

State Fair Film Video Podcast Transcript Minnesota Historical Society

Narrator: Late Summer means it's time for the State Fair. We have some nice objects from the fair in our collections. For example, we're lucky to have the KSTP-TV Archive that holds 3 million feet of news film from the late 1940s through the early 80s. More than 400 stories in the news film are about the fair.

The earliest fair footage in the collection is from 1949, when admission was 50 cents. It captures a Thrill day with staged car wrecks and acrobats - controlled chaos as spectacle.

The news film stories always return to the places that have the biggest crowds. Usually to ask a few of them some questions:

Reporter: What have you done so far? What do you like best about the Fair?

Boy: Machinery Hill

Farmer: I'm a farmer, so I like machinery.

Man: Machinery Hill, I always go to Machinery Hill.

Narrator: Machinery Hill is one of the oldest parts of the fair and the place for vendors to show off their products to hundreds of farmers with harvest money.

The 70 ft. high Swiss Skyride was built in Switzerland and put up in 1964. The popular ride lent itself to great film footage over the years. Very similar shots reveal different fairs at different times.

Reporter: Now, maybe that Skyride is just a little bit too tame for you. Well, if so, you can come out here to the loud and crowded Midway and ride the most popular thrill ride of the fair.

Narrator: Royal American Shows began running the midway at the State Fair in 1933. In the 1960s, that was the longest continuous relationship between any fair and a carnival.

The station tried to relate Fair history with reenactments and interviews.

One of the Fair's icons is harness racing horse Dan Patch. From the Fair's beginning harness racing was the leading amusement feature. They Reenacted Dan Patch's record race from 1906 when he ran one mile in a minute and 55 seconds.

Station reporters occasionally interviewed old timers at the fair for their memories.

Reporter: He started in 1924, and, Mr. Burke, has the Fair changed a lot?

Mr. Burke: Oh yes, I'll say...

Reporter: The Old Mill, has that been around for some time, sir?

Mr. Burke: Yes, it was here when I came here in 1924

Reporter: Has it always been pretty popular?

Mr. Burke: Well, yes, it has. It, I think, ran into a period where it slowed down a bit some twenty years ago, but a new generation comes on and it picks up again.

Narrator: To many, food is the most exciting aspect of all. Every year new food related ideas are introduced, and some become mainstays like mini donuts or pronto pups. 1947 was the Pronto Pup's first year, and judging by the footage, it became the definition of fair food.

Barker: You got one minute left, so let's hurry.

Narrator: There is something about the newsfilm of the fair that captures the sense of being there. The feel of the crowd, of the rides, the food and the animals. You watch this film and see a real effort by the journalists and camera people to share what the fair experience feels like.

The reason it draws so much attention it seems is that we as a state love our Fair...it reminds us about what we do, why we're here in this place and who we are as a community.

This has been John Fulton, with the Minnesota Historical Society.