

## **HISTORY: THE SOUTH DAKOTA STATE FAIR**

The history of the South Dakota State Fair is closely woven into the history of the state of which it is a part. Its origin was an act of the Territorial Legislature approved April 25, 1885, and signed by Governor Pierce at Bismarck, the capitol of Dakota Territory at that time. The legislative act created a Board of Agriculture for the purpose of "forwarding the interests of agriculture, horticulture, manufacturing, and domestic arts." The principal function of the Board was to organize and maintain an annual exhibition of the products of the territory in agriculture, stock raising, and other lines to be known as the "Annual Territorial Fair."

The site of the Fair was not designated, and there was keen competition among the larger towns of the territory. Sioux Falls, Pierre and Huron each submitted offers of suitable grounds and race track, advertising and considerable sums of money. After careful consideration the Board accepted the offer made by the city of Huron; and the first fair was held September 29 to October 2, 1885. For a new enterprise in a sparsely settled territory it was an amazing success from the standpoint of exhibits, attendance and gate receipts. In 1886 the Fair again was held in Huron with increased attendance, added interest, and keener competition in exhibits and racetrack features.

The practice of holding the Fair at the larger towns in the state was continued until 1905 when it seemed advisable to locate the Fair permanently. The schedule for the Fairs from 1885 to 1905 was: 1885 and 1886, Huron; 1887 and 1888, Mitchell; 1889 and 1890, Aberdeen; 1891 and 1892, Sioux Falls; 1893 and 1894, Aberdeen; 1895, Sioux Falls; 1896 to 1904, Yankton; and 1905, Huron where it has remained as a permanent feature.

In 1905, 85 acres valued at \$50,000 were deeded to the State of South Dakota by the Chicago and Northwestern Railway Company to be used for a state fair held annually. The buildings of the Central South Dakota Fair Association, which were located on this site in Huron, were purchased by the Board for \$1,015. That same year the grandstand of the Yankton State Fair Association was purchased and moved to Huron. As the population increased and the Fair grew, buildings were erected and improvements made as needed. In 1911, 65 acres adjoining this location on the south were

purchased to provide ample parking space and picnic features for State Fair visitors. Thus, by 1912 the State Fairgrounds was approximately 145 acres and has increased to 170 acres with the addition of 19 acres west of Lincoln Avenue being used for camper and vehicle parking.

Activities for the young people of South Dakota had their beginning with a Boys State Fair camp, which was first held in 1915. Each county was invited to send one delegate to be selected by the County Superintendent of Schools on the basis of skill in growing corn and potatoes and in judging crops and livestock. In 1918 the first Girls State Fair Camp was organized with 24 food canning demonstrations in teams of three members each and 24 Liberty food teams.

In 1919, 4-H Clubs took over the activities of boys and girls under the supervision of the State College Extension Service. County agents supervised the 86 girls and 90 boys that were in attendance. Throughout the years 4-H work at the Fair has shown steady growth. From the less than 100 exhibits at the first 4-H Fair, exhibits grew to 18,149 entries in 2001.

Beginning in 1905 with the acquisition of the first buildings from the Central South Dakota Fair Association, improvements and new buildings were needed to meet the demands of growing interest by South Dakotans' in their State Fair. The story of each building is history in itself. Few structures remain in 2002 that date to the early 1900's.

With the purchase of the 66 acres in 1911 and 1912 came buildings used as the Secretary's Office, Treasurer's Office, Press Building, and Secretary's Home. The Secretary's Office was the Grounds Superintendent's Home; the Secretary's Residence was the Manager's Home. The Grounds Superintendent's Home had been the Secretary's Office and housed the State Police Radio for many years.

In 1913, two buildings, Machinery Hall and the Dairy Buildings, were constructed. Machinery Hall became the 4-H Beef Barn. The 4-H Beef Barn collapsed under the heavy snow of 2001 and has not been replaced. The DakotaLand Museum is in the Dairy Building after having been used as 4-H Headquarters and 4-H Exhibits at one time.

The Education Building came into being in 1915. Two additions were built in 1918 and 1929 for \$7,083. When the new Education Building was erected

in 1961 it was named Younger Hall in honor of John F Younger, a former State 4-H Club Leader. Younger Hall was torn down in 1999. The Morton Building is now used in place of Younger Hall for 4-H exhibits.

The year 1918, was the year of the new \$50,000 Grandstand and the Industrial Building. The Industrial Building now is being used as the Senior Citizens Building. The Grandstand was added on to in 1929 with improvements of west bleachers in 1963 for \$3,542 and the east side in 1964 for \$3,473. In 1963, major renovation of the Grandstand was completed for \$63,732. Additional maintenance improvements in the year 2001 were made.

Performances at the Grandstand are enhanced with accommodations for performers with infield dressing rooms, concession facilities and infield lighting. The facilities were built or added on in 1977, 1978, 1982 and 1984 for \$10,300 replacing the dressing Rooms of 1946 (\$500).

Swine Barns were put in place in 1920, which are used today as Pony Barns located in the far northeast corner of the Fairgrounds. The Women's Rest Cottage built in 1921 for \$7,000 had been used for 4-H exhibits and photography.

Through the years, buildings were razed and replaced. In 1907, a poultry building was converted to a home appliance building. It was razed in 1953 and replaced in 1954 for \$100,566 with the Family Living Center, once called the Home Appliance Building.

The Horticulture Building of 1907 for \$5,000 was replaced on the same site in 1965 for \$83,542. In 1976, the Mirror Room was added for special floral displays. An Admissions Lodge built in 1948 and an Advance Ticket Office built in 1907 have been replaced with a Main Gate Entrance in 1956 at a cost of \$21,150 with portable ticket booths at the other gates. The advance grandstand ticket sales are serviced in the Ticket Office located at the south corner of the Administration Building.

Agricultural Hall (1907) and Beadle County Building (1908) have been removed, and the area is used as Independent Midway sites west of Midway Avenue. Six cattle barns built in 1905, 1907, 1908, 1909, 1923 and 1929 and the Stock Pavilion built in 1909 for a total cost of \$27,000 have been

replaced with the Open Class Dairy Barn in 1964 and the Beef Complex in 1979.

The original Women's Building of 1909 with additions made in 1923 and 1929 for a total cost of \$11,550 served its purpose until the new Women's Building was built in 1958 for a cost of \$176,480. The 1909 version was named Civic Hall in 1958. Plans were begun in the 1970's to have the building preserved as a historic landmark, but plans changed with a new Fair Board and Administration and was razed in 1974. The site now houses the Food Fair.

The current Women's Building houses adult and youth homemaker exhibits, commercial exhibits, and an auditorium with seating for 590 people where programs and competitions are held daily during the Fair.

The Feed and Forage building of 1916 was destroyed by fire on September 4, 1977. This has been the worst fire disaster in the history of the State Fair. There were 93,000 people on the grounds.

The numerous small 4-H Sheep and Swine buildings were removed to make room for the 4-H Livestock Complex built in 1968 and 1969 on that site.

Swine barns dating from 1916 to 1927 and a show ring from 1953 and 1954 were replaced in 1967 and 1972 by the Open Class Swine Complex Building.

Another building razed was the Public Health Building, previously the "Elite Dining Room of the 1920 Era." This site now is machinery display lots south and across the street from the Family Living Center.

The Public Safety Motor Patrol buildings also were removed. These buildings from 1920 had served as 4-H dormitories. The area now is commercial exhibit space and in 1988 and 1989, it became the site of the model homes, and in 1989, the Centennial Stage.

Due to heavy snowfall during the winter of 2001, which caused the 4-H Beef Barn's roof to collapse, the barn was torn down in May, 2001. Tents were used to house the 4-H beef during the 2001 Fair and in July, 2002 a Morton building was constructed to replace the old 4-H Beef Barn.