

# Penn State Started As Farmers' High School In Agriculture Back In 1850

## Land Grant Act Opened College

The Farmers' High School, baptismal name of the Penn State College, was a pioneer in agricultural education; its roots go back as early as 1850. Its development, if not its very existence, is due to its re-founding by the acceptance of the Morrill Act, signed by Governor Andrew Gregg

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Curtin, April 1, 1863, pledging the "faith of the State to carry the same into effect."

The first quarter of a century was marked by a struggle to hold the Land Grant, and by drifting and experiment in educational aims. Six presidents in twenty-three years were scarcely compatible with continuity of plan or purpose. Dr. Evan Pugh, a man of rare vision, trained by six years of study in the universities of Germany, France, and England, the first great president, died at the early age of 36, just as he was laying the foundations of Penn State. His successor, Dr. William H. Allen, formerly and later president of Girard College, served two years with no marked activities in disposing of the Land Scrip.

Only one course, agriculture, was offered up to 1866, but the settlement of the entire Land Grant upon the College by the Act of 1867, led President John Fraser and the trustees to a "reorganization" in which engineering was to be taught, agriculture and the arts expanded. The program was too ambitious and too expensive to carry out. The trustees voted a "de-

### College President



RALPH D. HETZEL

organization" and called Dr. Thomas H. Burrowes to salvage the College and restore it to its original purposes. His personal influence stemmed the tide of discouragement at home and opposition abroad (in which the so-called Model Experiment Farms largely figured), but he died in office after but three years of service. Dr. James Calder, a classically trained, classically minded executive, succeeded. The College grew in numbers, largely due to preparatory students, to music and art pupils. Three courses, agriculture, classical, and scientific, were offered, and women students were admitted on equal terms in 1871.

An unfortunate interregnum in 1880-1881 under President Shortlidge re-opened the flood gates of criticism and personal recrimination. Students were few and in open rebellion. Faculty, trustees, and legislative investigations followed—the Pennsylvania State College was passing through its darkest days.

However, a new leader, the second great president, Dr. George W. Atherton, had been found, destined to serve nearly a quarter of a century. He received an institution of one

building, Old Main, completed in December, 1863, a massive but forbidding structure, with a dark, almost prison-like interior, a student body so depleted in numbers that it scarcely exceeded the faculty, and with a reputation and name over the State (however unjust) of an educational failure and not entitled to the proceeds of the Land Grant. With rare determination and insight, he placed the work of the institution squarely upon its charter, won the people of the Commonwealth to its support, found in Governor James A. Beaver, a life-long friend of the College, a tower of strength and enthusiasm.

A revamping of Old Main was begun, over-crowded departments began their exodus to new buildings. The schools were organized in 1896, dormitories were erected, a University Inn, and the first buildings by private donors, the Carnegie Library and Schwab Auditorium. Agriculture began its modern development with a building program and expansion of facilities, under the aegis of The Allied Agricultural Societies in 1900. Engineering owes its first adequate housing to Governor Pattison who became a warm friend of Penn State during his second administration, while most caustic in his denunciations in his vetoes of the bills of 1883 and 1885.

Thus the College groped its way during the first quarter century. It

"found itself" under President Atherton during the second quarter century. Its rapid development has come during the third quarter century, and peculiarly so in the last five years. Presidents Sparks, Thomas, and Hetzel are three different types of executives. Under Dr. Sparks the student body grew almost phenomenally, popularizing and extension activities were greatly increased, the Summer School established on a new basis in 1910. Comprehensive building plans were outlined, and genuine additions to the plant made. More adequate support was provided in which the active cooperation of Governor Tener should be noted. President Sparks bore a huge burden during the Great War—a burden which sapped his strength to the breaking point, leading to his retirement in 1920. Dr. Sparks handed over to President John Martin Thomas an institution with 370 on the faculty and a resident student body of 4,016.

The service of Dr. Thomas of four years was marked by plans for a greater Penn State, a better physical

plant, more adequate legislative support. The College campaign to raise \$2,000,000 for welfare buildings was organized and vigorously carried on. September 24, 1926, Dr. Ralph Dorn Hetzel was called to the presidency and a new Penn State began rapidly to realize itself. An adequate campus plan and the following new buildings

which were dedicated as part of the Seventy-Fifth Celebration tell something of the external story: Recreation Hall, Engineering Building, Mineral Industries, Old Main, Frear and Grange Dormitories, Liberal Arts, and Chemistry units Power Plant, Botany Building, Hospital Service Building, and other permanent units.

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