



History

The Minnesota Agricultural Society was founded in 1854 with a mission to promote the Minnesota Territory's agriculture by presenting an annual fair - the first of which was held in 1855 in Minneapolis. Statehood was granted in 1858, and the Society held its first State Fair in 1859, also in Minneapolis.

During the fair's early years, the site of the exposition changed annually with stops in Minneapolis, St. Paul, Rochester, Red Wing, Winona and Owatonna. In the 1870s and early 1880s, civic groups from both St. Paul and Minneapolis worked to provide a permanent home for the fair in their respective cities. The Minnesota State Fair finally found a permanent home at its present location in 1885 when Ramsey County donated its 210-acre poor farm to the state for use by the Agricultural Society, the governing body of the State Fair. Secure in its new surroundings, the Minnesota State Fair began to grow. Physically, the fairgrounds blossomed to its current 320 acres. Architecturally, it is home to many historically significant structures, including the Fine Arts Center, Progress Center, Grandstand, Lee & Rose Warner Coliseum and Agriculture Horticulture Building.

An important change in the State Fair over the years has been in the growing attractions offered to fair visitors. The character of early fairs was dominated by agricultural exhibits and competitions, reflecting its original purpose of encouraging farming in the state. While agriculture is still the primary focus and bigger than ever, the scope of activities has broadened to include large-scale entertainment, technological and industrial exhibits and participation of scores of education and government institutions.

Since its inception, the fair has been held every year with only five exceptions: in 1861 and 1862 due to the Civil War and Dakota Indian Conflict, in 1893 because of scheduling conflicts with the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, in 1945 due to federal government travel restrictions during WWII, and in 1946 due to a polio epidemic.

In 1966, Fairchild the gopher became the official mascot of the State Fair and was joined by his nephew, Fairborne, in 1983. Fairchild got his name, a play on the institution's title, after a state-wide naming contest. It's also

a tribute to Henry S. Fairchild, the man who suggested the Ramsey County Poor Farm become the permanent site of the State Fair.

Historic Buildings & Landmarks

4-H Building

This magnificent three-story, monolithic concrete structure commands a view of the entire fairgrounds and surrounding vicinity. Built after the 1938 State Fair by the WPA (Works Progress Administration), the 4-H Building was dedicated in a ceremony on Aug. 29, 1940. Home to thousands of youth during the fair's 12-day run, the second-level kitchen serves more than 40,000 meals each fair.

Agriculture Horticulture Building

This octagon-shaped building hosts competitions, demonstrations, exhibits and concessions related to agriculture, horticulture and bee culture. Opened in 1947, its architecture mirrors the 4-H Building with the same lit tower, vertical thrust and streamlined shapes. In 1885, the first year the fair was held on the current fairgrounds, a wooden-domed building was constructed as the "main building," and by 1910, it was solely for agriculture. With an addition to this building in 1912, Minnesota could boast the largest permanent building devoted to the exhibition of agricultural products in the world. That building is no longer, due to fire on Nov. 10, 1944. The modern Agriculture Horticulture Building, commonly referred to as Ag-Hort, resides in the main building's former footprint.

Cattle Barn

The Livestock Pavilion, or Cattle Barn, was completed in 1920. The massive brick structure covers 117,450 square feet with sufficient housing for 1,000 head of cattle. The structure has changed several times in its 92 years, most notably serving in WWII as a home for the A.O. Smith Corporation that manufactured military aircraft propellers. The 21,000-square-foot corrugated steel Cattle Annex (Beef Barn) afforded more exhibit space in 1970. The most recent addition is the Moo Booth exhibit, which was rebuilt in 2009 to showcase beef and dairy cattle and the agricultural process from farm to table.

Lee & Rose Warner Coliseum

The original structure, known as the Hippodrome, was built in 1906 and used for horse shows and livestock judging. From 1909 to 1942, it was used as the Hippodrome Ice Rink during the winter months and was considered, at the time, to be the largest in the world. In 1943 during WWII, the building, along with others in the livestock area, was converted to a government-run military aircraft propeller plant, and horse shows came to a halt. After its use as a propeller plant, the building was no longer structurally sound and was razed. In 1950 and 1951, the present structure was erected, and horse shows were reinstated. The building continued to be called the Hippodrome until 1975 when a new ice rink was installed and the name was changed to Coliseum. The rink was permanently closed in 2014 due to declining use and deteriorating ice-making equipment. In 2006, the name became the Lee & Rose Warner

Coliseum. Mr. Warner was a member of the Agricultural Society Board of Managers and the vice president of the Agricultural Society from 1919 to 1944.

Commissary Building

Erected as a WPA project in 1938, this building's purpose is to give a central location to concession services and supply warehouses. From June 1943 until May 1946, this building was part of the war plant, housing the cafeteria and plant protection section of the A.O. Smith Corporation's propeller plant. In 1946, the building was reconverted for State Fair use and on Aug. 23, 1946, the west half of the superstructure burned and was replaced by the present concrete block, steel and wood structure. The building now houses Steichen's Grocery & Deli.

Creative Activities Building and Annex

The first building on this site was erected in 1904 to serve as a manufacturer's building. After only a few years, the name was changed to the Woman's Building. In 1911, a fine arts annex was built onto the Woman's Building and formed a link to the Schools Exhibits Building. The Woman's Building changed its name to Home Activities in 1952 and was razed in 1970. With the new structure in 1971 came a new name of Creative Activities to more accurately reflect its diversity of exhibits.

DNR Building

This wood structure is the largest log cabin on the fairgrounds. Known originally as the Conservation Building, it was erected in 1934 atop the former streetcar loop, which was shortened by a block. This extended Judson Avenue and allowed more accessibility to the livestock area. A formal water fountain and gardens graced the south side until 1971 when two connecting pools containing native Minnesota fish and waterfowl took its place. 1971 was also the year the name changed to Department of Natural Resources. A wetlands exhibit was added in 1992, the ability for visitors to climb the fire tower returned in 2007, and in 2013, updated aquariums and terrariums graced the interior.

FAN Central (formerly Modern Living Building)

Built in 1963 by the North Central Electric League as an exhibit of electrical appliances and equipment, the building was appropriately named Electri-City. In 1973, it was renamed the Modern Living Building, chosen through a statewide contest. In 2009, it was re-purposed and is now known as FAN Central where Minnesota sports teams are featured.

Fine Arts Center

Built in 1907, the Fine Arts Center originally served as the Dairy Building and eventually became Machinery Hall. In 1980, it became home to the fair's Fine Arts Exhibition, Minnesota's largest juried art show. Before finding a permanent home in the old Dairy Building, the Fine Arts Exhibition had been held at various locations, including the third floor of the Grandstand.

Food Building

The Food Building, which houses dozens of food concessions, was partially built and used during the 1948 State Fair and was completely finished in 1949. Known at the time as the Food Show Building, it housed the Beer Garden, the Food Show, dining halls and four corner refreshment concessions. In 2002, the Food Building underwent an extensive renovation with many new food vendors becoming part of the mix.

Grandstand

The Minnesota State Fair Grandstand is the historic heart of the fairgrounds. The original two-decked wooden Grandstand, built in 1885, was replaced in 1892 with an iron and wood Grandstand, which was razed after the 1908 State Fair. The current Grandstand, larger than the originals, was built in 1909. Large bleacher structures were added in the late 1930s. In November 2002, the fair began a two-year, \$18 million project to renovate the structure, adding new stairways, elevators, restrooms and seats, and removing the deteriorating bleachers. The State Agricultural Society has committed substantial resources to the renovation of this historic building to preserve it for future generations of fair visitors. In 2017, a new accessible elevator was added to the west side of the Grandstand.

The area beneath the Grandstand seating currently houses nearly 200 merchandise vendors on two floors of exhibit space, including the brand new Veranda shopping and dining area. In the past, it has also been utilized as an art gallery and automobile show space and display of WPA projects and programs.

The State Fair Grandstand has always hosted a variety of entertainment, including horse and auto races, military spectacles, concerts, fireworks, staged train wrecks, livestock parades, motorcycle races, stunt flying shows, beauty pageants, and speeches including Theodore Roosevelt's "Speak Softly and Carry a Big Stick."

In 2009, the Grandstand celebrated its 100th anniversary. In conjunction with this celebration, the entire Grandstand marquee was renovated and replaced with high-efficiency LED light bulbs. The Minnesota State Fair Foundation's Grandstand Marquee Campaign contributed to the renovation.

Home Improvement Building

Built in 1973 in Post World War II architectural style, this building is characterized by boxy-shaped concrete and metal paneling. Housing businesses exhibiting home articles such as sewing machines, air cleaners and landscaping supplies, it was aptly named the Home Improvement Building through a statewide contest.

Horse Barn

The Horse Barn was originally built in 1937 as a WPA project. From June 1943 until September 1945, the Horse Barn served the war effort by housing the machine shop of the A.O. Smith Corporation's military

airplane propeller plant. Some modifications were made after WWII, and in 1947, horses, sheep and 4-H'ers returned for competition. Currently, the Horse Barn houses horses in State Fair competitions, along with popular exhibits such as Aisle of Breeds and EquiMania!TM.

J.V. Bailey House

Originally called the Officers' Quarters, this was the fair-time home for State Agricultural Society board members from 1911 to 1967. With the erection of the first greenhouse in 1916, it also became the year-round residence to greenhouse superintendents and groundskeepers from 1916 to 2004. Restored with gifts to the Minnesota State Fair Foundation from Bailey Nursery Foundation and the Gordon and Margaret Bailey Foundation, the property now provides community meeting space and offices for the Minnesota State Fair Foundation. On Aug. 27, 2006, the home was named in honor of J.V. Bailey, founder of Bailey Nurseries. Mr. Bailey served the Minnesota State Fair as superintendent of horticulture (1912-1934) and as a member of the Agricultural Society board and president of the board (1933-1934).

Progress Center (Eco Experience)

Built in 1907, the Progress Center is one of the oldest two buildings on the fairgrounds (the Fine Arts Center was also built in 1907). Originally constructed as the Poultry Building and touted as "the largest exhibition building for poultry in the world," it has also been home to State Exhibits, Wonders of Technology and, currently, Eco Experience.

Ramberg Center

Like many buildings throughout the fairgrounds, the Ramberg Center has had various names and has been used for many purposes. The first building on the site was a brick structure built in 1886, and it was used as an art gallery. It then became the farmer's institute in 1890. In the 1920s, it was also used as the Minnesota Territorial Pioneers' Portrait Gallery. In 1958, the original building was razed, and a new portrait hall was built, along with the Pioneer Woman statue to honor the Statehood Centennial. In 1970, it became the Senior Citizens Headquarters, which coincided with the first ever Senior Citizens Day at the fair. In 1989 it was named after Leonard Ramberg, who was the supervisor from 1970 through 1986, vice president of the board of managers 1969-1986, Life Member in 1988, and Hall of Fame inductee in 1990.

Sheep & Poultry Barn

The current Sheep & Poultry Barn was built as a WPA project in 1937. As with many State Fair buildings in the livestock area, the A.O. Smith Corporation took it over from 1943 to 1945 for WWII military aircraft propeller manufacturing. This building once housed dog and cat shows, and only after the war did poultry share its barn with sheep. Sheep, poultry, goats and rabbits can be found here today.

Streetcar Arch

In 1934, the ERA (Emergency Relief Administration) created a trolley entrance on the south side of Judson Avenue, along with a new gate of brick construction with permanent ticket sale booths supporting an arch

bearing the inscription "State Fair." It remained in that location until the 1980s when it was moved to a far corner of the State Fair's Como Avenue parking lots and was largely forgotten. In 2013, the Streetcar Arch was restored, and in 2014, it became a permanent part of the West End Gate, once again welcoming hundreds of thousands of fair guests to the Great Minnesota Get-Together each year.

Swine Barn

In 1935, the Swine Barn construction began under the ERA (Emergency Relief Administration) and was completed in 1936 as a WPA project. Until 1943, swine shared their space with sheep. Like many other fair buildings, it served the war effort in WWII, when the A.O. Smith Corporation took it over for the grinding and shipping operations of its military aircraft propeller plant. In 2017, the Swine Annex on the west side of the building was removed, enabling new wash racks to be installed outside, more pens added inside, and windows and doors on the west side to be opened, improving air quality and ventilation.