

Armistice Day, which has been celebrated on November 11 since 1918, was changed by law on June 2, 1954 to Veteran's Day. Originally marking the cessation of hostilities in WWI, the day now commemorates the services of those who fought in all wars.

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. ¹ Congratulations to members of the Worcester County Farm Bureau on your 65th anniversary!! And thank you to Bill Carmean, who invited me--I'll get you later.

honored guests.

My respects to all veterans present & to their families & friends on this, their day.

My name is Louise Ash, I work for the Worcester County Library and I have a title--Coordinator of Community Services. I have been asked here tonight to speak to you and you, presumably, are here to listen. If you finish before I do, please let me know....

This is your 65th anniversary. You all look pretty good for your age--definitely too young to retire, and anyway, there may not be any money in the Social Security fund to collect....

A 20th-century philosopher, George Santayana, is not a household name. But something he said is very familiar to all of us--

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

Henry Ford said: "History is bunk." Somewhere in between there is likely a middle ground -- where we can learn something from history and not be bored to tears.

In 1985 a national study called the Foundations of Literacy was undertaken by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and it concluded that we are not teaching our youngsters very much

about history or literature. Of 141 history questions, 54.5% were answered correctly. Of 121 literature questions, 51.8% were correctly responded to by a sampling of the nation's students.

What do our 17-year-olds know?

Let me give you just an example of the nature of the questions asked. When was the Civil War? 1850-1900--only 32.2% knew the correct answer. Authors Diane Ravitch and Chester E. Finn say "Surely everyone should know that Columbus reached the New World before 1750 (31.9% do not); that the Constitution was written between 1750 and 1800 (39.1% do not); that the attack on Pearl Harbor occurred between 1939 and 1943 (40% do not); and that Watergate occurred after 1950 (35.5% do not)."

The study goes on and is, in the end, depressing.

In the field of literature, the best scores were obtained on questions about Shakespeare and the Bible as literature. However, they still were in the 65% range--nothing to write home about.

Now that I have you alarmed and feeling guilty about what we know and what we don't know about our history, and the humanities in general, you are sufficiently softened up to spring on you the real topic of my talk--the very early history of the Worcester County Farm Bureau.

Your farm bureau is part of the American Farm Bureau Federation, I would assume.

Today the American Farm Bureau Federation is the largest general farm organization in the U.S. More than 3 and a quarter million

families are members and the federation is composed of state farm bureaus from all of the states except Alabama, and from Puerto Rico. The state bureaus are composed of county bureaus, of which you are one. The national federation was formed in 1919 and played an important part in developing farm legislation during the Great Depression of the 1930's concerning soil conservation programs, price supports and acreage control regulations. After WWII, the federation recommended changes in government farm programs tending to reduce farmers' dependence on crop price supports and acreage controls.

But back in 1919 in Worcester County, just after the first World War, there was no central county organization. Instead there were 18 different clubs, farmers' unions, granges, with about 845 total memberships. A tomato growers' association was formed because Worcester County farmers were not getting a fair price for their crop--they were getting \$24/ton instead of the \$30/ton other farmers were getting up the Shore and in Delaware and New Jersey. The tomato growers' association claimed it was not possible to produce tomatoes at less than \$25/ton and make a profit.

They also said the real object of their joining together-- organizing--included far more than the effort to secure a fair price for tomatoes. It was for the organization of community life; the securing of more social intercourse and the exchange of ideas; closer cooperation with rural schools and the cultivation of the more vital things of life.

On March 14, 1919, 200 people met at the Court House in Snow Hill. George W. Kemp, Princess Anne, an officer of the Tri-State Tomato Growers' Association (which included New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland), told the farmers that they failed to get \$30 a ton for their tomatoes because of "lack of organization." That year Worcester County farmers lost \$100,000 because of their taking a lower price. A Snow Hill growers' association was formed at that meeting. Robert Stagg was elected president, Archer C. Holloway, vice-president, and W. E. Bowman, secretary-treasurer.

On March 29 at the Opera House in Snow Hill (how fancy for Snow Hill) farmers again met and came up with \$21/ton as a fair price for tomatoes. Dr. Symons of Maryland State College discussed tomato growing from the points of view of the canner, the grower and the consumer. Meanwhile in Seaford, tomato growers had settled on \$25/ton as their rock-bottom price.

I guess the tomato situation cleared up somewhat and farmers got a fairly decent price that year.... As a result of all the organization talks, there were now left about 16 farmers' clubs throughout Worcester County, with three central groups: The Farmers' Exchange in Berlin with Thomas H. Cropper as president; the Snow Hill Tomato Growers' Association with Robert Stagg as president; and the Pocomoke Tomato Growers' and Truckers' Association with Grover C. Brittingham as its president. Now the clubs were focusing on other issues, such as the schools, roads, and the social and educational betterment of the farm population.

In 1921 the Worcester County Farmers' Federation was formed with

E.E. Nock of Stockton president; Hale Harrison vice-president; Edward I. Oswald secretary and F. J. Dukes as treasurer.

In 1922 the federation cooperatively bought fertilizer, and initiated a wool to blankets program. They also passed a resolution that called for fertilizer manufacturers to furnish analyses on each bag of fertilizer.

Now to the actual founding of the organization. In 1923 at a meeting of the Farmers Federation at the Court House in Snow Hill chaired by Hale Harrison, farmers met to discuss organizing a Farm Bureau. R. F. Bower, assistant to Gray Silver, a well-known West Virginia Senator and friend of farmers, was the main speaker. Bower spoke of the accomplishments of the Bureau in passing legislation like the Packer Bill, preventing duties on imported potash, the Fabric Bill, and the selling of Muscle Shoals to Ford to manufacture nitrogen at less than 1/4 the present cost.

Bower told the farmers what the Farm Bureau stands for: better American homes with the housewife, the dominating factor of the home as one of the moving spirits of the Farm Bureau, better education for boys and girls to make them into useful citizens, better roads to make it easier and cheaper to move goods and for fair freight rates. The bureau was not a cooperative and would not buy or sell; however it would cooperate with business and banking interests to work for farmers' interests. Farmers were told that the exchange value of their dollar was 68 cents compared to the dollar in 1913. Sounds like today.

Feb 13
Tues.
Snow storm
Feb 6
Mr O. Z.
Ramberg of
National Fed
spoke
Legislative
agent
rep. Nat'l
Farm
Bureau
Fed.

200

The 500 or so at the meeting unanimously approved the organization and a group was designated from each election district to confer on the overall structure of the newly-formed bureau. Dues were to be \$10 a year for three years and those who thought that a high price to pay were told it was only "one egg a day per man."

Even the newspapers got into the act. The Snow Hill Democratic Messenger put out a special Farm Bureau edition on March 10, a front page of which is in the library's special collections. Later that spring a big campaign was sponsored to sign farmers up. 600 (40% of the county's farmers) signed up. On Saturday, April 7 at 2 o'clock at the Court House in Snow Hill, officers of the Farm Bureau were selected. E. E. Nock of Stockton was chosen president; Charles Chessser of Pocomoke City was named vice-president; and William H. Holloway was picked to be the secretary-treasurer.

meetings were
held at 22
locations
state &
local
farm bureau
officers

Fifteen "locals" were formed: Merrill's, Pocomoke City, Beaver Dam, Goodwill, Stockton, Girdletree, Box Iron, Snow Hill, Newark, Berlin, Sinepuxent, Whaleyville, Showell, Williams, Acquango. The program for that first year, signed by Nock, Holloway and Oswald, the county agent, was as follows:

To market potatoes and truck crops through existing co-ops and to market eggs and poultry through the Atlantic Coast Poultry Producers' Association. Cooperative buying arrangements were made to get Maine grown seed potatoes and Prince Edward Isle seed; to get fertilizer through the Tide-Water of Virginia Fertilizer Pool;

and to buy feeder cattle from Western Maryland county farmers. They were going to work for better train service for strawberry growers between Franklin City (now a ghost town) and Harrington. They wanted new siding facilities at Newark, Snow Hill and Stockton for potato loading and twice a week boat service from Snow Hill to Baltimore.

One of the more lively, fun undertakings of the Farm Bureau started that year on August 22--Farmers' Day at Public Landing. Some 2,000 folks gathered there for the first annual county-wide picnic of farmers. Senator Gray Silver was to speak, but his train was delayed in Berlin. It was a gay ol' time: the roll call of locals was answered by songs and yells and each local was bedecked in its own colors. Dr. Woods of the University of Maryland spoke, as did Mrs. A. G. McKinney, the chairman of the Rural Women's Organization. The menu was simply marvelous: whole boiled hams, roasts of beef, mounds of fried chicken, jars of potato salad, cakes, watermelons, jams and jellies. In fact, it was noted in a newspaper clipping of the event: "Many of the Farm Bureau members were accused of always being seen with both hands full of either a chicken leg, a pickle, a piece of cake or a slice of watermelon."

I cannot discuss the Farm Bureau without mentioning County Agent E. I. Oswald, as he signed his name. He was county agent for nine years, and under his careful ministrations, he introduced many useful innovations to Worcester County farmers. He helped to stamp out hog cholera through a persistent campaign, promoted the growing of different truck crops, introduced new seed and

purebred livestock, and in general, worked his heart out for the welfare of county farmers.

In his first report on efforts in the county, 1919 I believe, he lists the following: 1,653 visits, 7,576 miles traveled, was called on 2,116 times, attended 49 farmers' meetings, addressed 28 meetings with attendance of 2,445, attended 6 field meetings, wrote and sent 1,097 official letters, sent 1,801 circular letters, distributed 1,635 bulletins, visited 46 schools, and wrote 85 articles for publication. And that wasn't even a full year. An interesting and practical solution to poor math skills among youngsters who were destined to become today's farmers involved Oswald devising his own math problems for kids to figure out, problems directly related to farming. For instance:

If the Worcester tax rate is \$1.10/hundred and the total assessed wealth is \$9,500,000, what additional taxes does John Doe pay to rebuild the county jail at a cost of \$7,800 if his farm holdings are assessed at \$5,000?

Go figure.

He introduced the weekly report to the five county newspapers and the Maryland Farmer, as well as sending worthwhile reports to the Baltimore Sun and the Baltimore American.

In his 1920 report, he outlined how he had helped the Negro farmers in Worcester County. He had directly helped 31 with total acreage of 385 in potatoes, corn and tomatoes, and assisted them in controlling insects, fungus diseases, with sick livestock, helped them obtain loans and registered livestock, and had judged at shows "gotten up by the Negroes."

In 1920 he helped institute a system of weather signals across the county from weather reports telegraphed to him from the U.S. Wather Bureau. Corddry Lumber in Snow Hill, Adkins Lumber in Berlin and the Electric and Ice Manufacturing Company in Pocomoke City would give a signal at 11 a.m. forecasting the weather. A long blast meant fair weather, separate long blasts meant rain, and short blasts meant a cold wave would set in.

He helped get the Snow Hill Community Show on its feet and it was widely touted to be the best show in the state. It was held 11/19/20 in the Court House and the Deposit and Savings Bank. Tom Wharton's pumpkin weighed in at 145 pounds. (of Stockton) He taught the future farmers how to keep records so that, for instance, Joe Coe could have the best record on his pig Conqueror. Bought weighing 17.5 lbs at 6 weeks old, it grew to 341 lbs. and cost Joe just 11 cents a pould to raise.

The reports Oswald kept were detailed, accurate, grammatical, extensive and for the most part, interesting reading. In fact, according to a federal agriculture department official, Dr. Bradford Knapp, Oswald kept the best reports in the state. Worcester County was indeed fortunate to have him here for those years.

I hope you have enjoyed this walk down memory lane.

I hope all of you know about the scrapbook of your Farm Queens that we now have in our special collections and I hope you will come see it, add other items to the farm bureau collection, tell your children and grandchildren about, and please, please, keep your history alive!!!!

From a presentation to the Worcester County Farm Bureau in 1988 on its 65th anniversary by Louise Ash, Coordinator of Community Services, Worcester County Library.

**"SKY HIS ROOF; EARTH HIS FLOOR":
ORGANIZING THE WORCESTER COUNTY FARM BUREAU**

Today the American Farm Bureau Federation is the largest general farm organization in the U.S. More than three and a quarter million families are members. The federation is composed of state farm bureaus from all of the states except Alabama, and from Puerto Rico. The state bureaus are composed of county bureaus, of which Worcester County is one. The national federation was formed in 1919 and played an important part in developing farm legislation during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Soil conservation programs, price supports and acreage control regulations were topics addressed by the federation. After World War II, the federation recommended changes in government farm programs tending to reduce farmers' dependence on crop price supports and acreage controls.

But in 1919 in Worcester County, just after the first World War, there was no central county organization. Instead there were 18 different clubs, farmers' unions, and granges, with about 845 in total membership. A tomato growers' association was formed because Worcester County farmers believed they were not getting a fair price for their crop--they were getting \$24/ton instead of the \$30/ton other farmers were getting up the Shore and in Delaware and New Jersey. The tomato growers' association claimed it was not possible to produce tomatoes at less than \$25/ton and make a profit.

They also said the real object of their joining together--"organizing"--included far more than the effort to secure a fair price for tomatoes. It was for the organization of community life; the securing of more social intercourse and the exchange of ideas; closer cooperation with rural schools and the cultivation of the more vital things of life.

On March 14, 1919, 200 people met at the Court house in Snow Hill. George W. Kemp, of Princess Anne, an officer of the Tri-State Tomato Growers' Association (which included New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland), told the farmers that they failed to get \$30 a ton for their tomatoes because of "lack of organization." That year Worcester County farmers lost \$100,000 because of their taking a lower price. A Snow Hill growers' association was formed at that meeting. Robert Stagg was elected president, Archer C. Holloway, vice-president, and W.E. Bowman, secretary-treasurer.

On March 29 of the same year, farmers met again at the Opera House in Snow Hill and decided upon \$21/ton as a fair price for tomatoes. Dr. Symons of Maryland

State College discussed tomato growing from the points of view of the canner, the grower and the consumer. Meanwhile, in Seaford, tomato growers had settled on \$25/ton as their rock-bottom price.

The tomato situation improved that year and farmers received a satisfactory price for their crops. As a result of all the "organization" talks, there were now left about 16 farmers' clubs throughout Worcester County, with three central groups: The Farmers' Exchange in Berlin with Thomas H. Cropper as president; the Snow Hill Tomato Growers' Association with Robert Stagg as president; and the Pocomoke Tomato Growers' and Truckers' Association with Grover C. Brittingham as its president. Now the clubs were focusing on other issues, such as the schools, roads, and the social and educational betterment of the farm population.

In 1921 the Worcester County Farmers' Federation was formed. E. E. Nock of Stockton was elected president; Hale Harrison, vice-president; Edward I. Oswald, secretary; and F.J. Dukes, treasurer.

In 1922 the federation cooperatively bought fertilizer and initiated a wool-to-blankets program. They also passed a resolution that called for fertilizer manufacturers to furnish an analysis on each bag of fertilizer.

On Tuesday, February 13, 1923, at a meeting of the Farmers Federation at the Court House in Snow Hill chaired by Hale Harrison, farmers met to discuss organizing a Farm Bureau. R. F. Bower, assistant to Gray Silver, the Legislative Agent representing the National Farm Bureau Federation and a well-known West Virginia Senator, was the main speaker. Bower spoke of the accomplishments of the Bureau in passing legislation like the Packer Bill, preventing duties on imported potash, the Fabric Bill, and the selling of Muscle Shoals to Ford to manufacture nitrogen at less than a quarter of the current cost.

Bower told the farmers what the Farm Bureau stands for: better American homes, with the housewife--the dominating factor of the home--as one of the moving spirits of the Farm Bureau; better education for boys and girls to make them into useful citizens; better roads to make it easier and cheaper to move goods and for fair freight rates.

The bureau was not a cooperative and would not buy or sell; however, it would cooperate with business and banking interests to work for farmers' interests. Farmers were told that the exchange value of their dollar was 68 cents, compared to the dollar of 1913.

The 200 or so at the meeting unanimously approved the organization and a group was designated from each election district to confer on the overall structure of the newly-formed bureau. Dues were to be \$10 a year for three years and those who thought that

a high price to pay were told it was only "one egg a day per man."

The Snow Hill Democratic Messenger put out a special Farm Bureau edition on March 10, a front page of which is in the Worcester County Library's special collections. Later that spring, a sizable campaign was sponsored to sign farmers up as members. Six hundred (40% of the county's farmers) signed up. On Saturday, April 7 at 2 o'clock at the Court House in Snow Hill, officers of the Farm Bureau were selected. E. E. Nock of Stockton was chosen president, Charles Chesser of Pocomoke City was named vice-president, and William H. Holloway the secretary-treasurer.

Fifteen "locals" were formed; Merrill's, Pocomoke City, Beaver Dam, Goodwill, Stockton, Girdletree, Box Iron, Snow Hill, Newark, Berlin, Sinexuxent, Whaleyville, Showell, Williams, Acquango. The program for that first year, signed by Nock, Holloway and Oswald, the county's cooperative extension agent, was as follows:

To market potatoes and truck crops through existing co-ops and to market eggs and poultry through the Atlantic Coast Poultry Producers' Association. Cooperative buying arrangements were made to get Maine-grown seed potatoes and Prince Edward isle seed; to get fertilizer through the Tide-Water of Virginia Fertilizer Pool; and to buy feeder cattle from Western Maryland county farmers. They planned to work for improved rail service for strawberry growers between Franklin City (now a ghost town) and Harrington, Delaware. They wanted new siding facilities for potato loading at Newark, Snow Hill, and Stockton, and twice weekly boat service from Snow Hill to Baltimore.

One of the livelier undertakings of the Farm Bureau started that year on August 22, Farmers' Day at Public Landing, a Chincoteague Bay village about seven miles from Snow Hill. Some 2,000 folks gathered there for the first annual county-wide picnic of farmers. Senator Gray Silver was to address the crowd, but his train was delayed in Berlin. The roll call of the locals answered by songs and yells, and each local was decked in its own colors. Dr. Woods of the University of Maryland spoke, as did Mrs. A. G. McKinney, the chairman of the Rural Women's Organization.

The menu was marvelously sumptuous and included whole boiled hams, roasts of beef, mounds of fried chicken, jars of potato salad, cakes, watermelons, jams and jellies. In fact, it was noted in a newspaper clipping of the event: "Many of the Farm Bureau members were accused of always being seen with both hands full of either a chicken leg, a pickle, a piece of cake or a slice of watermelon."

Worcester County's first County Agent, E. I. Oswald, and Lucy J. Walters, the first Home Demonstration Agent, urged farmers to organize a Farm Bureau, as did many prominent farmers and community leaders.

The first and second decades of this century saw a marked increase in

industrialization, with its attendant labor organizations to represent the workers' interests. Farmers began to realize the value of banding together in common cause. As Lucy J. Walter makes it clear of the Worcester County farmer:

"He can no longer work profitably alone. The modern farmer is the manufacturer; the sky is the roof of his factory and the earth the floor. He must operate his factory just as efficiently as the manufacturer. His is a plant that is worth as much as the various businesses in town with which he deals. He needs to operate it just as carefully.

"That's why he must join an organization which has influence in his county, his State, his nation. The Farm Bureau is such an organization.

"The Farm Bureau movement marks the dawn of a new day in agriculture."