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**Volume 21, Issue 1, Fall 2009**

## **Chartering the New York State School of Agriculture on Long Island**

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**Abstract:** Farmingdale State College, SUNY, is the oldest public college on Long Island. Founded in 1912 as an agricultural high school for boys and girls in New York City and surrounding counties, the school's original mission was to furnish training in agricultural science. It has grown into a full-fledged college offering more than 40 academic programs that include baccalaureate and associate degrees. Farmingdale State College's history has mirrored the growth of Long Island from rural-agrarian to suburban-post-industrial in the development of the region's high tech and service economy. This essay presents the prevailing educational and agricultural background justifying the reasons why the school was established, the leaders who argued for its creation, and the early years of development.

**Keywords:** agriculture schools, Farmingdale State College, Hal B. Fullerton, Harte-Thompson Act, Franklin W. Hooper, Albert A. Johnson, Long Island Railroad, Morrill Land Grant Act, scientific farming, World War I

*Physiography, climate, and location have all combined  
to make Long Island a farming country.*

Gabriel, *The Evolution of Long Island*, 1921, 34.

- 1 Through its nearly one hundred years of development as a leading educational institution, Farmingdale State College, SUNY, has mirrored Long Island's transition from rural to suburban and from agriculture to high technology. It is a microcosm of local history. More than 80,000 alumni have achieved distinction in the public and private sectors of American society and beyond. Chartered in 1912, when William Howard Taft was president and the population of the United States was 92,228,496, as recorded in the 1910 census, its original name was the New York State School of Agriculture on Long Island and its mission was to provide agricultural training to high school boys and girls from

New York City, and the counties of Suffolk, Nassau, Westchester, Dutchess, Rockland, and Putnam. At the beginning of the twentieth century the southeastern section of the state attempted to preserve a lifestyle of the past; and it attempted to benefit from the prevailing economic and social conditions.

- 2 Farmingdale State is the oldest public college on Long Island, and is older than the State University of New York itself, which was established in 1948. The college has contributed to the present high socioeconomic status of the combined population of Nassau County and Suffolk County, which counted 2,895,377 in 2006. Since it was founded, change has been a constant factor in meeting the needs of an evolving society. This can be seen in the various names the college has assumed in its history as cited in the official catalogs in the College Archives:

*New York State School of Agriculture on Long Island, 1912.*

*State Institute of Applied Agriculture on Long Island, 1920.*

*State Institute of Applied Agriculture, 1924.*

*State Institute of Agriculture, 1939.*

*Long Island Agricultural and Technical Institute, 1946.*

*SUNY Long Island Agricultural and Technical Institute at Farmingdale, 1953.*

*Agricultural and Technical College at Farmingdale, 1966.*

*SUNY College of Technology at Farmingdale, 1987.*

*SUNY Farmingdale, 1993.*

*Farmingdale State College, 2002.*

- 3 The drive for an agricultural school on Long Island did not emerge out of a vacuum. Even before 1912, leaders stepped forward to provide the impetus for organization and planning to achieve that goal. They possessed the knowledge and experience to preach, publicize, and promote the need for a school. They used their political expertise to lobby effectively. For example, Frederick H. Cox, a Congressman from Queens who was to serve as a trustee for the Farmingdale school, had called for an agricultural school on Long Island as early as May 3, 1909 in a letter to *New York Times*. He pointed out that besides the State College of Agriculture at Cornell University, there were three similar farm schools existing at Canton, Alfred, and Morrisville, but none in the downstate area where the majority of the population resided. Because of this “unfairness to our part of the State,” he demanded that an agricultural school be established on Long Island.
- 4 Among the other outstanding leaders were Hal B. Fullerton, Special Agent of the Long Island Railroad who also served as Director of its Agricultural Department; Franklin W. Hooper, Director of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences (the Brooklyn Museum); John M. Lupton, State Assemblyman from Mattituck; George L. Thompson, State Assemblyman and later State Senator from Smithtown and Kings Park; Dennis J. Harte, State Assemblyman from New York City; Dr. James S. Cooley, Superintendent of Schools in Nassau County; Elwood Titus, pioneer in the cooperative movement among farmers and sponsor of the Nassau County Farm Bureau; Ezra Tuttle; and Austin Corbin, W. H. Baldwin, Jr., and Ralph Peters, all presidents of the Long Island Railroad who had a vested interest in transportation expansion.
- 5 The LIRR is one of the oldest railroads in the nation, and its

development was an important part of the expansion of the region's transportation infrastructure that would inevitably influence the establishment of an agricultural school in Farmingdale. It was not built for transporting people on Long Island. It was originally planned to connect a rail and water route between New York and Boston. The Railroad was chartered in 1834 to reduce travel time to Boston by transporting passengers from New York City eastward through Long Island, then by ferry to Stonington, Connecticut, to another train to reach their destination. Initially, the route achieved profitability carrying passengers and mail during the years 1844 to 1847. However, a competing all-land route was soon completed that extended from Charleston, South Carolina, to New York City to Boston, rendering the Long Island connection to Boston unprofitable. [1]



**Figure 1:** Melville Road, then called Farmingdale Road, reflects the rural nature of undeveloped Long Island in this pre-1912 image. The horse and carriage are having difficulty traversing the muddy road. The agricultural school would be built on land to the north. — All images in this article are courtesy of the SUNY Farmingdale College Archives.

- 6 The LIRR turned to developing traffic at the local level, eventually merging various short trunk lines. In 1902 the LIRR became a part of the Pennsylvania Railroad and in 1910 was connected directly to New York City via a tunnel under the East River to the newly constructed Pennsylvania Station. As a result, the LIRR was relegated to local interests, concentrating on expanding local travel. Since Long Island was primarily an agricultural region, food products would also be shipped to the city, thereby sustaining its population while the city grew into a manufacturing, corporate, and financial center. It became obvious to the railroad leadership that lobbying for construction of an agricultural school would increase population, generate business, and produce food for the New York City region. [2]

- 7 The vision of Hal B. Fullerton (1857-1935) contributed significantly to the development of Long Island. In 1897 the Long Island Railroad appointed him to the position of Special Agent and in 1905 assigned him the title of Director of its Agricultural Department. His photographs, writings, and lectures made the public aware of Long Island as a growth extension of the New York City metropolis, as a place that could foster seaside resorts, recreation, tourism, suburban population growth, and agriculture, which in turn could influence the local demand for a school that specialized in farming. Fullerton's goal was to secure a profitable environment for the railroad. For more than thirty years he guided the railroad's promotional activities that emphasized Long Island "as an ideal vacation destination, a recreational paradise, an ideal home for commuters, and a fertile land for agricultural pursuits."<sup>[3]</sup>
- 8 As the head of the railroad's agricultural department, Fullerton guided the successful experimental farms in Suffolk County at Wading River from 1905 to 1910, named "Peace and Plenty," and at Medford from 1907 to 1927, named "Prosperity Farm," containing 80 acres, whose purpose was to demonstrate that fruits, vegetables, flowers, and foliage plants could be profitably grown and marketed from the Island's less productive soils. The soil was considered a wasteland. Long Island Railroad President Ralph Peters justified the program as he explained,

The most unattractive parcel of land on Long Island can be converted into rich, fertile soil, capable of producing every species of vegetables, fruit, forage, and flowering plant common to the temperate zone.
- 9 The success of the Wading River experiment was then extended to Medford where "scrub waste" was cleared and converted into productive agricultural soil. Long Island's experimental stations for years proved that farming could succeed through proper cultivation and fertilization. *The New York Times* commented in 1911 that since agriculture was largely responsible for Long Island's prosperity in the past, it would "become a more potent influence in the future."<sup>[4]</sup>
- 10 Also, Fullerton combined his enthusiasm with staging publicity events to achieve his goals. As a close friend of former President Theodore Roosevelt of nearby Oyster Bay, Fullerton organized a media extravaganza on August 10, 1912, by inviting the former president to the Medford farm. The Long Island Railroad provided a special train, with accompanying reporters and photographers. The event was well publicized. In all his endeavors, Fullerton was joined by his talented wife, Edith Loring Fullerton; she assisted at fairs, expositions, trade shows, and public lectures. She produced a popular account of the Wading River experimental farm venture in a book, *The Lure of the Land, A Call to Long Island*, (New York: Long Island Railroad, 1906), later revised and expanded into several more editions. The book was accompanied with her husband's photographs. This successful husband-wife team established close connections with editors, publishers, and journalists who willingly assisted to publish articles extolling the benefits of the agricultural and country life on Long Island.<sup>[5]</sup>
- 11 *The Long Island Agronomist*, a monthly publication, praised Fullerton for seeing the potential of local "farming as a little better than anywhere else . . . and he had strong facts to account for his enthusiasm." At the 1912 State Fair in Syracuse, Long Island products won high honors in every important competition. Gold medals were won for butter; milk

earned the highest award. Long Island's fruit and grapes won 38 prizes, while its vegetables won 41. In addition, the fairs at Huntington and Riverhead demonstrated advances made in modern methods of Long Island agriculture. [6]



**Figure 2:** Pre-1912 view of the original farms. In this pre-1912 landscape view, the original farmhouses can be seen in the distance of the land that would become the New York State School of Agriculture at Farmingdale. The school evolved into present-day Farmingdale State College, State University of New York.

- 12 Fullerton and his wife seized every opportunity to advance their goals. Their work promoting the Long Island Railroad's "demonstration farms and agricultural publications were forerunners of government-sponsored extension services, and it is probably not a coincidence that the state created one of its first agricultural schools at Farmingdale." Through speaking engagements and writings in the *Long Island Agronomist* the Fullertons "lobbied successfully for the establishment of local Farmers' Institutes by the Cornell Extension Service and ultimately creation of Long Island's own agricultural college" at Farmingdale, which was chartered in 1912. [7]
- 13 Throughout his busy and creative life, Fullerton maintained the vision that agriculture would continue to play an important part of the economic and social life of Long Island. In 1927, the year he retired from the LIRR, in an interview at his home in Medford he clung to this vision. A reporter from the *Brooklyn Eagle* recorded his vision in this way:

[Fullerton] foresees a tremendous residential growth for Long Island, with New York working its way eastward at a rapid gait and the many villages becoming more and more urban in character. But tilling the soil is to be the main industry. . . "God, Providence, or whatever you may call it, put Long Island here to feed New York, and it has to carry out that purpose. . ." [8]

- 14 Despite the advances in transportation, suburbanization, and recreation on Long Island, so evident toward the end of his life, the agricultural ideal prevailed in the mind of this romantic-progressive leader. His “blessed isle” reflected the Jeffersonian vision of an agrarian society that he believed was conducive to democracy that engendered civic virtue, sustained by unencumbered farmers, superior to a “less free” life style in an urban-industrial society. In this view, farmers were regarded as “the chosen people of God.” [9] Fullerton was conscious of the high tide of immigration covering the period from 1880-1920 when 18,638,406 immigrants entered the United States, most of whom had settled in the cities and provided the labor for an expanding industrialized society. [10]
- 15 Changes were occurring rapidly in America. From 1870 to 1930 the nation’s rural population had declined from 80 percent to less than 40 percent of the total population. Though Fullerton enthusiastically promoted his vision of Long Island, unforeseen consequences would result as he nevertheless maintained an ideal image that dated back to the nineteenth century. By supporting the chartering of an agricultural school at the beginning of the twentieth century, future advances in technology would ultimately reshape Fullerton’s educational ideal in meeting the needs of future generations.
- 16 Franklin W. Hooper (1851-1914), educator, scientist, and civic leader, was more important than Hal B. Fullerton in setting the agenda for the Long Island school. As a respected educational reformer he heralded the benefits of scientific farming and the need for an agricultural school. He, along with local leaders recognized the importance of Long Island in the context of the region’s overall economic and social development. It was Hooper who was the driving force in the struggle to establish an agricultural school at Farmingdale.
- 17 Hooper was known throughout the scientific world for his achievements as a scientist and educator. Born in Walpole, New Hampshire, on February 11, 1851, he grew up on his parents’ farm. He was educated in common schools in a rural environment. At the age of 17 he entered Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. After two years there, he enrolled at Harvard where he completed his studies under such scholars as Asa Gray, Louis Agassig, and Josiah Cook, and he received a Bachelor of Arts degree in biological studies. In 1872 he attended the Agassig Summer School of Natural History at Penikese Island. In 1876 he was an agent for the Smithsonian Institution to study algae and coralline formations on Florida’s coasts. Returning from Florida the following year, Hooper married Martha Holden of Augusta, Georgia, whose father was an abolitionist during the time of slavery. This marriage produced three children. From 1877 to 1880 he served as principal of a high school in Keene, New Hampshire. He then accepted a professorship of chemistry and geology at Adelphi Academy in Brooklyn from 1880 to 1889.
- 18 In 1889 Hooper was appointed curator at the Brooklyn Institute, which he helped to reorganize to make it the newly established Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences. He had served there as a Fellow. His work earned him the right to be appointed as the first General Director in 1899, holding this position until his death in 1914. The Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences became the forerunner of the prestigious Brooklyn Museum of Art (1897) and included the Brooklyn Academy of Music, as well as the Brooklyn Children’s Museum and the Brooklyn

Botanic Garden. The Institute had been founded in 1823 as the Brooklyn Apprentices' Library Association to provide a library for working boys. Two years later, on July 4, 1825, the great Frenchman who had served the American Revolutionary cause, General Marquis de Lafayette, while visiting Brooklyn, laid the corner stone of the first building for the Apprentices' Library. This small beginning of the Institute evolved into one of the most influential cultural and educational institutions in the United States. Hooper provided the leadership in expanding the functions of the Institute because of his keen interest in education, horticulture, botany, and civic responsibility. [11]

- 19 Hooper also served as a member of the Board of Education and as a trustee for Brooklyn Public Library. As an important educator, leading citizen, and Director of the Institute, he assumed a prominent position in the community. He was aware of the emergence of new schools and courses toward the end of the nineteenth century. The agricultural high school was first established in 1888 at the University of Minnesota. By 1898, ten such high schools were in existence in the United States. After 1900, the development of agricultural high schools was more rapid than any other previous type of secondary school. The number of these agricultural high schools had reached sixty by 1909. Moreover, 346 other secondary schools were offering agricultural courses. Hooper would have been amazed, had he lived, that the number of secondary schools offering agricultural instruction had surpassed ten thousand by 1934. A movement for technical and vocational education began to emerge. John Dewey (1859-1952), educator and philosopher, greatly influenced Hooper and other leaders. Dewey responded to the social and economic changes in the nation by demanding that American education develop "practical content" along scientific and industrial lines. He believed that school activities be connected to real life experiences. [12]



**Figure 3:** The Mott House in 1916 was part of the original R. S. Mott farm purchased by the state for the new agricultural school in Farmingdale. It was near Melville Road. Mott House served as an office, dormitory, and classrooms. The pine trees used to be decorated at Christmas time and could be seen from a great distance.

- 20 The Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences was nearly seven decades old when Hooper became director, and from this vantage point he realized the importance of the relationship between education and a democratic citizenry. He expanded the work of the Institute and quadrupled its membership. He developed a philosophy of education that would have an important societal impact in the early part of the twentieth century. He merged this philosophy of education with his knowledge and experience to lobby effectively for the agricultural school in Farmingdale.
- 21 Toward the end of his life, having accomplished so much in public life, Hooper refined and articulated a philosophy of what he considered to be a progressive American educational system. In a paper he presented at a

conference in Philadelphia, 1913, his position was made clear when he stated,

Our educational ideals and institutions have been undergoing a very great change and that change has not at any time been more rapid or far-reaching than at present.

- 22 He pointed out that the American system of public and private education had been greatly influenced by colleges and universities. According to his educational philosophy, the old system prepared students for post-secondary education, rather than for life, in a chiefly agrarian society. Hooper termed it “artificial” because it focused on the classics and it had little relation to life. This put boys and girls living in the city at a disadvantage. He said nearly all American statesmen, painters, poets, and industrial leaders had come from a farm, a hamlet, or had country origins. He continued:

The life of the boy or girl on the farm or in the village workshop was a liberal education in itself superior to any substitute that could be devised . . . The youth on the farm learned more of botany than the city-trained college professor of botany. . . Our schools need to be revolutionized that each boy and girl have a real training— industrial, intellectual, and moral.

- 23 Hooper called for the formation of industrial and vocational schools; more high schools should focus on manual training and technical skills. He praised such contemporary educational institutions as Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, Drexel Institute in Philadelphia, Armour Institute in Chicago, and the Carnegie Industrial Schools in Pittsburgh. Though there were those who would disagree with this viewpoint, it did influence the evolving trend of American education and helped guide the establishment of the agricultural school in Farmingdale. [13]



**Figure 4:** Miss Nellie Buff. Seventeen-year-old Nellie Buff poses on the steps of the Agronomy building (Cutler Hall) March, 1916. She was the first girl student to enroll in the new farm school. Nellie and her mother moved from Switzerland to Huntington to be within commuting distance of the agricultural school in Farmingdale. She planned to return to her native country to practice modern farming and dairying, but for some unexplained reason, she soon withdrew from the school.

- 24 The interest in scientific farming to reclaim farms had been supported by agricultural societies in New England since the eighteenth century, while interest in the South had declined since the invention of the cotton gin because virgin land was more accessible and profitable. Agricultural societies flourished in the northeast. The first agricultural school opened in 1822. Agricultural societies became popular at this time and by 1867 there were over 900 such societies in existence. Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and John C. Calhoun were members of agricultural societies. *The American Farmer*, issued in Baltimore in 1819, became the first journal devoted to farming. In 1860 there were 50 farm papers being published primarily in the North, but also in the South, as progressive farmers sought new ways to reclaim and protect land. The Department of Agriculture was created in 1862, allowing the federal government to broaden its support for farming. There can be no doubt that the institution of farming played an important in the development of the United States. This development would continue into the twentieth century when the need for an agricultural school on Long Island would emerge. [14]
- 25 The passage of the national Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862 became the most important piece of agricultural legislation in American history, especially as it applied to education. The law appropriated public land to the states for the establishment of agricultural and industrial colleges. Congress enacted the Hatch Act of 1887, which further subsidized farming by providing agricultural experiment stations in every state in the Union. Thus, by the turn of the twentieth century scientific farming had been established as public policy with the goal of eliminating plant and animal diseases, overcoming natural obstacles, adapting plants to American conditions, and applying science to improve production.
- 26 In 1832 the New York State Agricultural Society was founded, and the *Cultivator* became its official voice. *The Rural-New Yorker* and *The American Agriculturist* were several of the leading publications that spread knowledge extolling the benefits of scientific agriculture. Other periodicals such as the *Plough Boy* (Albany, 1819), *Genesee Farmer* (Rochester, 1831), and *American Agriculturalist* (New York, 1842) gained readership in the tens of thousands by informing its readers of farming conditions and improvements. The first state fair was held in Albany in 1841 with support and endorsement of the state government, and huge crowds have attended the event. Since 1890 the state fair has been held in Syracuse. In 1841 the Queens County Agricultural Society was founded with Nassau and Suffolk Counties. As one of the oldest agricultural societies in the nation, the Society has sponsored a fair since 1842. Now known as the Long Island Fair, it has been held at the Old Bethpage Village Restoration since 1970. In 1865, under the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862, New York State chartered Cornell University with a small agricultural department, and it became the New York State College of Agriculture, 1904 (now the New York State School of

Agriculture and Life Sciences). An experiment station was set up in Ithaca, 1879, and it became affiliated with the Cornell Agricultural College. The following year a second experimental station was established in Geneva and placed under the Agricultural College in 1923. The College sponsored New York State's first Farmers Institute in 1886. These were among the major developments that led to the formation of agricultural schools at Canton (1906), Alfred (1908), Morrisville (1908), Farmingdale (1912), Delhi 1913), and Cobleskill (1916). [15]



**Figure 5 :** An early campus view, 1917, taken from the water tower showing, left to right, Cutler Hall (Agronomy), Hicks Hall (Horticulture), Conklin Hall (Power plant with smokestack), Ward Hall (Dormitory I).

- 27 Thus, such widespread interest in promoting farming set the stage for local lobbying activity to achieve this goal. As indicated earlier, Fullerton and Hooper were joined by other local leaders such as John M. Lupton, Ezra A. Tuttle, Elwood Titus, George Lincoln Thompson, Dennis J. Harte, Frederick Cox, Charles H. Howell, James C. Cooley, and those executives representing the Long Island Railroad. The press also voiced support. As a result, twenty-one bills establishing agricultural schools were passed in the New York State Legislature in 1908. Governor Charles Evans Hughes (1907-1910), however, vetoed all of them because they were considered too costly and too numerous. In 1909, Assemblyman Lupton introduced a bill that would create a school under the general education law. It was passed by the legislature, but vetoed this time by Governor John Alden Dix (1911-1912). In 1910 and 1911, similar bills were passed, and Governor Dix vetoed them as well. Nevertheless, Governor Dix accepted an alternative bill that authorized him to appoint a committee to develop a specific plan for the formation of agricultural schools. The committee gathered the relevant information and recommended that two schools be established: one in the Finger Lakes district and the other in the southeastern part of the state.
- 28 Opposition to a school on Long Island remained, however, especially from upstate, and the editor of *The Rural New Yorker* argued that such an agricultural school in the southeastern region of the state was not needed. New York City Congressman Cox had warned of such

opposition. Now, more than ever, Hooper and his colleagues determined to fight even harder to overcome this opposition. Aware of this development, the Agricultural Education Association, organized April 1912 with Hooper as president, contributed its influence in the fight for an agricultural school. At an organizing meeting at the Nassau County Court House in Mineola, May 21, *The New York Times* reported that Hooper had compared Long Island to Holland; by arguing Long Island could be as productive as that European country, but success was contingent on agricultural education. The Nassau County branch of the Agricultural Education Association elected its officers: Ellwood P. Titus (Glen Cove) as president; Adolph Bausch (Farmingdale), as vice president; Dr. James S. Cooley (Superintendent of Schools), as secretary. Titus also served as vice president of the main organization. A special committee was formed to recommend trustees for the school.

- 29 The New York State Advisory Board on Agricultural Education and Country Life, created in 1911 by the legislature for the purpose of studying this entire issue, reported to the governor and the legislature in March 1912. Responding to this official report, State Assemblyman George L. Thompson, Republican from Smithtown, introduced a bill in the same month for the creation of a state school of agriculture on Long Island. The bill was co-sponsored by State Senator Denis J. Harte, Democrat from Long Island City. Hooper drafted the bill with the assistance of Congressman Cox from Queens, Fullerton, Nassau County Superintendent of Schools James C. Cooley, and District Superintendent of Schools Charles H. Howell of Riverhead. Following passage by the legislature, Governor Dix signed the bill into law on April 15, 1912. Babylon's newspaper, *The South Side Signal*, praised Thompson for his leadership in creating the school. Superintendent Howell stated his support for the school:

An agricultural school on Long Island is an institution to which southeastern New York has long been entitled. ... Some Long Island fathers' sons have taken advantage of agricultural schools [in northern and central New York State] but they have been too far away from the average farmers' sons. Then, too, these [upstate] institutions cannot specialize along lines which are engaging the attention of Long Islanders most extensively. [16]

- 30 Even the influential *New York Tribune Farmer*, which described itself as "A National Illustrated Agricultural Weekly for the Farmer's Home," reversed its earlier opposition to the school. In a letter to Governor John A. Dix, the editor of this weekly publication now supported the agricultural school because "this section of the State has been neglected and that it has not been treated fair." Since the agricultural problems of the New York City area were different from other areas in the state, he asserted, "there should be an institution provided by the State to work specifically on these problems." Numerous upstate areas such as the Catskill and Adirondack regions, were not suitable for farming because the soil was acidic, infertile, sloped, and had a shorter growing season. The growing season in Franklin County was limited to a period of 97 to 135 days. On the other hand, Long Island soil consisted of sandy loam suitable for crops if properly fertilized. Also, the growing season in Suffolk County extended from 200 to 210 days. These factors, along with effective downstate lobbying and sense of fairness, laid the groundwork for the state government in Albany to establish an

agricultural school on Long Island.[17]

- 31 The Harte-Thompson Act became Chapter 319 of the Laws of New York and stated in its opening paragraph that the Act's purpose was to amend the education law in relation to the creation of the new school, and to provide for its control, management, and to provide an appropriation. The following are excerpts from the new law:

*Section 1185 . . .* There shall be established on Long Island an institution to be known as the New York State School of Agriculture on Long Island.

*Section 1186 . . .* Such school and the property shall be under the immediate supervision, care and management of a board of nine trustees, of whom the governor shall appoint one from each of the five boroughs of the city of New York, two from the county of Nassau and two from the county of Suffolk. They shall be so appointed that the terms of office of three trustees shall expire each year. All trustees shall serve without pay. . . Students bona fide residents of the state shall have free tuition.

*Section 1187. . .* Such school shall furnish instruction and training in agricultural science, manual arts and domestic science; courses for public school teachers and others; winter courses for farmers and others, and such other operations as may be approved by the trustees and the commissioner of education.



**Figure 6:** A student is sitting on the porch of Ward Hall, then called Dormitory I, looking toward Melville Road. The house and garage in background were used by farm Superintendent Patterson. A student is preparing the land for planting in 1920.

- 32 The Harte-Thompson Act mandated the governor appoint the members of the board of nine trustees within thirty days after the Act went into effect. Further, land was to be acquired in either Nassau or Suffolk counties, "suitable for the purposes of such school." Fifty thousand dollars was appropriated to carry out the Act. The sum of ten thousand dollars was added to acquire school lands, and "the remainder of such fifty thousand dollars for constructing and equipping a suitable school building and minor structures."
- 33 Based upon the philosophy of those leaders who lobbied for the school, a year-round calendar was to be established enabling students to acquire the science and practice of agriculture under real farm conditions. Instead of hiring employees to do the gardening and farming and to care for the livestock, students were to do the work as an essential

part of their education. The plan was to organize the course of study to emphasize a maximum of fieldwork, supplemented by study of the theory of agriculture and its underlying sciences. This goal intended to assure students of a thorough training in practical and scientific farming. Thus, the original mission of the school was to train high schoolboys and girls from New York City and surrounding counties in agriculture. The principle of learning agricultural science applied, but the emphasis was on hands-on experience. Theory was subsidiary to practical education and training.[18] In addition, courses in English, history, citizenship, economics, mathematics (arithmetic) were planned to round out the educational program.[19]

- 34 With the official chartering of the agricultural school on Long Island, new challenges lay ahead. An official site had to be located. It had to be planned, and the infrastructure built. Would it be in Nassau County or Suffolk County? Community leaders had to be appointed by the governor to serve on the board of trustees. Once the school was established, controversy arose over where to place the school. After much investigation, the Board of Trustees agreed that the site of the new agricultural school would be on the border of the Nassau County-Suffolk County line in the village of Farmingdale. Tracts of farmland, at a cost of \$300 per acre, were secured, eventually amounting to 380 acres.



**Figure 7 :** Student Group. A group of well-dressed students at the start of the school year, circa 1920. No girls appeared in this class, but they were regular students since the establishment of the school. The New York State School of Agriculture on Long Island, as it was named when it was chartered in 1912, required formal wear when not working on the farm.

- 35 After a national search, the Board of Trustees appointed Albert A. Johnson to be the first director of the school. On February 13, 1913 he accepted an annual salary of \$5,000, settling for this amount because housing and paid utilities were added. His credentials were impressive. He had received a Bachelor of Science degree from the College of Agriculture at the University of Wisconsin, served as Professor of Agriculture and Biology at North Georgia Agricultural College, and returned to Wisconsin to take charge of the Marinette County School of Agriculture. He also served as Principal of the La Crosse County School

of Agriculture, and then Superintendent of the Milwaukee School of Agriculture. He was a veteran of the Spanish American War. Johnson assumed full time residence on campus in early 1914, worked closely with the state architect in laying out the plans for the campus and buildings, and is mainly responsible for its physical configuration. He resigned in 1923. [20]

- 36 Construction began in 1913. Temporary wells were sunk, as well as temporary living quarters were built for the workers. The land was broken up by a series of deep trenches for sewer, water, and heating systems. Roads, sidewalks, and landscaping were laid out. The power plant with a tall smokestack was completed the following year at a cost of \$190,000. Later, this building became known as Conklin Hall and its smokestack was removed. The director's cottage was constructed in 1914 at a cost of \$15,889. This is where Johnson lived with his family, and where other directors resided until the 1960s. The Agronomy building, renamed Cutler Hall, and the Horticulture building, renamed Hicks Hall, were both started in 1914, each costing \$63,629. Dormitory buildings were also constructed for the beginning of classes March 1916, when 60 students entered. Thirty-two women began studies in gardening the following summer.
- 37 The school provided a comprehensive choice of courses within the Department of Horticulture, Department of Farm Crops and Soil Fertility, Department of Poultry Husbandry, Department of Farm Mechanics, and Department of Dairying and Animal Husbandry. These specialized programs were supplemented by a Department of Academic Subjects, which included English, Farm Accounting, and Civics and Citizenship. Extension courses were also offered. Originally, the minimum requirement was an elementary education, but soon age and academic requirements were increased. Images in the early years indicate older students attended the school.



**Figure 8:** Implementing the agricultural school's philosophy of "learning by doing," students are working on the farm in front of the Director's Cottage, 1920. The Horticulture Building (Hicks Hall) is at

center left, and the Agronomy Building (Cutler Hall) is to its right. Notice how lush the gardens are.

- 38 World War I (1914-1918) directly involved the school as it contributed to the war effort. The Long Island Food Battalion had been organized in 1916 under Director Johnson with the cooperation of the faculty and Board of Trustees to increase food production. This project relied on wealthy patrons who donated over \$15,000 for the production and distribution of food grown on the school farm. By the summer of 1917 over 170 acres of land was under cultivation. The Women's Land Army of New York City sent women to Farmingdale for agricultural instruction and work. The Liberty Loan Organization in Washington, D. C. commended the school for supporting Liberty Loan drives. One-hundred-percent participation was achieved among the faculty, staff, and students in this endeavor.
- 39 Military drill, instruction, and discipline, begun June 1917, played a unique role in the early history of the school. Male and female students in uniform could be seen doing daily exercises at 6:00 a. m. on the grounds opposite the Agronomy building at the circle in the area where Thompson Hall now stands. They had to undergo room inspection, parades, reveille, mess call, and tattoo. An honor system prevailed. After the Armistice, November 1918, rigorous discipline was no longer acceptable, and by the summer of 1919 military discipline and training were discontinued.



**Figure 9:** Students in uniform. Students dressed as cadets pose for this photo on the steps of Cutler Hall, 1918. When the United States World War I in 1917 students wore military garb and were subject to military discipline. When the war ended November, 1918, interest in military training waned and rigorous discipline was no longer acceptable as it had been when wartime patriotism was at its zenith.

- 40 In the post-war era, the New York State Institute of Applied Agriculture on Long Island, as it was now called, joined with other agencies in assisting returning veterans to adjust to civilian life. The Bureau of Rehabilitation, working with the Federal Board of Vocational education, encouraged over 225 veterans to enroll at the school.
- 41 The first graduation exercises took place April 4, 1919 preceded by a concert given by the 147th Infantry Band. Reverend Henry Mower of the Village of Farmingdale Methodist Church presented the opening invocation. Director Johnson followed with an address that emphasized the special educational goal of the school and how it would benefit young students from the cities. Kathryn Freeman was the Salutatorian and Bradford K. Southard was Valedictorian. H. W. Collingwood, editor of the *Rural New Yorker*, was the guest speaker who described the advances made as a result of the scientific study of agriculture. Trustee John M. Lupton presented the diplomas to the 15 graduates who had completed the complete three-year course of study, including a “full year of twelve months of work.” During these early years, the school would alter the time required for study and graduation.
- 42 The second commencement ceremony was held late May 1920 on the second floor of the newly completed barn. Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., son of President Theodore Roosevelt of Oyster Bay, presented the commencement address. Twenty-two men and one woman received diplomas. [21]
- 43 These were some of the important events during this era of the school under the leadership of Director Albert A. Johnson. There could be no question of the need for a state school in the southeastern region of New York because no such institution existed there. In this progressive era of American history, the potential for advancing society’s needs and the broadening of the democratic base seemed unlimited at the national and local levels. Even though Director Johnson and his faculty did have some agricultural and educational experience, in this new environment challenges arose and there was no perfect model to follow. Each decision set a precedent.



**Figure 10:** A welcome sign at the Melville Road entrance presents a panoramic view of the farm school in the early 1920s. From left to right are Conklin Hall, two barns, Hicks Hall, and Cutler Hall. Rows of plants dominate the scene.

- 44 The mission of the New York State School of Agriculture on Long Island grew to meet the educational needs of the region and mirrored the growth of Long Island during the school's almost one hundred years of existence. Developments on the national stage served as a background, framing events in the region. The school's origins emerged as part of the "Country Life Movement in America" and "Back to the Soil" evolution. It was an "extraordinary idea to train urban young people to become farmers and homemakers . . . [and] would relieve overcrowding in city neighborhoods and schools, and thus benefit both urban and rural interests."
- 45 As the school has evolved into an institution of higher learning, offering associate, bachelors, and advanced degrees, it has reflected the dramatic growth of Long Island from rural-agrarian to suburban-post industrial in the region's high tech and service economy. With this change, the agricultural program ended in 1987 and the history of Farmingdale State College, (as it is known today), illustrates an aspect of Long Island, which has all but vanished. [22]

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## Notes

The author wishes to acknowledge the research assistance provided by Karen Gellis, librarian and acting archivist at Farmingdale State College, SUNY.

[1] Edwin L. Dunbaugh, "New York to Boston via the Long Island Railroad," *Evoking A Sense of Place*, ed. Joann P. Krieg (Interlaken, NY: Heart of the Lakes Publishing, 1988, 75-79.

[2] Sean Kass, "The Long Island Rail Road and Its Promotion of Long Island, 1900-1930," *Long Island Historical Journal* 17 (Fall 2004/Spring 2005): 82, 89-90.

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See also, Ron Ziel and George Foster, *Steel Rails to Sunrise* (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1965).

[3] S. Kass, 84-90.

[4] *The New York Times*, May 11, 1911, xx, 2.

[5] Charles L. Sachs, *Hal B. Fullerton and His Image of Long Island 1897-1927* (Interlaken, NY: Heart of the Lakes Publishing, 1991), 52-64.

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[6] "Long Island Farming," *The New York Times*, October 6, 1912. C. L. Sachs, 64-65.

[7] C. L. Sachs, 7, 64.

[8] C. L. Sachs, 81-82.

[9] Samuel Eliot Morison, Henry Steele Commager, and William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Growth of the American Republic*, Vol. II, Seventh Edition, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 142.

[10] United States Department of Justice, *2000 Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*, (2002).

[11] J. Overton, 207, 243.

Peter Ross, *History of Long Island*, Vol. III, (New York: Lewis Publishing, 1902), 295.

[12] "The Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences," *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, Sixth Edition, (2008).

Ellwood P. Cubberley, *Public Education in the United States* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1934), 629-630, 506.

[13] Franklin S. Hooper, "Industrial Museums for Our Cities," *Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Meeting of the American Association of Museums*, (June 13-15, 1913), 6-10.

[14] S. E. Morison, H. S. Commager, and W. E. Leuchtenburg, *The Growth of the American Republic*, Vol. II, 127-131.

See, D. S. Nordin, *Rich Harvest: A History of the Grange* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1974).

[15] David M. Ellis, James S. Frost, and William B. Fink, *New York, The Empire State* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1989), 163-165, 184-186, 246-248.

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[16] Roy Douglas, "At the Door of the Metropolis," *Long Island Forum*, (Winter 2002): 16-30. The author presents a comprehensive examination of the struggle to locate the school at Farmingdale.

[17] *New York Tribune Farmer*, April 15, 1912.

James W. Darlington, "Agriculture," *The Encyclopedia of New York State*, ed., Peter Eisenstadt (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 28-29.

[18] Frank J. Cavaioli, "The State University of New York at

Farmingdale: The Foundation Years,” *Long Island Forum*, (Winter 2001): 22-33.

[19] “New York State School of Agriculture,” *Babylon Leader*, January 17, 1913.

[20] Roy Douglas, “Serving Community and Country: The New York State School of Agriculture at Farmingdale, 1914-1919,” *Nassau County Historical Journal*, 6 (2001): 13-27.

F. J. Cavaoli, “The State University of New York at Farmingdale: The Foundation Years,” *Long Island Forum*, 27-31.

[21] C. D. Thomson, *From Idea to Reality*, Unpublished document, Farmingdale State College Archives n. d.

*The Institute in Wartime*, Unsigned and unpublished document, Farmingdale State College Archives, n. d.

*The Furrow*, November-December, 1921, Farmingdale State College Archives.

“Farmers Fifteen in First Class, State School Has Initial Graduation Exercise For Its First Pupils,” *Amityville Record*, April 4, 1919.

[22] R. Douglas, “Serving Community and Country: The New York State School of Agriculture at Farmingdale, 1914-1919,” *Nassau County Historical Journal*, 13-27.

Questions have arisen whether the New York State School of Agriculture on Long Island (now Farmingdale State College) was established as a “land grant college” under federal legislation, the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862. It was not. The only land grant college established under the Morrill Act was at Cornell, now known as the New York State College of Agricultural and Life Sciences at Cornell. (Patricia Mazzaferro, Assistant in Higher Education, The State Education Department, State University of New York, “Letter to the Author,” August 13, 1986.)

Gould Colman, “New York State College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell University,” *The Encyclopedia of New York State*, ed., Peter Eisenstadt, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 1095.

See, Frank J. Cavaoli, *State University of New York at Farmingdale* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 1999).