CHAPTER VI
Origin of the Winter Shows, Who Kept it Going, and Who Is Active Today

Farming in the Red River Basin was in its infancy at the time the Winter Shows came on the scene. Farmers were having a lot of difficulty raising crops on what was largely soggy sod. Management of crop and livestock production required long hours of hard labor in all kinds of weather. Farm locations were few and far between. Often the closest neighbor might live half a day's travel away. Roads were nothing but trails on the prairie.

Railroads were beginning to provide useful service to major sections of the region. Mail service was in the early stages of formation. Newspapers and magazines were rare in the usual farm home. There were practically no county agents and Vo-Ag teachers in northwestern Minnesota at the time the Winter Shows became a reality. The only professional agriculture agents were the railroad agriculture development officers.

People out on the land were hungry for information. They wanted to know more about how to manage this rich, black soil. In the late 1800's, farmers began to form organizations for the purpose of promoting their interests and especially for exchanging experiences. Agricultural research was about 40 years old in the United States, and most of the research effort going on was far east of the Mississippi River. The Northwest Experiment Station was a new idea in the Valley and experiencing very sharp growing pains. Farmers wanted to hear about the happenings at this "state experiment farm".

It is not surprising that the Farm Crops Show (the Winter Shows today) began at the Northwest School and Agricultural Experiment Station. Superintendent Conrad Selvig, the staff of the school and station, and citizens from Crookston and surrounding area, saw a need for service and education for these pioneer farm families. An Annual Short Course was launched in 1910, and the man on the street dubbed it the Farm Crops Show. The official title in the early days was the Annual Short Course and Farm Crops Show. While the University provided the educational leadership and much of the organizational planning at the outset, Crookston community leaders, including bankers, machinery dealers, legislators and farmers, joined in to lend a hand in the development of this educational and social event.

People were especially anxious to talk because there weren't any telephones, radios, or electrical power. Successful short courses were being conducted by University agriculture and home economics specialists beginning in the 1880's in southern Minnesota. These were largely a community affair, however. Superintendent Selvig and his staff envisioned a larger field of service for northwestern Minnesota -- all counties needed service now. Everybody cooperated to give the new vision life and form. A few neighborhood clubs, including women's groups, expressed immediate interest. The early Farm Crops Shows sparked new organizations of farmers and farmers' wives, who looked forward to the midwinter break. People from all over the Red River Basin came on trains to spend several days learning, making new friends, and just getting away from home for a break, for even as little as a day or more was most welcome in the long, lonesome winters.

The following is a list of the various organizations who have been associated with the Winter Shows, along with a brief history of each organization. An asterisk indicates the organization, group or institution that belonged in the early years and is still active today. Otherwise an approximate date is given for those which became supporting cooperators with the Red River Valley Winter Shows Board of Managers, Inc.

*Northwest School, Experiment Station and Agricultural Extension Service -- All three of these arms of the University were located here by 1910 or shortly thereafter on the land given by James J. Hill for the purpose of starting an experiment station and then building a school of agriculture to teach what was learned on the "state experiment farm." About the middle of the second decade of this century, the Agricultural Extension Service became part of the local government scene in northwestern Minnesota. These three educational, research, and service arms of the University have provided the major stabilizing force for leadership and direction during the 75-year history.

Minnesota Vocational Agricultural Instructors Association (1958) -- Several individual vocational agriculture teachers participated annually in show activities from the 1920's onward. The Vo-Ag Teachers Association voted to request membership on the Winter Shows Board in the late 1950's. Their students, the blue jacketed FFA members, are a familiar sight at the Winter Shows and make up a substantial part of the annual youth participation in the various judging contests and other educational events. The Winter Shows provides a unique opportunity for the teachers of vocational agriculture in their educational and training programs. The Minnesota Vocational Agricultural Teachers Association has provided ongoing expert leadership as a cooperating organization for nearly 30 years.

*The Red River Valley Dairymen's Association -- This association is one of the very oldest commodity groups in the Red River Basin and has one of the longest records of working with Winter Shows. The Dairymen's Association was organized under the leadership of Torger Hoverstad, the first superintendent of the Northwest Experiment Station. Cooperative creameries were just beginning to be formed in the different communities, and the time was ripe for an organization of processors as well as producers of dairy products to promote the interests of the dairy industry. The Red River Valley Dairymen's Association continues today and is active in helping plan and sponsor the Honored Dairymen's Banquet and the Dairy