

II. IN THE BEGINNING 1/B. R. Bertramson 2/

The State of Washington was officially formed 11 November, 1889 (Bryan, 1928). On 18 November, 1889, the State Legislature met and organized. Forthwith, it accepted the 90,000 acres of land provided for in the Morrill Act of 1862. The Legislature decreed that the land-grant College should be located east of the Cascades and in a county not already housing a state institution. Spokane County had the mental institution and Walla Walla County had the penitentiary. This left Yakima and Whitman counties as the main contenders for the College. Yakima County had only a little irrigation then; the rest was desert land, covered by sagebrush. Whitman County had rather better land throughout; the eastern band--some 50 miles wide--was the fabulous "Palouse." This was fertile land with adequate rainfall and was already occupied by a vigorous farming community. Under the conditions of that time and state of development, the Palouse was the logical location. Politics notwithstanding, the logical area was finally selected.

The public-spirited citizens of Pullman, boasting a city population of 350 and 2 artesian wells, finally prevailed in getting the College located here (Bryan, 1928). The first term of school started 13 January, 1892 with 21 freshmen and 63 "preparatory students" without highschool diplomas. The school building was "The Crib", a four-room structure 30 by 60 ft. built in 1891 for \$1500. It was located on a portion of the grounds now occupied by Holland Library.

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1/ Part of History of Agronomy and Soils, WSU. 1984.

2/ Former Chairman and Professor Emeritus. Department of Agronomy and Soils, WSU. Pullman, WA 99164.

Political turmoil did not subside with the final location of the College. During the first two years, two presidents were hired, successively, and dismissed. There was an internal scandal that prompted a legislative investigation. The first Board of Regents was dismissed.

In July, 1893, Dr. Enoch A. Bryan was elected as the third President. The first full school year on a two-semester basis began 13 September, 1893. There were eight faculty members. With the beginning of school, so began the fall rainy season. It rained and rained; crops were ruined in the stack and in the sack.

In the early years of faculty development, no mention of Agronomy was made by Bryan, 1928. Mention was made of professors employed in Horticulture, Forestry, and Entomology as well as in Botany, Chemistry, Bacteriology, and Geology. One must reason that those who taught in the Department of Agriculture must surely have dealt with agronomic subject matter and thus they were the predecessors of the latter day "Agronomists." They, the early faculty, and administrators of the Department of Agronomy and Soils are listed as follows:

- 1892               Hendricks, John--Professor of Agriculture.
- 1893               Lake, E. R.--Head, Department of Agriculture. Also  
Professor of Botany, Horticulture, and Forestry. Left to  
join Oregon Agricultural College after teaching the first  
semester in Botany.
- 1892-1903       Piper, Charles Vancouver. Came to the College with B.  
Sc. and M. Sc. degrees from the University of Washington.  
He was Professor of Botany and Zoology, and was Secretary  
to the Faculty. He was also Proctor in Ferry Hall. He

resigned in 1903 to become "Agrostologist in Charge of Crop Investigations, U.S.D.A." He was later Chairman of the Committee that organized publication of the AGRONOMY JOURNAL. He was well known for his texts and other publications dealing with the flora of the Pacific Northwest. (Piper, Charles V., and R. Kent Beattie, 1915.)

- 1892-1901 Spillman, W. J.--Head, Department of Agriculture. He made many contributions here and was one of the three who independently re-discovered the Mendelian laws of Inheritance. He went to U.S.D.A., Washington D.C., in 1902 to establish 30 demonstration farms in the Southern Region under the direction of Professor Knapp, the "Father of Ag Extension". Spillman also developed independently the Spillman equation quantifying the relationship between growth response and added increments of a growth factor. This was very similar to the equation developed by Mitscherlich somewhat earlier. (Tisdale Samuel L., Werner L. Nelson and James Beaton, 1985, 4th ed. Soil Fertility and Fertilizers. Macmillan Pub. Co., N.Y. pp 46).
- 1902-1907 Elliott, E. E.--Assistant Professor of Agriculture. He left in 1908 to become Director of the Experiment Station at the University of Idaho.
- 1907-1913 Thatcher, Roscoe W., was apparently titular Head of the Department of Agriculture as well as Director of the Experiment Station and Director of Extension. He came to

the College first as a chemist in the Experiment Station. In 1913, he went to the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Mass. He was Editor of the AGRONOMY JOURNAL 1922-1925.

- 1908-1909 George Severance served as an acting Head of the Department of Agriculture. He came to the Department in 1902 as Instructor and taught most of the crops and soils courses. He was the first teacher of recognized "agronomy" courses at WSU. He became Head of the newly formed Farm Management Department 1918 and Vice-Dean of the College of Agriculture in 1921.
- 1910-1911 Hegnauer, Leonard, served as an Acting Head of the Department of Agriculture.
- 1911-1913 White, Paul J., likewise served as Acting Head of the Department.
- 1911-1943 Gaines, E. F., became an Instructor in Agronomy--the first mention of that specialty by Bryan, 1928. After completing his Ph.D. at Harvard, he became Associate Professor of Farm Crops in 1925.
- 1913-1947 Schafer, E. G., came to the College as Professor of Agronomy, succeeding P. J. White and was named Head of the Farm Crops Department in 1917.
- 1917-1927 Sievers, E. J., was made Head of the Department of "Soils." He left in 1927 to become Dean and Director at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Mass. Soils and Agronomy at WSU were consolidated when he left.

- 1924-1949 Vandecaveye came to the College in 1924 as an Assistant Soil Scientist (Bacteriologist) and succeeded Sievers as Head of the Soils Section, in 1928.
- 1939-1949 Swenson, S. P. succeeded Dr. Gaines as the Plant Breeder and in 1947 he became Head of "Farm Crops."
- 1949-1967 Bertramson, B. R., a soil chemist from Purdue University came as Chairman of Agronomy, the completely merged Farm Crops and Soils Departments, and in 1967 was appointed Director of Resident Instruction in which capacity he served until retirement in 1979.
- 1967-1970 Moodie, C. D., a Canadian by birth and a former graduate student of the Soils Section, was promoted through the ranks to Professor and became Acting Chairman then Chairman of Agronomy until 1970 when he was killed in an auto accident at Steptoe, March 12. During his tenure, the name was changed to "Department of Agronomy and Soils" to give some identity to Soils for those who think erroneously of agronomy as synonymous with "crop science."
- 1970 Bertramson, B. R., served for 9 months as Acting Chairman of Agronomy and Soils as well as Director of Resident Instruction.
- 1971 Engibous, J. C., came from a position of Industrial Agronomist with International Minerals Corporation to serve as Chairman of Agronomy and Soils.
- 1986 Cheng, H.H., assumed the Acting Chairmanship as Dr. Engibous became Director of Extension.

1987 Miller, D. G. returned to the Department as Chairman.

The name changes have been a part of the history, too. In 1905, the legislature approved a name change from "The Agricultural College Experiment Station and School of Science of the State of Washington" to "The State College of Washington." In 1959, the name was again changed--in conformity with the naming of many other Land Grant Universities across the land--to "Washington State University."

The name, agronomy, has become quite widely used in the media and is generally recognized as a collective term covering both crop science and soil science. Like engineering--or horticulture--its meaning is quite broad. In 1978, Bertramson attempted to provide a nationally acceptable definition of the professional agronomist--the product of these departments of agronomy. The definition of what professional agronomists do-- patterned after the definition of engineers-- was outlined as follows:

1. Possess a body of distinctive technical knowledge and art gained by education, research, and experience;
2. Recognize a service motive to society in vital and honorable activities;
3. Believe in standards of conduct, such as those represented by ethical rules;
4. Support a professional society and credentialing program which maintains standards for admission to the society and for credentialing;
5. Recognize the need for continuous, in-service growth, or renewal, for the individual professional throughout his/her career;

6. Apply, with judgment, the knowledge of natural, mathematical, and social sciences gained by study, experience, and practice to enhance food, feed and fiber production, while preserving and improving the environment for the benefit of mankind.

The value of Washington agriculture to the State and Nation--and therefore the importance of the Land-Grant College and its Department of Agronomy--was illustrated by a statistic of (Bryan, 1928). In 1897, \$15,000,000 of gold was imported to pay for wheat shipped from the Inland Empire. (Approximately half of that wheat production came from Washington.) That same year, the "Big" news was the \$3,000,000 of gold shipped to Seattle from the placer mining in Alaska. The Alaskan Gold Rush lasted only a few years, and is now all but forgotten. Meanwhile, wheat production resulting from the industry and ingenuity of Washington farmers and the improved technology from the College applied to the fertile soils of the area has added increased wealth to the State and Nation year after year.

One measure of that increased wealth for comparison with the Alaskan gold was the increased wealth to the Pacific Northwest resulting from the introduction of the fabulous world champion soft white wheat variety, Gaines, to commercial production. Its highest yield record was 209 bushels per acre. It was developed at the College in cooperation with neighboring states and the U.S.D.A. It was released in 1961. During the first ten years of its production, commercially in the Pacific Northwest, it provided a billion dollars of increased wealth over that possible with older varieties. Half of that wealth increase came to the State of Washington. This half billion of new wealth

exceeded by 2 or 3 times all the money invested in agricultural research by the Washington Agricultural Experiment Station from its beginning in 1891 until 1984--ninety-five years! (Bertramson, 1979--Statistics provided by Dr. Karl Hobson, Extension AG. Economist.)

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