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Photographs / Images: birds-eye view of the state fairgrounds in Lincoln, September 1888
Looking south from the amphitheater, a photographer captured this bird’s-eye view of the state fairgrounds in Lincoln in September 1888. Paid attendance topped 40,000 that year, down a bit from the year before.

According to Morton and Watkins’ *History of Nebraska* (1913), liquor sales and gambling were prominent in early fairs, but were banned in 1879 along with “indecent shows or dances.” On the other hand, attempts to stop littering were apparently left to the future.

As shown by this photo and others in this issue, the fair has long been associated with Lincoln. It wasn’t always so. Nebraska City hosted Nebraska’s first and only territorial fair in 1859, and hosted the first state fairs in 1868 and ’69. Brownville hosted the fair in 1870-71. Lincoln and Omaha each served as host city multiple times between 1872 and 1901, when the state legislature designated a permanent state fairgrounds in Lincoln.

Permanent, that is, until now. Lincoln’s long run ended this year. As of 2010, the fair’s new permanent home is Grand Island, the fifth city to host the event.