

THE HISTORY OF THE CALVIN PAIGE AGRICULTURAL FUND

Presented to

THE HARDWICK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

By

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What started out to be a history of the Hardwick Farmers Cooperative has developed into much more. Research and history of our farming activities at a time when lime, fertilizer, and the breeding of purebred livestock was just the beginning of a new era for agriculture in Hardwick and New England.

Since the Hardwick Farmers Cooperative was started by the Paige Agriculture Fund, it was necessary to research the past and present of this fund. To do this it became pertinent to know who Calvin Paige was and his place in the development of a better agriculture and way of life in Hardwick.

The information regarding Calvin Paige and his rightful place in the development in our history was taken from an issue of The New England Homestead dated April 1947, prepared by Ernest Ritter and an editor of the New England Homestead, along with bits that I recall from my Dad who was one of the original directors of the Hardwick Farmers Cooperative.

Calvin Paige, youngest of seven children, was born in Hardwick in the season of leaf turning, October of 1827.

He spent his boyhood in town helping with farm chores as did most other boys of the town in those days.

Calvin went to the Common School in Hardwick until he was twelve years old. Then his father and mother decided that, this their youngest son, should have more education. Off to the Academy at New Salem he was sent. Although it was not far distant, Calvin got so homesick one day, that he ran for home. Halfway there, he made himself return, seemingly a small decision at the time, but one that fixed the course of his later life. If he had not gone back for more schooling he might well have stayed on the farm.

When Calvin graduated from the Academy, he got himself a job in Boston in a dry goods store. The experience there, fitted him well in the field of buying and selling, a sphere of activity which later proved to be his guiding star.

Great events were taking place in those stirring days. The American frontier was pushing rapidly to the Far West. Maps marked "Unknown Territory" were fast becoming out of date. It was exceedingly hard for a young man of twenty-one to keep his feet on firm ground when the news got out that gold had been discovered in California. Calvin read the exciting news columns of 1849. He shook hands with other young men from Boston who were in a hurry to get to California to make a fortune. Still he stayed at the dry goods store for another year.

In 1850, he and his brother Timothy, could no longer resist the continual flow of news about gold. With a good financial stake between them, they took a fast Clipper ship out of Boston Harbor and sailed around the Horn to San Francisco. The hectic mining fever was in full flush. As shrewd as the two brothers were, they thought the best way and quickest way of making a fortune was not seeking gold from the earth but in selling supplies to the miners.

The Paige brothers quickly set themselves up in business selling mining supplies - hardware, tents, clothing, and personal goods. Business was so good they opened another store in Sacramento. From their profits they bought up vast acres in the Imperial Valley. In twenty-five years they worked and invested their money in rail stock and public utilities.

Throughout this busy period of prosperity, Calvin often thought of home. He never married as did his brother Timothy, but Calvin made frequent trips back home. About 1900, he returned to New York City to settle in the East for good. He made frequent trips to Hardwick renewing acquaintances and enjoying his native New England village. He was greatly interested in horses and agriculture and vowed that Hardwick should continue to prosper as an agricultural center. The natural beauty of this town must never be in jeopardy.

In the Murry Hilton Hotel in New York City, on March 19, 1909, Calvin Paige died at the age of 83 years. He left a legacy of over six and a half million dollars. Remembering his love for his boyhood town, he bequeathed to the town of Hardwick, \$100,000 to be known as the Calvin Paige Agriculture Fund - \$30,000 for the upkeep of the common and cemetery, \$25,000 to the Center School, and \$25,000 to the Universalist Church. Even today, this is a



huge amount of money, but in 1909 it was enormous.

65

Our love and respect for Calvin Paige should live on forever if we will but take the time to appreciate this beautiful New England village and one of its outstanding men.

The Paige Agriculture Fund begins in the Town Report of 1910.

Article 27 - \$100,000 - To see if the town will accept, subject to the terms and conditions imposed, a legacy of \$100,000 bequeathed to the town of Hardwick under the will of Calvin Paige, late of New York City, which follows: I give and bequeath to said town of Hardwick, the sum of \$100,000 or, its equivalent, to use so much of the principal thereof, as may be necessary, to acquire a suitable site for fair-grounds, within one mile of the Hardwick common and to safely invest the balance of the principal and use the income thereof in developing and improving such fairgrounds, and establishing and maintaining agriculture fairs thereon, to encourage the improvement of farming industries, and to revive so far as may be an interest in agriculture and horticulture pursuits among the inhabitants of said town and to that end to establish and maintain in said town from income of said fund, courses of lectures free to the inhabitants thereof, upon topics calculated to awaken and stimulate an interest in farming pursuits and domestic industries and to improve the methods of employed therein.

The town did vote to accept this article.

January 21, 1911 - \$6,000 appropriated from the principal for the purpose of buying suitable land to carry out the provisions of the will.

March 1911, at the annual town meeting, to see if the town will appropriate any part of the Calvin Paige Agriculture Fund and determine the amount, purpose for which, and persons by whom the same shall be expended, \$7,000 was voted.

66

Under the first annual report of the farm superintendent, Charles O. Flagg, read the following: A committee of three, George Mixter, Timothy Paige, and Joel L. Powers was appointed to invest the fund in such securities as by law are allowed for the investment of trust funds. Also appointed, a committee of five - Charles O. Flagg, John N. Hillman, W. A. Robinson, J. C. Paige, and O. A. Tuttle, to formulate plans for promoting most efficiently the purpose and intent of the bequest.

Also, at a special town meeting, November 8, 1910, the sum of \$500 was appropriated from the fund to purchase a stereopticon machine, a great help in giving lectures.

January 21, 1911 - The committee recommended that the authority for carrying out the purpose of the fund be invested in a permanent board of 5 trustees and that they be elected at the next annual meeting with terms of one to five years.

The report also recommended the purchase of the Aiken place, 6½ acres owned by M. N. Ayres, (where our present manager lives) said land adjoining the town common. Also the purchase of the Joseph Stoligitt's farm 3¼ mile from the common, about 50 acres, to be used as a demonstration farm, (Stanley Prouty's farm).

The two parcels were purchased for \$3,000 each and Charles O. Flagg appointed superintendent. Extensive repairs were made on each parcel of property.

In Mr. Flagg's report regarding the orchard on the Ayres farm, he stated there were 110 trees of 17 varieties - 47 baldwins, after severe pruning and spreading one ton of slag meal and 500 pounds of sulphate of potash, from the 3¼ acres they harvested 38 barrels of #1 baldwins, about 50 barrels of odd varieties and some 5 ton of cider apples.

At the Stoligitt's farm was a one acre peach orchard very much in need of trimming. The orchard was fertilized with 400 pounds of slag meal, 200 pounds of sulphate of potash and 200 pounds of nitrate of soda. The fruit was mostly shipped to the Worcester market, namely, 112 crates containing 6 - 4 quart baskets and 46 half bushel baskets.

To encourage the growth of strawberries, 1200 plants of 8 varieties were set out in a demonstration plot. Hope-



fully in the spring there will be a good number of plants available for townspeople to plant in their gardens.

Another project was the setting out of 5000 White Pine seedlings from the Mass Forestry Division and from another source 100 each of ten varieties of evergreen seedlings, Black Walnut, European Larch, and American Linden trees.

Extensive field trials of various hybrid seed corn was cultivated in small plots and results recorded. As this was the beginning of using lime, five different plots were treated with various amounts of ground limestone marl, caustia lime, wood ashes, and slag meal. Each plot also received 10 pounds of nitrate of soda.

Also in the first year of operation, six Berkshire sows and a boar were purchased from the Mass Agricultural College.

In the second report for the year of 1912, it states that considerable time was spent on digging around rocks and hauling them to the rock dump. In connection with this project, J. B. Sibley & Sons put on a two-day blasting demonstration using three different strengths of dynamite. About 150 people attended each day's demonstration.

Again, results of the seed corn trials were recorded as was the results of the strawberry demonstration plots.

In the 1913 report, a new stable 36 ft. x 42 ft. was added, a silo 10 ft. x 26 ft. and a manure pit 15 ft. x 20 ft.

The orchards were sprayed for the first time with lime sulfur, 1600 of 8 varieties of strawberry plants set out, and more corn trials.

About 3/4 of an acre of alfalfa was seeded, which seed was purchased out of Ohio, prior to planting, 600 lbs. of slag meal and 200 lbs. of sulphate of potash was sown and 200 bushels of dirt spread from an alfalfa field from the Maxter Farm. The purpose of the dirt spreading was to inoculate the soil with nitrogen producing bacteria.

The report of 1913 states that a pair of horses and

harnesses, and a wagon were purchased for \$500 and yoke of oxen sold for \$55 more than was paid for them at the purchase of the farm.

Poultry was introduced to the farm this year. A 240 egg incubator was purchased, and 240 eggs of White Wyandottes were obtained from two breeders in Massachusetts. One lot of eggs was almost all infertile, only 64 chicks hatched. Another lot of eggs, 225, purchased from two White Leghorn breeders in New York from which 125 chicks were hatched. Twelve cockerels were sold as breeders and the farm had 22 White Wyandottes and 42 White Leghorns.

The report of a new superintendent for 1914 given by R. D. Lull states that the trustees had formulated four projects to be carried out under the supervision of the Calvin Paige Fund, namely, establishing a purebred herd of Holsteins, continuing the establishing of a Wyandotte strain of laying hens, recommended for manager devote more time to the extension service area in working with the farmers and lastly, establishing a marketing cooperative to help in selling of eggs and apples and purchasing farm supplies.

In the 1916 town report, Mr. Lull reports that his work through the Cooperative Exchange has entailed a great part of his time working with a sales committee consisting of W. A. Robinson, Moses R. Paige, and himself. J. C. Paige furnished considerable time and money in bringing about the desired results. The first step taken was to have placed in our contract with Mr. Charles Nash, a milk dealer in Springfield, a clause to the effect that if the milk sold in Springfield at any time during the year sold above 9¢ per quart, the producers of Hardwick would benefit by half the increase. This resulted in our obtaining 50¢ per 10 quart can of our milk during November and December, 1916, instead of the former price of 45¢ per can. By working further with the Springfield Milk Producers Association we were enabled to obtain 55¢ per can until May first, qualified only by a slight surplus clause. This price to continue for the rest of the year.

Mr. Lull asked that credit be given where credit is due, primarily through the efforts of the Cooperative Exchange and the time and expense of the committeemen involved.



In the report of 1916, Mr. Lull reported as manager of the Cooperative a business of \$21,550, or an increase of \$5,500 over the previous year.

69

Mr. Lull reported on the progress of purebred Holsteins in town as follows: in 1914, when the Holstein Club was formed, there were eight purebred cows and about the same number of bulls. Today, 1916, we have 70 females and 26 males.

Our endeavors to establish a breed of White Wyandottes are fast being crowned with success. More calls for breeding stock and eggs are fast coming to those already in this breed.

The size of the herd at the experimental farm is now 10 grades, 2 purebreds, and one purebred heifer, 90 Wyandotte pullets and 20 yearling hens.

R. D. Lull continued as manager through 1917 and made some outstanding accomplishments for the Paige Agriculture Fund and the name of Hardwick. He was a man of outstanding vision and knowledge who worked closely with the Agriculture College, the Farm Bureau, and the Extension Service. A livestock show was held on October 4, 1917 in conjunction with the Worcester County Farm Bureau and the Mixer Farm when a display of purebred Holsteins, Mixer Farm Guernseys, and White Wyandottes were exhibited on the common. A great many people attended from out of town and some of the best cattlemen of the state made the statement, and I quote, "I didn't think it possible for Hardwick or any other town to make such a fine display of livestock." Another dairyman said, "As far as the show went, it was every bit as good as the National Dairy Show in Springfield of 1916."

The demonstrations at the experimental farm were proceeding well and the cooperative did about \$37,000 for the year 1917.

Because of ill health, R. D. Lull gave up his job as manager after four very successful years. He was replaced by W. L. Taplin who served for two years as manager of the Paige Fund and Exchange. These were trying war times for him as farm labor was scarce and very costly. Problems in accounting for the exchange occurred as did problems at the farm. As a result, the Paige Fund Trustees voted to

70

sell the cattle, equipment, and the farm, thus ending Mr. Taplin's services. This was for 1918 and 1919.

A young man just out of college was hired who was to become a great asset to the town of Hardwick. Ernest Ritter, the 11th of 13 children, was hired to assume the duties of manager of the Paige Fund. I note at this time, in going through the town reports, I occasionally read other committee reports and in 1914 or 1915, the report of school superintendent stated it was compulsory to teach a course in "thrift" from the fourth grade through the elementary school. Ernest Ritter had received his lessons on thrift in growing up with his family. Single at the time of employment, he soon married Sybil Fisk of Shelburne and became a vital part of the community.

He was a very close friend of two of Calvin Paiges' nephews, namely, J. C. Paige and Timothy Paige and had the greatest respect for his trustees. Perhaps because of his close relationship, the intent and purposes of the fund were administered. Social activities of the community were sponsored such as moving pictures, social dances, sponsoring calf club, poultry and garden work in the schools, free lectures to the inhabitants, fruit tree trimming demonstrations, the purchase of five spray machines, the purchase of lime and fertilizer spreaders, two cultipackers, assisting farmers in tax work and farm record keeping, the keeping of a purebred Holstein bull and a Jersey bull with free use to the farmers of Hardwick until artificial insemination came into being, all this besides conducting the exchange from a \$37,000 business to over a two million dollar business at the close of 40 years service to the Paige Fund in 1959.

He was recognized as a 4-H leader by the county and state for 43 years. Several of his members winning national honors at Chicago, Washington, D. C., and Waterloo. A scout master and troop leader for many years. A member of the Worcester and Springfield sales committees of the N.E.M.P.A. He had the honor of signing up every Hardwick producer of milk as an N.E.M.P.A. member. He was an outstanding promoter of the Mass. Farm Bureau, responsible for having all the farms in Hardwick mapped, and soils analyzed through the Harvard College research division. He was chairman of the County War Board during World War II, chairman of the State Agriculture Conservation Committee for many years, founder of the Hardwick Historical Society,

a deacon and treasurer of the Hardwick Universalist church right up to the present time. In summary, as manager of the Calvin Paige Agriculture Fund, and manager of the Hardwick Farmers' Cooperative from 1920 to 1960 Ernest Ritter was there in times of crisis, a leader when celebrating, an inspiration to all who came in contact with him and a true promoter of the intent and purpose of the Calvin Paige Agriculture Fund. Today, in his 91st year, he is the most respected citizen in the town of Hardwick.

71

From 1960 to 1984 we have had five different managers and regretfully little Paige Fund work has been accomplished, which should be a real challenge to the trustees of the fund.

This has been a brief history of the Calvin Paige Agriculture Fund and is followed by a brief history of the Hardwick Farmers Cooperative.

In summary, the Calvin Paige Agriculture Fund has exemplified through its founders those first two Great Commandments - loving Thy God with all our might, our strength and our heart, and the 2nd likened unto the first- Thy shall love thy neighbor as thyself.

The fund has given us leadership of men, created greater visions and ideals in promoting a better way of agriculture living, promoting the realization and appreciation of the natural beauty of our village, a concern for our youth in providing educational facilities not ordinarily provided by the town, a central meeting place, the Paige Hall, for town activities such as free lectures, extension meetings, 4-H facilities for home economics, the arts and crafts. It provides a residence for the manager of the Fund and Cooperative and presently is graced by Bob and Becky Bottomley and their two children.

Last but not least, we have the Hardwick Farmers Cooperative Exchange under the able management of Robert Bottomley who serves as manager of both the Cooperative and the Paige Fund. The trustees of the Paige Fund and the directors of the Cooperative work jointly in directing the policies of each organization.

72

In seventy-one years through cooperation, many times the original amount of the fund has been returned to the farmers and the welfare of the inhabitants of Hardwick.

At this season of the year, we have but another reason for giving thanks to one of our outstanding citizens, whose concern was for a better way of life in a better environment.

Calvin Paige, we thank you.

Chester Goodfield  
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