WELCOME TO THE MINNESOTA STATE FAIR.

This History Walking Tour was developed by the Minnesota State Fair Foundation and the Minnesota Historical Society. It’s your two-mile guide to some of the State Fair’s most historically significant spots.

Complete eight stops and earn a prize!

- Start your tour at any of the 12 stops.
- Use the map on the last page of this brochure to find your way.
- Use the hole punch at each stop to punch out the corresponding number in your brochure.
- Complete 8 or more stops and collect a free prize—PLUS the added bonus of walking approximately 2 miles!
- To collect your prize, bring your brochure to the Minnesota Historical Society booth in the Education Building or to the History & Heritage Center at West End Market.
Streetcar Arch
Installed 1934, reinstalled 2014

Then: It’s hard to believe, but horses and mules were once used as a mode of transportation to the State Fair. By the 1890s, a different type of horsepower took over: trains and streetcars. The railway allowed companies such as Royal American Shows to unload a 90-car train filled with midway attractions at the fair. Streetcars brought visitors into the heart of the fairgrounds. In 1934, those tracks were shortened, introducing a new gate entrance and steel arch inscribed with “State Fair” to welcome guests fresh off the streetcar rails. Streetcar transportation remained popular until the ’50s when its usage declined with a new mode of public transportation: the bus.

Now: Fair visitors arrive at the fair by bus, car, or bicycle. Although the Royal American Shows train doesn’t chug into the State Fair station anymore, a red and yellow train car from a bygone era sits in the West End Market next to the Transit Hub. Another treasure from the old railroad days can be seen overhead by the History & Heritage Center: the restored Streetcar Arch.

Distance from the Streetcar Arch to the Skyride:
Approximately .04 miles
Skyride
Installed 1964

Then: The installation of the Skyride was right in step with the Minnesota State Fair’s 1964 theme: “Pageant of Midwest Progress.” Created by Von Roll, the manufacturer of the New York World’s Fair Skyride, this Swiss machinery has been a hit with visitors for more than half a century. Since 1964, 100 skyrides have been installed across the country and fewer than a dozen remain operational.

Now: Today, many amusement parks have removed their skyrides. Yet the Minnesota State Fair Skyride continues to stand tall, with lines of ticket buyers waiting to take the 70-ft.-high trip running from the Agriculture Horticulture Building to an area near the West End Market. With a bird’s-eye view of the fairgrounds, State Fair visitors are suspended in the air like gondola riders in the Alps.

Distance from the Skyride to the Grandstand:
Approximately .1 miles
Grandstand
Built 1909
Then: The Grandstand boasts a grand history: it has hosted horse races, baseball games, airplane stunt shows, and auto races. The first wooden Grandstand was built in 1885, and was replaced by another in 1892. In 1901, thousands of Minnesotans at the Grandstand heard Theodore Roosevelt utter the famous line, “Speak softly and carry a big stick” in the presentation that became known as “The Minnesota Speech.” In 1906, the legendary harness-racing horse Dan Patch set a world record: one mile in one minute, 55 seconds. Today’s Grandstand opened in 1909, and in 1937 the ramp was added as part of a Works Progress Administration (WPA) building project.

Now: The Grandstand remains a premier outdoor concert venue that attracts national performers from KISS to Alabama, a country music band that has performed a record 19 times. The Grandstand also is home to one of the fair’s great shopping hubs, with vendors offering everything from eyebrow makeup to dicers, with plenty of peeling and chopping demonstrations to draw crowds of amazed onlookers each year.

Distance from the Grandstand to the Swine Barn:
Approximately .4 miles

Swine Barn
Built 1936
Then: The large red-brick Swine Barn was completed in 1936. It was one of more than a dozen structures on the fairgrounds built by the Works Progress Administration (WPA), a federal program that created jobs for people during the Great Depression. During the WWII years, exhibitions of livestock and poultry were suspended as the government converted all of the animal barns, including the Swine Barn, into a military aircraft propeller plant.

Now: Through the years, judging standards for swine have changed; in the 1940s, livestock judging handbooks described the ideal hog as “excessively fat.” Today, judges look for muscle, not fat. One of the Swine Barn highlights is seeing the winner of the Largest Boar category; in 2010, crossbred swine Reggie weighed in at 1,450 pounds. Grab a pig ear headband at the Oink Booth, and go on a quest to discover what weighs the most this year—the largest boar or the giant pumpkin in the Agriculture Horticulture Building!

Distance from the Swine Barn to the Lee & Rose Warner Coliseum:
Approximately .1 miles
Lee & Rose Warner Coliseum  
Opened 1951; renamed in 1975 and 2006  
Then: State Fair livestock competitions were held in large tents until 1906, when the Livestock Amphitheater became the home to horse shows and livestock judging in summer and an ice rink during winter. It was known as the Hippodrome, named for the ancient Greek stadiums used for horse and chariot racing. After being used as a military aircraft propeller factory during WWII, the building became structurally unsound and was razed. The present building, which opened in 1951, is designed like a military armory, strong and sturdy with two beautiful carved reliefs on the north side that depict the state motto, l'Etoile du Nord (The Star of the North).  
Now: The 5,200-seat Lee & Rose Warner Coliseum is a popular destination for fairgoers, particularly to watch the Supreme Six-Horse Hitch class. For many, the Coliseum will forever be associated with ice hockey. The building’s indoor ice rink closed in 2014 due to increasing maintenance costs, but it had been the place to see high school, college, and semipro games for decades.

Distance from Lee & Rose Warner Coliseum to CHS Miracle of Birth Center: Approximately .1 miles

CHS Miracle of Birth Center  
Opened 2001, moved to current location 2006  
Then: Oohing and ahhing over baby animals has been a fair tradition since 1956, when the Future Farmers of America (now the National FFA Organization) created the Children’s Barnyard. The Miracle of Birth Center exhibit joined the Children’s Barnyard in 2001 and gave fairgoers a chance to reflect on the importance of four-legged creatures to Minnesota’s well-being. Quickly outgrowing its space, it moved to its current location and was renamed CHS Miracle of Birth and FFA Chapter House & Leadership Center.  
Now: About a million visitors come to see 150 to 200 calves, goats, piglets, and lambs being born during the run of the fair. Animal species are chosen based on their tolerance for people watching their birthing process. The Minnesota Veterinary Medical Association coordinates over 150 volunteer veterinarians to staff the center, as well as University of Minnesota interns and FFA members who feed and care for the animals.

Distance from the CHS Miracle of Birth Center to the Dairy Building:  
Approximately .1 miles
**Dairy Building**

**Built 1967, occupied by dairy products in 1968**

**Then:** Dairy exhibits were housed at many locations through the years, including the mezzanine level of the Cattle Barn and the building that is now the Fine Arts Center. The latter was 142 feet wide and 118 feet long, said to be the largest fairground dairy building in the world. It contained a Milk and Dairy Bar, and for a time, a Land O’ Lakes butter label printing and wrapping machine. In 1968, the Midwest Dairy Association and other vendors moved to a new and improved structure on the corner of Underwood and Judson, with plenty of room to showcase Minnesota’s flavorful dairy production!

**Now:** Today, the Dairy Building features educational exhibits and the famous butter heads. Butter sculptures have been featured at the Minnesota State Fair for more than a century. In 1910, a stellar attraction to the Dairy Building was the life-sized sculpture of Teddy Roosevelt! Since 1965, fairgoers have gathered to watch Princess Kay of the Milky Way and her court get sculpted in 90-pound blocks of butter. It takes about six to eight hours to complete each carving.

**Distance from the Dairy Building to the J.V. Bailey House:** Approximately .1 miles

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**J. V. Bailey House**

**Built 1911, restored 2006**

**Then:** The State Fair’s green thumbs once “planted themselves” at the J. V. Bailey House. From 1916 to 2004, greenhouse superintendents and grounds-keepers resided year-round at the 1911 American foursquare-style home. They watched over the greenhouse and took care of the iconic cannas, the beautiful red-and-yellow tropical flowers growing by the thousands throughout the fairgrounds. The house is named for J. V. Bailey, founder of Bailey Nurseries, Agricultural Society superintendent of horticulture (1912-1932) and board member (1924-1934).

**Now:** Since 2006, the Bailey House has been home to the Minnesota State Fair Foundation. Founded in 2002, the foundation preserves and improves the historic Minnesota State Fair’s buildings, grounds, and educational programs. Stop by to learn how you can become a Friend of the Fair.

**Distance from the J.V. Bailey House to Fairchild the Gopher:** Approximately .06 miles
Food at the Fair
Since the beginning of the fair

Then: In the early days, if you wanted a full meal at the fair, you had to bring your own. The first foods available for purchase included peanuts, watermelon, popcorn, and lemonade. Around the 1900s, churches started pitching tents for sit-down meals, such as roast chicken and gravy, prepared at home and transported to the fair. After WWII, fair visitors were introduced to foods from around the world, like falafel and chow mein.

Now: Eating is an all-day activity. Visitors check off their annual must-haves like mini donuts, cheese curds, and the Pronto Pup, which made its State Fair debut in 1947. And then try the most outrageous additions, such as mac and cheese cupcakes and chocolate jalapeño ice cream. Food-on-a-stick has become synonymous with the State Fair, and with good reason. With portable versions of Key Lime pie, deep-fried lobster, walleye, or even tater tot hot dish, it’s much easier to eat on the go!

Distance from Food at the Fair to Machinery Hill:
Approximately .3 miles

Fairchild the Gopher
Introduced 1966

Then: With his pinstriped jacket, straw hat, and buck-toothed grin, Fairchild has served as the State Fair mascot since 1966, when he was named in a statewide contest. Fairchild’s name pays tribute to Henry S. Fairchild, a prominent St. Paul citizen who lobbied for the fair’s current location. During the fair’s early years it traveled to various cities, and both Minneapolis and St. Paul vied to be chosen as the permanent home. In 1885, it was Fairchild who persuaded the battling burgs to choose a permanent site between the two—one on 210 donated acres of the Ramsey County Poor Farm in Hamline, today’s Falcon Heights.

Now: This twenty-four-foot tall, fiberglass Fairchild sculpture depicts our favorite gopher dressed as a carnival Barker. His likeness also was carved out of a tree, using a chainsaw, and that sculpture can be found outside the Grandstand. Fairchild always is part of the daily parade, often accompanied by his sidekick and nephew, Fairborne, who was introduced to the fair in 1983.

Distance from Fairchild the Gopher to Food at the Fair:
Approximately .1 miles
Machinery Hill

1909

Then: Farm implements have been a part of the State Fair since its beginning. And for more than 100 years, Minnesota farmers have found the latest and greatest in agricultural equipment atop Machinery Hill. In its prime, nearly 80 acres displayed farm implements and vehicles that gave visitors a glimpse into the future of farming. Countless kids were in awe of the giant tractors and combines. In 1957, there was a surprise attraction—two young bison at the Deere and Webber Co. exhibit!

Now: New agricultural and industrial equipment still find a home on Machinery Hill. Many State Fair attendees pay a special visit to Machinery Hill for the Old Iron Show, showcasing antique machinery including the renowned John Deere products. Souvenirs such as John Deere toys and hats bring the memories of Machinery Hill home. The hill now features the Little Farm Hands exhibit, a fun place for kids to learn about agriculture from the field to the grocery store.

Distance from Machinery Hill to the 4-H Building: Approximately .5 miles

4-H Building

Opened 1939, dedicated 1940

Then: 4-H originally was known as boys’ and girls’ clubs, and since 1914, they have exhibited at the State Fair. The Works Progress Administration constructed this gleaming white, Art Deco-style building at the end of the Great Depression. Concrete in the building’s horizontal base and central tower conveys a sense of strength meant to boost morale during those challenging economic times. Visitors can see the 4-H symbol, a four-leaf clover, depicted above the main entrance doors. The “H” in each clover’s leaf represents one area of personal development central to the youth organization: head, heart, hands, and health.

Now: Thousands of young Minnesotans flock to the 4-H Building every summer to showcase the results of their hard work. Some present livestock while others exhibit projects that feature technology, art, gardening, photography, quilting, and more. The upstairs dormitories are filled with 4-H participants excited to make new friends from around the state. They’re also excited to compete for a ribbon!

Last Stop: Prizes are available at the next-door Education Building or at the History & Heritage Center in West End Market.
Congratulations, you did it! After completing the tour, pick up your prize at either the Minnesota Historical Society booth, located in the front-center aisle of the Education Building, or at the History & Heritage Center at West End Market.

Don’t miss History-on-a-Schtick, 9:30 & 10:30 am daily on the Schell’s Stage at the Schilling Amphitheater, and enjoy a vaudevillian romp through Minnesota’s past with songs, trivia, and prizes!
The Minnesota State Fair Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that preserves and improves State Fair buildings, grounds, and educational programs.

msffoundation.org

Established in 1849, the Minnesota Historical Society (MNHS) preserves and shares Minnesota history through museum exhibits, historic sites, libraries and collections, educational programs, and book publishing.

mnhs.org

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