

## First Ekka held 1876

The first Ekka was called the "Intercolonial Exhibition of 1876". On opening day 17,000 people attended, a massive turnout for Brisbane's then population of 20,600. Such was the excitement that 5000 people charged the turnstiles and mounted police had to be called to drive back the crowd. Today, the Ekka attracts about half a million visitors over 10 days.

The first show was also a formal affair with men in suits and ladies in their "finest garments". Food was served on long tables and a bag of coal was free for all visitors.

The Ekka has only been cancelled twice in history - in 1919 during a Spanish influenza epidemic and in 1942 during World War II when the showgrounds were used as a staging depot for troops.

New technologies have traditionally been introduced at the show, with crowds as early as 1879 amazed by inventions such as telephones, microphones and electric lights.

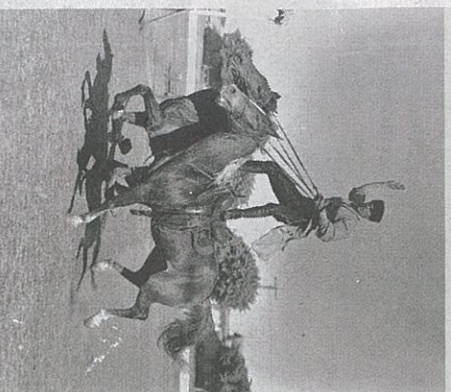
There have been several royal visitors to the Ekka. In 1920, Edward, Prince of Wales, attended and in 1954 Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip visited.

The Royal National Agricultural and Industrial Association of Queensland (RNA) was established in 1875. Its charter was to promote the agricultural and industrial development of the state.

The first show covered 6.8ha, compared to today's 22ha.

The iconic strawberry sundae debuted in 1950. Today, about 145,000 of the treats will be sold.

Visitors are expected to eat about 185,000 dagwood dogs, 4400 Country Women's Association scones and 17,000 Coon cheese toasts.



# 'Showmen don't retire, they don't get sick. They just die'

**Richard Miller**

*As the head of a dynasty that stretches back four generations, Richard Miller has show business in his blood, writes Elissa Lawrence*

Richard Miller has a quiet smile to himself at the showmen on TV. Such grandiose special effects. Such complex lighting. Such extravagance and pomp.

The disappearing girl, the girl split in two, the head on the sword, the floating lady. Richard Miller can do these tricks, too. In fact, he's been doing them most of his life and all the old-fashioned way. The original way. In a tent at the Ekka.

Miller, 65, comes from an impressive lineage of "show people" that stretches all the way back to his great-grandfather, a

showman in England in the 1830s. Since then, there has been little or no deviation from these show roots for this family who, seemingly without exception, have followed each other into the business of sideshow entertainment.

Born in Toowoomba into a family of Sideshow Alley operators, Miller has been to the Ekka every year he has been alive.

For nearly 50 years, with few exceptions, he has had his own stalls at Brisbane's Ekka.

He also has an interest in preserving the past and, with his wife of 46 years, Janet,

travels the country with his "old-time sideshow memorabilia" show, which includes original illusion acts used at Brisbane's show.

"I've got about 11 original illusions," Miller says. "In the old days at the show there were 37 tent shows, ranging from boxing tents to snake shows, spidergirls, the wall of death, the head on the sword, the guillotine. When I see those illusionists on TV I have a bit of a smile to myself because I can do the same acts.  
"Maybe it's not as presentable with their