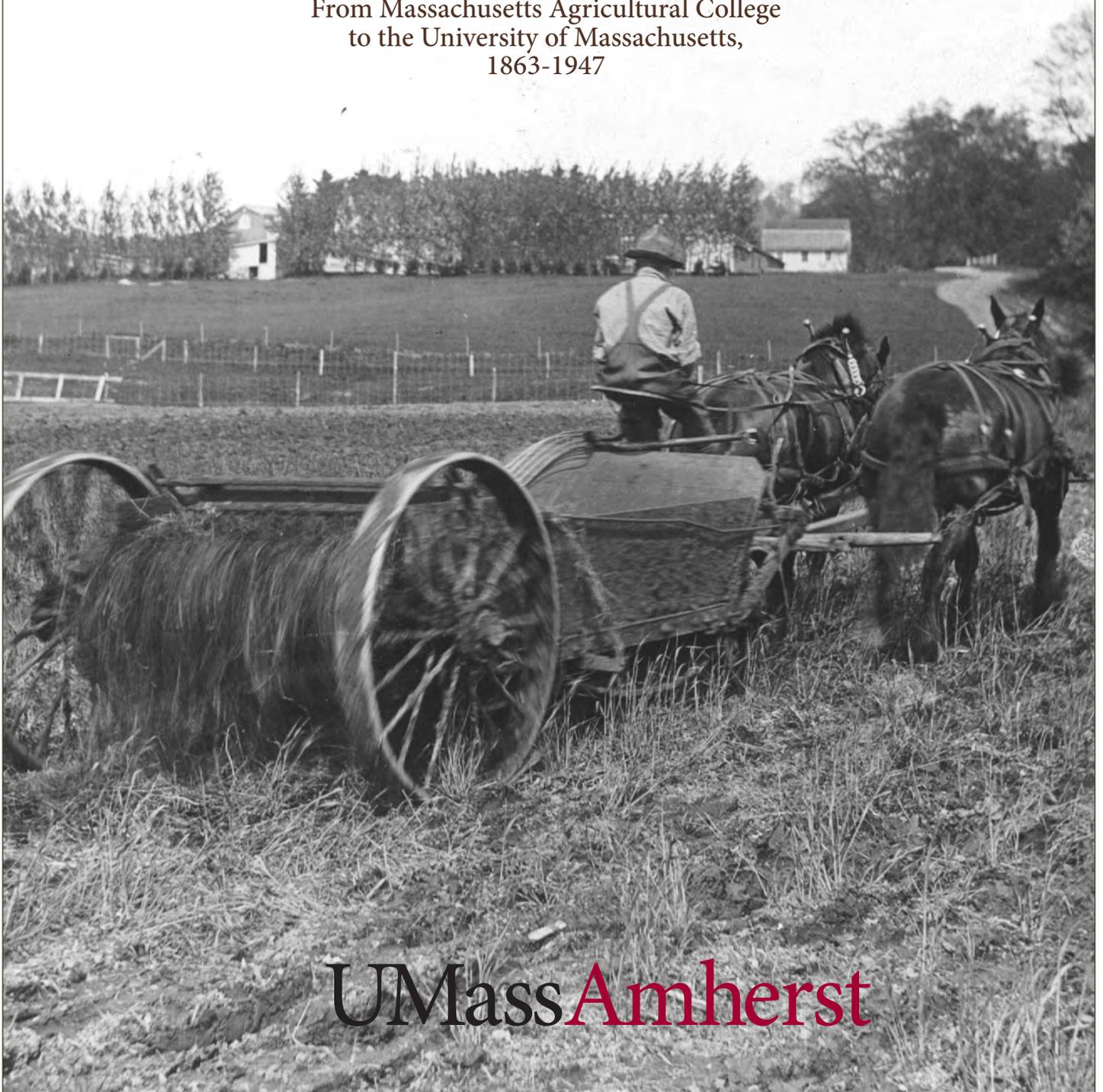


Cultivating Agricultural Education in Amherst



From Massachusetts Agricultural College
to the University of Massachusetts,
1863-1947



UMass **Amherst**

“Equality, Progress, and the Dignity of Labor”

Henry Flagg French



As early as the 1820s, a small but influential group of men, scattered from Boston to the Berkshires, began to preach the gospel of scientific agriculture. They were well aware that the growing network of canals (soon to be followed by the railroads) was bringing New England into competition with the rich farm lands of trans-Appalachian America.

Levi Stockbridge, a future president of the Massachusetts Agricultural College, asked how the “hard, rocky old fields of New England could hope to compete with “the cheap, fertile lands of the West and far West?” “In this unequal competition,” he declared, “we must go down, unless we can bring to our aide all the skill, power, and efficiency which education, culture, and scientific attainments can give.” And so various proposals were advanced to provide a higher education for the sons of New England farmers—an education which would be liberal and enlightening, but above all, eminently practical.

These agricultural enthusiasts met, unfortunately, with persistent skepticism both from the state legislature and from the farmers themselves. The experiment might have foundered without the efforts of Vermont Congressman Justin Morrill. In 1858 he submitted a bill which would

donate a portion of federal lands for the endowment of an agricultural college in each state. This federal support finally prompted the General Court, in 1862, to establish the Massachusetts Agricultural College.



Henry Flagg French, the first president of Massachusetts Agricultural College, was a radical agrarian. “Wealth and education,” he argued, “monopolized by any class..., will draw to that class the political control of that country.” French viewed public education as a means to advance democracy. “Equality in education,” he wrote, “in wealth, in power, so far as God has permitted, is the key-stone of the arch of liberty, which our fathers established.” The new college, he hoped, would help to “... recast society into a system of equality... by raising all, through education, to the full dignity of free men.”

After considering several locations, the college board of trustees purchased 400 acres of rather neglected farmland north of the village of Amherst.

Judge Henry Flagg French of New Hampshire, an avid student of scientific farming and the father of sculptor Daniel Chester French, was appointed the first president. French worked hard to design a campus that would reflect the agrarian mission of the Massachusetts Agricultural College. In 1865 he consulted Frederick Law Olmsted, the celebrated landscape architect, who suggested that the students be housed in cottages adorned with rustic arbors, trellises, dovecotes, and croquet greens.

The board of trustees rejected these arcadian visions and decided to house the students instead in a four-story brick structure located on the site of the present South College. A frustrated French tendered his resignation and, in 1866, left his residence in the old (1728) Boltwood House, never having seen a student. The future of the new college seemed bleak.



Old South College, the first building constructed at Massachusetts Agricultural College, was completed in 1867. It housed dormitory rooms, classrooms, and some administrative offices until it burned to the ground in 1885. The present South College was built on the site.



The campus as it appeared in the late 1860s. Old South College is on the left. At right is College Hall, a wooden structure that contained the chemistry laboratory and the assembly hall. Between the two is North College, where administrative offices and additional dormitory rooms were located. It remained a campus landmark until it was destroyed in 1955 to make way for Machmer Hall.



The location of the new college was the first problem faced by the board of trustees. Lexington, Springfield, Chicopee, Northampton, and Amherst vied with each other to be the chosen site. The trustees finally decided upon Amherst when its citizens, led by William S. Clark, a future president, and Edward Dickinson, father of Emily Dickinson, levied a tax to pay for college buildings. Furthermore, the trustees reported, Amherst was a place where “honest men can thrive by honest labor on the land, instead of seeing agriculture as in some parts of the state, despised by the poor and the expensive pastime of the rich.”



“Boys, Be Ambitious!”

William Smith Clark, Sapporo, Japan 1876



The ebbing fortunes of the college were dramatically revived when the flamboyant, charismatic Colonel William S. Clark became its third president in 1868. Born in nearby Ashfield, the German-educated Clark did everything in his power to put the new college on the map. Under his enthusiastic leadership, four buildings rose up among the old apple orchards, hedgerows, and untended fields. Guided by his slogan—“Do it!”—Colonel Clark quickly became the acknowledged hero of the ninety-six young men at the college. Anxious to establish the reputation of his “bucolics” among the older colleges, he encouraged the students to establish a rowing club. In 1871, the “College Navy” entered the first American intercollegiate regatta, which was held at Holyoke’s Ingleside Hotel on the Connecticut River. Competing against Brown and



William Smith Clark, third president of Massachusetts Agricultural College—entrepreneur, showman, visionary. Clark’s colorful personality and vigorous leadership gave the struggling college a much needed boost.

Harvard, the “Aggies,” “with magnificent ease,” came in two minutes ahead of the second-place team, winning national acclaim for their brand-new institution.

President Clark tried publicizing the college in other dramatic ways. One of the most notorious was his “giant squash experiment.” He had a large squash placed in a metal harness that was intended to measure the expansive force of its growth. The pressure exerted by the harnessed squash was apparently sufficient to counterbalance a long beam on which Clark had suspended nearly two and a half tons of anvils,

bricks, and iron weights. One can imagine the impression this made on the local farmers, already suspicious of the value of “academic agriculture.”

In the first regatta of the National Rowing Association, the “Mass Aggie” crew beat Harvard and Brown by an unprecedented 14 lengths on July 21, 1871. The victory caused a national sensation and was characterized in countless editorials as the triumph of rustic Davids over privileged, city-bred Goliaths. The event helped discredit current theories of “Brahmin caste” superiority and opened up intercollegiate sports to schools beyond the Ivy League.



Colonel Clark's enthusiasm for scientific agriculture made him an international figure. In 1876-77 he took a leave of absence in order to help establish the Imperial College of Agriculture (now Hokkaido University) in Sapporo, Japan. The fruitful relationship between Hokkaido and the University of Massachusetts endures to the present day. Visiting students from Hokkaido still wish to see Clark's grave in Amherst. Japanese



trees and shrubs descended from the seedlings which Clark brought back with him are still flourishing all over the campus.

In these early, precarious years of the Massachusetts Agricultural

College, the ambi-

tions of the visionary Clark were tempered by the practicality and gentle humanity of the college's first professor of agriculture, Levi Stockbridge. A self-educated farmer from Hadley, Stockbridge had a genius for experimental research. His work on crop fertilization stressed the nutritional needs of specific crops rather than general soil fertilization. With the help of his former pupil, William Bowker, he successfully



Levi Stockbridge was one of the earliest supporters of Massachusetts Agricultural College. A successful New England farmer, he had little confidence in "textbook agriculture" and valued, instead, practical experience and hard work. As a member of the General Court, the State Agricultural Board, and a "Greenback" candidate for Congress, he championed farmers' interests. Founder of the college's agricultural program, he served a brief tenure as president beginning in 1880, restoring public and legislative confidence in a time of crisis.

marketed the "Stockbridge Manures," investing nearly all the profits into college. As M.A.C. president in 1882, he obtained funding



William Bowker

from the Legislature for an Agricultural Experiment Station to be established on campus. Working together with the college's brilliant new German professor of chemistry, Charles Goessmann, Stockbridge was the person who, more than anyone else, convinced

the region's farmers and the state legislature that the new agricultural College had something significant to offer.



“Old Aggie”



Levi Stockbridge not only rekindled public confidence in “Mass Aggie,” but he also inaugurated a building program which, by 1890, left an architectural legacy that still endures—South College, with its profusion of odd peaks and gables, the fine Gothic chapel constructed with Pelham granite, the President’s (now the Chancellor’s) House, and the East and West Experiment Stations. In 1892, the finishing touch was added to the old campus when a small brook was dammed up to create the College Pond.

President Stockbridge was a radical agrarian who believed that the farmer must form “protective unions and granges” to ensure that he receive “an equitable portion of the value he creates.” Like the other founding fathers of Massachusetts Agricultural College, Stockbridge adhered to the Jeffersonian vision of a republic which rested



Henry Hills Goodell, president from 1886 until 1905, brought a period of stability and growth to Massachusetts Agricultural College. In addition to his administrative duties, he taught numerous and varied courses, supervised physical education and campaigned for expanded library facilities.

on a virtuous, enlightened, independent yeomanry. During the late nineteenth century, Dr. Charles S. Walker, college chaplain and professor of Moral Science, urged the graduates to “Make farm life so much more desirable than the strife and struggle of the city’s street that the tenement home and the saloon shall be deserted, and men, women, and children shall hasten to enjoy real existence in the wholesome contact with nature and with nature’s God.”

The guiding spirit of “Mass Aggie” from 1886 until his

death in 1905 was President Henry Hills Goodell. A modern language scholar, Goodell was converted to the cause of scientific agriculture by William Clark in 1867. From that point on, he devoted his life to M.A.C., serving in every imaginable capacity—professor of French and English Literature, leader in gymnastics and military



drill, dormitory supervisor (he was physically tough), director of the Hatch Experiment Station, state representative from the Fourth Hampshire District, librarian (his real passion), faculty secretary, and president. Stern, compassionate, literate, Goodell significantly expanded the academic scope of the college, determined, as he put it, that “Culture and refinement shall flourish in the homes of the masses as well as in the stately mansions of the classes.”

During Henry Goodell’s long presidency, many of the traditions that shaped “Old Aggie” for so long became firmly established. The student population grew slowly from 123 in 1872 to 250 by 1904. The student body was divided, as usual, between serious scholars and rowdy hellraisers. The Washington Irving Literary Society might have their meetings interrupted by a rock thrown through the window. The Aggies organized secret societies such as Q.T.V., played baseball and football, dug potatoes in the fields, attended (or evaded) military drills, went to plays mounted by the Roister-Doisters, and occasionally went on strike. Classes challenged each other in contests for temporary possession of some object—these brawls were politely called rushes. Some of the “class warfare” was eventually channeled into less destructive forms such as the freshman sophomore rope pull, held at the campus pond. Finally, despite male student



opposition, women began to be admitted to the college in the 1890s. By 1905,



enough female students were present to warrant special dormitory accommodations in Draper Hall, the new dining commons. The increasing presence of women, particularly after World War I, seemed to modify this somewhat rough-edged character of student life at “Mass Aggie.”

Henry Goodell was succeeded in 1905 by the last of the ardent agriculturalists, younger Kenyon Butterfield of Michigan. He quickly introduced extension courses for area farmers and



Kenyon Butterfield

began a practical two-year program in agriculture which, in 1928, was institutionalized as the Stockbridge School. Butterfield revamped the curriculum to include courses with titles such as “Agricultural Economics,” “Rural Home Life,” “Rural Journalism,” and Jour-

nalism,” and even “Rural Sociology.” Frustrated by the increasingly urban-industrial character of the Massachusetts economy, Butterfield returned to Michigan in 1924, and “Mass Aggie” began its slow, halting, but irresistible drift toward a broad-based liberal arts curriculum. The agricultural renaissance which Butterfield sought to promote was never to be.

The College at a Crossroads



During the late 1920s, there was increasing pressure from students and alumni to broaden the scope of the college beyond the study of scientific agriculture. In the spring of 1929, a group of students (one among them was Frederick S. Troy, later a founder of the *Massachusetts Review*) formed the Agitation Committee to persuade the trustees that “Mass Aggie” should become a state college or even a university. The General Court responded to the growing pressure and, in 1931, passed a bill which changed the name of the institution to Massachusetts State College.

No major restructuring of the college occurred in the wake of the name change. M.S.C. was launched at the outset of the Great Depression and the college had to struggle just to hold its own. Led by the energetic professor Marshall O. Lanphear, the faculty pushed for the creation of strong divisions in the humanities and the social sciences. Not until 1938, however, was the first A.B. degree awarded and a Division of Liberal

Arts created. Increasing demand for admissions continued despite the depression, but the campus facilities grew slowly. President Hugh Baker had to rely on the enterprise of alumni such as Alden Brett ('12), who created a private building association to underwrite the construction of dormitories.

Thanks to Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal legislation, the college also received help from the federal

government. The much-needed Goodell Library was constructed primarily by funds obtained from the Public Works Administration.

Early in 1941, with an enrollment of 1700 and hundreds more clamoring for admission, President Baker declared in his annual report that the responsibilities of Massachusetts State Col-

lege went “beyond those who live on the land... to all the people of the state.” The outbreak of World War II dramatically halted all plans for expansion, yet the impact of the war would profoundly alter the character of the college. As more opportunities opened up for women in the work force, women began to move into the curricular mainstream. The greatest pressure for change at the old college, however, was generated by the passage by Congress of the “G.I. Bill” on June 22,



Class Day, 1931, the year Massachusetts Agricultural College became Massachusetts State College.



Class in practical teacher training, 1920s.

1944, opening the doors of the college for thousands of young men.

The college tried desperately to respond to the new pressure for admissions. The campus soon became a maze of wooden classroom annexes and wooden residential units such as Commonwealth Circle and Federal Circle. Perhaps the most imaginative response was the decision to open a branch of the college at Fort Devens, a successful experiment

which lasted from 1946 to 1949. Agitation for a university now came not only from a students, but from organized labor, the Grange, the



Market Gardening Class, 1920s.



President Hugh Potter Baker, in front of dorm construction, 1940s.

American Legion, and the V.F.W. Senator Ralph C. Mahar championed the cause in the General Court, and his bill creating the University of Massachusetts was passed and signed into law by Governor Robert Bradford on May 6, 1947.