

The Visitor

Devoted to the Interests of Agricultural Education in Minnesota Schools

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REFLECTIONS AND PROJECTIONS

Milo J. Peterson, Professor
Agricultural Education

Vol. I, No. 1 of The Visitor published a masthead that read "Devoted to the Interests of Agriculture, Manual Training and Home Economics in Minnesota High Schools." Since that time (January 1914) The Visitor has held steadfast to that mission. As far as can be determined it is the oldest professional publication in continuous service to agricultural education.

To be sure, there have been changes. In Vol. IIV, No. 1 of September 1916 "Home Economics" was deleted from the masthead. Items and articles dealing with Home Economics continued to appear nonetheless. In September 1918 The Visitor format changed from tabloid size 12 x 18 to a 6 x 9 bulletin. In 1920 "Manual Training" was dropped from the masthead and the present "Devoted to the Interest of Agricultural Education in Minnesota Schools" was adopted.

The Visitor mirrors the philosophy, trends and developments in vocational agriculture. There follows a few selected excerpts from previous issues which reflect vocational agriculture in Minnesota.

From Vol. I, No. 3, March 1914

"An Agricultural Education Club has been formed at The College of Agriculture. Students and members of the faculty interested in teaching of secondary and elementary school agriculture are eligible to membership."

Comment: The AgEd Club has been in continuous operation for 62 years. It is among the oldest, if not the oldest, professional student organization in the University.

From Vol. I, No. 4, April 1914

"The Minnesota Association of High School Agriculture Instructors held its

fourth annual meeting at The College of Agriculture on March 27 and 28 . . . Seventy-seven of the one hundred thirty-six instructors were in attendance . . ."

Comment: Among the officers elected were A. M. Field, Northfield, as President and A. J. Olson, Waseca, as Secretary. Field later went on to become a national leader in agricultural education and head of the department at the University of Minnesota. A. J. Olson became a leader in the Farm Bureau and served on the University Board of Regents.

Many people assume that vocational agriculture had its origin with passage of the Smith-Hughes Act in 1917. As a matter of fact, Minnesota had a vigorous program in 1910 and by the time of the Smith-Hughes Act there were one hundred sixty agriculture instructors in the State. The program suffered a severe disruption following passage of Federal legislation as Minnesota made the required adjustments to comply with requirements of the Act to qualify for Federal subsidy. It was several years before Minnesota could again boast of one hundred sixty agriculture departments.

From Vol. II, No. 1, September 1914

"When the ten agricultural high schools known as Putnam schools were established (1909) they began the practice of making an exhibit at the State Fair, and this has been continued until the present time. Three years ago (1911) the educational exhibit was made a regular department of the State Fair and the old Manufactures building was set aside for its use. The department is very well housed. Each school is given a booth 18 by 19 feet, with walls one and one-half feet high which provides ample space for putting up an attractive and comprehensive exhibit of the various lines of work done in a school.

The exhibit at the State Fair of 1914 was by far the best ever made. Eleven high schools made displays of their work and they proved conclusively to the Fair visitor that they are doing much to educate the boys and girls in their schools

along practical lines. Their exhibit, together with that made by the consolidated and rural schools won much praise and commendation. The opinion was freely expressed by those competent to judge that no other state in the Union could duplicate the display . . ."

Comment: Sixty-seven years ago vocational agriculture began to be visible at the great Minnesota State Fair. Since then this visibility has been greatly magnified. The construction of a new Education Building was a milestone. Similarly the FFA livestock and crops shows may legitimately be billed as the best and biggest in the Country. More important is the effective use of State Fair opportunities to provide learning experiences for students and to project the image of vocational agriculture to the million plus people who currently visit the Fair.

From Vol. II, No. 2, October 1914

"Agriculture is so diversified in different parts of the State that a uniform and rigid course of study for all high schools is not desirable. However, the variation found in the schools is much greater than the diversity of agricultural interest warrants. The factors causing these variations are not always entitled to the amount of influence in determining the course that they are allowed to exert.

For example: There is much evidence to show that certain high school courses are one-sided because the teacher chanced to take special work in a certain subject during his college course, even though such emphasis as he places upon that subject is not warranted either by local or general agricultural conditions. Superintendents and agricultural instructors should endeavor to formulate well-balanced courses for the high schools in which they are employed . . . While all schools should not have the same course, each school should have a well-planned coherent course with consistent sequences and this course should be carefully followed."

Comment: The foregoing excerpt must ring a familiar bell with teachers, supervisors and teacher educators. In retrospect, the curriculum problems of 1914 may seem easily solved by the practitioners of 1976. In perspective, however,

the setting in 1914 had much in common with 1976. Agriculture, then as now, was dynamic, changing and constantly presenting new challenges. Teachers, supervisors and teacher educators, then as now, were doing their best to develop programs to meet the needs of people engaged in agriculture. For us, in the here and now, the lesson to be learned is that while the philosophy, principles and basic objectives remain unchanged over the years, the practices and procedures by which the philosophy is fulfilled must constantly be evaluated, updated and adapted to changing conditions.

From Vol. IV, No. 2, October 1916

"The Visitor publishes this month a report by W. L. Oswald, in charge of the seed laboratory, University Farm, showing the results of an investigation of seed testing done by high school agriculture instructors. The report helps to emphasize the necessity for instructors trained outside of the state to familiarize themselves with Minnesota methods and Minnesota conditions. A study of the returns to Professor Oswald by individuals shows that practically the only ones to make accurate estimates of purity of the samples sent out were those who were specially trained in seed analysis by the course especially designed to prepare for such work offered in the University of Minnesota and required for graduation from the divisions of Agricultural Education and Agronomy and Farm Management of The College of Agriculture."

Comment: The problem outlined above has been and continues to be of significance. During the 1950's and early 60's the shortage of agriculture instructors was less severe in neighboring states than in Minnesota. In addition, Minnesota's program and salary schedule were attractive. Then too, there were annually a number of Minnesota-born students attending border state institutions, but with the goal of returning to Minnesota to teach agriculture. Given this situation it was possible for the State Supervisor of Agricultural Education (the late G.R. Cochran) and the Department of Agricultural Education to "strongly recommend" to teachers trained outside Minnesota that they attend a summer session at the Uni-

versity before beginning a career as a "Minnesota Ag Man." This system proved to be extremely effective and mutually beneficial. As the supply of agricultural instructors continued to fall behind the demand and as the Minnesota Vo-Ag Adult Farm Business Management Education program continued to demonstrate its worth such a procedure was no longer feasible. Minnesota school administrators were literally "beating the bushes" for instructors. This finally led to the present situation where a constant file of about sixty teachers who are provisionally certified is being maintained. The provisionally certified teachers are people with a degree in some field of technical agriculture, but lacking the professional agricultural education degree requirements. They are employed as teachers on the condition they pursue a program leading to full certification. As of this writing the provisional certificate program seems to be the most expedient way to meet a critical situation. It is devoutly to be hoped that an adequate supply of fully qualified teachers will be available in the not too distant future.

From Vol. IV, No. 4, December 1916

"The agricultural extension division is issuing a new edition of a farmer's account book. High school agriculturists who wish to encourage the keeping of farm records may secure a limited number of these books for the use of cooperating farmers, provided the high school agriculturist will furnish the necessary supervision. Where the book is used as a home project for students living on farms, the use of this book will be regarded as an extension activity and it will be furnished free. Where the book is used as a laboratory guide a small charge will be made. Before the books are furnished, high school agriculturists are required to sign a project agreement outlining the nature of the cooperation between the high school and the extension division. Specimen copy of the account book and copy of the project agreement may be had upon application to the Division of Agricultural Extension, University Farm, St. Paul."

Comment: This project never was a widespread success for several reasons. No follow-up was provided. Analysis and interpretation was not envisioned as an integral part of the instruction. Teachers were not prepared for either analyzing the records or interpreting the results to farmers. Undue attention was given to identifying the program as an "extension" activity which made it difficult for teachers to identify with it as an integral part of their school's program. Nevertheless, it was a definite plus in the enrichment of the vocational agriculture program. It was not until 1952, however, that any real progress was made to overcome the deficiencies. Among the factors that brought the concept of farm business management teaching to fruition were (1) a deliberate provision for preparing teachers to initiate and carry on such an instructional program for farm operators, (2) a specific arrangement for an analysis of the records and interpretation to individual farm operators, (3) support of the State Department of Education in incorporating the program as an integral and important segment of the Minnesota vocational agriculture education offering. As a result some seven thousand farm account books are expected to be analyzed during the current year. This has truly become a highly significant aspect of vocational agriculture with an impact economically as well as educationally.

From Vol. IV, No. 5, January 1917

"The recently organized Farm Boy Cavaliers should appeal especially to high school agriculture instructors who have had to deal with rural schools and rural boy problems. The Farm Boy Cavaliers is a non-military organization of boys mounted on horses. It has for its chief aims: Service, honor, thrift and loyalty. Its work is on the farm and in community betterment. The three ranks of the order are page, esquire and knight. All Cavaliers enter as pages and pass on to the higher ranks by obtaining achievement badges. An achievement badge may be earned by certain definite work such as: (Editor's Note: Here the article lists 43 areas in which achievement badges may be earned.

These include all manner of agricultural activity from entomology to photography to sausage making to soldering to horsemanship and 38 others.)

Boys . . . who are able to mount a horse from the ground and to ride at a gallop may join the organization . . . Girls are included in the Farm Boy Cavaliers in Home Cavaliers . . . girls learn to ride as soon as possible after becoming members. They take the same pledge, subscribe to the same principles, give the same salute and are entitled to equal franchise . . ."

Comment: Few, if any, Visitor readers will remember the Farm Boy Cavaliers. The excerpt is included here because the organization was a forerunner of the FFA. Looking for an organization that would inspire rural youth and provide them with much needed leadership Mr. D. D. Mayne conceived of the idea of the Farm Boy Cavaliers patterned more or less after the Knights of the Round Table. Thus a seed was planted that would contribute to the formation in Virginia some ten years later as the Future Farmers of America. Readers wishing more information on this significant leadership example in agricultural education are referred to Agnes Mueller's book, That Inspiring Past, which chronicles the history of The Future Farmers of America in Minnesota.

From Vol. VI, No. 1, September 1918

"Perhaps I am beginning work at a new place this fall, or perhaps I am not new to my present location. Have I already taken stock of those things with which I have to work? Do I know every book, chart and piece of apparatus available for use? Have I taken them from their resting place and removed the dust, placed them in order and made a mental note of various occasions on which to use them? Have I made use of leaves, plants, stocks of corn and other illustrative material on every occasion possible? When I taught

this lesson on the botany of the corn plant did I go into the field and examine some plants or have several plants in front of the class or was I "too busy" for this? Have I given the pupils a chance to learn with the hands as well as with the eye? Do I make the greatest possible use of the blackboard? Do the pupils get a chance to express themselves at the blackboard? Have I started a collection of diseased plants and insects? Have I a hectograph, duplicator, mimeograph or some other device for making copies of outlines, exercises and experiments to place in the pupils hands? If not, why not?"

Comment: The questions posed to teachers of agriculture 58 years ago at the beginning of a school year are as appropriate now as they were then. With a few changes due to advances in technology they represent the kind of questions all teachers should use as a checklist before take-off into a new year.

From Vol. XX, No. 1, September 1932

"If I were starting a new school year: I would decide definitely to do my work better.

I would try to recognize my points of weakness and invent ways of making improvements.

I would fall in love with my job and consider it the greatest job in the world.

I would learn how to get real joy and personal satisfaction in my work.

I would expect some grief and disappointments but I would learn to capitalize on these as bases for new courage and greater effort.

I would learn to smile in the face of discouragement.

I would be active in all worthwhile community improvement activities.

I would try to realize that dreams are useless unless they find expression in realities.

I would realize there is no substitute for hard work.

I would recognize the fact that it is the quality of our work that counts.

I would not select activities on the basis of selfish interest or from selfish motives.

I would aim at progress — not perfection.

I would have faith in myself, in my work, my fellow-beings and in the possibilities of the future.

I would not leave for tomorrow what should be done today.

I would do more than is expected of me and I should expect some of my reward in heaven.

I would cooperate with others in worthwhile activities.

I would try to make good. Excuses are not a product of effort.

I would become well acquainted with the boys and share their joys and troubles.

I would cultivate the personal friendship of the parents.

I would be loyal to the school and its traditions.

I would try to master the technique of getting along well with people.

I would try to be honest and fair in my dealings with others.

I would make and cultivate new friendships with worthwhile people.

I would cultivate wholesome, altruistic attitudes toward life and my fellow-beings.

I would base my content selection on the recognized needs of the students.

I would set up definite objectives for each unit of work and for each lesson.

I would learn to know my community thoroughly.

I would make good assignments.

I would make special effort to develop a good technique for individualizing my teaching procedures.

I would make careful daily preparation for my teaching.

I would develop a strong and effective planning of my work.

I would do everything possible to keep in good health.

I would find some time each day for wholesome recreation. Every teacher should have a hobby.

I would begin a definite, systematic plan of saving a part of each month's salary.

I would recognize the fact that the seat of good teaching is in the mind. To be good teachers we must think good teaching.

I would get my reports in on time.

I would read some good professional books and magazines, I would keep growing.

I would cultivate the habit of doing some reading outside of my field of professional and technical interest.

I would begin to plan for a vacation for next summer.

After I have mastered most of the above, I would try to think of other items to add. In this way I would keep on growing and going up because most of the growth would be at the top."

Comment: Dr. A. M. Field said it all 44 years ago.

Projections

The Visitor is truly a treasure lode of history, philosophy and challenge. If there is anything to be gained from this brief sampling of the wisdom to be mined from past issues of The Visitor it is that our readers will re-read and re-energize themselves for the tasks that lie before us. The past is prologue to the future. It is not too much to project that The Visitors of the future will continue to contribute to agricultural education in the same measure as in the past.

A TIP OF THE HAT

To Rodger Edward Palmer:

At the age of thirty-eight years and two weeks to the day Rodger Palmer will receive his diploma granting him the highest earned degree Academia has to offer, the Doctorate of Philosophy. Born on the family farm near Frazee, Minnesota, Rodger graduated from Frazee high school as salutorian in 1956. His University career was interrupted by a three year tour of duty in the U.S. Army Signal Corp. Following this he farmed for two years with his father before graduating in Agricultural Education from the University of Minnesota in 1964. During his undergraduate career Rodger worked for the Pinkerton Detective Agency. There followed four years as vocational agriculture instructor at Pine City during which time he initiated the adult farm management program. Then in 1968 Rodger began a significant tour of duty as Vocational Agriculture Coordinator at the Duluth Area Vocational Technical Institute. In 1974 Rodger returned to the campus as an EPDA Fellow, one of eight Minnesotans so selected. Rodger was fortunate to get in on the ground floor of The Small Business Management Project. The Visitor congratulates Rodger Palmer and anticipates for him a career of distinguished service.

To Peter Merle Probasco:

Hillman, Minnesota, population 48 in 1933 increased to 49 with the arrival of Pete Probasco. Unfortunately there is not available record of his activities and accomplishments. However, enough is at hand to trace Peter from graduation from Brainerd high school to completion of his Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Education from the University of Minnesota in 1956. Following a tour of duty in military service Peter taught vocational agriculture at Two Harbors and Thief River Falls, Minnesota. He served as vocational agriculture coordinator for the Thief River Falls Area Vocational Technical Institute until 1966. For the past ten years he has served as Agricultural Agent and later as Program Leader, Resource Development and Management, in the

Cooperative Extension Service of Alaska. Pete Probasco, after stellar service in the Upper One, joins Rodger Palmer as the latest additions to the roster for fifty-six individuals completing a Ph.D. Program in agricultural education at the University of Minnesota. The Visitor congratulates Pete Probasco and looks forward to his continued service to the people and the agriculture of the Upper One.

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THE STAFF

GEORGE COPA	ROLAND L. PETERSON
GORDON SWANSON	W. FORREST BEAR
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