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FIFTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

SECRETARY

OF THE

Massachusetts Board of Agriculture,

TOGETHER WITH

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

APPOINTED TO VISIT THE COUNTY SOCIETIES:

WITH AN APPENDIX

CONTAINING AN ABSTRACT OF THE

FINANCES OF THE COUNTY SOCIETIES

FOR

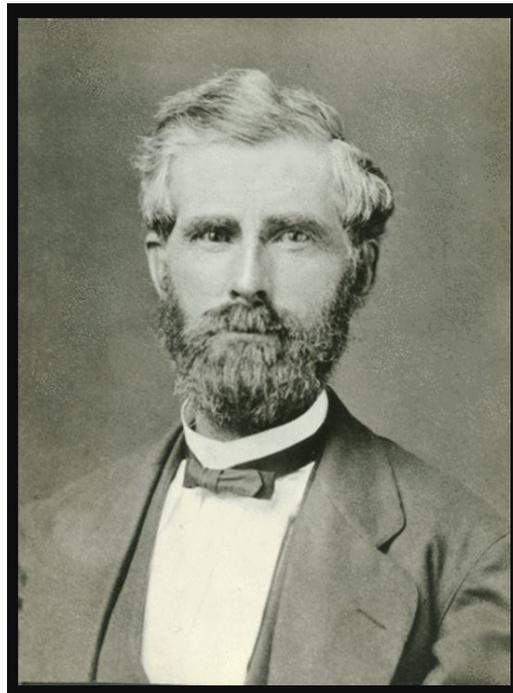
1867.

PUBLIC MEETING OF THE MASSACHUSETTS BOARD OF AGRICULTURE

The Fifteenth Annual Meeting of the State Board of Agriculture met “for lectures and discussions” in the Concord Town Hall from December 10-13, 1867. Thirty-three leading farmers from throughout the Commonwealth were chosen to attend by the many local Agricultural Societies. Three representatives were appointed by the Governor including Professor Louis Agassiz of Harvard College and four members were ex officio, including the President of the Massachusetts Agricultural College, Professor William S. Clark.

The following session took place on the evening of the first day of the meeting, Tuesday, December 10, 1867. The Annual Report states:

The Board met at 7 o'clock. The chair was occupied by the Hon. E.W. Bull who stated that President Clark, of the Agricultural College, who had been announced as the speaker for the evening, had been detained by his duties at the College, and that his place would be supplied by the Hon. Levi Stockbridge.



Levi Stockbridge, Hadley farmer, first employee and fifth President of Mass Aggie, as he appeared circa 1873

ADDRESS OF LEVI STOCKBRIDGE

Gentlemen of the Board, - I desire to ask your attention to the few remarks which I may make as a plea for the agriculture of Massachusetts, and for the agricultural education of the farmers of Massachusetts and the Massachusetts Agricultural College. You are by law the overseers of that institution. Being connected with it temporarily, as one of its officers, I have been upon the ground ever since the first blow was struck the present year towards putting up the buildings and getting the institution in order for the reception of students; and I have been, to say the least, a very attentive observer of all that has taken place there. I can, therefore, speak of the facts as many others, who are equally interested but who were not upon the ground, cannot speak.

In the first place, I find there is a great deal of ignorance in relation to the institution. Why, a man who has a son in the institution told me in this room, tonight, that he had hardly any idea that there was such an institution in the State, or that there was to be one, before his son started to go to Amherst. It is so, generally throughout the Commonwealth. The people have had no idea that we were really to have an Agricultural College, notwithstanding the talk there has been about it, and notwithstanding the money that has been appropriated for it. They have had the idea that there would be no college; that it was all talk, and nothing else.

Now, gentlemen, I can say that there is an Agricultural College in Massachusetts. In the first place, it is located, as you know in the town of Amherst. We have there, in my judgement, a beautiful farm for the institution, of 400 acres, finely located in the valley of the Connecticut, with a great variety of soil. We have alluvial soil, with clay underlying it; we have a soil of a lighter cast, with quartz underlying it; we have soil entirely free from stone, and soil like some of your Middlesex County farms which we have passed through today, covered with stone, and hard and difficult of cultivation.

The land is rolling, interspersed with brooks and streams; bounded on one side by quite a river, and there are numerous springs upon the land, giving us great water privileges. There will necessitate a large amount of under-draining. The soil is fertile – there is no mistake about that. It is well adapted to the growth of corn and rye. Wheat and tobacco (which is contraband so far as the farm is concerned) grow on that soil finely. The farm, although not very productive, is yet a farm which, on the whole, has never been run out or abused by over-cropping. Very few of those acres have been over-cropped, and are what we call exhausted land.

The trouble is, it has been neglected. It is covered with brush. Last spring there was a hedge about twelve feet wide all along the fenced part of the farm, giving it a very offensive aspect, which disappeared as if by magic, the present year. I say, therefore, we have got a farm, we have got a college, and we have the encouraging feeling that we may possibly succeed.



Massachusetts Agricultural College as it appeared in 1867

Another thing – which I should have said first – we are located in a spot entirely accessible to all God's creation. It has been said that you could not get to Amherst; or if you managed to get there, you could not get away. Now, we are within three-quarters of a mile of a railroad depot, at which six trains a day stop; so that we have abundant opportunity to go there and to get away. There is no trouble in getting to Amherst or in getting away.

I located myself upon the farm the first of April. At that time, we had no buildings; the first blow, in fact, had not been struck. We have erected the past season, in the first place, a large dormitory building, four stories high, 100 x 50.



The Old South College Dormitory

The lower story is divided into recitation-room, reading-room, and cabinet; the three upper stories are rooms for the students, of which we have twenty-four, designed for two students each; giving each two students a sitting-room or parlor, 15 x 16; each of them a fine bed-room; each of them a fine clothes-press or wardrobe. These are the accommodations we give our students.



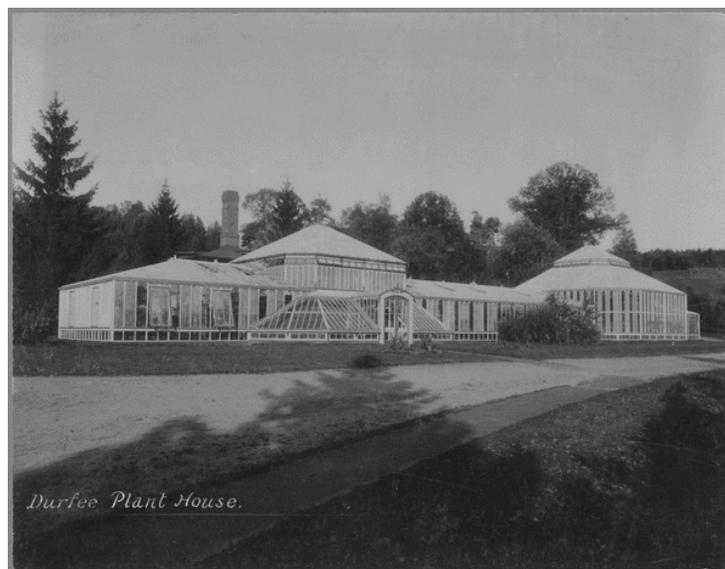
Sitting room or parlor in the Old South College Dormitory

We erected a laboratory, so-called, in which is to be placed the chemical apparatus of the professor of chemistry, and which is to be the working chemical-room. In the upper story, we have a dining-hall, 50 x 16, where it is proposed by the trustees of the institution, that all the boys shall take their meals, if they desire it.



The Chemistry Lab

We have erected a convenient botanical building, with a recitation-room for the class in botany, on the lower floor, and a specimen-room for the reception of all sorts of specimens in the hall above it. We have erected a large conservatory, 100 x 70, with propagating pits, and all the conveniences of the best modern houses.



The Durfee Plant House

These are the buildings which have been erected during the past year. You will see from what I have stated with reference to our dormitory building, that the trustees have laid a plan for a college of forty-eight students, and yet today, the college building is full. Our term commenced the 2nd of October, and we have a Freshmen class of forty-six, with the prospect of double the number for the next class. One of the rooms is occupied by a professor, so that we are now full.

The question is often asked, “*What are the terms of admission?*” The candidate is examined in the common English branches, reading, writing, spelling, geography and arithmetic, and we mean that the examination shall be thorough and exhaustive. We do not examine them in Latin or Greek, for those languages are not taught at the institution. We teach geometry, chemistry, physiology, and practical agriculture; and some of our students, have taken German.

The next question you will ask me is, “*What have the boys been doing in agriculture? What have the boys been taught?*” Before the school commenced, the plan was adopted that every young man who came there should be taught to work upon the land. Some, perhaps knew how to work, some did not; some had no sort of acquaintance with agricultural operations. The plan was adopted, I say, that every young man who came there should work upon the land six hours in a week; that the whole class should work, upon the land, as a part of their regular school education, two hours on Monday, two hours on Wednesday, and two on Friday. And then we held out the inducement, that if there were any young men in the Commonwealth who desired a first-rate intellectual education and thorough discipline (for that the trustees designed to give,) they would give them wages for just such an amount of labor as they could perform, without detriment to their studies. The consequence has been, that we have some twenty students who have been at work during the entire term for wages, from one up to four hours a day, besides their two hours work with the class every other day in the week.

Then the question comes, “*How do you make labor and study go together?*” I suppose that question will be asked me. If I should answer in the off-hand way I sometimes do, I should say, “*first-rate.*” I am ready to acknowledge, that before our students appeared there, I had many misgivings in relation to the question of labor. I knew the responsibility would fall upon me, and I dreaded to have the day come when I should have from thirty to fifty young men there, and be required every other day to take them upon the land, and make a business of teaching them to work – in the first place, planning the work; and, in the second place, seeing that they did the work like men, systematically and regularly. But there has been no trouble about it; it has come as a matter of course without any difficulty whatever.



“Well-dressed” Stockies working in the field

Of course, in these hours of labor, we are on discipline. It is regular business, as much as the inside work of the institution. At the appointed hour the roll is called, and every student is required to be there unless he has a good excuse, from sickness or some other cause. And I do not find them playing baby; I do not find them talking off; I do not find them trying to shirk the duty. One reason, I suppose, is this, that the best scholars in the school, those who regularly mark highest in their studies, are the very best men we have in our labor companies. They take hold, and then all the rest, as if were by their influence, follow.

“What have you set them about?” Well, they came at a very unpropitious time of the year. I can imagine that I could interest them if they came in April, when we were planting our gardens, and when everything was starting with the new life of spring; but they came in the fall, when our work was the hardest and least interesting. Now, I have put those boys upon the hardest work – upon everything that has to be done upon a farm. I have made no selection, taking that which would be the nicest or the easiest, but they have been called upon to do in these hours of labor, whatever there was to be done. They have husked all our corn, some 1,800 bushels; dug all our potatoes and all our root-crops; spread all our manure; and everything those boys did with the utmost cheerfulness and alacrity. They took hold and worked like men.

“When the crops were harvested, what next?” We had upon the farm some old orchards, whose day had gone by. The trees had become worthless, and the boys were set to work digging around them, digging up the roots, and taking the tree down, stem, root and branch. They have made a clean sweep of something like five acres, cutting up every tree in good shape. Then, as I have said, our land was covered with bushes, our pastures were overrun with brush. A large number of bush-cutters were purchased, and the boys were turned out and took out the bushes by the roots. They went into it with alacrity, and apparent pleasure, and something like nine acres have been cleared of every bush by the boys.

I can report, then, in relation to this matter of labor, that the system works well; there has been no difficulty whatever. Of course we have boys of different characters and different capacities. Some are lively, some are smart, and some are the other way; but as a whole – as a class – they have far exceeded our anticipations. No fault can be found with them. The thing is a perfect success. But “one swallow does not make a summer,” and one term cannot finally settle the question. I say that, for today it is settled. I find, on comparing the marks of the professor of agriculture with the marks of the professors in other branches, that the two correspond identically; that the boy who has a clean record with the professor of agriculture marks the highest in every other department; it is invariable.

Another question you will ask is, *“What have you taught the boys in relation to agriculture?”* So far as my teaching is concerned, I have taught them what the Board of Agriculture taught me. That I call pretty good teaching. Of course we had no text-books on agriculture there. In the next place, we had no system of agriculture there. I am sorry to say that here in Massachusetts today, although the Board of Agriculture has been at work for fifteen years, we have no system of agriculture – nothing that a man can teach a class of students and say, “This is the established, approved system of agriculture for Massachusetts.” We have no such thing.

Commencing with the soil, our course of instruction has been to give its origin; the manner in which it was prepared for the purposes of cropping; the material in the soils by which plant-food is formed; then the influences in the soil which go to make that raw material up into food for plants; then the manner in which the plants themselves take up and appropriate that food to their own uses, and form their bodies and their roots from it; next the effect of cropping upon the soil itself – what the process is, what the effect upon the soil is, and what the condition of the soil is after a course of cropping, running down to exhaustion; next the methods by which the fertility of the soil can be increased; or how, without manuring, the soil can be

restored from barrenness to fertility; next ploughing in green crops as one method, under-draining, irrigation, the use of muck, ploughing and stirring the soil, as sources of fertility; then animal manures, their character, their composition, how they act in the soil, chemically, mechanically, etc. That has been the course of instruction in the institution, and that is as far as we have got; and if I have learned anything, I think the young men have learned something in return, of agriculture, both theoretically and practically.

I must say to you, gentlemen, familiar as you are with my views in relation to an agricultural school in Massachusetts, that from my knowledge of the people of this State, I feel assured that the Massachusetts Agricultural College will be a perfect success. Yet I have no very great amount of confidence in the men who now have that institution in charge; but my confidence is based on the knowledge I have that there is a feeling abroad throughout the Commonwealth that such an institution is needed. The constant inquiry which is being made, and which is spreading and growing more and more, day by day, convinces me that the people of the Commonwealth have been educated by the Board of Agriculture up to the point that they feel the need of an institution to educate the young men of the Commonwealth for agricultural pursuits.

And here is my faith – not in the men who are there today, for they may make a failure of it; but in the people of the Commonwealth, and the felt need of the people of the Commonwealth for an institution of the kind. The men who are there today may fail of success, but Massachusetts will find men who will make a success of it; for those men feel that whenever the old Commonwealth wants men she will find them. True we have no books today such as that institution should have to instruct us in agriculture, but I have faith that somebody in Massachusetts will yet make the very book we need. There is no question about that. We have no system of agriculture to be taught there, but I have faith in the people of the old Commonwealth, or in some of the men of the old Commonwealth, that they will make a system of agriculture that shall be taught there, and which shall be just the system we need.

Then, I say, I have faith in the permanent success of that institution. I believe that an Agricultural College will succeed in Massachusetts if it fails in every other State in the Union; for there are elements of success in our State which do not exist anywhere else. First, because our soil and climate are such that, competing with the great West, we are from necessity driven to a more intelligent course of cultivation. That is one reason why an Agricultural College will succeed in Massachusetts.

Another reason is this; that this Board of Agriculture have been for fifteen long years or thereabouts at work to educate the people of the Commonwealth up to the point that they shall feel the need of a school of this kind. This college could not have been started twenty years ago with any prospect of success. Out of the desire of a few individuals for an Agricultural College grew the Board of Agriculture. That Board of Agriculture have been at work educating the people, and they now feel an interest in the school which will insure its perfect success.

Another thing. Through you, gentlemen, as the delegates of the agricultural societies of the State, the Massachusetts Agricultural College is linked to every farmer in the Commonwealth. Your societies will look to the Agricultural College eventually. You yourselves, while occupying the position you now do, and your successors after you, will look after the Agricultural College; and there will be a reciprocal influence from the college to the farmers, and from the farmers to the college, which will be highly advantageous, I trust, to both.

Professor Levi Stockbridge
Presented to the Board of Agriculture
December 10, 1867
Concord, MA