

CHAPTER X

Quality of Life - People

The Winter Shows began as the service and educational arm of Minnesota’s Land Grant University. The University was beginning to reach out into the countryside in northwestern Minnesota in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s. The people on the land were struggling to make a living and a satisfying life. The best established educational arm about 1910 was the one-room country school, readily available to most farm families. Farmers and others who came to the first Winter Shows programs were lonely for fellowship, eager to hear about the new “experiment farm,” and ready to listen to outsiders. Music, singing, pageants, educational contests, all added a special quality of experience for the early visitors of the Winter Shows. People on the land were longing to hear the voices of knowledge, of investigation, of experience to speak to them, talk with them, to answer questions.

For the most part, it was the community leaders and innovators who came to those early short courses. Such a trend continued even as the Winter Shows changed program ideas to fit the shifting scene from horsepower to tractor, from walking to the mailbox to the modern three-wheeler, from almost no communication with the outside world to so much that sorting out what is fact and what isn’t becomes a daily challenge.

The individual members of the board of managers, of course, have changed with time. An estimated 300 men and women have served on the board during the 75-year history. Some have served over 40 years -- a generation of time. Generally, tenure on the board extends several years. This longer tenure, yet with the constant infusion of new people, provides stability of purpose and the creative challenge of new ideas.

A study of the program booklets finds a recurring theme which gives emphasis to speakers, events and activities that extended the quality of life. The major projects or activities which are particularly designed to enhance the quality of living are explained in this chapter.

YOUTH ACTIVITIES

A natural and immediate happening in the early Winter Shows was the emphasis given to the human family, out there working with the soil and water to produce crops and livestock. All hands in the family were organized to survive in the setting chosen by the pioneer farmers of the Valley. It wasn’t surprising, therefore, that leadership of the Winter Shows included youth very early in the 75 years.

Interestingly enough, the earliest youth contests were related to that very prominent institution out in the country, the one-room country school. Spelling contests were popular and continued as long as the country schools were on the scene. Declamatory, posture, essay, and one-act play contests were programmed for nearly two decades beginning about 1915. Vocal and instrumental music by youth groups in those early years provided entertainment at programs. The music department of the Northwest School of Agriculture and their students probably sang and played at more Winter Shows programs than any other single group of Red River Valley youth up until 1968, when the N.W. School phased out to make room for the Technical College. In the late 1950s, and through most of the 70’s, high school bands were bused in during the day to play and to see the show.

A Talent Show now known as the “Talent Festival” was developed by the board of managers, with the Crookston Jaycees initially cooperating to start the project. This talent contest provided an opportunity for young people to compete in drama, dance, voice, and instrumental. The 75th year, 1985, will be the 26th consecutive Talent Festival to attract amateur youth as individuals or groups. Currently, the music department of the Technical College organizes the Talent Festival each year as a service to the Winter Shows exposition. As many as 50 auditions have been held each year, from which approximately a dozen top numbers are selected for an evening of final competition in Kiehle Auditorium at the University of Minnesota Technical College. Expert judges select the top three numbers, and cash prizes are awarded by the Winter Shows board of managers. Weather permitting, the

Youth activities at the Winter Shows includes more than judging contests, showing livestock, and attending clinics. Opportunities to serve and to experience the unusual are available. This group of FFA students serve the King Agassiz banquet and also get a chance to visit first hand with former Senator and Vice President Hubert Humphrey.