

## American Agricultural College Libraries, 1862-1900

*Mrs. Thurber, who is an archivist and the reference consultant in the Division of Veterans' Records at the National Archives, gathered the material for this article from "college catalogs, college and regents' reports, agricultural yearbooks, and reports of the commissioners of agriculture and education."*

THE LIBRARIES of the agricultural colleges receiving funds from the Federal Land-Grant Act of 1862, with which this article deals, had their precursors in those of certain agricultural societies of the eighteenth century. One of the first of these societies was organized in 1785 in Philadelphia, then the national capital, and had such esteemed names as those of George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and Timothy Pickering on its honorary roll. Others were founded later throughout the fringe of states bordering the Atlantic Coast. Not only did the members of the societies interest themselves in the study of agricultural subjects, but they published articles and bulletins of interest to the farmers throughout the community and devoted their meetings to reports and discussions of agricultural investigations.

Schools for the study of agriculture were a natural development from the agricultural societies. New York led the way in proposing state aid for such schools, and, after efforts in 1819, 1838, and 1849, a loan was extended for agricultural instruction to what formerly had been Ovid Academy. This institution survived only

until 1860, but, meanwhile, agencies for agricultural education had been promoted with state help in Maine, Connecticut, and Massachusetts. Also, private agricultural schools grew up in various parts of the country and agricultural courses found their way into existing college curricula.

It was not until 1857, however, that an agricultural college was actually established by a state. This happened in Michigan, pursuant to a specific provision in the state constitution of 1850 and in a legislative act of 1855.

On Dec. 14, 1857, soon after the opening of the Michigan school, Congressman Justin S. Morrill, of Vermont, introduced the first bill for federal financial assistance to agricultural education. The measure failed then and again in 1859. It finally was passed, and signed by President Lincoln, in 1862. Under this Federal Land-Grant Act each state received thirty thousand acres of land for each Senator and Congressman representing it. There followed, in some states, the founding of agricultural colleges and in others the addition of schools, departments, or courses to colleges already operating. This last tendency sometimes was resisted on the ground that the industrial classes, comprising the majority of citizens and taxpayers, desired to build up institutions devoted primarily to their own needs and concerns.

As interest grew, and as agricultural colleges multiplied, more funds were required. Mr. Morrill again supported the cause, and a federal bill which was passed

in 1890 and amended in 1907 ultimately provided \$50,000 per year per state. Parallel with all this, the claims of research were asserting themselves. In 1887 Congress allowed each state \$15,000 to initiate an experiment station in connection with its agricultural college, and by 1911 each such station was receiving \$30,000 a year from the same source.

### *Libraries Established*

Hand in hand with the gradual growth of agricultural societies and colleges went the publication of books and periodicals dealing with agricultural subjects and the establishment of agricultural libraries. As early as 1814 the first noteworthy volume in this field, entitled the *Farmer's Assistant*, a book arranged alphabetically and carefully indexed, was written by John Nicholson. This was followed in 1819 by the *American Farmer*, the first periodical devoted entirely to agricultural topics; and the *Farmer's Library* by Leonard E. Lathrop was soon published, bearing the imprint date 1826-27. Agricultural societies began early to collect books and papers on agricultural subjects and to obtain bulletins by exchange, both in this country and abroad. And some of the societies not only had libraries in their local organizations but established branches in country schools, with the schoolmasters as secretaries or librarians. By 1859 holdings of the agricultural society libraries varied from 253 volumes in the Michigan State Agricultural Society in Detroit, to 2300 volumes owned by the New York Agricultural Society of Albany. Then, as the state-supported agricultural colleges began to make their appearance with their more bountiful resources, the agricultural libraries became more complete.

But it was not until the expansion of agricultural education, following the pas-

sage of the Morrill Act of 1862, that large libraries became available to the students of agriculture. This, in spite of the facts that colleges which were struggling to exist and were willing to give up their names and charters in return for financial aid and that universities in which schools or colleges of agriculture were made a part of the university, often had large, well-selected general libraries; and that, in addition to the books in these college libraries, the students had access to the libraries of the literary societies. These student literary societies, it may be noted, had a strong influence on the life of the colleges and universities, and often their libraries contained as many or more volumes than did the college libraries.

As may have been inferred, in some states the attempt to divert the lands of the Land-Grant Act of 1862 to the state university or to some already established college was resisted. This was done on the ground that the industrial classes comprised the majority of the people and taxpayers of the states and desired to build up institutions that would be devoted to their interests. Many of these independent, self-sufficient institutions began with one building which housed everything from the recitation rooms, chemical laboratories, armory, chapel, and library, to rooms for the president. Sometimes dormitory space was also provided in this building. And, in anticipation of the future need for more space, the buildings were so constructed that they could be easily enlarged.

To their credit, the founders of the agricultural colleges considered books and libraries as indispensable requisites of an educational institution. It was their desire that the libraries be the chief attraction for all the better class of students. The educators felt that they should not be mere circulating libraries, filled with the

transient literature of the day but "should contain the most rare and most precious productions of past ages, as well as the best thought of the present," and should "be a place for study and for writing, with every accommodation for those purposes." Often the new president or some professor, anxious to see the college progress or desiring to share his collection with his fellow-workers and students, turned over his library to the college. In some instances, the local board of agriculture was made a board of overseers of the college, with the privilege of transferring its library to the new institution. College publications were distributed to sister institutions in exchange for their bulletins. Agricultural colleges were designated as depositories for government documents, and complete files were obtained through the efforts of Congressmen. By 1873 the value of the libraries of colleges receiving land-grant aid varied considerably. That in the older, well-endowed colleges which added the land-grant fund to their generous budgets, ran from sixty thousand dollars at Cornell University to twenty-five thousand dollars at Rutgers College. In the same year, that at the new agricultural college libraries was as little as three thousand dollars at Kansas State College and twenty-five thousand dollars at the University of Nebraska.

#### *Inadequate Financial Resources*

Agricultural colleges with inadequate financial resources did not hesitate to make direct appeals to the people of their states for books. These requests were inserted in the annual catalogs or in the reports of the presidents or boards of regents. Sometimes a loyal friend of the college or some member of the faculty made personal efforts to secure books and periodicals for the college library. A collection of nearly three thousand volumes was accumulated

in this way at Kansas State Agricultural College through the efforts of the Honorable I. T. Goodnow, who wrote hundreds of soliciting letters to Eastern publishers, philanthropists, and personal friends. It is true that many of the books acquired in this manner were not the most suitable for a library of that type. Greek and Latin dictionaries and commentaries, religious monographs, old and poorly printed fiction, and sermons frequently found their way onto the shelves, only to be discarded as the library grew and money could be obtained to replace them with more appropriate books.

Library budgets of the new agricultural colleges were pitifully small, even for that early period in educational expenditures. Until about 1868 the colleges had a hard struggle to equip their laboratories and to provide professors and buildings to carry on the work of the few courses which were offered. Little money was left for the library, and what was used for this purpose could ill be spared from other departments. The sums appropriated for books and periodicals by these struggling colleges often amounted to less than a thousand dollars a year. A plea for greater financial appropriations was general all over the country. In 1871 Kansas Agricultural College, through its regents' report, expressed the need for additional appropriations in view of the fact that the library was peculiarly deficient in books on agriculture and the classics and was entirely destitute of important works in each of these departments. The University of West Virginia, in its biennial report of 1884-86, mentioned that unless some of the books were not soon rebound they would become entirely useless and that an appropriation of three hundred dollars was needed for the year 1887 for this purpose, in addition to the sum of one thousand

dollars for new books. That library, too, lacked a "vast number of standard works in literature and science which ought to be on the shelves of every good library," since the appropriations had been "entirely inadequate to allow the purchase of even a small proportion of the books that are annually produced."

#### *More Generous Appropriations*

As the colleges became stronger financially, the annual appropriations for books became more generous. In the various libraries the number of volumes pertaining to agricultural subjects increased materially each year. In 1872 Kansas State Agricultural College added only 70 volumes on agricultural matters and in 1888 the same library increased such holdings by 667 volumes. The Missouri Agricultural and Mechanical College purchased only 50 volumes in this field in 1872, and sixteen years later its library was able to increase its agricultural collection by 100 volumes; while Iowa Agricultural College, which added 100 volumes on the subject in 1872, tripled its agricultural accessions in 1882 with 352 volumes. However, with the growth in financial strength, came also enlarged needs for books for new courses. A new, separate department like botany would be established, and at once it claimed its share of whatever money was available; and, since the income unfortunately did not increase in proportion to the demands, the appropriations for the older departments suffered. Thus, the necessity for additional money for books and periodicals was an ever pressing one.

In the meantime, the universities and colleges which had added the study of agriculture and the mechanic arts to their curriculum and were receiving money from the Land-Grant Act had comparatively liberal appropriations for library expendi-

tures. Many of these institutions, founded in the late eighteenth or in the early nineteenth century, were endowed and had passed the first years of want and deprivations. At the time the struggling agricultural colleges were receiving two, three, and eight hundred dollars as their annual appropriations for library purposes, the older institutions were spending from two to five thousand dollars.

Toward the latter part of the nineteenth century, some of the libraries were materially aided by benefactions from private citizens. These gifts were sometimes for the erection of new library buildings, while at other times they came in the form of choice collections accumulated in years of study and travel by the owners. Among the notable donations of this period were the Billings' gift of \$150,000 to the University of Vermont and that of Mrs. Sophia Astley Kirkpatrick, of \$50,000, to Rutgers College, both for new library buildings. The Colorado Agricultural College received material aid from the Annia Jones, Louis B. France, and Barton O. Aylesworth gifts. The University of Vermont came into possession of the famous library of the Honorable George Perkins Marsh—a collection of twelve thousand volumes of rare value and interest—and the munificent sum of \$100,000 for the erection of a library building suitable to house such treasures. The library structure was completed in 1885 at a total cost of \$150,000 and was one of the most notable of that period. Sometimes the bequests were left with the provision that the money was to be used in the purchase of books, which proved of great assistance in removing deficiencies.

#### *Experiment Stations*

The Hatch Act of 1887, which provided for the establishment of experiment stations, brought financial aid to many of the

agricultural college libraries. In the institutions where the station libraries became a part or branch of the college libraries, the consolidated financial resources materially increased the appropriations for books. In such libraries there was no need for duplication, and the combined budgets permitted the purchase of a greater variety of titles and periodicals than would have been possible on a single budget. Even when the experiment station was separated from the agricultural college, the station library usually confined its buying to agricultural works—such as bulletins, periodicals, and standard agricultural reference volumes—while books on general subjects and sciences related to the study of agriculture were purchased by the agricultural library. The privilege of interlibrary loan or exchange increased the collections available to both libraries.

Thus, in effect, by 1893 the experiment stations were adding a considerable number of volumes to the agricultural libraries. During that year the experiment station in Michigan gained 501 volumes, the one in Kansas 200 volumes, and that in Connecticut 365 volumes. Partly through the resulting release of funds, by 1899 many of the agricultural college libraries had large collections. Michigan Agricultural College had a library of 19,380 volumes, 9,000 of which were on agriculture. Rutgers University at the same time had a total collection of 40,000 volumes, of which the agricultural books numbered 12,855. Some of the Western agricultural college libraries, however, were still comparatively small: Utah Agricultural College had a total of 7,201 volumes and listed only 364 as dealing with agriculture; and South Dakota, at the same time, had 4,974 books, of which 585 were on agriculture.

By 1900 many of the agricultural libraries had acquired excellent collections, not only in agriculture, but in engineering,

mechanical arts, and science. The scientific periodicals included the best published in the United States, as well as many from England, Germany, and France. Whenever possible an effort was made to complete the files of the more important periodicals and to have them bound for permanent use. The reference collections, too, contained the most recent dictionaries and encyclopedias. In addition to acquiring scientific collections, some of the librarians in the new states realized the importance of accumulating local history material. To this end newspapers, official documents, letters, and bulletins which touched upon the history of the state were acquired, often by solicitation through the college catalogs.

#### *Development of Policies*

Policies concerning cataloging, the number of hours the libraries were open, the privilege of borrowing books, interlibrary loans, and the reserving of books gradually developed in the agricultural college libraries, as in all college or university libraries during that period. As a means of increasing the resources of the libraries, the practice of interlibrary loans was a natural expedient, especially between the older and better equipped libraries of the East. At first, accurate records of the loans were not kept and there were no rules governing the procedure; the practice grew without plan or program. In the biennial report of the University of California in 1886, Mr. Rowell, the librarian, commented that "from private sources of information I note a growing liberality as regards the use of books in eastern libraries—one library making loans to another at a distance. Such action is not often mentioned in the annual reports because as yet rules covering the cases of this kind have not been adopted." But the advantages of interlibrary loans soon became apparent, and there was an increasing readiness on

the part of all libraries to cooperate.

As the agricultural colleges were established, the office of librarian was usually an added duty of an overcrowded faculty member. The most scholarly members of the faculty were put in charge of the libraries—men who were full of enthusiasm and in sympathy with the students—for it was felt that “the youthful student needs assistance in his selection of reading matter; and a good librarian is his best adviser.” Sometimes this position, as well as that of clerk, accountant, registrar, and instructor, was assumed by the president. Since the academic duties of the busy faculty member permitted him to devote only Saturday and an hour or two a day to the routine work of the library, students often were called upon to assist in the library while the professor’s attention was directed toward classroom work. It was not infrequent that a student assistant became actively interested in library work and, after graduation, was appointed librarian of his alma mater. To acquire the knowledge of library technique before assuming his new duties, a student sometimes spent the summer months studying the most approved methods for the arrangement and classification of books in the larger libraries.

#### *One Person for Librarian*

A faculty member who was attempting the dual task of librarian and professor soon realized that the library required one person’s undivided attention. It needed someone who could give his entire time to the purchase of books when it was most profitable to obtain them and to the cataloging and classifying of the library. In 1894 the professor-librarian at the University of Illinois informed the regents of that university that it was “imperative that a trained librarian should be employed, and that catalogers should be placed at his direction,” and, he concluded, much care

should be taken that the man selected could work harmoniously with the library committee.

Salaries of librarians during this early period were comparatively meager. In 1876 a Midwestern agricultural college fixed the librarian’s salary at two hundred dollars per year. The previous year the rate of compensation had been increased from seven to nine cents per hour.

The increased book collections, made possible by the more liberal appropriations, required scientific methods of cataloging and classifying. As already implied, it was not uncommon for a student assistant to attempt the classification of the books or for an enthusiastic faculty member to undertake the task—only to find his twofold responsibilities so arduous that the cataloging had to be discontinued until an assistant assumed the routine duties of the library. A shelflist was the first tool prepared by every librarian as a means of inventory, for if a book happened “to be lost or stolen the fact could not be detected without infinite labor and trouble.” And with the distribution of the Library of Congress cards, toward the latter part of the century, the dictionary catalog came into general use. Pennsylvania State College was among the libraries which changed from a simple author catalog to a dictionary catalog, “which would have been impracticable with the assistance available had not the library been authorized to subscribe for the cards printed by the Library of Congress.” The subscribing libraries found the expense of the cards “but a fraction of the cost of the additional labor required to print them by hand.”

#### *Hours Open*

With a limited staff, it was possible to keep the libraries open only short periods of time. Often a busy faculty member could devote but an hour or two in the morning

and the same length of time in the afternoon, or a few minutes at the beginning and close of class periods, to the duties of the library. But, as the number of students increased, the library became a center of study and the hours were lengthened from eight in the morning to five in the afternoon; occasionally the opening hour was as early as seven o'clock. It was some time before it was felt necessary to permit use of the libraries at night. However, as the demand increased, the students were permitted to use the library a few nights each week, and finally many of the libraries not only remained open every night but a few hours on Sunday as well.

Access to the books was often prohibited in an attempt to keep the collections intact. Alcoves containing the bookstacks were separated by an iron railing or by some other method, and only the more advanced students were permitted access to the stacks. Likewise, freedom in borrowing books was frequently restricted. As late as 1870 the Illinois Industrial University readily loaned books to the teachers of the university, but loans to students were made to a very limited extent—each book so taken being charged to the librarian or to some teacher.

With the increased number of books and greater use of the agricultural college libraries, students were gradually permitted access to the stacks; and then came the problem of lost books. During the two-year period, 1885-86, the University of California lost twenty-four books, and the librarian could see no means of preventing this as long as the students enjoyed unrestricted access to the shelves. The pupils were immature and lacked recognition of the rights of others, while demands made upon the books offered "strong temptation to unrecorded borrowing." During the five-year period, 1893-98, the same library lost 342 volumes, and the cost of replacement was estimated at \$414.43. As a

protection, numerous books were reserved during the course of the year and were charged for library use; and at the same time, consideration was given to closing the stacks for the good of the students themselves.

The character and manner of agricultural college instruction experienced decided changes during the last half of the century, and this change was nowhere more felt than in the library. A visit to the library of almost any agricultural college in the sixties would have found it the resort of professors or occasionally of the more ambitious students. During the later years of the century a new conception of the functions of the library had taken place. Books and periodicals had multiplied, and those in authority had wisely concluded that the library was not simply a storehouse or a mausoleum for preserving literary memories but a place to house books which were to be used. Students were allowed greater liberty in consulting the books, even to free access to the shelves; and the librarians endeavored to improve the methods of cataloging, indexing, and classifying, so that the resources of the libraries were made available. With the changed attitude concerning the functions of the library came a change in library architecture. The dim cloistered rooms were flooded with light, and the rooms were enlarged or more space was provided for the library, so that there was latitude for readers who wished to browse and consult the books. And the librarians, too, became something more than turnkeys or sextons. They were expected to know something about books, to be able to suggest lists of books to be added to the various departments, and to act as guides to the students in the selection of reading matter. By 1900 the agricultural libraries had become adjuncts of the regular work of instruction, as well as centers of general student education.