

## Iowa at the Centennial

Almost half a century has elapsed since Iowa participated for the first time in a World's Fair. When news first reached Iowa of a proposed Centennial Exposition at Philadelphia it aroused only a mild interest in the event, and the General Assembly of 1874 adjourned without taking any action in support of the project. As additional information about the stupendous plans for commemorating the century anniversary of the nation's birthday reached Iowa, however, interest grew, and in 1875 a voluntary organization of citizens began to raise money "to secure a creditable representation of the industries, agricultural and mineral resources, and educational advantages and facilities of Iowa". The Sixteenth General Assembly which convened in January, 1876, preceding the opening of the Exposition in May, passed an act appropriating twenty thousand dollars for an exhibit, and directed that the Executive Council of the State should take charge of the enterprise and appoint a manager with as many assistants as might be necessary. The citizens' organization turned over the money it had raised to the Iowa Commission and immediate steps were taken to prepare an exhibit which would arouse the interest of prospective settlers and show the world how prosperous Iowa was.



Between the Missouri and Tennessee buildings on State Avenue the Iowa Commission erected the Iowa Building, a comfortable, two-story, home-like structure of wood. It had four commodious rooms on the first floor furnished in the ornate style of that day — one room was fitted up as a ladies' parlor, another as a reception room for men, a third as a reading room, and the fourth as an office. Four rooms on the second floor were used as sleeping quarters for the manager and his assistants. Such services as finding boarding places for Iowa visitors during their visit to Philadelphia, delivering mail and telegrams, and countless other helpful acts were performed by those in charge of the building. By August 27th, over seven thousand Iowans had registered at the Iowa headquarters.

But while the Iowa Building compared favorably with the other State homes at the Centennial it was the exhibit of the Hawkeye State in Agricultural Hall which attracted and held the attention of every visitor. The Iowa display occupied a conspicuous place in the Hall and was enhanced by a border of thirty-five, upright, glass cylinders, six feet long and six inches in diameter, each one mounted on a square wooden pedestal and surmounted by a glass globe on which appeared the name of a county. These tubes contained vertical soil samples six feet in depth from thirty-five counties representing every section of the State. So interested was the Swedish Commission in this display that one of these tubes



was later shipped to Sweden to show prospective emigrants the rich quality of Iowa soil.

Within the space allotted to Iowa seventy-four varieties of corn, arranged in attractive designs, and an extensive display of vegetable seeds, grasses, wheat, rye, oats, and barley were a convincing testimony to the agricultural wealth and possibilities of the State. In the agricultural display, too, were attractive samples of butter from the Manchester Creamery to which was granted a gold medal as first prize by the Butter and Cheese Association.

Nor was farm machinery manufactured in Iowa missing from the display. Plows, a hay rake, a seed drill, a fanning mill, hay scales, a wheat dryer, a cultivator, a clod masher, and a wine mill made a modest yet interesting exhibit, while a fine display of wines from the famous White Elk Vineyard of Lee County undoubtedly won its share of attention. In Machinery Hall a steam engine, a steam boiler, draw-cut sausage choppers, a wagon, and specimens of wagon springs were exhibited by Iowa firms.

In the Mineral Annex the Iowa display showed a reproduction of the geological stratification of the State arranged in twelve cases with glass fronts. Lead ore from Dubuque, coal from different counties, and building stone afforded glimpses of the mineral wealth of the State, while an extensive collection of archeological remains suggested the days of the mound builders in the Mississippi Valley.

A collection of maps, charts, geometrical and



freehand drawings, examination papers, slates, and copy books in the Educational Annex represented the work of Iowa school children, while a display of statuary by Vinnie Ream in Memorial Hall led a correspondent to write: "Her collection appeals strongly to the hearts of observers by the telling expression of the statues and the delicacy, fineness, and precise clean cutting of her chisel."

Perhaps, however, the showing made by Iowa in Pomological Hall during the month of September redounded to the credit of the State as much or more than any other part of its exhibit. The Exposition was then at the height of its popularity. All the hotels of Philadelphia were crowded to their utmost capacity, filled with beds and cots from sky parlors to basement. Railroad trains, horse cars, hacks, omnibuses, buggies, wagons, and carriages were taxed to capacity in trying to get the crowds of be-whiskered gentlemen and fine ladies with enormous bustles to and from the Exposition grounds.

Thousands of people passed daily through the huge exhibition halls of steel and glass. When the Iowa exhibit of fruits was reached, the visitor invariably paused to marvel. During the earlier days of the Exposition the Iowa display had consisted of wax casts of some three hundred varieties of fruit. While these wax models — colored, shaded, tinged, spotted, or streaked so as to be almost indistinguishable from real fruit — made an attractive picture, nevertheless friendly jibes had been made by rival



States. Now all was changed. Down the center of Pomological Hall, seven pyramid-like tables each thirty-five feet long were heaped high with plums, quince, pears, and apples — all clearly and attractively labelled. Spurred on, it is said, by the size and quality of the Iowa exhibit the California managers sent daily telegrams for more and better specimens, but to Iowa the judges gave the highest awards for the largest and best display of fruits.

September 7, 1876, which was designated as Iowa Day at the Centennial Exposition, found about two hundred Iowans gathered in the forenoon at the Judges' Pavilion to hear C. C. Nourse of Des Moines deliver an address on the history of Iowa. Judge Nourse was introduced by the Secretary of the Centennial Commission, and in spite of din and confusion outside the building he held the attention of his audience for nearly two hours.

Iowa's participation in the Centennial Exposition led a Philadelphia reporter to write: "Perhaps Iowa more than any other State west of the Mississippi is deserving of attention by the people of the East." Indeed, the showing made by Iowa at Philadelphia in 1876 exceeded the expectations of even the promoters of the enterprise, and the twenty thousand dollars appropriated by the General Assembly was returned many-fold to the State by the new settlers who were attracted by the Iowa Centennial exhibit.

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