

# HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS

OF THE IOWA STATE FAIR





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**IowaStateFair**

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## *Overview*

The internationally-acclaimed Iowa State Fair is the single largest event in the state of Iowa and one of the oldest and largest agricultural and industrial expositions in the country. Annually attracting more than a million people from all over the world, the Iowa State Fair in Des Moines is Iowa's great celebration, a salute to the state's best in agriculture, industry, entertainment and achievement. It is the true heartbeat of the Midwest, unequalled and unduplicated.



*A throng of people crowd the Grand Concourse during the 2004 Fair.*

The Iowa State Fair, the inspiration for the original novel *State Fair* by Iowan Phil Stong, three motion pictures and Rodgers and Hammerstein's Broadway musical, is without a doubt the country's most famous state fair.

National media frequently rank the Fair as one of the top events in the country. In 2004, *USA Weekend* named the event the #2 choice for summer fun in America, topping New York City's Times Square, Cedar Point Amusement Park Resort in Ohio and Disneyland in California.

*Midwest Living* magazine named the Fair one of the "Top 30 Things Every Midwesterner Should Experience." The Fair is also the only fair listed in *The New York Times* best-selling travel book, *1000 Places to See Before You Die*, and the subsequent travel book, *1,000 Places to See in the U.S.A. and Canada Before you Die*.

Iowa's Fair is also known as "America's classic state fair" because the event features all of the traditional activities associated with state fairs in a park-like, 450-acre setting (the Fair's home since 1886). The grounds and the adjoining 160 acres of Campgrounds are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Most of the buildings pre-date World War I;

many are priceless examples of American exposition-style architecture.

Throughout its history, the Fair has been a unique institution, serving to educate, inform and entertain people from all walks of life. It is an outstanding agricultural showplace, boasting one of the world's largest livestock shows. Also home to the largest art show in the state, the Fair showcases visual and performing arts with a variety of special exhibits and activities.

Each year, hundreds of manufacturers and industrial representatives clamor to rent coveted exhibit space. In addition to its tremendous showcase of agriculture and industry, the Fair is also an entertainment destination for Iowa and the Midwest.



*The view from Rock Island Avenue circa 1890. (The buildings pictured no longer exist.)*

Several ground stages feature more than \$500,000 worth of spectacular entertainment free with gate admission. Internationally-acclaimed performers and dynamic track events thrill thousands of fans in the Grandstand (Iowa's original outdoor concert venue). Nearly 600 exhibitors and concessionaires feature quality merchandise and tasty

foods – more than 60 of them served on-a-stick. Hundreds of displays, exhibitions, demonstrations, unique attractions and all kinds of competition – for fun, for ribbons and for the pride of being chosen best – make Iowa's Fair one of the biggest and greatest.

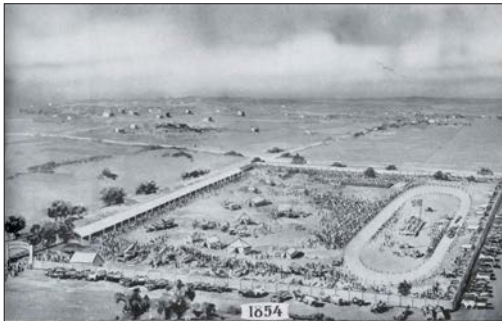
In 1881, historian James Wilson noted that, "One of the most valuable effects of the State Fair is the fraternizing, humanizing consequences of bringing our people together... No one meets and mingles with 20,000 Iowa men, women and children on the Fairgrounds – the only place they can be brought together – without growth of sympathy." Certainly, this



is even more relevant today, when the pace of modern life tends to isolate individuals even more from their neighbors.

## ***Its Beginnings***

The first Iowa State Fair was held in Fairfield, in southeast Iowa, October 25 to 27, 1854. This was 20 years before America's great westward movement began, when a streaming tide of countless thousands of people migrated from the east in white-topped prairie schooners to settle in what had been called "The Great American Desert."



*An artist's sketch of the first Iowa State Fair at Fairfield in 1854.*

The outgrowth of one of Iowa's early county fairs, the first Iowa State Fair was managed by the fledgling Iowa State Agricultural Society. The first president was Judge Thomas W. Clagett of Keokuk. Dr. J.M. Shaffer of Fairfield served

for many years as secretary and leading spirit of the Fair.

The six-acre Fairgrounds tract, surrounded by a high rail fence, boasted temporary sheds and pens for livestock, a tent for exhibits and a circular 1,500-foot track. The grounds, as later noted in the State Historical Society's Palimpsest Magazine of July 1954, were policed by a "chief marshal, five assistant marshals and a number of policemen" who were made conspicuous by wearing a "blue sash around the body."

Fairgoing families traveled by covered wagon, camping on the road and at the Fair. Admission was 25 cents. First-place ribbons were red, second-place ribbons were white and third-place ribbons were blue.

Commenting on the three-day run, the Fairfield Ledger of

November 2, 1854, reads, "The attendance was large. For several days before the Fair, strangers commenced by pouring into Fairfield by scores...Such a concourse of people never before assembled in Iowa. We think we are safe at estimating the number at 7 or 8,000."

Secretary Shaffer displayed a collection of "more than 100 varieties of snakes, lizards, etc., preserved in alcohol." A Mr. Moore of Fort Des Moines exhibited a "fine collection of birds, all the varieties of which are found in the state." The Ledger also noted, "As to corn, it is useless to talk of finding any better. One sample of oats was the best we ever saw." In the grain yield competition, Hezekiah Fagan of Polk County won first for the best five acres of Indian corn, with a production of 139.5 bushels, shelled, to the acre. The prize fall wheat yield was 26 bushels per acre, while H.G. and J. Stuart of Lee County raised 66 bushels of spring wheat on two acres.

The entertainment feature that seemed to have made the greatest impression upon spectators was the exhibition of horseback riding by women, or, to use the official designation, "female equestrianism." Ten performers, wearing various colored ribbons, competed for "a lady's superior gold hunting watch" offered by Fair President Clagett. According to the Palimpsest, the contest was so exciting the first day that it had to be repeated the second. Miss Belle Turner of Keokuk, "the Lady of the Pink Ribbon, with elegant form, fine face and soft blue eyes," was judged the winner. Total expenditure for staging the first Fair: about \$323.

## ***Early Years***

The second State Fair, in 1855, was also held at Fairfield on a 10-acre tract. Almost 100 visitors used the same admission ticket, slipping it back over the fence so others could enter without paying. The next year, officials adopted a more reliable ticketing system.

The Legislature appropriated \$2,000 in funds to the 1856 Fair

held in Muscatine. Officials exulted in attendance on one day tallying 15,000 people. The 1857 Fair was also held in Muscatine. At the first plowing contest, each of the seven contestants plowed a one-fourth acre land in "old, loose and sandy" soil, turning a furrow at least six inches deep. The shortest time required was 48 minutes and the longest 61 minutes, according to records. Fair officials remarked that "owing to the hardness of the times, the attendance was not so large as was anticipated."



*A young boy grooms his  
Hereford bull for competition.  
(Undated photo.)*

The next two years (1858 and 1859) found the Fair in Oskaloosa. During the plowing match in 1858, the top prize was actually awarded to the slowest plower on the principal that it is "vastly more important that the plowing be well done than that it be speedily done." At the 1859 Fair, officials reduced Friday's admission to 15 cents because "the very numerous permits which had been granted to exhibitors to remove their articles had so thinned out the exhibition, that it

was unjust to charge the same as had been charged when the exhibition was full."

The 1860 and 1861 Fairs were held in Iowa City. Two halls for horticulture and fine arts, each 24 feet by 140 feet, were built on the 25-acre grounds in time for the 1860 event.

The Civil War, at the beginning, had an unsettling effect on the Fair but did not stop it. In 1861, the Johnson County Fairgrounds at Iowa City served as the site of Camp Fremont, occupied by a volunteer company up until three days before the State Fair. The directors resolved to carry on as best they could. Admission was 25 cents for adults and 10 cents for children (ages 6-12). Weather that year was "stormy, wet and disagreeable." The attendance was small and a drastic curtailment of expenditures was necessary. There was not enough



money to pay all the premiums; exhibitors unanimously voted to accept 50 percent of their premiums.

In 1862, only Iowa, Indiana and Ohio held Fairs in what was then considered the Northwest part of the country. Iowa's Fair, held in Dubuque, was extended one day due to rain. The grounds included a number of refreshment stands as well as an amphitheater with seating for 2,500 people. Despite war hardships, the Fair was greatly successful.

At the 1863 Fair, also in Dubuque, special arrangements gave campers "a good, healthy location" near the river, and a "trustworthy guard" was paid to "look after it and preserve order" both day and night. "Do not be afraid to bring your wives and daughters," urged the Secretary. "Parties having ladies in company will receive special consideration from the superintendent of the camp." Entry fees were charged on all classes for the first time.

Burlington hosted the next three Fairs from 1864 to 1866. In 1864, a "circular swing" amusement ride was set up on the grounds in Burlington for \$50. Superintendents were designated by sashes. Fair officials happily noted that there was "no necessity for a single interference on the part of the police to suppress disorderly conduct."

The 1865 Fair featured a "grand cavalcade," including the Burlington Cadets in uniform. The National Merchant, "an advertising paper," published the "Fair Journal," complete with all proceedings pertaining to the Fair.

Heavy rains plagued the 1866 Fair, and daily changes were made to the program. Fair officials even noted a trace of snow one day.



*James Hethershaw had been a State Fair exhibitor for more than 50 years when this photo was taken in 1931.*

At the 1867 Fair in Clinton, permits were issued allowing

concessionaires and their horse teams to deliver goods on the Fairgrounds until 9 a.m.

At the 1868 Fair, also held in Clinton, silver medals were awarded instead of cash to “extraordinary” exhibits. A few stands served “whisky” and beer although sales were prohibited. The Board ordered the stands closed. Each day, 2,000 daily programs were distributed on the grounds at 2 p.m. and in the local newspaper.

Carriages and campers utilized 20 acres of ground adjacent



*A youngster poses with his State Fair entry. (Undated photo.)*

to the Fair in 1869. Keokuk citizens were the first to offer special prizes of “considerable amount.” The Board secretary’s salary rose to \$1500. In 1870, the Board prohibited all games of chance from the grounds in Keokuk. England, France and 15 American states were represented in exhibits.

The following year, the Iowa State Fair and California State Fair exchanged fruit displays. A class for Holstein cattle was established. The Board paid \$450 for the police force to patrol the grounds in Cedar Rapids.

The committee on side shows reported “the remarkable absence of thieves” during the 1872 Fair in Cedar Rapids. An admission fee of 10 cents was charged to horse races held on two days of the Fair. The money was split between the local committee and the Fair. A “ladies salon” was listed as one of the conveniences.

In 1873, long-time Board Secretary J.M. Shaffer retired. The Fair was again held in Cedar Rapids. Camping with teams on the grounds cost \$2 per day (50 cents for each additional person). Babcock Fire Extinguishers tested their equipment in front of the amphitheater. Honorable mentions were given in poultry.

The Fair returned to Keokuk in 1874. The treasurer was asked

to open two or more places in the city to sell tickets. Rain “drowned out the Fair” on the last day. The 1875 Fair, also held in Keokuk, neared bankruptcy and was unable to pay premiums and other expenses.

In 1876, the Fair moved back to Cedar Rapids for the next three years. That year, there were reported “unprecedented rains during the week before the Fair and continuing during the week of the exhibition.” Officials extended the Fair one day due to the downpour. Finances were so reduced that the Agricultural Society borrowed \$5,000 from the City National Bank in Cedar Rapids.

Officials described 1877 as a “great depression of business of all kinds.” Weather was reported as incessant rain, rare sunshine, impassable roads and “unfathomable” mud. A 16-piece band from Marshalltown was paid \$150 to perform. Despite the weather, the 1877 Fair was declared the “most satisfactory and profitable exhibition” in many years.

Handiwork from “girls under fourteen years and of boys under sixteen years” was on display during the 1878 Fair. Officials took a stand on gambling and barred all games of chance from the grounds. They also requested an annual Legislative appropriation of not less than \$2,500. C.L. DeWolf was paid \$200 to ride 20 miles in one hour and five minutes, changing horses every half-mile. He rode the last half-mile with no saddle and bridle, and lassoed a buffalo.

## ***Permanent Home***

After the 1855 Fair, Society President Thomas Clagett declared, “The prosperity of the Society will be greatly promoted by the permanent location of the place of holding the exhibition...the Society must be permanently located in some central position and permanent arrangements made for its accommodation.”

In the years to come, the same idea was voiced on many

occasions and by supporters courageous enough to put the future of the Fair above other considerations. Finally, in 1879, the Fair moved to Des Moines and remained there, although it took six years to persuade the Legislature to appropriate the money. In the meantime, according to historian George Mills, the Fair took place on the west side of Des Moines. Now a residential site, it was then a city park named "Brown's Park," located between 38th Street on the east, 42nd Street on the west, Center Street on the north and Grand Avenue on the south.



*Members of the Keokuk County 4-H Sheep Club pose with their winning entries. (Undated photo.)*

At the first Fair held in Des Moines, the state was divided into three districts for fruit judging, and cattle competition was limited to Iowa cattle. A band-wagon was engaged for two hours each morning (Tuesday through Friday) to play on principal city streets to promote Fair attendance. Officials invited President Hayes to deliver an address. The exclusive right to sell ale, wine, beer, cider, "pop-corn," cigars and tobacco was granted to a concessionaire for \$1,050. The Ladies Aid Society sold lemonade in the amphitheater.

Chariot races were featured at the 1880 Fair. The Fruit and Floral Hall was constructed for \$600, half paid by the Board, half paid by the local committee. Officials declared that "in the ladies' (horseback) race they be required to ride as ladies usually do, i.e., not astride." The Iowa State Agricultural College presented a remarkable display encompassing entomology, botany, veterinary, physics, chemical, mechanical, wood, printing press, zoology and civil engineering.

The Fair was held at its earliest in 1881, on September 5 (opening day) temperatures reached 95 degrees. "Musical prodigy" Little Ella was among the entertainment booked. A

violent windstorm completely demolished the new Fruit and Floral Hall under construction and “unroofed” the entire amphitheater just 26 days prior to the Fair. Officials ejected a man from the grounds “for threatening language to one of the Board.” A pyramid of cheese weighing 1,100 pounds was on display. Officials discussed finding a permanent home in Des Moines.

The 1882 Fair was the first to run eight days, up from five. Large signs stating “No smoking allowed” and “Beware of thieves and pickpockets” were printed and placed in prominent places in exhibition halls. Boys were allowed to sell candy and lemonade in the amphitheater. U.S. Commissioner of Agriculture George B. Loring spoke at opening ceremonies.

Former Fair officials held a reunion during the 1883 Fair. The Board voted to receive proposals for a permanent location. Cattle and poultry entries were the largest ever.



*Sign posted in the Maintenance Department in the 1930s.*

Expert judges on “beef and milk breeds and general classes of cattle” were used for the first time in 1884. The entertainment line-up included a balloon ascension race between a man and a woman, bicycle and tricycle exhibitions and races as well as an “exhibition of Japanese day fire works.” The Legislature appropriated \$50,000 for the purchase of a permanent location on the condition that the same amount be donated “in cash or property” by the city.

The citizens of Des Moines raised the money to match the legislature’s so the Board purchased 262.91 acres of land from Calvin Thornton for \$175 per acre. An additional three acres were purchased for \$1,000. Great debate ensued over the size of the track, whether it should be one-half mile or one-mile. When additional appropriations were not granted, the track



was made one-half mile. In 1885, Fair officials declared that “special grounds be designated for camping purposes within the Fairgrounds free of charge.” The Fair joined the International Association of Fairs and Expositions for \$20.



*In 1911, some visitors arrived in cars while others still relied on horses and buggies to reach the Fairgrounds.*

A historian of the times wrote, “There is doubtless no more beautiful site for the Fair in the U.S. Situated about two miles east of the state capitol, it rises from the plain in a beautiful and slightly eminence from which the country for miles to the west, northwest and southwest stretches out before the view.” Iowa was the sec-

ond state in the Northwest to acquire a permanent home for its fair. Several waited until the next decade.

The new grounds on the east side of Des Moines, stretching between University and Dean Avenues from East 30th to East 36th Street, were dedicated on September 7, 1886, with addresses by Governor Larabee and other notables. When the Board purchased the land there were four buildings. By Fairtime, the Society had erected 54 buildings, including Pioneer Hall, which is still used today, and private parties had constructed eight buildings. Officials leased two board fences for advertising purposes. The Women’s Christian Temperance Union and Western Union Telegraph Company were among the exhibitors. About 10,000 people attended a Sunday church service.

In 1887, the Board commissioned 1,500 trees planted at the cost of \$330 – that’s 22 cents per tree! The Horticultural Society was given 10 acres for an arboretum. The minister was detained by a storm so no sermon was given at church services. Officials were thrilled at 30,000 in attendance on one day.

A band tournament offering \$250 for first place and a best “base ball” amateur class offering \$200 for the top prize were both held at the 1888 Fair. Sidewalks from Grand Avenue to Walnut Street were completed as well as one new horse barn. Five more company buildings were constructed and a 32-foot by 36-foot addition was finished for the Dairy Barn. A log cabin built near Des Moines in 1835 was placed on the grounds. Receipts were greater than any other state fair except Minnesota, and premiums offered were more than any other agriculture society’s.

The first “Seni-om-sed” (Des Moines spelled backwards) celebration, a forerunner of the annual parade which kicks off each Fair, was held in Des Moines around Fairtime in 1889. There were 86 floats in the parade. Axtell, the famous horse who set a world record for trotting, was on display in a glass house (the horse was owned by an Iowan). Polk County added a headquarters building on the grounds which is now the Ralph H. Deets Historical Museum. Fair officials allowed horse races to be held on the grounds in June and July as part of a circuit. The Fair closed with a surplus of \$10,000.

All the leading newspapers had tents on “newspaper row” during the 1890 Fair. There were three courts of tennis tournaments. A division fence was built in the Campgrounds “to prevent any stampede of horses among the campers.” The largest crowd up to that point – 50,000 – attended on September 3. Electric light was used at night for the cost of \$3 per lamp post. A landscape architect was hired to furnish plans for “parks, roadways and walks” as well as locations for new buildings.

Evening devotional services were held for the first time in 1891. A pavilion was constructed for band usage. There was an exhibition of gymnastic drills. Carrie Lane Chapman Catt



*This unidentified boy likely enjoyed “Children’s Day” activities at the Fair. (Undated photo.)*

delivered an address on women's suffrage. A dozen new buildings were erected, the Dairy Hall doubled in size, the Agricultural Hall increased by one-third and 600 electric lights were installed. An electric light plant was purchased for \$4,860.

Three two-story hotels were built on the Fairgrounds in time for the 1892 Fair. The amphitheater was destroyed during a summer storm; two new ones were built by Fairtime. The Des Moines Producer's Hall, featuring local businesses, was dedicated. Officials remarked the "weather was perfect." The fastest mile ever trotted on a half-mile track was accomplished. Fairgoers marveled at three balloon ascensions, including parachute leaps by a man and a dog. The Society requested money from the Legislature in order to purchase land for a one-mile racetrack.

After much debate, Fair officials determined to hold a Fair in 1893 despite the World's Fair being held in Chicago. The "Fall of Pompeii" fireworks spectacular replaced the Seni-om-sed celebration. The Fair featured a dairy display by Professor H.C. Wallace and his assistants from the State Agriculture College. A contortionist, trapeze artists and elk races entertained Fairgoers. Unfortunately, the Fair finished the year \$25,000 in debt.

A combination of poor crops, bad weather and hard times ruined the Fair in 1894 and only specific guarantees from the city of Des Moines made it possible to open the gates the following fall. Miss Lillian Cooly (claimed to be the champion rifle and revolver shot of the world) gave exhibitions of her skill with the revolver and gun in front of the Grandstand each day, shooting a ball through a lemon placed upon her companion's head during the 1894 Fair. Other entertainment included a man fired from a cannon.

Two days of bicycle races and offering prizes valued at \$800 took place at the 1895 Fair. Participants, all 600 of them, paraded through Des Moines. Great Western was granted the privilege of erecting a miniature railway to be used in operation during the Fair. Professor K.P. Speedy's high-dive into a barrel



*The aftermath of the collision of "Gold Bug" and "Silver Bug" in 1896.*

40 feet below was proclaimed as "the most daring feat ever witnessed on the Iowa State Fairgrounds."

In 1896, the first of three railway locomotive collisions was staged at the Fairgrounds. Many Fairgoers (estimated attendance was 50-60,000) watched from building roofs near the Grandstand.

Many Indian tribes stayed in an area called "Indian Village" during the 1897 Fair. Chief Black Hawk attended the Fair. Dr. Carver's diving horse was a main attraction.

No Fair was held in 1898 due to the Trans Mississippi and International Expo in Omaha, and Fair buildings were used by the military during the Spanish-American War.

In 1899, entry fees were abolished, except from money winners and winners in the speed department (horses). Winners paid the Fair 10 percent of premiums won.

## ***Fair Board Created***

In 1900, management of the Fair by the State Agricultural Society was superseded by a Board of Agriculture. In 1923, the Iowa General Assembly created the Department of Agriculture as well as a separate State Fair Board to manage the State Fair.

Originally the Board consisted of the Governor, the Secretary of Agriculture, the president of Iowa State University, one elected director from each of six Congressional Districts, three at-large directors, plus a secretary/manager and treasurer elected by the Board.

Following redistricting in 1991, this was modified to include two directors from each of five Districts, with no at-large members. Due to a State of Iowa Code change in 2002, delegates of six geographic State Fair Board districts elected two Board members each, increasing the number of State Fair Board Directors from 10 to 12.

Still in operation, the Board gathers at a convention each December to elect directors. Delegates from Iowa's county fairs elect Board members.

By statute, the Fair Board is the custodian of the Fairgrounds and is charged with the management of the annual Fair. The secretary-manager takes direct charge. The law provides that all operating expenses, maintenance, etc., shall be paid out of the Fair's receipts unless there is a special appropriation made by the Legislature.

Special appropriations have been made since 1902 by the General Assembly for the construction of permanent buildings, purchase of additional land and grounds improvement. Tax money has never been used for salaries, amusements or operating expense. The title to the Fairgrounds and all property belongs to the state.

## ***Early 1900s***

Horse racing had become an established institution before 1900 but not without protests from those who felt sporting events should not be part of agricultural expositions. By 1900 the overwhelming demand for this type of event overcame all opposition, and Iowa's Fair joined the racing circuits. It was during the "New Prosperity" era (1902-1908) that



special thrill events became a regular Fair feature. Early special attractions included high-diving horses, wire-walking and feats of marksmanship. Re-enactments of wartime battles and historical plays and pageants were also offered.

Electricity was installed in buildings in 1900. No other light source except bulbs was to be used. Seat backs were installed in the amphitheater.

Dust was so deep at the 1901 Fair that officials found it nearly impossible to keep it down. Calls for improvements on the grounds were made including erecting better buildings, installing sewers and paving sidewalks and streets.

In 1902, the Livestock Pavilion, which still stands today, was built in less than four months at a cost of \$45,000. (The Iowa Legislature appropriated \$37,000.) Fair officials noted that “Wednesday was a record-breaker and more money was taken in on that day than on any other day in the previous history of the society.” Nearly a mile of brick sidewalks was laid.



*Judges survey a line-up of cattle in the Pavilion. (Undated photo.)*

A \$200 Iowa State College scholarship was awarded for the first time at the 1903 Fair. Ellis Rail of Birmingham was the worthy recipient. Fair officials remarked that, “Probably no state fair was ever held under more adverse weather conditions, and the financial showing we are now able to make is all the more remarkable for it.”

In 1904, Fair officials called for the Agriculture Building to be erected for the next year’s Fair. The building is still used today. Camping tents were available to rent and, if ordered ahead, could be pitched and ready for Fairgoers on arrival at the 1905 Fair. An “imposing entrance” of a \$400 iron gate was built at

Grand Avenue. Registering turnstiles were installed at all entrances. Capt. J.W. O'Donnell of the O'Donnell Fireworks Co. was contracted to stage the "Siege of Port Arthur."

Attendance at the 1906 Fair (188,000) increased 22 per-cent over the previous Fair. Nearly \$14,000 was spent on "amusements." Fair officials adopted the policy of erecting nothing but permanent brick and fireproof buildings in so far as possible. "Men refused to believe their eyes and children stood in amazement" while an airship "winged its flight from the state Fair-



*The interior of the Agriculture Building.  
(Undated photo.)*

grounds to the Capitol and back again," according to reports of the time. About 5,000 people enjoyed the shady groves of the Campgrounds during the Fair.

Improvements for the 1907 Fair included the Swine Pavilion (erected at a cost of \$77,000), Horse Barn, water works and electrical light plant. Ninety counties were represented by exhibits. Twenty-four fire hydrants were installed. The first section of the proposed Horse Barn was built at a cost of \$10,500. More than 1,200 exhibitors covered 60 acres with machinery displays. The Swine and Horse Barns are still used today.

Long before her ill-fated flight, Amelia Earhart visited the Fair in 1908 and saw her first airplane. She reportedly was not impressed with the "thing made of wood and wire." The Administration Building was constructed and work on the second section of the Horse Barn started. The Fair opened on a Wednesday instead of the usual Friday. Many within driving distance of Des Moines came in covered wagons and brought their own tents to camp.

Some 900 tons of steel and vast amounts of cement and stone went into building the Grandstand in 1909 with \$100,000 from the Legislature. The structure is still used today. Wireless telegraphing flashed messages across the Fairgrounds and motorcycle races were held for the first time. Iowa women rallied for the right to vote. Fair admission cost 50 cents.

Entertainment in 1910 featured John C. Weber's "Prize Band of America" with soprano soloist Blanche Mehaffey. With the help of Des Moines' Free Information Bureau, "There was no need of any one paying more than one dollar per bed or fifty cents per person per night for as good accommodations as he would have at home" while in town for the Fair.

The Wright Brothers were under contract for four airplane flights per day during the 1911 Fair. Church ladies opened a day nursery in the Women's Rest Cottage so mothers could thoroughly enjoy the Fair by leaving their children in good hands. The Baby Health Contest began. Machinery Hall, the 5.5 acre building now known as the Varied Industries Building, was constructed. J.K. Daniels sculpted the Fair's first butter cow, an ongoing tradition that would become an Iowa State Fair icon.



*The interior of the Varied Industries Building.  
(Undated photo.)*

Three aviators in the air at the same time, each with a different kind of machine (Wright and Curtis biplanes and a Nieuport monoplane), were promised in 1912. Work on the new \$25,000 Horse Barn progressed rapidly. A new streetcar entrance was unveiled and bleacher seats erected in front of the racetrack doubled seating capacity.

A 10-acre state fish and game preserve was new in 1913. Premiums offered totaled \$76,000, the largest in history, with

\$25 awarded to the best peck of potatoes. "Old Mexico-1847" with 300 performers was the big fireworks show, preceded by a ballet of 50 dancing girls, Apex "The Man Up the Pole," the beautiful Jordan girls, the posing Loretas and the famous Delino Troupe. Cut flowers went on display every day of the Fair for the first time.

Built in time for the 1914 Fair, the massive Women's and Children Building was considered architecturally ahead of anything ever before erected on the Fairgrounds. The building was torn down in 1980 due to disrepair when the damage had progressed so far that it became impractical to restore.

Steeplechase, auto polo, racing hounds and trick mules were booked as entertainment, as well as famous aviator Lincoln Beachey who amazed crowds with flying

speeds up to 240 mph. In the Campgrounds a three-room family tent with room for a family of four could be rented for \$7.50 for the entire run of the Fair; two double cots cost an additional \$2. The new Cattle Barn, accommodating 108 head, was also constructed, and is still used today.



*Two people survey the construction of the Cattle Barn. (Undated photo.)*

Funds for a complete sewer system estimated to cost \$14,000 and a long-wanted sheep pavilion were appropriated by the Legislature in 1915. The pavilion is still used today. Thaviu's Band and Operatic Octet, fresh from the San Francisco Exposition, starred in the amphitheater. Other entertainment included the famous Japanese Namba Family acrobatic troupe as well as Cora Youngblood Corson's Premier Instrumentalists who delighted Fair visitors with novel musical numbers. A roller coaster was constructed; however, it was removed in 1949 due to rotting timbers.

In 1916, aviator Ruth Law performed three flights each day

of the Fair. During her night flight, she was accompanied by a brilliant trail of colored lights. Miss Elfrieda Mais was the first woman to drive a racing car at the Fair. For the first time, lawns were mowed on the Fairgrounds using 300 sheep at a cost of \$600. 4-H Baby Beef shows and judging began.

The new Sheep Barn, housing the largest sheep exposition of the time, was one of the main attractions at the 1917 Fair. The Hankinson Auto Polo Team entertained Fairgoers. However, officials noted “probably no other feature of the fair furnished such universal enjoyment as the music.” Once filled with buggies, horse drawn vehicles and other farm wagons, Machinery Hall was now filled with farm trucks, trailers and accessories in endless array. The auto show, made up of 1918 models and all the leading makes of pleasure cars, occupied “the large show room under the grandstand and temporary annex built along the south side of this room.” Nearly 32,000 cars were recorded as being on the grounds.

“From beginning to end the spirit of patriotism was in evidence,” officials remarked of the 1918 Fair. “The various exhibits and demonstrations in the line of food conservation were proof that the people of Iowa appreciate the (wartime) situation.” There were no buggies or carriages in the machinery exhibits. Cement floors were laid in the aisles of Machinery and Power Halls. A style show emphasizing “Conservation in Buying” was held every afternoon in the auditorium of the Women and Children’s Building. “Silo Town,” consisting of a dozen or more silos, was built to call attention to the government’s food conservation campaign.

## ***1919-1929***

The “Victory Fair” in 1919 was the largest Fair to date and featured the theme “Food Won the War.” Because Des Moines hotels could not accommodate the greatly increased number of Fairgoers (408,147), 100 acres were turned into Campgrounds. (The Fair’s Campgrounds now boast 160 acres and 2,300 spaces.) The Legislature appropriated \$54,000 for the purchase of 41 acres to the north of the Grandstand. Officials



noted "inasmuch as the war was over a greater portion of the boys had returned" so that the Fair was held under most favorable conditions.

The Cattle Barn and Sale Pavilion (now the Penningroth Media Center), still used today, were completed for the 1920 Fair. Judges pronounced them "practically ideal." Attendance for evening Grandstand performances was above 12,000 for most events. "One of the outstanding features of the machinery exhibit was the motor-driven and motor-drawn vehicle and implements," officials remarked.

"Work and Prosper" was the theme of the 1921 Fair. Fairgoers could spend hours marveling at exhibits, lectures and demonstrations in the Women and Children's Building and still not see all that was offered. Items of interest ranged from a proper nutrition class to instruction on how to freshen up hat trimmings. Entertainment highlights included an auto to airplane transfer by Ruth Law, balloon races and hippodrome shows.



*A view of the Grand Concourse. (Undated photo.)*

More than 550 babies entered the Baby Health Contest in 1922. Judging was started a day earlier in order to complete the competition on schedule. The contest, which weighed, measured and closely examined children before determining the "most perfect winners" continued until about 1951. Miss Bonnie Murray of Sioux City was chosen the most beautiful girl in Iowa from among more than 6,200 young ladies. The National Horseshoe Pitching Tournament lasted several days. Gate admission was reduced from 75 cents to 50 cents. Two locomotives traveling at 10 mph crashed into each other in the second staged train wreck at the Grandstand. The Floriculture Department was discontinued due to building disrepair.

Rain on six of the eight days of the 1923 Fair deterred visitors. The new Baby Beef Barn (now part of the Sheep Barn) provided housing for more than 500 head, the largest display of baby beeves ever assembled by the Iowa Boys and Girls Clubs. For the first time in history, the “exact pulling power of a team of horses could be measured accurately and scientifically with the newly invented ‘horse power dynamometer’ perfected by the Engineering Department of the Iowa State College in Ames,” officials noted. A new feature was added to the program in front of the Grandstand: the “Loud Speaker.” The big attraction was the “Tokyo” fireworks display depicting the 1923 earthquake.



*Baby Beeves Parade at the 1923 Fair.*

The 1924 Fair was known as the 70th anniversary jubilee, marking seven decades since the first Fair. Mr. J.S. Shepherd and Mrs. Eliza G. Rhodes were honored as the oldest man and woman who had attended the 1854 Fair. A motion picture of the jubilee was taken and available free of charge to Farm Bureau meetings, county institutions and like events. An American Kennel Club recognized pedigreed dog show was held for the first time. A new “electrolier” street lighting system was used on Grand and Rock Island Avenues to make them almost as bright as day. The newly-constructed 15,000-square-foot balcony in the Agriculture Building was used for a dairy exhibit. More than 500,000 gladiolus blooms were on display in one of the largest shows ever in the U.S.

Two world records were established in draft horse team pulling in 1925. Overall attendance records were broken during the 10-day run, attracting nearly 408,000 visitors, almost one-sixth of the entire state population. Nearly \$24,000 was spent on advertising. Admission was 75 cents. More than 100 people entered the new fiddlers’ contest. (This contest continues today.) However, high heat and hot sun kept spectators out

of the Grandstand. As a result of the national recognition the Fair had been receiving, the Iowa State Fair became the Iowa State Fair and National Livestock Show.

A notable feature of the 1926 Fair's livestock show was the large number of new herds; fully 25 percent of exhibitors were first-timers. More than 450 babies were scored and given thorough health examinations during the popular Baby Health Contest. The Hog Calling contest debuted. While receipts fell somewhat from the year before because of heavy rain, \$19,000 in revenue was still tallied.



*Hog callers at the 1927 Fair.*

Ten days of perfect weather made 1927 the most successful in the Fair's 73-year history. The addition of the Education Building to the Grandstand was a great attraction with its second floor art gallery and 90,000 square feet of exhibits. Today, these additions are

known as Shoppers' Mart and the Halls of Law and Flame. Special grounds exhibits of radios, farm refrigerators, milking machines, hen houses, washing machines and scores of other modern conveniences were powerful attractions. Colonels Charles Lindbergh and Clarence Chamberlin visited the Fair in 1927, following their Atlantic triumphs. John Philip Sousa's famous band attracted the largest Sunday throng in the history of the Fair.

More than 15,000 people paid to see the Fair's first aircraft show in 1928, held in a 90 by 300-foot tent. The outstanding feature was the famous Lockheed-Vega, which Captain Sir George Wilkins and Lieutenant Ben Eielson had flown across the North Pole the spring before. The fireworks spectacular illustrated "A Night in Baghdad," thrilling Grandstand audiences. While the Fair was successful overall, bad weather and the lateness of the threshing season slowed attendance.

The year 1929 marked the Fair's Diamond Jubilee (75 years), the biggest Fair up to that time. All previous records in attendance, financial returns and exhibits were broken. A new \$60,000 addition to the Horse Barn (originally started in 1914) was rushed to completion. A pageant of transportation beginning with Native Americans using horses and dragging poles (travois), prairie schooners, wagons made before the era of springs, stagecoaches and ox carts continued all the way to modern autos and aircraft. The first statewide woodchopping contest was held. More than 15,000 Iowa boys and girls contributed nickels and dimes to purchase a baby elephant in cooperation with *The Des Moines Register and Tribune* and the Fair. The pachyderm was christened Baby Mine on Children's Day.



*Baby Mine with handlers.  
(Undated photo.)*

## ***Great Depression***

The period of 1930-1935 was a time of retrenchment, as the Great Depression and destructive droughts reduced attendance and revenue.

Eleven different bands, orchestras and drum corps furnished music for the 1930 Fair. Among them was the Iowa Rural School Chorus comprised of more than 4,000 children from rural schools in nearly 70 counties. The first statewide checkers tournament was held. Despite the depression and other adverse conditions, the Fair made a profit.

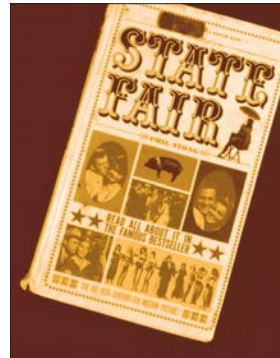
An exhibition of an autogiro (airplane with windmill-like blades rotating above the fuselage) was considered a major entertainment draw at the 1931 Fair. The machine was the first of its kind to be exhibited and flown in the state. In response to widespread demand, a new modern shower bath facility was built in the Campgrounds. It was "a most valuable addition to

the Fair's accommodations," campers remarked. An aerial accident killed some people on the grounds when a performing plane crashed into a parking lot.

In 1932, the machinery and farm equipment show featured the first complete television show ever held in Iowa. Thousands of feet of scenes for the motion picture version of Phil Stong's novel, *State Fair*, were filmed during eight days at the Fair. A head-on locomotive collision (the third in Fair history) topped the "Thrill Day" program. All the leading newsreel companies covered the train crash, and films depicting the wreck were shown in theaters around the world.

The introduction of night horse racing on an illuminated track – the first to be seen in the Midwest – was a successful feature of the 1933 Fair. A rodeo and Wild West Stampede also debuted. Officials commented the Fair was the most successful since 1931.

Extensive improvements – from reroofing the Cattle Barn to building a storm sewer on Dean Avenue – heralded the 1934 Fair. A five-day program of harness and running horse races offered more than \$12,500 in premiums. Forty additional acres were added to the Campgrounds, increasing the total to 160 acres and making it the largest of its kind in the U.S. Because of widespread demand, Baby Mine, the Fair's elephant, toured county and district fairs.



*A copy of Phil Stong's novel State Fair. (Undated photo.)*

The 1935 Fair welcomed the famous "Festival of Light" direct from the Chicago World's Fair, combining fireworks, smoke clouds and huge marine searchlights in a spectacular evening show. Total premiums rose \$22,000 because of "better times" ahead for Iowa. New features included a Sunday horse show, the first statewide amateur baseball tournament, plus a thrilling "bat-winged" airplane daredevil jumping from a height of 8,000 feet. Lighting on the racetrack was boosted 50 percent,

making it the best-illuminated in the Midwest. An FHA model home, designed to be built anywhere for under \$3,000, was a main attraction in the Varied Industries Building.

The 1936 Fair boasted a search for “the most beautiful girl in Iowa” to compete as Miss Iowa in the Miss America pageant later that year. Carol Bailey of Waterloo beat out 200 other contestants to take the title. The new \$100,000 Swine Barn addition proceeded rapidly. The famous Karl L. King Band headed the list of more than 20 bands playing at the Fair. Photographs were displayed in the Arts Salon for the first time. Camping trailers began to replace traditional tents in the Campgrounds. While heavy rains over three days and a visit to Des Moines from President Roosevelt cut into Fair attendance, a surplus of approximately \$10,000 was earned.

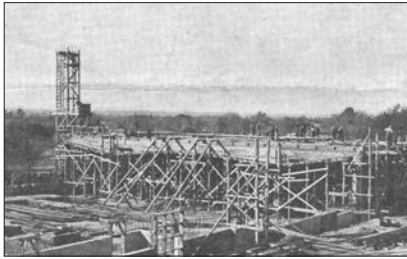
More than 200 Iowa young ladies, all wearing wedding gowns handed down from earlier generations, competed in a statewide Bridal Beauty Contest at the 1937 Fair. Plans to build a new Poultry Industries Building (now the 4-H Exhibits Building) were announced. Approximately 60,000 spectators watched in awe as Captain F.F. Frakes crashed a speeding airplane into a house climaxing “Thrill Day.” Frakes barely escaped law enforcement authorities trying to arrest him for his daring feat. Europe’s most renowned knife-thrower hurled knives at his partner who was strapped to the face of a revolving drum. Attendance was the third-largest in Fair history.

The 1938 Fair celebrated the Territorial Centennial of the state with many special exhibits including “Homes of the Century.” Chuck wagon, wild horse and Roman standing races were added to the rodeo line-up. WHO Radio opened its Crystal Studio in the Varied Industries Building, while the Iowa Network (KRNT, KMA, KSO and WMT) announced plans for their own broadcast studio. Auto speed star Floyd Roberts – fresh from his win at the Indianapolis Speedway – made several personal appearances. Some 6,000 entries filled the new poultry building.

In 1939, the former Baby Beef Barn and the Sheep Barn were



combined under one roof to create the newly-enlarged (235 feet by 620 feet) 4-H Exhibits Building, totaling three acres of exhibit space. New events included window garden and bird-bath planting classes. Hollywood glamour star Susan Hayward visited to personally pick "Iowa's Queen of the Redheads," a contest open to the state's red-haired girls ages 16-26. Margaret Leeper of Waterloo won a trip to tinsel town and a screen test. A mammoth mural depicting the history of agriculture was dedicated after more than a year of continuous painting by Public Works Administration artists.



*The Youth Inn under construction,  
October 1940.*

## ***Wartime***

Work on a new \$137,000 4-H Club Dormitory (now the Youth Inn), a joint project of the Iowa Legislature and the Works Progress Administration (WPA), began in 1940.

The Fair's half-mile dirt track, billed as the greatest of its

type in America, hosted 60 top drivers including Gus Schrader, Emory Collins, Ben Shaw and Jimmie Wilburn competing for the world title. The seating capacity of the Grandstand was enlarged to provide room for more than 25,000 spectators at each performance. Famed trumpeter Louis Armstrong entertained. Record premiums were offered in open and 4-H cattle shows.

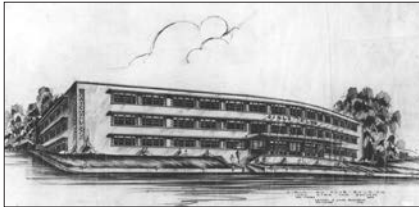
Daredevil Captain F.F. Frakes, who had crashed an airplane into a house four years earlier, returned to the 1941 Fair to drive his car at 60 mph into a specially-constructed house loaded with dynamite charges and set afire. A huge victory arch built at the main gate struck the patriotic keynote of the exposition, which also featured an extensive national defense exhibit plus special events promoting "Bundles for Britain." The tall corn contest debuted and was won by a stalk 23 feet, 2.5 inches tall. Other new contests included an Iowa Quiz Derby for teams of schoolchildren and Iowa's first statewide Farmers' Horseshoe Pitching Tournament. The Fair ended

with a \$75,000 surplus, which was put into a “cushion fund” for future fairs. Lloyd B. Cunningham succeeded Arthur R. Corey as secretary/manager.

The Fair became a wartime casualty in 1942 when the Board turned its many fireproof buildings over to the Army Air Corps at a token rental to be used as a supply depot. Even plans for a limited 4-H Fair were canceled in the interest of gasoline and tire conservation. This was only the second time the Fair had been cancelled; the previous omission was in 1898 because of the World’s Fair in Omaha as well as the Spanish-American War. No Fairs were held 1943-45 either.

After World War II ended, Iowa’s 1946 Centennial celebration provided an ideal theme for the renewal of the Fair. Noteworthy among the exhibits was a display of the nation’s aerial might, plus other weapons and armaments that had helped gain victory for the American Allied Forces. The G.I. Farm Family contest debuted, designed to honor Iowa’s outstanding veteran farm family.

For the first time, the Fair passed the half-million mark despite adverse weather conditions. The event also resulted in the largest profit. The 1947 Fair marked the first full showing of machinery since the end of World War II. Attendance – 514,036 – was the second highest in Fair history.



*An undated architect's sketch of the Girl's 4-H Dormitory (now the Cultural Center).*

Attendance fell in 1948, largely due to Fair dates

overlapping with the opening of the school year in many communities. The Fair was held Aug. 25 - Sept. 3.

Livestock exhibited in 1949 reached a new record of 7,107 head. For the first time international recognition was given through the U.S. Department of State's Information Service. With operation in 70 foreign countries the department featured the Fair “as a typical American enterprise” and used it “to interpret life in the U.S. through illustrated articles and pictures.”

The new Girls' 4-H Dormitory (now the Patty and Jim Cownie Cultural Center) was dedicated during the 1950 Fair. The building was paid for entirely from Fair earnings, without any appropriation from the state. The livestock show, called "the backbone of the State Fair," reached a new record of 7,113 head of horses, cattle, swine and sheep.

## ***10-Day Fair***

Increased interest in the Fair in 1951 led to its expansion to 10 days rather than the usual eight. The Fair was hailed as a success and the decision was made to stay at a 10-day event. (The 10-day Fairs continued until 1975.) Attendance reached an all-time high of 543,461.



*A crowd of people enjoy the 1952 Fair.*

Attendance at the 1952 Fair dropped approximately 32,000 under the previous year. Officials contributed the decline to the severe polio epidemic and two days of rain. The swine show was limited to Iowa exhibitors because of a widespread outbreak of animal disease; despite this handicap, the entry list was one of the largest in history.

Night auto racing was successfully introduced at the 1953 Fair. Commercial exhibit space was filled to capacity with demand exceeding supply. The title "America's Greatest Livestock Fair" was used to describe the event.

The Fair marked its centennial in 1954. A horse caravan consisting of 509 people, 471 horses and 40 covered wagons traveled from Fairfield (the location of the first Fair) to the Fairgrounds in Des Moines to officially open the Fair. President Dwight D. Eisenhower and former President Herbert Hoover visited as well. A 20-foot time capsule,



*President Dwight D. Eisenhower and former President Herbert Hoover meet with 4-H members during the 1954 Fair.*

called the Centurlon, was erected. The collection inside will give Fairgoers in 2054 a good look at Iowa life a century ago.

The 1955 Fair, following the gala centennial celebration the year before, reverted to normal in many respects. Attendance dropped to 505,050. Livestock entries increased; more than 550 horses and ponies were entered in the night horse show, the largest ever. Both 4-H and FFA set entry records as well. Premiums paid reached a new high of \$196,023.

The 1956 Fair, held during a drought period, resulted in a lower-than-normal attendance of 456,828. The Family Center (now the Maytag Family Theaters) was constructed.

The 1957 Fair was held during a year of above-average rainfall. Attendance was 432,521. The 100th Fair was held in 1958. The horse show that year included a sidesaddle class (13 entries) and a Gentleman's Driving Class.

Roy Rogers appeared in the Grandstand in 1959. Bill Riley's Talent Search debuted. This long-running talent show, featuring young Iowans age 2 to 21, is one of the enduring trademarks of the Iowa State Fair. In 1996, after 50 Fairs and 37 Fair Talent Shows, Riley retired. The show continues with Bill Riley Jr. as the host. Bill Riley Sr., known affectionately as "Mr. State Fair," celebrated his 60th Fair in 2006. He passed away the following December.

## ***The 1960s: "Heritage Fairs"***

In 1960, new additions included free acts on the Plaza Stage (now the Anne and Bill Riley Stage), major exhibits open until 9 p.m. and new entertainment features. Norma "Duffy" Lyon took over sculpting the butter cow, the third person and first woman to do so. (She retired in 2006.)

The Fair of 1961 marked the return of major machinery exhibitors housed in a tent. In 1962, Kenneth Fulk, working with the newly-created Iowa Agricultural Marketing Division, was named secretary/manager.

For the first time, Grand Avenue was closed to traffic and transformed into the “Grand Concourse” for the 1963 Fair. More than 60 high school bands played and paraded on the street. Other firsts included the 4-H Saddle Horse and Pony Show, pony pulling, free tent camping and a main gate sign proclaiming “The Finest from Farm and Factory.” A small train transported Fairgoers around the grounds for a nominal fee. The Greater Des Moines Chamber of Commerce presented a citation to the family that earned the most blue ribbons in county and state fairs during the previous year. A video taken at the Fair was shown to Latin American theater audiences.



*Duffy Lyon sculpting her first butter cow in 1960.*

In 1964, the Clearfield Lions began providing shuttle buses between the Campgrounds and Fairgrounds. The first State Fair Queen pageant, in its current form, was held.

A new focus on Iowa's history in 1965 led to major additions in Heritage Village each year, starting with two wickiups on display. Andy Williams (of Wall Lake, Iowa) performed for five nights in the Grandstand. The Osmond Brothers also appeared with him. Connie Shafar of Taylor County was named State Fair Queen. The International Motor Contest Association celebrated its 50th anniversary.

A replica of one of the Fort Madison Blockhouses and a totem pole were added to Heritage Village for the 1966 Fair. International college students in native dress staffed the International Palace, featuring cuisine and art from around the world. Midget car races were added to the racing lineup for the first time. “Gold circle” seating was introduced in the Grandstand. Lawrence Welk performed six shows in the Grandstand. A parade was held the day before the Fair started. The Baby Beef Show celebrated its 50th anniversary. For

the first time the Fair grossed more than \$1 million.

A \$125,000 model home was added to the grounds, complete with a swimming pool, for the 1967 Fair. It would later become the manager's residence. An exact replica of the first church ever built in Iowa was added to Heritage Village. The Talent Search Champion was awarded a 1967 Ford Mustang. Despite mile-long traffic jams to enter the grounds, attendance topped 600,000.

Bob Hope, Eddie Arnold, John Davidson and the world-famous pianist Liberace performed in the Grandstand during the 1968 Fair. As a tribute to the one-room country schools that made Iowa a national leader in educating its children, the North Lincoln Country School, then located southeast of Indianola, was donated to Heritage Village. The school remains furnished just as it was in the late 1800s, with a wood-burning stove, desks fastened to the floor and a recitation bench. An all-time high \$236,509 was offered in premiums. New offerings included a Dairy Goat Show, a newly-constructed Dairy Parlor, a "Hall of Law Enforcement," plus cookie and cake decorating demonstrations. Despite two days of rain and five days of "excessively hot" and humid weather, attendance reached 561,267.

The "Casa De Redondo" modern fiberglass home was a popular attraction at the 1969 Fair. A Herbert Hoover birthplace exhibit also drew large crowds. The "Dog Style Show," "Kiddie Cattle Capers" and a zebra hitch were all new. Master Jack's and Steer and Stein both replaced their concession tents with permanent structures. Pioneer Hall's Iowa Museum of Agriculture opened to the public, displaying half an acre of Iowa artifacts.

## ***The 1970s: "Discovery Fairs"***

The theme for the 1970 Fair, "Discover Iowa," challenged all Iowans to discover what their great state had to offer in the way of business, industry, agriculture and entertainment.



Several successful firsts occurred during the 1970 Fair including a wild animal petting zoo, demolition derby and a star – Ken Curtis “Festus” of TV’s Gunsmoke – performing in the rodeo. Lawrence Welk made a return Grandstand performance, along with Engelbert Humperdinck, Red Skelton and Johnny Cash. The Fair hosted the spectacular National Championship Hot Air Balloon Races. The Iowa Arts Council sponsored the first statewide arts festival held during the Fair. Record prices were paid for the 4-H market lamb and steer. Total attendance set a record when more than 665,000 people passed through the admission gates.

A Mexican folkloric show (“an outstanding group of Mariachis flown in from Mexico”), a Mexican market and representatives from the Mexican National Tourist Council highlighted the 1971 Fair theme “Discover Mexico.” The Carpenters, Glen Campbell, Charley Pride and The Jackson Five performed in the Grandstand to huge crowds.

Sonny and Cher attracted the largest Grandstand crowd – 26,200 concertgoers in two shows – at the 1972 Fair. Their record still stands! Other Grandstand performers included Bob Hope, Paul Anka and Bill Cosby. The theme, “Discover Canada,” provided Fairgoers the opportunity to “know their northern neighbors better,” officials noted. While the Fair ended with a small profit, it was not enough to cover repairs and basic improvements made prior to the Fair.

The 1973 “Discover Hawaii” Fair grossed \$1,602,267 and was the most profitable in history, netting \$286,605. Fairgoers admired paintings of the U.S. Army Exhibit of the Pacific in the Hawaiian Village. Special shows included Zulu, a Hawaiian television and nightclub performer. The Grand Champion Barrow was presented to the people of Hawaii as a goodwill gesture to be used for an Iowa luau in Hawaii. Grandfather’s Farm, an authentic basement barn and part of the original farmstead, opened to the public for the first time and proved quite popular. Stocked with baby animals, it was the perfect setting for antique farm machinery displays during the Fair.

Less than a decade later, the barn would be forced to close due to safety concerns; the barn was completely restored and re-opened to the public in 1994. Elton John performed in the Grandstand. Some 15 acres of land were purchased for additional parking; University Avenue frontage was expanded 800 feet.

A three-year series of Fair themes began in 1974 with “The Discoverers,” honoring Christopher Columbus and the land of his birth (Italy) and the country for which he sailed (Spain). The series, commemorating 200 years of American history, ended at the 1976 Fair which celebrated the nation’s bicentennial. New improvements and features included the Spanish Plaza, Italian Villa, Plaza Bandstand Stage (now the Anne and Bill Riley Stage) and a new Campgrounds entrance. Heritage Village was officially “opened” by Governor Robert Ray as part of “Heritage Week” held in April. Art, photography, crafts and hobbies were all moved to the former Women’s and Children’s Building.

A new Grandstand record was set when Chicago grossed \$129,260 – more than any single show in the history of all fairs in the United States and Canada at that time. Other Grandstand crowd-pleasers included Charlie Rich, Redd Foxx and Academy Award-winner Liza Minelli.

“The Colonizers” Fair in 1975 featured the British Isles and presented an exciting British premiere show, including contemporary English singers and artists, authentic folk dancers and a town crier. President Gerald Ford spoke to a crowd of more than 10,000 in the Grandstand. The new Sky Glider gave nearly 100,000 people a chance to see the Fair from the air. Thousands walked the new Avenue of Breeds in the Cattle Barn. A new Machine Arena gave exhibitors the opportunity to pur-



*A man hangs a banner promoting the Fair in downtown Des Moines.  
(Undated photo.)*

chase time to demonstrate machinery in a 1,000-seat arena.

## ***1976-1979***



*The quarter-mile-long Skyglider has been a favorite attraction since its addition in 1975. A second Skyglider was added in 2003.*

The 1976 Fair, themed “The Spirit of Iowa ’76,” ran 12 days in honor of the nation’s bicentennial. The area under the Grandstand was transformed into the “Spirit of Iowa” theme center, a proud and impressive showcase for the ethnic groups who settled in Iowa. Special attractions included a 40-member German youth group playing “old-world

style” music and an exhibit of paintings of America created by German immigrants. The Stone Map of Iowa, which contains a stone native to each of Iowa’s 99 counties, was added east of the Plaza Stage (now the Anne and Bill Riley Stage) to commemorate the anniversary as well. A 40-horse hitch, billed as the world’s largest team of horses, returned to the Fair. Four days of tractor pulling, encompassing 25 separate events, offered more than \$12,000 in premiums.

The 1977 “New Horizons” Fair marked the first 11-day event. The Beach Boys, Bay City Rollers and Kansas were notable Grandstand performers. J.D. Taylor was appointed secretary/manager following the resignation of Kenneth Fulk.

In 1978, Fairgoers were encouraged to “Take a Closer Look,” focusing on the tremendous entertainment value. Nearly 600,000 Fairgoers discovered that once they paid gate admission there were hundreds of things to do and see without spending another penny. National motorcycle racing returned to the grounds after a 25-year absence. The first Iowa State Fair Tug O’ War attracted many teams. New attractions included “dancing waters” and a concourse mall, both located east of the Varied Industries Building. The Kool Aid Circus

featured a human cannonball. An economic impact survey, compiled by the Iowa Development Commission, indicated that a whopping \$27 million worth of spending was generated in the community by the 1978 Fair.

Four major Grandstand events were cancelled during the 1979 Fair due to six days of rain. Sixty horses and riders plus five mule-drawn covered wagons left Fairfield on a four-day, 112-mile trek to Des Moines in commemoration of the 125th anniversary of the Fair. Internationally-acclaimed sculptor Al Kidwell was artist-in-residence at the Cultural Center.

## ***1980-1989***

Two-for-one admission after 6 p.m. was an important factor in reaching a total estimated attendance of 632,000 for the 1980 “Celebrate, Iowa!” State Fair. A sensational line-up of free performances heightened the Fair’s family-oriented entertainment value.

Discounted Midway rides and free fireworks were additional incentives. New record prices were paid at the Sale of Champions (when the Fair’s champion livestock are auctioned).



*Two young girls take a wild ride on the Midway. (Undated photo.)*

Nearly 40,000 fans turned out for Kenny Rogers, with Dottie West, in four Grandstand performances. The first Rock ‘n’ Roll Reunion was held. Nearly 663,000 people – the largest total in the previous five years – found “So Much More to Go For” at the 1981 Fair. Admission revenue was the largest in history. An unofficial survey listed visitors from 36 states and seven foreign countries. The Fair ran one week earlier than usual, enabling many more school children and parents to participate. Barbara Mandrell and Pat Benatar both attracted huge crowds in the Grandstand for their shows.





# IOWA STATE FAIR

- RESTROOMS
- ACCESSIBLE RESTROOMS
- FAMILY RESTROOMS
- FIRST AID
- TRAM/SHTTLE STOPS
- BABY CARE STATIONS
- ADULT CHANGING STATION
- PHONE CHARGING STATION
- LOST CHILDREN/ADULTS
- WHEELCHAIR/SCOOTER/STROLLERS
- FAIR INFORMATION
- ATM
- CARE CUBES

Administration Building.....H13	Legacy Terrace.....G10
Agriculture Building.....H16	Principal's Plaza at Legacy Terrace
John Deere Agriculture Building	Little Hands on the Farm E17
sponsored by Alliant Energy	Andringa Family Foundation Little Hands
Alliant Energy Landing.....J16	on the Farm
Animal Learning Center...F17	Livestock Pavilion.....J15
Paul R. Knapp Animal Learning Center	MidAmerican Energy Stage I18
sponsored by Christensen Farms	With Iowa Realty & media sponsor KCCI
Anne and Bill Riley Stage...I12	Museum.....G23
Sponsored by Pepsi with	Ralph H. Deets Historical Museum
media sponsor iHeart	Museum Complex.....G23
Avenue of Breeds.....M6	Richard L. Easter Museum Complex
Sponsored by Iowa Bankers Association	Outdoor Arena.....N19
Cattle Barn.....L16	Bob & Deb Pulver Outdoor Arena
John & Emily Putney Family Cattle Barn	Parking/Tow Office.....A3
sponsored by Vermeer	Poultry and Rabbit Bldg...E22
Country School.....F21	Pioneer Hall.....H22
Cultural Center.....J20	Farm Bureau Pioneer Hall
Patty & Jim Cowmie Cultural Center	Service Center.....H11
DNR Building.....G5	Robert G. Horner & Sheri Avis Horner
Elwell Family Park.....D4	Service Center sponsored by Mattress Firm
Exhibition Center.....L10	Sheep Barn.....N11
Richard O. Jacobson Exhibition Center	Sky Glider East.....G14/H22
First Aid Center.....G18	Sky Glider West.....K4/K13
Hy-Vee Health & First Aid Center	Sky Gliders sponsored by Superior Sleep
First Church.....G20	Stalling Barn.....N21
Food Center.....J2	Sponsored by Van Wall Equipment
Elwell Family Food Center	Susan Knapp Amphitheater F19
FFA Display Building.....K10	Sponsored by Prairie Meadows with
4-H Exhibits Building.....N8	media sponsor WHO 13
Bruce L. Rastetter 4-H Exhibits Building	Swine Barn.....N16
sponsored by Touchstone Energy	Sponsored by Corteva Agriscience
Cooperatives of Iowa	Thrill Town.....K6
Fun Forest.....H17	Thrill Ville.....E14
Hy-Vee Fun Forest	Thrill Zone.....F3
Fun Forest Stage.....H17	Varied Industries Building H8
Sponsored by Community	William C. Knapp Varied Industries
Choice Credit Union	Building sponsored by Principal®
Gallery.....G23	Volunteer Office and
Richard O. Jacobson Hall &	Credential Pick Up.....N2
Kenyon Gallery	Walnut Center.....K12
The Garden.....D17	Wind Turbine & Education
Sponsored by Corteva Agriscience	Center.....H19
Grandfather's Barn.....J23	MidAmerican Energy Wind Turbine &
Vermeer Grandfather's Barn	Education Center
Grandstand.....F10	Ye Old Mill.....F14
Presented by Homemakers Furniture	Youth Inn.....M20
Grand Concourse.....G3-14	Oman Family Youth Inn
Presented by Google	
Horse Barn.....L12	
Iowa State Fair Police.....H4	
The Kitchen.....G6	
Maytag Family Theaters	

Gate 11 presented by Kwik Star  
Gate 15 presented by Chevron



New attractions in 1982 included the State Fair Museum as well as a new free entertainment stage west of the Cultural Center (now the Fairview Stage). Textile and food exhibits were divided and the Food Department moved into newly-refurbished quarters in the Family Center (now the Maytag Family Theaters). State Fair souvenirs, including shirts, hats, caps and more were offered for the first time. Nearly 11,000 cars jammed the Fairgrounds on August 20 when attendance set a weekday record.

A sizzling August heat wave in 1983 (108 degrees on Older lowans' Day, 100 degrees or above the next four days) singed attendance. The Fair ran Wednesday through Saturday instead of the previous Thursday to Sunday schedule, a change intended to strengthen the Fair's last day. The premier edition of the Iowa State Fair Cookbook went on sale. (Twenty-one editions have since



*The former Polk County Headquarters Building was transformed into the State Fair Museum in 1982.*

been published, the most recent in 2022.) A new five-lane entrance at East 33rd and University Avenue was opened. The \$100,000 earth-sheltered home (now home to the Blue Ribbon Foundation's offices) was built on Expo Hill. The Textiles and Clothing Department was completely remodeled.

Significant capital improvements were made to the Campgrounds, Cattle Barn and Livestock Pavilion prior to the 1984 Fair. Plus, the Fair Board voted to cover the outdoor arena west of the Horse Barn. Two new cattle contests, a production-tested barrow contest, a new swine breed show, dairy production awards, a new celebrity dairy goat milking competition, the introduction of Fun Forest for children and Duffy Lyon's 25th anniversary as butter sculptor were important features of the Fair. It was the sixth consecutive year that the Fair turned a profit.

Adopting a German theme in 1985 and reverting to the traditional Thursday through Sunday schedule, the Fair's "Augustfest!" offered German-style food, music and entertainment. A record-breaking 668,000 people attended the Fair and generated an economic impact conservatively estimated at \$56 million. Harness racing, a long-standing staple of the Fair, took a new turn that summer when pari-mutuel racing made its statewide debut at the Fairgrounds. Short racing seasons continued for the next three years.

Two significant events marked the 1986 ag-extravagazana: the Fair celebrated the 100th birthday of the Fairgrounds and a new secretary/manager, Marion Lucas, took charge. A second time capsule was buried to commemorate the Fairgrounds' 100th birthday. Slated to be opened in 2086, it is filled with memorabilia of the Fair's first century in Des Moines. An exceptional Grandstand line-up, including the Beach Boys, and free entertainment by famous Iowans encouraged native sons and daughters to "Come Home to the Fair." Thanks in part to near-perfect weather, attendance reached a whopping 732,000 over the 11-day event.

On the heels of a prosperous year, more than \$280,000 in premiums were offered in 1987, an increase of 10%. The theme, "Celebrate an American Classic," summed up the pride and admiration Iowans felt about their Fair. Despite seven inches of rain and the chilliest weather in 10 years, 716,000 visitors flocked to the Fair. A debate between seven Democratic presidential hopefuls drew 150 national media reporters and a standing-room-only audience. A record 72 county fair candidates competed for the State Fair Queen title. Coca-Cola donated a new electronic marquee at East 30th Street and University Avenue. WHO Radio built its new version of the Crystal Studio on the Grand Concourse. The Walnut Center debuted with 8,400 square feet of air-conditioned exhibit space. The entire 400-acre Fairgrounds district was named to the National Register of Historic Places.

Nostalgia, tradition and down-home fun inspired the 1988 theme, "For an Old-Fashioned Good Time." New events

included the Fair's first llama and Shire shows plus the Giant Ram contest. A replica of the Vietnam Memorial was featured on Expo Hill, while an intricate, 14-foot tall sand castle towered in the Cultural Center atrium. Following this very successful Fair, the Board approved a three-phase, 10-year, \$30 million fundraising plan for renovating the Fairgrounds.

In 1989, Fairgoers celebrated another "Old-Fashioned Good Time" with an extended 12-day Fair. Ice carving was featured in the Agriculture Building, the Fair's Rock 'n' Roll Reunion celebrated its 10th anniversary, "TV8 and Pepsi on Ice" delighted crowds with colorful daily ice skating performances under the hot August sun, and 1,000 homing pigeons were released during the Great Pigeon Escape. A colossal 40-horse hitch rocked the grounds with pure horsepower. More than 857,000 visitors were tallied.

## ***1990-1999***

The 1990 Fair was another 12-day event. The 10,000-square-foot Iowa Tourism Building (now the Elwell Family Food Center) debuted, and for the first time Grandstand tickets were sold statewide through Ticketmaster. Three Grandstand performances sold out: Kenny G with Michael Bolton, Alabama with Clint Black and Bob Dylan. A little-known country singer named Garth Brooks filled in as a replacement for Ricky Van Shelton. Brooks returned to the Grandstand in 1991 and 1993. In the final tally, total attendance soared to nearly 874,000.

To raise funds for critical Fairgrounds repairs, adult gate admission was raised from \$4 to \$5 for the 1991 "Blue Ribbon Fun Fest." An Enormous Equine joined the jumbo livestock judging contests. The Fabric and Threads Department hosted the first Grand National Afghan Show. More than 700 crocheted, knitted and



*Fairgoers check out a giant sand sculpture in the Cultural Center.*

cross-stitched masterpieces were on display. Nearly a mile of sidewalks were replaced prior to the Fair, thanks in part to statewide Fairgoer's contributions.

In 1992, the Fair reverted to its previous 11-day schedule with plans to gradually move the dates up one week. The first World Barrow Show was held; \$1,000 went to the top hog. Fan Fair was redesigned, allowing contributors to have the first opportunity to purchase Grandstand tickets. The Cultural Center displayed a 24-foot replica of the U.S. Capitol constructed out of more than 250,000 Lego building blocks.

The Blue Ribbon Foundation, the Fair's fundraising arm, was established in 1993 with the goal of raising millions of dollars for renovation of seriously deteriorated buildings and facilities. The Fair followed on the heels of a catastrophically wet year throughout the Midwest. Record flooding pounded the area, leaving the city of Des Moines without water for 12 days. Garth Brooks sold out his Grandstand performance in 19 minutes. Despite heavy rain and overflowing storm sewers during the Fair's final weekend, the sixth consecutive attendance record – more than 893,000 – was set.

In 1994, Mother Nature was much more cooperative. The Blue Ribbon Foundation's efforts were beginning to pay off in visible facility improvements, including the rebuilding of Grandfather's Barn, external repairs to the Administration Building and rehabilitation of the Agriculture Building. The talk of the town – and the country – was Duffy Lyon's 400-pound, life-size butter sculpture of Garth Brooks, with Tom and Roseanne Arnold's Food Department Loose Meat Sandwich competition coming in a close second. Martin Mull and Comedy Central filmed a farce on the grounds. Sunliner Trams began to provide convenient transportation from the north parking lot. Grandstand sell-outs included Reba McEntire and George Strait. Previous attendance records were shattered for the seventh consecutive year with a total of more than 913,000 attendees.

Despite record levels of humidity and suffocating heat, nearly



*Duffy Lyon's butter sculpture of Garth Brooks at the 1994 Fair.*

790,000 visitors attended "The Fun and Only" 1995 Fair. For the first time in Fair history, two Grandstand shows were canceled (due to performer illness) and an auto race was rained out. Daredevil motorcyclist Robbie Knievel turned the last day of the Fair into one of the best attended day ever with his death-defying 180-foot jump over 20 vehicles. The Fair ventured into the internet scene with a temporary website.

Bouncing back in 1996, the Fair scored its highest attendance ever – a whopping 918,000. A spunky new theme, "Let Yourself Go," encouraged Fairgoers to kick up their heels at Iowa's favorite summertime event. Celebrating Iowa's Sesquicentennial (150th birthday), Duffy Lyon amazed visitors with her butter sculpture of Grant Wood's "American Gothic." More than \$4 million worth of improvements were made to the Grandstand, Ye Old Mill (an original "tunnel of love" amusement ride) and Riley Stage. The picturesque Pella Plaza, featuring flags from all 99 Iowa counties, was added as well. Tragically, two concessionaires were found murdered in their camper on the Fairgrounds. Family members were subsequently convicted for the crime. The Fair's widely popular website, [iowastatefair.org](http://iowastatefair.org), became a permanent fixture on the world wide web.

The Administration Building received a much-needed interior overhaul in 1997 to the tune of \$1.8 million. Murals were added to Ye Old Mill in response to Fairgoer's requests. The nearly two and a half tons of seats removed from the Grandstand during renovation were recycled into black lawn edging. Stand-out Grandstand attractions included The Wallflowers, ZZ Top and Little Richard in the Rock 'n' Roll Reunion. A record number of exhibitors and entries was tallied with nearly 14,000 exhibitors entering more than 46,000 entries. Attendance was at an all-time high of 946,239.

In 1998, Fairgoers clamored to see the Dixie Chicks on one of

the free stages. Motorcycle daredevil Robbie Knieval returned to the Fair and jumped 15 Kenworth semis lined up on the Grand Concourse. Kenny and Bobbi McCaughey, parents of the famous septuplets, and their daughter Mikayla led the State Fair Parade. Leona Ashman of Oskaloosa became the first female Fair Board President.

In June of 1999, Steer and Stein restaurant, located across from the Administrative Building, burned down but was rebuilt in time for the Fair. Nearly perfect weather (daily highs around 70 degrees), strong-selling Grandstand shows and Duffy Lyon's 40th anniversary butter sculpture of Da Vinci's "The Last Supper" all contributed to the record-breaking attendance figure of 969,523. Martha Stewart spent a day at the Fair taping an episode for her television show. A record number of county queens (92) vied for the State Fair Queen title. The 1999 Fair was the most profitable in history.

## **2000-2009**

In celebration of the new millennium, Fairgoers were encouraged to "Zero in 10-20, 2000" on a variety of high-tech related exhibits. Credit cards were accepted at the gates for the first time. Iowa Farm Bureau celebrated the 25th anniversary of its Century Farm Awards program.

In the Cultural Center, Iowan Bryan Berg created a replica of the state's capitol from playing cards. The U.S. Marine Corps Silent Drill Platoon performances delighted visitors.



*Duffy Lyon's butter version of "The Last Supper" at the 1999 Fair.*

A new corporate logo was phased in during the 2001 Fair. Crafters from across the state found a new home in the Walnut Center. Entertainment offerings included the Farmall Promenade Dancing Tractors, Beatlemania and the Shenani-guns Comedy Wild West Show. Gary Slater was named Fair manager. Marion Lucas continued as CEO until early 2002.



The 2002 Fair kicked off a three-year campaign for the Fair's Sesquicentennial in 2004. For the first time Fair attendance topped one million, a remarkable milestone for "The Big One." The approximately \$10.2 million renovation of the Varied Industries Building was completed, making it the largest single-level exhibit facility in the state. A lovable blue ribbon named Fairfield debuted as the Fair's mascot. He was named through an online contest on the Fair's website and salutes the Fair's first home in Fairfield. The last Sunday became known as "Extreme Sunday" and featured the Village People on the Anne and Bill Riley Stage, attracting an estimated 10,000 fans. In 2003, a new \$1 million Skyglider, stretching 1440 feet, was installed. The new ride connects Gate #10 to the heart of the Fairgrounds. Restaurant Row, a newly redesigned eatery area, and an online newsletter debuted. The Livestock Pavilion received a new roof and Legacy Terrace was completed. A new cyber station in the Varied Industries Building allowed Fairgoers access to the Internet and email.



*Fairgoers enjoy a performance by the Village People during the 2002 Fair.*

Perfect weather averaging a daily high of 76 degrees and hugely appealing Sesquicentennial activities marketed locally and nationally all helped drive a record 1,053,978 visitors to the 2004 Iowa State Fair.

The Sesquicentennial Horse Caravan, the Torch Run and *USA Weekend Magazine's* May ranking of the Fair as the #2 summer fun spot in the U.S. helped make opening day one of the largest in history, tallying nearly 84,000. More than 96,000 visitors – also one of the largest counts ever – turned out for Extreme Sunday, the Fair's eleventh and final day. On-grounds ATM withdrawals totaled nearly \$2 million. The Des Moines Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) shuttle ridership rose 36 percent with more than 113,000 riders. For the first time ever,

more than 5,000 kegs of beer were sold.

National media visiting included Bill Geist and a crew from CBS News Sunday Morning, *USA Today* and *Monster Nation*, which produces television shows for the Discovery Channel, also spent four days on site. ESPN ranked the Fair's debut Outhouse Race among its Top 10 Plays of the Day.



*Fairgoers throng the Grand Concourse during the 2004 Fair.*

Additional superlatives included 103 State Fair Queen candidates, a new record; one of the top five draft horse shows in the nation; and 10.2 million hits on [iowastatefair.org](http://iowastatefair.org) over the 11-day run. The Sale of Champions set a new record of \$190,500 with 11 record-selling prices. Plus, the Super Bull broke the 1995 record, weighing in at 3,378 pounds.

The 2005 Iowa State Fair proved it was "America's Favorite Fair" by surpassing the one million mark for the fourth consecutive year. The Fair was challenged with rain on the first three days and early school start dates. In conjunction with MTA, expanded shuttle bus service from a new location at Southeast Polk High School was added and a record-breaking 178,164 riders took advantage of the convenient service, now available in three locations. The Richard O. Jacobson museum opened in time for the Fair. The Grandstand line-up featured events ranging from Professional Bull Riding to Garrison Keillor, including two sold-out shows: Keith Urban and Brad Paisley with special guest Sara Evans.

The "Only at the Fair" fun of the 2006 Iowa State Fair attracted more than a million visitors for the fifth consecutive year. Picture perfect weather on Extreme Sunday drew an estimated 112,295 – a record for the Fair's last day. Special activities for

the day included free performances by Disney star Raven (one of the largest free entertainment crowds with more than 10,000 attendees), Joan Jett and The Blackhearts, The Buckinghams and two human cannonball launches.

The 2006 Fair also debuted the Fair's kids' club, Blue Ribbon Kids, a club for kids 10 and under, as well as the Susan Knapp Amphitheater in Heritage Village. A record number of entries were noted in dairy cattle, foods, fabric and threads, photography, stock dog trials, angora and boer goats and rabbits. After 15 years of apprenticing with Norma "Duffy" Lyon, Sarah Pratt became the Fair's fourth butter sculptor.



*One of the largest free entertainment crowds ever – estimated at more than 10,000 – enjoyed Disney sensation Raven on the new Susan Knapp Amphitheater during the 2006 Fair.*

"Sounds Like Fun" summed up the 2007 Iowa State Fair, which, despite stiflingly hot weather, attracted more than a million visitors for the sixth year in a row. The Animal Learning Center, an ag-education facility, opened with exhibits showing Fairgoers about the animal birthing process. In addition to displays of chicks, lambs, kids and piglets, 10 calves were born in it during the Fair. The Food Department – the largest of any state fair in the country – moved from the Family Theaters to the re-named Elwell Family Food Center, formerly the Iowa Tourism Building. The new location provided additional display and judging space. The tourism exhibits moved to the south hallway of the Varied Industries Building. A wind turbine for renewable energy generation debuted on Expo Hill, and the newly-renovated Iowa State Fair historical museum re-opened. New horseshoe courts were constructed to the east of Pioneer Hall. The Fair ceremoniously broke ground on a major \$20 million capital improvement project. Construction commenced after the 2007 Fair.

The 2008 Fair – “U Gotta Love It” – drew a record 1,109,150 people to the grounds. More than 11,000 Fairgoers packed into the Grandstand in the early hours of opening day to set a world record for the most people simultaneously eating a corn-dog. The glamour of a world record, paired with free admission and a free corndog, contributed to the largest opening day attendance on record.

An Olympic Pavilion set up near Rock Island Avenue offered continuous televised coverage of the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, and Fairgoers watched as Des Moines native and butter-sculpture subject Shawn Johnson took home gymnastics gold. The Budweiser Clydesdales paraded through the grounds daily, and Fairgoers flocked to see the World’s Largest Traveling Horse Wheel and Stable Display. Construction continued on the Richard O. Jacobson Exhibition Center, a new, world-class facility featuring an indoor arena, practice arena and seating for 3,500 Fairgoers scheduled for completion in time for the 2010 Fair.

“State Fair Time” in 2009 drew a million-plus crowd for the seventh consecutive year, but rain led to a drop in attendance from the record-setting 2008 Fair. Des Moines native, gold medal Olympian and *Dancing with the Stars* champion Shawn Johnson served as Parade Marshal and took part in opening ceremonies along with her dance partner, Mark Ballas. Fairgoers brought canned goods for free admission opening day helping the Fair collect 74,375 pounds of food for the Food Bank of Iowa. Improvements were made throughout the grounds. Most notably, the Elwell Family Food Center renovation was completed in time for the 2009 Fair, and Grandfather’s Barn was re-opened with the Wine Experience exhibit. The Journey with opening act Heart concert was a Grandstand sell-out. The Way We Live Award made its debut recognizing five Iowa farm families who demonstrate a daily dedication to animal agriculture and exemplify farm values.

## ***2010-present***

The 2010 Fair was indeed “Non Stop Fun!” Opening ceremonies dedicated the new Richard O. Jacobson Exhibition Center, and Fairgoers packed its arena to pay tribute to Iowa Troops stationed overseas. Fairgoers attended Grandstand shows like Keith Urban, Sugarland and Jeff Dunham, in record numbers while a free performance by Vanilla Ice and Tone Loc drew a record-setting free stage crowd. Grape Getaway opened near Grandfather’s Barn and provided young Fairgoers with activities relating to the grape industry. The Blue Ribbon Foundation also successfully introduced its own concession treat. The Fair Square, a marshmallow and crisped rice cereal treat on-a-stick, was frequently sold-out, and all its proceeds benefited the Foundation’s efforts to restore the Fairgrounds. Heavy rains prior to and during the Fair impacted attendance, and for the first time since 2002 attendance dipped below the one million mark.

A total 1,080,959 attendees – the second largest tally in history – flocked to the 2011 Iowa State Fair to celebrate “100 Years of the Butter Cow” during 11 gala days. A fully integrated ad campaign resonated with Fairgoers of all ages making it one of the most successful Fairs in history. Superlatives included a record-setting four sold-out Grandstand shows (Train/Maroon 5, Def Leppard/Heart, REBA/Jerrold Niemann, Jason Aldean/Chris Young/Thompson Square) with the largest ever gross sales and attendance, an all time best food and merchandise income, the successful debut of the Fair’s print at home tickets, increased DART shuttle bus ridership, a 10,000 plus free stage crowd for The Band Perry, and popular introduction of the Kids’ Zone, the Iowa Craft Beer Tent and the new entertainment area west of the Jacobson Exhibition Center.

Hugely appealing Butter Cow activities marketed locally and nationally included: 100 “tribute” cows of different sizes and materials – sand to cans to wood – including more than 60 concrete cows painted by Iowa artists and on display throughout the grounds; on grounds banners; gate and stage signage,

an updated and enhanced cooler in the Ag Building; a giant Butter Cow birthday card for Fairgoers to sign; birthday cake at opening ceremonies, a daily amateur butter sculpting contest (Battle of the Butter); and even Fried Butter on-a-stick. There was a huge media turnout for the Fair and the side show of presidential campaigners. Candidates made their stops at the Fair before and after the Iowa Straw Poll in Ames, and media from around the world followed. The result was exposure on national television and major print outlets, the likes of which the Fair could never afford in advertising.



*Prize winning concrete cow celebrating 100 years of the Butter Cow in 2011.*

Outstanding programming, grounds improvements and near perfect weather during the 2012 Fair led to above average attendance on weekdays and unprecedented crowds on the second weekend of the Fair, including the best attended Extreme Sunday in history.

The eco-friendly transformation of Expo Hill was complete for the Fair. A uniquely-designed covered structure for free entertainment, a new stairwell as well as additional solar benches and pathway lighting were all Phase Two additions. The Grandstand boasted two sell-outs, and Fairgoers enjoyed an average high temperature of 80.7 degrees and an average low of 59 degrees for the 11 days; a much-needed break from record setting temperatures just days before the Fair.

The 2013 Fair saw over one million visitors throughout the 11 days. More than 1500 Fairgoers volunteered in the first ever Opening Day Meal Packaging event which produced over 255,000 meals. An additional Food Drive discount day resulted in another 45,438 pounds of donated food. The 2013 Fair also saw the first New Fair Food Contest for concessionaires, capi-



tal improvements to the Patty and Jim Cownie Cultural Center, a relocated Budweiser stage and the advent of the hugely popular “Butter Cow Security” t-shirts. Other highlights included the first Cowboy Mounted Shooting Demonstrations in Fair history, a Supreme Six-Horse Hitch, the 20th anniversary of the Blue Ribbon Foundation and the 50th anniversary of the Clearfield Lions offering Campgrounds shuttle service.

The “Amazingly Amusing” 2014 Fair celebrated its 160th anniversary with over one million people attending during the eleven day stretch. One of the most popular attractions was the 25-foot “God Bless America” sculpture depicting Grand Wood’s famous American Gothic, which was displayed in Pella Plaza. Opening ceremonies celebrated the last phase of renovations to the Patty and Jim Cownie Cultural Center, complete with air conditioning, elevators and new exhibit space on the third floor. In celebration of the 75th year of the Fair’s Photography Salon, the Cultural Center displayed hundreds of black and white photos as a salute to Ansel Adams. The first phase of renovations was completed to the Youth Inn, providing air conditioning, new shower and restroom facilities along with new bunks and mattresses in the upper level. Other highlights included the 50th anniversary of the Iowa State Fair Queen Contest, the 10th anniversary of Little Hands on the Farm and the 25th anniversary of our information volunteer program.

Great weather, presidential candidate visits, a later school start date and four sold-out Grandstand shows all attributed to a record-breaking attendance of 1,117,398 people at the 2015 Fair. The campaign theme was “Fair Tour” and fair attendees were encouraged to “Find A New Path” by participating in four customized audio tours. Opening ceremonies celebrated the completion of the new MidAmerican Energy Stage complete with a loading dock, dressing rooms and new restroom facilities. The first phase of Ruan Plaza was completed featuring a pedestrian friendly plaza that connects Grand Avenue to the Richard O. Jacobson Exhibition Center, and the second phase of the Youth Inn was complete, adding elevators and air conditioning to the first floor. The Fairgrounds 5k was held during the Fair for the first time in 2015, and over 300 people

participated in the early Saturday morning run. Other highlights included the 100th anniversary of the Sheep Barn and the 150th anniversary of Grandfather's Barn.

The 2016 "My State Fair" drew more than one million people for the eleven day event. The "My State Fair" theme was special and unique, because it is celebrated longtime Fairgoers and their stories throughout the campaign Popular attractions such as "Running with the Bull" straw sculpture and The Gantry Show, a pedal powered theatrical circus were crowd favorites. Opening ceremonies celebrated the last stage of renovations to the Oman Family Youth Inn, complete with air conditioning, elevators, new shower and restroom facilities, and new stage and auditorium with balcony seating. The second stage of renovations to Ruan Plaza was completed prior to the start of the Fair, providing a pedestrian friendly plaza as well as improved drainage and water control for Fair time vendors and off-season events. Discovery Garden welcomed a new permeable paved path made of crushed regional stone and recycled glass that allows for water to return to the ground water below. Highlights from the 2016 Fair also include a record setting 171, commercial wine entries and a sold out Grandstand show performed by Megan Trainor.

The 2017 "State Fair Thrills" again had over one million Fairgoers attend the eleven-day event. The "State Fair Thrills" theme highlighted new rides and attractions on the Fairgrounds, as new thrill zones and midway areas were created and reconstructed. The Sale of Champions set three new records: the Grand Champion FFA Market Hog sold for \$54,000; the Grand Champion 4-H Meat Goat sold for \$19,000; finally, the Grand Champion FFA Meat Goat sold for \$16,000. These were new record prices for each species.

The 2018 "State Fair Moments" focused on revisiting and creating new memories for Fairgoers. A new record of 1,130,260 people attended the eleven-day event. This broke the 2017 record by 89 people. Opening ceremonies were held in the newly renovated Grandstand. The renovations to the Grand-

stand added over 4,000 seats for concert-goers, and a Grandstand show by Thomas Rhett held the highest number of attendees, with 14,102 people. The Grandstand had renovations done to the stage and pit area, as well as new bathrooms. A record number of people parked on the Fairgrounds in 2018; 75,554 cars were parked on the Fairgrounds over the 11-day Fair. To add to the 2017 thrill zones and midway area renovations, a record number of credits were redeemed in 2018 in one day. A digital wristband was also an upgrade for the thrill zones and midway areas. The Woodcarver's Auction raised a record \$56,500 in 2018. The Sale of Champions, which supports student scholarships, set new records with the following sales: Reserve Grand Champion 4-H Market Steer was sold for \$60,000; the Grand Champion 4-H Meat Goat was sold for \$21,000; and finally, the 4-H Market Hog was a new record for hogs by selling at \$61,000 as well as a new record for all animals sold in the Sale of Champions in its history. The 2018 Sale of Champions raised a record \$381,500. A new Iowa State Fair app debuted for mobile devices, where Fairgoers could refer to the interactive daily program for a listing of each day's events.

In 2018, Fairgoers also had new chances to learn more about the agricultural industry with the addition of two new events: Fair After Dark, which gave Fairgoers an exclusive, behind-the-scenes look at baby animals in the Animal Learning Center or a world tour of agriculture combined with butter, floriculture, and bees in the Agriculture Building, and Farm to Fair, an event focused at giving Fairgoers a chance to sit down to meal with Iowa's beef, pork, corn, dairy, egg, soybean and turkey farmers.

The 2019 Fair had another record-breaking year, with 1,170,375 Fairgoers. Over the eleven days, Fairgoers participated in numerous records, including Grandstand attendance. 17,032 concert-goers attended a sold-out Slipknot concert on Saturday, August 10. Along with Luke Bryan's crowd of 15,272, Dan + Shay's audience of 15,070 and eight other Grandstand performances, the Grandstand had a total attendance of 128,516 people. DART Park & Ride provided 253,217 rides

during the Fair, the highest number of rides provided since DART began providing the Park & Ride service in 2006. After the Fair, food vendors supported the Food Bank of Iowa by donating their leftover food. Food vendors donated 5,475 pounds of food to the Food Bank of Iowa. A new gate was constructed at Gate 11 on the northwest corner of the Fairgrounds. Five records were seen in the Sale of Champions on Saturday, August 17. New educational opportunities could be found in the Have You Herd? ag education presentation program, with 4-H and FFA members giving livestock demonstrations during the Fair, and Bacon Buddies was a success, with 4-H and FFA members teaming up with exhibitors with special needs to show swine. A Shining Stars show was put on by special needs performers at the Anne and Bill Riley stage. A popular free entertainment option, Mutton Bustin', was located all eleven days just west of the Jacobson Exhibition Center.

Due to concerns for the safety and health of Fairgoers in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Iowa State Fair officials made the difficult decision to postpone the 2020 Iowa State Fair to 2021. This was the first time since World War II that the Fair had been cancelled and the sixth time in the Fair's 166-year history.

The 2021 Iowa State Fair followed the postponement of the 2020 Fair. Even with a number of changes due to the challenges of global COVID-19 pandemic, the 2021 Fair was still a success. The Sale of Champions raised a record \$443,500 to support youth livestock scholarships, and 24,122 pounds of food were rescued by the Food Bank of Iowa. On the Fairgrounds, Fairgoers could find a new community garden, east of Little Hands on the Farm, and Elwell Family Park, west of the Grandstand. The Avenue of Breeds was relocated west of the newly renovated 4-H Exhibits Building, and the Fair celebrated 50 years of the Giant Slide, also in a new location, southeast of the Varied Industries Building. The 2021 Fair attendance was 1,094,480.

The 2022 Iowa State Fair was a year to remember with atten-

dance, entertainment, new foods, new programs and livestock shows. Attendance in 2022 was up nearly 25,000 compared to the 2021 attendance number, and an all-time one-day record number of 128,298 people attended on Saturday, August 20. That same day, the Iowa State Fair crushed the Guinness World Record for largest cornhole tournament, with 730 participants. The Finisher, a new food from the Rib Shack, finished first in the People's Choice for Best New Food. The Kitchen demonstration area opened in Maytag Family Theaters, including sessions on wine mixology, cooking with honey, constructing a wedding cake, hot chocolate bombs and a play dough/slime demonstration on the first-ever Sensory-Friendly Morning. The goal of the Sensory-Friendly Morning was to enable families who have a member with special needs to visit, explore and enjoy the Fair in a modified environment. The Sale of Champions, held on the second Saturday of the Fair, raised a record \$481,500. Five individual champion records were broken in 2022, including an all-time record for all species at \$135,500. The Woodcarver's Auction brought in \$79,137 for the Blue Ribbon Foundation.

The 2023 Iowa State Fair brought entertainment, politicians, new foods and more to the Iowa State Fairgrounds. Highlights of the 2023 Iowa State Fair, "Best Days Ever," included being the second-largest Fair in its 169-year-old history. Attendance totaled 1,133,958. Sunday, August 13, was a first Sunday record with 114,937 Fairgoers in attendance. A strong Grandstand lineup entertained 112,258 Fairgoers, including the largest contemporary Christian concert in Fair history (9,294 attendees watched FOR KING + COUNTRY on August 10). Other Grandstand highlights included crowds of more than 17,000 for Eric Church (August 13) and The Chicks (August 19); comedian Jeff Dunham enjoyed some Fair food and craft beer during his show; and the bass guitar player for Maren Morris won the yodeling contest at Pioneer Hall. More than 13,000 concertgoers danced and sang through a show flip with Ludacris and Sean Kingston, not to mention having sold a whopping 1,159 tickets on the day of the show. Fairgoers were hungry and concessionaires delivered. More than 200 food

booths kept lines moving, provided Iowa Nice service, used more than 500 tons of ice and served up their signature dishes day and night. The Deep-Fried Bacon Brisket Mac-n-Cheese Grilled Cheese won the People's Choice Best New Food award. A total of 8,254 people voted in the Best New Food Competition while thousands more enjoyed trying the more than 60 new foods offered at the Fair this year. Agriculture is the foundation of the Iowa State Fair and was highlighted by eight new records in the 4-H and FFA Sale of Champions, including the all-time record for all species. The Grand Champion FFA Market Hog sold for \$150,000. The last weekend of the Fair saw climbing temperatures and a record surge in bottled water sales by the Blue Ribbon Foundation. Throughout the 11-day Fair, a record 20,850 cases of bottled water were sold. Those bottled water sales booths, as well as the Blue Ribbon Foundation merchandise locations, were staffed by a record 668 volunteers. The Woodcarver's Auction on the last day auctioned off the work of the chainsaw artists during the Fair. Proceeds from the auction benefited the Blue Ribbon Foundation Endowment and raised \$66,609 for improvements to the Iowa State Fairgrounds.

## ***Conclusion***

From simple beginnings, the Iowa State Fair has grown larger, longer and wider in scope. It has become a pacesetter in the industry. The Fair's evolution from a simple stock show to today's agricultural, industrial and entertainment extravaganza is a direct reflection of Iowa's evolution from an untilled prairie to the very center of the nation's food production. The Iowa State Fair has been the historical trademark of this progress. For more than 15 decades – more than a century in the same location – the Fair has instructed, influenced and guided an agricultural people in making agricultural history.

Over the years the Fair has never veered from its primary purposes: the celebration of excellence, the recognition of individual achievement and the enhancement of agriculture. Whether it's Grandma's pickles, Dad's farm gadget, the neigh-



bor's Cookout Contest entry or the sister's photography, the emphasis continues to focus on recognition of the particular talent or skill that makes each person unique. The Fair is the true, ever-changing reflection of what's best about Iowa and her people.

## ***Iowa State Fair Secretary/Managers***

### *Iowa State Agricultural Society*

J.M. Shaffer, Fairfield, 1854-1856

J.H. Wallace, Muscatine, 1856-1863

J.M. Shaffer, Fairfield, 1863-1874

John R. Shaffer, Fairfield, 1874-1894

P.L. Fowler, Des Moines, 1894-1899

G.H. Van Houten, Lenox, 1899-1900

### *Iowa Board of Agriculture*

G.H. Van Houten, Lenox, 1901

J.C. Simpson, Des Moines, 1901-1911

Arthur R. Corey, Des Moines, 1911-1923

### *Iowa State Fair Board Secretary/Manager*

Arthur R. Corey, Des Moines, 1923-1941

Lloyd B. Cunningham, Des Moines, 1941-1962

Kenneth Fulk, Des Moines, 1962-1977

James D. Taylor, Des Moines, 1977-1985

Marion Lucas, Des Moines, 1986-2001; CEO 2001-2002

Gary Slater, Des Moines, 2001; CEO 2002-2023

Jeremy Parsons, Des Moines, CEO 2023-present

## ***Iowa State Fair Themes 1965-present***

1965	"Our Indian Heritage"
1966	"Our Explorer Heritage"
1967	"Our Pioneer Heritage"
1968	"Our Gay 90s Heritage"
1969	"Our Roaring 20s Heritage"
1970	"Discover Iowa"
1971	"Discover Mexico"
1972	"Discover Canada"
1973	"Discover Hawaii"

1974	"The Discoverers"
1975	"The Colonizers"
1976	"Spirit of Iowa '76"
1977	"New Horizons"
1978	"Take a Closer Look"
1979	"Get In Touch With Iowa"
1980	"Celebrate, Iowa"
1981-1983	"So Much More To Go For"
1984	"Just See Us Now"
1985	"Augustfest!"
1986	"Come Home to the Iowa State Fair"
1987	"Celebrate an American Classic"
1988-1989	"An Old-Fashioned Good Time"
1990-1991	"Iowa's Blue Ribbon Fun Fest"
1992-1994	"The Only Fun of Its Kind"
1995	"The Fun and Only"
1996	"Let Yourself Go"
1997	"Go for It"
1998	"Way Too Much Fun"
1999	"Knock Yourself Out"
2000	"Zero In, August 10-20, 2000"
2001	"It's a Winner!"
2002	"The Big One"
2003	"One in a Million"
2004	"Still the One"
2005	"America's Favorite Fair...and it's right in your own backyard"
2006	"Only at the Fair"
2007	"Sounds Like Fun"
2008	"U Gotta Love It"
2009	"State Fair Time"
2010	"Non Stop Fun"
2011	100 Years of the Butter Cow"
2012	It's Fairlicious"
2013	"Happiness Is" the Iowa State Fair
2014	Amazingly Amusing
2015	Fair Tour
2016	My State Fair
2017	State Fair Thrills
2018	State Fair Moments
2019	State Fair Favorites
2020-2021	How Do You Fair?
2022	Find Your Fun at the Iowa State Fair
2023	Best Days Ever

## ***Fair Dates 1854-present***

- 1854 Wednesday, October 25, to Friday, October 27
- 1855 Wednesday, October 10, to Friday, October 12
- 1856 Wednesday, October 8, to Friday, October 10
- 1857 Tuesday, October 6, to Friday, October 9
- 1858 Tuesday, September 28, to Friday, October 1
- 1859 Tuesday, September 27, to Friday, September 29
- 1860 Tuesday, October 2, to Friday, October 5
- 1861 Tuesday, September 24, to Friday, September 27
- 1862 Tuesday, September 30, to Saturday, October 4  
(extended one day because of rain)
- 1863 Tuesday, September 15, to Friday, September 18
- 1864 Tuesday, September 27, to Friday, September 30
- 1865 Tuesday, September 26, to Friday, September 29
- 1866 Tuesday, September 18, to Saturday, September 22  
(Tuesday was rainy - opening ceremonies postponed until  
Wednesday, Fair extended one day)
- 1867 Tuesday, October 1, to Friday, October 4
- 1868 Tuesday, September 29, to Saturday, October 3  
(extended one day because of rain)
- 1869 Tuesday, September 14, to Friday, September 17
- 1870 Tuesday, September 13, to Friday, September 16
- 1871 Monday, September 11, to Friday, September 15
- 1872 Monday, September 9, to Friday, September 13
- 1873 Monday, September 8, to Thursday, September 11
- 1874 Tuesday, September 22, to Friday, September 25
- 1875 Monday, September 27, to Friday, October 1  
(opening ceremonies held on Tuesday, September 28)
- 1876 Monday, September 11, to Saturday, September 16  
(extended one day because of rain)
- 1877 Monday, September 17, to Friday, September 21
- 1878 Monday, September 16, to Friday, September 20
- 1879 Monday, September 1, to Friday, September 5
- 1880 Monday, September 6, to Friday, September 10
- 1881 Monday, September 5, to Friday, September 9
- 1882 Friday, September 1, to Friday, September 8
- 1883 Friday, August 31, to Friday, September 7
- 1884 Friday, August 29, to Friday, September 5
- 1885 Friday, September 4, to Friday, September 11
- 1886 Friday, September 3, to Saturday, September 11  
(extended one day because of rain)
- 1887 Friday, September 2, to Friday, September 7
- 1888 Friday, August 31, to Friday, September 7
- 1889 Friday, August 30, to Friday, September 6
- 1890 Friday, August 29, to Friday, September 5
- 1891 Friday, August 28, to Friday, September 4
- 1892 Friday, August 26, to Friday, September 2

1893 Friday, September 1, to Friday, September 8  
 1894 Friday, August 31, to Friday, September 7  
 1895 Friday, September 6, to Friday, September 13  
 1896 Friday, September 4, to Friday, September 11  
 1897 Saturday, September 11, to Saturday, September 18  
 1898 No Fair (World's Fair held in Omaha, Neb., Trans-Mississippi  
     Exposition and Spanish American War)  
 1899 Saturday, August 25, to Saturday, September 2  
 1900 Friday, August 24, to Friday, September 1  
 1901 Friday, August 23, to Friday, August 31  
 1902 Friday, August 22, to Friday, August 30  
 1903 Friday, August 21, to Friday, August 29  
 1904 Friday, August 19, to Friday, August 28  
 1905 Friday, August 25, to Friday, September 1  
 1906 Friday, August 24, to Friday, August 31  
 1907 Friday, August 23, to Friday, August 30  
 1908 Thursday, August 20, to Friday, August 28  
 1909 Friday, August 27, to Friday, September 3  
 1910 Thursday, August 25, to Friday, September 2  
 1911 Thursday, August 24, to Friday, September 1  
 1912 Thursday, August 22, to Friday, August 30  
 1913 Wednesday, August 20, to Thursday, August 28  
 1914 Wednesday, August 26, to Friday, September 4  
 1915 Wednesday, August 25, to Friday, September 3  
 1916 Wednesday, August 23, to Friday, September 1  
 1917 Wednesday, August 22, to Friday, August 31  
 1918 Wednesday, August 21, to Friday, August 30  
 1919 Wednesday, August 20, to Friday, August 29  
 1920 Wednesday, August 25, to Friday, September 3  
 1921 Wednesday, August 24, to Friday, September 2  
 1922 Wednesday, August 23, to Friday, September 1  
 1923 Wednesday, August 22, to Friday, August 31  
 1924 Wednesday, August 20, to Friday, August 29  
 1925 Wednesday, August 26, to Friday, September 4  
 1926 Wednesday, August 25, to Friday, September 3  
 1927 Wednesday, August 24, to Friday, September 2  
 1928 Wednesday, August 22, to Friday, August 31  
 1929 Wednesday, August 21, to Friday, August 30  
 1930 Wednesday, August 20, to Friday, August 29  
 1931 Wednesday, August 26, to Friday, September 4  
 1932 Wednesday, August 24, to Friday, September 2  
 1933 Wednesday, August 23, to Friday, September 1  
 1934 Wednesday, August 22, to Friday, August 31  
 1935 Wednesday, August 21, to Friday, August 30  
 1936 Wednesday, August 26, to Friday, September 4  
 1937 Wednesday, August 25, to Friday, September 3  
 1938 Wednesday, August 24, to Friday, September 2  
 1939 Wednesday, August 23, to Friday, September 1

1940 Wednesday, August 21, to Friday, August 30  
1941 Wednesday, August 20, to Friday, August 29  
1942 No Fair (World War II)  
1943 No Fair (World War II)  
1944 No Fair (World War II)  
1945 No Fair (World War II)  
1946 Wednesday, August 21, to Friday, August 30  
1947 Friday, August 22, to Friday, August 29  
1948 Wednesday, August 25, to Friday, September 3  
1949 Wednesday, August 24, to Friday, September 2  
1950 Friday, August 25, to Friday, September 1  
1951 Friday, August 25, to Friday, September 3  
1952 Saturday, August 23, to Monday, September 1  
1953 Saturday, August 29, to Monday, September 7  
1954 Saturday, August 28, to Monday, September 6  
1955 Saturday, August 27, to Monday, September 5  
1956 Friday, August 24, to Sunday, September 2  
1957 Friday, August 23, to Sunday, September 1  
1958 Friday, August 22, to Sunday, August 31  
1959 Friday, August 28, to Sunday, September 6  
1960 Friday, August 26, to Sunday, September 4  
1961 Friday, August 25, to Sunday, September 3  
1962 Friday, August 17, to Sunday, August 26  
1963 Friday, August 16, to Sunday, August 25  
1964 Friday, August 21, to Sunday, August 30  
1965 Friday, August 20, to Sunday, August 29  
1966 Friday, August 19, to Sunday, August 28  
1967 Friday, August 18, to Sunday, August 27  
1968 Friday, August 16, to Monday, August 26  
1969 Friday, August 15, to Sunday, August 24  
1970 Friday, August 21, to Sunday, August 30  
1971 Friday, August 20, to Sunday, August 29  
1972 Friday, August 18, to Sunday, August 28  
1973 Friday, August 17, to Sunday, August 27  
1974 Friday, August 16, to Sunday, August 26  
1975 Friday, August 15, to Sunday, August 24  
1976 Wednesday, August 18, to Sunday, August 29  
1977 Thursday, August 18, to Sunday, August 28  
1978 Thursday, August 17, to Sunday, August 27  
1979 Thursday, August 16, to Sunday, August 26  
1980 Thursday, August 14, to Sunday, August 24  
1981 Thursday, August 13, to Sunday, August 23  
1982 Thursday, August 12, to Sunday, August 22  
1983 Wednesday, August 10, to Saturday, August 20  
1984 Wednesday, August 15, to Saturday, August 25  
1985 Thursday, August 15, to Sunday, August 25  
1986 Thursday, August 14, to Sunday August 24  
1987 Thursday, August 20, to Sunday, August 30

1988	Thursday, August 18, to Sunday, August 28
1989	Thursday, August 17, to Sunday, August 27
1990	Wednesday, August 15, to Sunday, August 26
1991	Wednesday, August 14, to Sunday, August 25
1992	Thursday, August 20, to Sunday, August 30
1993	Thursday, August 19, to Sunday, August 29
1994	Thursday, August 11, to Sunday, August 21
1995	Thursday, August 10, to Sunday, August 20
1996	Thursday, August 8, to Sunday, August 18
1997	Thursday, August 7, to Sunday, August 17
1998	Thursday, August 13, to Sunday, August 23
1999	Thursday, August 12, to Sunday, August 22
2000	Thursday, August 10, to Sunday, August 20
2001	Thursday, August 9, to Sunday, August 19
2002	Thursday, August 8, to Sunday, August 18
2003	Thursday, August 7, to Sunday, August 17
2004	Thursday, August 12, to Sunday, August 22
2005	Thursday, August 11, to Sunday, August 21
2006	Thursday, August 10, to Sunday, August 20
2007	Thursday, August 9, to Sunday, August 19
2008	Thursday, August 7, to Sunday, August 17
2009	Thursday, August 13, to Sunday, August 23
2010	Thursday, August 12, to Sunday, August 22
2011	Thursday, August 11, to Sunday, August 21
2012	Thursday, August 9, to Sunday, August 19
2013	Thursday, August 8, to Sunday, August 18
2014	Thursday, August 7, to Sunday, August 17
2015	Thursday, August 13 to Sunday, August 23
2016	Thursday, August 11, to Sunday, August 21
2017	Thursday, August 10, to Sunday, August 20
2018	Thursday, August 9, to Sunday, August 19
2019	Thursday, August 8, to Sunday, August 18
2020	No Fair (due to COVID-19 pandemic)
2021	Thursday, August 12, to Sunday, August 22
2022	Thursday, August 11, to Sunday, August 21
2023	Thursday, August 10, to Sunday, August 20

## ***Buildings of the Fairgrounds***

The first Iowa State Fair was held in Fairfield in 1854. From 1855-1878, the Fair was staged in Fairfield, Muscatine, Oskaloosa, Iowa City, Dubuque, Burlington, Clinton, Keokuk and Cedar Rapids. In 1879, the Fair moved to Des Moines. Land for the present location was purchased in 1885; the first Fair held in its permanent home took place in 1886.



Located near the eastern city limits of Des Moines, the Iowa State Fairgrounds comprises a large collection of late Nineteenth and Twentieth Century exposition type buildings. Traveling east along University Avenue from downtown Des Moines the viewer receives a clear impression of the Fairgrounds as a major east side landmark in the city. The key intersection is at East 30th Street and East University Avenue. The site opens up with a foreground of a park-like parking area. The major site line terminates at the impressive dome of Pioneer Hall. The backdrop of wooded hillsides, together with the overlapping roof lines of the Grandstand, Livestock Pavilion and Agricultural Building, gives the site the most impressive introduction.

The first visual documentation of the Fairgrounds occurred in 1886. An antique photographic image shows an early view of these buildings: Exhibition Hall, Pinecrest Lodge, Floral Hall and two Fair officials' cottages. These buildings no longer exist but had similar design and scale to the Agricultural Building and Pioneer Hall today. Exhibition Hall provided the Fairgrounds with its dominant topographical feature, one that architectural and landscape planning had integrated carefully into its scheme. The buildings were situated across the west slope of the hill, latterly and at various grades on the hill, vertically, to provide a picturesque composition when viewed from the plain. The major buildings had cupolas which increased the visual interest of the buildings in addition to their mass. All buildings were frame.

By the late 1980s many priceless facilities faced critical deterioration due to lack of maintenance funds. In 1993, the Fair established the Blue Ribbon Foundation to generate renovation dollars to rebuild the crumbling buildings. Since its inception, the foundation has raised \$100 million through individual contributions, state appropriations, in-kind services and corporate, federal and state grants. Much remains to be done, but completed projects have inspired pride and excitement.

An Iowa treasure, the entire 450-acre Iowa State Fairgrounds (including the Campgrounds), are listed in the National Register of Historic Places and feature a large collection of late

Nineteenth and Twentieth Century exposition type buildings. The Fair has gained international fame through the years and plays a vital role in Iowa's economy while upholding the link between Iowa's work ethic, achievement and talent.

### ***Administration Building***

Built in 1908 and renovated in time for the 1997 Fair, the stately Administration Building serves as the year-round office of the Iowa State Fair staff, as well as a residence for Fair Board members during annual Fairs. Located east of the Service Center, the building is encircled by wide, shady porches and built of red brick trimmed with light-colored stone, it is also a nostalgic reminder of the historic significance of Fair architecture.



### ***Alliant Energy Landing***

Just east of the Pioneer Livestock Pavilion is the Alliant Energy Landing. The shelter is available for rent during the Fair.

### ***Anne and Bill Riley Stage***

The Bill Riley Stage was first dedicated in 1996 and renamed the Anne and Bill Riley Stage in 2007 to commemorate the Rileys' numerous contributions to the Fair. Originally built in 1927, the band shell has been completely renovated including new sound and light systems as well as the addition of 3,400 square feet of roof area and 500 square feet of stage area. During the Fair, a complete entertainment line-up is scheduled on this stage including the Bill Riley Talent Search, held annually since 1959.

### ***Bruce L. Rastetter 4-H Exhibits Building***

Dedicated at the Iowa Centennial State Fair in 1939 to commemorate the Iowa Territory's organization as a separate government unit in 1839, the spacious 4-H Exhibits Building was

originally built as the Poultry Industries Building. Constructed as part of a post-Depression Public Works Administration program at a cost of \$125,000, the



49,000-square-foot masonry and steel building features extensive clerestory windows and elaborate stone carvings on its exterior. In 2012, a west entrance was added to the building. It has been a showcase for outstanding 4-H

member achievements since the mid-1960s and is also used year-round for a variety of off-season events. The 4-H building was renovated from top to bottom in 2020 with new lighting, floors and updated restrooms. A portion of the south exterior wall was removed, creating space for a new kitchen facility, storage area and loading bays. An expansion to the west created classroom space in the building.

### ***Department of Natural Resources***

This graceful arched brick pavilion was built between 1926 and 1929. Its decorative elements are Italian Renaissance-inspired, stone-trimmed arches supported by Corinthian columns and flanked by twin pairs of small arched windows with decorative wrought iron false balconies. Intricately carved swans and eagles also grace the building. During the Fair, visitors enjoy pausing on the beautifully landscaped lawn and viewing several fish aquariums inside.



### ***Earth-Sheltered Home***

This 3,500-square-foot home was built as a major attraction for the 1983 Fair. The home features three bedrooms, a sunken living room, a skylight and a garage. Three to six feet of earth cover on the roof provides a fairly stable year-round temperature inside the earth-sheltered home. However, the real efficiency of such construction is centered in the mass of earth



and concrete (10-inch walls), which can conduct and store energy. Used in the past as the manager's residence and a craft show home, the facility became the home of the Fair's Blue Ribbon Foundation in 2002.

## ***Expo Hill***

The hill north of the Cultural Center is known as Expo Hill, named for Exposition Hall, one of the Fair's original buildings that majestically sat atop the hill. The eco-friendly transformation of Expo Hill was complete for the 2012 Fair. A uniquely-designed covered structure for free entertainment, a new stairwell as well as additional solar benches and pathway lighting were all Phase Two additions to Expo Hill. These new enhancements complement MidAmerican



Energy's 130-foot tall wind turbine and wind education center as well as the solar pavers, lighting and seating introduced at the 2011 Fair. Phase One of Expo Hill's transformation included solar path lighting, solar panels on the MidAmerican Education Center, electronic monitoring wind and solar power production, a solar cooling bench, a solar film tent, as well as other green design concepts. Also, the hill's pathway provided a new handicap accessible route to the Cultural Center.

## ***Elwell Family Food Center***

Built in time for the 1990 Fair, the former Iowa Tourism Building originally showcased exhibits by Iowa tourism attractions and leisure time events. In 2007, the building was renamed the Elwell Family Food Center and the Food Department moved into it. Following a two-year remodeling and expansion project from 2008-2009, the 15,000-square-foot facility is heated and air-conditioned and used year-round for a variety of activities.

## ***FFA Display Building***

The 3,200-square-foot FFA Display Building, built in 1998, supports FFA members and provides a venue for teaching the public about agriculture. During the Fair, the FFA Photography exhibit is on display here.

## ***FFA Headquarters***

During the Fair, the FFA/Open Ag Mechanics Technology Show, agricultural demonstrations and working displays can be found in or adjacent to the FFA Headquarters.

## ***First Church***

This is an excellent replica of Iowa's first church built in 1834 on Washington Square in Dubuque. First Church was originally conceived by Catholic settlers; however, after the settlement priest died of cholera, a Methodist circuit rider planned



the construction. Seventy people raised \$250 to build the church; with the help of many hands, it went up in just 28 days. The interior of the Fair's Church located in Heritage Village displays simple furnishings, which permitted

churches of its time to be used as both a court and school-room. The backless rail oak benches sit humbly before an altar carved from a huge elm log. Daily hymn sings are featured during the Fair.

## ***Gammon Barn***

The Gammon Barn, named for Polled Hereford founder Warren Gammon (a lawyer from Des Moines), is known as the birthplace of Polled Herefords. Moved to the Fairgrounds in 1991, the Barn serves as a museum to the breed and its leaders. The museum houses memorabilia relevant to the breed, most notably the Polled Hereford Hall of Fame.

## ***Grandstand/Shoppers Mart***

Stretching 600 feet along the Grand Concourse, the Grand-

stand is one of the largest buildings on the grounds. Designed to be completed in stages as funds became available, the first phase, a large open steel amphitheater was built in 1909. It was enclosed and five additional sections were added in 1927. Under the Grandstand (on street level) are the Shoppers Mart, the Hall of Law and the Hall of Flame, all of which are used for exhibits during the Fair. Both ends and back were faced with



brick and terra cotta, giving the building the appearance of an immense exposition hall rather than an amphitheater. Seating capacity is approximately 14,000. The facility was restored over a four-year period in the 1990s. It received another

renovation in 2018, adding 4,000 more floor seats, new restroom facilities and the Krause Group Stage.

## ***Heritage Village***

In addition to the new buildings, older buildings have been brought into the Fairgrounds. During the 1960s and 1970s the Iowa State Fair Board relocated select buildings onto the Fairgrounds from other parts of the state to establish Heritage Village. Grand Avenue between East 34th Street and East 34th Court received most of these buildings. They included a small railroad depot (circa 1880) and the Harper Mutual Telephone company office (1915). Reconstructions were another aspect of the Heritage Village movement. They included construction of replicas of a log church in Iowa (1967). Some of the buildings in Heritage Village are actually old buildings from the Fairgrounds.



## ***Barber Shop***

Typical of "tonsorial parlors" of 1900-1920 where men kept their personal mugs on hand for daily shaves, the Barber



Shop in Heritage Village features equipment from many towns throughout Iowa. Chairs and a sink from Pilot Mound, a back bar from Highland Park in Des Moines, lights from Sioux City, a stove from Madrid, a fan from Hamburg and a shoeshine stand from the barber shop in the State Capitol.

### ***Country School***

The Iowa country school system was designed in such a way that no child had to walk more than two miles to attend school. Children were not separated into grades, but worked together to the best of their ability with older students assisting younger ones. The Fair's structure was originally North Lincoln School, located southeast of Indianola.



It was donated and moved to the Fairgrounds in 1969 by one of the school's graduates. The school is authentically furnished with a wood stove, desks fastened to the floor, a recitation bench and early primers. The traditional bell and pull rope stand outside along with the American flag. Children's educational activities are offered during the Fair. The Country School was fully renovated in 2009.

### ***Depot***

One of the buildings relocated from around the state, this small railroad depot, circa 1880, is from an unknown location. Its size and design resembles old Pennsylvania Dutch architecture indicating its use as a depot for trains.

### ***General Store***

The General Store, built in the early 1900s, would most likely have been a favorite among Iowans of all ages in days gone by. It not only offered such essentials as canned goods,



household equipment, food staples and nails, but also tempted customers with penny candy, ribbons and lace, plus the "latest" in fashions and mail-order catalogs. During the Fair, the Heritage Village

General Store features displays reminiscent of those times and includes pickle jars and barrels, display cases, old heat stoves, racks used for food and dry-goods displays and sells many old-time items.

### ***Ice Cream Parlor***

The Ice Cream Parlor is the only structure original to Heritage Village, and is still used as an ice cream parlor during the Fair.

### ***Telephone Building***

Built in Harper, Iowa, by John and Helen Crooks in 1915, the Harper Telephone Building was the home of the Mutual Telephone Association until 1958. The two-room office, furnished with a coal or wood-burning stove, had no running water. The day bed in the small back room was used by the night shift. A collection of telephone equipment used between 1910 and 1940 includes a wooden telephone booth, a magnetic switchboard from Humeston, several wall phone headsets, insulators, lineman's equipment and industry catalogs and magazines. Visitors can also observe the process used to place telephone calls.

### ***Hillcrest Dorm***

Following the traditional design of red brick buildings, Hillcrest Dorm was constructed in 1930. Currently, FFA members who serve as Grandstand ushers reside here during the Fair.

### ***Horse Barn***

Designed in 1907, with additions in 1909, 1912 and 1929, the two-acre Horse Barn contains 418 box stalls and 11 tie stalls for horses. Brick and stone decorate its surfaces. A raised center area is flanked by shed roofs on the north and south with rhythmic gabled ventilators. Thousands of horses have been stalled in the majestic barn during off-season and Fairtime horse shows.



## ***Horseshoe Courts***

The horseshoe courts, located east of Pioneer Hall, were built in 2007. The courts were originally located south of Little Hands on the Farm and were relocated to make room for the Paul R. Knapp Animal Learning Center. Horseshoe pitching competitions are held each day of the Fair.

## ***Hy-Vee Fun Forest***

Introduced in 1984, Fun Forest is a veritable family land, dotted with shady trees, colorful annuals and perennials and plenty of places to climb and explore. With easy access from Pella Plaza, this 1.5-acre grassy park located east of the Agriculture Building provides fun and adventure for kids of all ages; features include a snake walk path, decorated gates, concrete lions, a chainsaw-carved eagle and a wooden train engine. A trumpeting concrete elephant stands guard as a tribute to Baby Mine, the 1930s era pachyderm purchased by children's nickel and dime contributions. In 2009, the play area was rejuvenated with new playground equipment.



## ***John Deere Agriculture Building***

Constructed in 1904, the Agriculture Building was one of the first buildings resulting from the major effort to convert the Fairgrounds from wood frame to permanent buildings of brick and stone. Two Jeffersonian domed rotundas announce twin entrances, while the middle and endpoints are celebrated with large arched barrel dormers decorated with shell designs of stone. The building is one of the best remaining examples of exposition-style



architecture in the world. During the Fair, visitors can find the world-famous Butter Cow, floral exhibits, jumbo vegetables

and hundreds of other horticulture and floriculture displays.

### ***John & Emily Putney Family Cattle Barn***

The huge Cattle Barn, covering 154,000 square feet with room to hold up to 1,600 head of cattle, is one of the most commanding structures on the Fairgrounds. The imposing brick edifice was built in two major stages, in 1914 and 1920, uniting the original north and south barns and adding the Sale Ring/Media Center. Improve-



ments to the Cattle Barn include a new roof, replacement of all gutters and downspouts and a new concrete floor in the foyer area. Additionally, both the north and south ends of the west side were extended 35 feet to the sidewalk in 1999. These annexes are used for a wide variety of consumer events. The Penningroth Media Center, also located in the Cattle Barn, hosts the Sale of Champions and other non-livestock events during the Fair. In 2013, the Cattle Barn was rechristened in honor of out-going Executive Director of the Blue Ribbon Foundation and former President of the Sale of Champions John Putney.

### ***Little Hands on the Farm***

Added to the Fairgrounds in 2004, Little Hands on the Farm provides children ages 2 to 10 the chance to get involved with agriculture as farmers. They plant and harvest products, earn money at the market for their work and then buy food at the grocery store. Children are asked to do chores on the farm, ranging from gathering an egg from the chicken coop to planting a carrot or onion seed. They also get the chance to feed and milk a cow or drive a pedal tractor. Most recently, a beef barn and swine barn were added to the farm. The program helps kids connect to agriculture by teaching them in an entertaining, interactive way.

### ***Maytag Family Theaters***

The Family Theaters (formerly the Family Center), constructed

in 1956 of brick and stone and fully air-conditioned, houses two completely separate theaters: Variety and Homemakers'. Originally built as a live TV studio and called the communications center, each theater features a stage, dressing rooms, office space and graded seating up to 300. Beginning in 1982, the Family Theaters formerly housed the Food Department contests and activities during the Fair. By 2007, the Food Department had outgrown the Family Theaters and was relocated to the Family Food Center. Since 2001, a variety of demonstrations and presentations are held in the building during the Fair.

### ***Mid-American Energy Stage***

This structure was built in time for the 2015 Fair and is located



west of the Cultural Center. The architecturally unique stage hosts a full line-up of free entertainment acts each year, including acts like local favorites The Blue Band and The Nadas as well as nationally recognized acts such as 38 Special.

The facility also includes restrooms, dressing rooms, storage areas, and a loading dock. KCCI 8 News broadcasts its First News at 5 live from the stage during the Fair.

### ***Mid-American Wind Turbine and Education Center***

Expo Hill is now the permanent home of the 133-foot wind turbine and education center in addition to several interactive displays during the Fair. These were added as part of Expo Hill's eco-friendly transformation began prior to the 2011 Fair and were finished for the 2012 Fair.

### ***Oman Family Youth Inn***

Built from 1939-42 as a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project (at a cost of \$4.89 per square foot), the Youth Inn is an outstanding example of art deco design. The rounded corners and glass block on the 12-inch thick steel-reinforced concrete

exterior walls typify this style of architecture. During the Fair, hundreds of young exhibitors stay at the “Hilton on the Hilltop,” where facilities include living quarters as well as a cafeteria and tiered seating. Phase three of renovations was completed prior to the 2016 Fair, providing air conditioning, new bunk beds and mattresses and new restroom and shower facilities. The downstairs kitchen also received an update and elevators were added for accessibility. The Youth Inn stage and auditorium was updated as well and balcony seating was added.

### ***Outdoor Arena***

Originally located west of the Horse Barn, the covered arena and its adjacent warm-up arena were relocated east of the Swine Barn in 2008 to make way for the Jacobson Exhibition Center. The arena is used during the Fair and off-season as a show and warm-up facility.

### ***Patty and Jim Cownie Cultural Center***

This monolithic three-story reinforced-concrete structure was built in 1948 to be the 4-H Club Girls’ Dormitory, at a cost of \$400,000. Transformation of the building to the current Cultural Center was done in time for the 1981



Fair and included installing new lighting, removing some interior walls, adding new display cases and painting the building inside and out. The 2012 Fair saw the addition of elevators to the building with completion of its renovation, including air-conditioning, in time for the 2014 Fair. A glittering showcase for Iowan artisans and a Fairtime residence for an impressive variety of artists, the Cultural Center is truly the center of art and contemporary style on the Fairgrounds. The Fair’s art show is the state’s largest.

### ***Paul R. Knapp Animal Learning Center***

Built in 2007, the Animal Learning Center features more than





17,000 square feet of flexible space. During Fairtime, the climatized building is home to an animal birthing center. Fairgoers can witness the births of baby calves, chickens, piglets, lambs and more. During the off-season the multi-use facility hosts a variety of receptions, trade shows and events.

## ***Pella Plaza***

A 50,000-square-foot picturesque pocket park nestled between the Agriculture Building and Livestock Pavilion, Pella Plaza is beautifully designed with flowers and pop jet fountains plus shady trees and comfortable benches. Colorful flags from each of Iowa's 99 counties fly proudly during the Fair, a gala reminder of the state's sesquicentennial celebration in 1996.



## ***Poultry and Rabbit Building***

Built in 1967 as an employee building, this 10,800-square-foot facility houses more than 400 species of poultry and rabbits during Fair competition.

## ***Pioneer Hall***

Built in 1886 for the first Fair held in its present location, Pioneer Hall boasts the high ceilings, the decorative millwork and the distinctive cupola high atop its roof typical of exposition halls of the time. During the Fair, it is a veritable museum of Iowa agriculture, including early farm machinery inside and outside, tools, equipment and home furnishings that illustrate an important period in Iowa history. It's also the site for the Fair's Rural Americana Olde Tyme contests including hog and husband calling, wood chopping and cow chip throwing. Demonstrations of several crafts, including weaving and



basket making, are also offered.

### ***Pioneer Livestock Pavilion***

Built in 1902, this landmark, dome-shaped, 47,000-square-foot arena seats up to 2,000. Rows of arched alcoves (used



by concessionaires during the Fair) are constructed of dark red brick, trimmed with stone and topped by an enormous three-tiered roof with clerestory glass that allows daylight to flood the center exhibition ring. Horse

and cattle shows are one of the many uses of the building.

The original wooden understructure and wooden seats were replaced in 1989 and air conditioning was added in 2011.

### ***Principal Plaza at Legacy Terrace***

This three-phase landscape project that sits immediately south of the Grandstand entrance, started in 2002 and replaced the Concourse Stage. The semi-circle park-like area includes arching water fountains as a main feature as well as trees, benches, three-foot tall pathway lights, granite pavers and limestone blocks. An eight-foot tall kiosk memorial erected in the center of the area bears panels dedicated to those who made the Terrace possible.

### ***Richard L. Easter Museum Complex***

The museum complex includes Richard O. Jacobson Hall featuring Kenyon Gallery and the Ralph H. Deets Historical Museum, the Fair's original museum.

#### ***Richard O. Jacobson Hall***

Built in 2005, Richard O. Jacobson Hall houses the new State Fair Museum. Interactive exhibits within Kenyon Gallery detail the Fair's history from its humble start in Fairfield in 1854 to the present. With the touch of a button, visitors to the Ronald and Margaret Kenyon Gallery in the State Fair Museum can



send two locomotives crashing into each other. They can also relive fantastic concerts by checking out a Grandstand shows memory wheel, test their livestock judging skills against others or marvel at more than a century of Fair fashion showcased on a revolving carousel.

### ***Ralph H. Deets Historical Museum***

Opened in 1982 and fully restored in 2007, the Ralph H. Deets Historical Museum houses photographs, artifacts and memorabilia from more than 15 decades of Iowa State Fair history. Permanent and changing exhibits include antique furniture, historical records, postcards, badge and ticket collections, premium book trophies and ribbons and other nostalgic mementos. The Museum occupies the former Polk County Headquarters Building, built in 1887. It was used by residents of the Polk County Home and Farm (in Saylor Township) as a place to rest and eat during annual visits to the Fair.

### ***Richard O. Jacobson Exhibition Center***

This facility is part of the \$20 million multi-phase project that broke ground in 2007. Completed in time for the 2010 Fair, the Richard O. Jacobson Exhibition Center is a flexible venue that



can host events ranging from livestock and trade shows to concerts and sporting events. The state-of-the-art facility is fully climatized and includes a show arena, a covered warm-up arena and fixed seating for 3,500. The striking design and unique architecture combined with tiled quilt patterns adorning the exterior walls make the Exhibition Center a welcome addition to the Fairgrounds. Jake's Club, the second floor VIP area, can be used independently for business meetings, private parties or receptions.

### ***Robert G. Horner & Sheri Avis Horner Service Center***

Designed to “look as though it has always been there,” the Service Center was one of the first new buildings of signifi-

cance constructed on the grounds since renovation efforts began in the early 90s. Built in 1995, the 3,800-square-foot building features mosaic-tiled floors and a two-story lobby



accentuated by clerestory windows. Fairtime services include an information booth, first aid, ATMs, a paging station for lost children and adults, nursing and diaper changing areas, and restrooms for the disabled.

### ***Sheep Barn***

Designed in phases in 1915, 1923 and 1939, the Sheep Barn is a most surprising edifice. From its unique polychrome terra cotta trim and east entrance murals to its floral arches and wonderful ram's head column capitals around the perimeter of the building, the barn is a prime example of its architectural inspiration. The six-acre barn houses 480 sheep pens, 840 cattle ties and a show ring with bleacher seating for 500 spectators.



### ***Stalling Barn***

Built in time for the 2008 Fair, the Stalling Barn was part of the multi-phase Richard O. Jacobson Exhibition Center project. The 40,656-square-foot covered, open-air facility, houses beef cattle and llamas during the Fair and a variety of year-round events. The covered arena and practice arena are adjacent to the Stalling Barn.



### ***Stone Map***

In 1976, the Iowa State Fair Board initiated a project to commemorate the country's bicentennial birthday in a meaningful and lasting manner. The Stone Map of Iowa, which contains a stone native to each of Iowa's 99 counties, was the result. Each stone is said to represent the strength and heritage of the state. The Stone Map was finished in 1977 and is located

southeast of the Administration Building near the Anne and Bill Riley Stage.

### ***Susan Knapp Amphitheater***

Completed for the 2006 Fair, the Susan Knapp Amphitheater is the largest of the Fair's free entertainment stages. The 39-foot by 99-foot venue can accommodate a crowd of more than 10,000, including seating for 3,000. The facility also features dressing rooms, storage areas and trailer/bus loading docks.

### ***Swine Barn***

Built in 1907 and 1936 with alterations in 1942, the sprawling 184,096-square-foot Swine Barn is distinguished by arched brick entries, which use layered brick and diagonal brick infill to decorate the arch. Raised and multi-tiered open clerestory roof forms announce the central show ring area. The barn houses 1,100 swine pens with seating for 800 persons in the more than four acres of covered space in addition to two sawdust-covered show rings.



### ***Thrill Parks***

From roller coasters to bumper cars and Ferris wheels, amusement park rides have been a staple at the Iowa State Fair. In 2017, the super spectacular midway areas on the Fairgrounds got a facelift and new names as a part of the Iowa State Fair Thrill Parks. Thrill Parks showcase three separate



parks designed for different ages and levels of entertainment. Construction began the fall of 2016 and was completed by the 2017 Iowa State Fair. Thrill Town features kid friendly rides and is located east of Gate 10 and directly north of the Richard O. Jacobson Exhibition Center Lawn. Thrill Ville offers a clean and family friendly atmosphere, but focuses on the jaw dropping, and super-speed screams of the best of today's rides; it is located between the Grandstand and Ye Old Mill. The wide open space in Thrill Ville is used for various vehicle events as well as overflow parking during the

off-season. Lastly, Fairgoers seeking heart-stopping adventure will find it in the Thrill Zone which is located on the southwest corner of the Fairgrounds.

## ***Time Capsules***

Time capsules are located east and west of the Anne and Bill Riley Stage. The “Centurlon,” buried to mark the Fair’s 100th birthday in 1954, is slated to be opened in 2054; the other, buried in 1986 to commemorate the 100th birthday of the current Fairgrounds at East 30th Street and East University Avenue, will be opened in 2086.

## ***Vermeer Grandfather’s Barn***

This authentic basement barn, still standing on the original site where it was built in 1865, was part of the original Calvin Thornton farmstead. The state of Iowa and the city of Des Moines purchased the land in 1885 for the Fair’s permanent home, and the first Fair held here was in 1886. The barn is a classic example of early Iowa agricultural architecture.



The foundation is of native stone; the walls are constructed of hewn and rough Iowa lumber, meticulously mortised and tenoned together and secured with wrought iron nails. Closed because of safety reasons in 1989, the barn was completely renovated in 1994. Grandfather’s Barn was closed in 2008 for further renovations and reopened in time for the 2009 Fair. The renovated barn features the Wine Experience, a showcase of Iowa’s wine and grape industry.

## ***Walnut Center***

Designed for a variety of off-season uses including parties, meetings, picnics, fundraisers and small trade shows, construction began on the Walnut Center in 1987. During the Fair, the clear span, 8,000-square-foot steel building houses a variety of crafters.





## ***WHO Crystal Studio***

Built in 1987, WHO Radio broadcasts live from this 1,000-square-foot building during the Fair. The name of the building is derived from WHO broadcasts in the 1930s that took place in the Varied Industries Building surrounded by “crystal” glass. Ronald Reagan broadcasted baseball games from the Fair in the 1930s when he served as the station’s sports director.

## ***William C. Knapp Varied Industries Building***

Built in 1911 and completely rebuilt from 2000-2002, the Varied Industries Building offers more than 110,000 square feet of prime exhibitor space. The three-year renovation included enclosing the building, removing 25 interior pillars, replacing the concrete floor and adding heating and air-conditioning for year-round use. It is the state’s largest enclosed, single-level exhibit facility. One of the most-used facilities on the Fairgrounds, it is jammed with a wide variety of products and services, from seed corn to grand pianos during the Fair. It was originally called the Machinery Building due to its tractor and engine exhibitors.



## ***Ye Old Mill***

The nostalgic Ye Old Mill is the Fair’s oldest permanent amusement ride. The old-fashioned “tunnel of love” has been in continuous use since it was built in 1920-1924 and is one of only two such attractions remaining in the country out of seven built by John Keenan. The original waterway was constructed of tarred wood. In 1996, the wheelhouse and 950-foot long canal were completely reconstructed to the exact specifications of the prototype. Twelve 1,800-pound fiberglass boats were specially designed to carry passengers. The bright red paddlewheel remains the only vestige of the original Mill.



### ***Other Fair Buildings***

Other buildings located on the Fairgrounds include the Fair's Electrical and Maintenance Departments and Ice and Feed, as well as the Hy-Vee Health and First Aid Center and the Fire Station and Public Safety Headquarters.

**Material for this publication was taken  
from a variety of sources:**

Art in the Park Walking Tour prepared  
by William M. Dikis

FAIA

Iowa State Fair Blue Ribbon  
Foundation Walking Tour

Don Muhm's State Fair Trivia

Iowa State Fair  
Heritage Village Brochure

Iowa State Fair News  
Releases and Newsletters

The logo for the Iowa State Fair, featuring the words "IowaStateFair" in a white, sans-serif font. The text is contained within a dark blue, rounded rectangular shape that has a slight 3D effect with a lighter blue shadow on the right side.

**IowaStateFair**