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 Show 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 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 Hovestead, 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
Show and related dairy production activities at the annual Winter Show. It was the first livestock association to step up as a serious cooperator.

"Minnesota Red River Valley Development Association -- Providing Crops Show premiums, recognition plaques and the like soon became a problem for the first organizers and leaders of the Farm Crops Show. While business, banks, newspapers and other industry were very generous show, such an annual provision became a burden on a few individuals.

Conrad Selvig, superintendent of the station, was the kind of person that thrived on getting the job done despite the problems along the way. He envisioned the Winter Shows as a northwestern Minnesota educational and agricultural developmental force. Through his efforts, county governments became interested in the Red River Valley Winter Shows, and after some enabling legislation, the counties were authorized to appropriate monies to help with selected operational needs. No county funds, however, could be used for constructing new buildings.

In these early years there wasn't any legal organization to receive such monies. Consequently a Red River Valley Development Association was established; its purpose was to promote and develop the industry of agriculture through the efforts of the Winter Shows. A constitution and by-laws were developed which called for each county board to appoint a citizen in the county to the membership board of the Development Association. The responsibilities of the board were and still are to expend the appropriations by each of the 14 counties for those projects at the Winter Shows which are sponsored by the Red River Valley Development Association. The superintendent of the Agricultural Experiment Station has always been a director-at-large.

In the 1920's and 30's, the Red River Valley Development Association was also active in matters of general public concern to northwestern Minnesota. For instance, in matters of drainage, soil conservation, water management, and Red River Valley Winter Shows management, the board of the Development Association could make recommendations and forward resolutions to appropriate agencies. Today that kind of action does surface from time to time; however, the major effort of the board of directors is confined to the several projects which they underwrite at the Winter Shows. The Association was officially incorporated as a nonprofit agricultural rural life development association in the 1950's when Dr. Olaf Soine was president. The new name adopted was Minnesota Red River Valley Development Association, Inc.

Today the board is organized with an executive committee and a project committee to carry out the policies of the full board. Each of the counties in northwestern Minnesota has one person on the board who serves for a period of three years. One-third of the board members are re-elected or replaced in accordance with the wishes of the county commissioners each year. The officers are elected at the annual meeting held each year during the Winter Shows schedule. Currently, they are expending a budget of about $13,000 annually, provided jointly by each of the 16 county units in northwestern Minnesota. The Development Association now concerns itself with four human resource recognition and development projects as well as with the Crops Show section of the Winter Shows. The Red River Valley Development Association has adopted a philosophy of recognizing civic leadership at the grassroots level. These people are recognized as the real builders of life in the Red River Basin.

The Valley Farmer and Homemaker Honors Banquet is 46 years old and still a top event of each show. Here a farm couple is honored, usually a man and his wife, who have largely made it in the business of farming. They are selected by a committee of their peers.

The competition among crops, livestock, and other judging contests began about 1913. Above includes teams from Minnesota, North Dakota, and Manitoba. FFA, 4-H, Schools of Agriculture, and Farmers clubs are represented with
out in the county, aided by the county extension director. They are chosen for stable management of their farming enterprise, for solid family capabilities, for their service to community and government, for their service to their church, and for their stewardship over the soil and water resources. The Agricultural Extension Service is the key cooperating organization which facilitates this project at a high level year after year.

The King Agassiz project was started by the Development Association 24 years ago. This was a project in which the Winter Shows wished to recognize the young couples or single individuals here in northwest Minnesota who are coming up the ladder of leadership and civic responsibility. Here again, the county kings are selected by their peers in each county and are recognized as a County King Agassiz during the county fairs or other events. These county kings and their spouses come to the Red River Valley Winter Shows where they compete for the title of King Agassiz of the Winter Shows. The king is then the representative of the Winter Shows for the year ahead in various affairs and events in the region. The project has succeeded well, with the emerging leadership rising to the top each year. They have now formed their own association for fellowship and service purposes to Winter Shows.

The most recent human resource effort is the Builder of the Valley Award. Here the Development Association recognizes the quiet but yet substantive grassroots citizen who shows personal growth in the region. The judging group is interested in the kind of people who provide unusual and extended leadership in their sector of the Valley. The committee looks for a person who has made a substantial contribution to the community, the state and the nation as well as who has the ability to make a living for himself and his family. Two such awards have been given to date and may not be presented each year. A committee from the board studies the candidates carefully in terms of the criteria which have been established.

The fourth human resource program is that of supporting youth programs, including expenses for plaques and premiums for demonstrations and contests.

Another major effort of the Development Association is furnishing premium monies for Crop Show winners each year. The Association continues to provide continuing and dependable cooperative support to the Red River Valley Winter Shows.

*Red River Valley Livestock Association -- This group was formed in the second decade around the time of World War I when livestock raising became a more prominent part of the Winter Shows. The livestock scientists of the Northwest Experiment Station provided the leadership for the organization of livestock breeders of the region and have actually been part of the association in one form or another continuously. The Livestock Association was incorporated under Minnesota Laws in 1918 and began to assume responsibility for the livestock show section of the Winter Shows. There was strong feeling among agricultural leaders that livestock had to be part of the developing farming scene here.

The armory was in the process of being planned and built in downtown Crookston beginning in 1914. It was natural for people up and down the Valley to envision that some facilities for Winter Shows next to the armory would be useful to the fast-growing Winter Shows. At that time the Winter Shows was planned and operations were handled by an informal committee, the strongest cooperators being the Red River Valley Development Association, the University, and the businessmen from Crookston. About 1916 there wasn't sufficient room any place in downtown Crookston for holding the fast-growing Livestock Show, including sheep, beef and horses. Then in addition, there was the Dairy Show encouraged and
sponsored by the Dairymen's Association. In addition, the Poultry Association had been invited to join forces with the Winter Shows. It had been operating by itself.

The effort came on fast to build a building. Let's get along! But the war effort delayed the action stage. The Red River Valley Livestock Association was very young and still groping for identity. Yet, with completion of incorporation, it was the only group which could take title to the property; however, it really didn’t want to plan and operate the Winter Shows each year. So, rather loosely, the big drive for funds developed. Shares were sold up and down the Red River Basin to build the first set of buildings and details on this are well recorded in Selvig’s book entitled “The Tale of Two Valleys”.

The Livestock Association continued. The show grew fast and filled the facilities year after year. For 40 years, the Livestock Association owned the buildings. They had a building committee to look after repairs. There was always a hassle over who was to pay for what as the Winter Shows board of managers planned and operated the show each year. By 1957 it became apparent to the board that the facilities downtown, while they were tremendous in 1920, were no longer useful to the burgeoning needs of the Winter Shows.

As a first step, the Livestock Association moved to turn over their title to the facilities in downtown Crookston to the Winter Shows board of managers, with the proviso that the new facilities be built and the Livestock Association maintain four people on the board. David Hoff, farmer and member of the teaching staff of the University of Minnesota, Crookston, is the current president of the Livestock Association. The cooperative spirit and service of the Red River Valley Livestock Association as a major foundation block of the Red River Valley Winter Shows is indeed a story of faith and trust working together that can get the job done despite problems.

Northwest Minnesota Crops and Soils Association (1922) -- This group of crop farmers was loosely organized by Otto Bergh, an agronomist at the Northwest Agricultural Experiment Station. It continued as an informal organization of farmers and seedsmen until the 1920's, at which time it developed its own constitution and by-laws which lasted until the Minnesota Crop Improvement Association began to have county associations in northwestern Minnesota. Ray Dunham, former agronomist, was a frontline leader for about 20 years. At the time the Minnesota Crops and Soils Association reorganized, with a member of each of the several County Crop Improvement Associations providing membership for the new Northwestern Minnesota Crops and Soils Association. The association became the leader in planning the Crops Show activities at the Red River Valley Winter Shows, replacing somewhat the detailed planning of the RRV Development Association.

In addition, they were helpful in sending some of the new foundation seed increases to southern locations for over winter increases. Seed was then sent back to the Valley and distributed through the county crop improvement groups. Currently this association is not very active. It has a modest amount of money on deposit and in addition to being one of the organizations on the Crops Show committee, it does help from time to time with cash support as needed. Medard Yurtzenka, farmer from Argyle, is president.

The University of Minnesota Technical College (1968) -- In the late 1950's, the secondary level schools of agriculture were quietly looking to other opportunities for service to agricultural education. After the findings of Bernie Youngquist's doctoral thesis along with findings of a legislative interim commission and an official University of Minnesota in-house task force study, the recommendation was made to the legislature to begin phasing out the secondary level schools of agriculture. A two-year collegiate institution built around the industry of agriculture and related services was initiated at Crookston and later at Waseca. The Technical College at Crookston began under Dr. Stanley Sahlstrom's leadership in 1966, and as an arm of the University has strongly supported in a substantial way the present Red River Valley Winter Shows. The college under Dr. Sahlstrom's leadership has developed a higher education seminar at the Winter Shows, which is well attended by all educators in northwestern Minnesota. Likewise, it supports the Winter Shows substantially with service and leadership expertise as noted in Chapter 11.

Minnesota Farm Bureau (1961) -- The Minnesota Farm Bureau is an organization of farm families organized for the purpose of developing and working on matters of mutual interest. The Farm Bureau became a continuing supporter of the Red River Valley Winter Shows very early in Winter Shows history. They were a primary group who helped to launch the county agent system in each county. The group, however, didn't have a person on the board until the early 1960's.

Red River Valley Potato Growers Association (1962) -- The Potato Growers Association is a two-state organization representing growers primarily from the Red River Valley. They joined forces with other organizations in supporting the Winter Shows in the early 1960's and provided assistance and leadership with

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the Potato Show. For years the organization has had a seed potato seminar at the Shows.

County King Agassiz Association (1981) -- The King Agassiz project, electing county kings annually in each county and also the King Agassiz is now 25 years old. These men formed an organization with their own constitution and by-laws in the late 1970's. The main purpose is to develop leadership opportunities among the county kings and to provide support to the Red River Valley Winter Shows.

Minnesota Crop Improvement Association (1979) -- This is an organization of farmers and others interested in the improvement of crop varieties in the state of Minnesota. The Minnesota Crop Improvement Association has always been interested in the Red River Valley Winter Shows and began to have more direct responsibility after the new building was built and put into operation in 1962. Gradually the contribution of the Crop Improvement Association to the Crops Show has increased and has really replaced the old responsibilities of the N.W. Crops and Soils Association. The Minnesota Crop Improvement Association is a major support organization now undergirding the Crops Show Committee at the Red River Valley Winter Shows. This wide-based committee evaluates, changes, and plans the show each year.

Minnesota Wheat Growers Association (1982) -- This is a commodity organization of farmers established to promote the welfare of the wheat-growing industry in Minnesota and beyond. Wheat producers are the most recent commodity group to request representation on the board of managers. Their support with grants of money and with top level representation is encouraging. Their headquarters are in Red Lake Falls, where they have built a building and where the executive director and staff are located. This commodity group is affiliated with other wheat-grower groups in the country and already has impact on the national and international scene.

*Women's Division -- Right from the beginning in 1910, the Annual Short Course included programming for the women. The immediate success and enthusiastic response by the women resulted in a local committee from farm clubs to assist the home economics teachers of the N.W. School with planning. In the late 1920's the agricultural extension service joined the effort. The earlier women's meetings extended over a four-to-five day period and continue so today except that there's more variety and more groups are included. The planning effort hit a low about the time the School of Agriculture phased out and the College was established. Sandy Johnson, Crookston, provides history on the exciting growth of the women's involvement since the mid-1960's.

Early 1960's

The women's Seminar was organized by the Agricultural Extension Service in St. Paul with Miss Arlene Barkheim, N.W. District Supervisor. A one-day program, held in Bede Hall on the campus of the N.W. School, included topics of general interest, a luncheon, and a speaker. The county extension staff promoted the program out in the counties.

1968

UMC Faculty Women's Association joined with the agricultural extension service to plan and organize the Women's Seminar. Under the general chairmanship of Mrs. Jeannine Windels, the day has become a significant event to the RRVWS.

1968-1973

The seminar was held in several locations in downtown Crookston. The day-long seminar included speakers and mini-sessions on such topics as Fashion, a look Behind the Seams, Foodspiration, Ideas Galore for Home Decor. A highlight was a luncheon and style show. Crookston merchants supported the style show and provided door prizes.

1972

The Women's Division was organized. The purpose was to plan and coordinate an expanded women's program to take place in the newly built National Guard Armory adjacent to the Winter Shows building. The committee included women from the Red River Valley area, with Mrs. Jeannine Windels as chairman.

1973

This was the first year the Women's Division began programming at the Armory. Features were an Arts and Crafts Day, Senior Citizens' Day, and educational activities. It was the last year the UMC Faculty Women's Association was involved with the seminar held in downtown Crookston.

1974

This was the first year all activities pertaining to the women's program were held in the Armory.

1975

The president of the Women's Division became a member of the board of managers. Mrs. Jeannine Windels served as the first president of the Women's Division from 1975-1977. She was the first woman to become a member of the board of managers.

1977-Present

The Women's Division is a committee of volunteers from the Red River Valley area that plan and coordinate the activities of the women's program held in the Armory. A committee member serves a three-year term. The president is elected from this committee, serves a three-year term, and holds a position on the board of managers. The committee meets from September through April. Programs presently included are: an Arts and Crafts Fair, educational demonstrations, Senior Citizens' Day, Town and Country Art Show, needlework display, and Women's Seminar.

Purpose of Women's Division

To foster information and educational programs with regard to the resources of the Red River Valley area and to conduct educational meetings featuring problems confronting farmers and homemakers (i.e. men and women of the Red River Valley).

Visions for the Future

Donna Rae Jacobson, present chairman of the Women's Division, says "I feel the Women's Division has made a contribution to the educational programming of the Red River Valley Winter Shows through the educational programs devoted to improving the 'quality of life' in the Red River Valley region."

Mrs. Jacobson continues, "The future of the Women's Division is bright due to the energy and enthusiasm of the volunteers who serve on the various sub-committees. These volunteers initiate programs which are indeed providing for the improvement of the quality of life as well as encouragement for participants to display their talents through art, photography and needlework. I believe we, the members of the Women's Division, are at the forefront for new challenges which will be initiated during the 75th Anniversary and for years to come."

Red River Valley Horse Breeders Association (1965) -- This association was organized in the early 60's for the purpose of encouraging the recreation horse industry and particularly of taking charge of the horse show section of the Red River Valley Winter Shows. A number of horse breeding organizations, including some saddle clubs, make up the Red River Valley Horse Breeders Association. This group, while changing somewhat as the years have progressed, has been in charge of the Horse Show at the Winter Shows since the new building was built. This show has been very successful in involving many families who own horses and who come to the show in the middle of winter. They bring their entire family to exhibit the breeds in competition and to engage in the several sporting events like barrel racing. The show draws people from several states.

Minnesota Farmers Union (1971) -- This organization is part of the National Farmers Union, which is a nationwide association of farmers dedicated to the continued development of the agricultural industry and of the family farm as a unit of management. They joined the Winter Shows' cooperating organizations in the early 1960's.
National Farmers Organization (1971) -- The Minnesota National Farmers' Association is part of the national association which include all organized state groups. The organization is an association of farmers interested in the promotion and development of production agriculture. It expends significant effort in the marketing sector of industry.

*Northern Minnesota Poultry Association -- This association began in the very early 1900's under the leadership of C. E. Brown, poultry husbandryman at the Northwest Experiment Station. The organization started out as an educational effort, later assumed by the county extension service when it was established after World War I. It became a show organization which took care of the poultry display at the Winter Shows. Currently this group remains in charge of the Poultry and Pet Show. Harold Thomforde, international poultry judge and longtime representative of the Poultry Association on the board of managers, provides the following reflections:

While the Red River Valley Winter Shows has a long and illustrious history, there is one organization which has been active for a much longer time -- the Northern Minnesota Poultry Association. This association, organized in 1902 by such people as John Saugstad, August Aas, Mrs. F.C. Mitchell, and Henry Boltman, has sponsored an annual show since that time. For the first 15 years of its life, the shows were held in downtown Crookston in whatever building was available. It was one of the best shows in the state at that time, as it is today. When the Winter Shows were organized each also had a separate show. This led to some problems, as they were individually competing for the same support, advertising and attendance. The Winter Shows president, Conrad Selvig, asked for a combined meeting of the officers of both organizations to discuss the problems. After much discussion it was agreed everyone would be better served if there was only one organization. It was agreed that the Winter Shows would provide a show room and pay the Poultry Association $125 annually to help pay premiums and other expenses. The Poultry Association agreed not to solicit donations, advertising or have separate programs. For 60 years this agreement has continued with one exception. For some years the Poultry Association has not asked for the entire $125. They have asked, and have received, what they needed to cover their expenses. This usually runs from about $45 to $85 annually. The poultry people feel that any balance of the $125 not used, should go for the betterment of the Winter Shows.

There isn't any question this agreement has been of mutual benefit to both organizations. The Poultry Association remains a vital force in the promotion of the Poultry and Pet Show that is well received by the public and helps to promote a combined agricultural activity.

Minnesota Soil and Water Conservation Districts (1963) -- This is an organization of all the soil and water conservation districts in Minnesota and in particular those in northwestern Minnesota. Its membership represents the various soil and water conservation districts which are organized under the Minnesota statutes to encourage the conservation of soil and water in agricultural operations.

*Area Chamber to Commerce, Crookston -- An association of business and professional people in the Crookston area was organized for the purpose of developing and improving the quality of life in the Crookston community. When the Winter Shows began back in 1910, the Crookston Businessmen's Association was probably the most active cooperator to assist Superintendent Selvig and the staff of the Northwest School and Experiment Station in planning and putting on the first farm crop shows. About the middle of the second decade, the businessmen's association appropriated $1,000 a year toward the planning and operational expenses of the Winter Shows. In fact, this practice was maintained until the Shows moved from downtown to the present site. The strong support given to the 14 county exposition by the Crookston community, without a doubt, is a foundation which the RRV Winter Shows has needed to remain in continuous service for 75 years.

Red River Valley Sugarbeet Growers Association (1961) -- The seminar series for sugarbeet growers started in the late 1960's at the Northwest Experiment Station under the leadership of Olaf Soine, assisted by local sugarbeet growers. The success in terms of attendance was immediate -- overflowing the Kiehle auditorium, which held about 700 people at that time. Very little extension work was conducted out in the counties as the American Crystal Sugar Co. contracted for sugarbeet acres and controlled the production process via their fieldmen. The Sugarbeet Growers Association grew in strength and influence and requested membership on the board of managers in the early 1960's. They have been a strong cooperator of the Winter Shows.