CHAPTER XI

Letters, Interviews and Telephone Calls

Early in 1984 letters were sent to 68 individuals inviting opinions and observations about the 75-year old Red River Valley Winter Shows. An item was also placed in the quarterly Northwest Agricultural Experiment Station News published in early April of 1984, announcing the Winter Shows history writing project and inviting contributions. More than 60 responses were received via letter and telephone and have been included throughout the book. This chapter, however, records a number of letters and quotations from the interview process, all of which capture in their own way the consistent spirit of the volunteers who have been part of the 75-year history. Each letter or quotation will be introduced with the person’s name and a few words about his or her connection with the show.

C.J. (Rudy) Gustafson of Route 2, Underwood, Minnesota, was a county extension agent for five years in West Ottertail County and a leader of the fund raising taskforce to construct facilities in 1960. Later he directed the Farm Service Department for the Ottertail Power Company and retired recently as vice president for development. He has one of the long-time records of volunteer service to the Winter Shows.

I began attending the Red River Valley Winter Shows in 1946 when I was West Ottertail County extension agent. I was the coach of the 4-H judging team and escort for the farm couple from West Ottertail County selected to receive the Valley Farmer and Homemaker Award from the Development Association. I continued to attend each year until about 1980. I left the Extension Service in 1951 and established the Farm Service Department for the Ottertail Power Company but continued attending the Winter Shows as a commercial exhibitor and as a volunteer helper in conducting various events at the show.

My job for many years was superintendent of the livestock judging contest, working with O.M. Kiser and later others instructing the participants in the mechanics of the contest and organizing the listening to oral reasons. While with Ottertail Power Company, I spent the entire week at the show. Now as I reflect on those years, my most vivid memories are of several very severe cold and stormy days that somehow seemed to occur the week of the Winter Shows. This convinces me that there had to be great educational value to make it worthwhile for farmers to leave home and drive to Crookston and they did, in ever increasing numbers year after year.

As for the judging contests in the years following World War II, participants, including 4-H and FFA members, the subcollegiate teams from the Minnesota Agriculture Schools and the Park River North Dakota Aggies as well as great numbers of young farmer teams coached by the Veteran’s Agricultural Instructors working in the region for several years after World War II.

The reason for farmers coming to the shows were the educational benefits they received from studying the commercial exhibits. The exhibits usually featured new products and ideas. The chance to see and to study high-quality livestock, poultry, crops exhibits, and talk with agriculture extension specialists who were always at the show, and finally for the knowledge they could obtain by attending the broad scope of seminars and lectures conducted by University of Minnesota staff members as well as other recognized experts. This was true for the farmer’s wife, for there were annual sessions planned for the ladies.

As a professional person working in agricultural education, the Winter Shows had great value for me. It put me in close contact for a whole week with fellow workers and specialists so that I had a chance to ask questions and to get answers to things that were bothering me.

The building of a new arena located on the site north of Crookston was a great undertaking and a tribute to the leadership of Bill Strickler, Bernie Youngquist, Harold Thomforde, and the leadership of many others. It changed the character of the show. Instead of the events being scattered in many locations, it brought everyone and everything together. In a way that was kind of sad because there was a certain romance and excitement in having many things going on at the Methodist Church, Presbyterian