

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY



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ON THE COVER: *The Pioneer and Democrat* office, as it looked between 1854 and 1857. It stood on the corner of Third and Jackson Streets.

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Corn-busking and Sweeping Out

1901 Graduate Recalls Early Years of St. Paul Campus

By Coates P. Bull

THE STORY of the early years of the University of Minnesota's St. Paul campus, as I remember them, begins long before the founding of the institution that now is one of the country's leading centers of agriculture, experimentation and education.

My father, James A. Bull, had come to Minnesota in March of 1858. He farmed 120 acres at what is now the corner of Fiftieth Street and France Avenue in Edina, and another forty acres east of France Avenue in what is now southwest Minneapolis.

Father was the first Master of the Minnehaha Grange Number 398. The Grange was much concerned with education for farm boys. During the late 1870's and early 1880's, he worked and dreamed for the day when farmers and farm boys could have an agricultural education, comparable to high school for city boys.

IN THE 1880's, the State Grange appointed a three-man committee consisting of W. S. Chowen of the Minnetonka Grange, John D. Scofield of the Bloomington Grange and Father, representing the Minnehaha Grange. They were to work for the establishment of a school of agriculture and to set up an experimental farm.

With the cooperation of Dr. David L. Kiehle, state superintendent of public instruction; Professor Edward D. Porter, director of the Minnesota Experiment Station which already had been established; Cyrus Northrup, president of the University of Minnesota, and S. M. Owen, editor-owner

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Coates Bull will be 94 years old this year and has lived in the same house at 2137 Commonwealth Avenue, St. Paul, since 1904. He resigned from the University of Minnesota in 1919 to organize a seed and grain business in Worthington, Minnesota. In 1921, he joined the state department of agriculture as a special assistant in charge of weed and seed control and inspection. He retired in 1943. He is a charter member and a past president of the Ramsey County Historical Society.



Coates P. Bull in 1898. Pictures on these pages are from author's collection, now owned by the Ramsey County Historical Society.

of *Farm Stock and Home*, they took steps to get the State Legislature to appropriate funds for a building at the State Experiment Station, or the University Farm, as it then was called.

The three-man committee of the Grange spent many hours talking to legislators about the establishment of an agricultural school in the state. They paid the expenses of their efforts out of their own pockets. In 1887, after the men had worked for years, the head of the state senate's finance committee said, "Let's give the blankety-blank old farmers \$25,000 and that will be the last we will hear from them." The resulting act stipulated that the University's Board of Regents act as "guardian angels" for the establishment of an agricultural school.

THE OLD Home Building to house the newly authorized School of Agriculture,



was built in 1887-1888. It provided quarters for the principal, W. W. Pendergast; the assistant principal, H. W. Brewster, and his wife, who was the librarian, and dormitories for the students. This building also included classrooms, an assembly room, a reading room, a kitchen and a dining room, but no indoor plumbing.

Little progress was made in adding to the faculty until the federal government passed the Hatch Act on May 7, 1887. This gave each state \$15,000 a year with which to conduct agricultural experiments. The University's Board of Regents complied with the act and in 1888, after receiving its appropriation, began hiring faculty members.

The question as to who would teach the subjects the farm boys would need, such as agriculture, horticulture, dairying and control of livestock diseases, was solved when the Experiment Station chiefs became the mainstays of the faculty. They included Willet M. Hays, agriculturist; Samuel B. Green, horticulturist; Otto Luger, entomologist and botanist; Dr. Otto Schwartzkopff, veterinarian; and the new director of the Experiment Station, Clinton D. Smith, dairyman.

THE SCHOOL opened in the fall of 1888. Roger S. Mackintosh was the first boy to register. Altogether, eighty-seven boys attended classes that first year. The term ended April 17, 1889. The school offered a two-year program in agricultural education at the secondary or high school level.

The first year's courses included English, algebra, accounting, physical geography, botany, physics, woodworking, mechanical drawing. Lectures were given in farm

School of Agriculture's Alumni Bicycle Club, 1897. Coates Bull is at left. Behind them is the old Dairy Hall, left, and the Drill Hall, later the Science building.

management, farm architecture, horticulture, farm crops, dairying and livestock.

The second years' courses included algebra, geometry, civil government, political economy, agricultural chemistry and animal physiology. There were lectures on grains, soils, fertilizers, stock and dairying, horticulture and animal diseases and treatment.

Almost all of the boys did some work to help with the cost of their schooling. Some did janitor work, others stoked furnaces and shoveled snow.

I BELONGED to a family which, on both sides, believed in an agricultural education. With Father so active in the Grange, it was almost inconceivable that no one in his family would take advantage of this wonderful opportunity he had worked so hard to make possible. My older brother, Harry, did not take to schooling, so I was "elected." Besides, I wanted to go on in school. In 1889 the farm crops were bad, (50 bushels of potatoes from five acres) so I stayed home and went to our district school to bone up on my algebra and other district school studies.

In the fall of 1890, I took my sheets, bed blankets and pillow and moved into a room in the southeast corner of the third floor of Pendergast Hall. (It had been built in 1889 but now has been torn down). Room, board, washing and books cost me \$12 a month. I helped out by sweeping the floors in the dormitory for 10 cents an hour. Later on, I found a job with Professor

Hays, husking 15 varieties of test corn at 15 cents an hour. It was so cold that we kept warm by constantly moving. For exercise, we played football, boxed and wrestled in the gym.

The food usually was palatable but two stories I think are worth repeating. At one morning assembly, Dr. H. W. Brewster asked why the students were complaining about the food. August Hummel of New Ulm got up and said, "Well, Professor Brewster, the most I object to is the bread weighing twenty ounces to the pound." After that, our bread was much better.

PRUNE SAUCE was a common dessert and one day when one of the students, Fred Illstrup, was late to dinner, I slipped into his sauce some bitter aloes I'd taken from the veterinary building. By the time dinner was over, Illstrup's face was as red as a turkey gobbler's head and he was complaining indignantly to Professor Brewster about what had happened. Luckily for me, they never found the culprit.

That year Clinton D. Smith, director of the Experiment Station, was asked to test a centrifugal cream separator. The first time he tried it, with the help of some students, the results were pretty messy, but in 1891,

the first creamery course was offered at the school under the direction of Theophilus L. Haecker. I enrolled and learned how to make butter and cheese.

Dr. Otto Schwartzkoff, who had served in the German army, taught us our veterinary science. We had lessons in an upstairs classroom thirty feet square. Two wooden stairs led to it and there was a trap door in the floor.

Dr. Schwartzkoff was fond of smoking his pipe in class. One day before he arrived for class, Hans Wayne, a student, started the doctor's pipe and began smoking it in front of the rest of the class. When he heard the doctor coming, Hans slipped the pipe, still warm, into the desk drawer. Of course, Dr. Schwartzkoff found it. He threw it at Wayne and started for him. Hans ran right through the trap door and outside.

COMMENCEMENT was held in the spring of 1892 with nine of us graduating—one of the school's smallest graduating classes. They tried to make us sing the

Dormitory scene, 1890's. Author is at right with harmonica.



class song. Few of us could carry a tune, but we certainly tried.

During the next five years I worked at home on our farm. It was becoming apparent, however, that farming was changing in the area and that the farm could not support all of us. So, on January 18, 1897, I returned to the University of Minnesota's College of Agriculture as a student. I had \$18 in my pocket. Room and board were \$13 a month.

After applying to the different departments for a job, I found an opening in agriculture under Professor Hays. My field work during the summer paid \$33 a month and I did plant breeding experimentation. I worked out a plan for planting four-by-four-foot square blocks of 100 plants, rather than using the rod-row method. Later, Hays coined a name for this procedure—"Centgener Method." During my sophomore year, Hays went to Europe to study experiment stations there and I was put in charge of the field work and the men.

IN 1901 I graduated from the University of Minnesota and spent one year in Champaign, Illinois, as assistant professor of agronomy. I returned to Minnesota in August, 1902, as an assistant agriculturist in the Experiment Station and a teacher of agricultural subjects. I gradually rose to the position of full professor of agronomy. Not only did I have to teach courses in crops, rotation methods, farm economics, agricultural engineering and farm management, but I also was in charge of plant breeding at the Experiment Station.

By the time I began my work as an assistant professor at the college, the world was focusing its attention upon advancement and experimentation in agricultural science and education. I would say, along with other men of that era, that by 1907 the University's Agricultural Experiment Station was unsurpassed in the United States.

During my seventeen years at the University, our experiments developed new and better strains of seeds which finally outsold and displaced many common varieties. Among them were several strains of Dent corn, one of Crosby sweet corn, and barley, hemp and flax. At one time, 90 per cent of the hemp grown in the United States came from seeds I developed. At



Pendergast hall, built in 1889, razed in 1950's. Author has marked some windows to indicate rooms of faculty, friends. Window of his room was the last on the right, third floor.

that time there were new organizations forming in the field of agriculture, some of which I helped establish—the Corn Association of Minnesota, the American Society of Agronomy, the National Corn Association, the Minnesota Crop Improvement Association, the International Crop Improvement Association and the American Breeders Association.

AS FOR THOSE "blankety-blank farmers" the legislators thought they'd never hear from again, the following were among the agricultural leaders who came from the early classes: T. A. Hoverstad, superintendent of the Crookston subexperiment station; W. G. Smith, who became a soil chemist for the United States Department of Agriculture; R. S. Mackintosh, who returned to the University of Minnesota as agriculture horticulture professor; John Thompson, who became editor of a number of farm papers in Iowa; Emil P. Sandsten, who became director of the Fort Collins, Colorado, Experiment Station; A. E. Stene, who was director of the Experiment Station in Delaware; Carl Scofield, who joined the United States Department of Agriculture; and A. J. Glover, who became editor of *Herd's Dairyman*; Andrew Boss, who was chief of the University's Division of Agronomy and Farm Management, and his brother, William, who was chief of the Division of Agricultural Engineering.

All were in school about the same time I was there and they were heard from for many years to come.



THE GIBBS HOUSE

Headquarters of the Ramsey County Historical Society, 2097 Larpenteur Avenue W., St. Paul, Minn.

THE Ramsey County Historical Society was founded in 1949. During the following years the Society, believing that a sense of history is of great importance in giving a new, mobile generation a knowledge of its roots in the past, acquired the 100-year-old farm home which had belonged to Heman R. Gibbs. The Society restored the Gibbs House and in 1954 opened it to the public as a museum which would depict the way of life of an early Minnesota settler.

In 1958 the Society erected a barn, behind the house, which is maintained as an agricultural museum to display the tools and other implements used by the men who broke up the prairie soil and farmed with horse and oxen.

Today, in addition to maintaining the Gibbs property, the Ramsey County Historical Society is active in the preservation of historic sites in Ramsey county, conducts tours, prepares pamphlets and other publications, organizes demonstrations of pioneer crafts and maintains a Speakers' Bureau for schools and organizations. It is the Society's hope that through its work the rich heritage of the sturdy men and women who were the pioneers of Ramsey County will be preserved for future generations.