

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

IMW-7
The Royal of '61

P.O.Box 5113
Nairobi, Kenya
October 20, 1961

Mr. Richard H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, New York

Dear Mr. Nolte:

The Royal Show has come,...and gone! And Kenyans have settled down to wait for the Royal of '62.

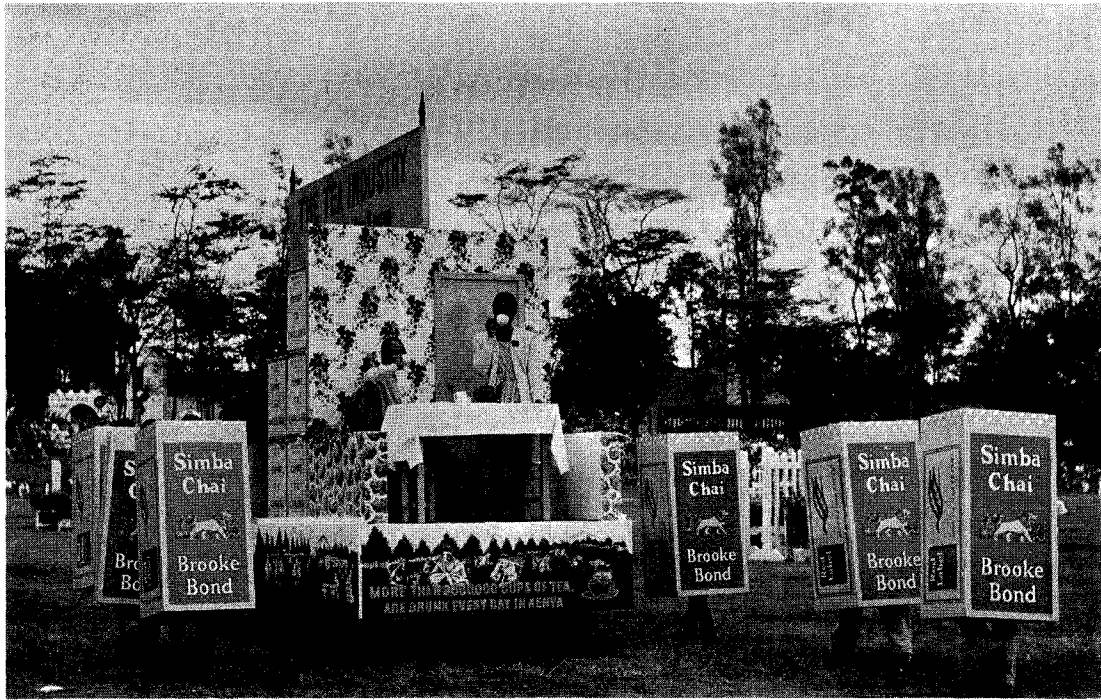
This is a unique public event in Kenya, not unlike our own State Fairs, and this year's Diamond Jubilee more than lived up to my expectations. It lasted for four days (September 27-30), and the headlines of Nairobi's leading newspaper told of its progress: "The Royal Show Off to a Flying Start---First Day Attendance Only Slightly Down" (it poured); "Two Hurt and Official Has Flu"; "Show Officials Confident Now---Sunshine Sends Crowd Flocking to Show"; and "Show Records Shattered---Supply of Tickets Runs Out In Rush". So it was a success after all!

The Royal Show is organized annually by the Royal Agricultural Society of Kenya (RASK). RASK, then known as the East African Agricultural and Horticultural Society, was formed in 1901 and had a fairly successful start, although later the society had its ups and downs. During the last decade since the first Royal Show opened in Nairobi in 1952 (when it was predominately a livestock show), it has changed to become a showplace for most of the goods produced and sold in Kenya. Although it is mainly European, RASK is non-racial and has members of all races.

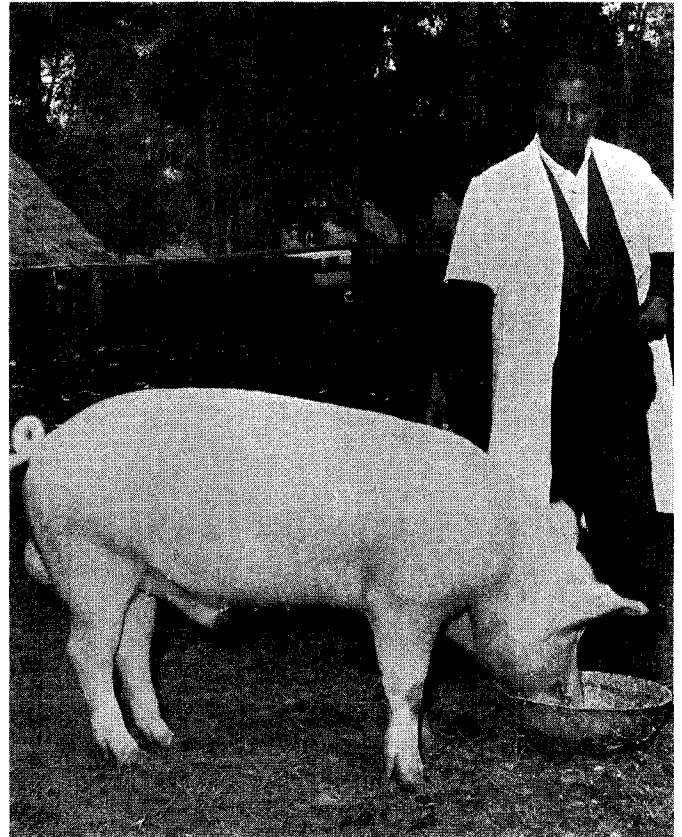


For the first time Europeans, Asians and Africans march together in the Kenya Regiment.

Long before the Royal of '61 opened, people doubted if it would compare favorably with its predecessors. Agriculture and livestock are the mainstays of Kenya's economy (38% of gross national product in 1960 excluding subsistence production), but the ravages of drought and army-worm have made 1961 a bad year. At the same time the country faced political and



The "best ever" Royal Show!!!
(Photos courtesy of Kenya Info. Services)



economic uncertainty. Most people feared the Royal Show would reflect the anxious times, and that there would be a decline in standards, size and attendance. Many thought the increasing speed of political development, with possible independence next year, spelled the end of the Royal as an institution of the Kenya farmer. It is the commercial interests which have been most affected by this decline, yet the trade section was larger, more imaginative and more impressive than ever before. An explanation for this seeming paradox was given by the President of the Nairobi Chamber of Commerce who said:

"Few of the trade exhibitors at the Royal come out on the right side of the ledger at the end of four days. But they do not think in terms of four days: they think in terms of the years ahead. They know that if Kenya is to prosper there must be a close liaison between farm, factory and commercial house. The wealth of Kenya is not created in the skyscrapers of Nairobi: it is wrested from the soil by the ceaseless endeavors of the farmers."

The opening of the show took place in a downpour which dampened most people's enthusiasm. As they sloshed about, one official had the humor to remark, "Well, at least it's laying the dust." The President of RASK opened the show in a damp vein by saying, "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, but the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference." The Governor, Sir Patrick Rennison, however, took a different course in his speech: "Governors come and go, but your Royal Show has gone on and, God willing, will go on for another and yet another sixty glorious years."

Kitty and I went the next day when the rain had abated. Although it was "Members Day" and the prices were correspondingly higher, it was jammed. The women wore hats and gloves and their best clothes, and even the men managed coats and ties (no small achievement in Kenya). A larger number of Africans attended than ever before, many brought by their employers as if on a company outing. Bars, an indispensable part of any public gathering in Kenya from the theater to the Royal Show, were doing a thriving business. Everyone was having a good time and showing it.

The show really had two parts: the trade and the livestock sections. The number and variety of trade exhibits indeed gave the impression of a vigorous economy. One company had imported a family of kangaroos from Australia, another had a real miniature steam-engine puffing up and down its tracks with innumerable packets of Rex cigarettes, and several firms had bands drawn from local nightclubs to entice potential customers.

Although the trade section was bigger and better than ever, livestock entries were down even though breeders were

assisted with the cost of transportation to and from the show. Fewer cattle, pigs and sheep were shown, although this year was the first time African breeders had entries in the cattle section. The horse section also had fewer entries, but this was made up by the enthusiasm of those who took part, and as always it was the most popular.

The most exciting part of the Royal was its Pageant (in which more than 1000 people took part) which paid tribute to Kenya's early settlers. It traced Kenya's progress from before the arrival of the first European settlers at the turn of the century to the present day. As one magazine pointed out, however, "it did not get around to telling the whole story--- the rise of African nationalistic aspirations, the increasing economic instability, Mau Mau, the land-grab threats, and the eventual exodus, by passenger liners and jet planes, although much of this would have to be anticipation". Nevertheless, it too made history in that for the first time European, Asian and African new recruits marched together in the Kenya Regiment.

In spite of its successes, many people felt there would never again be another like it. The spectre of uhuru (freedom) overshadowed the whole show. For many of the European settlers it was a time to mourn "the good old days" and the passing of white supremacy. Few of the oldtimers can see themselves playing a constructive role in an independent Kenya dominated by Africans, and every week one reads of a few more who have left, many unable even to sell their property. On the whole Kenyans aren't rich and all they have is locked up in their farms, and so their decisions to leave must reflect their utmost despair. On their part, Africans are taking an increased interest in such events and with the question of an East African federation being discussed increasingly, there is a good possibility the Royal Show may become East African.

Perhaps the Royal of '61 will be the last of its kind, and no doubt as Africans take a greater part as organizers and exhibitors, the pattern of future Royal Shows will change. Nevertheless, I'm sure the Royals will go on and on, regardless of politics and economics, if only because everyone enjoys them so much.

Sincerely yours,



Ian Michael Wright