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History of Our State Fair

In this connection, it may not be uninteresting to enumerate the former Fairs held in our State. The first was held in the city of Springfield in 1853. In the winter succeeding the summer of 1853, a call was issued for those interested in the subject of agricultural competition to meet in Springfield on the assembling of the State Legislature. Some half a dozen counties were represented at that meeting, and the organization of a State Agricultural Society determined on. A committee was appointed to draft a Constitution, etc. At the adjourned meeting the Constitution was adopted, and some fifty or sixty gentlemen paid their one dollar membership fee. James N. Brown, of Sangamon County, now known as one of the most successful breeders of stock on the continent, and, by the way, one of the earliest and best friends of President Lincoln, was appointed President of the Society, and a Vice President was chosen for each Congressional District. At a subsequent meeting, held May 25th at Springfield, there were but about three gentlemen present. They were, we believe, Dr. Johns, J. N. Brown, and Dr. Kennicott. They drew up a program for the first State Fair, which was accordingly held in Springfield in the ensuing fall.

This Fair would no doubt be deemed a failure by those accustomed to attend those of a latter day's, but it was here a seed was planted, the germ of which has grown so as to become an honor to the State – a source of pride to the people. Dr. H. O. Johns, one of the three who drew up the original Constitution, succeeded to the executive chair. During his administration it grew and became a permanent institution to the surprise and joy of its early friends. Next comes as President Mr. C. N. Webster, of Salem; who is followed successively by Mr. Louis Ellsworth of Naperville, DuPage County; Mr. Wm H Van Epps, of Dixon and Mr. A. B. McConnell of Springfield. The offices of Recording and Corresponding Secretaries was first filled by Mr. B. Murray of Ottawa. Dr. Kennicott was next elected to that position, and fulfilled the duties with ability. Thus we find the three men who framed the constitution entrusted with the highest offices within the gift of the association, in a short period. Mr. John P. Reynolds, of Springfield, is the present incumbent of these offices, which at their last meeting, held the 27th, was submerged into one, called Secretary. At the first Fair in Springfield there were between 400 and 500 entries made. At the second, they numbered 600. In 1856, the entries numbered 1,800 having tripled themselves in three years. At the next Fair they still reached 1,500.