

HAWARDEN....HOW IT ALL BEGAN

Hawarden Festivals and Celebrations

Chapter 36

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If you have lived in Sioux County, Iowa for longer than a year, you have no doubt heard of the Tulip Festival in Orange City. Other towns have music festivals, band festivals and jazz festivals; festivals of every kind. Have you ever heard of Hawarden's most famous festival: The Calf Festival!

According to my research, 1952 was the year that introduced this popular festival to Hawarden and Sioux County. When you really think about the concept; why not a Calf Festival? We live in the middle of livestock country – let's celebrate one of our best commodities –Beef and the young Future Farmers that raise them. A great idea!

Parents who were interested in having their son or daughter raise a calf would contact a Hawarden Chamber of Commerce member to indicate their intentions. The son or daughter was then enrolled in the Hawarden Community Calf Club. The Hawarden Chamber secured a number of calves and on a date in October the calves were distributed. Each member of the Calf Club drew a number to determine his or her calf. That calf was weighed and recorded, and only that calf was eligible to participate in the Calf Festival. Through the next eleven months the calves were fed and pampered by their young owners. Each owner dreaming of showing the Champion Calf at the Labor Day Event.

As the weekend festivities approached the calves were bathed and groomed and brought to the Northwestern Stockyards east of the light plant to be on display to spectators over Saturday and Sunday of the Labor Day Weekend. On Saturday afternoon the calves were judged and the winners announced. The judges were skilled in their field and came from as far away as Vermillion and Yankton to pick the yearly Champion.

On Labor Day morning a large auction was held to sell the prime beef calves raised by the youth of the Hawarden area.

In 1952 the Hawarden Independent reported that prices paid for the calves that year, were believed to be the highest average per hundred weight in Iowa or South Dakota.

The prize winning calf, which previously had won all top honors at the Sioux County Youth Fair brought a price of \$50.00 per hundred weight for a total of \$412.50. The total of the thirty calves auctioned off that year was \$11836.30, for an average price of \$37.82 per hundred weight.

Hawarden business men were the majority of the bidders at the auction. The young owner who raised the Championship calf that first year was Jack Krusen with his 825 pound Black Angus.

In the rate of gain division high honors were won by Darrel Noble with a 755 pound gain and Stanly Venard with 715 pound gain.

This first Calf Festival was such a success and so popular that the Festival continued to be held on Labor Day weekend for over a decade.

Some of the FFA youth who showed the yearly champions were: Dudley Jans, 1953 – Randal Rozell, 1957, Dallas Rozell, 1960 and Arden Wiksen, 1963 to name just a few. Edith Milbrodt was crowned Queen that 1st year.

The weekend festivities of the Calf Festival were very similar to our present Big Sioux River Days. There were Flower Shows, the crowning of a Queen, prizes for the largest family attending and a prize for the person traveling the furthest distance to attend. Other activities at the first Calf Festival was a parade reported to be three miles long, First prize in the float division was awarded to employees of the City of Hawarden who constructed a float depicting the various municipal enterprises.

The evening of the Calf Festival in 1952 featured a baseball game between the rivaling communities of Hudson and Ireton. When the game ended Hudson defeated Ireton 7 -2, but all the spectators had been driven away by the cold weather and the two teams were building bonfires in their dugouts to keep warm. The street dance that followed the game was moved indoors because of the weather and the dance hall was reported "filled to capacity".

1957 Calf Festival festivities included a Soap Box Derby where it was estimated that over 1,000 people lined up on both sides of Tenth Street to watch Jim Tausz and his brother Terry win the Championship trophies in the two classes of the race. Other activities that year included a Carnival on main street, airplane rides given to 350 people with the proceeds benefiting the airport improvement project. Pilots donating their services were, Ben Boyer, Pete Sauer, Lou Heeren, Warren French, Milo Engelbritson, and Rex Burington. It was reported that Ben Boyer started giving rides at 9:30 AM and continued until dark. A swimming meet was held in the afternoon, drawing a capacity crowd. In the diving contest, Rusty Schoeneman took first and Roger Strong received second. An amusing event at the meet saw the "Bloomer Girls" (teachers) defeat a bunch of farmers in a tug of war, over and into the pool. A crowd estimated to be over 2,000 attended the Horse Show sponsored by the Hawarden Saddle Club. Clubs from Hudson and Canton were awarded first and second prizes in the parade, with the Hawarden Saddle Club declaring itself not a contender. Virlene Williams was Queen of the show, based on her riding ability.

The October 1961 edition of the Hawarden Independent reported that the Hawarden Chamber of Commerce had voted to continue the Calf Festival in 1962. That festival was held in October, 1962 and I could not find a record of a Labor Day Celebration. Thus the demise of the Calf Festival.

The next mention of a Labor Day Celebration was the 1965 Fun Festival, which boasted a Rocking Chair Marathon in front of the Farmers State Bank. Contestants brought their own rocking chairs and rocked day and night, starting Saturday at 10 AM with 5 minute breaks every 2 hours. The world record at that time was 70 consecutive hours. Hawarden had two winners who agreed to stop after 55 hours breaking the state record. The winners of \$30 in prize money were Kevin Richmond and Ken Marshall. Wilbert Verros and Doug Finch were the youth who remained the longest, stopping after 53 ¼ hours on Monday at 3:11 PM. The other participants who dropped out earlier were victims of the unusually cold evenings that weekend.

Labor Day Celebrations continued through the years in Hawarden celebrating the last weekend of summer.

1986 heralded the FIRST Big Sioux River Days with the combined efforts of The Hawarden Chamber of Commerce, Border Bandits Car Club, Hawarden Jaycees, Hawarden Ministerial Association, Hawarden Kiwanis, Hawarden Area Arts Council, South Pit Recreation Club, Calliope Village Committee, Hawarden Fire Department and several other organizations, providing Hawarden area residents with a wide variety of activities. It was at this 1st Big Sioux River Days Celebration that the White Horse Patrol first appeared in Hawarden. How appropriate that they also appeared on our 125th Birthday in 2012.

Hawarden has always loved their celebrations, no matter what they were called. The Big Sioux River Days are now 26 years old and judging by the large turnout in 2012 they still do !!