

Martin County Event Attracts 50,000 to 100,000 People

What effect would an event that would attract an estimated 50,000 to 100,000 people and 20,000 cars and trucks have on Martin County today? Well, it happened in 1934 in Martin County and was covered by national media.

The National Cornhusking Contest was held in Martin County on November 8, 1934. The site of the event is where the airport is presently located. There were an estimated 50,000 to 100,000 people in attendance. However, the Fairmont Daily Sentinel news department of that time decided to split the difference of A.P. estimates that were 50,000 and Minnesota Highway Patrol estimates that were 100,000, and make the headline read 75,000. The state patrol also estimated that there were 20,000 cars and trucks parked in the field near the event. As of that date, it was the largest crowd ever at a National Cornhusking Contest.

The crowd was said to be almost "beyond description" as not even the most enthusiastic supporter expected the kind of response witnessed by residents of Martin County for this event. There were an estimated 800 policemen, 250 guardsman, 20 traffic policemen, and 400 legionaires and others directing traffic. The traffic from 9:00 a.m. to noon was so heavy that highway patrolmen were forced to send it toward the contest in a double line. Returning from the event was next to impossible. There were reports of numerous bent fenders and bumpers in the traffic jams due to sudden stops and some motorists trying to pull in and out of traffic lanes. Due to the many cars coming from the west, Highway 16 was made a one-way by patrolmen on the scene. Cars were reported to be approaching three abreast from the west. Four airplanes also hovered over the area, eventually landing near the contest.

People began converging on Fairmont, referred to as the "contest city", at 4:00 a.m., and by 8:00 a.m. there were several thousand cars in and near the grounds, most belonging to officials and others that were involved in some way with the event. Stands selling hamburgers and coffee were doing "land office business" and had to make frequent trips into town to replenish their supplies.

The national cornhusking entrants were officially welcomed at a banquet served at the American Legion Hall the night before the event. It was presided over by Judge J. E. Haycraft, with other dignitaries in attendance. Champions of nine states were recognized by farm paper publishers who sponsor contests. The following day, there was a parade that included eleven companies of the National Guard from neighboring towns and the American Legion Drum & Bugle corps from Mankato.

The contest was sponsored by the Wallace Farmer and was designed to show the athletic skills of young farmers. It was broadcast by NBC. The managing editor of the Farmer and Farm, Stock and Home gave a history of previous contests as well as describing the upcoming contest. He also explained the work involved in putting on the biggest event of its kind ever held in Minnesota to date. The winner of the contest was Ted Balko, four time Minnesota champion, of Redwood County. His net was 25.78 bushels.

The November 8, 1934 Fairmont Daily Sentinel gives a vivid account of the contest. If you would like to read more about the National Cornhusking contest, visit the Pioneer Museum in

Fairmont.

by
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