

The Role of Virginia in the Development of the FFA

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In my opinion the farm boys of Virginia who are enrolled in vocational agriculture are equal to any other group of boys in the State. But somehow the boys themselves seem to have a feeling of inferiority. Especially is this true when the farm boy goes to the city and has to compete with his city cousin. This condition should not exist. I believe that a strong organization of our boys in agriculture would help them to overcome this handicap. Let's form an organization that will give them a greater opportunity for self-expression and for the development of leadership. In this way they will develop confidence in their own ability and pride in the fact that they are farm boys. (Taylor & Crunkilton, 1979, p. 6)

These words or ones very close to them were spoken by Walter Newman on a hot September day in Blacksburg, Virginia in 1925. He and some colleagues in agricultural education were seated around an oak table in the Agricultural Education Department at Virginia Polytechnic Institute.

There were many reasons why Virginia agricultural educators were interested in forming an organization for their students. Certainly persons in other states had discussed similar ideas and some had started various organizations similar to the Future Farmers of Virginia (FFV), however none so clearly led to the establishment of the Future Farmers of America as did the organization discussed in September 1925 at Virginia Polytechnic Institute. Many precedents were set by the founders. Their backgrounds and professional experiences shaped them and, consequently, both the FFV and the FFA.

Purpose and Objectives

The major purpose of this study was to examine and determine the role Virginia agricultural educators had upon the development of the National FFA.

Specific objectives were to:

Examine the agricultural education student organizations that preceded FFV.

Describe the background of each of the founders of the FFV.

Determine who developed the name, constitution, ceremonies, degrees of membership, emblem, and the creed for the FFV.

Determine which co-founder helped establish the FFA at the regional and national level using the FFV as a model.

Determine the influence of Virginia in the development of the New Farmers of America (NFA).

Procedures

Historical research methods were utilized to accomplish the objectives of the study. Both primary and secondary sources were utilized to obtain the information needed. Primary sources included mass media publications, personal letters, videotapes, and speeches given by prominent leaders. Secondary sources included newspaper articles, dissertations, theses, books, and journal articles. Information was obtained at such locations as the Library of Congress, National Agriculture Library, and the United States Department of Education Library. Sources were subjected to both internal and external criticism.

Early Organizations for Virginia Agricultural Education Students

Many of the student organizations which existed prior to the establishment of the Future Farmers of Virginia were specific to agricultural commodities. For example, there existed poultry clubs, corn clubs, and soybean clubs.

In 1924, Botetourt High School organized the "Gloucester Vocational Boys Poultry Association" (Yeatts, 1954). Harry W. Sanders organized the Manassas Poultry Club in 1922-23. Its primary purpose was to better market eggs (Yeatts, 1954). Walter S. Newman organized corn clubs at Carrsville and Isle of Wight while serving as an agriculture instructor at Windsor (Yeatts, 1954). F. B. Cale supervised a club for school boys for the purpose of growing soybean seed. This club was started in 1922 and eventually became the Caroline County Soybean Growers Association (Noblin, 1942).

Other organizations that were started for agricultural education students at about the same time included tomato clubs, thrift clubs, and tomorrow's farmer clubs. Edmund Magill gave a lot of credit to the thrift clubs. "Thanks are due to these that the thrift idea was embodied into a workable plan in vocational agriculture and was the first objective ever set up in a Future Farmer program. May it never be abandoned in future programs." (Magill, 1931, p. 6).

In addition to the departmental specific activities, there was one major state-wide activity held for Virginia agricultural education students that served as a forerunner to the Future Farmers of Virginia state convention. The Rally or annual crops and livestock judging contest for boys studying agricultural education was started by the first Virginia state supervisor of agricultural education, Thomas D. Eason. It was originally held at the Virginia State Fair in Richmond (Taylor & Crunkilton, 1979).

After the 1923 judging contest a decision was made to move the judging contests to Virginia Polytechnic Institute and combine them with the annual track meet for agricultural education students held there. The combined activity became the new Rally. The first such Rally was held April 23-25, 1925. A total of 360 individuals attended with 50 schools participating in judging contests and 33 schools participating in athletic events (Yeatts, 1954).

Another factor which led to the founding of the Future Farmers of Virginia was the general inferiority that farm boys felt, "Farm boys were becoming less interested in farming and were leaving the farm as time went on. Agriculture had begun to feel the pinch and (Walter) Newman was looking for something to give the boys a 'shot in the arm'" (Yeatts, 1954).

By the time Walter Newman met with the others around the oak table in September 1925, the concern for the feelings of inferiority on the part of farm boys weighed heavily on his mind. Newman was also aware that agricultural student organizations existed in at least 12 Virginia schools. "In every instance where there was some form of organization, the morale and interest in the total agricultural program was much higher. The boys seemed to have a goal to accomplish and worked harder toward attainment of that goal." (Yeatts, 1954, p. 17).

Background of the Founders of the FFV

Recognition has always gone to Walter Newman, Harry Sanders, Edmund Magill, and Henry Groseclose for the role they played in the founding of the Future Farmers of Virginia. One of the points of controversy surrounding the actual founding concerns the possibility of a fifth person being present at the meeting.

That person was Jim Hoge. Hoge was an agriculture teacher in Wythe County in 1925. He later became a supervisor of agricultural education. He was also the brother-in-law of Walter Newman. The September meeting occurred during Newman's first trip back to Blacksburg after assuming the role of head state supervisor on September 1, 1925. It is very likely that Hoge could have come to Blacksburg to meet Newman simply as a relative. In a videotape made in 1980, Harry Sanders (Sanders, 1980) briefly mentioned the fact that Jim Hoge was present at the meeting.

The four recognized founders had interesting paths that brought them together in September of 1925. They also had interesting careers and lives.

Edmund C. Magill was born in Kingman, Kansas on November 9, 1889 (Loan Fund, 1940). He received his B.S. degree in horticulture from Kansas State College in 1912. He received his M.S. degree in agricultural education from Virginia Polytechnic Institute in 1924 (Prof. E. C. Magill Dies, 1940).

Magill became an agricultural education teacher in 1913 at Wayzata, Minnesota. From 1916 to 1918 he was the managing partner of the Parkhead Orchard Co. in Big Pool, Maryland. In 1918 he became the garden specialist of the Agricultural Extension Division of Virginia Polytechnic Institute. In 1919 he was appointed associate professor of agriculture. Four years later Magill was made an itinerant teacher trainer. In 1924 he was promoted to professor and named head of the Agricultural Education Department (Prof. E. C. Magill Dies, 1940).

Henry Casper Groseclose was born in 1892 in Ceres, Virginia. He completed educational work at Washington and Lee University and at Virginia Polytechnic Institute

receiving both a bachelors and masters degree (Kinnear, 1952). He started his teaching career in Buckingham County. He served as principal at a school in Painter, Virginia. In 1925, he joined the faculty at the Agricultural Education department of Virginia Polytechnic Institute. In 1928, he was appointed state supervisor of secondary education in Virginia. He returned to Virginia Polytechnic Institute in 1929 as professor of agricultural education and served in that capacity until 1942 (Kinnear, 1952). He was a recipient of one of the first Honorary American Farmer Degrees, awarded in 1929 (Minutes, 1929). He served as National FFA Treasurer from 1931 to 1941 and also served as National FFA Executive secretary from 1928 to 1931. His last professional position was school superintendent in Bland County, Virginia (Death, 1950).

Walter Stephenson Newman was born at Woodstock, Virginia in 1895 (Kinnear, 1952). He was educated at Hampden-Sidney College, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, and the Pennsylvania State College (Kinnear, 1952). After serving as an assistant in the Department of Animal Husbandry at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute he became the teacher of vocational agriculture at Windsor, Virginia (Kinnear, 1952). He returned to Virginia Polytechnic Institute as an associate professor of agricultural education in 1922, but went to Richmond as State Supervisor of Agricultural Education in 1925 (Kinnear, 1952). In 1942 he became Assistant State Superintendent of Public Instruction in Virginia (Kinnear, 1952). In 1946 he became Vice President of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and in 1947 was elevated to the presidency and served in that capacity until 1962 (Kinnear, 1952). He was a recipient of one of the first Honorary American degrees awarded in 1929 (Minutes, 1929).

Harry Warriner Sanders was born in Richmond, Virginia in 1895 (Sanders, 1984). He was educated at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and at Harvard University (Kinnear, 1952). He began his professional career as a teacher of vocational agriculture at Manassas, Virginia where he taught from 1917 to 1924 (Kinnear, 1952). In 1924-25 he served as one of the first district supervisors for vocational agriculture to be appointed in Virginia (Kinnear, 1952). In 1925, he moved to Virginia Polytechnic Institute as assistant professor of agricultural education (Sanders, 1984). In 1932-33 he went to Puerto Rico to assist in establishing a Department of Agricultural Education (Kinnear, 1952). In 1940 he was made professor and head of the Department of Vocational Education at VPI (Kinnear, 1952). Sanders also pioneered in adapting the job analysis technique to vocational agriculture in Virginia. The influence of this early work is clearly apparent in most of the publications and bulletins prepared by the Department of Agricultural Education from 1925 through the 1950s (Kinnear, 1952).

Name

One of the first issues to be resolved was what to name the organization discussed at the oak table. Henry Groseclose liked the initials FFV which for generations had stood for the First Families of Virginia. George Washington and Thomas Jefferson were considered among the First Families of Virginia (Noblin, 1942). He suggested that FFV now stand for the Future Farmers of Virginia (Noblin, 1942). Groseclose's idea proved to be a popular one and was quickly accepted.

Constitution

Henry Groseclose was also asked to write a constitution and by-laws for the FFV which was accomplished while he was a patient at Johns Hopkins University (Yeatts, 1954). Walter Newman presented the idea of the organization at the Rally in April of 1926 where it received favorable response. By June of the same year Groseclose mailed a copy of "The Proposed Constitution and By-Laws for a Boy's Organization of Vocational Agriculture Students in Virginia" to every agriculture instructor in the state. "In performing this service, Groseclose not only made an outstanding contribution to the Virginia organization but provided the basis for the national organization as well" (Yeatts, 1954, p. 7). The agriculture instructors at the 1926 summer conference put the finishing work on the constitution and the future plans for the organization (Yeatts, 1954).

Ceremonies

Another important contribution made by Henry Groseclose was the writing of the ceremonies for the organization (Noblin, 1942). Credit has been given to various organizations for influencing the FFA Constitution and ceremonies. Some have credited the Boy Scouts of America, The Grange, and the Masons along with DeMolay for such influence.

Degrees of Membership

It appears that the Masons influenced Groseclose and the FFV a great deal for degrees of membership. Masons have three degrees of membership--Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason (Brown, 1987) as did the FFV when established by Groseclose--Greenhand, Virginia Farmer, and Virginia Planter. Several aspects of the ceremonies of both the FFV and DeMolay were quite similar with both having assigned officer locations, statements on the part of officers, and the unique office of sentinel.

The Emblem

In a letter addressed to A. L. Yeatts, Jr. dated June 30, 1954, R. W. Cline, head of the Department of Agricultural and Home Economics Education at the University of Arizona, described the origin of the FFV emblem:

The events which lead to the development of the Future Farmers of Virginia, the influence of these activities upon the Future Farmers of America as a national organization, is well known among young men on farms and ranches of this country. The Owl, the Plow, and the Rising Sun are also familiar symbols to everyone acquainted with the program and activities of the F.F.A. The origin of these symbols and the reasons for their selection as a part of the emblem, however, may not be generally understood since little has been written concerning this phase of F.F.A. history.

Little progress was made until the early part of 1927 when Mr. Groseclose procured from Chris L. Christensen some information concerning agricultural organizations in Denmark. Among the materials was a picture of an owl perched on the handle of a spade, standing in a field which had been partly spaded for the next crop. From this idea, the plow was substituted for the spade, the rising sun placed in the background, and the first F.F.A. emblem was drawn. After the sketch had been revised several times on the basis of criticism and suggestions from state officials and teachers, the emblem was submitted to the Virginia teachers of vocational agriculture for approval at the annual meeting at Blacksburg, July 18 to 23, 1927.

William R. Shaffer, former National FFA president (1935-36) from Virginia, related how the letters FFA were added to the emblem. "(H. A.) Ross noted that nowhere was there any evidence of FFA. So he got some adhesive black letters about 3" high and pasted them on the painting (of the emblem). That's how FFA got on the emblem" (Shaffer, 1990).

Creed

Many members of the FFA have memorized the organization's creed. An early forerunner of the present creed was called "The Country Boy's Creed" and was dedicated to the Boys' Corn Clubs of Virginia. It was written by Edwin Osgood Grover (Grover, no date).

Country Boy's Creed

I believe that the Country which God made is more beautiful than the City which man made; that life out-of-doors and in touch with the earth is the natural life of man. I believe that work is work wherever we find it, but that work with Nature is more inspiring than work with the most intricate machinery. I believe that the dignity of labor depends not on what you do, but on how you do it; that opportunity comes to a boy on the farm as often as to a boy in the city, that life is larger and freer and happier on the farm than in the town, that my success depends not upon my location, but upon myself - not upon my dreams, but upon what I actually do, not upon luck, but upon pluck. I believe in working when you work and in playing when you play and in giving and demanding a square deal in every act of life.

Regional Influence

Walter Newman attended the Southern Regional Conference of vocational agriculture supervisors and teacher-trainers during March 28-April 2, 1927 in San Antonio, Texas. He participated on a committee that also had T. E. Browne of North Carolina and J. T. Wheeler of Georgia as members. This committee wrote a resolution concerning the establishment of other Future Farmer State organizations (Tenney, 1978).

Whereas, it appears from the experience of several States that the community interests of members of all-day, day-unit, and part-time classes can be greatly advanced and solidified through intercourse of growing out of organized effort.

Be it therefore resolved: 1. That the States of the Southern Region encourage the organization of members of all-day, day-unit, and part-time boys of our vocational agricultural classes into appropriate groups for directing community effort. 2. That such local organization be known as the "Future Farmers" of the State in which the organization is located; for example "Future Farmers of Virginia." 3. That each of the States develop a State organization of Future Farmers, looking forward to regional or national federation.

By September of that year, five of the 13 states other than Virginia had organized student organizations similar to Virginia. A survey made by Groseclose about the same time revealed that state organizations were in operation in 12 states, although most of these were in the Southern States, and patterned largely after the Future Farmers of Virginia.

National Influence

In 1927, Henry Groseclose gave a speech at the American Vocational Association Convention held in New Orleans where he described some of the accomplishments of the Future Farmers of Virginia.

He reported that Virginia needed an organization for agricultural students to:

- Satisfy the boys desire to "belong"
- Improve morale of students
- Decrease the instructors' load
- Teach cooperation and thrift

Groseclose went on to report that:

An organization was perfected and named The Future Farmers of Virginia. A state constitution was adopted which set forth the purposes of the organization as follows:

- To promote vocational agriculture in the rural high schools.
- To create more interests in intelligent agricultural pursuits.
- To create and nurture a love of country life.
- To provide recreation and educational entertainment for students of vocational agriculture through state agricultural and athletic contests, vacation tours, father and son banquets and the like.
- To promote thrift.
- To afford a medium or cooperative marketing and buying.
- To establish the confidence of the farm boy in himself.
- To promote scholarship and rural leadership.

Certain qualifications were set up for each grade and promotion from one grade to another is based upon these qualifications (Groseclose, 1927).

The New Farmers of Virginia - NFA

The national constitution for the NFA reported it to be ". . . the national organization for Negro students of vocational agriculture in states where separate schools are maintained." (N.F.A. Guide, 1944)

The NFA like the FFA was organized in Virginia. It started in May 1927 with the first state meeting and convention at Virginia State College in Petersburg. G. W. Owens, a teacher-trainer at Virginia State College wrote the first constitution and by-laws of the New Farmers of Virginia (Guide for NFA, 1962).

A great deal of credit is given to H. O. Sargeant for enhancing the development of and increasing the popularity of the NFA. Dr. Sargeant was appointed to the Federal Board for Vocational Education in 1917. A native of Alabama, he was placed in charge of vocational training in agriculture for blacks. His duties took him to every Southern state. During the 19 years he held this position the number of Negro Departments of Vocational Agriculture increased from 39 to over 600. He also played an important role in standardizing the agricultural instructional program in the 1890 land-grant universities (N.F.A. Guide, 1944).

Conclusions

Both agricultural education and the FFA are very fortunate to have had the dedicated leaders from Virginia who spent untold hours working on the establishment of the latter student organization. Many agricultural educators wonder how the founders would react to a proposed change in the FFA. Frequently it is concluded that they would be opposed to making changes in the organization they helped found. In reality, the founders made the biggest change of all by starting a new organization when they could have stayed with its forerunners. Once that fundamental decision had been made, other important policies and procedures had to be implemented. The Virginia founders need to be credited with making such courageous decisions and advancing the cause of agricultural education and the FFA.

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