a prize of twenty-five dollars was to be given, and for wheat, one of fifty dollars was offered. Contenders for the prizes were to make proof before a justice of the peace, a judge, or a notary before January 1, 1851.⁸ The nature of this association and the success of the crop contest, however, are unknown.

But the date of the formation of the first agricultural society in Minnesota is of little interest except to the antiquarian. Of greater significance are the number of societies active during the 1850's, their location, and the work they did. Some of the first societies naturally were organized in the counties that had the greatest population densities in the early 1850's—counties such as Benton, Ramsey, and Hennepin.

The Benton County society was incorporated by an act of the legislature approved on March 5, 1852. There were ten charter members, among whom was Oliver H. Kelley of Granger movement fame. Most of the members were fur

⁷ Darwin S. Hall and Return I. Holcombe, *History of the Minnesota State Agricultural Society from Its First Organization in 1854 to the Annual Meeting of 1910*, 7 (St. Paul, 1910); *Minnesota Pioneer* (St. Paul), November 10, 1853.

⁸ *Pioneer*, November 15, 1849.

traders, but the formation of the society inspired the editor of an eastern farm journal to write :

Those who have not lately visited the far west, can hardly credit the statement, that in a region so recently a wilderness, there already exists a fully-organized and flourishing society of men, deeply interested in the growth and success of agricultural industry. But such is the fact.⁹

On March 6, 1852, the Ramsey County Agricultural Society received a legislative charter, and it held its first meeting on April 10. Listed among its members were editors, a minister, politicians, a barber, and other urbanites who believed that the organization of agricultural societies was an excellent way to advertise the resources of Minnesota to the outside world.¹⁰

The Hennepin County Agricultural Society was chartered by the territorial legislature on March 5, 1853. The prime mover behind the organization was Colonel John H. Stevens, and the first meeting of the society was held at the courthouse in St. Anthony on September 7, 1853. A large audience heard addresses by various notables and decided to hold a fair in October, 1853. The fair of 1853 did not materialize, but in October, 1854, the Hennepin County society actually did hold a fair, the first such exhibition in the territory, and it proved a success. It was located at what was later known as Bridge Square in Minneapolis. Governor Willis A. Gorman, Ex-governor Alexander Ramsey, and Ex-justice Bradley B. Meeker gave high-sounding addresses, typical of the day, and over fifty exhibitors displayed their wares of grains, roots, vegetables, livestock, poultry, dairy products, fine arts, machinery, ladies' work, and miscellaneous materials. The premiums, amounting

⁹ Hall and Holcombe, *State Agricultural Society*, 7; *American Agriculturist* (New York), 12:201 (June 7, 1854). The latter item is among transcripts, made for the Minnesota Historical Society, of material of Minnesota interest in eastern periodicals.

¹⁰ Hall and Holcombe, *State Agricultural Society*, 7; *Pioneer*, April 8, 22, 1852.

to several hundred dollars, were all paid—a real accomplishment. It was claimed that the exhibits would have done credit to one of the oldest and richest counties of New York. Some strangers were so impressed that they later became permanent residents of Minnesota. All in all, this first agricultural fair was a valuable advertisement for the territory.¹¹

As time went on other county organizations began to appear. Some of the most prominent were the Dodge County Agricultural Society, formed in July, 1856; the Dakota County Agricultural Association, organized on March 20, 1858; the Fillmore County Agricultural Society, also dating from 1858; the Faribault County Agricultural Society, organized at Winnebago City in 1859; and the McLeod County Agricultural Society, which adopted a constitution on March 19, 1859. All these groups suffered early vicissitudes which, however, they were able to weather, and they finally emerged in healthy conditions. The ideals for which they were established—to encourage the importation of blooded stock and the introduction of choice seeds, grains, and fruit trees—ultimately transcended difficulties such as inadequate finances and rivalries among towns concerning fair sites.¹²

In addition to the formation of county societies, the 1850's witnessed the organization of a society to represent the farming interests of all Minnesota. At the first meet-

¹¹ Hall and Holcombe, *State Agricultural Society*, 17–19, 27; John H. Stevens, *Personal Recollections of Minnesota and Its People*, 208, 242 (Minneapolis, 1890); *Pioneer*, April 28, September 8, 1853; *St. Anthony Express*, September 17, 1853.

¹² *History of Winona, Olmsted and Dodge Counties*, 1256 (Chicago, 1884); J. A. Kiester, *History of Faribault County*, 102–110 (Minneapolis, 1896); *Glencoe Register*, March 26, July 23, October 22, 1859; *Dakota County Tribune* (Farmington), March 9, 1934; *Spring Valley Tribune*, August 16, 23, 1934. In 1859 members of the state legislature and others organized at the Capitol the Agricultural and Mechanics' Club of the Legislature of Minnesota, with John H. Stevens as president. Farm problems and agricultural methods were discussed at its meetings. *Weekly Pioneer and Democrat* (St. Paul), December 30, 1859; January 13, 1860.

ing of the Hennepin County Agricultural Society in 1853, the following resolution was unanimously adopted:

Resolved, that this society deems it expedient that there should be a convention held at St. Paul on the first Wednesday of January next, to form a territorial agricultural society; and that other agricultural societies in the territory are respectfully requested to send delegates to said convention.¹³

From this resolution and the action taken in pursuance of it grew the Minnesota Territorial Agricultural Society. The meeting suggested in the resolution was held at St. Paul on January 4 and 5, 1854, and in spite of inclement weather the attendance was good. Delegates from Benton, Chisago, Dakota, Hennepin, Nicollet, Pembina, Ramsey, Scott, and Washington counties were present when the society was organized in the Capitol. Governor Willis A. Gorman was elected president, and Judge A. G. Chatfield made the main address. One of the newspapers said that many of the delegates were practical farmers, and added: "The organization of this Society should be hailed with pleasure, and it is hoped that our farmers and others will give it their unqualified support."¹⁴

The second annual meeting of the Territorial Agricultural Society was held in the Capitol on January 10, 1855. This gathering was addressed by Henry H. Sibley, who made a plea for a federal bureau of agriculture. He pointed out that the whole subject of husbandry was then committed to the bureau of patents. His plea, of course, was answered in 1862 when the United States department of agriculture was created. The establishment of the department was in no little way the result of the work of various agricultural societies throughout the country. At the 1855 meeting of the territorial society, Stevens was elected president and it

¹³ Stevens, *Personal Recollections*, 208; Hall and Holcombe, *State Agricultural Society*, 19.

¹⁴ Hall and Holcombe, *State Agricultural Society*, 19; William W. Fowell, *A History of Minnesota*, 1:361 (St. Paul, 1922); *Pioneer*, November 10, 1853; January 5, 12, 1854.

was decided to hold a fair. It was impossible, however, for the society alone to raise the necessary funds, so the fair held at Minneapolis on October 17 and 18 was sponsored jointly by the territorial and the Hennepin County societies.¹⁵

This first fair was truly a success. Newspapers stated that it drew the largest crowd of whites ever assembled in the territory and that many ladies were present. People from as far away as the James River, west of Big Stone Lake, attended. There were excellent exhibits of grain, vegetables, and livestock, and for the first time in the upper Mississippi region the dairy interest was represented. A good display of cheese, made by Mrs. Joel B. Bassett of Minneapolis, was among the entries. On the other hand, only three counties exhibited products at the fair—Hennepin, Ramsey, and Washington. Among the horses entered, Morgans were the most popular, a stallion and a colt of this breed winning first premiums. There does not seem to have been a Percheron, a Belgian, or a Clydesdale in Minnesota in 1855. The first premium for bulls went to E. L. Larpenteur for his three-year-old Durham, and J. G. Lennon won in the sheep class with a Leicestershire, the breed made famous in England by the renowned Robert Bakewell. The hog exhibit was mediocre, but there were chickens in abundance, mainly Shanghais, Chittagongs, and Brahmapootras. Yellow Dent corn that yielded eighty-five bushels to the acre was on display, and Stevens exhibited a stalk of corn seventeen feet high. The wheat, rye, and buckwheat shown were produced chiefly in Hennepin County. The vegetable display “astonished even the natives,” with Ramsey County leading in cabbages, pumpkins, and squashes, and Hennepin in potatoes, turnips, beets, and onions. One radish that was shown weighed nearly eighteen pounds, and potatoes weighing nearly three pounds and yielding four hundred bushels to an acre were numerous. Among the ladies’ exhibits were

¹⁵ *Pioneer*, January 18, March 29, 1855; Hall and Holcombe, *State Agricultural Society*, 28–31.

house plants, butter, carpets, flowers, rugs, needlework, and fancy articles. A highlight and a harbinger of the future was the showing of three fine apples by the Reverend Gideon H. Pond. Another attraction securing much attention from the two thousand spectators was a contest of horsemanship among ladies. Later, however, the department of ladies' equestrianism was abolished, because great dissatisfaction, and even feuds, developed among the contestants' friends.¹⁶

In 1856 the society held a fair of its own in Minneapolis, and in 1857 it sponsored another, this time in St. Paul. The latter event coincided with the panic of 1857, which caused great financial loss to the society. Political rivalry also hurt the fair. Many Republicans refused to attend because they believed it was part of a Democratic machine. No fair was held in 1858 because of depressed economic conditions, but in 1859 the society joined with the Hennepin County society again and presented a "Union Fair" at Minneapolis, which was only partially successful.¹⁷

An act of the legislature approved on February 16, 1860, gave the society, henceforth known as the Minnesota State Agricultural Society, the powers of a corporate body and provided for the organization of county agricultural societies. Thus, although the act was not well drawn up, the state society was placed on a legal and permanent basis. An attempt at this time to get the legislature to appropriate money for the society's work failed.¹⁸

Having achieved a sounder basis, the society renewed its work with enthusiasm. A fair was held at Fort Snelling from September 26 to 28, 1860, which of all the fairs "from Donnybrook to Nijni-Novgorod" was not surpassed in the

¹⁶ *Pioneer*, October 18, 25, 1855; Loehr, ed., *Minnesota Farmers' Diaries*, 24, 25; Hall and Holcombe, *State Agricultural Society*, 31-34.

¹⁷ *Pioneer*, October 16, 1856; Hall and Holcombe, *State Agricultural Society*, 35-47.

¹⁸ *Laws*, 1860, p. 143-145; *Minnesota Farmer and Gardener* (St. Paul), 1:44 (December, 1860); Hall and Holcombe, *State Agricultural Society*, 48-53. Files of agricultural periodicals cited herein are owned by the Minnesota Historical Society unless otherwise indicated.

degree of satisfaction it afforded those who attended. Among the notable exhibits was John H. Manny's combined reaper and mower, the only machine of its kind on the ground. There were entries of cattle, horses, sheep, hogs, farm products, horticultural products, farm implements, articles of domestic manufacture, and miscellaneous materials. The largest hog in Minnesota, a 640-pound Chester White barrow, was shown by Wyman Elliot of Minneapolis. An address lasting two hours was given by Cassius Clay of Kentucky. Only perfunctory applause came at the end.¹⁹

The Civil War changed the plans of the state society, which did not attempt to arrange fairs in 1861 or 1862. In the former year the Anoka and Blue Earth county groups held fairs, but they were not successful. Economic conditions were disturbed, crops were poor, and people were greatly concerned over the war. At times even the weather conspired to defeat the well-laid plans of fair sponsors. In the words of the editor of one Minnesota newspaper: "The first Tuesday . . . of our second annual Fair was drizzly, mizzly, nasty, dirty, disagreeable, and generally otherwise uncomfortable, besides being somewhat moist." Still some people wanted to see agricultural society work continued, and there were unsuccessful efforts during these years to get state aid for such bodies.²⁰ The leading state farm journal in 1861 commented as follows on the subject:

Minnesota is one of the few states that has done nothing to advance her great interests of agriculture. An effort was made last winter to have the Legislature make a small appropriation in aid of the various agricultural societies, but without avail. Money could be found for almost any other purpose, but when a few hundred dollars were asked to aid our State and county societies there was a general plea of poverty. Not a few seemed to think that appropriating money for such a purpose was entirely new and unheard of in the annals of modern legislation. The body was composed largely of farmers, but . . . most of them took little or no interest in the subject.

¹⁹ Hall and Holcombe, *State Agricultural Society*, 55-64.

²⁰ *St. Peter Tribune*, September 26, 1860; Hall and Holcombe, *State Agricultural Society*, 65-70.

We are now engaged in a war that is making a fearful show for heavy taxes, and it may be deemed altogether inexpedient to even talk of an appropriation for our agricultural societies at such a time. . . .

The cultivation of the soil and raising stock of various kinds will always be the chief occupation of our people. It is highly proper then that these great interests should be encouraged by the government. Even a small appropriation would result in great good. It would help the now feeble societies to attain the object of their organizations. In one year . . . we should hear of many efficient societies and annual fairs worthy of the name.

This has been the result in other States. . . . We hope, therefore, something will be done by the present Legislature, and that a small appropriation will be made, not only for the State Society, but for every county that shall conform to certain conditions, which shall be specified in the act. Without such encouragement our societies will eke out a miserable existence, and make but little, if any, real progress.²¹

In 1861 many county societies were not in working order. The three old counties of Washington, Ramsey, and Benton had no organizations, though some new and remote counties, such as Blue Earth, Freeborn, and Faribault, had groups full of life and activity. The *Minnesota Farmer and Gardener* placed the blame for lifeless societies upon their officers. Finally, in the legislative session of 1861-62, the house passed a bill giving twenty-five dollars to county societies, but the senate killed it. At that time there were only two farmers in the senate, and some of those in the house were described as "old fogyish." Probably about ten societies would have been ready to use the money. This would have meant a total outlay of two hundred and fifty dollars, or about half the cost of a daily legislative session.²²

Available evidence indicates that the 1860's were difficult years for the county societies. Speaking of the Ramsey County fair of 1863, Mitchell Y. Jackson recorded in his diary on February 7:

Attend what is called a Ramsey County fair which is a meagre collection of Cattle & horses brought in by their owners & offered for

²¹ *Farmer and Gardener*, 1:362 (December, 1861).

²² *Farmer and Gardener*, 1:258, 2:73 (September, 1861, March, 1862).

sale at auction. Offered my bull under a limit of 100.\$ no sale
Reach home about 10 Oclock cold and tired.²³

For the Faribault County fair of 1868 even the weather was inclement, and the exhibition could not begin until the day after that announced for the opening. "Two beets and a harness looked askance at each other downstairs," reads the newspaper report of the fair, "while out of doors, two fine wooled bucks occupied the rear of a lumber wagon. All took the premium. . . . The department of Fine Arts upstairs," continues the report, "was ornamented with a variety of useful and ornamental articles, including babies." Even the track was in poor condition; nevertheless the horse races came off.²⁴

During the 1860's the state society was in financial straits. In 1863 the state fair was renewed and it was held annually thereafter, though all the fairs were not successes by any means. The fair of 1863, which was characterized by a St. Paul paper as "a ridiculous failure, a burlesque," was located again at Fort Snelling; that of 1864, at Red Wing; that of 1865, at Minneapolis; and those of 1866 and 1867 at Rochester. At the conclusion of the fair of 1866 some interested people formed the Minnesota Fruit Growers' Association and elected, as president, the well-known editor and fruit-fancier, Daniel A. Robertson. None of these fairs was unusual, but an action of the state society at its meeting in 1867 deserves recognition. It adopted a resolution stating "that the continual cropping of wheat, year after year, in the same field, without even a change of seed, is bad farming and ought to be discouraged."²⁵ Few farmers heeded this admonition, but it illustrates the society's interest in promoting better farming.

The year 1868 was notable in the history of agricultural

²³ Jackson, in Loehr, ed., *Minnesota Farmers' Diaries*, 217.

²⁴ Kiestler, *Faribault County*, 264.

²⁵ Hall and Holcombe, *State Agricultural Society*, 73-96; *Pioneer*, October 4, 1863.

societies in the state in at least two ways. First, the legislature finally appropriated money to aid both the state and county societies. The act, approved on February 27, gave a thousand dollars to the state body and set aside two thousand dollars to be apportioned among the county organizations. Two restrictions were placed on the use of the money. It could not be used to pay officers' salaries or premiums on horse racing. A second development of the year was the formation of the State Farmers' Club at Minneapolis on October 2. Its purpose was to aid in the organization of farmers' clubs in various towns and to co-operate with the Minnesota State Agricultural Society and the Minnesota Fruit Growers' Association. Charles Hoag was elected president and Stevens was chosen secretary. During 1867 and 1868 many farmers' clubs were being organized in the state, and it was only logical that this development should culminate in the formation of a state club.²⁶

In the early 1870's county agricultural society work was stimulated by the law of 1868. At the meeting of the state society in 1874 the secretary reported that there were forty-three county societies in the state, of which thirty-eight had made reports and drawn fifty dollars each from the standing state appropriation. Even some of the western counties had societies by the early 1870's. For example, the Lac qui Parle County Agricultural Society was organized and held its first exhibit in 1872. "Within ten years," according to a county history, the annual fairs "had come to be recognized as among the leading events of their kind in western Minnesota and were largely attended by persons from all over this part of the state."²⁷

²⁶ *Laws*, 1868, p. 33-35; *Farmers' Union* (Minneapolis), January, November, 1868; *Glencoe Register*, March 25, April 29, 1869; *Rochester Post*, November 13, 1869; March 12, 19, 1870; *Farmer and Gardener*, 1: 37 (December, 1860); *Minnesota Farmer* (St. Paul), 2: 269 (June, 1879); Kiestler, *Faribault County*, 264; Hall and Holcombe, *State Agricultural Society*, 97.

²⁷ Hall and Holcombe, *State Agricultural Society*, 118; Lycurgus R.

The state fairs of 1868, 1869, and 1870 were located at Minneapolis, Rochester, and Winona, respectively, and nothing unusual marked any of them. During the 1870's, however, a bitter rivalry developed between St. Paul and Minneapolis over the location of the state fair site. In earlier years it seemed best to follow an itinerant system of exhibitions; but with the extension of railroad facilities and the need for better accommodations at the fairs, it appeared advisable to obtain permanent fair grounds. Bitter struggles between towns contending for fair sites had occurred in many states, and Minnesota was no exception.²⁸ It did not obtain a permanent location for its state fair until 1885.

Beginning in 1871 and continuing through 1876 the state fairs were held at St. Paul, where they encountered many obstacles. Just two weeks before the Minnesota State Fair of 1871, Hennepin County held its fair with Horace Greeley as the chief speaker. Then Minneapolis people "knocked" the Minnesota fair, and Colonel William S. King, a well-known Minneapolis livestock breeder, sent his finest cattle to the Illinois State Fair rather than show them in St. Paul. The general economic depression following the panic of 1873 and losses resulting from the grasshopper plagues were other causes for distress on the part of the state agricultural society. Hence, at the annual meeting of 1877, the secretary had the unpleasant task of announcing that the society was over three thousand dollars in debt. At the same gathering the agricultural society consolidated with the Minnesota Stock Breeders' Association, despite the opposition of some who objected to the latter's alleged leaning toward horse racing. From the financial standpoint, however, the breeders' association had much to offer,

Moyer and Ole G. Dale, eds., *History of Chippewa and Lac qui Parle Counties*, 1:592 (Indianapolis, 1916).

²⁸ *St. Paul Weekly Pioneer*, October 2, 1868; *Rochester Post*, October 2, 1869; February 19, 26, 1870; Hall and Holcombe, *State Agricultural Society*, 96-104; Ross, in *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, 24:462-465.

for it was out of debt. A joint fair under the auspices of the two groups at Minneapolis from September 3 to 8, 1877, was a great success. Beer stands were plentiful, side shows were numerous, and a crowd of twenty thousand was present on the second day. As a result of this exhibition all debts of the agricultural society were paid and surplus funds were divided between the two organizations, which then dissolved partnership. For the first time in the fair's history people rode the grounds in horse- or mule-drawn streetcars.²⁹

In 1878, two fairs again divided honors, the Minnesota State Fair at St. Paul and a fair at Minneapolis sponsored by the Minnesota Agricultural and Mechanical Association. Rutherford B. Hayes and James G. Blaine attended both exhibitions and helped to attract many people. At St. Paul "the 'Britishers', in their red coats and top boots, flying amid clouds of blinding dust" put on a genuine English hurdle race such as they enjoyed at the English colony of Fairmont. Nevertheless most accounts admit that the Minneapolis fair outshone the one at St. Paul; and, in 1879, the same was true, when two fairs again were held in the rival cities.³⁰

When delegates to the meeting of the state agricultural society assembled in St. Paul in February, 1880, they were a discouraged group. Unpaid debts totaled four thousand dollars, and the Minneapolis society had announced its intention of holding another great fair of its own. Members of the state society in the southern part of the state, however, came to the rescue, and the state fairs of 1880, 1881, and 1882 were held in Rochester. Trends in agriculture

²⁹ Hall and Holcombe, *State Agricultural Society*, 107-133; Ross, in *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, 24:470. The *Stillwater Messenger* of September 20, 1878, urged farmers to turn out and make the county fair a fair and not an "agricultural hoss trot."

³⁰ Hall and Holcombe, *State Agricultural Society*, 130, 135-139; Maurice Farrar, *Five Years in Minnesota*, 84 (London, 1880); John R. Cummins' Diary, September 5, 1878. The latter is a manuscript in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

were well manifested at these fairs. The Minnesota State Wool Growers' Association and the State Dairymen's Association co-operated with the state society in promoting the fair of 1881, and more cattle, hogs, and milch cows began to be displayed. Farmers in the southern part of the state were paying less attention to wheat and were beginning to diversify their farming. The fair of 1883 was held at Owatonna, and whether or not it was a success seems to be a controversial matter.³¹

The legislature of 1883 passed a bill, framed by officers and friends of the state society, providing an annual state appropriation of four thousand dollars for the society and creating a board of auditors to report to the legislature at each session. At its annual meeting of 1884 the society took definite action for obtaining a permanent fair location. Action toward the same end in 1877 and in 1883 had proved premature. Now a committee was appointed in pursuance of a resolution to negotiate with citizens of St. Paul and Minneapolis with a view to buying eighty to a hundred acres of land as a site. No location was selected in 1884, however, so the state fair was again held at Owatonna. A joint committee to consider the matter, made up of the representatives of the Minneapolis Board of Trade and the St. Paul Chamber of Commerce, met in November and again in December, but it failed to take action. In the meantime, H. S. Fairchild suggested to the Ramsey County commissioners that it might be well to sell a hundred acres of the Ramsey County Poor Farm for a fair site. After many discussions, conferences, and expressions of rivalry, the state society accepted as a gift from Ramsey County two

³¹ Hall and Holcombe, *State Agricultural Society*, 141-157; David M. Fyffe, "Reminiscences," 55-58. The latter is a manuscript in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society. The writer, who settled in Pipestone County as the manager of a colonization company in 1882, describes the Owatonna fair. There were sheds about the outside of the grounds for the horses and some beef cattle, and cheap sheds on the ground for sheep, hogs, and cattle. The judging of stock was accompanied by numerous quarrels.

hundred acres of land formerly included in its poor farm. Finally, the legislature by an act approved on March 2, 1885, provided for the acceptance of the gift, though not without much opposition. During the debates on the question, Hennepin County state legislators even proposed that two fair grounds be established. The first state fair on the new site was held from September 7 to 15, 1885. In preparation for this event buildings costing \$150,000 had been constructed in the short space of ninety days. Thus, after many vicissitudes, the great Minnesota State Fair found the home which it still occupies. At the conclusion of the 1885 fair the *St. Paul Dispatch* expressed the opinion that "the results have justified the wisdom of locating the fair grounds midway between the two great cities," but a Minneapolis newspaper still voiced the hope that a northwestern exposition would be held in 1886 to compete with the state fair.³²

With the advent of the 1870's, new social and economic conditions arose in Minnesota which called for other types of rural organizations in addition to the society and the fair. This was true in other Middle Western states as well. As one writer has pointed out, the period from 1850 to 1870 was the "golden age" of the agricultural fair, but about 1870 other types of farm associations arose to supplement these expositions. This did not injure the fairs, but they became agencies "through which a hundred other associations make a popular appeal." They were forced to readjust themselves, and to define their "relationship to other agricultural organizations."³³ They reflected the work and interests of other rural groups, but they no longer remained the sole agency to which the farmer might look for inspiration, education, and co-operation.

Thus agricultural societies and fairs were no longer the

³² *Laws*, 1883, p. 198; 1885, p. 214-216; *St. Paul Dispatch*, September 15, 1885; Hall and Holcombe, *State Agricultural Society*, 158-191, 194.

³³ Neely, *Agricultural Fair*, 99-109.

sole outlets for farmers' organizing tendencies. The Patrons of Husbandry had become important in Minnesota by the middle 1870's. In addition, general farmers' clubs and groups of specialists in various branches of agriculture were in existence before 1885. One of these was the Winona County Poultry Association, which opened its first exhibit with over fifty coops of chickens, geese, ducks, turkeys, and fighting cocks on January 1, 1873. The most unusual display consisted of two coops of Drahmas. Three of these birds sold for fifty dollars, and their eggs were worth five dollars a dozen. In 1874 poultry men organized the Minnesota State Poultry Association and arranged the first of its annual exhibitions.³⁴ This group did much to induce farmers to devote attention to poultry and eggs.

The Minnesota Stock Breeders' Association was organized in 1877 with King as its first president and R. C. Judson as secretary. This organization was composed of farmers of central Minnesota, while breeders in the southern part of the state belonged to the Southern Minnesota Stock Breeders' Association. One outstanding figure in the Minnesota livestock business, Leonard Johnson of East Castle Rock, in 1878 was elected a vice-president of the National Association of Importers and Breeders of Norman Horses at a meeting in Peoria, Illinois.³⁵

In February, 1878, a meeting of some thirty-five dairy-men in St. Paul resulted in the formation of the State Dairy-men's Association. Articles of incorporation were adopted and officers were chosen. S. S. Gardner of Wadena was elected president, and William Fowler of Newport and C. F. Whittier of Northfield were named vice-presidents.

³⁴ *Winona Weekly Republican*, January 1, March 19, 1873; *Minnesota Farmer*, vol. 1, no. 8, p. 2 (April, 1878); *Farmers' Union*, June 20, 1874. The Minnesota State Poultry Association filed its articles of incorporation with the secretary of state on March 16, 1885. These and the association's bylaws are owned by the Minnesota Historical Society.

³⁵ *Minnesota Farmer*, vol. 1, no. 6, p. 3; no. 7, p. 7; no. 8, p. 9 (February, March, April, 1878).

Several essays on dairying were read, aid was asked from the state for the publication of the association's transactions, and the secretary was instructed to gather data about the state's dairy interests and to report his findings as soon as possible. This meeting reflected a growing interest in dairying and revealed the farmers' desire to learn more about this branch of agriculture. The second meeting of the group was held at St. Paul in February, 1879. Butter and cheese were exhibited, and papers were read on various subjects connected with dairying.³⁶ Undoubtedly this body was not without some influence in transforming Minnesota from a wheat-growing to a dairying state.

With the exception of the five years from 1860 to 1865, sheep production was neglected in Minnesota during the early period, and in order to advance this interest several prominent owners of sheep met in St. Paul on February 20, 1879, and organized the Minnesota State Wool Growers' Association. A constitution was adopted, and a report was read asking that dogs be subjected to legal restrictions and that all owners pay a dog license annually to build up a fund for the benefit of sheep owners who suffered losses because of dogs. For many years dogs were the bane of sheep owners in the state, and the newspapers were filled with condemnations of dogs by sheep raisers. An act of 1873 made the owner of a dog who killed or wounded sheep liable for the value of such sheep, but it evidently did not satisfy the sheep owners.³⁷

Another important agricultural organization was the Minnesota State Butter and Cheese Association. This body grew out of a meeting of over eighty people at Rochester on March 7, 1882. There a temporary chairman and secretary were elected, a committee on permanent or-

³⁶ *Minnesota Farmer*, vol. 1, no. 7, p. 4; vol. 2, p. 153 (March, 1878; February, 1879).

³⁷ *Minnesota Farmer*, 2: 184, 3: 128 (March, 1879; February, 1880); *Laws*, 1873, p. 140.

ganization was chosen, and the association's aim—to gain knowledge of dairying—was defined. The next morning a second session convened, at which permanent officers were elected and a constitution and bylaws were adopted. After the business session, various persons related their experiences in the dairy business. Some of the subjects discussed were the "History and progress of dairying," "Pioneer dairying, the adaptability of our soil for dairy purposes, and our wants as a dairy state," "Are stock and dairy conventions useful and beneficial to the agricultural industries of the state?," "The best and most practical means of operating creameries," "Which pays the farmer better, the full milk or gathered cream system?," and "The best stock for a dairy farm and how it could be obtained." In addition a letter was read from the freight agent of the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad, dated March 1, 1882, saying that it was interested in promoting the dairy business in Minnesota. Finally, committees were appointed on dairy implements, on butter and cheese, and on resolutions.³⁸

In March, 1883, the association met again in Rochester, W. L. Brackenridge of that city making the address of welcome. W. D. Hoard of Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin, president of the Northwest Dairymen's Association, responded, stating that it was difficult to get farmers to change their ways until they were brought "down to the last depths of despair." Charles E. Marvin, in his presidential address, listed some of the obstacles to a rapid development of dairy and stock interests. These were, he said, lack of cooperation, improper handling or feeding of stock, buying too many cows, and building too many creameries.³⁹

The Butter and Cheese Association meetings proved at-

³⁸ Martin J. Anderson, "The Development of the Dairy Products Industry in Minnesota," in Minnesota Dairy and Food Department, *Bulletins*, no. 52, p. 8 (Minneapolis, 1914); Minnesota State Butter and Cheese Association, *Proceedings*, 1882, p. 3-9, 15-79.

³⁹ Butter and Cheese Association, *Proceedings*, 1883, p. 6-11.

tractive and helpful to those who attended, and the association did much to build up dairy interests in Minnesota. In its published *Proceedings*, it made available many important items of information that were useful to the farmer of the day. These publications seem to indicate that the organization was more active than the State Dairymen's Association. During its first three years of existence the Butter and Cheese Association paid out over fourteen hundred dollars in premiums. Thus it was able to qualify for state aid under an act of the legislature of 1883. According to this law, a society might receive at least three hundred dollars from the state for premiums if it had paid out that much in premiums itself a year before applying for state aid. Incidentally, in 1883 there were forty agricultural societies in the state that met these conditions.⁴⁰

It is interesting to compare the organizational development of agrarian interests in Minnesota in 1885 with that of the 1850's. In the earlier period, when the region was a frontier, slight evidence can be found of the existence of specialized farming groups. General societies, farmers' clubs, and fairs served the farmers' needs. In the later period, however, this situation no longer existed. Parts of the state had passed out of the stage of specialized wheat farming; and some farmers were concentrating on dairying, others were mainly interested in wool production, and a third group was devoting itself to raising livestock. New economic and social conditions necessitated new types of organization, and these organizations in turn played a part in the transition of agriculture from wheat raising to diversified farming. Specialization in wheat is often associated with a pioneer agriculture, yet by 1885 Minnesota had progressed so far from this stage that it was awarded the "grand sweepstakes" for the best butter and the "grand diploma of honor" for an exhibit at the World Industrial

⁴⁰ Butter and Cheese Association, *Proceedings*, 1883, p. 117.

and Centennial Exposition in New Orleans. To no small degree was this dairy development due to the efforts of the dairymen's associations in the state.⁴¹

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⁴¹ Minnesota Butter, Cheese, and Dairy Stock Association, *Proceedings*, 1885, p. 13; Theodore Christianson, *Minnesota: The Land of Sky-tinted Waters*, 2:133 (New York, 1935).



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