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Wallaces' Farmer

Nobody knows exactly when *Wallaces' Farmer* began because nobody knows exactly when "Uncle Henry" Wallace conceived the idea of becoming a writer. Perhaps his early training on the Westmoreland County farm in Pennsylvania, where his father, John Wallace, was one of the good farmers of the region, had something to do with it; and no doubt his preaching experience before and after the Civil War was a contributing factor.

The first trends appeared when he was living in Winterset, Iowa, and managing his farms over in Adair County. He was the last living member of his family, seven brothers and sisters and his mother having been carried off by that dread disease, consumption. Henry Wallace also contracted the disease and for a while his recovery was very uncertain. Acting on doctor's orders, he began living outdoors and drinking large quantities of cream and milk. The prescription worked a miracle and the old fire of pulpit days came back.

Henry Wallace, as a rejuvenated man, developed a love for the farm with its wholesome outdoor life. As with all farmers, he had much time in which to observe and think. Here was a life that he liked, but it had certain drawbacks over which farmers seemed to have insufficient control. Many questions must

have gone filtering through his alert mind during the late seventies on those Adair County acres. As he was a man of unusual education and possessed of a keen intellect, we may readily assume that he came to certain definite conclusions on the general farm situation of that day.

In a speech at Winterset on the Fourth of July, 1878, Henry Wallace aired his views on the nation's financial troubles. The Winterset *Madisonian* thought well of the speech; another local paper denounced it. The Wallace name gained prominence.

To him who has the will to express, it is but a step from speaking to writing. Not long after the Fourth of July speech, "Uncle Henry" accepted an invitation to become agricultural editor of the *Madisonian*. Here was an outlet for his thoughts inspired during odd hours on the farm. In effect, his writing career was thus begun. On trips down the long dusty road to Winterset, behind the steady clop-clop of his team, he took note of farmers and their farms, of crops and live stock. Certain ideas and questions came to him; they were reflected on the agricultural page of the *Madisonian*. But this was not for long.

Wallace bought the fagged-out Winterset *Chronicle*. More than an outlet for his writings, it was a success. Four hundred subscribers grew to fourteen hundred. The farmer-preacher-writer became more prominent. In 1883, J. H. Duffus, without the usual consultation, appointed him editor of *The Iowa*

Homestead, published at Des Moines. Again he accepted.

Then followed the change of *Homestead* ownership from J. H. Duffus to James M. Pierce and another person. The new owners retained Henry Wallace as editor and agreed to sell him some of the stock. The paper thrived under new management. Wallace was a prolific writer and made many friends. James Pierce once remarked upon the ease with which his editor worked. "Writing just runs out of him," he said. However, the smooth course came to an end in 1895 when Wallace left the company in a disagreement over editorial policies.

It is a matter for idle speculation now as to what "Uncle Henry" would have done next had it not been for the journalistic tendencies of his two sons, Henry C. and John P. The eldest, Henry C. Wallace, had lent strong arms to work on the home farms. During the brief *Chronicle* ownership, he had learned the tricks of a "printer's devil", and incidentally the irresistible smell of printer's ink. In 1885, just after he had turned nineteen years old, he entered the Iowa agricultural college at Ames to learn the "something more" a farm boy should know.

About two years later a tenant decided to leave one of the Wallace farms. Henry C. left his junior work unfinished, was married to Miss May Brodhead, and took over the tenantless farm. For five years, from 1887 to 1892, he managed to skimp a

living with hogs at \$2.75 a hundred and corn at the fire-wood price of ten to fifteen cents a bushel. At home evenings and on slack days, he wrote things about farm life. These articles published in farm papers caught the eye of Dean Henry of the Wisconsin Experiment Station. Urged by the dean, Henry C. went back to finish his college work. His reward was a job as assistant professor of agriculture in the dairy department at Iowa State College.

In the meantime John P. Wallace had entered college and was working his way through.

The Department of State did a great thing for Iowa agriculture in 1893. N. B. Ashby of Cedar Rapids was appointed consul to Dublin, Ireland. Ashby, in order to meet the emergency, sold to H. C. Wallace, his brother-in-law, and C. F. Curtiss, associate professor of agriculture at Ames, his agricultural paper called the *Farmer and Breeder*. Started at Iowa City in 1875 by Don Donnan as a consolidation of *The Northwestern Stock Field and Farm*, the *Farm Journal and Livestock Tribune*, the *Iowa Stockman and Farmer*, the *Iowa Farmer and Stockman*, the *Western Stock Journal*, and the *Western Stock Raiser*, it had about run its course when Wallace and Curtiss bought it.

Perhaps a little dubious about their purchase, Curtiss and Wallace moved the property to Ames and set up shop above a down-town store. Soon they were cranking out a small semi-monthly publication headed "Farm and Dairy" — more in promotion of

the college agricultural department than anything else. John P. Wallace, who had been keeping books and doing stenographic work at the college, was sold a third interest in the publication and was appointed to look after the advertising, a position which at that time consisted of visiting widely-scattered business firms and live-stock breeders. He was often gone for weeks at a time, but mailed in advertising copy regularly.

Meanwhile "Uncle Henry" left the *Homestead* and most of his ready capital. Being a minority stockholder, he was not able to persuade the others to turn his stock into cash. There were days of restlessness and indecision. His sons beckoned to the thumping little paper at Ames. The elder Wallace hesitated. He was fifty-nine years old, the age at which most men retire, but — somehow the boys' proposition looked good. At least it was an opportunity to talk to the farmers of the State. The deal was closed and he became editor-in-chief; H. C. resigned from the college staff and became manager and editor, and J. P. kept his original position as advertising manager. The elder Wallace agreed to do his writing in Des Moines and mail it to the sons at Ames. The next issue of the paper came out headed "Wallaces' Farm and Dairy", with the statement that it was "an independent agricultural journal for middle western farmers".

Five years ago, *Wallaces' Farmer* celebrated its thirtieth birthday. Only one of the original foun-

ders, John P. Wallace, was present. "Uncle Henry" had died in 1916; Henry C. followed him in 1924. There was a review of events and biographies. "Uncle Henry" in the years that had followed 1895 became one of the best known of agricultural writers and speakers in the country. In coöperation with "Tama Jim" Wilson, then professor of agriculture at Ames, the other experiment station professors, and the railroad companies, "Uncle Henry" in 1896 helped organize a "better dairying" demonstration train. Out of this successful effort grew the "seed corn train" and the "good roads train". Mr. Wallace accompanied all of them and made many talks on various agricultural subjects. He consequently became a very popular personality among Iowa farm people. Of course, this was no detriment to his thriving farm paper.

One day along in the early nineteen hundreds, "Uncle Henry" made a deduction while looking over some rather arid literature which had been issued to his Sunday school (he always taught a Sunday school class). The careless preparation of this material must have irritated him severely. A few weeks later he announced to readers that the "Sabbath School Lesson would be started on trial." If they did not like the lesson after three months, the department would be abandoned. However, at the end of three months, the department continued very full of life. "Uncle Henry's" vivid and practical illumination of Bible times and characters made a

great hit with the readers. It has been continued to this day.

Editorials from the beginning have been strong and practical. Hard-headed farmers delighted in Wallace's stand against Colonel Pete Hepburn in the fight over railroad monopolies. With equal relish, they followed his opinions that the Philippines should have been freed at the close of the Spanish-American War. Dozens of other editorials with an earthy smack to them built up a remarkable following.

"Uncle Henry" took five trips to Europe, which gave him a valuable background for his editorial dealings with the agricultural situation at home and abroad. In 1908 he was appointed to serve on President Roosevelt's famous Country Life Commission which made detailed and significant investigations into rural life in America.

Farm folks liked him for his sincerity, clear vision, and earnest desire to make rural life the very best in all existence. "Uncle Henry" had the faculty of understanding common people and working for their welfare. Somehow he found the language to convey his feelings and beliefs to them. A vast populace mourned when he died in 1916.

The son, Henry C. Wallace, did not finish his greatest job. Death intervened on October 25, 1925, when Wallace was Secretary of Agriculture in the Coolidge cabinet. He was scarcely fifty-eight years old, a little short of the age when his father began

editorial work on *Wallaces' Farmer*. There are many who will say Secretary Wallace gave his life to his work. He came to the cabinet in 1921 after a happy period as head of the editorial staff of the paper, but in the middle of a trying agricultural deflation. Prices of agricultural products were sinking to the depths. Huge debts assumed in the balmy period of high prices faced thousands of farmers. Secretary Wallace so keenly felt their position that he worked as a man loaded with all their combined troubles.

He fought for marketing work in the United States Department of Agriculture and was largely responsible for the creation of the department's Bureau of Agricultural Economics; he defied the interests headed by Albert B. Fall which sought to remove forestry to the Department of the Interior and to gain control of Alaska; he enforced the packers and stockyards act and grain futures act in the face of bitter opposition; he worked toward raising the limit on farm land bank loans and the intermediate credit system.

While editor of *Wallaces' Farmer* from 1916 to 1921, he was actively identified with the creation of the office of Iowa State Commerce Counsel, equalization of railroad rates on farm products, modification of the government's conservative policy on the consumption of live stock products during the World War, and the prophecy of damage to agriculture when the Federal Reserve Board began its de-

flation program in 1918. He was for seventeen years secretary of the Corn Belt Meat Producers Association, a most active guardian of the live-stock feeders' interests in the Middle West.

All these things are credited to Secretary Wallace, but they are likewise the whole cloth of the contemporary history of *Wallaces' Farmer*. All of them were talked about repeatedly and found sympathetic ear in the editorial columns. It may truthfully be said that a good deal of the success of the journal is due to the activities of its owners beyond and above the immediate task of editing.

After the father and son came the grandson, Henry A., son of Henry C. Wallace, born on an Adair County farm and prominent while still a Des Moines high school boy because of his unusual experiments with corn breeding. Naturally practical, skeptical, and quizzical, he watched carefully back in 1902 while Professor P. G. Holden of Ames told a group of boys at the *Wallaces' Farmer* publishing plant how to judge seed corn. The gathering had been arranged by "Uncle Henry" who had conceived the idea while at a similar show in Illinois. Certain boys at the Illinois show had excelled their fathers in seed corn exhibition and Wallace was so pleased that he bought up a quantity of good seed corn, distributed it to boys in Iowa, and later had them exhibit their best seed ears.

In judging, Professor Holden picked symmetrical ears as ideal. Young Wallace wondered: "Were

they really the best producers?" Holden laughingly told him to try them out, thus to satisfy his inquisitive head. Where most boys would have forgotten, H. A. Wallace faithfully planted Holden-judged "poor" and "good" seed and discovered his hunch was right. Production was not in proportion to appearance.

The corn belt is richer for this juvenile experiment because it was the beginning of a varied and interesting era of corn breeding. H. A. Wallace, as much as any other man, is responsible for the development and popularizing of hybrid corn. Like his father and grandfather before him, he does many practical things outside of his editorial office. The findings give him support for his editorial contentions.

Stacked about his office in the *Homestead* building in Des Moines are books and pamphlets relating to education, history, economics, animal husbandry, field crops, weather, and genetics. He ventures far in the field of economics, aided by his mathematical intuition. He is well known for his statistical studies and is credited with the development of the cornhog cycle correlation. In brief, he has made statistics, market prices, and seasonal trends mean something to the lay reader.

There are others deserving along the line. The editorial staff in late years has included several feature writers and a number of contributing editors who supply special stories on leading agricul-

tural enterprises. Donald R. Murphy, managing editor since 1921, is responsible to a large degree for improvements in the magazine's content and appearance. Of a natural literary bent, he has been quick to see the cultural possibilities in farm life and has influenced editorial copy in that direction. The aim is to encourage a greater enjoyment of farm life as well as to teach the growing of more bushels per acre and more pounds of pork per hundred pounds of feed.

Journalistically, the magazine has had a steady development. The little publication called "Farm and Dairy" had its shortcomings in typography and layout, but a surprising amount of practical information was packed into its twelve by eighteen-inch pages of four columns each. There was no appealing cover picture nor feature stories, but the readers probably did not mind because other journals were little better. Unabashed, the ambitious publishers offered their semi-monthly issue at fifty cents a year or on a club subscription rate at twenty-five cents a year.

After three months, a Chicago firm offered an attractive sum for a large contract of advertising space. It was a great temptation for the Wallaces, especially when it is understood that H. C. worked many a night over the type cases to avoid depleting their bank-roll by hiring the necessary help. They were convinced that the paper would grow and refused the offer. Months afterward, they saw the

wisdom of their move; space in the paper in the meantime had multiplied in value due to increases in circulation and would have been a decided bargain for the Chicago agency had it been sold at the low rate offered.

The publishing plant was moved to Des Moines in 1896, six months after its origin, and the paper was changed from a semi-monthly to a weekly. As more advertising flowed in, Questions and Answers, Washington Letter, Hearts and Homes, Horticulture, Poultry, Hogs, Dairy, Livestock, and other departments swelled in size. First full-page cover pictures were introduced in the latter part of 1900. In 1902, the paper was increased in size to as much as twenty-eight pages per issue.

One of the first feature articles was printed in the Thanksgiving number of the same year. The big land boom of that period brought in much land advertising. By 1906 a number of college men were writing small articles, but the small unobtrusive one-column heads remained. In 1908, the two-column box heads began to appear over the feature stories. A wealth of pictures, many poor ones, were scattered through the magazine. By 1919, a Farm Engineering Department, a Boys' Corner, and Markets had been added. By 1920, there was a Voice of the Farm, in which letters, agreeable and disagreeable, sent in by subscribers were printed. The Service Bureau was created in 1921 to function against farm thievery and fraudulent practices and to answer inquiries.

Jokes, localized first-run fiction, and a full-sized boys' and girls' section came in 1924. The Odds and Ends feature, signed by the editor, Henry A. Wallace, was installed in 1925 as an informal wind-up on the editorial pages. The Master Farmer movement was introduced in Iowa in 1926 by *Wallaces' Farmer* and has been continued every year since. A resumé of the journal's physical changes reveals that the true magazine style has been developed since 1919. More feature stories have been distributed through the front part of the book.

The rapid growth of *Wallaces' Farmer* is indicated by its circulation figures. In the beginning, friends throughout the State raised hundreds of club subscriptions, and friendly letters from the business management brought in many more. The circulation curve kept an upward slant. In the decade preceding consolidation with the *Homestead*, the number of subscribers more than tripled.

John P. Wallace, the only one of the original founders of *Wallaces' Farmer*, is in charge of the directing force of the Wallace Publishing Company, as its president and general manager. He has become familiar with and interested in every department of the business during his more than thirty-five years experience. Once a month he writes a personal message which is published on a Boys' and Girls' Page, a favorite department of his. Henry A. Wallace and James W. Wallace, sons of Henry C. Wallace, who serve as editor and assistant manager,

respectively, and Ross Wallace, son of John P. Wallace, serving as advertising manager, work with their general manager in publishing the magazine. Each of the younger generation of Wallaces has two sons — which augurs a continuation of the Wallace regime for years to come.

In 1930, after thirty-five years, *Wallaces' Farmer* is still a strong Wallace organization. But it is more than that; it is *Wallaces' Farmer and Iowa Homestead*. One day last fall, middle westerners were surprised to hear that the two leading farm papers in Iowa had merged. Dante M. Pierce, owner and publisher of *The Iowa Homestead*, had sold his big establishment to the Wallaces. Both had publications which served Iowa and surrounding States; one was willing to buy and the other was willing to sell; result, a merger.

To-day out on West Grand Avenue in Des Moines a new name-plate adorns the front of a white terracotta building, the home of *Wallaces' Farmer and Iowa Homestead*, serving agriculture under "Uncle Henry's" motto, "Good Farming — Clear Thinking — Right Living".

ARTHUR T. THOMPSON