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Education in the 'right' sense of the word: The quest for a balanced education at the Kansas State Agricultural College

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Abstract & Keywords

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AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE, 1870-1897

History 586, Spring 2015

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History 586

Professor Sanders

Colin T. Halpin

May 11, 2015

In life, there are experiences that can only be appreciated retroactively. This is the case for understanding the value of a good education. At the Kansas State Agricultural College Reunion for the Class of 1872, Albert Todd gave an address about what he had learned in the 15 years after graduation. He first discussed the thoughts of students in trying to analyze “what particular advantage each study was to give us.” Then if they couldn’t find one, they would ask, “What is the good of learning that?” He went on to say that, “the best and the truest education is not that which can be put into immediate and practical use; and by “practical,” I mean here, ‘dollars and cents.’—education is but a training of the mind to enable it to be ready for whatever it may meet.” He finishes by echoing the belief that:

Schools which assume to give an education which shall be directly convertible into “coin of the realm” either do not fulfill their promises, or they are not really schools, but workshops. I do not wish, for a moment, to be understood as saying that these latter are not useful; but they do not give an education in the right sense of the word.¹

Today education is viewed as a great equalizer, but how did education develop such a large role in our society? And how did the structure of formal education evolve in our country? Both of these questions are too large to be easily answered, but can be examined on a smaller scale. We can look at the formation of the Kansas State Agricultural College, and President Fairchild’s work, to begin to answer these questions. After the establishment of the Kansas State Agriculture College in accordance with the Morrill Act, there was significant disapproval for the scope of education at the school, in favor of a more “practical” agricultural education which came under the leadership of President Anderson. Although Anderson made significant efforts in advancing education, his moves were too drastic and extreme, and the final direction of the college was determined when President George Fairchild successfully combined the practical and classical structures to provide a broad curriculum that did not ignore the importance of hands-on training, and in doing so, he built a model agricultural college for the nation.

To begin to analyze education trends, it is important to understand the legislation that founded land-grant institutions nationwide. The Morrill Act of 1862 defined the process for securing the funding for “a college where the leading object shall be, without excluding other scientific and classical studies—to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts—in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes.”² This clause has been interpreted in many different ways, leading to debates about where the emphasis should be placed. Does the Act emphasize the teaching of “agriculture and mechanic arts,” or is it more important that it not “exclude[e] other scientific and classical studies.” What about the importance given to “education of the industrial classes?”

It was not clear which line of thought the legislation followed when it was passed, but it was believed that these institutions were designed primarily to serve the sons and daughters of the working classes and the farm people. That is why the importance was placed on agriculture and mechanical arts, as opposed to eastern universities that focused solely on the classical studies. Many historians, such as Earl Ross and Edward Eddy, have sought to analyze land-grant institutions, but their work focused on “the history of the land-grant legislation and its implementation on a national scale.”³ The problem with this approach is that the Morrill Act was written extremely broad and invited interpretation by individual states and colleges. In order to fully understand the creation of this new educational philosophy it is important to study how “individual teaching philosophies, application of skills, and the introduction of new technologies” at land-grant schools helped to guide the technical aspect of education of the nineteenth century.⁴

Before 1850, the majority of formal education in the United States concentrated primarily on the classics, modern humanities, law, medicine, or related academic fields. Meanwhile most American farmers and mechanics acquired their knowledge and skill through first-hand

experience, hands-on training, or by reading technical journals or newspapers. Over time, westward expansion created a gap between old knowledge, skills, and technologies of the East and new environments and requirements of the West. Land-grant institutions emerged to bridge this gap. They provided a new foundation of college education that combined solid principles of modern science with wide-ranging practical skills. To build these programs college administrators enjoyed a *tabula rasa*, or “blank slate” environment that was not burdened by an established curriculum. Administrators were free to shape new paths in education that fit regional demands and public opinion.

Along with these trends in agriculture education, Land-Grant schools also made strides towards bettering engineering education. These institutions led the way in “developing a functional and professional form of engineering education, with a curriculum that both addressed applied technical skill and promoted the development of new scientific knowledge.”⁵ Too often historians have assumed that the rise of modern engineering education came from the already-industrialized East. In fact, transformations of “mechanic arts” into modern engineering occurred at land-grant colleges rather than elite east coast universities because their “very newness and frontier opportunity gave their leaders a free hand to experiment.”⁶ Although it is clear that land-grant institutions made significant advances in the structure of education, there was a growing debate over the scope of education that these institutions should utilize.

When Kansas State was founded, it faced the problem of under-educated youth. Many of its future students did not finish primary and secondary school because they needed to work on the family farm or in other areas of family business. This gap in education led to most of the early course work at the college not being at the collegiate level. The reading, writing, spelling, and arithmetic coursework was elementary, while the coursework offered in algebra, book-

keeping, english, and history was at an intermediate level. Most of the students needed preparation at those levels before pursuing regular college courses.

For the first ten years of its existence, students at Kansas State did not have agriculture textbooks or trained professors. They lacked a barn, a team of horses, and even tools. Like many states, Kansas was attempting to create a land-grant college without a model program anywhere in the world. In his 1867 annual report for the college, President Denison stated, “Our most diligent efforts by continued correspondence and otherwise, have failed as yet to secure a Professor of Agricultural Science.” He went on to point out that many agricultural schools were in the same predicament due to a lack of qualified individuals.⁷ The same year, the Patrons of Husbandry, or the Grange, was organized in Washington D.C. Their objectives were cooperation among farmers, the reduction of middlemen, opposition to monopolies, and the establishment of agricultural and technical colleges. The Grange was very active nationwide in education reform, and was instrumental in the reform at the Kansas State Agricultural College in the early 1870’s. During this time farmers were becoming more interested in shaping society, and in turn had more interest in the Agricultural College, “their school.” This organization played a major role in swinging the college away from some of its early classical patterns and towards a practical agricultural program.⁸

As this desire for reform continued, John A. Anderson, a preacher, politician, editorial writer, and future president of Kansas State, began to appeal to farmers as someone who could possibly bring about their desired reform at Kansas State. He agreed that “the traditional academic program, emphasizing the classics, did not conform to the purposes set forth in the Morrill Act.”⁹ He chose to place the emphasis on the teaching of “agriculture and the mechanic arts.” Behind Anderson, pro-agriculture activists united under a common belief and with a

common drive. In an effort to please this growing group, the Greek courses were dropped at Kansas State by the regents in the spring of 1872.

As the debate grew, both sides became more vocal about their message and the battle found its way into the press. The *Kansas Farmer*, produced by the State Agriculture Society, was the most outspoken of periodicals in its clamor for Kansas State to adapt and develop programs more suited to agriculture and the mechanic trades.¹⁰ They fed the fire, and encouraged many other local newspapers to join the public debate. J. H. Lee, an English Professor at Kansas State, wrote two letters published in the *Kansas Daily Commonwealth* protesting the extra emphasis being placed on agriculture and lamenting the decision to drop Greek courses. Lee called attention to the part of the Morrill Act that expressly stated: “without excluding other scientific and classical studies . . . in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life.”¹¹ George T. Anthony, proprietor and editor of the *Kansas Farmer*, was very critical of Lee’s statements. In support of Lee, the *Manhattan Nationalist* on multiple occasions, accused Anthony of publishing diatribes against Kansas State. The *Nationalist* referred to Anthony and the *Kansas Farmer* as “fanatics” who preferred “mere plow and wood chopping schools.”¹² The *Manhattan Beacon* also supported Lee and the *Nationalist*; however they didn’t remain aligned. Soon a Manhattan-Lawrence rivalry developed as the *Nationalist* charged the *Lawrence Journal* with trying to exploit the Board of Regents’ statements. They also claimed the Lawrence paper advocated “farmers’ sons and daughters . . . not be as thoroughly educated as any other class.”¹³ These attacks continued from both sides of the issue without much change in opinion, and without care for the truth or harmful nature of some the headlines.

Although the majority of the public and the press supported Lee, they did not necessarily support his views, just his right as a citizen to express them. His plea did not deter people from seeking an increase in agriculture education and a reduction in the role of the classical education. In response to public pressure, the Board of Regents, in June of 1872, recognized the necessity of modifying the curriculum toward “the grand object of this college . . . to fit the youth of our state to enter upon and prosecute the industrial pursuits of life . . . on a scientific basis.”¹⁴ This change merely showed the activists that progress was possible, and they just pushed harder for reform. Junction City developed into one of the focal points of the reform movement—with the strongest criticism of the current administration. Reverend Anderson served as an editorial writer for the *Junction City Union*, where he vocally supported an educational program to qualify students “for the actual practice of agriculture, the mechanic trades, or industrial arts.”¹⁵

Throughout the debate, the *Junction City Union*, the *Kansas Farmer*, the *Lawrence Journal*, and at times the *Manhattan Nationalist*, all tended to support a more “practical program” at the Kansas State Agricultural College. The *Junction City Tribune* and the *Manhattan Beacon* lined up on the other side. The *Topeka Commonwealth* usually took a more balanced position.¹⁶ It is important to note that not only was this the opinion of the owners and publishers of these papers, but most of the staff. The papers hired writers that typically followed similar ideologies so that the paper seemed united behind certain issues, educational reform being one of the major issues of the time.

State officials soon began to call for reform at the agricultural college. They reorganized the Board of Regents and the new board requested the resignations of the entire faculty at Kansas State. All members of the faculty were rehired for the fall term except for President Denison.¹⁷ Reverend Anderson was elected to take over September 1, 1873. Almost immediately after

taking office, President Anderson announced the new “objective of this Institution” was to give “prominence . . . to the school branches of learning which relate to Agriculture and the Mechanic Arts according to the directness and value of their relation.”¹⁸ He took swift action to back up his speech and on the same day announced the narrowing of the curriculum to three “courses of study”: the first was for students who wished to be farmers; the second was for those desiring to be “Mechanics or industrial citizens”; and the third was chiefly for young ladies, “that they may be prepared to earn an honorable self-support and adorn the highest stations of Life.”¹⁹ Due to the great public discontent at the college when he was hired, Anderson acted quickly to ensure that the public saw his commitment to the ideals of the reform was legitimate.

Anderson’s educational philosophies can be found in the Kansas State Agricultural College *Hand-Book*. In fact, his statements over the policy of the Board of Regents and the course of study take up sixty-five pages in the College Catalog for 1874. Julius Willard, a K-State historian summarized his ideology as follows: “Anderson believed that the object of the Morrill Act was to endow institutions which should teach young men in the elements of practical farming [blacksmithing, woodworking, stone-cutting, etc.]”²⁰ His philosophies aligned with the “new education” model, which “was grounded in the sciences rather than the humanities. Students gained practical skills and training through various methods, arising from manual labor hours, various forms of shop work, and eventually, formalized laboratory instruction.”²¹

In the early years, many institutions embraced “training” in manual labor to placate public demands for technical training while building up college infrastructure. They assigned students to clear land and trees, dig wells, and level roads. To complete such tasks, students gained hands-on training with readily available frontier tools, surveying equipment, farm machinery, as well as newer technology.²² This style faced some criticism for its use of students

for their manual labor without financial pay or academic credit outside of their normal course credit. Students were to complete their labor like any other classroom assignment. Professors defended combining classroom instruction with manual labor by noting that the new styles of education “put useful tools into the young man’s hands and teaches him their use, while work enlivened and strengthened the man himself.”²³

President Anderson had a similar program in the 1870’s that placed emphasis on “the training of “practical” farmers, mechanics, and homemakers.” At this time, each student was required to spend from four to six hours a week in labor on the College farm, in the orchards or garden, or in the shops to develop their skill.²⁴ This program was also criticized for turning the college into a mere trade school. He was also concerned with courses centering on practical ability rather than theory. During his term courses offered included printing, telegraphy, wagon-making, painting, blacksmithing, photography, carpentry, cabinetmaking, and dressmaking.²⁵ These courses represented the industrial or mechanic arts.

Anderson’s ideas for the important factors of education spawned from an assumption of monetary value. “For example, the knowledge of tillage and stock . . . is worth more to the student than that of geography; familiarity with plants more than with history; and skill in accounting and book-keeping more than skill of . . . grammar.” His argument centered on the premise that geography or grammar would not bring a “market value,” but agricultural ability would. “Knowledge” should have a “real” value; thus, the College program contained no “Latin or Greek rubbish, no useless ‘abstract’ mathematics, and no fancy ‘ologies’ or ‘osophies’.”²⁶ With the importance of the “monetary value” of an education, some also started to take note of the cost of an education, both in time and money, and used this as part of their argument. The *Ellsworth Reporter*, reprinted in the *Lawrence Journal*, asked its readership, “What is the design

of this Institution?” It then answered the question, placing emphasis on the Morrill Act’s “education of the *industrial classes*.” They argued that an education that involved classical studies took more time to complete and therefore cost the students and parents more. With the economic hardships that many farmers were facing, this gave an “aristocratic view” of higher education.²⁷ It is clear why how many Kansans initially supported this argument. They wanted Kansas State to be accessible to their children so that they may receive the value of a higher education. After time, people understood that a broad education, while it added to the total time in school, was more valuable in the long run. This idea however was not understood for many years.

Throughout this time, the battle continued, still relying on the press as a primary weapon. Newspapers were feuding against one another in a slug-fest. The *Junction City Union* and the *Junction City Tribune* were two of the papers still entangled in this accusatory blood-bath. The editors of the two Manhattan papers, the *Nationalist* and the *Beacon*, were also guilty of vicious journalistic attacks on each other and on people and papers of opposing viewpoints. The fact that so many of the College’s activities were publicized also contributed to the factionalism. All involved in the debate; faculty, regents, friends, and even students; had a tendency to use aggressive print media to let their points be heard. The President and faculty publically lobbied for or against the selection of certain Regents. Conflicts of interest were very rarely recognized, so there wasn’t anything keeping people of power pushing their ideas on others. Everyone involved wished to shape the college into the image they preferred. The broader idea of an institution of higher education, to serve the preferences of the entire state, emerged very slowly.

President Anderson had a strong backing from the regents, but he did not have the support of the entire faculty, nor all of the students. His opposition in the faculty concentrated on

three key professors, Benjamin Mudge, Fred Miller, and H. J. Detmers. It would be safe to assume that these professors likely represented the humanities, as that is the area that Anderson was actively seeking to harm, but in fact, these are professors of science, agriculture, and veterinary medicine respectively.²⁸ Mudge and Miller believed that students needed two years preparatory work before they could profitably receive instruction in science, agriculture, and the mechanic arts. It was Anderson's contention that students should immediately start their college work in those areas, since many students only took a year or two of college. It soon became evident that there was still active opposition to the direction being taken by the administration of the Agricultural College. Extremists on one side were charged with wanting to spend thousands of dollars on manure, but not one cent on literature. The other side was accused of favoring a classical seminary and falsely representing it as an agricultural college. While some debates were more reasonable, there was not a significant percentage of people searching for a middle ground.

These ideas of education were not only held at Kansas State, Iowa State Agricultural College also expressed similar philosophies. There was a strong faction there, led by the Iowa Farmer's Alliance, to ensure that agricultural studies remained the focal point for the institution. Significant debate ensued, but the end result was a strong agriculture program, and to enforce the programs the board of trustees was forced to change much of the leadership of the college.²⁹

Anderson continued to call for a college that would emphasize science, agricultural research, and the development of mechanic and industrial arts, but it was inevitable that he would always face opposition by defenders of the classical college. This opposition was crucial in shaping the future of Kansas State, by not allowing the college to become merely a trade school or a farm apprentice shop. Conforming to the strong public pressure when he assumed office, Anderson had gone too far in expelling the theoretical work and classical studies from the

institution on the grounds that they did not train youth for hard physical labor and the superior virtues of the farm and the shop.³⁰

Before the resurging growing opposition took root however, Anderson was elected to the United States House of Representatives in 1878, leaving the college without a president. Not wanting to rush into a new administration, the Board of Regents placed Professor M. L. Ward as acting president until a permanent replacement could be selected. The Board of Regents minutes suggest that over 40 ballots took place before they were able to settle on a candidate to take office. They finally settled on George T. Fairchild, a professor of English Literature at Michigan State Agricultural College. He was welcomed graciously because as an outsider he had no entanglements in the politics that have ruled the college for many years. The selection of an English Literature professor suggested that the Board of Regents understood the public belief that Anderson's changes had been too extreme for the college and the community. They knew that a professor of literature would restore some of the classic studies at the college.

George Fairchild represented the type of student that the Kansas State Agricultural College was established to serve. He was raised on a farm in rural Lorain County, Ohio where he learned the value of hard work. He also understood the role education can serve in developing a strong character. He graduated from Oberlin College with his A.B. in 1862 and his M.A. in 1865. He was also an ordained minister, although he never held a church assignment. After he graduated, he became an instructor at the Michigan State Agricultural College, and was made a professor the following year. In his 14-year tenure at Michigan State, he taught English and served as Vice President of the college, he was also the acting President in 1878 when the President was absent. College presidents were not strangers to the Fairchild family: one of his

brothers, James, was the president at Oberlin College in Ohio, and another brother, Edward, was president at Berea College in Kentucky.³¹

In September 1879, after his selection, President-Elect Fairchild made an address to the student body of the college in a chapel service. The subject of his talk was “Does it Pay to Study?” He answered this question saying that it pays in four ways. The first is “pecuniarily,” meaning higher wages can be expected with some level of college study. The second is that “it gives a man influence in society.” The people who have the most influence over the towns and states likely received an education. The third is that “it increases one’s capacity for enjoyment.” The final way an education pays is by teaching self-control. Fairchild quotes Huxley who said about an education: “It enables us, when necessary, to do what we don’t want to do at the time when we don’t want to do it.”³² It was through these different forms of payment, that Fairchild showed the value of an education. This wasn’t the last time that Fairchild would use a similar subject for a speech. In a future address to the students he wrote “A Good Education Pays” in four ways: in dollars and cents, in influence and position, in usefulness, and in enjoyment.³³

Fairchild enjoyed writing, and through his time at Kansas State, frequently wrote articles for *The Industrialist*, the student newspaper. His articles, along with his speeches, articulate his philosophies about education and outline his plans for the college. Some of his earliest ideas for the structure of education were written in a paper published in the *Chicago Farmer’s Review* titled, “Our Agricultural Colleges,” which was reprinted in full in *The Industrialist*. He starts the paper with the ideal of agricultural colleges: “education for the young.” He goes on to say:

The education which they furnish must be agricultural, in quickening and deepening a young man’s regard for a farmer’s life, while in every way making him more capable in such a life. Learning and labor are to meet in a more profitable life upon the soil.³⁴

He then stated his two aims, “to develop the man in the farmer, and to develop the farming through the man engaged in it.” The first is the development of the mind through education. The ability to think is the first learning objective because “Thinking has made the world’s discoveries and inventions, and it will always be the means of progress.”³⁵ The second aim can be sought through information. He said about information, “While this always accompanies discipline and directs the application of ability, it differs from that just as the instruction of a child how to drive a nail differs from the training which enables him to do it successfully.”³⁶ He acknowledged the difference between simple instruction and teaching students to think for themselves, which had not been previously analyzed.

The method of achieving these aims, according to Fairchild, was a course of study, “long enough to establish principles and habits, severe enough to develop strength of mind, and so associated with agriculture as to cultivate enthusiasm for it.”³⁷ In this course, there has to be,

systematic instruction by most approved methods in the sciences, training to logical investigations of facts and principles, history and general knowledge of civilization enough to kindle inquiry, and technical training enough to give a general ability.³⁸

These are the standards that Fairchild used to create his first catalog and guided him in his decisions about courses being offered.

Finally, Fairchild discussed the importance of not allowing public sentiment to regulate the curriculum of the classroom. His reasoning is that if a student focuses on what is viewed as popular or important at the time, such as a specific skill or trade, he will only be prepared in that area. The preferred course of study provided the “taste and ability for an enlightened and progressive agriculture.”³⁹ The importance Fairchild placed on the development of the mind towards enlightenment had a significant impact on the advancement of agriculture nationwide.

The Fairchild Administration brought back the practice of holding Farmers' Institutes as "a means for disseminating newly discovered facts and methods pertaining to agriculture and horticulture."⁴⁰ This practice, which was originally established at the college in 1872, was forgotten during the Anderson administration. There were anywhere from six to ten of these conferences every year in different counties of the state. They allowed farmers and their families to meet "with the representatives from the College for mutual discussion and information upon matters of interest in farm life, including the home."⁴¹ This practice grew into a valuable means for maintaining the bond between the College and its patrons. During Fairchild's tenure, nearly 150 of these conferences were held.

In 1880, President Fairchild gave an address at the Farmers' Institute held in Manhattan. An abstract of his speech was published in *The Industrialist* where he emphasized the importance of thought and advancement. When discussing the innovation that has altered agriculture in the past he states, "It is a necessary law of civilization that each year's progress calls for a larger proportion of mental effort than its predecessors." Every day farmers are forced to think about many things: "the best seeds, best methods, best implements, best fertilizers, best rotations, best storage, and best ways of feeding; best breeds of stock, and best ways of handling them; best means of exchange, and best markets."⁴² In this sense, the most important skill for a farmer was being able to think and adapt to the changing environment. Fairchild asserts that all people need to "ask questions, and to search for the answers, not expecting ready-made information."⁴³ This meant encouraging students to go beyond the previously accepted and understood theories to develop the future of agriculture.

With a different view of what education should be Fairchild's course of study was significantly different than Anderson, his predecessor. However, he was not the first to hold

these beliefs about the importance of enriching education with the arts, sciences, and humanities; along with hands-on training. Theophilus Abbot, President of Michigan State Agricultural College, wrote:

Knowledge of the sciences would help any man to see what he didn't see before. The world shows in every kind of business, men who stand vastly higher in it than others of much better natural abilities, owing the systematic learning they have.⁴⁴

Both Abbot and Fairchild recognized education as a social equalizer and saw the land-grant movement as a way for middle and lower-class members of society to gain status. They especially found this to be true with regards to the Eastern upper-classes who dismissed the scientific learning of farmers and mechanics. In order for education to serve as this equalizer however, it had to be open to students of all classes and backgrounds. Fairchild wrote “students must be able to reach the advantages of such an institution from their rural homes.”⁴⁵ This was mainly referring to examinations for admission not requiring knowledge or skills outside of what would be taught at rural schools. Everything above would be taught at the college. By this standard, no advantages would be given to students from cities or preparatory schools. Fairchild was trying to bring about “inspiration and cultivation of scientific modes of thought in agriculture among the multitude.”⁴⁶ He understood the importance of educating the masses because, “No mere expert training of the few can open to the industrial classes the liberal education promised and provided for by Congress.”⁴⁷

Although Fairchild differed from Anderson in some aspects, he still recognized the importance of hands-on experience. He said “Experience is fast lending into the golden means between the extreme pure intellectual drill suggested by classical models and that of mere technical information and skill suggested by old-fashioned schools of law and medicine.”⁴⁸

Anderson's model could be classified as one of simple technical information and skill; the training of farmers. Fairchild recognized however:

The most successful agricultural colleges, in students, prestige, and influence upon agriculture, have adhered to such a training as gives real education of intellect, along with such constant and varied information and training in the art of tilling the soil as keeps lively an interest in agriculture.⁴⁹

This is not to be confused with the belief that only classroom education was important. Fairchild wrote, "If during these four years of student life no opportunity is given for direct contact with the soil and its crops, however excellent the early training may have been, it is remembered only as something outgrown."⁵⁰ If students are not given the chance to put into practice the theories and principles they have learned about, they will not retain their importance, nor be interested in their use. Practical work was paired with theoretical work, and made easier with new courses being introduced in home economics, engineering, horticulture, entomology, and zoology. Political economy and psychology were also added to the curriculum.⁵¹

The practical work aspect was paired with the idea of experimentation. Students were to be taught to question and test observations, as a way to make new discoveries in their respective fields. Fairchild wrote, "The chief efforts in experiment must be to establish principles, and enforce them."⁵² The efforts of the college in experimentation were supported by the Hatch Act of 1887. This provided for the establishment of agricultural experiment stations under the direction of the state's land-grant college. Kansas established the Agricultural Experiment Station in Manhattan, and also formed branch stations at Fort Hays, Garden City, Tribune, and Colby. After the formation of these stations in 1887, over thirty experiment and irrigation fields functioned under this off-campus research program.⁵³

Under the leadership of President Fairchild, the actual organization of the college changed very little. Some courses were added or altered, but overall, the only change was a more

liberal atmosphere that provided for a somewhat broader education. Fairchild was an idealist, who made known his values, and impressed them upon the college. Fairchild's college took "youth direct from the common schools, but mature in energy, to give four years, or less if desired, to mastery of self for life's uses." The school gave "direct and accurate knowledge," developed "natural abilities to the best advantage," and "built sound character in its students."⁵⁴ His model emphasized the development of the students, not the worker.

Late in the Fairchild Administration it became clear that Kansas State was a model program for the nation, as evident by Fairchild receiving countless letters requesting help or information. He received a letter from the Agricultural Experiment Station of North Carolina asking for information to aid in "building up a public sentiment and a proper knowledge of Agricultural Colleges."⁵⁵ Another letter was received from the South Carolina Department of Agriculture. The letter told Fairchild that legislation had been approved to establish an Agricultural and Mechanical College. The board was requesting information on "the cost of [the] college's buildings; the numbers they will accommodate; number and cost of work animals used on the farm; cost of all tools and machinery," among other things.⁵⁶ This showed that Fairchild was not only known for his ideals of education, but for his ability to successfully run a college. Multiple letters were received from the Iowa State Agricultural College. One of these letters asked "how much money is given annually by your state & other bodies, towards Farmers' Institutes?"⁵⁷ Another letter received was very short in length, and was trying to get course information. It read in full:

Dear Sir,

Will you please send me a copy of your latest catalogue?

Respectfully,

W. I. Chamberlain⁵⁸

Fairchild was recognized for his abilities as an educator, as well as his personal character. As one who knew him wrote, “He was a good logician and a man of constant growth. He was systematic—a man of order and correct habits—a master of all details of his work.”⁵⁹ He was respected in the state by the board of regents and administrators at other institutions. Albert Taylor, President of the State Normal School at Emporia wrote to Fairchild after his leaving Kansas State. He praises Fairchild as a “most wise and unprejudiced counsellor,” and when differing in opinion, the “honesty of [his] heart” could always be felt.⁶⁰ Not only was his program a model for the country, but his administration also served as an example for other college officials.

Fairchild’s reputation stretched much farther than the borders of Kansas. Proof of this occurred in 1896 when he was elected as the President of the National Association of American Agricultural Colleges. This was not only “a merited honor to President Fairchild, but it also shows the standing of the institution which he and his able Faculty have made second to no college of its kind in America.”⁶¹

Under the leadership of President Anderson, the Kansas State Agricultural College followed a model of producing mainly plowboys, blacksmiths, cooks, and seamstresses. Fairchild brought the school into the modern educational system, and formed a “model school for the education of young men and women who were to go back to the farm or workshops, not only to perform manual labor, but to live complete lives and to develop and honor their calling.”⁶² This is what the state, the college, and the students needed, and this is the legacy he built.

In response to the question “what is the best manure upon the land” Ben Franklin is alleged to have replied “The foot of its owner.” This meant that thoughtful attention and care was

key in the productivity of a farm. The Kansas State Agricultural College, under President Anderson, produced farmers to follow this idea. They were trained in modern farming and, through hours of extensive hands-on training, were knowledgeable of the current methods of agriculture. Fairchild brought the “radical” idea that farmers were charged with the advancement of agricultural practices. Learning current farming methods and practices would not advance the trade and would leave the students with outdated experience. He encouraged a broad education that taught students to think and grow in character, as well as in trade. He built a model agricultural college at Kansas State where he is known to have made “men of farmers, not farmers of men.” When asked what is the best manure for the soil, Fairchild imitated Sir Joshua Reynolds, and answered, “Brains, sir.”⁶³

Endnotes

¹ Albert Todd, *Address at the Alumni Reunion, Kansas State Agricultural College, June 8, 1887* (Manhattan, KS: Kansas State Agricultural College Press, 1887).

² *The Land-Grant Tradition* (Washington DC: The National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, 1995).

³ Paul Nienkamp, "Land-Grant Colleges and American Engineers," *American Educational History Journal*, 37, no. 1. (Spring 2010), 314.

⁴ *Ibid*, 314-315.

⁵ *Ibid*, 316.

⁶ *Ibid*, 314.

⁷ James C. Carey, *Kansas State University: The Quest for Identity* (Lawrence, KS: Regents Press of Kansas, 1977), 40.

⁸ *Ibid*, 41.

⁹ *Ibid*, 41.

¹⁰ John Walters, "Makers of the K.S.A.C.," *The Industrialist* (May 1898).

¹¹ *Kansas Daily Commonwealth* (February 2, March 9, 1872).

¹² *Manhattan Nationalist* (April 19, 1872).

¹³ *Manhattan Nationalist* (April 19 and 26, 1872).

¹⁴ Board of Regents Minutes, (June 19, 1872).

¹⁵ Carey, 42. Quoting *Faculty Records* (September 3, 1873).

¹⁶ Carey, 43.

¹⁷ Board of Regents Minutes, (June 27, 1873).

¹⁸ Board of Regents Minutes, (September 3, 1873).

¹⁹ *Ibid*. See also *Handbook of KSAC* (Catalog)(1874).

²⁰ Julius T. Willard, *History of the Kansas State College of Agriculture and Applied Science* (Manhattan, KS: Kansas State College Press, 1940), 39.

²¹ Nienkamp, 316

²² *Ibid.*, 319.

²³ “The Old and the New,” *The Aurora*, no. 4. (September 1873), 2, Iowa State University Archives/Special Collections.

²⁴ C. M. Correll, “Capsule History,” *The K-Stater*, (December 1961), 15.

²⁵ Carey, 52.

²⁶ *Handbook of KSAC*, 70.

²⁷ *Ellsworth Reporter* (February 20, 1874).

²⁸ Carey, 48.

²⁹ Edward Goedeken, “An Academic Controversy at Iowa State Agricultural College, 1890-1891,” *The Annals of Iowa*, (Fall 1979), 111.

³⁰ Carey, 53, 56.

³¹ *The Industrialist* (October 11, 1879).

³² *The Industrialist* (September 27, 1879).

³³ George T. Fairchild, “A Good Education Pays”.

³⁴ *The Industrialist* (October 11, 1879).

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ John Daniel Walters, *History of the Kansas State Agricultural College* (Manhattan, KS: K.S.A.C. Printing Department, 1909), 84.

⁴¹ Ibid. 84.

⁴² *The Industrialist* (January 31, 1880).

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Keith R. Widder, *Michigan Agricultural College: The Evolution of a Land-Grant Philosophy, 1855-1925* (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2004).

⁴⁵ George Fairchild, "Agricultural Schools: Their Objects, Methods, and Equipments," in *The Industrialist* (August 25, 1888).

⁴⁶ George T. Fairchild, "What Should Be Taught in Our Agricultural Colleges?" In *The Industrialist* (January 4, 1897).

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ George T. Fairchild, "Our Agricultural Colleges," in *The Industrialist* (August 21, 1880).

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ George T. Fairchild, "College Training in Agriculture," in *The Industrialist* (May 3, 1890).

⁵¹ Carey, 60.

⁵² George T. Fairchild, "College Work," in *The Industrialist* (April 30, 1881).

⁵³ Carey, 62.

⁵⁴ George T. Fairchild, "What This College Does For Young People," in *The Industrialist* (August 26, 1893).

⁵⁵ Charles W. Dabney to President George T. Fairchild, Raleigh, North Carolina, July 2, 1887.

⁵⁶ A. P. Butler to President George Fairchild, Columbia, South Carolina, August 19, 1887.

⁵⁷ President William I. Chamberlain to President George T. Fairchild, Ames, Iowa, January 13, 1888.

⁵⁸ President William I. Chamberlain to President George T. Fairchild, Ames, Iowa, April 11, 1888.

⁵⁹ Walters, 96.

⁶⁰ Albert R. Taylor to President George T. Fairchild, Emporia, KS, October 13, 1897.

⁶¹ *The Industrialist* (November 23, 1896).

⁶² *College Symposium of the Kansas State Agricultural College* (Topeka, KS: The Hall & O Donald Litho. Co., 1891), 31.

⁶³ *The Industrialist* (January 31, 1880).

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Colin T. Halpin

Kirmser Award Reflective Essay

The first step of any research project is picking a topic. This is one of the most crucial steps because the right topic can motivate you to work harder, dig deeper, and think of new ways to analyze your information. When I had to select my topic for my History 586 capstone paper, I picked a bad topic. It was interesting to me, but it wasn't feasible. I originally wanted to write about a U.S. Supreme Court Case. While this was within the requirements of the class, it was nearly impossible. We had to write a new argument for a topic, or bring new light to a previously discussed idea. The topic I originally chose had been analyzed too much, and I struggled to find any real primary sources to analyze.

After falling behind, I knew I needed to pick a new topic that was not only interesting, but would have primary sources available to analyze. I knew, because of a previous history class with Dr. Sherow, that I wanted a local topic that could utilize the resources available in University Archives as well as other local historical societies. Accordingly, I settled on a topic that involved the Kansas State Agricultural College and the educational philosophy of President Fairchild, focusing specifically about the struggle to find the right balance between practical and liberal arts education.

To begin my research, I relied primarily on the library's databases to find some background information. Through databases like "America: History and Life" and "Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers" I began to collect information about the College, President Fairchild, and the public opinions at the time. Once I had developed a theory of an argument, I needed to find specific material to support my thesis. This is when I turned to the Morse Department of

Special Collections. I started with the Vertical Files of President Fairchild to get more broad information. After I knew what types of material I was looking for, the Special Collections staff suggested different areas I could explore.

I used the historical indices to find Industrialist Articles that were written by, or expressly stated, President Fairchild. I then was able to use the archived film reels to find all of those articles. I explored the library catalog to find firsthand accounts of the college from students, as well as to find historical collections that discussed the different stages of growth the college underwent. These books led me to even more sources than I could have imagined. At the same time I was finding all of this material, I was also digging through it to add to my argument. I spent many long hours reading through scans and highlighting important phrases and passages that advanced my ideas.

Once I had the ‘meat’ of my paper, I knew I only needed a few more items to set my paper over the edge. The problem was, I didn’t know what I was looking for, but that is the amazing aspect of research. Sometimes, to find what you really want, you can’t be looking for it. The first thing I knew I wanted, was some type of personal story about how the educational system that Fairchild developed impacted his students, but I wasn’t sure this even existed. After many random searches through the library’s online catalog, I stumbled upon an address given by Albert Todd, a graduate in the class of 1872, at his 15 year reunion. His words defined the theme of my paper.

The last piece of my paper was found while looking through the boxes of correspondences of President Fairchild. I wasn’t sure what I was looking for, but I figured I would know it when I found it, and I did. I came across a number of letters to President Fairchild from administrators at other agricultural colleges around the country. These letters were all

asking for information about how our agricultural college was run. They were looking to us as a model to build from. This is what I used as the final piece to my argument.

The magic of research isn't finding material to prove a point or show an idea. The true magic is when your research opens you to new ideas or perspectives you had never before considered. Students today experience a disconnection with research. It is too easy to use the internet to find what you are looking for. People are no longer interested in holding and touching actual primary sources, and the majority are definitely not prepared to analyze them. If you don't think of research as exploring, you are missing an opportunity to advance thought and question the previously accepted ideas. Research not only gives us access to information, but allows us to use our ingenuity to draw new conclusions from the information, and take our work to new heights. To quote President Fairchild, "Thinking has made the world's discoveries and inventions, and it will always be the means of progress in any calling."

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