CHAPTER V
Government and Sponsorship of the Winter Shows

Webster’s dictionary defines the word govern “to guide or to direct or to decide.” Further, the word government is defined as “the act or process of managing, especially referring to a governing body or organization.”

Certainly, in 1910 the guiding force and directing body or organization of the first annual Short Course and Farm Crop Show was Superintendent C.G. Selvig and the staff of the Northwest School and Experiment Station. By the time the second year rolled around, citizen-leaders in business and in the professions in Crookston joined the University staff.

The history of the guiding and governing organization which planned and operated the Winter Shows each year is a story of vision for the future, of courage to try something new. There were voices among the agricultural leaders which suggested that a strong agriculture could not develop in the Red River Basin unless there were livestock. Consequently, the Dairymen’s Association, the Poultrymen’s Association and the Red River Valley Livestock Breeders were among the earliest commodity groups to become associated with the Show. Even though a livestock show in midwinter was a question mark, livestock farmers needed every help available to successfully raise livestock in the rugged winters out on the prairie. The Crops Show generated wide interest. As a result, a special organization, the Red River Valley Development Association, was set up in 1914. This group had representatives from each of the ten counties and was the first association to give financial aid. They adopted the Farm Crops Show and built wide regional support. They scoured the countryside and secured top-level premiums. Until 1920 it was this Red River Valley Development Association which was the guiding and governing body of the Winter Shows. Other commodity groups were cooperating but weren’t providing governing service to the annual Short Course and Farm Crop Show. The building of the new buildings in downtown Crookston brought on new problems. The nature of the Red River Valley Development Association did not provide for owning buildings nor could the modest appropriations provided by each county be used for constructing buildings.

The Red River Valley Livestock Association was beginning to come alive through the efforts of agricultural leaders who realized the importance of livestock as part of the future farming scene. County breeding associations had been formed in the early part of the decade, and a Red River Valley Livestock Breeders Association was organized in 1914 at the short course. In 1917 this group reorganized at a Development Association meeting in Warren and were formally incorporated in 1918 under the laws of the State of Minnesota as the Red River Valley Livestock Association, Inc. It became the only organization cooperating with the Winter Shows which could own property. When the push came to erect buildings and facilities in the immediate area of the new armory, therefore, the Red River Valley Livestock Association took on that task.

The leadership of the Livestock Association and of the Development Association included many of the same people. For nearly four decades, 20’s, 30’s and 40’s and even extending into the 50’s, there was a strong cross-linking of directorships between the Winter Shows board of managers and the government of the Red River Valley Livestock Association. A quick look at the old premium books for those decades will show the name of a University staff member as president of both organizations. The livestock association became the leading cooperator in the fund drive for the first two buildings: the livestock pavilion in 1918 and the big livestock barn in 1919. The third building, which was built in 1920, met with some internal differences among the cooperating groups and with the post-World War I recession. It began to dawn upon leaders of the Winter Shows that the title to the Red River Valley Winter Shows facilities by a single commodity group might well be providing the shows with some problems.

Consequently, the government of the Winter Shows took on a new name in 1920; the Winter Shows Board of Managers, and from that time the government of the exposition repre-
resented Valley-wide commodity and farm-related organizations. Except for a few years in the late 1940's, this rather loosely organized board of managers has planned and operated the Red River Valley Winter Shows annually, even though the title to the buildings belonged to the Red River Valley Livestock Association.

In the 1940's, problems developed within the governing body of the Winter Shows. The board of managers was an organization of commodity groups and agricultural agencies joined informally for the common welfare of the Winter Shows. They succeeded in organizing grass roots volunteer committees in the original ten counties and swelling the number to 14 counties by the 1930's. The Northwest School and Experiment Station grew greatly in influence and respect, especially in the Red River Basin and even across the State and was noted for its top-level professional people and the caliber of leadership each one brought to a particular area of expertise, as in soils, agronomy, livestock, or horticulture. These leaders then became the "government in being" behind the scenes for the annual Winter Shows.

As sometimes happens in loosely knit organizations, it's easier to do the job of planning and leadership yourself than to go out and maintain that very important level of volunteer leadership out at the grass roots. That kind of situation nearly resulted in the demise of the Red River Valley Winter Shows. In 1948 the 30-year charter of the livestock group expired, and a move was made to declare the Red River Valley Livestock Association, Inc. as illegal with no state charter.

While the Show kept rolling each year, it took a protracted lawsuit to settle the issue, which finally ended up in the State Supreme Court, which ruled in favor of the Red River Valley Winter Shows Board of Managers.

Before the lawsuit, some explanation is helpful. The last of the three buildings built after World War I was built in 1920. The Livestock Association raised some serious questions as to whether they ought to be involved in building a building for an industrial show. The fund raising fizzled. The banks loaned money to build the major portion of the industrial building, and it wasn't paid off until 1940. The Livestock Association was liable for paying the debts, as they had title to the buildings even though all organizations had helped raise the money. Income to the Livestock Association from renting the structures didn't make full payments on the principal. The board of managers handled the modest income from tickets and concession booths which barely paid expenses of the show. Thus, there was a situation where misunderstandings could and did develop. Further detail on the lawsuit is noted in Chapter 11.

With the lawsuit settled, the board of managers went to work forthwith and officially incorporated under Minnesota nonprofit laws with appropriate articles of incorporation and bylaws. Generally the articles called for carrying on the work of the Show and related activities with a broad enough charge to meet the changing scene in agricultural production. The articles did place additional emphasis on the participation of any Valley-wide commodity organization or other related farm institutions who wished to have a person on the board of managers by making application. Such application was considered on its merits and voted upon. The original articles of incorporation have been amended officially and the amendments lodged with the Secretary of State on two occasions since that time.

In 1960 the articles were adjusted to include additional agricultural organizations. This action provided for a membership of no fewer than nine on the board, a number divisible by three, and one-third to be elected each year. The amendment was necessary when the new building program was being funded and when a great deal of interest on the part of several Valley-wide organizations expressed interest in the government of the Show. Organizations at that time which were expressing an interest were the Vo Ag Teachers Association, the Soil Conservation Districts, the Farm Bureau, Farmers Union, NFO, Potato Growers Association, the Sugarbeet Growers Association, and the Minnesota Crop Improvement Association.

Again, in 1972 the official articles were amended, adding appropriate language to the articles needed by the Bureau of Internal Revenue so that anyone giving funds to the Red River Valley Winter Shows could fit under the new laws which regulated charitable and educational giving. Further, the amendment provided that if the Winter Shows as an organization is ever dissolved the assets shall pass on to an organization providing similar charitable and educational service to society.

Since the first set was drawn up in 1953, the bylaws have been changed several times to fit the changing scene.

Summer meeting of the Crops and Soils Association in 1924. A picnic, a look at crop variety plots, and some planning for the next crop show were on the agenda.
of governmental needs on governing the Winter Shows. One of the first official listings of the organizations that were cooperating to plan and guide the Show each year was announced about 1916. This group included the Crookston Commercial Club, the Farm Bureau, the Red River Valley Livestock Breeders Association, the Northern Minnesota Poultry Association, the Red River Valley Dairymen’s Association, and the Red River Valley Development Association. While the Crookston Commercial Club is now called the Crookston Area Chamber of Commerce, all these organizations, while differing in character, still are among the cooperating organizations today among a total of 21 different groups.

The strength of the volunteerism effort began to wane with the emerging of the World War II and the recovery period that followed. Unfortunately, a lot of the planning and directing was done by very few people, most of whom were on the staff and administration of the Northwest School and Experiment Station. This is one of the factors that may have led to the misunderstanding resulting in the lawsuit. The downturn of grass roots volunteerism seemed to reach a low point after the lawsuit was settled and after the Winter Shows board of managers became officially incorporated.

The associate dean of the Institute of Agriculture, Forestry and Home Economics, T.H. Fenske, requested that a good look be taken at the relationship between the Northwest School and Experiment Station and the Winter Shows. His observation was “The Winter Shows is a very good institution in northwest Minnesota but it is too heavy a drag on the superintendent and staff of the University. This needs adjusting.”

The board took a good look in 1956-57. They found serious parking problems, public safety hazards in the buildings, not enough space for concessioners and University personnel more involved than appropriate for a 14-county regional activity. The board members held meetings out in the counties. They were surprised at the solid encouragement to do something about the Red River Valley Winter Shows. The theme of the new effort, which surfaced in 1957 and grew to a rather loud clamor in 1958, was to “Grow or Die.” After a lot of discussion, the idea surfaced to dispose of the property in downtown Crookston and use the proceeds, along with conducting a regional-wide fund drive, to purchase land and build a facility adjacent to the City of Crookston.

The big stumbling block was that the board of managers really had no title to the buildings. They had no debts but also very modest funds in the bank. They had a responsible credit reputation but little or no physical assets. Other organizations supporting the Show at that time had even less money in the banks. The Red River Valley Livestock Association had title to the buildings.

At a meeting in the fall of 1957 the president of the Red River Valley Winter Shows reported to the Red River Valley Livestock Association directors and advisory members on the findings of the board of managers. He said relocation was essential if the Show was to continue. He pointed out that the Livestock Association owned these buildings and could build the needed facilities if they wished. He reported that the Winter Shows board of managers was now incorporated and could own real estate. On motion by Arlan Stangeland and duly sec-

---

The
Minnesota Association
of
Wheat Growers
congratulates the
Crookston Winter Show and its staff on
75 YEARS OF EXCELLENT Service and Devotion to agriculture.

Minnesota Association of Wheat Growers
Red Lake Falls, MN
onded, the Livestock Association moved to study the building needs.

At their annual meeting on February 24, 1958, the committee report was presented and discussed. Upon motion by Bob Schafer and duly seconded, a unanimous decision by the Red River Valley Livestock Association was made to turn over title to their downtown show buildings to the Red River Valley Winter Shows Board of Managers, Inc. The motion required that should the Winter Shows ever cease, the title to such buildings would revert to the Livestock Association. The latter stipulation was rescinded at a later meeting.

Additionally, the Red River Valley Livestock Association asked to have four members on the board of managers—each representing a separate class of livestock. The legal counsel of

The Superintendents of the Northwest Experiment Station were among the frontline volunteers and four of them served as president of the Winter Shows for 72 years. The bylaws were adjusted in 1981 to encourage a change in this practice. The four superintendents who served are pictured here along with the two presidents who served most recently.
the Winter Shows studied the actions taken by the Livestock Association, and the board of managers were advised they could legally move on accepting custody of the buildings and land. Four places on the new board of managers from the Livestock Association were duly elected at a subsequent meeting.

Action went ahead immediately to enlarge the board of managers to include additional organizations. Currently, there are 24 members authorized by the bylaws representing 21 different organizations. Some organizations, of course, are more active than others. It is interesting to note, however, that the three original strong leadership organizations which really provided the key governing minds and guides for the Winter Shows are largely the same: the Red River Valley Livestock Association, the Red River Valley Development Association and the University of Minnesota, now including the Technical College, the Northwest Experiment Station and the Extension Service out in the 14 counties. These three have now been joined by 16 other farm or farm-related organizations. The trend of too much involvement by University-based leadership was thereby reversed. This may well be the most significant governance change in the history of the shows.

The board has been reorganized into a strong regional committee structure and the idea of the managership responsibility of each board member is stronger than ever at this time in history. With attendance growth from a few thousand people to nearly 40,000 and ownership of property in excess of three million dollars, however, the details of accounting and leg work in between board meetings are such that full-time help is needed for accomplishing details in an orderly manner. An interesting note is that the superintendents of the Agricultural Experiment Station have been president of the board of managers for 72 years! President Youngquist began working on the change in that format about three years before retirement, and one year prior to his retirement the presidency of the board of managers changed after appropriate revision of the bylaws. Currently, the president can serve two years and must come up through the ranks of vice presidency and have the personal qualifications of leadership and experience. A full-time manager was hired July 1, 1983. A complete list of the board of managers members, with organizations they represent, is found in the appendix, together with the officers at the time this history was written.

In summary, the government of the Winter Shows has gone from a very loose kind of grass roots cooperative effort to a more sophisticated non-profit, tax-exempt corporation, incorporated under the laws of the State of Minnesota and broadly represented by the major agricultural organizations in northwestern Minnesota. The corporation is a nonprofit charitable and educational organization formed for the purpose of enhancing the quality of life as lived on the land and on the urban scene in northwestern Minnesota. It engages in educational activities which today complement but not duplicate those carried on by other organizations, agencies, and individuals here in the Red River Basin. It is a membership corporation and operates under rather strict articles and bylaws. If any organization ceases to provide any real ongoing usefulness in northwestern Minnesota or fails to do its part in the governing leadership it can be dropped from a membership role.

Of course, it's impossible for a board of managers of 24 members to be part of the everyday management. A strong executive committee has been formed of members of rather longtime tenure who are able to handle the details of planning that go with each show. Every board member is included on one or more committees and has responsibility for his or her particular sector.

At best, it's still a rather loose aggregation for planning the exposition looked forward to by a lot of people in the middle of a long winter. The Winter Shows hasn't lost one year in a 75-year span. Partial cancellation took place at the time of the flu epidemic in 1919 and during the war effort in 1939. Meetings were called off both times, but the crops, livestock, and industrial show were held.

Selected lists of officers, board members and committees are included in the appendix. There is a set of closely guarded bound volumes of all of the premium books and program books since 1910 in safe storage. These volumes include the list of directors and committees for any year about which the reader might have a question.

Someone raised the question, "What's the secret of the Red River Valley Winter Shows?" It's a grass roots organization. It has never asked for a cent of Uncle Sam's government money to build new buildings and buy land. How can they keep going 75 years and stay afloat when one sees volunteer organizations start and stop several times during even one lifetime? Other parts of this historical writing have made reference to the volunteer board of managers who plan and operate the Show each year. These volunteers represent the frontline organizations and institutions in northwest Minnesota. This group of 24 people is undergirded by about 300 additional volunteers organized into committees out in the 14 counties. New board members are added as new organizations petition for and are granted membership.

An interesting development currently is the growth of a new organization known as the County King Agassiz Association. Again, it's a loosely organized association of young couples who have been elected as county kings and gone through the King Agassiz coronation ceremony. Because they have developed a sense of belonging to each other, of having a common interest, they like to get together. That doesn't mean that every county king is gung-ho and active, but enough of them are so that it's a growing organization, and it may well be that some day as a group they'll take on other interests besides the Red River Valley Winter Shows King Agassiz activity.

The land grant University of Minnesota leadership for service and education, of course, is the ongoing stabilizing leadership, always there to provide expertise as needed.

In the years ahead, the government of the Winter Shows will be especially challenged to maintain the kind of membership that is responsive to what's happening among organizations in northwestern Minnesota. Special attention will need to be given to the maintenance of a strong volunteer corps of planners, doers, and participants in this mid-winter agricultural exposition. The process of new membership election to the board of managers must always be a careful procedure of communication. No organization should have a membership on the board of managers if it can't meet the commitments for the cooperative undertaking each year. Also, no person should be a member of the board of managers unless there is a commitment of time, energy, and substance to the ongoing effort. They must be people respected in their communities.
Community farm clubs created production booths demonstrating what was happening in their section of the Valley--1915 to 1930.

Crookston National Bank

"Crookston's Only Independent Community Bank"

"You Know Us, We Know You"

116 West Robert Street And
1226 University Avenue AUTO BANK

MEMBER FDIC