Community celebrations of various kinds are held throughout Minnesota. One local event, known as “King Korn Days,” was at one time a major festival in Fairmont and Martin County. It flourished during the 1950s and 1960s and was briefly resurrected in the 1980s.

Included in the festivities were parades with floats and bands, various forms of entertainment, singers, dancers, instrumentalists, magicians, novelty acts, notable celebrities, and banquets. In addition, there were King Korn queen candidates from throughout Martin County.

In reviewing several past King Korn Celebrations, an article from the September 26, 1952, edition of the Sentinel stated the following: “Fairmont is wearing its gay festival clothes today, with queens, parades, kings and corn on its mind as the gigantic 1952 annual King Korn Days festival begins to unfold in all its golden, harvest splendor.” The story goes on to state, “Everything is in place – bunting, corn exhibits, gifts for the public, eat stands, a carnival, reservations for notables, even purple robes for the Queen and Korn King. Corn - no matter which way you spell it - will be everywhere Friday and Saturday. Eleven thousand ears of corn will be served to the public Saturday.” Included in the advance festivities were a “bevy” of five clowns selling balloons to advertise the event. That pretty well sets the stage for what was undeniably at one time one of the largest and best attended festivals in the local area.

In that same edition of the Sentinel, another article read “Somewhere in Fairmont is a young lovely Miss who tonight will be named 1953 King Korn queen to represent the community throughout the state.” “Three professional ‘queen selectors’ will know by early tonight but they won’t disclose their choice until a special public radio broadcast later in the evening from Interlaken ballroom.” Wow, professional “queen selectors!” One might wonder how they got that job. Actually these judges, or “queen selectors,” were Aquatennial Queen Betty Barnhart, Frank Matson of St. Paulites, Inc., and Miss City Club, Jeri Demick. They were apparently well qualified for the task at hand.

There were twenty-five King Korn queen candidates in 1952, each sponsored by a local business. Newspaper accounts included pictures and detailed personal information involving height, weight, hobbies, home addresses, and future plans, some of which might seem incredibly inappropriate in today’s world.

The queen selection was to be made during the queen’s dinner at which time two princesses and one queen would be chosen. At that point the judges would “wrinkle
their brows some more at the queens” in attempting to make their final decisions. After the dinner, the queen candidates were to be escorted to their homes to change into formals for the Queen’s Ball.

The grand finale, the crowning ceremonies, would begin at 10:30 p.m. in order to allow enough time for the fans watching the Fairmont-New Ulm football game to attend. The Chamber of Commerce planned to present the candidate selected as queen $100.00 to purchase a new wardrobe to be worn in celebrations she would attend in the next year. Each princess would also receive $10.00. In addition, the Korn Queen and all queen candidates would ride in what was described as the “mammoth” 1952 King Korn parade on Saturday. Finally, the candidate selected to be the 1953 King Korn Queen was Betty Harris, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. John Harris. Coincidentally, the coronation took place on her father’s birthday, and her parents’ wedding anniversary, all on the very same day.

Moving ahead to 1967, King Korn Days of that year featured a number of activities and events. The Fairmont Chamber planned to serve 10,000 free hot dogs, the corn show was to be held in the Youth Center, the King Korn races were scheduled for Saturday, and the King Korn parade route would wind through town.

A near record, 462 entries, for the corn show was displayed in the Fairmont Youth Center, suggesting that a big fall harvest was in store. The overall grand champion of the Fairmont King Korn Days three foot tall corn show trophy was Walter Reinke of Truman. He won the trophy in 1966 and was champion of the professional class in 1965.

Vic Dicks of Jackson defended his King Korn car racing title winning a hotly contested race at the Fairmont Speedways. Trophies were presented by Kathy Kay Kittleson, Miss Fairmont of 1968.

Newspaper articles indicated that Fairmont’s 1967 King Korn festival may have set a record with the 10,000 hot dogs being devoured by 1:00 p.m. and an estimated crowd of 10,000 plus watching the parade. Closing events included 415 attending the teen dance at the Youth Center and a standing room only crowd at the adult dance at the Legion Hall. In addition, the carnival was also well attended as a result of advance ticket sales giving ten rides for a dollar.

Moving forward to the 1985 King Korn Days festival, this event included a parade, Enduro car races, a chicken and sweet corn feed, and perhaps most significant was that Fairmont hosted the Minnesota State 1985 “Corn Husking Contest.” The contest was slated to begin at 9:00 a.m. on a twenty-five acre site across from the Martin County
Fairgrounds. It included six classifications based upon age. Men’s and women’s categories were also included. Although not expecting anything near the 75,000 to 80,000 spectators the 1934 event attracted, the chamber predicted 5,000 to 6,000 would attend.

The contest fielded sixty contestants ranging in age from seven to ninety-four. However, the rainy and cold weather conditions apparently affected the turnout as only 1,500 to 2,000 spectators watched, considerably less than originally anticipated.

Although King Korn Days provided an important and fun filled function for the county during its life span, as is frequently the case with community festivals, it gradually evolved and was replaced by something else. However, those that remember King Korn Days will most likely consider it to have been one of the premier festivals held by any county in the state of Minnesota.

For more information on this topic, or to become a member of the Martin County Historical Society, visit the Pioneer Museum in Fairmont and our website at www.fairmont.org/mchs/.
Don’t Miss Fairmont’s 1985 KING KORN DAYS
September 21 - 28
Fairmont’s Salute to Agriculture and the Farmer for ’85

Highlights of King Korn Week

Saturday, September 21
KING KORN PARADE at 11 a.m.
Parade Marshal, Jim Nichols, Minnesota Secretary of Agriculture. Best parade ever with over 150 units participating. Floats, Bands, Queens, Clowns, and much more!

“SUNDAY IN THE PARK” at Sylvan Park beginning at 10 a.m. and running till 6 p.m. Food and drink of all sorts, plus booths of crafts and oddities and entertainment.

Barbershop singers at 1:30 p.m. in Sylvan Park. Special performances at 4:30 p.m. and 7 p.m. at the Opera House. DON’T MISS IT!

Sunday, September 22
ENDURO CAR RACE SPECIAL - Annual King Korn Race at 2 p.m. at Fairmont’s Speedway Track! Don’t miss it!
Plus...
Children’s matinee at 1 p.m. at Fairmont Opera House. Featured will be a carnival of classic cartoons.

Friday, September 27
Homecoming football game at 7:30 p.m., preceded by Chicken and Sweet Corn Feed at the high school from 5 to 7 p.m.

Saturday, September 28
Minnesota State Corn Husking Contest, beginning at 9 a.m.
See below for details... an exciting event for the whole family!

Buy a King Korn Days Button...
...and check your Lucky Button Number at a participating sponsor during King Korn Week! You could have won one of several hundred prizes! Lucky numbers posted at most King Korn Days sponsors.

Contests and Other Events Throughout KING KORN WEEK
Fun for the Whole Family
Call 235-5547 for Details

Minnesota State 1985 “CORN HUSKING CONTEST”
Saturday, Sept. 28
Fairmont, MN
Starting at 9 a.m. Runs All Day!
Location: ½ mile south of I-90 • Exit 99 • Across from Fairgrounds

For Further Information, Call Fairmont Area Chamber of Commerce (507) 235-5547
KING KORN DAYS
1984
SEPTEMBER 13, 14, 15, 16 - FAIRMONT, MN.
Last King Korn Day Parade-Fall of 1967
Miss Fairmont Attendant-Theresa M. Schneider