

THE FARMERS' INSTITUTE

Submitted by Village of Richfield Springs Historian Harriett Geywits

Ninety-six percent of the land in Otsego County was in productive farms by 1860. By the 1880s, the area had become the national center for hop production. There is little wonder why there was development of organizations to help the area farmers make a success of their labor. A national organization was formed in 1867 known as the Order of the Patrons of Husbandry - better known as the Grange. Another group to help local farmers was called the Farmers' Institute. This was later formalized into the Cooperative Extension Service. Their services were offered in almost every township in the county at frequent intervals, featuring all types of lectures and practical advice on a variety of topics pertaining to the interests of the local farmers. The *MERCURY* carried an example of what such a gathering would entail. It was one of several held in the village at various times, this one held at the Elk Hotel in 1899.

"The Director of Farmers' Institutes says that an Institute has been assigned to Richfield Springs and the dates fixed for January 5th and 6th. The following circular will give something of the particulars: In order to make the Farmers' Institute in your county a decided success, will you see that a live local committee is appointed to work up the Institute, extend the notice and get out a



A Dairy Farm near Richfield Springs, N.Y.

everywhere. A few bills struck off and put in post office, stores and blacksmith shops will reach farmers who most need the Institute work." The request was signed by Geo. T. Powell, Director.

A later notice in the paper stated: "The printed programmes of the coming Farmers' Institute, which are furnished by the State, are not yet at hand, but Director Powell has furnished the *MERCURY* a list of the papers to be presented which are as follows: First Day - "Hop Culture and the Hop Pests" presented by Springer Goes, Warren; "Potato Culture", Edwd. VanAlstyne; "Holstein Cattle", Deforest F. Wilber, Oneonta; "Science in Breeding Domestic Animals", E. A. Converse, Woodville; "The Teaching of Agricultural Science in our Public Schools", John D Cary, school commissioner; "Horse Breeding and Training", H. S. Matteson, Morris.

The schedule for Day Two includes: "Roads and How to Make Them", F. E. Mungor, Richfield Springs; "The Influence of the Fat in Milk on the Yield of Cheese as shown by Recent Experiments", George A. Smith, cheese instructor, dairy commission, Frankfort; "Possibilities in Dairying", J. D. Smith, Delhi."

Apparently, there were questions as to how this institute was to be handled. Further information that was provided by Mr. Powell, as director, included: "First, you will be expected to furnish suitable accommodations in the way of hall, club, church or court house in which to hold the meetings and to warm and light the same; also to secure hotel accommodations with reduced rates to the farmers of your vicinity.

Second: What is the leading industry of your locality and what industry would you have encouraged? What other topics would you suggest as best fitted to the interest and benefit of the people likely to attend?

Third: We shall desire you to furnish three local speakers who are not to exceed twenty minutes in their addresses. We want only topics of purely agricultural character. Tariff, currency and other questions that lead to political discussions cannot be received for there is no time for such in a Farmers' Institute. Please be particular to notify local speakers as to these limitations of time and topics. As ladies are always in attendance, include them among your local speakers on such topics as will interest and instruct.

The State Society will furnish the speakers from a distance and will furnish, ready for distribution, the programs. It will be desirable if you can furnish music or one or two sessions of the Institute. You are to distribute the programs and to do sufficient personal work and local advertising. The newspapers of your county should be only too glad to help work this matter up free of expense. We need full audience at the first session; after that we will accept the responsibility of holding it."

Needless to say, all the sessions were well attended as farmers then, as well as now, desire to keep up to date with the latest testing and innovations which will help them to succeed.



GREETINGS FROM RICHFIELD SPRINGS, N. Y.

full attendance? One or two ladies associated on the committee often are a valuable aid. We would like to have the committee assist in carrying out some features of special interest.

In fruit sections it would add much to the interest to have specimens of the fruit put on exhibition, with a statement as to whether the fruit had been sprayed or not; also vegetables and any new grains that have proved to be good; all of the varieties of corn grown for grain or the silo and in dairy districts, butter and cheese. Flowers and plants brought to the Institute are always attractive.

A milk tester will be used at the Institute and the milk of herds or of individual cows can be tested by bringing samples of milk of each in bottles. How to take the samples: Have cows milked entirely clean; turn the milk from one pail to another once or twice, then at once take the sample, two ounces being sufficient in quantity. Be particular not to allow milk to stand before samples are taken.

Competition in farming is great and will be increasingly so in the future. So much more of knowledge and skill is required to make farming pay at the present time, that the vigor and energy of young men ought to be more largely given to it. Will you make special effort to secure the attendance of the young people of the vicinity and ask them to take part in the programme? Two or three of them would perhaps give five or ten minute papers.

In some instances, the children of the public school can be invited to attend one session of the Institute with much interest and profit.

Thorough local advertising is very necessary. Farmers live scattered from each other and away from the centers. See that notices are sent out