

Woodford County Historical Society to Feature Traditional Art of Corn Husking

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The late Irwin Bauman, the 1940 U.S. corn husking champion, still had his touch in his later years, as demonstrated in this photo. The Woodford County farmer had been second in the Illinois state contest, but he amazed everyone at the National by setting a new record of 3,269.9 pounds, or 46.71 bushels in the 80 minutes allotted, nearly twice the amount husked in the first national contest in 1924. In 1938, Irwin was second in the National contest. He didn't place in 1939, and no one suspected as the 1940 contest rolled around in Scott County, Iowa, that he would not only take the prize, but set a new record. The event drew a crowd estimated at more than 150,000 spectators. --Photo from the Bauman Family and the Woodford County Historical Society ROANOKE - Marge and Don Bauman of Roanoke will give a talk about the traditional art of corn husking at the Aug. 13th meeting of the Woodford County Historical Society. The meeting will be held in the Roanoke Park building at 7:00 p.m. The Roanoke Park is on the northeast side of Roanoke. Follow the signs from Route 116.

Don's father, Irwin Bauman, was the corn husking champion of the nation in 1940, a feat not easily imagined in our time. In the days before automated corn harvesters, it was back-breaking labor to get the corn ears from the dried stalk into a wagon. Farmers developed techniques and equipment to speed up the process and eventually held informal contests to see who was the best corn husker. In 1922 Henry A. Wallace, editor of Wallace's Farmer Magazine offered a \$50 prize to anyone who could husk corn at the rate of better than 14 bushels an hour. The first contest led to others which then developed into gigantic farm-related events. By 1940, crowds numbering in excess of 150,000 people poured into the grounds of the Henry Keppy farm in Scott County, Iowa. Five thousand cars were parked in nearby fields and special trains brought people from far and near. The corn was specially grown for the contest.

Each contestant walked along his section, yanking ears off the stalks and pitching them into a wagon called a "bangboard" because of the sound of the ears hitting the built-up wooden side. Irwin had perfected his technique, and in 1940 he threw 46.71 bushels in the 80 minutes allotted to the contest. This was twice the amount that won in the 1924 contest.

The wonderful era of the corn husking competitions died out with the coming of World War II and the increase in automated machinery.

The Woodford County Historical Society is dedicated to preserving our history in all its varied and colorful forms. Meeting the second Thursday of each month, March through December, at different places within the county, the group welcomes any and all. There is neither a pre-registration requirement nor any entry fee.

The September 10th meeting will be at the South Pointe Park building in El Paso and will feature Pete Fandel speaking on the history of Woodford County soils. The meeting coincides with the annual El Paso Corn Festival.

For more information, please contact Karen Fyke (467-4525) or Barbara Bradle (467-3106).

A crowd of over 150,000 people attended the National Corn Husking Championship in Scott County, Iowa on October 30, 1940, to see Woodford County farmer Irwin Bauman win the contest.

Corn huskers wore a variety of attachments to help with the difficult task of removing the husks, such as these gloves advertised in a mail order catalog. (below). --Photos from the Woodford County Historical Society