CHAPTER IV

Educational, Promotional, and Social

The Red River Valley Winter Shows began and largely remains as a "people-on-the-land" idea. From the very beginning, in 1910, the idea concerned those who made a living from the land. In that first decade of this century the venture was a pioneering effort by a people who believed that this open prairie land and the transition land between the heavy forests of northern Minnesota and the prairie was a resource with a future. They believed one could earn an acceptable standard of living for themselves and produce food and fiber for themselves and for others.

The adult educational opportunities for those who were on the land and for those who were beginning to service the farming industry were nearly nonexistent. The situation needed educational service and agricultural research. The University was nudged to move ahead with educational service through the efforts of farsighted legislators and industrialists like James J. Hill. By 1910 the Experiment Station had gone through its birthing pains and had developed enough know-how so there was a modest list of farm practices which could be shared with the farming public. The School of Agriculture was established in 1905 and began teaching in 1906 with a staff which included professional agriculturalists. People wanted to know these teachers.

Into this situation C.G. Selvig was appointed superintendent in 1910, and he didn't take very long to organize his staff and interested leaders to step into that adult educational vacuum. Selvig and his staff put together the first extension meetings for farmers. People came, they visited, they met new friends, they learned, and came away enthusiastic and wanting more. The feedback from farmers served to set the pace for the Agricultural Experiment Station. Researchers heard firsthand about problems out on the farm. Numbers of livestock increased immediately on the Station. The scientists went to work in horticulture, on soils research, on improved varieties, on looking at better procedures to manage the difficult soils and the water. The Winter Shows had been going about five or six years when the county agent system took a quantum leap forward in northwestern Minnesota. By the middle 20's most of the counties had a full-time county agent providing a much-needed adult education leader locally in each county. The presence of a top level adult education service in each county began to change the kind of meetings and seminars that were held at the Winter Shows. It didn't make sense to talk over the same ideas at the Winter Shows that were talked about and taught at the meetings of the county agents and of the home economists. The natural development in the adult education at the Winter Shows was to talk about topics which weren't covered at the county level. In the early 20's, too, the vocational agricultural departments in the high schools increased. Here was another support for adult education for the farming public. This group, too, teamed up with the Red River Valley Winter Shows and integrated it as an extension of and as a partner to their education.

Learning also took place at the attractive displays of machinery and other farm service needs. Ideas came from visiting with others from the region. New ideas from agricultural experts were brought in from outside and beyond. Every farmer and his wife, as they farmed and raised their family, encountered difficulties along the way. An opportunity to visit with other farmers helped understand these difficulties and was in itself therapeutic, inspirational, and educational. The Winter Shows has been educational, promotional, and social throughout the 75 years. While it actually began as a pioneer educational function serving those who were launching the farming industry in northwestern Minnesota, the show has been, in more recent times, careful to complement and strengthen the other educational agencies: extension and vocational agriculture.

Travel to the educational meetings in the early years was difficult. Few cars were in use, and the roads available were not usable the year around. People would travel from their farms to town by horse-drawn sleigh. After leaving the horses in the livery barn for care and feeding, the visitors, bound for the meetings, boarded the train for Crookston. They'd stay for a day or more. The railroad cooperated by providing a half fare for a round trip. During that period there was a daily train from Noyes to Crookston and return, allowing people to attend the daytime meetings. A daily train from Warroad to Crookston and return was scheduled and several from Moorhead would be arranged, as was one from Staples to Crookston.

People who wanted to attend the very popular evening meetings had to ask neighbors to look after their livestock. Some came for the entire Show, therefore a housing bureau provided rooms in Crookston. The railroad also furnished special sleeping cars on the track, with a steam engine hooked up for heat. Even with those helpful arrangements, it was quite a project just to travel back and forth to the Winter Shows each year.

The early formal educational programs were planned around topics of the time. The technical meetings for men and for women were immediately popular and, for a number of years, were very much like the extension meetings held out in the counties. Of course, though lacking the tremendous visual aids of today, the show, without a doubt, used the up-to-date communication devices of that day. The evening programs included speakers who usually came from the University of Minnesota, from state government or from outside of the state. The lecturers were very popular. Attendance ran from a few hundred to crowds of 1,500 or more. Occasionally the new armory, which held 1,800 seats, was filled, and the overflow would be housed in the Methodist and Presbyterian churches. Very popular speakers addressed all three audiences. In later years the addresses were piped in by loudspeaker. People were more patient in those days with outside lecturers. They came to listen and to learn. The evening lecture idea was well received into the 1940's; in fact, the last topnotch lectures were scheduled until the middle 1950's. By that time radio, television, news-
papers, and other forms of media were reaching nearly every rural home in northwestern Minnesota.

Currently, the policy of the Board of Managers relating to the seminar series sets the following pattern. The superintendent of the Experiment Station is coordinator of the general agricultural and related seminar series at the Winter Shows. Each scheduled seminar has its own chairperson who sets up a committee to coordinate planning, arrangements, and follow-through.

The philosophy of what should be talked about has a threefold criteria. First, a real effort is made to avoid what is treated by county extension service or vo ag departments. Secondly, the topics that are talked about at Winter Shows are of general regional concern. Thirdly, high priority is given to natural resource conservation and planning, and new technology. For instance, the current International Sugarbeet Seminar and sunflower culture were first part of a Winter Shows seminar.

The Crops and Soils Seminar, as it is called today, is among the oldest continuous formal educational meeting at the Red River Valley Winter Shows. Today it draws one of the largest crowds to hear the frontline, cutting-edge ideas. A noon luncheon provides a chance for informal talk.

The children’s farmyard is sponsored by the FFA Chapters of Climax and Crookston. Seeing and touching farm animals by the children, as well as experiencing a pony ride, is a popular event.

Time is taken to recognize winners at the Crops Show competition also. Partner to the Crops and Soils Seminars are the women’s meetings. Early in its history the School of Agriculture developed a course of study called the Domestic Economy Studies for farm girls. The domestic economy faculty provided for the earliest women’s meetings. For example, a news story for the 1926 Winter Shows reported that the women’s meetings were attended by large groups both forenoon and afternoon. Speakers included W.C. Coffey, dean of the College of Agriculture, former governor of Illinois Frank O. Lowdon; Anna Swenson, State Department of Education; Miss Muriel Boe, University of Minnesota; and Fanny B. Lippit, Northwest School of Agriculture. Program topics in-
cluded color schemes in the home, batik dyeing of garments, and trends in forms of dress, home decoration, and textiles. The entire gamut of activities for the housewife and partner in the farming enterprise can be found in the programs for women's meetings throughout the 75-year history.

An interesting development during the last 30 years, however, is that the women's programs are planned by the women's division of the Winter Shows with an ongoing committee of several women from the region and chaired by someone elected by the committee. The elected person serves on the board of managers. The Agricultural Extension Service home economics professionals of the county have always provided stable, modern, uninterrupted leadership to the committees as they planned and developed their annual presentations. Their program is far-reaching, including those topics which aren't necessarily covered in quite the same way out in the county meetings. Each year the women's meetings now draw the largest single crowd of all of the seminars.

Early in the history of the women's meetings, some of the local clubs provided leadership. The Fairfax-An­dover Social Circle, as they were called in the second decade of the 20th century, served as hostesses for women's programs for many years. A very popular meeting place was the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches located in Crookston. Social groups of this nature, while they were active cooperators in the early history of the Winter Shows, are now part of the women's division planning committee.

Educational sessions about livestock were much a part of the study in the 1920's and 1930's but these were discontinued in the 1950's due to low attendance. This is understandable when one considers that livestock producers at the Winter Shows are always busy with their full docket of show competition and of purebred livestock sales. There isn't time during the show for the educational activities.

Youth activities were emphasized beginning about the time of World War I, and these have continued to grow in importance. The youth work of the board of managers includes farm youth and youth from the cities and villages. Most interesting to us today were the earlier educational contests, including spelling, declamation, essay writing, and posture competition. The prominence of the country schools produced such an emphasis. Crops judging by FFA, 4-H, and regional schools of agriculture teams began in the early 1920's. Today nearly 1,000 youngsters are involved from FFA and 4-H judging in the Red River Basin. Educational programming in Extension and FFA uses the Winter Shows as an additional opportunity for competition.

For approximately 30 years, a Boys and Girls Club conference was held, at which some of the planning and coordination of the district 4-H work was conducted. This was first led by A.J. Kittleson and after him by H.H. Pflughoeft. These extension leaders were located at the Northwest Experiment Station shortly after 1910.

The purebred livestock sale days filled the livestock showing to the hilt with buyers and spectators. It was an exciting setting for the seller and buyer of top quality purebred livestock. This was the 1941 Sale.
and until 1940 when the 4-H district office was moved to St. Paul. Today there’s a full gamut of crop judging, livestock teams, and dairy teams, as well as a grain clinic emphasizing clean grain production and storage. An arts-in extravaganza for 4-H youth is an exciting, recent development. A talent festival has been conducted for over 25 years, with rather attractive cash prizes for those who are judged winners. The Minnesota dairy princess is involved, and a youth horse husbandry clinic and judging contest are on the scene. In addition there are a cow clipping contest, a dog show, a futurity livestock show, and pony rides and a children’s barnyard for the tiny children.

The great American institution—the banquet for entertainment, for fun and fellowship—was an early item among Winter Shows events. In the past history of the Winter Shows these banquets tended to be held early in the evening, followed by lectures in the evening program. Today there are midday banquets as well as evening banquets. Banquet speakers are not as popular today. Evening lectures have practically disappeared.

Food, of course, is important to those who come to see the Show. The restaurants and private clubs in Crookston have always been good hosts. For nearly forty years the ladies of the Methodist and of the Trinity Lutheran Church provided coffee, pie, and grill foods at the old winter shows buildings downtown. The story is told that these hard-working ladies paid off a substantial portion of the mortgage on the new Trinity Church with proceeds from their annual feeding of the crowds at the Farm Crop Show. At present, the food concession in the new buildings is under the control of the Winter Shows board of managers.

Beginning about World War I a trend for various organizational meetings during Winter Shows began and grew for nearly a 30-year period. The various commodity groups, the new Northwest School Alumni Association, the purebred livestock associations, the board of managers, Crops and Soils Association, for example, would use the Winter Shows as a time to meet, for fellowship and business discussion. A few annual meetings were scheduled for that time of year.

As an example, the program of one of the early 1920 Winter Shows included the following meetings: Red River Valley Guernsey Breeders, Red River Valley Holstein Breeders, Crookston Association of Public Affairs, Red River Valley Livestock Association, Red River Valley Dairymen’s Association, Crops and Soils Association, Boys’ and Girls’ Club Conference, Red River Valley Development Association, Northwest School of Agriculture Alumni, the Seventh District Women’s Clubs, the Northwest Minnesota Press Association and the Northwest annual meetings at the Winter Shows.

Today there is so much other activity of a general nature that the organizations tend to have their annual meetings at less busy times of the year. While they might get together for a banquet or some social event, meetings at the time of the Winter Shows by commodity or breed-related groups aren’t scheduled.

The Red River Valley Development Association, however, still holds its annual meeting, where it merely reorganizes for the year ahead. The

The Northwest Singers and the Special Winter Shows Orchestra gathered together over a three decade span of time. The singers and musicians came from surrounding communities. After a two-hour or so rehearsal, they’d put on an evening concert.
Winter Shows board of managers will schedule a full meeting during the latter part of the show to evaluate and record observations and make corrections as they look ahead to another year. Most other planning groups tend to meet at other times. For instance, in the women's division, very shortly after the show was closed, the women's division committee will meet to evaluate and begin planning for another year. These were an inspiring part of every program. The Department of Music at the Northwest School of Agriculture provided great choral and sing-along leadership. Lucile Holiday, Ann Simley and A.H. Larson are among those who are dear to the hearts of people who lived in the 1920's and 1930's. Newspaper reports suggest that "the rafters rocked" with the singing of the audience as they joined in the national anthem, popular ballads, and the famous Red River Valley song. In fact, there was a special song created called "The Farm Crop Show", which was sung with a great deal of gusto.

Another feature of several shows was the pageant where historical developments would be acted on the stage. C.G. Selvig was a great writer of pageants, assisted by other members of the community and of the staff of the Northwest School of Agriculture. The pageants were then produced by 4-H groups or by groups organized at

as well as sing for events including celebrity speakers. The late T.W. Thorson directed this group for nearly twenty years--the last concert celebrated the dedication of the new facility north of Crookston in 1962.
large, with representation from each county. These pageants were used to emphasize the progress made with new farm practices and new ideas that provided assistance to the farmwife as she struggled to be a mother, a partner, and a community leader. The assistance of A.J. Kittleson, who was the district 4-H club leader, and later of H.H. Pflughoef, and of county agents really made the pageant idea successful. The organization, practice, and production were great experience for those who participated. Fun and learning took place. Lifelong friends were developed.

While this kind of approach was very much needed in those early days, the radio, television, hi-fi, and you name it, are an entirely different form of entertainment today, and it just may well be that a sing-along may not be appreciated at the 75th annual educational seminars of the Winter Shows.

A regional musical effort of long-time duration was the formation of a group called the Northwest Singers. This group evolved in 1918 when a number of small choral groups from the 12-county area gathered for a couple hours of practice in the afternoon to prepare a choral concert for the evening. This unit became quite famous, and at peak there were over 200 singers who met annually to sing the famous Farm Crop Shows ballad and more formal and classical music for the enjoyment of those who attended the shows. The Crookston municipal band, the Fertile orchestra, the Northwest School musical groups, among others, provided music for many events. Many barbershop groups performed individually or as part of the Northwest Singers program. A rather active group was the Ross Brothers quartet, including Ferd, Henry, Otto and August Ross, from the Fisher area. The Ross Brothers traveled by sleigh from Fisher to Crookston to perform. A Ross quartet also sang with the Northwest Singers. Ferd Ross will be remembered as the father of Walter Ross, who lives in the Fisher area. The Northwest Singers continued for many years under the leadership of a number of people. The longest, most influential leader was T.W. Thorson of the Crookston Public Schools. The last time this group assembled with about 120 singers was at the dedication of the new arena and facilities built in 1961. T.W. Thorson conducted this choral group and they received a standing ovation. It was a moment when the human family of the Valley seemed to speak and hear a language dear to the hearts of all.

An enriching and continuing source of educational leadership for the Winter Shows, beginning in the 20's and lasting until 1960's, was provided by agricultural development agents for the railroads. John Haw, Paul Wagner, A.J. Dexter and Tony Meisen provided a great deal of leg work and frontline leadership. Through the years they were able to assist with getting special train schedules for the Winter Shows, with bringing in topnotch agricultural speakers, with arranging for sleeping cars on sidings, with helping entertain VIP guests, and providing technical leadership in the conduct of the Crop Show and the livestock shows. These men were the front-line, technical advisors for pioneer farmers who purchased railroad land. Of course, other farmers benefited too.

To summarize, the Winter Shows started out as the first organized adult education activity for the pioneer farm families in the Red River Basin. The women's programs, seminars, lectures, demonstrations, crops show, youth activities, livestock show and sale, the poultry and pet show, the farm service show, and added special events have changed with the changing methods and life styles of making a living in the Red River Basin. People still come 40,000 strong for fellowship, for learning and for fun in the middle of a long winter.