



Exhibiting the possibilities : the Montana State Fair
by Douglas Michael Edwards

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History
Montana State University

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Abstract:

This thesis analyzes the history of the Montana State Fair between 1903, its inaugural season, and 1917, the last season before the First World War altered the institution's mission. It begins by looking at the origins of the event, calling attention to early agricultural fairs in Montana then emphasizing the influence of the state's participation in several nineteenth-century world's fairs. The growth of the fair and its utilization as a promotional vehicle is discussed in detail. In the process, the improvement of the grounds and the rising popularity of the event are explored. Then the thesis highlights the role of the fair as an educational institution designed to guide the course of Montana's agricultural development. Particular attention is given to the manner in which the event served to encourage Montanans to embrace the emerging social and economic order of an incorporated America. The final chapter discusses the declining influence and eventual death of the state fair in 1933. In sum, this thesis argues that for a decade and a half the Montana State Fair existed as a central state institution, one that fostered the development of the state's natural resources and familiarized Montanans with the mass of inventions and ideas profoundly altering American society at the turn of the century. In the process it challenges popular images of so-called agricultural fairs and illuminates a side of these events not heretofore unveiled by scholars.

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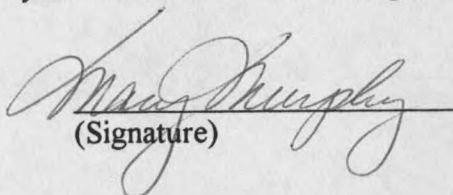
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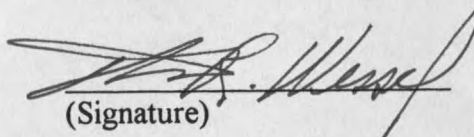
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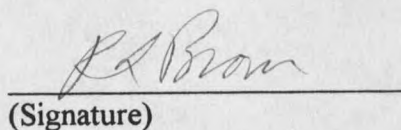
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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes the history of the Montana State Fair between 1903, its inaugural season, and 1917, the last season before the First World War altered the institution's mission. It begins by looking at the origins of the event, calling attention to early agricultural fairs in Montana then emphasizing the influence of the state's participation in several nineteenth-century world's fairs. The growth of the fair and its utilization as a promotional vehicle is discussed in detail. In the process, the improvement of the grounds and the rising popularity of the event are explored. Then the thesis highlights the role of the fair as an educational institution designed to guide the course of Montana's agricultural development. Particular attention is given to the manner in which the event served to encourage Montanans to embrace the emerging social and economic order of an incorporated America. The final chapter discusses the declining influence and eventual death of the state fair in 1933. In sum, this thesis argues that for a decade and a half the Montana State Fair existed as a central state institution, one that fostered the development of the state's natural resources and familiarized Montanans with the mass of inventions and ideas profoundly altering American society at the turn of the century. In the process it challenges popular images of so-called agricultural fairs and illuminates a side of these events not heretofore unveiled by scholars.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"Folks, we're all going to the State Fair," Tom Farmer announced enthusiastically to his family, quickly dismissing his wife's concerns about the cost by insisting that "we need a little vacation."¹ The following day, as Mr. Farmer wished, the entire family climbed aboard their automobile and ventured more than one hundred miles to Helena, where they took in the Montana State Fair. The story of the Farmers' fictional trip appeared in a 1918 edition of the *Montana State Fair News*, a publication that extolled the benefits afforded by a day at the fair and encouraged participation in an event that had secured a position as one of the state's premier promotional and educational institutions.

Established in 1903 and held annually through 1932, the six-day Montana State Fair played a central role in the development of the Treasure State at the beginning of the twentieth century. The significance of the Montana State Fair, however, has not been recognized by historians. Neglect is not peculiar to Montana's exposition, as state and local fairs in general have not received the scholarly attention they warrant, despite having been fixtures in American society since the early nineteenth century. Consequently, popular understanding of these events is largely mythical, based on fictional accounts and nostalgic memories rather than historical evidence. State fairs and other so-called agricultural fairs are commonly portrayed as populist gatherings, organized and maintained

¹ B. J. Paulson, "One Large Time," *Montana State Fair News*, July 1918, 2.

solely through the efforts and for the benefit of rural communities. Illustrating that fairs were not always built upon agrarian foundations and that they often existed as more than icons of rural bliss, the history of Montana's state fair challenges traditional interpretations. It was a complex institution with a far more ambitious agenda than those of the festivals portrayed in literature and film.

Arguably the work that has been most instrumental in shaping popular conceptions of American fairs was Phil Stong's *State Fair*, a fictional tale of an agrarian family's pilgrimage to one of the country's most prestigious fairs--the Iowa State Fair. Published in 1932, Stong's work cast fairs as idealized rural institutions where contented agrarians celebrated country life, met old friends, and earned recognition for the products of their labors. This book chronicled the journey of the Frake family from their prosperous farm in New Brunswick, Iowa, to Des Moines. Camped at the fairgrounds on the outskirts of the capital city, the Frakes savored a rewarding week of excitement and relaxation. The father's prize boar, Blue Boy, captured the first-place ribbon in the hog contest, his wife swept the pickle competition, and the two children, Margy and Wayne, each enjoyed passionate week-long affairs with members of the opposite sex. In addition, the parents found time to reacquaint themselves with old friends; Wayne exacted revenge on the "hoop-la" concessionaire who duped him the year before; and Margy repeatedly tested her courage on thrilling midway rides. Despite triumphs, trysts, and thrills, at week's end each member of the clan happily returned to the sanguine predictability of life on the farm.

This soothing vignette of rural stability and prosperity certainly appealed to depression-era farmers. Agrarian visitors were prosperous and happy when they arrived, even more so on departure. In the words of one reviewer, "the state fair is only a brief

idyll in the idyllic lives of the Frakes."² *State Fair* became a best-selling book subsequently adapted to stage and film. More importantly, it established a state-fair model for future fair organizers to emulate and a master narrative to shape ongoing experiences and memories of fairs. An engaging story, then and now, Stong's novel did not present the complexity of state fairs. The same reviewer pierced through Stong's veiled depiction, commenting that the author's "dreamy Iowa would seem an even more appealing land if we did not have so much evidence indicating quite clearly that it does not exist."³ The fictive quality of Stong's account was probably even more apparent to Montana readers, for the novel's arrival in bookstores corresponded with the last year of the struggling Montana State Fair. Discouraged by a decade of diminishing appropriations and patronage, only stalwart supporters could have hoped that the event would open the following year.

Another person who no doubt recognized the limits of Stong's novel was Wayne Caldwell Neely, a rural sociologist who wrote a pioneering study of agricultural fairs. *The Agricultural Fair* was published three years after Stong's fictional account. Neely delved beyond stereotypes and presented a historical analysis of the evolution of agricultural fairs in the United States.⁴ Unlike the timeless, quaint, and bucolic event that the Frakes visited, agricultural fairs as described by Neely are complex institutions that have a legacy of perpetual modification. In fact, he suggested that change is a common characteristic of fairs that must be recognized in order to understand them. "Like the society of which it is part," wrote Neely, "the fair is subject to eternal change; we see it at one time or another

²Robert Cantwell, "This Side of Paradise," review of *State Fair*, by Phil Stong, *New Republic* 71 (July 1932): 215.

³*Ibid.*, 215.

⁴Wayne Caldwell Neely, *The Agricultural Fair* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935).

assuming characteristic forms, now given a new direction, now fulfilling some new interest of society, now dropping some old function as it becomes obsolete or is elsewhere better performed."⁵ To understand these events, then, requires acknowledging their elastic nature and their relationship to the societies in which they exist. The Frakes did not have to confront these issues when they visited the Iowa State Fair and neither did those who read about their journey, for Stong's state fair was one of the imagination, not reality.

Scholars have only slowly built upon the work of Neely and begun to dismantle the image created by Stong. Specific aspects and functions of various fairs have been the focus of several shorter works. Fred Kniffen authored two insightful articles addressing the development and proliferation of agricultural fairs in the United States. The first, "The American Agricultural Fair: The Pattern," examined the physical design of fairgrounds and concluded that form followed function.⁶ He charted the geographic spread of fairs in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in a companion piece, "The American Agricultural Fair: Time and Space."⁷ In a more recent article, "The Nineteenth-Century North Carolina State Fair as a Social Institution," Melton A. McLaurin explained that "during that era fair week was the social event of the year, an occasion anticipated by all elements of society."⁸ Warren J. Gates investigated the role of fairs as agents of progress in "Modernization as a Function of an Agricultural Fair: The Great Grangers' Picnic Exhibition at Williams Grove,

⁵Ibid, ix.

⁶ Fred Kniffen, "The American Agricultural Fair: The Pattern," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 39 (December 1949): 264-283.

⁷ Fred Kniffen, "The American Agricultural Fair: Time and Place," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 41 (March 1951): 42-57.

⁸ Melton A. McLaurin, "The Nineteenth-Century North Carolina State Fair as a Social Institution," *North Carolina Historical Review* 59 (Summer 1982): 213.

Pennsylvania, 1873-1916."⁹ All of these articles are helpful for understanding the nature of county and state fairs held throughout the United States.

Two very good studies that address many of these issues in the context of specific state fairs are Karal Ann Marling's *Blue Ribbon: A Social and Pictorial History of the Minnesota State Fair* and Chris Allen Rasmussen's doctoral dissertation, "State Fair: Culture and Agriculture in Iowa, 1854-1941."¹⁰ As the title indicates, Marling emphasized the social function of the event she described as Minnesota's "central cultural institution."¹¹ In a more analytical work, Rasmussen identified the many ways in which the Iowa State Fair changed over the years, emphasized that the event "was seldom held without some disagreement over its exhibits and entertainments," and asserted that it was influential in "the creation of a distinctive middle western identity."¹² Boasting both longevity and notoriety, the Iowa and Minnesota State Fairs have long been the models by which other fairs measure themselves and are judged by outsiders. Fair managers across the continent have aspired to organize events as large as those held annually in Minnesota and Iowa, to offer comparable attractions, or to measure up in some other manner.

Several additional sources warrant attention. An interesting cultural analysis of county fairs is found in Leslie Prosterman's *Ordinary Life, Festival Days: Aesthetics in the Midwestern County Fair*.¹³ This is a contemporary study, but it contains useful models

⁹ Warren J. Gates, "Modernization as a Function of an Agricultural Fair: The Great Gangers' Picnic Exhibition at Williams Grove, Pennsylvania, 1873-1916," *Agricultural History* 29 (July 1984): 262-279.

¹⁰ Karal Ann Marling, *Blue Ribbon: A Social and Pictorial History of the Minnesota State Fair* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1990); Chris Allen Rasmussen, "State Fair: Culture and Agriculture in Iowa, 1854-1941," Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1993).

¹¹ Marling, introduction, n.p.

¹² Rasmussen, 530, ii.

¹³ Leslie Prosterman, *Ordinary Life, Festival Days: Aesthetics in the Midwestern*

and theories for evaluating fairs of the past. Donald B. Marti's *Historical Directory of American Agricultural Fairs* is also helpful. It enumerates hundreds of fairs, past and present, complete with brief histories and bibliographic information.¹⁴ Lastly, the growing body of scholarship on world's fairs held in the United States provides valuable insight into the role of public exhibitions in American culture. As a journalist pointed out in 1914, the annual gathering of people at state and county agricultural fairs cannot be dismissed lightly, for "it is their world's fair."¹⁵ In particular, Robert Rydell's *World of Fairs: The Century-of-Progress Expositions* addressed the grass-roots influence and popular appeal of these larger expositions.¹⁶

An obvious limitation of the existing scholarship is that it has focused primarily on events held in the eastern and midwestern United States. Fairs located there have longer histories and the Midwest, home of the legendary Iowa State Fair, has customarily been identified as the heartland of rural America. It is not surprising, therefore, that previous research concentrated on fairs in these regions. Nevertheless, state, regional, and county fairs also developed on the western half of the continent. The California Agricultural Society founded a fair as early as 1854; Colorado held an official state fair by 1886; and Montana opened a publicly financed state fair in 1903.¹⁷ By concentrating on eastern and midwestern fairs, scholars have generally ignored the existence of fairs in the American

County Fair (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995).

¹⁴ Donald B. Marti, *Historical Directory of American Agricultural Fairs* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986).

¹⁵ "The Point of View," *Scribners Magazine* 56 (October 1914): 552.

¹⁶ Robert W. Rydell, *World of Fairs: The Century-of-Progress Expositions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).

¹⁷ Marti, 43, 52.

West, where annual exhibitions like the Montana State Fair were instrumental in developing the region and shaping its culture.¹⁸

Successful participation at several world's fairs during the nineteenth century eventually convinced state builders that Montana should have a permanent, annual exhibition of its resources. Consequently, in 1903 the state legislature passed a bill that created the bureaucratic apparatus and appropriated funds for the establishment of the first publicly-financed Montana State Fair, to be located in the capital city of Helena. The fair soon became an influential state institution that hastened the settlement and economic development of Montana. Organized and funded in an effort to attract the human and pecuniary resources necessary to exploit the state's varied natural resources and to guide the course of Montana's growth, the exposition projected visions of perpetual progress and unlimited prosperity that served to unite the Treasure State's divergent economic, social, and political interests. Straight ahead toward an ideal future--this was a mutually acceptable direction for all Montanans, whether miner, farmer, politician, or capitalist. As an advertising medium, an organ of public instruction, and a symbol of infinite possibilities, the state fair was a force in the "modernization" Montana. It helped to integrate the Treasure State into a global market system and acquainted Montanans with the technological, organizational, and ideological characteristics of an increasingly "incorporated" America.¹⁹ This thesis examines the origins of the Montana State Fair, its

¹⁸There are two books that provide some insight on the nature of fairs in the American West, although both feature fairs in western Canada. See David Breen and Kenneth Coates' *Vancouver's Fair: An Administrative and Political History of the Pacific National Exhibition* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1982); and David C. Jones, *Midways, Judges, and Smooth-Tongued Fakirs: The Illustrated Story of County Fairs in the Prairie West* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1983).

¹⁹For an excellent analysis of the effects of incorporation on American culture see Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).

value as a promotional device, and its influence as an educational institution during the first two decades of the twentieth century, a time when the state found itself amid a series of fundamental transformations.

In the thirty years that the Montana State Fair existed, the state of Montana--only eleven years old at the turn of the century--experienced a number of dynamic changes. The creation and early growth of the fair occurred as Montana was still adjusting to the transition from territory to state. Politics bordered on the absurd, copper barons struggled for power and profit, and urban centers battled for the spoils of statehood, one of which was the Montana State Fair. By the dawn of the twentieth century, the Treasure State had enjoyed booms in gold, silver, copper, cattle, and sheep, but it lacked an internal industry capable of providing economic stability and a foundation for future growth. Agriculture increasingly appeared to be the answer. By 1910, small-grain farming eclipsed mining and grazing as the state's leading industries, the result of a homestead boom of magnificent proportions. In less than a decade, the settlement frenzy more than doubled the state's population and filled the once sparsely settled eastern counties. The homestead boom took place amid transformations wrought by industrialization, consumerism, and progressivism. Adding to the maelstrom were the impact of World War I, the subsequent collapse of the homestead boom, and the emergence of the Great Depression. Life in Montana during the early decades of the twentieth century was anything but static or predictable.

The Montana State Fair opened its gates annually despite all these changes, but it was not immune to them. As Wayne Caldwell Neely wisely concluded, "it is evident that fairs are the creation of the society underlying them, and that they are established, shaped

and sometimes abolished in response to the processes that change that society."²⁰ Initially utilized to showcase Montana's myriad of natural resources--minerals, timber, ranching, and agriculture--the fair soon emphasized developing the state's farming potential. It served as a clearinghouse for products that were exhibited at world's fairs, at eastern land shows, on traveling railroad exhibits, and at other miscellaneous venues. In addition to advertising the state, the fair introduced visitors to the latest innovations in agricultural equipment, household appliances, and consumer products. Such displays, organizers hoped, would shape the values of communities the fair helped to populate. When the homestead boom subsided in the late teens and the state entered a period of economic decline, the exhibition also experienced trying times. World War I temporarily redirected the mission of the state fair, while the post-war decade brought financial reductions and evaporating patronage. Helena business interests, which had long profited by utilizing the fair to cash in on Montana's newest resource--a consumer market--tried to save the event. But the fair, already weakened by the state's fiscal problems in the 1920s, could not overcome the damaging effects of the emerging national depression.

Organizers and supporters of the state fair continually restructured the event to accommodate immediate conditions; thus, an analysis of the fair sheds light on the concerns and intentions of Montana's state builders. Among other things, a study of the Montana State Fair exposes the unbridled optimism shared by the state's economic, political, and cultural barons. These turn-of-the-century boosters foresaw great things in the future and the fair reflected their enthusiasm. In fact, they utilized the event to publicize their vision of Montana's future and to provide an ocular demonstration of the rate of progress. It took years of droughts, grasshopper infestations, post-war price

²⁰Neely, 16.

reductions, and severe economic conditions to dampen the people's spirits. Eventually doubt did set in, and Montanans' future-oriented gaze was redirected to the halcyon days of the past. Perhaps nowhere was this shift in attitudes more evident than at the Montana State Fair, which in 1925 adopted the revealing motto "A Fair Like We Used To Have."²¹

Although the exposition was an institution designed, boosted, and financed by elites for the express purpose of promoting and directing the state's development, it depended upon the patronage and support of ordinary citizens, and therefore included elements of popular appeal. The annual event included the educational, social, and recreational components traditionally associated with fairs. It is important to realize, however, that the lines separating these elements were seldom as distinct as many scholars have suggested and each aspect usually reinforced the primary message of the fair--modernization. People socialized as they milled among promotional displays, educational exhibits often provided entertainment, and thrilling extravaganzas frequently taught a lesson or two. Accordingly, many events might easily fall within more than one category. Auto races, for instance, were social gatherings, entertainment, and previews of the latest in four-wheeled technology. Nevertheless, the fair was a multifaceted event with broad popular appeal.

A promotional device, an educational forum, a social event, and an amusement center--the Montana State Fair was all these things and more. It genuinely offered something for almost everyone. A trip to fair provided visitors with an opportunity to meet with others and offered them a chance to earn prestige and monetary awards by entering crops, crafts, food products, or babies in contests. Men, women, and children were all encouraged to attend. While on the grounds they might listen to a distinguished

²¹*Twenty-Third Annual Montana State Fair*, premium list, 1925, cover.

speaker, witness a thrilling aerial exhibition, wager on assorted equestrian events, or enjoy the excitement of the midway. The event entailed much more than wild rides, side shows, and a day at the races, however; it was also a trip to the city, educational lectures, model kitchens, eye catching displays, and barking vendors. Perhaps most important, the fair served as a temporary vacation from the toils of everyday life; it was an experience to be savored--a time to celebrate the past, enjoy the present, or dream about the future. Diverse offerings attracted tens of thousands of ordinary citizens, like the fictional Farmers, to Helena each fall.

Published more than a decade before Phil Stong offered the world his fictional depiction of the Iowa State Fair, the story of the Farmers' 1918 trip to the Montana State Fair gave readers a much richer depiction of the role of fairs in twentieth-century American society. Like the Frakes, the Farmers met old friends, enjoyed amusement rides, and even won a few awards. Yet, the Farmers witnessed much more. The men previewed "tractors of every description . . . power plows, threshers and other heavy machinery," received instructions from representatives of the various companies, and returned home with "a generous supply of descriptive machinery literature."²² While the men learned about the advantages of modern farm equipment, the women stopped by the Baby Conference where they "learned all about the scientific care of babies."²³ Later that afternoon, the family united to tour the main agricultural hall's "great rooms filled with remarkable displays of grains, vegetables, grasses, flax and corn with walls and ceilings decorated most artistically."²⁴ They capped the day off by watching the "Call to Colors," an extravaganza that launched "a tidal-wave of patriotic fervor that swept the grandstand

²²Paulson, 2.

²³Ibid., 4.

²⁴Ibid., 4.

crowd off its feet."²⁵ Upon returning home, even Mrs. Farmer, who had grudgingly attended the event, expressed pleasure in having gone. In fact, "she was brimful of good nature and felt fifteen years younger than her years. She had been to the Montana State Fair."²⁶

The following chapters analyze the Montana State Fair between 1903, its inaugural season, and 1917, the last season before the Great War for Civilization altered the institution's mission. Chapter Two explores the origins of the event, calling attention to early agricultural fairs in Montana then emphasizing the influence of the state's participation in several nineteenth-century world's fairs. The growth of the fair and its utilization by boosters as a promotional vehicle is discussed in Chapter Three. Secondly, this chapter sheds light on the improvement of the grounds and the rising popularity of the event. Chapter Four concentrates on the role of the fair as an educational institution designed to steer the course of Montana's growth. Particular attention is given to the manner in which the event served to encourage Montanans to embrace of the emerging social and economic order of an incorporated America. The conclusion, Chapter Five, discusses the declining influence and eventual death of the state fair. In sum, this thesis argues that for a decade and a half the Montana State Fair existed as a central state institution, one that fostered the development of state's natural resources and familiarized Montanans with the mass of inventions and ideas profoundly altering American society at the turn of the century. In the process, it challenges popular images of so-called agricultural fairs and illuminates a side of these events not heretofore unveiled by scholars.

²⁵Ibid., 8.

²⁶Ibid., 8.

CHAPTER 2

A STATE FAIR?

On October 5, 1903, Frank L. Benepe, President of the Montana State Fair, ascended a platform on the outskirts of Helena, Montana, extended salutations, then introduced the guest of honor, Governor Joseph K. Toole. After welcoming the ten thousand people who had gathered, the governor spoke optimistically about the Treasure State's future and formally opened the first Montana State Fair, thus launching the maiden season of an event that would serve the state for the next three decades.¹ This was not Montanans first experience with fairs, however; almost as soon as Euro-American settlers arrived in the region they began to coordinate such gatherings. More important, in 1884, while still a territory, Montana began a tradition of sending exhibits to world's fairs held in the United States, a practice it continued well into the twentieth century. These international expositions afforded unmatched opportunities to promote Montana's abundant natural resources in an attempt to attract the settlers and capital necessary to spur the development of the state. Politicians, businessmen, railroad executives, and others interested in the development of the state embraced these events as an advertising medium capable of expediting the exploitation of Montana's natural resources. In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, visitors to world's fairs could see for themselves

¹"Montana's First State Fair Opened Yesterday," *The Helena Independent*, 5 October 1903, 4.

the Treasure State's mineral wealth. But, as Montana's agrarian base grew, displays at major expositions shifted toward extolling the state's agricultural possibilities. In addition to publicity, exhibitions served to ameliorate internal discord by presenting a vision of harmony and mutual purpose for Montanans as they navigated the precarious course from territory to state, and implemented an economic transition from mining to agriculture.

The foundation of permanent Euro-American settlement in Montana was laid in the early 1860s, built upon "a golden cornerstone."² A series of rich placer strikes at colorfully named locales like Grasshopper Creek, Alder Gulch, Last Chance Gulch, and Confederate Gulch attracted swarms of fortune seekers. Mining camps, some of them quite substantial, sprang to life almost overnight. Although most of these instant centers of population proved ephemeral, Virginia City, Helena, Butte, and a few others eventually reached a measure of stability, providing markets for agricultural goods. In response, many newcomers abandoned the gold fields, swapped pick for plow, and began to farm the region's fertile valleys, where they established communities supported by tillage rather than mining. Montana's first agricultural fairs materialized in these agrarian centers.

Several of the first agricultural communities in Montana appeared in the Gallatin Valley, and it was there that many of the earliest documented fairs took place. Gallatin City, situated near the headwaters of the Missouri River, reportedly organized a fair as early as 1866.³ By 1872, the township had procured land "conveniently located near the city, and enclosed in a neat substantial fence" to serve as a permanent fairgrounds.⁴

²Michael P. Malone, Richard B. Roeder, and William L. Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995): 64.

³Francis L. Niven, "The History of Fairs in Gallatin County," unpublished manuscript, c. 1974, 7, in Gallatin County Pioneer Museum and Historical Society, Bozeman, MT.

⁴*Headwaters Heritage History*, Diamond Jubilee ed. (Three Forks Area Historical Society, c. 1983): 44.

Financed by the recently formed Eastern Montana Agricultural, Mineral and Mechanical Association, the 1872 event featured horse racing and awarded prizes for an assortment of agricultural products, livestock, homemade goods, fine arts, and women's equestrian competitions.⁵ Gallatin City hosted successful events for the next two years. A reporter described the 1873 assemblage: "Money is very plenty - gambling brisk, reminding me of the old times, saloons doing a good business, and the horse talk - my pencil fails - I cannot describe it."⁶ The occasion apparently drew patronage from nearby Madison, Jefferson, and Meagher counties, but Gallatin City's fair was principally a local event, organized and financed by municipal leaders as an annual festival serving the immediate region.

Similar gatherings took place in other recently established towns. Like Gallatin City's, these fairs never became permanent fixtures in their respective communities. Held under the auspices of an assortment of short-lived associations, they opened intermittently under frequently changing names. Fair activity arose in other section of the territory as well. Citizens of Deer Lodge considered holding a fair in 1870, but eventually concluded that the idea "was premature as the territory is not populous enough or productive enough to sustain more than one good exhibition of stock and product."⁷ Less hesitant, Missoula residents organized the Western Montana Agricultural, Mineral, and Mechanical Association in 1874 and held a fair the following year. Four years previous Helena businessmen had been infected by the fair bug.

In August 1870, seventy-nine individuals and partners, all but two of whom were listed as Helena residents, purchased shares of the Montana Agricultural, Mineral, and Mechanical Association. A list of shareholders reads like a virtual who's who of Helena's

⁵Niven, 7.

⁶*Avant Courier* quoted in *Headwaters Heritage History*, 44.

⁷Niven, 7.

prestigious citizens; among others, it included the names of Anton M. Holter, Cornelius Hedges, A. J. Davidson, Francis Pope, and Conrad Kohrs.⁸ The record of incorporation stated that "the purposes of this Association are to acquire by purchase or otherwise grounds enough to accommodate the Territorial Fairs and other purposes and for improving the same in the County of Lewis and Clark."⁹ The inaugural season was highly anticipated. In particular, the "territorial society was all agog over plans for the first annual territorial party which was held at the International hotel" and attended by the governor and his wife.¹⁰ The central feature of the fair, aside from the always popular equestrian events, consisted of various contests. Artistic entries vied for awards as high as five dollars, while superior examples of cheese, candles, kegs of lager beer, and other "home manufactures" earned their producers cash prizes and diplomas. And, befitting Helena's mining-based economy, the program included "competitions for the best miner's picks, hydraulic nozzles and other mining equipment."¹¹ This association, unlike those short-lived ones formed in Missoula and Gallatin City, sponsored annual events for more than two decades.

When its charter expired in 1891, the Montana Agricultural, Mineral, and Mechanical Association was reorganized and given a different name, the Montana State Fair. The restructured corporation immediately announced that "our 23rd Annual Exhibition Opens at Helena, August 13, [1892] and continues 7 days."¹² Largely the

⁸Montana Secretary of State, Record Book A of Certificates of Incorporation, August 1870, Montana Historical Society (hereafter identified as MHS).

⁹Ibid., August 1870.

¹⁰Margaret Walsh Nagle, "What Actually Would Happen at 'Fair Like We Used to Have' Is Revealed in Early Journal," newspaper clipping, MHS vertical files.

¹¹Ibid, n.p.

¹²*The Montana State Fair: Articles and By-Laws*, n.d., n.p., MHS. Suggests that a fair was held as early as 1869, a year earlier than the 1870 incorporation of the Montana Agricultural, Mineral, and Mechanical Association.

same stockholders who had financed the first association, bought the \$4,000 worth of shares of the Montana State Fair at twenty-five dollars each. Montana's recent attainment of statehood surfaced in the mission statement of the new corporation, which dedicated itself to "aiding in the development of the industrial and productive interests of the State of Montana by holding State Fairs."¹³ Unfortunately, the renamed corporation could not match the record of success achieved by its predecessor. A string of continuous openings that began in 1871 ended abruptly in 1896. Hampered by the economic panic that swept the nation in the 1890s, "the men who had always promoted the fair at Helena found themselves unable to do so."¹⁴ The grounds sat abandoned, falling into disrepair, until they were acquired after the century turned to serve as the home of the first official Montana State Fair.

It would be convenient to identify these nineteenth-century events as the forerunners of the 1903 Montana State Fair, viewing it as simply a rebirth of the former fairs. Such an assumption, however, is most likely erroneous. To begin with, although "territorial" and "state" were adopted as distinctive surnames, early fairs held in Helena had no sanction from territorial or state governments and they do not appear to have been anything more than local events funded entirely by private funds and catering to communities in the immediate vicinity. When the Montana State Fair opened its doors almost a decade after the death of these fairs, it was financed and officially sanctioned by the state to represent all of Montana. This is not to imply that Helena's early fairs were not influential. They led to the development of the grounds that would eventually house the state fair, a factor that certainly contributed to the decision to locate it in Helena.

¹³Ibid., n.p.

¹⁴"Montana State Fair Will Open Tomorrow," *Helena Independent*, 4 October 1903, 9.

Furthermore, the second corporation, the Montana State Fair, indicated a desire to have an annual exposition at home that, at least in name, represented the state, much like those exhibits that Montana had been sending to world's fairs.

Since territorial days Montanans had advanced their interests at international expositions held in the United States. Financed through legislative appropriations and private donations, substantial displays, highlighting the cornucopia of natural resources that awaited exploitation in Montana, were organized and sent to the New Orleans World's Industrial and Cotton Exposition (1884), the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition (1893), and the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition in Omaha (1898). Perhaps more than anything else, Montana's involvement with these events prompted the creation of an officially authorized, publicly-financed state fair. Firsthand experience with the promotional potential and symbolic power afforded by these spectacles, and the enthusiasm that preparing for them generated among the citizens of the state no doubt prompted Montana's politicians and business interests to believe that they should launch an exposition of their own. When the Louisiana Purchase Exposition opened its gates in 1904, the Montana State Fair had already enjoyed a successful first year and was able to contribute to the exhibit sent to St. Louis, where the state continued a twenty-year pattern of involvement with world's fairs.

Montana's maiden venture at world's fairs took place in 1884, when territorial leaders paraded before the nation a sample of the natural resources that lay within the area they hoped to make a state. The opportunity presented itself as Montana's politicians mounted another campaign for statehood. Federal lawmakers had rejected Montana's first bid in 1866, but the territory was maturing rapidly in the 1880s and many leaders believed that the time had come for another try. According to several prominent Montana historians, "the arrival of the railroad and the booming quartz mining and livestock

industries combined to send Montana's population soaring and breathed new fervor into hopes for statehood."¹⁵ Encouraged by a revitalized economy and rapidly growing population, the legislature convened a second constitutional convention and drafted a governing document that easily passed in the general election of November 1884.¹⁶

Now federal legislators merely needed to be convinced that it was in the nation's best interest for them to approve Montana's request for statehood. What better way to do this than to display the vast mineral deposits that were waiting to be extracted from the mountains of the Treasure State. Industrialization required capital, and Montana held vast quantities of gold and silver to contribute to the nation's coffer. Furthermore, expansion of mining activities would create jobs, increase railroad traffic, and open new consumer markets in the West. To make their case, territorial leaders put together an exhibit highlighting Montana's mineral wealth, loaded it aboard railroad cars, and dispatched it to the New Orleans World's Industrial and Cotton Exposition.

Completion of the transcontinental Northern Pacific Railroad figured prominently in both the renewed desire to advance from territorial status and the ability of Montana to participate at New Orleans. By providing cost-effective access to smelters and reduction works, and a reliable link to national and international markets, rail transportation accelerated the development of silver mining operations in the territory, making it the nation's second largest silver producer by 1883. Although the railroad rejuvenated the territory's depressed economy, politicians soon targeted the Northern Pacific as an untapped source of revenue. Taxing railroads, an option only available to states, presented an opportunity to substantially increase Montana's treasury.¹⁷ Nevertheless,

¹⁵Malone, 194.

¹⁶Ibid., 194.

¹⁷Ibid., 188, 194.

both the Northern Pacific and the Union Pacific railroads abetted those who sought to tax them by "forwarding to New Orleans, free of charge," Montana's exhibit for the Industrial and Cotton Exposition.¹⁸ Railroad executives recognized that the development of industry in Montana equated to more raw materials for them to haul out and more passengers and goods for them to haul in. This was only the first of many times that railroads facilitated Montana's participation at expositions, institutions that they themselves would later utilize to promote the region.

Appointed "to represent the interests of the Territory of Montana," John S. Harris, a successful rancher from Deer Lodge, headed the commission tasked with designing an exhibit that would "direct the attention of the world to the material resources and advantages of this Empire Territory of the Northwest."¹⁹ If Montana wanted to be considered for statehood it needed to shed its rather infamous territorial reputation, one fraught with images of ruthless vigilantes, rowdy cowboys, and renegade Indians, and to show that it had something of value to offer the nation. To this end, a promotional pamphlet distributed in New Orleans championed Montana's salubrious climate, natural beauty, and well-funded schools, and it assured readers, who undoubtedly remembered Custer's demise and Chief Joseph's capture, that "danger, or even annoyance, from Indians no longer exists."²⁰ The brochure also described the excellent conditions for raising livestock and the expansive forest reserves that awaited the logging industry. These, however, were presented as added perks that enhanced Montana's primary attribute.

¹⁸*Montana at the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition* (Helena: George E. Boos and Company, n.d.): 51.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 3, 4.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 15.

Above all else, the exhibit sent to New Orleans advertised "the mineral wealth of the Territory, the most important factor of its prosperity."²¹ The same handout that described climate and Indian conditions underscored that mining was "the chief industry of the Territory," and that therefore the "principal feature of the exhibit consists of ores and minerals." Twenty-eight pages of the pamphlet, almost half the total, detailed the outputs and production capacities of prominent mines and reduction works already in operation. Those who visited the exhibit or read the handout undoubtedly learned of Montana's mineral prowess. "Extensive and comprehensive," the display included "a large collection of rare and costly specimens from several noted mines of gold, silver, copper, lead, and iron."²² Mrs. Tingle, wife of Dawson County's state representative, sent a letter to the *Helena Independent* expressing her satisfaction with Montana's efforts. "I was quite proud of Montana," she wrote, "the space is large, well filled and beautifully arranged, reflecting credit on the commissioners."²³

As impressive as it may have been, the showing made by the Treasure State at New Orleans did not overcome political maneuverings in the nation's capital that prolonged the attainment of statehood. With the House and the presidency in the hands of Democrats and the Senate controlled Republicans, each party refused to admit states that might shift the balance of power in favor of their opponents. But, territorial politicians did not have to wait much longer. Democrats, who lost control of both houses of Congress and the Oval Office in 1888, withdrew their opposition and agreed to grant statehood to Washington and the Dakotas. Along with these Republican strongholds, largely Democratic Montana entered the union as the forty-first state and its leaders began the

²¹Ibid., 33.

²²"New Orleans Exhibit," *Helena Independent*, 22 January 1885, 2.

²³"New Orleans Exposition," *Helena Independent*, 24 January 1885, 2.

task of charting the post-territory future, a process that had only begun when they financed an exhibit for the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition.

Montana's participation at the Chicago exposition took place amid vastly different circumstances than its involvement with the New Orleans exposition. Economically, the state was suffering the effects of a collapsed silver market, a situation that precipitated a shift toward mining copper instead. Politics were in even worse shape. The notorious battles waged between the "copper kings," William Clark and Marcus Daly, coupled with the rise of an urban-based populist movement, severely disrupted internal politics and tarnished the young state's national reputation. On top of this, heated debates concerning the permanent location of the state capital eroded what little camaraderie existed among Montanans. The "war of the copper kings" and the "battle for the capital" left deep wounds that were slow to heal. The Chicago World's Fair presented an opportunity to restore Montana's national image and to assuage tensions building up within the state.

The Montana legislature facilitated participation in the exposition by quickly establishing the Montana Board of World's Fair Managers and appropriating \$100,000 to finance a display. Lawmakers appointed Missoula businessman Walter Bickford to head the board. In an effort to generate support for the activities of the commission, Bickford authored weekly articles and disseminated them to newspapers across the state.²⁴ Almost immediately, he initiated the process of collecting products to display in the ample space Montana had secured--seven thousand square feet in a state building of its own, three thousand in the Hall of Mines and Mining, three thousand in the Agricultural Building, and another one thousand in the Forestry Pavilion.²⁵ In addition to these venues, the

²⁴Robert Rydell, *World of Fairs: The Century-of-Progress Expositions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993): 27.

²⁵Dave Walter, "Montana's Silver Lady: Curvaceous Heroine of the Columbian Exposition," *Montana Magazine* 76 (March-April, 1986): 69.

resources of the state were "interestingly set forth by the Northern Pacific Railway in an exhibit made in two elegant cars . . . in the Transportation Building."²⁶ Once again the railroad cooperated in promoting the state at a world's fair. Supplementing Bickford's efforts, the Montana Board of Lady Managers, under the direction of Eliza Rickards, the governor's wife, collected an array of items to represent the state's women and children. Soon after initial preparations had been put in motion, word arrived concerning the magnitude of the scheduled exposition and the substantial amounts of money that other exhibitors were spending in preparation. In response, the board determined that their exhibit required something more; it needed a spectacular attraction that could lure visitors to Montana's displays.

Two Chicago entrepreneurs, Joseph O. Harvey and Frank D. Higbee, approached Bickford with a suggestion for the creation of a nine-foot, solid-silver statue of the mythical goddess, Justice, to serve as the centerpiece of Montana's exhibit in the Hall of Mines and Mining. Bickford applauded the concept and proceeded to hasten its realization. Richard Henry Park, an accomplished sculptor from New York, secured the right to execute the statue by contributing \$3,000 to the project. For giving a like amount, Ada Rehan, an internationally renowned actress, bought the opportunity to be the model for *Justice*. Although he was well aware that Rehan would pose for Park, Bickford craftily generated local publicity by suggesting that *Justice* was to be modeled after a Montana woman. Nationally, the prominence of the artist and the model provoked widespread interest. The cumulative effect of these activities was phenomenal. Historian Dave Walter noted that "statewide support swelled for all of Montana's displays, and state

²⁶*Montana: Exhibit at the World's Fair and a description of the various Resources of the State* (Butte: Butte Inter Mountain Print, 1893): 61.

pride coalesced around the issue of "The Silver Statue."²⁷ Exuding "immense strength and exquisite grace . . . with a superabundance of life and movement," *Justice*, with one foot on a globe, would balance gracefully upon the back of a Montana eagle.²⁸ Introduced in New Orleans, Montana's credentials as a mineral-laden interior colony were boasted in Chicago.

Although it cost nearly \$250,000, the magnificent depiction of Justice perched atop a plinth of gold served Montana well. Before it even had a physical form, *Justice* became an emblem of the Treasure State's greatness that inspired pride and unity among an increasingly agitated and divided state population. Once unveiled the statue had an even greater impact. Many Montanans considered it an example of the state's superiority not only in comparison to other states, but in relationship to the great civilizations of the past as well. For viewers who might not reach this conclusion on their own, promotional literature guided them toward a proper appreciation of *Justice*. One pamphlet distributed to Chicago fairgoers explained that Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians had excelled at statuary, "but the enduring marble and bronze were the best material employed. It has been left for Montana to offer the world a statue of Justice in the beautiful white metal that ribs her mountains and which has been classed as precious since history began."²⁹ In addition to locating Montana in civilization's hall of fame, *Justice* provided some much needed positive publicity that conveniently advanced the interests of the state. Amidst the industrial violence of the Gilded Age and vitriolic national debates concerning the silver issue, the sixteen-hundred-pound, sterling-silver statue, depicted without her traditional blindfold, artistically expounded the Treasure State's stance on bimetallism. Perhaps most

²⁷Ibid., 69.

²⁸"Rehan in Solid Silver," *Helena Independent*, 19 March 1893, 1.

²⁹*Montana: Exhibit at the World's Fair* . . . , 14.

important, the Grecian goddess attracted countless spectators to Montana's exhibit in the Hall of Mines and Mining.

Justice might have been the main draw, but it was not the whole show.

Commissioner Bickford and his associates had succeeded in organizing a first-rate, well-patronized exhibit. Pleased with the results of the venture, Bickford stated at the conclusion of the event that "we could not get the same amount of advertising for the State of Montana for a million dollars in cash."³⁰ Indeed, more than 170,000 promotional pamphlets were distributed by state representatives at the mining exhibit.³¹ These handouts, like those distributed in New Orleans, concentrated on extolling Montana's mineral wealth; nevertheless, a brief description of agricultural conditions in the state reflected a growing interest in exploiting this resource as well. Those who read the literature learned that:

Great as are the mines of Montana . . . they are not to be compared in point of value and importance with the treasure of soil that lies hidden beneath the unturned sod of her magnificent agricultural area Happily for Montana her resources are diversified, and while she glories in the wealth of her mines, which promise a constantly increasing product for years to come, her chief and certain reliance for the future is Agriculture.³²

Divergent from the message conveyed by *Justice*, this rhetoric suggested that Montanans had grown weary of the economic instability resulting from dependency upon a single resource and were ready to develop the state's other natural assets.

Any harmony, not to mention justice, fostered by Montana's participation in the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition was ephemeral. The metallic spokeswoman went on a national tour following her debut in Chicago and never found her way back to

³⁰*Helena Weekly Herald*, 5 June 1893, quoted in Walter, "Montana's Silver Lady," 72.

³¹Walter, "Montana's Silver Lady," 72.

³²*Montana: Exhibit at the World's Fair*, 31.

Montana where the "copper kings" were gearing up for another round and the divisive capital question remained unresolved.³³ Nevertheless, the White City experience left its mark on Montana. To begin with, it familiarized numerous Montanans with expositions and encouraged them to associate fairs with progress. Even the majority of Montanans, who did not venture to the exposition, were able to take part in the spectacle vicariously through assisting in the preparation of the exhibits or simply by monitoring the progress and discussing the merits of the "Silver Lady." State residents who actually journeyed to Chicago and witnessed the advancements of industrialization could assure neighbors at home that Montana was indeed headed in the proper direction by developing its resources in support of national progress. Lastly, the entire experience demonstrated to local elites the value expositions. Those who had paid attention recognized the utility of such spectacles for, at least temporarily, uniting the public and channeling their energies in a given direction. Apparently, William Clark and Marcus Daly took heed.

For more than two decades Clark and Daly had dedicated themselves to the task of undermining the other's ambitions. Regardless of the issue, these rivals invariably chose opposite sides--the location of the state capital was no exception. Daly thought that Anaconda should be the capital, while his nemesis championed Helena. In 1894, the two mining monarchs waged a pitched battle to resolve the issue. Despite spending an estimated \$2,500,000 dollars promoting his cause, Daly failed to bring the capital to Anaconda.³⁴ Clark, who spent at least \$400,000, came out on the winning side and consequently won the hearts of Helena's citizens. Needless to say, defeat only intensified

³³Dave Walter asserts that Harvey and Higbee toured the statue in the East and Midwest following the exhibition. In 1896 a dispute erupted between the exhibitors and the owners, Samuel Hauser and William Clark. Apparently the parties reached a compromise in 1903 that resulted in *Justice* being reduced to bullion at an Omaha Smelter.

³⁴Malone, 214.

Daly's disdain for his adversary and prompted him to challenge vigorously Clark's persistent efforts to become one of Montana's United States senators. Given the antagonistic nature of their relationship, few were the times that Daly and Clark supported a common cause. The Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition of 1898 was one of these instances.

Omaha hosted the 1898 world's fair, one that organizers fashioned to celebrate and sanction the federal government's imperialist policies--past and present, at home and abroad.³⁵ In particular, the exposition commemorated westward expansion and proclaimed that the time had arrived to take full advantage of the continent's "Inland Empire." Furthermore, supporters posited that expositions provided the means to that end. In the words of John Baldwin: "The exposition has become the instrument of civilization. Being a concomitant to empire, westward it takes its way--The Crystal Palace, the Centennial, the World's Fair, the Trans-Mississippi Exposition."³⁶ Omaha's exposition lacked the extravagance of Chicago's, but Montana, which had routinely offered itself to the nation as a resource-abundant internal colony, did not pass up the opportunity to once again showcase its assets.

The Montana Legislature appropriated \$15,000 to support an exhibit at the Omaha fair.³⁷ Unfortunately, very few records are available concerning the Treasure State's participation at this event; however, those that exist disclose that both "copper kings" actively supported Montana's exhibit.³⁸ Chaired by W. H. Sutherlin, the commission

³⁵See Robert Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984).

³⁶Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 105.

³⁷"Five Mile Auto Race For Montana Record," *Helena Independent*, 5 October 1906, 1.

³⁸According to Malone et al., Clark "first tasted public acclaim as Montana's centennial orator at the Philadelphia Exhibition in 1876," 212.

established to prepare for the event included both the Daly and Clark.³⁹ Historians can only imagine the dynamics of a board meeting at which these archenemies collaborated. In addition to leadership, Daly contributed fiscal support as well, matching the legislative appropriation. An official guidebook to the exposition acknowledged Daly's generosity, noting that largely because of him "this young state has not only taken 2,000 square feet in the Mines building, 1,000 square feet in the Agricultural building and a like area in the Liberal Arts building but has erected a cosy, comfortable home for its citizens."⁴⁰ With reports of the Montana Column's trek toward the Philippines dominating front-pages, the exhibit at Omaha failed to incite enthusiasm in Montana comparable to that generated by participation at the Chicago World's Fair. Nevertheless, the experience reemphasized to Montana's elites the multifarious potential of expositions, while further inculcating the notion that fairs not only aided progress, but that they also symbolized it.

Steps toward the creation of an officially sanctioned, publicly-financed state fair in Montana quickened after the Omaha Exposition. In fact, at the first legislative session following the 1898 fair Montana lawmakers passed a bill "granting to the Montana State Fair Association, A Corporation, A Franchise for holding and conducting the annual State Fair of the State of Montana for A period of ten years at or near the city of Butte."⁴¹ The bill included no appropriation and stipulated that "if said association shall fail to hold said fair two years in succession, the franchise hereby granted shall be forfeited."⁴² During

³⁹*Official Guide Book to the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition* (Omaha: Megeath Stationary, n.d.): 167, in Smithsonian Institution Libraries. *The Books of the Fairs; A Microfilm Collection Drawn From the Holdings of the Smithsonian Institution Libraries* (Woodbridge, CT: Research Publications, 1989): reel 129, no. 1.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 44.

⁴¹Montana. *Laws, Resolutions and Memorials of the State of Montana passed at the Sixth Regular Session of the Legislative Assembly*. (Helena, MT: State Publishing Company, Legislative Stationers, Printers and Binders, 1899): 108.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 108.

that same year, 1899, William Clark, still seeking a seat in the U. S. Senate, purchased a 21-acre pleasure spot on the outskirts of Butte with the intention of turning it into a modern amusement park dedicated to the area's children.

Over the next two years Clark funneled more than \$100,000 into Columbian Gardens.⁴³ Lavishly landscaped grounds surrounding a lake provided a relaxing retreat from the urban confines of Butte, while a dance hall, children's playground, and other attractions introduced working-class residents to the type of mass entertainment made famous by the Midway Plaisance at the Chicago World's Fair and New York's Coney Island.⁴⁴ Financed initially by Clark and later by the Anaconda Company, Columbia Gardens was continually improved and maintained for the enjoyment of locals for the next six decades. Scholars, like many of Clark's contemporaries, have often asserted that this apparent gesture of goodwill was in reality an attempt to induce Butte voters to support Clark in his quest for a Senate seat. Perhaps so, but he continued his philanthropy long after he finally went to Washington. Local residents, who quickly embraced it as a symbol of community pride, did not seem to care why the park existed. While the construction of Columbia Gardens apparently diminished Butte's desire to host the state fair, as authorized by the legislature in 1899, it undoubtedly caught the attention of other communities that would have like to have a similar attraction.

The arrival of the twentieth century brought with it an end to the feud between Clark and Daly. Marcus Daly died in 1900 and his rival, who could finally introduce himself as Senator Clark, vanished to the nation's capital. Realigned mining interests

⁴³Dave Walter, "Beautiful Columbian Gardens," *Montana Magazine* 73 (September-October 1985): 22-27.

⁴⁴For an excellent analysis on the role of commercial amusements at the turn of the century see John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Millions: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1978).

continued the struggle for control of the copper industry, but their maneuverings no longer permeated every aspect of life in Montana. Meanwhile another breed of capitalists emerged as powerful political, economic, and cultural barons.

Seeking to guide Montana in a different direction during the twentieth century, this new group of power brokers rose to prominence by boosting the state's agricultural attributes. Reaffirming his title of "empire builder," James J. Hill completed the Great Northern Railroad, providing reliable access to the vast open plains that constituted the High Line of Northern Montana. At the same time, Paris Gibson promoted a new townsite known as Great Falls and Ignatius O'Donnel advanced the cause of Billings. These men and others, like Governor Joseph K. Toole and U. S. Senator Thomas H. Carter, gazed beyond the hypnotizing allure of precious metals and recognized the profits to be made by exploiting Montana's other resources. Furthermore, they believed that agricultural development would establish the basis for a stable and prosperous future. This new group of visionaries initially advocated irrigated farming as the key to Montana's future prosperity and they rejoiced when Congress passed the Newland's Reclamation Act in 1902. All that was needed, they believed, was an effective method for advertising the agricultural possibilities that lay within the borders of their state. Unsurprisingly, they turned to fairs, organizing an exhibit for St. Louis' 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition and simultaneously creating the Montana State Fair.

Exactly who conceived the idea to fund an official state fair was a point of contention at the beginning of the century and there is no clear answer as it draws to a close, but the timing of the action is obvious. The excitement generated by the announcement that a world's fair would be held in St. Louis played an important role in the decision to establish a permanent fair at home. In 1903 a bill appropriating \$42,000 for the support of an exhibit at the St. Louis Exposition appeared before the Eighth

Legislative Assembly. During the same session, Senator William M. Biggs and Representative Charles H. Bray, both of Lewis and Clark County, submitted bills in their respective forums for the establishment of the Montana State Fair. After considerable debate both the state fair and the world's fair bills passed. Ironically, however, legislation authorizing and financing an exhibit for the Omaha exposition failed to win support in the regular session.

Approval for an exhibit at the St. Louis exposition required a special session of the 1903 legislature, called specifically for that purpose. The origins of this bill actually dated back to 1901. Many people in the state had assumed that the legislative session held that year would produce funding for an exhibit at the exposition, which was initially scheduled to open in the spring of 1903. When lawmakers made no appropriation, Governor Toole, "in response to the urgent request of the Press of the State and the personal solicitation of many citizens," established an honorary commission to begin soliciting private donations and otherwise planning for the event.⁴⁵ However, the opening date for St. Louis's exposition was moved to 1904 and the commission took no action. At the next legislative session the governor personally addressed lawmakers and encouraged them to appropriate a total of \$35,000 to support exhibits at both the Louisiana Purchase Exposition and the Lewis and Clark Centennial to be held in 1905 at Portland, Oregon.

The legislature obliged by submitting a bill that encountered little resistance until the Senate amended it by naming a five person commission to head the project. Disputes concerning appointees broke out among Representatives and the House refused to concur. Unable to reach a compromise, the House continually rejected amended versions of the bill and failed to pass any by the final night of the legislative session. Once again the governor

⁴⁵"Montana at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition," *Contributions to the Historical Society of Montana* 6 (1907): 122.

appointed an honorary commission, which immediately met and petitioned the governor to call an extraordinary session of the legislature to establish a formal commission and appropriate sufficient funds. Not surprisingly, Governor Toole complied with the request. Legislators soon met in an extraordinary session and quickly passed a bill establishing the Montana World's Fair Commission and appropriating \$60,000 to fund exhibits at both events--\$50,000 for St. Louis and \$10,000 for Portland.

The effort that concerned individuals put forth to ensure that Montana sent an exhibit to these events attests to the importance that many Montanans had come to attribute to expositions. Also telling is the fact that the Montana Historical Society documented the state's participation at both these events in its annual publications for the years of 1904 and 1907.⁴⁶ State historians considered these pivotal events in the history of Montana. Before Montana took part in either of these events, however, it held its first state fair. It was probably the energy unleashed by preparations for the Louisiana Purchase Exposition and the Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition that precipitated Montana lawmakers' establishment of an annual exposition of their own, an action that reopened old social cleavages.

The clamor over the location of the state capital was only one of many squabbles that took place in Montana after it became a state. Similar contests erupted over the other spoils of statehood, as "each region and each major town in the new state vied for the state university, the agricultural college, the normal school, the mental hospital, the school for the deaf, and other institutions."⁴⁷ Most of these issues had been ironed out by 1900;

⁴⁶"Montana at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition," *Contributions to the Historical Society of Montana* 5 (1904): 80-108; "Montana at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition" and "Montana at the Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition," *Contributions to the Historical Society of Montana* 6 (1907): 19-82, 88-101.

⁴⁷Malone, 200.

however, the proposal to create a state fair reinvigorated the fighting spirit of several communities. An editorial in the *Helena Independent* observed that "judging from the articles which have appeared in the press of the state concerning this matter there appears to be a strong sentiment in favor of a state fair, but not unnaturally several different towns think they are best located for the holding of such an exhibition."⁴⁸ Helena and rapidly growing Great Falls fought most ardently for the prize at stake, while several other towns put forth lesser efforts. Waged within the halls of the capital and on the front pages of newspapers, the battle for the state fair frequently harkened back to the capital controversy.

Introduced by legislators serving Lewis and Clark County, both the House and the Senate bills identified Helena as the proper home for the state fair. The notion that Helena should automatically receive that right sparked the ire of many solons from other counties. Disgruntled lawmakers submitted numerous amendments in an effort to change the location of the fair. Missoula, Billings, Butte, Great Falls, and Bozeman were each proposed as alternative locations.⁴⁹ Attacking from another direction, Senator Fletcher Maddox of Madison County challenged the organizational structure outlined in the original bill and tried to amend it so that the board of directors consisted of the presidents of the Woolgrowers, Stockgrowers, Horticulture, and Breeders associations.⁵⁰ The nature of this amendment suggests that the fracas involved more than the mere location of the fair. On another level the struggle for the fair represented a concerted effort by nascent agricultural interests to wrest power away from the old order of elites.

⁴⁸Editorial, *Helena Independent*, 6 February 1903, 4.

⁴⁹*Great Falls Tribune*, 17 February 1903, 1.

⁵⁰*Helena Independent*, 5 March 1903, 8.

Furthermore, it demonstrates that the state fair was not simply an agricultural event, as the leaders of agricultural groups were not invited to participate in managing the institution.

Reports on the progress of the debates appeared daily in newspapers throughout the state. The *Helena Independent* and the *Great Falls Tribune* served as the voices for their respective communities. Each proclaimed the reasons why that community should or why some other location should not be selected as the home of the state fair. The *Tribune* credited Great Falls' businessmen with coming up with the idea for a fair and pointed out that the Electric City was the logical location for such an event. "This city," exclaimed the *Tribune*, "is the most central to the great farming districts of the state, [whereas] the location of the fair at Helena would have little to do with the agricultural development of the state."⁵¹ As it became more likely that Helena would win the contest, attacks against that town intensified, often resurrecting memories of the clamor for the capital. "The Helena hog is much in evidence; and grunting away, in the front, as is the record of that city," editorialized the *Tribune*, adding that "because the people of the state were good enough to Helena to locate the state capital at that city, the old town appears to think it has the call upon every other state institution which may now be available."⁵² When it became obvious that Great Falls had lost the contest, the *Tribune's* editors committed themselves to trying to ensure that Helena would lose as well. At one point the paper remarked that "Great Falls has nothing whatever to say against the pretensions of Bozeman for this fair. As compared with Helena, Bozeman has vastly superior claims."⁵³

⁵¹*Great Falls Tribune*, 12 February 1903, 8; Editorial, *Great Falls Tribune*, 13 February 1903, 2.

⁵²Editorial, *Great Falls Tribune*, 19 February 1903, 2; Editorial, *Great Falls Tribune*, 21 February 1903, 2.

⁵³Editorial, *Great Falls Tribune*, 13 February 1903, 2.

Bozeman was considered an appropriate location because, like Great Falls, it served agrarian communities.

Capital City journalists rose to the challenge and faithfully defended their town as a wise choice. Helena's *Independent* rebutted charges levied by other papers and pointed out why that city should be selected. One issue instructed that "owing to the splendid railroad facilities offered by this town, it is the best place that an institution of the kind could be established."⁵⁴ Another advantage of holding the fair in Helena, supporters argued, was that the city already had grounds suitable for the exposition. Throughout the rhetorical duel, the *Independent* maintained confidence that Helena would secure the right to host the fair. When the state fair bill was finally put to a vote, with Helena named as the location, it passed forty-four to two in the House and seventeen to four in the Senate.⁵⁵

The creation of the Montana State Fair marked the culmination of two decades of experience with exhibiting at world's fairs. Montana's political, business, and cultural leaders had learned to appreciate both the symbolic and promotional power inherent in these events, while widespread community involvement in amassing and funding displays demonstrated the willingness of ordinary citizens to contribute to the boosting of the state. In addition, the railroad corporations, which would play a paramount role in fostering the development of Montana during the twentieth century, had shown their respect for the advertising potential of expositions. State leaders, Montana citizens, and railroad interests--each of these groups would soon contribute to making the Montana State Fair

⁵⁴Editorial, *Helena Independent*, 3 March 1903, 4.

⁵⁵Montana. *House Journal of the Eighth Regular and Extraordinary Sessions of the Legislative Assembly of the State of Montana* (Helena: State Publishing Company, Legislative Stationers, Printers and Binders, 1903): 231; *Senate Journal . . . Montana*, 196.

an extraordinary promotional vehicle. If the fair was established, at least in part, to help unify Montana, it got off to a rocky start; nevertheless, upon learning that its city would host the exposition, the *Helena Independent* assured readers that "Montana can rest assured that it will have a state fair that will be a credit to the commonwealth."⁵⁶

⁵⁶Ibid., 4.

CHAPTER 3

THE BIG SHOW WINDOW OF THE WEST

The bill passed by Montana's Eighth Legislative Assembly set forth "that for the promotion of the public welfare there shall be and is hereby established a State Institution, to be designated and Known as the 'Montana State Fair.'"¹ In declaring the fair a state institution, legislators envisioned that it would serve all Montana's divergent interests. The bill declared that the fair was designed to "disseminate knowledge concerning, and to encourage the growth and prosperity of all agriculture, stock grazing, horticulture, mining, mechanical, artistic and industrial pursuits."² The management of the event rested with a board of directors comprised of one resident from each county, who were to select from their numbers a president, secretary, treasurer, and any other necessary officers. Aside from the secretary and treasurer, who were to receive a small salary, members of the board would volunteer their efforts. Thus equipped with legislative authority and a paltry appropriation of \$10,000 for the first two years, the board organized Montana's first state fair. From modest beginnings, the state fair expanded rapidly in size, popularity, and promotional significance. Initially representing each of Montana's varied industries, as tasked by law, the focus of the fair soon narrowed to promoting agricultural development.

¹Montana. *Laws, Resolutions and Memorials of the State of Montana passed at the Eighth Regular Session of the Legislative Assembly* (Helena, MT: State Publishing Company, Legislative Stationers, Printers and Binders, 1903): 173.

²*Ibid.*, 173.

It emerged as one of Montana's premier advertising mediums, annually showcasing the state's agriculture prowess in an effort to attract investment capital and settlers. The fair served as a clearing house for products exhibited at world's fairs, at eastern lands shows, on traveling railroad exhibits, and at other venues. And, like those exhibits sent outside the state, the institution served as a symbol of progress around which state residents could rally. Nicknamed "The Big Show Window of the West," the Montana State Fair functioned as the central component of an extensive promotional campaign that expedited the development of the state's agriculture resources and helped to usher in a new era in the history of Montana.³ Before the fair could accomplish any of these things, however, the board had to provide a suitable home and secure popular support.

The community of Helena, which clearly stood to benefit from hosting the fair, did not receive the privilege unconditionally. In return for being named the host community, Helena was required to arrange for the donation of at least eighty acres of land, located within three and one-half miles of the city, to serve as the State Fair Grounds. Thanks to the efforts of the defunct Montana Agricultural, Mineral, and Mechanical Association, members of the board knew exactly where they could acquire a suitable tract of land. In fact, this had been one of Helena's principal lobbying points. To fulfill the obligation, a group of prominent citizens "secured the site previously used by the Montana Fair Association" from wealthy horse breeder Charles D. Hard for "a reasonable price" and subsequently transferred the title to the state.⁴ These grounds were to be maintained by

³1918 Letterhead, Montana State Fair Association, vertical files, Montana Historical Society (cited hereafter as MHS). The vertical files at the Montana Historical Society contain miscellaneous material concerning both the Montana State Fair and Montana's participation in world's fairs, in particular the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition.

⁴"Montana State Fair Will Open Tomorrow," *Helena Independent*, 4 October 1903, 9. Charles Hard had previously donated land for Helena's Montana University.

the state and reserved exclusively for the purpose of the Montana State Fair. This action began a trend of Helena business interests providing considerable support to the institution. Well aware that a popular event would bring large numbers of people to the city, Helenans dedicated themselves to ensuring the success of the fair. With a location secured, the board of directors went to work making improvements to the grounds and otherwise preparing for opening day.

Almost immediately it became apparent that the task at hand was a substantial one that easily exceeded the financial resources allocated by the legislature. Fortunately, the president of the Amalgamated Copper Company, William Scallon, followed the example set by his predecessor, Marcus Daly, who had contributed funds for the exposition in Omaha. Scallon donated \$10,000 to support the operation of the state fair.⁵ He considered fairs, internal and external, so valuable to the growth of the state that he contributed both his time and money to ensuring that Montana benefited from them. At the time of his donation to the state fair, Scallon served as a member of the Montana World's Fair Commission, the group that was organizing exhibits for both St. Louis and Portland. In their efforts to furnish the Montana State Building at the St. Louis exposition, the Women's Auxiliary Committee received considerable support from Daly's widow, Margaret Daly, who matched Senator Clark's gift of \$500.⁶ Donations made by these prominent citizens and others like them greatly enhanced Montana's ability to participate in world's fairs and to establish an exhibition of its own. Scallon's financial

⁵*The Montana State Fair: Statement Covering Operations of the State Fair For 1903 To 1904, With Suggestions By the Officials*, 4, in University of Montana, Mansfield Library, Special Collections.

⁶W. W. Cheely, "Report of Women's Auxiliary Committee," in "Montana at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition," *Contributions to the Historical Society of Montana* 6 (1907): 70-71.

contribution to the state fair was crucial; it enabled officials to repair existing structures on the grounds and to add a few new features.

An exploratory survey of the fairgrounds by board members revealed that "it had not been used for several years and as a result some of the buildings had decayed and the roads leading to it were not in good condition."⁷ Almost a decade had passed since the grounds were utilized--time and elements had taken their toll. Nevertheless, the managers went to work, restoring those structures that could be saved, even if only temporarily, and tearing down others that proved too dilapidated to be used safely. By opening day, October 5, 1903, the grounds had been put in respectable shape.⁸ The *Helena Independent* described the appearance of the fair grounds that afternoon:

Directly facing the entrance is the main exhibition hall, a large two story building, with two wings To the left of this main hall are enlarged stables, and the new poultry house and a little farther away on the same side are the new pens for sheep, goats and swine. To the right . . . is the old grandstand, repaired and brightened up. The judges stand has been moved across the track to the infield. To the right of the grandstand is the place where pools will be sold, and adjoining is the bar. Next comes the stables for racers. Every building that has not been painted has been whitewashed.⁹

⁷"Montana State Fair Will Open Tomorrow," 9.

⁸The bill establishing the state fair dictated that it was to be held sometime between the fifteenth day of August and the fifteenth day of October--not to exceed twenty days. The dates of the fair each year were as follows: 1903, Oct. 5 - 10; 1904, Oct. 3 - 8; 1905, Oct. 2 - 7; 1906, Oct. 1 - 6; 1907, Oct. 30 - Sept. 5; 1908, Oct. 28 - Sept. 3; 1909, Oct. 27 - Sept. 2; 1910, Oct. 26 - Sept. 1; 1911, Sept. 25 - 30; 1912, Sept. 23 - 28; 1913, Sept. 22 - 27; 1914, Sept. 21 - 26; 1915, Sept. 20 - 25; 1916, Sept. 25 - 30; 1917, Sept. 24 - 29; 1918, Sept. 9 - 14; 1919, Sept. 8 - 13; 1920, Sept. 13 - 18; 1921, Sept. 12 - 17; 1922, Sept. 26 - 30; 1923, Sept. 25 - 28; 1924, Sept. 23 - 27; 1925, Sept. 7 - 12; 1926, Sept. 6 - 11; 1927, Sept. 5 - 9; 1928, Sept. 24 - 28; 1929, Sept. 23 - 28; 1930, Aug. 18 - 23; 1931, Aug. 17 - 22; 1932, Aug. 15 - 20.

⁹"Montana State Fair Will Open Tomorrow," 9.

In the years that followed, substantial additions greatly improved the grounds, but the facilities recorded above had to suffice for the initial season.

Planning for the exposition got off to a good start. Twenty-two of twenty-six counties sent representatives to the first board meeting.¹⁰ Such representation fueled optimism since organizers understood that the success of the fair hinged upon its ability to secure the support of Montana's diverse economic interests. At the first meeting Frank L. Benepe, a successful agricultural implement dealer from Bozeman, was elected president and John W. Pace was chosen as secretary. The *Helena Independent* did its part to generate favorable publicity for the actions of the board. It frequently carried editorials emphasizing that the fair "is a state institution, [which] belongs to the whole people of Montana" and proudly announced that "no event of a public nature that has ever taken place in Montana has received the liberal advertising from the press of the state."¹¹ The official report filed by the secretary at the end of the first year substantiated this assertion of cooperation and credited the fair with achieving widespread support among Montana's citizens. According to the annual report:

The enterprise has been particularly free from the criticisms that often attach to similar institutions, by the eradication of all local prejudice, and the hearty co-operation of earnest men from every portion of the state. No movement in the history of the State has ever brought forth more cordial and general support by the masses of the people and especially of the taxpaying class. There has been no dissensions whatever in the management and there has been a spirit of harmony that could hardly fail to make the Fair a success.¹²

¹⁰*Annual Report of the Secretary and Treasurer, Montana State Fair, 1903*, 1, MHS, Montana Governors' Papers, MC 35, Box 327.

¹¹Editorial, *Helena Independent*, 5 October 1903, 4.

¹²*Annual Report . . . Montana State Fair, 1903*, 4.

Attracting an estimated thirty thousand paying visitors over six days, the first fair exceeded the expectations of many of its boosters. Indeed, one journalist concluded that "from whatever point the fair may be viewed it was a great success."¹³ It was definitely not beginners luck; the fair grew larger each year, attracting increased patronage from communities throughout Montana.

As dictated by the act that created it, the board endeavored to organize an event that represented all of Montana. That meant, in particular, boosting mining as well as agriculture. In meeting this obligation, the first several fairs mirrored those exhibits that had been sent to world's fairs, featuring substantial displays of Montana's mineral wealth. Visitors in 1904, for instance, saw "ores from all of the more prominent mines in Butte, and some from the silver mines."¹⁴ Several years later, in 1907, a description of the event noted that "immense slabs of copper, great lumps of lead, gold nuggets, and a profusion of samples of unrefined ore meet the eye of the spectator on every hand."¹⁵ However, each season the prominence of mineral exhibits declined as the fair increasingly emphasized agriculture.

As proponents of agricultural development increased in number and relative power, they began to monopolize the state fair to advance their agendas. Declining numbers of mineral exhibits at the fair corresponded with the erosion of mining as the solitary pillar of Montana's economy and the primary symbol of its culture. The time had arrived for the state to exploit the fertility of its soil and for the nation to awaken to Montana's ability to serve as America's breadbasket, a small-grain growing region capable of supplying staple crops needed to feed burgeoning urban centers. Montana's shift

¹³"The Fair was a Great Success," *Helena Independent*, 11 October 1903, 8.

¹⁴"Minerals at State's Fair," *Helena Independent*, 5 October 1904, 7

¹⁵"Display of Montana Minerals Interesting," *Helena Independent*, 2 October 1907, 1.

toward agricultural development took few by surprise. On the contrary, in his speech at the opening of the first state fair, Governor Toole proclaimed that "the pioneer days are over and we have entered a new era." The coming era of prosperity, he insisted, was to be built upon agriculture, not mining. "The wealth which nature has stored up in the rich soil of Montana cannot be estimated," said the governor, who then prophesized that "the time will come when the hay, grain, fruits and vegetables from the farms will be worth tenfold more than the gold, silver and copper from the mines."¹⁶

The Montana State Fair became the symbol of the new era and garnered widespread support. At the conclusion of the maiden season, the board professed that the fair provided a setting where "differences of whatever character are for the time forgotten and everyone may take pride in the showing of progress and material advance made by the state."¹⁷ By 1906, even the *Great Falls Tribune* put aside grudges and ecstatically boosted the state fair, agreeing that it displayed "what a great state we live in and how varied are the natural resources that the state can boast."¹⁸ The *Tribune* was not alone. Within a few years of opening, the state fair received accolades from newspapers across the state; patronage increased as well.

Each substantial urban center in the state--Missoula, Great Falls, Butte, Billings--annually organized large delegations that traveled to Helena during fair week. Venturing to the capital city aboard specially chartered trains, civic delegations frequently took the opportunity to promote their own community or region. Boosters from Great Falls, upon arriving in Helena in 1906, marched through the downtown. Led by the pride of their city,

¹⁶"Montana's First State Fair Opened Yesterday," 3.

¹⁷*Annual Report of the Secretary and Treasurer, Montana State Fair, 1903*, 5.

¹⁸Editorial, *Great Falls Tribune*, 5 October 1906, 2.

the Black Eagle Band, the procession snaked through Helena's business district, announcing their arrival by shouting in unison:

Great Falls--once!
Great Falls--twice!
We can always cut the ice.
Are we right?
Well, I should smile--
We've been right for a hell of a while."¹⁹

A few years later they came adorned with buttons that read "Great Falls, watch our smoke," a reference to that city's "undeveloped horse power [which was] ready to be harnessed into many industries."²⁰ Butte merchants took advantage of the promotional opportunity as well. Spectators who watched the balloon ascension in 1904 certainly noticed that the gas bag was emblazoned with the "legend 'City of Butte,' and covered with printed utterances telling the merits of certain cigars and some body's corsets."²¹ During fair week, Helena became the hottest travel destination in the state and, in the words of one correspondent, "the busiest city of its size in the world."²²

As a token of appreciation for widespread support, and as a means of encouraging it, the board dedicated certain days to honor various communities, regions, and groups in Montana. "Butte and Anaconda Day," "Billings Day," and "Great Falls Day" were, not surprisingly, perennial favorites. Frequently, the day paid tribute to an entire region, such as "Northern Montana Day," "Western Montana Day," or "Eastern Montana Day." Other popular designations included "Children's Day," "Ladies Day," and, particularly when the

¹⁹"Helena Bound," *Great Falls Tribune*, 5 October 1906, 4.

²⁰"Many People Go To Helena," *Great Falls Tribune*, 1 October 1908, 3.

²¹"State Fair Attendance is Increasing Daily," *Great Falls Tribune*, 6 October 1904, 8.

²²"Fair Week is On," *Helena Independent*, 22 September 1912, 1.

fair needed additional funds, "Bankers Day." In short, the board wanted every Montanan to believe that the fair represented their interests. Noticeably absent are days dedicated to any of the state's ethnic groups. In particular, although they contributed to the success of the event, Native Americans never had a day assigned to them. Each community made it a point to organize a large turnout for their designated day, and fair season gradually became a period of dueling delegations, each community endeavoring to send the largest group of representatives to the state fair. The entire process was made possible by the railroads.

Railroad corporations operating in the state contributed immeasurably to the initial success and rapid growth of the state fair. Montana's population was dispersed over an expansive area. Consequently, without the presence of railroads, which was limited until the twentieth century, it would have been almost impossible to hold a fair that received widespread patronage. Rather than gouge fair-bound travelers by increasing rates, each of the railroads in the state agreed to standardize and reduce rates during fair week. Railroad companies stood to gain enormously from the development of the state; therefore, they supported the event that sought to bring that about. Furthermore, increased fair-time traffic probably offset losses caused by reduced fares and this seemingly benign act aided the railroads in winning the goodwill of the people.

Almost immediately Montanans took advantage of reduced ticket prices. Various groups began to schedule their yearly conferences at Helena during the fair week. This enabled organizations to save money and it also brought people to the fair who might otherwise have had no interest in making the journey. To the joy of the fair's organizers, the State Press Association almost always met in Helena--clearly this had its distinct promotional advantages. Many other groups increasingly began to convene during fair week as well. In 1907, for example, the capital city hosted conferences for the Montana

Wool Growers, the Poultrymen, the Funeral Directors, the Anti-Saloon League, the Medical Veterinarians, and the State Press Association. A columnist anticipated that "these state meetings alone will bring hundreds of visitors to the city during the week."²³ Daniel Webster, a sheep rancher from the Laurel area, ventured to Helena in 1911 to attend the Woolgrowers' meeting. Before he boarded the train to return home, Mr. Webster visited the fairgrounds, where he "saw the crowds . . . and best of all saw a splendid exhibition of flying, horses, cattle, sheep and hogs."²⁴

To accommodate and increase fair-bound traffic railroads began scheduling "specials" from locations throughout Montana. Specials became commonplace during the homestead boom, bringing countless visitors to the state fair. According to the 1911 annual report filed by Secretary James A. Shoemaker:

The four Great Northern Special Trains from Great Falls to Helena; the six Northern Pacific Special Trains from Livingston and two from Garrison to Helena; the Special Milwaukee sleeper service from Lewistown to Lombard and the Special Train from Roundup to Helena, were all large factors in the increased attendance outside of Helena.²⁵

Helena, which had less than thirteen thousand residents in 1910, experienced a tremendous population increase during fair week. Recording a respectable paid attendance of 20,465 in 1903, the fair attracted 35,596 visitors in 1911, and hosted almost 50,000 in 1914.²⁶ These are impressive figures considering the state had only 376,053 residents as of 1910.

²³"6 Conventions to Meet Here," *Helena Independent*, 30 September 1907, 1.

²⁴Daniel Webster, Diary, 28 September 1911, MHS, Daniel Webster and Lizzie Ellis Slayton Papers, MC 178, Box 2.

²⁵*Annual Report of the Secretary and Treasurer, Montana State Fair, 1911*, 2. in Montana State Archives. Montana State Board of Examiners Records, 1891-1983, MHS, RS 196, Box 1, Folder 6.

²⁶"Montana State Fair: Fair Week, Receipts & Disbursements, September 25 to 30, 1911," State Accountants Report, in Montana State Archives. Montana State Board of Examiners Records, 1891-1983, MHS, RS 196, Box 1, Folder 6.

Rising attendance counts and state-wide popularity prompted legislators to loosen governmental purse strings and appropriate additional funds for the support of the fair.

The physical facilities of the grounds improved steadily during the fair's first decade. Additions to the grounds in the early years included "a machinery hall, an addition to the exhibition hall, a barn for exhibition cattle, an additional building for sheep and swine, additional stalls for speed stock and a restaurant fully equipped for accommodation of state fair visitors."²⁷ In time for the second season an "artistic gateway, that gives a taste of what it on the other side" was erected at the entrance to the grounds.²⁸ Although legislators displayed increased willingness to fund construction projects at the fairgrounds, they refused to provide financing for the "crying and apparent need of the state fair," a new grandstand.²⁹ Influential anti-gambling forces encouraged lawmakers to refrain from financing improvements to the race track. Nevertheless, thanks to a group of local citizens who organized the Grand Stand Fair Company and secured a loan to finance the erection of a new structure, the Montana State Fair had improved seating arrangements for the 1906 season. Described as "the finest in the northwest and a model of its kind," the grandstand measured 360 feet long and sixty feet wide.³⁰ It had a seating capacity of five thousand, including thirty-six private boxes and one for the press.³¹ Two more substantial additions to the grounds debuted in 1914. Upon arrival at the fair, visitors passed through "a new magnificent entrance . . . white as alabaster with an emblazoned gold 'Montana State Fair' set within the steel arch, and studded with electric lights above

²⁷*The Montana State Fair: Statement Covering...*, 4.

²⁸"Great Improvements at the State Fair Grounds," *Helena Independent*, 30 September 1904, 9.

²⁹*Annual Report of the Secretary and Treasurer, Montana State Fair, 1905*, 4.

³⁰This is the same grandstand that is presently located at the Lewis and Clark County Fairgrounds.

³¹"The New State Fair Grandstand," *Helena Independent*, 1 October 1906, 1.

and below the name."³² Inside the gate, fairgoers confronted a recently complete horticulture building designed according to "the world's fair type" at a cost of \$25,000.³³ Sixty feet wide by 150 feet long the impressive building formed the centerpiece of an institution that had long since abandoned attempts to represent all state industries equally and now unapologetically heralded agricultural.

Since the dawn of the twentieth century, boosters of Montana's agricultural resources had intensified their efforts each year and the Montana State Fair became one of their chief promotional devices. Initially, their hopes hinged upon large-scale irrigation projects. They believed that a series of dams would provide sufficient water to transform Eastern Montana's arid bench-lands into a lush agricultural oasis. Advocates of irrigation were definitely pleased when the Newland's Reclamation Act of 1902 launched the construction of the Huntley, Lower Yellowstone, and Milk River Projects. Despite the erection of these dams, it gradually became obvious, even to the most ardent reclamationists, that it would be impossible to irrigate to the extent that promoters had envisioned. All hope was not abandoned, however, and as early as 1905 many promoters began to champion an innovative technique known variously as dry farming or scientific farming.

Defined by historian Mary Hargreaves as "the practice of agriculture without irrigation in regions of limited natural precipitation," dry farming raised new hopes.³⁴ Several progressive farmers, most notably Hardy Webster Campbell, experimented with dry farming techniques and found them to be quite successful in both the Dakotas and Montana. Most experts insisted, however, that this method of tillage required more land

³²"Entrance Way is Ready for Fair," *Helena Independent*, 20 September 1914, 8.

³³*Montana Farmer*, 22 August 1914, 4.

³⁴Mary Wilma M. Hargreaves, *Dry Farming in the Great Northern Plains, 1900-1925* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957): 83.

than the 160 acres allowed by the 1862 Homestead Act. The only thing that stood between Montana and its future as a breadbasket, asserted advocates of dry farming, was the federal government's reluctance to increase the amount of land available to homesteaders. State legislators and others concerned with the development of the northern plains actively lobbied Washington lawmakers to amend the Homestead Act. Their pressure brought results. Congress finally enacted the Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909, which doubled the amount of free land that settlers could file for in a handful of western states including Montana. In response, Montana and the railroads that traversed it initiated massive promotional campaigns designed to lure the settlers and investors needed to usher in an era of agricultural growth. Promoters utilized Montana's state fair as an instrumental component of these campaigns.

The Montana State Fair became a show window for exhibiting to the world the wonderful possibilities that awaited capitalists and agrarians in the Treasure State. Like the show windows designed to lure consumers into urban department stores, the fairground display offered temptations for a variety of shoppers. Investment opportunities caught the eye of capitalists, new markets attracted eastern merchants, high-quality crops excited manufacturers, and fertile, low-cost land tempted those with a penchant for farming. The state fair, in effect, became a display case for a state-sized emporium. In so doing, it placed Montana's resources on the market and helped to integrate the state into a global economy.

Although officially still funded to support all of Montana's resources, the Montana State Fair had become principally a booster of agriculture long before the advent of the homestead boom, which took place after the passage of the Enlarge Homestead Act of 1909. An annual report filed by the secretary of the fair in 1905 reflected the emergence of agricultural as the premier industry represented at the fair. A three year enumeration of

exhibits revealed that mining entries dropped from forty-six in 1903 to twenty-seven by 1905, while entries of farm products increased from 248 to 1,621 during the same time span.³⁵ The number of county collective exhibits also rose dramatically. Only seven counties sent displays to the first fair; three years later visitors could view the productive capabilities of thirty-five counties. The manner in which agricultural goods were exhibited at the fair enabled counties to use the event to their advantage.

County collective exhibits constituted the heart of the agricultural display until categorical methods replaced them in the early 1920s. Initially housed in the main exhibition hall, county exhibits were later shown in the agricultural building constructed in 1914. Specially designed for the purpose of housing horticultural and floricultural exhibits, the new building had windows in the ceiling to provide natural lighting and an automatic ventilating system to ensure that exhibits maintained their freshness. Descriptions suggest that the building itself drew almost as many gasps as the sights it contained. Unlike single-category displays, in which wheat was displayed along with other samples of wheat, corn with corn, and so on, the county collective method enabled each county to create a display that presented the range of products grown within its borders. Competitions for the best sheaf of barley, the best russet potato, and a host of other categories still occurred, but like samples did not appear side by side. The collective system spotlighted the region of origin rather than the individual product; therefore, county displays presented an opportunity for attracting any prospective settlers or investors who happened to be at the fair. "The advertising value to the county exhibiting," asserted one journalist, "is unquestionably great, as the people in other states who contemplate purchasing land . . . are naturally attracted to that portion of the state which

³⁵*Annual Report of the Secretary and Treasurer, Montana State Fair, 1905, 2.*

produces the best quality of products."³⁶ Counties spent considerable amounts of time and money preparing displays for the state fair with impressive results.

Early fairs had relatively simple displays; however, by 1909 many of the exhibits were nothing short of extraordinary. To understand the extent to which collective displays evolved over the years, consider the contrast between three Fergus County entries. The county sent a small exhibit to the 1904 fair that was described as "good and thorough and worth inspection because the entries were grown on dry bench land."³⁷ In 1910, at the start of the homestead boom, "Old Fergus" came "to the state fair with a display of dry farming products that is a wonder . . . [it] gives a splendid demonstration of what can be accomplished without other than nature's aid in watering the fields . . . [and] the decorations compare favorably with any at the fair."³⁸ Three years later, the county's entry was so extensive that the ceiling alone warranted this fulsome description:

There is a border of straw extending entirely around the ceiling, done in the most artistic and fantastic shapes, all in scroll work. Outside this scroll border is a border of oat heads which dips down into the walls on all sides. A big chandelier, trimmed in red and green fringes of grass, is suspended from the center of the ceiling and sheds its light over the whole exhibit in a truly oriental fashion.³⁹

The escalating complexity and artistic creativity of Fergus County's annual showings were not exceptions. Each year counties strove to organize more attractive exhibits than the year before in hopes of winning the award for best collective display, which meant that their exhibit might be put aboard one of the railroad's traveling exhibits, sent off to a land

³⁶"Urge Farmers to Prepare Exhibits," *Helena Independent*, 10 April 1915, 8.

³⁷"Fine Show in Agriculture," *Helena Independent*, 5 October 1904, 5.

³⁸"Agriculture at the State Fair," *Helena Independent*, 28 September 1910, 5.

³⁹"Fergus Exhibit is Like Grotto," *Helena Independent*, 24 September 1913, 5.

show, or displayed at a world's fair where it might be seen by prospective settlers, investors, or commodity purchasers.

The Montana State Fair was seldom the end of the line for products displayed there. Instead, it served as the master-link in an exhibit chain that reached into each county and extended outward to venues across the continent. Several bills enacted by the state legislature at the beginning of the twentieth century helped to locate the Montana State Fair in this position. The first, passed the same year that the state fair was created and exhibits for the St. Louis and Portland world's fair were funded, allowed each county to spend up to \$1,000 annually to support the creation of a county fairs.⁴⁰ A 1907 bill, authorizing counties to expend an additional \$1,000 a year for "collecting, transporting and taking care of an exhibit from such county at the State Fair," enhanced the system.⁴¹ Lawmakers acted, in effect, to provided the state with an ideal system for collecting and disseminating exhibits that illustrated the superior crops that could be raised in Montana.

Neighboring states joined Montana in a veritable fair frenzy during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Rural sociologist Kenyon Butterfield has identified the period between 1850 and 1870 as the "golden age of the agricultural fair" in the United States.⁴² While this might be an appropriate conclusion for the East and Midwest, it does not apply to Montana or other nearby states. In the northern plains, the "golden age" occurred between 1900 and 1920. South Dakota established a large fair at Huron in 1903, while North Dakota funded an exposition in 1905 that alternated between Grand Forks and Fargo, and the state commissioner of immigration organized the Bismark

⁴⁰Montana. *Laws, Resolutions* . . . 1903, 137.

⁴¹Montana. *Laws, Resolutions* . . . 1907, 414.

⁴²Kenyon Butterfield, "Farmer's Social Organizations," in Liberty Hyde Bailey, *Cyclopedia of American Agriculture*, vol. 4 (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1909): 289-297.

Industrial Exposition in 1911.⁴³ At least one state fair, three regional fairs, and thirteen county fairs took place in Montana in 1920.⁴⁴ Fairs even appeared on several Indian reservations located in Montana. In addition to establishing fairs throughout the state, Montanans also participated faithfully in land shows, an innovative form of exposition that appeared in the United States following the turn of the century. Several of these land shows had been organized specifically to advertise the resources of Montana and other northwestern states.

The proliferation of state, local, and regional fairs across the northern plains and the appearance of major land shows in urban centers took place amidst a global infatuation with expositions that began in Europe in the mid-nineteenth century and swept across the United States following the Columbian Exposition of 1893. Cultural historian Tony Bennett has asserted that the leaders of industrial democracies embraced "exhibitionary complexes"--museums, galleries, world's fairs, etc.--as a means to exert a shaping influence on society. According to Bennett, "a force regulated and channeled by society's ruling groups but for the good of all: this was the rhetoric of power embodied in the exhibitionary complex."⁴⁵ In an attempt to utilize this power to advance their own interests and to shape the growth of the state, Montana elites implemented and supervised a chain of "exhibitionary complexes" that encouraged and enabled residents to participate in the systematic exploitation of their state's natural resources.

The network fused together the efforts of individuals, counties, and the state, directing them in a common direction. For instance, a wheat farmer in Meagher County might have harvested an especially high-yield crop one year. Encouraged by local fair

⁴³Hargreaves, 261.

⁴⁴*Montana Farmer*, 1 September 1920, 13.

⁴⁵Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1995): 67.

officials, the farmer would then enter a sample of the crop at the county fair, where other residents could witness what could be grown locally. Ideally onlookers would adopt the methods used by the successful farmer in their own operations. After the county fair closed, the wheat would be incorporated into the county's collective exhibit. At the state fair, the wheat not only brought distinction to the farmer, but it also represented the fertility of the county. If the sample earned further accolades, it might be added to the state's exhibit at an upcoming exposition or purchased by one of the railroads to decorate a traveling exhibit car. To ensure that the fair had "the cream of all the displays from all over the state," fair organizers and railroad companies offered cash or prizes for the best exhibits.⁴⁶ For instance, in 1915 the state fair offered a \$100 prize to the farmer with the best five sheaves and one bushel of barley, while the best five sheaves and one bushel of wheat earned the winner a \$1,550 Studebaker.⁴⁷ A farmer may have only been interested in earning some extra income, driving home a new automobile, or finding out how her or his crop measured up to that of other agrarians; however, the fair network harnessed this individual desire for the benefit--at least in the eyes of boosters--of the county and state. In the fall of each year, the best crops, livestock, crafts, and sundry other items flowed to Helena, where promoters selected the best samples for their needs.

Serving as a clearing house for items that would be displayed elsewhere and fostering enthusiasm for exhibitions, the state fair contributed immeasurably to the promotion of the state. When Frederic B. Linfield, professor of agriculture at Montana State College, had trouble organizing an agricultural exhibit for the St. Louis Exposition, John Pace, secretary of the Montana State Fair, urged Linfield to "work in conjunction

⁴⁶Editorial, *Helena Independent*, 1 September 1904, 4.

⁴⁷*Montana State Fair Official Souvenir Program and Score Card*, 24 September 1915, 88, 98, MHS.

with the county fair directors, to the end that a good collection might be on exhibition at the State Fair, and that after the Fair the collection could be turned over to the World's Fair Commission."⁴⁸ Linfield reported that it was through this method that "we finally got the collection we needed for the St. Louis Fair."⁴⁹ Essentially the same display traveled to the Lewis and Clark Exposition the following year. Although the Northern Pacific Railroad advertised the state at the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition held in 1909, Montana sent no state-sponsored exhibit to Seattle, probably because Billings hosted the Dry Farming Congress that year and displays were needed for that event.

Montana did organize substantial displays for two 1915 world's fairs, San Francisco's Panama-Pacific International Exposition and San Diego's Panama-California Exposition. Once again, the agricultural exhibits came primarily from entries at the state fair. The *Montana Farmer* explained to readers that "these grains and grasses will be of special interest this year because from their winners will be selected the products that are to represent Montana at the Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco."⁵⁰ President of that year's state fair, Sid J. Coffee, noticed that people "have been prompted largely by this stimulant to greater endeavor to make a little better showing than might have been expected from them in ordinary circumstances."⁵¹ The premium list for the 1916 state fair alleged that Montana's success at the San Francisco exposition was "partly made possible by the Montana State Fair and Exposition, [as] many of the prize winning entries at San Francisco were gathered through the medium of the State Fair."⁵²

⁴⁸F. B. Linfield, "Report of Prof. F. B. Linfield, In Charge of the Agricultural Exhibit at St. Louis, Mo.," "Montana at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition," 59.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 59.

⁵⁰Editorial, *Montana Farmer*, 4 September 1914, 4.

⁵¹"Crowds Eagerly Await Opening of Montana's Big State Exposition," *Helena Independent*, 20 September 1914, 1.

⁵²*Premium List and Rules and Regulations of the Fourteenth Annual Exhibition of*

Even when there were no world's fairs to participate in, state fair exhibits were put to good use after the season came to an end. The demand for samples from Montana's fields increased steadily during the first ten years of the twentieth century and exploded with the advent of the homestead boom. Recognizing that an annual display no longer met promotional needs, the managers of the state fair inaugurated a permanent display of Montana products brought to the fair in the Kohr's Block of downtown Helena in 1908. They created the exhibit "to show a sample of every article produced in Montana and give information to inquiring homeseekers and investors."⁵³ The following year, the board provided "for the installation of a permanent exhibit of the agricultural resources of Montana at St. Paul and likewise a display at the National Corn Exposition to be held next month in Omaha."⁵⁴ Many products were acquire by railroads, which joined the state in the promotion of Montana and played a major role in fostering the homestead boom.

Perhaps no person was more influential in the agricultural development of Montana than Great Northern Railroad executive James J. Hill. Not only did he control most of the railroads linking Montana to the world beyond, but he also emerged as the state's foremost booster. Historian Mary Hargreaves has argued that it was the favorable impression made by the 1909 state fair that convinced Hill to set in motion the extensive promotional campaign that his railroads undertook soon thereafter.⁵⁵ Although Hill's rail lines had advertised opportunities in Montana prior to this year, the efforts were minimal. Following James J. Hill's first visit to the Montana State Fair, his companies tenaciously boosted agricultural settlement in Montana and the "empire builder" himself avidly supported the state fair as a influential promotional device.

the Montana State Fair and Exposition (Helena: Independent Publishing Co., 1916): 22.

⁵³*Annual Report of the Secretary and Treasurer, Montana State Fair, 1908*, 15.

⁵⁴"East to Hear of this State," *Helena Independent*, 1 October 1909, 5.

⁵⁵Hargreaves, 229.

The date of James J. Hill's first experience with the Montana State Fair, September 27, 1909, had been designated as "President Taft's Day." Taft's presence created unusual excitement that season. Upon his arrival in Helena, the president participated in a cornerstone laying ceremony at the construction site for Mount St. Charles College.⁵⁶ In the afternoon he adjourned to the fairgrounds to address a crowd of more than ten thousand. Taft delivered a standard political speech replete with patriotism, optimism and trite references to the value of farming. Despite the presence of the nation's leader, however, all eyes and ears trained on James J. Hill. The "empire builder" held celebrity status in Montana. He had built a railroad across the continent without the assistance of a government land grant and was widely considered the individual who had the power to expedite Montana's transformation into the breadbasket of the continent, if not the world. Most attendees probably forgot much of the president's speech once Hill perched atop the speaker's stand.

Extraordinarily pleased with the quality of the exhibits he had seen during the day, Hill expressed his excitement when he addressed the largest single-day crowd in the history of the Montana State Fair up to that time. He orated on the agricultural future of Montana and emphasized the need for the state to advertise its possibilities to settlers and investors. Pointing to the agricultural building, he assured Montanans that "in that building there is an exhibition of agricultural products that cannot be obtained by any state or province on the continent."⁵⁷ Next he offered a brief history lesson that underscored the importance of an agricultural foundation to the strength of a nation, and called on

⁵⁶*First Annual Prospectus of the Mount St. Charles College* (Helena: Thurber Company, n.d.): 6, in Carrol College, Jack and Sallie Covette Library.

⁵⁷Montana. Department of Publicity of the Bureau of Agriculture, Labor and Industry of the State of Montana, *Speech of J. J. Hill on President Taft's Day at the Montana State Fair*, n.d., 7, in University of Montana, Special Collections, Mansfield Library.

Montana to come to the assistance of the United States. An avid Malthusian, Hill had frequently cautioned the nation that its population threatened to outgrow its ability to feed itself. He viewed Montana as a granary capable of producing the staple crops necessary to feed the nation's swelling population. "You must put your lights on the hill," proclaimed the "empire builder," "you must not hide it in the bushel any longer."⁵⁸ Newspapers across the state printed Hill's speech in full and commented on it throughout the week. So encouraging was his rhetoric that the Montana Bureau of Agriculture, Labor, and Industry actually reproduced the speech in the form of an advertising pamphlet. Later the same day, Hill escorted Taft on a tour of the agricultural exhibits. "I want to show you," said Hill to the president, "the best agricultural exhibit I ever saw."⁵⁹

After viewing the displays at the state fair, Hill not only understood the agricultural possibilities that lay within Montana's borders, but he also recognized the promotional value of fairs. His son and successor, Louis Hill, also learned the lessons. In the wake of their initial visit, both father and son aggressively touted the agricultural development of Montana and the growth of the Montana State Fair. Before he departed in 1909, Louis Hill negotiated with the board for the acquisition of products for a permanent exhibit back east. The younger Hill informed them that "we need a great lot for our St. Paul experiment exposition rooms, which was erected principally to exploit Montana."⁶⁰ A year later, Louis Hill returned to the state fair and encouraged Montana to enlarge the exposition. "This is going to be a big state, a great state, and it should have a big state fair. The future fair should be planned on a large scale," asserted the son of the "empire builder."⁶¹ He then offered one of the highest compliments a fair at the time could

⁵⁸Ibid., 10.

⁵⁹Ibid., 1.

⁶⁰"East to Hear of this State," 5.

⁶¹"Montana Best for Farmers," *Helena Independent*, 1 October 1910, 1.

receive. "Today," said Louis Hill, "the finest fair in the world is that of Minnesota, but to my mind in five or ten years, at least, the Montana State Fair should be the greatest of them all."⁶²

Other prominent individuals praised the fair as well. Describing the 1910 fair as "epoch-making in the history of the state," William Clark disclosed that he was "greatly in favor of any plan which will make the Montana State Fair the greatest advertising medium any western state ever had."⁶³ Anxious to witness for themselves the investment opportunities that awaited entrepreneurs out west, a group known as the Montana Booster Club arrived in Helena in 1910 to preview the exposition that so inspired the Hills. One hundred strong, the group consisted of "some St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Duluth businessmen and a large number of Montana's citizens, all of whom believe[d] in boosting the Treasure State."⁶⁴ Organized by Louis Hill, the club included many employees of the Great Northern Railroad and civic leaders from towns across Montana. This group, having adopted the motto "Watch Montana Grow," thrilled at the waves of settlers who were swarming into eastern Montana and intended to keep them coming through increased advertising via expositions. Calls for a greater state fair did not fall on deaf ears.

The Montana Legislature took steps to restructure the mission of the state fair and increased its funding. In 1911, the Twelfth Legislative Assembly passed an act that enabled the state fair to expand its promotional activities. The statute officially narrowed the fair's focus. No longer did organizers have to attempt to promote all of Montana's industries. Instead, "to encourage the location and settlement of the public lands within

⁶²Ibid., 1.

⁶³"Clark Boosts Greater Fair," *Helena Independent*, 29 September 1910, 8.

⁶⁴"In L. W. Hill's Special," *Helena Independent*, 26 Sept 1910, 1.

this state, and to encourage immigration and capital in aid of the further development of our national resources" became the Montana State Fair's primary purpose.⁶⁵ Annual appropriations were doubled to \$20,000 and the board of directors, now gubernatorial appointees, was authorized to acquire an additional 135 acres adjacent to the current ground, "by donation, purchase or condemnation."⁶⁶ To lead the fair into a new era, the governor appointed as president a man who had already done a considerable amount to promote Montana's agricultural resources.

Typifying the new breed of power brokers who rose to prestige in Montana after the century turned, Lewis Penwell assumed the helm of the state fair and steered it to new heights. Once an attorney for Lewis and Clark County, the Montana native abandoned the practice of law after losing a bid to become State Attorney General early in the century.⁶⁷ He turned to business instead and applied the technique of incorporation to Montana's sheep industry. Utilizing the tactic that had created some of the world's wealthiest individuals--James Hill, Andrew Carnegie, J. P. Morgan, etc.--and wrought dynamic changes in the structure of American life, Penwell organized corporations for the purpose of buying large sheep and cattle ranches in the state. By 1910, at the age of forty-three, the one-time county attorney oversaw the operation of fifteen ranching companies that owned more than 1,500,000 acres of land and leased another 700,000. Penwell recognized that agricultural settlement in the state would dramatically increase the value of the land he had acquired; thus, he worked diligently to depict Montana as an agricultural

⁶⁵Montana. *Laws, Resolutions and Memorial of the State of Montana passed at the Twelfth Regular Session of the Legislative Assembly*. (Helena, MT: State Publishing Company, Legislative Stationers, Printers and Binders, 1911): 80.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 144.

⁶⁷"President Penwell of the State Fair Gets Magazine Write-Up," *Helena Independent*, 23 September 1913, 10; "Successful Results in the Penwell Enterprises," *Montana Daily Record*, 29 September 1910, 10.

state and to attract farmers. In addition to directing the operations of the Montana State Fair, Penwell also served as president of the Northwest Development League, an organization dedicated to promoting the American Northwest and frequently identified as the "largest commercial club in the world."⁶⁸ He was an ideal choice to supervise the "Big Show Window of the West."

Under Penwell's management the Montana State Fair blossomed. One contemporary praised the quality of the state fair in 1913, asserting that it projects "on the screen of the visitor's eye, the products of the Treasure State, and there the picture must remain forever."⁶⁹ County displays increased in number and improved in quality, while Penwell's involvement with promotional groups ensured that Montana was represented at all major expositions. In particular, he organized displays for the Northwest Land Products Shows, which were sponsored by the Northwest Development League. Held in different eastern cities each year, these events featured exhibits from Minnesota, North and South Dakota, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, the Territory of Alaska, and, of course, Montana. The Northwest Development League planned to established permanent exhibits at locations in St. Paul, Minneapolis, Chicago, and other eastern cities as well.⁷⁰ In a 1912 letter to the State Board of Examiners, Penwell outlined the importance of the state fair in these promotional activities:

For several years the State Fair Office and permanent exhibit has been a depot for the collection of large amounts of materials which have been supplied to the railroads to furnish their exhibit cars and for exhibits for Eastern land shows . . . some of the finest exhibits in the United States,

⁶⁸"Land Show Boomers and What They Are Doing," *St. Paul Daily News*, 26 November 1911, 23.

⁶⁹Editorial, *Helena Independent*, 21 September 1913, 12.

⁷⁰"League Will Boost for the Great Northwest," *Helena Independent*, 15 September 1911, 4.

which have been displayed in exhibit cars and Land Shows, have come from the Montana State Fair.⁷¹

Furthermore, Penwell and the Northwest Development League initiated planning for state exhibits at the 1915 San Francisco and San Diego world's fairs. Coming largely from products displayed at the state fair, Montana's entries at these international expositions fared so well that a reporter concluded "a blue ribbon at the Montana State Fair is almost a synonym of a world victory."⁷²

Advertising through fairs and expositions contributed immeasurably to Montana's homestead boom. In the wake of the state fair's 1911 restructuring and the state's participation in the Northwest Development League's first land show that same year, immigration to Montana and other states represented by the league exploded. In March 1912 alone, 2,344 cars of immigrant goods, "representing the personal effects of 11,720 colonists, passed through the Twin City transfer station."⁷³ Montana's meager population of less than 250,00 in 1900, more than doubled in the next twenty years. Immigrants came to establish farms, erect homes, open businesses, and build communities. Numerous towns sprang to life; the number of farms and ranches quadrupled; and a state that harvested under eleven million bushels of wheat in 1909, produced an impressive forty million bushels just six years later. Individuals who had much to gain from this influx of settlers supported the state fair as the key instrument in attracting new residents.

⁷¹Lewis Penwell to the State Board of Examiners of the State of Montana. in Montana State Archives. Montana State Board of Examiners Records, 1891-1983, MHS, RS 196, Box 1, Folder 8.

⁷²"Many Counties of Treasure State Join Vanguard to Make State Fair Greatest in History," *Helena Independent*, 22 August 1915, 9.

⁷³"Colonists at Rate of 75 Cars Daily," *Great Falls Tribune*, 9 April 1912, 7.

Penwell served as president of the fair for three years and remained as a member of the board until he left for Washington, D.C. to serve on the Wool Production Board at the onset of World War I. After the war he resumed his association with the fair as a board member; however, his involvement with the dramatically changed event never returned to pre-war levels. The fair's function as a promotional tool had come to an end, even before Penwell departed for the nation's capitol. Prior to America's entry into war, most of the lands in Montana had been taken up by settlers, many of whom were beginning to realize that life in Montana proved a little more difficult than they had been led to believe. Consequently, by 1916 the state and the railroads significantly scaled back their advertising activities. Although the Montana State Fair ceased to serve as a "Big Show Window," it remained a fixture of Montana society for years to come. Advertising was only one of the functions of this institution. Montana's political leaders liberally financed the state fair until the early twenties, despite the loss of its promotional value, because they considered the Montana State Fair "as great an educational institution as the Agricultural College or the State University."⁷⁴

⁷⁴Department of Agriculture and Publicity. *The Resources and Opportunities of Montana* (Helena: Independent Publishing Company, 1914): 50.

CHAPTER 4

THE FAIR THAT EDUCATES

A decade before the state fair welcomed its first visitors and treated them to a view of the varied and bountiful resources of Montana, citizens founded two additional institutions designed to enhance the economic growth of the state and the education of its residents. In 1893, the same year that *Justice* turned heads in Chicago, the legislature dispersed the plums of statehood, awarding the state university to Missoula and the agricultural college to Bozeman. Each of these institutions has often been credited with contributing to the maturity of the state by molding the minds of its citizens. Established as a land grant institution, the agricultural college has always held a special place in the hearts of Montanans and the histories of the state. Between 1903 and 1916 the Bozeman campus awarded degrees to 150 individuals.¹ In 1903 alone, the Montana State Fair graduated a class of more than twenty thousand and an estimated 176,967 passed through the institution during a five-year period beginning in 1913.²

¹Office of the Registrar, "Registrar's Report to the President: Summary of Student Statistics 1893-94 Through 1966-67, second revision" (Montana State University, Bozeman, June 1967): 39.

²Annual Report of the Secretary and Treasurer, Montana State Fair, 1903, 5, MHS, Montana Governors' Papers, MC, Box 327; "Attendance Almost Up To 50,000 Figure," *Helena Independent*, 25 September 1914, 1; "State Fair Closes with Finances in Good Shape," *Helena Independent*, 26 September 1915, 1; "Fair Closes," *Helena Independent*, 30 September 1917, 4.

Dubbed "The Fair That Educates," the Montana State Fair not only played an important role in encouraging the development of the state, but it also served to channel the direction of growth.³ Of course, the fair provided an assortment of attractions and activities designed to elevate the quantity and quality of agricultural commodities produced. But visitors confronted lessons that were not directly related to tillage. Through the fair, Montana's elites advanced the proposition that individual progress was synonymous with productivity and purchasing power, while state and national progress hinged upon technological innovation and industrial growth. The fair projected an image of an ideal future offering social harmony, prosperity, and material comfort to those who embraced technology, principles of efficiency, and modern consumer ethos. Select individuals, that is white Americans, who "modernized" their lives could look forward to increased leisure time and access to a "land of desire."⁴ In other words, just as the state fair fostered Montana's integration into national and international market systems, it also served to position the state within the cultural landscape of a new "incorporated" America. Fairgoers, urban and rural alike, encountered mass entertainment, modern conveniences, and consumer products. The predominantly white attendees witnessed visions of a future that belong to them, but only if they joined the march of progress. Until America's entry into World War I and the collapse of Montana's economy redirected the focus of the event and diminished patronage, the Montana State Fair presented an annual illustration of the possibilities of tomorrow and encouraged those in attendance to reach out for them.

Organizers made no attempt to disguise the fact that they intended to use the fair in an effort to shape society, nor were Montana's leaders alone in their faith that

³Department of Agriculture and Publicity. *The Resources and Opportunities of Montana* (Helena: Independent Publishing Company, 1914): 50.

⁴William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993): 10.

expositions could guide the course of social and economic growth. Two years before Montana held its first state fair, President William McKinley delivered a speech at Buffalo's 1901 Pan-American Exposition that highlighted many of the widely held assumptions concerning the didactic nature of fairs. Defining expositions as the "time keepers of progress," the president stressed that they "open mighty storehouses of information to the student."⁵ According to McKinley, "comparison of ideas is always educational, and as such instructs the brain and hand of man. Friendly rivalry follows, which is the spur to industrial improvement, the inspiration to useful invention and to high endeavor in all departments of human activity."⁶ Montana governor Samuel Stewart displayed similar respect when he asserted that the state fair "touches the life of the people, whether they dwell in the populous centers or in the hamlets and villages or on the isolated farm," sending them home "refreshed in mind and spirit, broadened in vision, more than ever convinced of the unmatched possibilities of our wonderful commonwealth, and given greater inspiration for the tasks that lie ahead."⁷ Countless politicians, capitalists, and scientists joined McKinley and Stewart in praising expositions as catalysts and barometers of progress. Many actively supported events with donations, leadership, or personal appearances.

The participation of local and even nationally prominent elites at Montana's state fair enhanced its influence by seemingly legitimizing the messages it broadcast. As noted in the last chapter, railroad mogul James J. Hill and his son, Louis, applauded the state fair and encouraged its expansion. Executives from the Northern Pacific and the St. Paul, Chicago and Puget Sound Railway System also frequented the fair. Individuals

⁵"President McKinley Favors Reciprocity," *New York Times* (L), 6 September 1901, 1.

⁶*Ibid.*, 1.

⁷Samuel V. Stewart, editorial, *Helena Independent*, 20 September 1914, 4.

throughout the state came to associate the event with the prominent individuals who boosted and patronized it. Those who visited the state fair on September 27, 1909, for example, did not soon forget that President William Taft also roamed the grounds that afternoon. Similarly, guests in 1916 no doubt had lasting memories of seeing and hearing "the silver-tongued Nebraska orator," William Jennings Bryan.⁸ Taft's and Bryan's reasons for venturing to the grounds probably had more to do with the fact that it presented an opportune occasion to reach a large audience than it did with a personal desire to witness the attractions. Montana's political candidates took advantage of the fair for the same reason. In 1912 the *Helena Independent* anticipated that one of the attractions at that year's gathering would be "the greatest assortment of candidates for political office ever brought together at any one time."⁹ Regardless of their motives for attending the fair, the participation of business and political elites added credibility to the institution and the lessons it endeavored to teach.

Several years after Taft's visit, another president, Woodrow Wilson, opened the 1913 season by addressing crowds via a direct wire provided by the Postal Telegraph Company. Read by Governor Stewart, Wilson's message extended "warmest greetings to the managers of the state fair" and urged those assembled to remember that "we are all one people, all love the same justice, all seek the same liberty, and should all stand together for the same common purpose."¹⁰ The mode of delivery enhanced the rhetoric, sending a message far more meaningful than that captured in the text. In addressing the crowd by telegraph, Wilson intimated that the ends of justice and liberty were attainable

⁸"State Fair's Doors Swing Out Monday," *Helena Independent*, 24 September 1916, 1.

⁹"Politicians Are Coming," *Helena Independent*, 22 September 1912, 8.

¹⁰"Crowd Enjoys Fair In Spite Of Bad Weather," *Helena Independent*, 23 September 1913, 1.

through the means of modernization. In so doing, the president endorsed the one of the primary messages put forth at Montana's state fair.

Members of the fair board desired to organize an event that furnished lessons as well as good times. They believed that the institution they supervised could serve as a university for the masses. A program for the 1910 season explicitly revealed that promoting natural resources was only one aspect of the fair's mission. In addition, organizers intended that the event would help Montanans keep pace with rapid and fundamental changes taking place in the United States as a result of industrialization. The "aims and the object of the state fair" were:

FIRST - To show the possible resources of the state and the character of the same.

SECOND - To furnish a substantial measure of the progress made by a comparison of the exhibits displayed at the successive fairs.

THIRD - To educate those in attendance with reference to the various industries represented in the exhibits. This education comes largely through ocular demonstration and is therefore not only the simplest, but also of the most valuable kind.

FOURTH - To acquaint those in attendance with what is newest and best in the various departments, without some such aid it is impossible now to keep pace with the progress of the present age.

FIFTH - To advertise the state with reference to its productions. In a state such advertising is beyond all comparison, the cheapest and most effective in proportion to its cost.

SIXTH - To stimulate those who attend and especially those who compete to reach out after high attainment in all the various lines of production.¹¹

Only two of the six stated objectives focused on boosting the state, while the remainder concerned the development of "those in attendance." The list identifies no specific segment of society. Farmers and miners, men and women, urban dwellers and rural residents--each group had something to gain from spending a day at the fair. These

¹¹*Montana State Fair: Premium List and Program*, 1910, 5, MHS.

objectives reflected the optimism that flavored the era. Viewing the future with enthusiasm, organizers did not seek to represent the good old days; nostalgia for the past had no place at the Montana State Fair. Even the agricultural components cast eyes toward the future, for this institution exuded a belief in progress at every turn.

The agrarian society envisioned by those who championed the agricultural development of Montana and the one depicted at the state fair was not based upon mythic notions of self-sufficient Jeffersonian yeomen. Instead, it incorporated ideas consistent with the increasingly popular, nation-wide Country Life Reform Movement of the early twentieth century. Aptly described by historian Katherine Jellison as the "rural arm of American Progressivism," the Country Life Movement sought to "make the social, intellectual, and economic aspects of rural life more satisfying," thereby strengthening the nation's agricultural foundation.¹² Montana boosters advertised an advanced form of rural living in which modern technologies reduced drudgery and isolation; in which innovative farming practices brought forth bountiful crops; and in which educated, professional agrarians, utilizing efficient farming practices, produced large profits enabling them to participate in the nation's burgeoning consumer culture. The state wanted to attract the "man with the hoe," if you will, but the hoe of modern industry driven by the steam engine."¹³ Governor Samuel Stewart exemplified the optimism and faith in technology shared by the architects of Montana's agricultural coming of age when, in 1914, he announced that "Montana is now receiving the men and capital necessary for the development of our state, and with the assistance of all the aids and appliances of a

¹²Katherine Jellison, *Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology, 1913-1963* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993): 4; William Bowers, "Country Life Reform, 1900-1920: A Neglected Aspect of Progressive Era History," *Agricultural History* 45 (1971): 211.

¹³"League Will Seek for Homebuilders," *Great Falls Tribune*, 5 March 1911, 7.

modern age we propose to make use of our great heritage in the building here of an empire which will rank among the really great achievements of mankind."¹⁴ The Montana State Fair figured prominently in attempts to bring this vision to fruition.

To begin with, the state fair made it clear that the future would be designed in accordance with the desires of white Americans. In support of a white tomorrow, the state fair denigrated non-whites in general, Native Americans in particular. At the fair visitors confronted two distinct images of Indians, each one stressing that Native Americans were not to have a hand in the blueprint for the world of tomorrow. An exhibit from the Fort Shaw Indian School at the 1903 fair highlighted the two interpretation of Native Americans perpetuated at the fair. The exhibit had two departments, "one symbolic of the wild and uncivilized life of the redskin and the other showing the work of the educated Indian."¹⁵ Thus, the fair distinguished the Native American of the past from those who were attempting, or being forced, to conform to the new order.

The state fair cast the Native American of the past in the mold of the noble savage. Early fairs frequently included Indian villages, "where the redmen and women put on tribal ceremonials and traditional dances."¹⁶ The *Great Falls Tribune* described a Blackfoot encampment at the 1912 state fair:

There will be more than a score of tepees on the fair grounds all of next week, and those selected for the occasion are the gaudiest and the most handsomely painted to be found in the Blackfoot country. The Indians will engage in their tribal dances twice daily The Indian village promises to

¹⁴Department of Agriculture and Publicity, 1914, 16.

¹⁵"Fort Shaw Indian Exhibit," *Helena Independent*, 11 October 1903, 5.

¹⁶"Indian Village, War-Dances, Pony Races and Other Thrills by the Flatheads at Fair," *Helena Independent*, 5 September 1920, 2.

be truer to life than anything of the kind heretofore attempted in the northwest.¹⁷

In this description, the paper suggested that Native American culture no longer existed; it was, instead, a thing of the past that people had to recreate. Visitors also previewed the Native American of yesterday through a variety of shows that resembled those popularized by William "Buffalo Bill" Cody. The Irwin Brother's Real Cheyenne Wild West Show, a frequent attraction at the fair, "brought before the spectator . . . in startling and realistic manner . . . the days of the fast fading frontier."¹⁸ Historian Patricia Limerick once posited that the end of a frontier might be appropriately identified as the point at which the area in question is transformed into a tourist site.¹⁹ Along the same lines, white Montanans could reassure themselves that conflicts with Native Americans were no longer a threat if Indians were relegated to fairground entertainment. Suggesting that Indians were a feature of history rather than the present served the state's growing, white, and increasingly agricultural communities well.

Montana's homestead boom, it should be recognized, took place at the expense of Native American residents, who once again possessed something that Euro-Americans wanted. Much of the "unsettled" land that incoming whites homesteaded had only recently been taken away from Native Americans in accordance with the Dawes Acts of 1877 and 1902. Solicitation for settlers occurred simultaneously with calls for Congress to expedite the opening of vast tracts of reservation land. Portraying Indians as relics of the past no doubt eased the minds of prospective investors and settlers who might still

¹⁷"Blackfeet at the Fair," *Great Falls Tribune*, 22 September 1912, 9.

¹⁸"Counties of Treasure State Prepare Graphic Showing of Montana's Resources," *Helena Independent*, 20 September 1914, 2.

¹⁹ Patricia Nelson Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987), 25.

have lingering fears of hostiles, and it also helped ameliorate any residual or new guilt that might have developed in response to the treatment of Native Americans. How could one fear or regret taking land from people who existed only in the annals of history and why should the future be planned to accommodate a culture that no longer existed?

The ideal world envisioned by state fair managers had room for only those Native Americans who distanced themselves from their ancestral ways and adopted white culture. The second image of Native Americans that confronted fairgoers was that of the civilized savage. Each season, for example, the Indian school at Fort Shaw sent exhibits demonstrating the progress made by students at that institution. "After seeing a sample of the many things the Indian boys and girls are taught at Indian training school," professed one newsperson, "there can be no doubt that it is one of the best things that could have possibly been instituted for the betterment of their condition."²⁰ Such thinking reassured whites that Native Americans were better off now than they had been in the past. When the annual celebration of the progress of Montana's white culture ended, visitors could return to their homes proud of the accomplishments of their state and their race.

To some extent, Native American participation at the state fair probably helped to dissolve some stereotypes by introducing visitors to various aspects of Indian culture. For the most part, however, the white organizers of the fair dictated the nature of Indian involvement with the event. Accordingly, fairgoers saw colorful teepees, exotic savages, and "educated" Indians rather than images of the brutal conquest of Native Americans and the harshness of reservation life. The reality of the situation faced by Montana's native residents was recorded in 1911 by a local reporter, who failed to realize the irony of the scenes described. According to this journalist, after the fair closed, "a number of Indians

²⁰"Fort Shaw Indian Exhibit," 5.

... invaded the fairgrounds, gathering the waste fruit which the exhibitors had left strewn about, while a number of [white] men were engaged in selecting the best of the exhibits and packing them for exhibition at the various lands shows to be held in the east."²¹ Thus, while Euro-American newcomers prepared to display to the world the agricultural bounties and progressiveness of their state, the original inhabitants of Montana scavenged for leftovers.

Montana's state fair also served to bolster stereotypes of and to demean other non-white peoples. These lessons usually came in the form of side-shows or carnival attractions and centered primarily on perceptions of people of African descent. In 1911 George Forsythe Amusement Enterprises brought to the state fair a show similar to the ethnological exhibits that had garnered so much attention at world's fairs.²² Forsythe's "cannibal shows" generated so much excitement prior to opening that the "manager of this enterprise spent the greater portion of the afternoon 'shooing' the inquisitive away from the tent in which his ebony-hued 'cannibals' were kept in a state of captivity."²³ Interestingly, newspapers advertised Forsythe's show extensively, but none printed a description of the sights inside the tent and no comparable attractions appeared at subsequent fairs. It would be comforting to think that organizers deplored the stereotypes presented by such spectacles; however, it is more likely that fair officials deemed it more imperative to schedule shows that shaped perceptions of the state's most visible minority, Indians. Although the "cannibal show" did not return to the fair, attendees had other opportunities to form opinions about African Americans. In addition to the Ferris wheel,

²¹"Moving Day at Big Fair," *Helena Independent*, 2 October 1911, 8.

²²For information on the presentation of "human oddities" at fairs and other venues see Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990).

²³"Decorate for the Big Show," *Helena Independent*, 22 September 1911, 5.

the rolling tub, and the merry-go-round, visitors to the 1913 state fair could enjoy themselves at the "nigger-baby rack," where the "owner uses every ruse to sell the balls thrown at the grinning and tousled headed babies."²⁴ When patrons grew tired of hurling missiles at representations of infant Africans, the fair provided live targets. At the 1919 exposition, those looking for good times could aim their sights on the "African Dodger." To the disappointment of one reporter, war-time shortages had rationed some of the fun, "as eggs are too valuable and only baseballs are available to throw at his head--and, at that, he has covered with a helmet."²⁵ These and other spectacles broadcast that the bright future depicted at the fair belonged exclusively to whites.

But the event also made clear that not all whites would have equal access to the rich promise of tomorrow. Montana's promoters hoped to build an idealized agrarian community populated by educated and progressive agrarians. As a promotional pamphlet issued by the state in 1912 explained, "industrious and intelligent farmers are what Montana needs . . . no invitation is extended to the undesirable, the penniless, the weakling, or the drone."²⁶ The state fair appeared to many experts to be the perfect instrument to mold such farmers. One observer went so far as to suggest that the state fair "has solved the problem of higher education for the farmer who desires to benefit by the experience of others."²⁷ Proponents of the state fair's didactic utility argued that it presented agrarians, who might never pick up an agricultural journal, with an opportunity

²⁴"Every County in Treasure State Will Help Present Pictures of Resources," *Helena Independent*, 21 September 1913, 34.

²⁵"Barnardi Carnival is Feature of State Fair," *Helena Independent*, 10 September 1919, 6.

²⁶Department of Agriculture and Publicity, *The Resources and Opportunities of Montana* (Helena: Independent Publishing Company, 1912): 187.

²⁷Editorial, *Helena Independent*, 28 September 1911, 4.

to "get new ideas of methods and results."²⁸ Visitors to the fair, organizers hoped, would learn the theories of scientific farming and the principles of efficiency that would make them better producers.

In addition to the benefits of efficiency, the state fair extolled a correlation between industrialization and productivity. To visitors at the state fair, examples of technology's contributions to the advancement of agriculture were everywhere. Each year the fair brought together the latest lines and types of equipment available to make farming less arduous and more profitable. "With these machines," suggested a local journalist, "the farmer is rendered immune from those hard tasks that formerly were prevalent. At one fell swoop he is lifted up to the plane of the businessman."²⁹ Machinery Hall at the 1903 fair included displays by six implement companies. T.C. Power Company showcased the Deering line of harvesting equipment; Steel, Hindson & Co. advertised the Plano line of machines and Stoddard line of plows; C. H. Fortman unveiled the McCormick line of harvesting equipment; and Benson, Carpenter & Co. offered Mitchell and Winona wagons.³⁰ Various brands of tools, small engines, and increasingly automobiles also tempted browsers. In 1916, the fair hosted its first full-fledged automobile show, complete "with cars right from the factory, spic and span in their latest accoutrements and trappings."³¹ Representatives from each implement company and car dealership (which were quite often the same) made themselves available to greet prospective buyers. Presumably salespeople extolled the advantages of their particular product, outlined why

²⁸Editorial, *Great Falls Tribune*, 26 September 1911, 4.

²⁹"Machinery for the Farmers," *Helena Independent*, 1 October 1910, 1.

³⁰"Last Day of State Fair Proves a Great Success," *Helena Independent*, 11 October 1903, 1.

³¹"State Fair's Doors Swing Out Monday," *Helena Independent*, 24 September 1916, 1.

that product best suited the customer's needs, and explained how it would make the purchaser the envy of their community. Implement and auto dealers were not the only ones who called upon farmers' pride.

Indeed, the central premise of the fair was that farm families who took pride in their work and modernized their procedures would be rewarded. Presumably heightened productivity would equate to increased profits that would enable families to purchase the increasing array of mass produced items available. Fair experts around the country considered friendly competition the best method for pressuring individuals to improve productivity. Consequently, the fair featured contests for almost every conceivable product produced on the farm or in the home. In case pride failed as an incentive, the fair also offered cash premiums and prizes to the winners. Awards for the best sample of cheese, the best sheaf of barley, the best jar of preserves, and countless other categories challenged farm families to constantly seek better ways of doing things.

Men, women, and children all had the opportunity to see how their labor measured up to that of their neighbors. Although rules did not explicitly state that some contests were reserved for men and others for women (except in the case of children in which it was always specified), men generally participated in those for crops and livestock, while women submitted entries such as poultry and canned goods. This continues to be true at contemporary fairs according to ethnographer Leslie Prosterman. In a study of recent Midwestern county fairs, Prosterman discovered that "no stated rules stop either gender from entering categories unspecified by sex . . . still, custom, not law, precludes one sex or another from entering any of these nongender-specific sections."³² In so doing, fairs reinforce notions that men alone labor in the fields while women manage the home.

³²Leslie Prosterman, *Ordinary Life, Festival Days: Aesthetics in the Midwestern County Fair* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995): 100.

Gender lines extended down to the children's competitions as well. In 1915 the Montana State Fair advertised a free trip to the fair for the boy who grew the best twelve potatoes and the best ten ears of corn and for the girl who produced the best pint of Montana grown peas.³³ Records indicate that men seldom entered categories associated with women, but many women participated in male oriented contests--often doing quite well. Louise Sieger of White Sulphur Springs, for example, took home the prize for the best sheaf of turkey red wheat in 1915. A local newspaper reported that other women experienced similar success that year. According to the paper, "several 'co-ed' homesteaders have knocked down the persimmons and walked off with some of the most coveted awards."³⁴ Native Americans also took home many prizes in open competition.

The fair scheduled specific contests open only to people residing on reservations; however, Native Americans were not officially barred from competing in non-specific categories. Despite latent racism reservation entries occasionally earned recognition. In many cases it was in the state's best interest to award prizes for crops grown on reservations, for much of this land would eventually be opened to white settlers. The *Montana Farmer* noted that six prizes in open categories went to Native Americans in 1915. An unnamed Flathead woman took first for the best dressed doll baby; Emma Marion, also a Flathead, won second for best hand-painted china; and Mary Kramer received second on fruit, second on Bartlett pears, and third on green gage plums.³⁵ Contests reserved for Native Americans mirrored the pattern of competitions as a whole with certain categories geared toward men and others toward women.

³³*Montana State Fair Official Souvenir Program and Score Card*, 24 September 1915, 145, MHS.

³⁴"Meagher County Woman Takes First on Turkey Red Wheat," *Helena Independent*, 24 September 1915, 10.

³⁵"Indians Have Fine Display," *Montana Farmer*, 1 October 1915, 6.

While most of the agricultural contests targeted men, women had plenty of opportunities to participate in contests designed specifically for them. In fact, women had their own department. Initially located on the top floor of the main exhibition building and usually supervised by one of the state's distinguished women, the Women's Department included culinary, fine arts, and educational exhibits. Highlighting the abilities of Montana's women, the Women's Department proved quite popular and viewers had to make "their way through a constantly moving throng of visitors."³⁶ In 1904 guests encountered "rugs, centerpieces, bedspreads, embroidered aprons, tidies, lace collars, sofa pillows--to be brief, everything that goes to make up a collection of those little bits of handiwork so dear to the heart of woman."³⁷ Women interested in participating at the 1916 state fair had seventy-nine culinary and sixty-one fancy work categories to choose from.³⁸ The organizers of the fair considered the value of these exhibits comparable to those contests for crops and livestock: to encourage women to improve the quality of their sewing, cooking, and other activities deemed women's work. One observer noted that "the women's department is a thing of joy and beauty to every feminine visitor. There they all can revel in old laces, embroidery and other garniture which appeals only to women. There they can also learn just what makes Mrs. Brown's bread so light and what makes Mrs. Smith's devils food so fluffy."³⁹

Experts stressed the need to cultivate a competitive demeanor in children as well as in adults. One advocate of rural improvement praised children's contests, asserting that they are of "inestimable value since they form a solid foundation on which many a boy or

³⁶"Woman's Department," *Helena Independent*, 1 October 1911, 9.

³⁷"Woman's Building Drawing Crowds," *Helena Independent*, 4 October 1904, 1.

³⁸*Montana State Fair Official Souvenir...*, 24 September 1915, MHS.

³⁹"Greatest Opening Day in the History of the Fair," *Helena Independent*, 28 September 1909, 1.

girl will build success both in agriculture and in the home."⁴⁰ Accelerated rates of rural-to-urban migration at the turn of the century, convinced many rural reformers that particular attention needed to be paid to the condition of children. Country Lifers strove to instill in children an appreciation for agrarian living in hopes that they would not abandon the farm in pursuit of urban enticements. To do their part, the organizers of the Montana State Fair earnestly solicited the participation of children. They designated a children's day each year and encouraged communities to give youngsters a day off from school so that they could attend the fair. According to P. B. Snelson, secretary of the 1915 Montana State Fair, that children should be "excused from their classes in school is a forgone conclusion for a few days at the fair educates would far surpass the routine work at school."⁴¹ Young Beatrice Roberts of Lewiston expressed the joy that many children probably received from participating in fair contests. Upon winning a gold medal for sewing in 1913, she promptly wrote the *Montana Farmer* and confessed, "I think I may safely say I was the happiest girl in Montana when I received my medal."⁴² Following the passage of the Smith-Lever Act in 1914, which created a nationwide system of cooperative education, the number of children's competitions at the state fair increased annually and 4-H activities constituted the central feature in the late twenties. Not only did children participate in contests, but they also became the object of them.

The eugenics movement that swept across the country at the turn of the century did not bypass Montana. Like many other fairs during this period, Montana's state fair introduced better babies contests in 1913 and held them annually until the 1920s, when

⁴⁰Joseph B. Fligman, "The Montana State Fair of 1918," *The Montana Farmer*, 1 September 1918, 1.

⁴¹P. B. Snelson, "Coming State Fair To Be Largest Yet," *Montana Farmer*, 3 September 1915, 1.

⁴²Beatrice Roberts, letter to the editor, *Montana Farmer*, 6 December 1913, 6.

they were renamed child welfare clinics or child health exhibits. These contests became especially popular in the nation's hinterlands, where reformers hoped to improve the health of country children. Referring to the baby contest at the Minnesota State Fair, cultural historian Karal Ann Marling wrote that the competition "had all the trappings of a horse race. City babies were pitted against county babies, [while] Minneapolis babies were matched against those of St. Paul."⁴³ Contests at Montana's state fair operated in similar fashion. The message was clear: science properly utilized could produce superior humans as well as crops.

Secretary A. J. Breitenstien, who previously served as secretary of the Missoula Chamber of Commerce, proudly announced the debut of the baby. "The Better Babies contest, which is a new innovation in the state, is of great educational value," proclaimed Breitenstien, "It is a practical demonstration of the subject of eugenics which is being widely taught, and is a scientific movement to insure better babies and a better race."⁴⁴ Organized through the cooperation of the state fair, the *Woman's Home Companion*, and the Montana State Federation of Women's Clubs, the first contest offered two grand prizes of \$100 for the best boy and girl in the state, \$25 each to the best city and rural baby, and \$10 to the winner from each county. Just as the state fair emphasized racial distinctions, it also offered visitors an opportunity to view differential examples of the white race.

Thrilled by the opportunity to showcase the superiority of their genes, parents entered 330 children in the first contest. A description of the evaluation process suggests that perhaps livestock had a more enjoyable exhibition experience:

⁴³ Karal Ann Marling, *Blue Ribbon: A Social and Pictorial History of the Minnesota State Fair* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1990), 168.

⁴⁴ A. J. Breitenstein, "The Montana State Fair is Rapidly Growing Institution," *Montana Farmer*, 23 August 1913, 2.

The name, age and weight at birth of the baby is obtained and recorded . . . together with a statement of the habits, occupation and nationality of the parents and grandparents, then the little one is stripped of all clothing. The baby is then weighed, the height measurement is made . . . and the circumference of the head, chest, abdomen, arms and legs is taken. The shape and symmetry of the head is judged, after careful measurements have been made with tape and calipers. The eyes and throat are scrutinized. Each separate feature is measured and scored and especial attention is given to facial expression, the quality of the skin and the condition of muscles and bone. A careful record is made of some 22 different points.⁴⁵

The first contest concluded with a lad from Butte earning the distinction as the best boy in the state, while a Helena child was named best girl. Even if their baby did not win, parents of all entrants had to be pleased when Mrs. M. Finns of the *Woman's Home Companion* reported that "I have attended many eugenics contests throughout the country, but I believe that I may truthfully state that I have never seen a finer body of babies."⁴⁶ Thus, Montanans could boast of superiority in child rearing as well as agricultural production.

Whether it was livestock, crops, or children, the state fair emphasized that with the tools and knowledge of the modern age every aspect of life could be improve. Individuals who embraced the fair's message stood to earn immediate rewards in the form of cash premiums or prizes. In the long run, those who put machines to work in the fields, brought labor-saving appliances into the home, and applied principles of efficiency to daily routines could not only expect greater profits but also increase liesure time that might be spent enjoying new forms of mass entertainment or purchasing the cornucopia of manufactured goods available. "Your prosperity naturally means your pleasure," asserted a Great Northern Railway advertisement urging attendance at the fair.⁴⁷ While it prodded

⁴⁵"Better Babies," *Montana Farmer*, 11 October 1913, 6.

⁴⁶"Better Babies," *Helena Independent*, 24 September 1913, 2.

⁴⁷Advertisement, *Great Falls Tribune*, 6 September 1911, 9.

visitors to be more efficient producers, the state fair also sanctioned the dignity of consumption and encouraged visitors to spend their new-found wealth.

An abundance of commercial exhibits strove to elicit participation, particularly by women, in the nation's burgeoning consumer culture. Those who wandered through the commercial exhibits encountered a myriad of companies showcasing an assortment of mass produced goods. In 1904, for example, Capital Brewing Company, Hennigsen Produce Company, A. M. Holter Hardware, New York Dry Goods, National Biscuit Company, Kessler Brewing Company, Reinig Company, and Adams Heating and Plumbing all had substantial exhibits at the state fair. Reinig Company treated onlookers to "a showing of the Home brand of canned goods," Adams Heating and Plumbing replicated "a millionaire's bathroom," and B. Betor of Marysville enticed shoppers with samples of silk opera shawls, sofa pillow covers, and other items that were thought to "make glad the heart of the women folk who love such things, [while winning] admiration from the men who do not understand them yet are able to see the beauty thereof."⁴⁸ A very elaborate display of consumer goods appeared during the 1915 season. That year Hennessy & Company, a large department store located in Butte, secured the use of the old agricultural building and spent \$4,500 to convert the interior into an eleven-room model home complete with a plethora of modern accouterments and luxury items. The bathroom had "all the conveniences that the feminine heart could desire," the breakfast room was furnished with an "elegant dining room set of the Jacobean pattern" topped with Bavarian china and Venetian gold glass, and the bedroom featured a colonial mahogany bedroom set.⁴⁹ These exhibits introduced patrons to the increasing variety of name brand

⁴⁸"Merchants in Fine Booths," *Helena Independent*, 4 October 1904, 8.

⁴⁹"Women Crowd Exhibit of the Hennessy Company at Butte," *Helena Independent*, 24 September 1915, 4.

goods available to Montanans and emphasized that anyone, regardless of occupation or continental location, could partake in the benefits of modernization. In particular, however, salespeople targeted women as consumers.

Merchants concocted innovative methods for trying to entice women to their displays. "Gotten up with an eye single to catching the women folks," Weinstein & Company sought to attract them by advertising that it had a restroom stocked with free writing materials for the accommodation of visitors. Another gimmick used by the Helena firm consisted of distributing cards to women who stopped by the display at the fair. These cards entitled the holder to a free "silver pin tray" if they visited the company's downtown store.⁵⁰ Many exhibitors adopted the technique of providing a resting place for women. "When the ladies get real tired tramping around and carrying the baby," reported a local paper in 1906, "they can drop into the Moore Book & Stationery Co.'s booth and take a good rest. Comfortable quarters are provided for the purpose and affords a chance to leisurely survey the exhibit."⁵¹ Taking the idea a step further, the state fair managers opened a nursery on the grounds in 1911 and also organized a department where visitors could check "all articles and packages which may in any way hinder the public from seeing the fair."⁵² The *Montana Progressive* reported that an average of fifty babies a day spent time in the nursery during the 1915 season.⁵³ For a charge of ten cents per hour, a corps of trained nurses watched children, thus freeing their parents to enjoy the fair and presumably do a little more shopping.

While merchants utilized the fair in an attempt to turn women into consumers, suffrage leaders took advantage of the event to transform them into voters. Although the

⁵⁰"Fine Display by Merchants," *Helena Independent*, 4 October 1905, 5.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 5.

⁵²"Nursery at State Fair," *Helena Independent*, 13 September 1911, 8.

⁵³State Fair a Success," *Montana Progressive*, 30 September 1915, 1.

state fair reinforced notions of separate spheres for men and women, it also presented a unique opportunity for those who wished to alter the existing social order. The same thing that brought politicians and merchants to the state fair--crowds--also attracted advocates of women's suffrage. As early as 1912, suffrage leaders came to the grounds and missed "no opportunity to impress the male population of Montana with the idea that woman suffrage is the right thing to do."⁵⁴ A year later they requested, but were denied by the board of directors, permission to conduct a speaking campaign at the fair. In response, Jeannette Rankin, chairperson of the Montana Equal Suffrage State Central Committee, announced that a "silent speaker" would be on hand every day of the event to press the cause of equal voting.⁵⁵ Denied a forum in 1913, suffrage proponents took center stage the following year.

Two months before Montana voters narrowly passed an amendment granting women the right to vote, leaders of the movement mounted a concerted effort to win support at the state fair. Volunteers distributed copies of the *Suffrage Daily News*, a newspaper printed especially for fair week. In conjunction with activities at the fairgrounds, a suffrage parade of more than one thousand marchers strode through downtown Helena on September 25, 1914. Almost every woman in the parade wore special yellow costumes prepared for the event and children had arm bands declaring that "we want our mothers to vote."⁵⁶ According to the *Montana Progressive*, marchers carried flags listing every state in the union. A huge American flag enumerated states that had approved women's suffrage, near-suffrage states were listed on a gray flag, and those states "where men constitute themselves the divine rulers of the state and where women

⁵⁴"Suffragettes Busy at the Fair," *Helena Independent*, 27 September 1912, 12.

⁵⁵"Puts Fair Board in Bad Quandary," *Helena Independent*, 12 September 1913, 3.

⁵⁶*Suffrage Daily News*, 26 September 1914, 1, MHS.

are placed in a class of nonentities" were displayed on a flag of black.⁵⁷ These reformers took advantage of the large crowds gathered for the fair to promote their own vision of the future, one that was not necessarily in accordance with the image constructed by fair officials.

Ironically, although the fair may have aided the suffrage cause, it more effectively maintained the status quo. The following year, the *Helena Independent* explained that "visitors at the state fair can scarcely believe that the women of Montana were engaged in an aggressive suffrage campaign last fall . . . even the most ardent enthusiast in the cause of suffrage, after a visit through [the women's] department, could do naught else but admit that in Montana at least the woman's sphere is truly in the home."⁵⁸ Still, Progressive reformers found the fair an advantageous venue for advancing their causes. Indeed, fairs served as vehicles for Progressive causes such as social uplift, child protection, improved labor conditions, and, at least in Montana, women's suffrage.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the event was not to be a pulpit from which the discontented vented their anger or an opportunity for unrestrained revelry. Like other expositions at the time, officials had designed the fair to be a place of order that could help visitors make sense of the changes transforming America.

The board paid particular attention to ensuring that order was maintained. To this end, organizers hired N. P. Walters, a distinguished local detective with ties to the Pinkerton Agency. Walters, who served in this capacity for more than a decade, did his job well and earned praise from the local press. According to one reporter, "the fact that there was no lawlessness on the grounds, and that women and children were free to go

⁵⁷"Suffrage Parade," *Montana Progressive*, 1 October 1914, 3.

⁵⁸"Women's Section Admired by Many," *Helena Independent*, 1915, 2.

⁵⁹See Richard B. Roeder, "Montana Progressivism: Sound Fury and One Small Tax Reform," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 20 (October 1970): 18-27.

wherever they chose without danger of running across a drunken man or a tough one, speaks volumes for the way the grounds were policed."⁶⁰ While Walters kept unsavory characters off the grounds, the management assumed responsibility for securing reputable attractions. Visitors to the 1905 state fair could take comfort in knowing that "while there will be a 'pike,' there will be no show allowed that cannot be witnessed by a young girl."⁶¹ Throughout the life of the event, organizers endeavored to "keep the entire fair on a high moral plain . . . [so] the mothers and children will not have any cause to blush for anything they see at the fair, and will not have to hesitate about visiting any of the attractions."⁶² The fair, then, existed as a model of orderly and virtuous behavior.

The high moral tone preached by fair officials returned to haunt them, for in 1915 state lawmakers outlawed betting on horse races at the fair. As it did at other fairs, the racetrack contributed significantly to the coffers of the Montana State Fair. Consequently, the fair existed as the last bastion of legal gambling in the state and the target of reformers. In 1915 state anti-gambling forces lobbied the legislature put an end to the hypocrisy of allowing betting at the state fair. Many reformers voiced complaints similar to that of Senator Joseph Annin, who pointed out that "if gambling is wrong 359 days of the year it is wrong 365."⁶³ Annin and his colleagues prevailed and it became "unlawful to make or report or record or register any bet or wager upon the result of any contest of speed or skill or endurance of animal or beast."⁶⁴ Formal betting eventually returned to the

⁶⁰"Second Fair Big Success," *Helena Independent*, 9 October 1904, 1.

⁶¹"State Fair Ready For Visitors," *Helena Independent*, 1 October 1905, 9.

⁶²"All Road Lead to Helena from Every Part of State," *Helena Independent*, 28 September 1908, 1.

⁶³"Approve Anti-Race Bill," *Great Falls Tribune*, 2 March 1915, 2.

⁶⁴Montana. *Laws, Resolutions and Memorials of the State of Montana passed at the Fourteenth Regular Session of the Legislative Assembly*. (Helena, MT: State Publishing Company, Legislative Stationers, Printers and Binders, 1915): 83.

fairgrounds in the mid 1920s when the legislature failed to appropriate funds and Helena's business community struggled to keep the event alive. For a decade, however, the managers of the state fair could not count on income derived from betting. To compensate for lost revenue, the organizers increased the amount and quality of other amusement attractions.

Since the end of the nineteenth century a movement existed throughout the country that sought to remove or at least to lessen the entertainment component of fairs. These crusaders viewed midways and side shows as contradictory to the true mission of fairs, which they believed to be the education of farmers. While the organizers of the Montana State Fair endeavored to make shows suitable for women and children, they did not appear to have seriously considered scaling back the amount of entertainment and, with the exception of gambling, they were not pressured by outside groups to do so. In fact, many supporters of the fair touted such harmless fun as beneficial, even necessary for the state's hardworking farm families. To begin with, they argued that successful farmers should have sufficient leisure time to appropriate a week to enjoy the sights of the state fair. Secondly, they claimed that entertainment provided citizens with a sojourn from the routine of everyday life. Consequently, organizers of the fair steadfastly supported the inclusion of entertainment attractions. According to the premium book issued for the 1920 fair, the management gave "cognizance to the fact the people also want diversion from the familiar topics of their vocations. They want to get away from the routine of the season's labors, whether they hail from the city or country."⁶⁵

⁶⁵*List of Premiums and Rules and Regulations of the Eighteenth Annual Exhibition of the Montana State Fair, 1920, 138, MHS.*

Originally known as Spudville, "because this section will be such a hot potato," a midway appeared at the Montana State Fair for the first time in 1904.⁶⁶ It had one every year thereafter. Each season new and exciting shows afforded guests an opportunity to enjoy the type of modern entertainment popularized by the Midway Plaisance at the Chicago World's Fair and New York's Coney Island. For example, "the brilliant dazzle, the luster and glare of the blaze of electricity," offered by the Parker Shows, "brought the pleasure seeker to a miniature Coney Island."⁶⁷ Advertisements frequently touted attractions as "practically the same as those of the Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, and other big fairs."⁶⁸ In so doing, they added credibility to the acts and ensured prospective attendees that they had an opportunity to experience a first-class, well-known show. Visitors could take pride in knowing that they had access the same type of entertainment that people in more populated regions of the country enjoyed.

The fair grounds presented ample opportunities for fun: "merry-go-rounds, carousels, Ferris wheels, the Tango club, the Hesitation Maze, the Crazy Horse, Lover's Tub, Maid of Mist, Lorita, the Nomia Girl Show and Patterson's Big Animal Circus" were just some of the attractions that enticed money away from visitors to the 1914 fair.⁶⁹ As exciting as its amusements were, the midway paled in comparison to the spectacles staged before the main grandstand, particularly when night shows became a standard occurrence. Imagine the thrills generated by the first night program in 1912. That evening visitors

⁶⁶"Menagerie at the Fair to be a Strong Feature," *Helena Independent*, 30 September 1904, 9.

⁶⁷"Parker Shows Please Crowds," *Helena Independent*, 29 September 1908, 5.

⁶⁸*Premium List and Rules and Regulations of the Fourteenth Annual Exhibition of the Montana State Fair and Exposition*. (Helena: Independent Publishing Co., 1916): 23, MHS.

⁶⁹"Night Shows and 'Joyville Lane' Attracting Thousands of Pleasure Seeker each Evening," *Helena Independent*, 23 September 1914, 2.

witnessed a pyrotechnic reenactment of the bombing of Tripoli. Onlookers gazed wide-eyed as mock battleships burst into flames upon being struck by fire balls projected through the air. During the entire spectacle "the surrounding scene was illuminated by means of prismatic scenic lights, with five changes of colors." A silver Niagara Falls provided the grand finale, awing those in the grandstand with "a dazzling torrent of brilliant white fire, 50 feet in width, and falling from 50 feet high."⁷⁰ Sights less colorful but equally thrilling took place before the grandstand while the sun still hung in the air.

Of course horse racing, in a variety of forms, provided much of the day-time entertainment at the fair, even after the legislature banned betting. Traditional forms of horse racing, however, did not always draw the largest crowds. The most popular equestrian events during the early years were women's relay races which drew tremendous crowds and earned winners substantial purses. Intent on watching the second heat of the 1903 women's relay race, "several thousand spectators packed like sardines in the grandstand, on the bleachers and on the veranda of the exhibition hall, filling the space in front of the betting ring and lined up against both sides of the fences for 200 yards."⁷¹ Well known rider Fanny Sperry quickly became a crowd favorite and took home more than one first place prize. Such races continued to be an annual event at the state fair until 1916, when a \$2,000 purse awaited the victor; however, they do not appear to have been held at any fair following that year.⁷² Like many once popular shows, women's relay races were dropped in favor of more modern spectacles.

Coverage of equestrian events vanished from front pages as automobile, then aircraft exhibitions treated visitors to vivid previews of technological progress. Early in

⁷⁰"Firing on Tripoli," *Helena Independent*, 26 September 1912, 4.

⁷¹"Women's Relay Races," *Helena Independent*, 8 October 1903, 1.

⁷²*Premium List and Rules and Regulations of the Fourteenth Annual Exhibition of the Montana State Fair and Exposition* (Helena: Independent Publishing Co., 1916): 28.

the evening on October 5, 1906, those who had paid admission to the grandstands at the state fair witnessed the "first automobile contest ever seen in Montana on a race track."⁷³ A Stanley steamer belonging to J. Gaynor of Butte and driven by Ed Van Lune of Chicago faced off against driver E. C. Fallonsby who was at the helm of Pony resident Charles Morris's White Steamer.⁷⁴ In describing the contest, a reporter captured the wonder with which onlookers viewed these spectacles. "With such rapidity did the heavy machines travel," penned the journalist, "that the wheels were lost to sight, and only the bodies were visible skimming along just above the ground, with gossamer vapors trailing and hovering in their wake."⁷⁵ Every season thereafter, the state fair advertised automobile races, each reportedly bigger and better than the previous year's. Mere races eventually gave way to full-blown automobile shows, where visitors could preview the latest makes and models available. "The idea of complete automobile shows at state fairs is an excellent one," asserted one automobile salesperson, because "there is no class of people more interested in cars than farmers."⁷⁶ It did not take long, however, before automobiles became a second-rate attraction at the fair. As Montanans entered the second decade of the century with sky-high spirits, the state fair scheduled entertainment to match.

Automobiles replaced horse racing as the premier day-time entertainment feature of the state fair, only to be cast aside in 1910 in favor of aerial exhibitions. Overcoming a series of set backs, aviator Bud Mars, on September 27, 1910, "gave to Montana people the first really successful aeroplane flights they ever saw [and] brought to the assembled

⁷³"Van Lune Finishes Race in Sea of Flames," *Helena Independent*, 6 October 1906, 1.

⁷⁴"Greatest Automobile Contest Ever Witnessed in Northwest," *Helena Independent*, 5 October 1906, 1.

⁷⁵"Van Lune Finishes Race in Sea of Flames," 1.

⁷⁶George A. Kissel, "State Fair Is Ideal Place for Season Automobile Show," *Helena Independent*, 19 September 1915, Sec. 3, 3.

people their first vivid realization of the fact that man's thousand year efforts for aerial navigation have been rewarded by success."⁷⁷ Mars's flight provided Montanans with a lucid demonstration of technological progress. A member of the press recorded a conversation between a young couple who had just finished watching Mars fly and were debating whether to stay to watch the automobile contests that followed. "Why should we stay for an automobile race?" asked the woman to her male friend, quipping that "these are out of date now."⁷⁸ Three years after Mars became the first person to fly in Montana, Katherine Stinson, "the youngest aviatrix in the world and a girl who does not know what fear means," earned the distinction of being the first woman to fly in the state.⁷⁹ Frank Wiley, author of a book on aviation in Montana, remembered Stinson's appearance well. "I was spellbound in watching these airplane flights and seeing the aircraft leave the ground," recalled Wiley, explaining that "this phenomenon, contrary to the normal reaction of the laws of physics, seems to motivate undivided attention that cannot be denied."⁸⁰ Both these performers attracted large crowds, but it was another young pilot who won the hearts of Montanans by giving them a grand demonstration of technological supremacy.⁸¹

⁷⁷"Great Flights Thrill State Fair Visitors," *Helena Independent*, 28 September 1910, 1.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 1.

⁷⁹"Gates Open for Montana State Fair---Best in History," *Helena Independent*, 21 September 1913, 34.

⁸⁰Frank Wiley, *Montana and the Sky: The Beginning of Aviation in the Land of the Shining Mountains* (Helena: Montana Aeronautics Commission, 1966); 77.

⁸¹For information on each of these aviators see Frank Wiley, *Montana and the Sky*; on Dixon see also Thomas K. Worcester, "First Flight over the Rockies," *Montana Magazine* 10 (Nov/Dec 1979): 82-83, and Del Phillips, "Cromwell Dixon: The First to Fly Across the Continental Divide," *Stereo World* 17 (Jan/Feb 1991): 34-37.

In 1911, only eight years after the Wright brothers made history at Kitty Hawk, Cromwell Dixon came to the Montana State Fair and secured a place in the annals of aviation history for himself. That season Dixon accomplished what Mars had failed to do the preceding year; he piloted his craft over the Continental Divide and back again. Dixon, only nineteen and the youngest licensed aviator in the world at the time of his appearance in Helena, flew his Curtis bi-plane from the state fair grounds seventeen miles across the Continental Divide to Blossburg. There he delivered a letter from Montana Governor Edwin Norris to local dignitaries, sent a telegraph to his company announcing the record, and prepared for the flight back to Helena. The young man flew for more than the mere challenge and collected more than applause when he arrived safely back at the fair grounds. Lewis Penwell, Louis Hill, and John Ringling had each donated one-third of the \$10,000 purse that awaited the first pilot to fly across the backbone of the continent.⁸² More than likely, these men considered such a feat a tremendous gimmick for attracting visitors to the fair and publicity for the state. Like the silver statue *Justice*, Dixon became a figure around which many Montanans proudly united.

So impressed was Louis Hill with the young flyer that he arranged for a special train to accompany Dixon on a transcontinental flight to begin the following month.⁸³ Dixon did not get the opportunity to take advantage of Hill's offer, however, for two days after stunning crowds in Helena, Cromwell Dixon perished in a crash at a fair in Spokane, Washington. Organizers of the Montana State Fair paid homage to young man by erecting a granite memorial at the grounds in 1913, as "a tribute to this fearless airman who made

⁸²"Dixon to Fly Across Divide," *Helena Independent*, 30 September 1911, 1.

⁸³"Aviator Dixon Falls to Death," *Helena Independent*, 3 October 1911, 3.

his last successful flights at Helena." ⁸⁴ It would be a long time before Montanans forgot the deeds of Cromwell Dixon.

It is not at all surprising that Montanans emotionally embraced Cromwell Dixon. Like the state itself, Dixon was young, bold, and forward looking. He symbolized the potential of technology to overcome natural hurdles, whether they were in the form of gravity, immense mountain ranges, or arid bench-lands. On the other hand, an acute observer might have gleaned a slightly different lesson, for Dixon's premature death suggested that progress had its risks and that technology was not a magical elixir. With the advantage of hindsight, the daring flyer is an even more appealing symbol of Montana's growth during the early twentieth century. Energized by optimism and faith in progress, Montanans, like Dixon, exuded confidence in themselves and in the future. Nevertheless, for both the aviator and the state the good times came to an abrupt end. Gravity brought the young man down, while the natural cycles of weather devastated Montana's agricultural industry and closed an era of prosperity. And, as the economy went, so went the state fair. The institution that served to promote the resources of the state and to guide the direction of growth steadily lost patronage and legislative support after 1919. The Montana State Fair continued through 1932; however, it never regained the prestige and support it had during the first two decades of the twentieth century and it no longer served as a influential state institution.

⁸⁴"Gates Open for Montana State Fair--Best in History," 1.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In an interesting turn of events, World War I triggered a reversal in one of the central messages promulgated by the state fair. Whereas the dignity of consumption had been heralded prior to America's entry into global conflict, conservation became the dominant theme stressed at the fair after the nation took up arms. Recognizing the didactic power of fairs, the federal government tapped into the established system to provide training for civilians. Managers of the event took pride in the fact that federal officials designated the Montana State Fair as a food training camp, "the drill ground where thousands of boys and girls as well as men and women will be taught what they can do and how they can do it to help the nation."¹ Just as they had been targeted as consumers, women became the focus of conservation training. "The individual woman," according to one journalist, "is the primary foundation of the education work, for if she can be impressed with the necessity of saving and not wasting, the battle is half won."² In conjunction with conservation the war-time state fair also called for increased efficiency and production.

If, prior to the war, Montana emerged as a breadbasket capable of feeding eastern cities, during the war it strove to become the granary of the world. The Treasure State,

¹*Montana State Fair News*, September 1917, 1.

²Joseph B. Fligman, "The Montana State Fair of 1918," *Montana Farmer*, 1 September 1918, 3.

some would have argued, was the last best hope for feeding democracy. Doing its part, the state fair broadcast the "urgent necessity of doing things on a 100 percent efficiency basis" in an effort "to stimulate the utilization of resources of this state to such a degree that not one plowable acre will be left unplowed, not one cuttable tree needed for war work shall be left standing, not one hours necessary labor shall be wasted."³ Indeed, the exposition garnered support for the war effort as it had once encouraged cooperation in developing the state's natural resources. Exhibits, amusements, and ceremonies each served to muster the support needed to bring the conflict in Europe to an end.

The Montana State Fair brought residents of the state in direct contact with the war and fueled the fires on anti-German sentiment that swept across the state during the conflict. In 1918, for example, the War Department secured 20,000 square feet of exhibit space at the fairgrounds to house a war trophies show that included "captured guns, shells, gas masks, air planes, and other instruments of war which the Germans have used ruthlessly against the French, British, American, Canadian and Italian forces."⁴ Local leaders did their part as well. In 1917 Secretary R. S. Skinner initiated the construction of a maze of trenches on the fairgrounds that gave visitors an opportunity to tour "an exact reproduction in miniature of the French and German battle fronts around Verdun."⁵ The next season patrons could witness mock battles fought in such trenches. The premier entertainment spectacle in 1918, "Over-the-Top," featured a company of Canadian veterans who demonstrated the dynamics of trench warfare. A local newspaper assured visitors that:

³Ibid., 3.

⁴Ibid., 20.

⁵"Entrenchments at Fair To Repel Foe's Attack," *Helena Independent*, 12 September 1917, 8.

You will see a miniature reproduction of how the Canadians handle Fritz. You will see the traverses, and the advanced posts. You will see the Canucks crouching behind their bayonets, waiting for the whistle to send them after Heinie in his dugout. And then you will see them go--these devil-may-care, hard-boiled fellows from over the northern Montana line.⁶

Where once demonstrations of technological supremacy wowed spectators and encouraged them to join the modern age, now vivid glimpses of warfare enlisted their support in overcoming a bloody hurdle that threatened to impede the march of progress.

The influence of the war permeated every aspect of the fairgrounds, where guests could ride upon the "Pershing Aerial Swing" and the "Yankee Submarine Chaser."⁷ Instead of orating on the potential of the state and the possibilities of the future, as they had at earlier state fairs, dignitaries who visited the event during the war often presided over ceremonies honoring those who had lost their lives in distant lands. During the season of 1918, Governor Stewart called for a moment of silence "that each and all of us may show our appreciation of the supreme sacrifice of Montana boys in the great cause." He asked that at three o'clock on September 12, 1918, "every wheel in the state of Montana shall cease to turn--that every pedestrian pause, wherever they may be--that absolute silence shall become effective for a period of one minute."⁸ Thankfully, the next season presented the governor with the privilege of commemorating the end of the war. Officials had designated the 1919 state fair as the "Victory Exposition" and dedicated it to

⁶"Don't Miss Canadians' Display--It's the Goods," *Helena Independent*, 11 September 1918, 2.

⁷"Wortham's Alamo Shows at State Fair," *Helena Independent*, 9 September 1918, 7.

⁸Samuel V. Stewart, "A Proclamation by the Governor," *Helena Independent*, 8 September 1918, 1.

returning military personnel. "In the name of the State of Montana," the governor spoke to Montana's veterans on the opening day, "I bid you welcome, a most sincere welcome."⁹

With the war won and the soldiers back home, Montana, like the rest of the nation, sought a return to normalcy. But, Montanans soon realized that a return to the conditions that preceded the war was not a feasible option. Beginning in 1917, the state had suffered a series of severe droughts and grasshopper infestations that destroyed crops and demoralized recently situated homesteaders. In response, a large percentage of the settlers who swarmed into the state during the teens had left by the end of the decade. Those who struggled on actually benefited from the inflated crop prices that existed during the war. The reduction of commodity prices brought about by peace made the situation in Montana even worse and illustrated just how devastating the droughts had been.

The institution that had initially functioned to build Montana's agricultural foundation now served the purpose of damage control. During the same year that it adopted the title of "Victory Exposition," the state fair endeavored to convince people that Montana could overcome the current situation. In the words of one editor:

That the drouth did not leave a prostate and helpless Montana is one of the arguments the Montana State Fair is going to bring to the notice of the citizens of the state For every burned bench there was a fertile strip of bottom--for every lean cow there was a fat one, for every impoverished farmer there were four or five prosperous ones.¹⁰

Nevertheless, while there might not have been "any signs of a drouth in Montana at the fair grounds--except in the forlorn appearance of the old bar under the grandstand," agricultural communities in the state had been crippled by natural weather cycles and the

⁹"Governor Welcomes Returned Soldiers," *Helena Independent*, 11 September 1919, 1.

¹⁰Editorial, *Helena Independent*, 8 September 1919, 4.

bright optimism that characterized life in Montana prior to the war dimmed to a faint glow.¹¹ Homesteaders abandoned their claims, banks closed at frightening rates, and few people ventured to the state fair, which lost its status as an independent agency in 1921 when legislators placed it under the direction of the Bureau of Agriculture.

In the years following the end of the First World War, patronage to the institution that once brought a flood of people to the state's capital slowed to a trickle. Helena's business elites collaborated with the fair managers to reinvigorate the event that had previously brought so many consumers to their city. They launched several new attractions to incite the interest of Montanans. In 1920 the fair inaugurated the Golden Glow Pageant, a local beauty competition named after the city flower of Helena, that soon evolved into the state-wide Queen of Montana Contest. When a parade of women failed to revive attendance, organizers incorporated automobiles and advertised a Motor Style Show in which contestants drove through downtown Helena in the latest makes of automobiles. In the final years of the fair, 4-H activities dominated the fairgrounds during the day, while public weddings emerged as the premier evening attractions. In addition to these tactics, fair officials employed nostalgia to lure back crowds.

By 1925, the fair had adopted a new motto: "A Fair Like We Used To Have." In advertising a fair like they used to have, promoters were, in fact, asking state residents to patronize the event like they used to do. The theme also served to remind people of a time when spirits were high, when possibilities appeared endless, and when the future held so much promise. This maneuver toward emphasizing the past marks a fundamental shift in the purpose of the state fair. No longer did it serve as an institution designed to propel the state forward. Instead, it increasingly projected soothing images of the past, a time

¹¹"State's Tremendous Resources are Shown in Her Mammoth Fair," *Helena Independent*, 9 September 1919, 1.

before global conflict and economic crises made visions of a perfect tomorrow seem like an impossible dream. The Montana State Fair ceased to serve as a catalyst of progress and focused instead on self preservation, which it strove to accomplish by resurrecting memories of a better era.

As much as they would have liked to return to the halcyon days of the past, Montana's residents, in the midst of an economic crisis, were struggling to make ends meet, as were legislators. Residents could not patronize the fair as they had in the past, while lawmakers' liberal financing and zealous support for the event eroded steadily between the end of World War I and the onset of the Great Depression. Consequently, on August 23, 1933, Montana's Governor addressed a congregation of fairgoers in Great Falls rather than Helena. "If I mistake not," said a somber F. H. Cooney, "this is the only one of our major fairs to carry on this year, and while we feel pride in this one, it is to be regretted that there is only one of them."¹²

The 1932 season was the last hurrah for the Montana State Fair. Montanans had experienced for more than a decade what other Americans were only beginning to comprehend. That is, they had come to realize that technology, science, and faith in progress did not necessarily produce a perfect future. The promise of an ideal tomorrow, as presented at the state fair, had proved to be an apparition. Drought, unemployment, and hard times were the immediate reality. Discouraged by the fair's failure to deliver on its promises, Montanans abandoned the institution that had fostered and shaped the development of the Treasure State at the start of the twentieth century. Perhaps realizing that memories of the once grandiose event and the times it symbolized would only make the present that much more painful, Helena newspapers ran no columns of remorse when

¹²"Northern Montana Fair Opens Today," *Great Falls Tribune*, 23 August 1933, 1.

the fair failed to open in 1933. That year Montanans could read a best-selling work of fiction by author Phil Stong that detailed the Frake family's joyous trip to the Iowa State Fair, but they could not attend their own state fair.

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