

THE TRANSITION YEARS 1955-1965

The decade from the mid-1950's to the mid -1960's set the stage for widespread diversification and many other changes, which occurred in the College of Agriculture and the University in general. During its first 50 years the mission of the College remained essentially the same – to produce teachers for the state's high school vocational agriculture classrooms. The University accomplished this mission with distinction. Notable graduates such as Floyd Doering, (need more names here – check with Matteson) endowed the state with a strong legacy for excellence in classroom teaching and learning, and along with countless others are remembered for their contributions to the lives of their students and to the state in general.

John May retired in 1957 after 44 years. 840 former students attended his retirement party. Gifts, mementos and a bound volume of letters of appreciation were presented.

Prucha retired in 1959 and passed away the same year. He had joined the faculty in 1915. At the time of his retirement he also served as the University Registrar.

1960 – Art Johnson, who had begun his career at River Falls in 1919, retired in 1960. Johnson was also the Farm Manager. Here is a sample of some the testimonial letters written to Johnson by former students and colleagues.

A letter written by Floyd Doering, class of 1949. Oct. 1, 1960. At the time Doering was the agriculture instructor at Wittenberg, WI.

Dear Art,

It was with mixed emotions that I reacted to the news of your retirement. Nice to look back on a job well done, but sad to know that the newcomers would not have the advantage of having you as a teacher. Your vast knowledge on almost any subject has continually amazed me, and I want to take this opportunity to thank you for all the help you have been to me and the countless others in the field of teaching agriculture education.

We know that River Falls College will never be the same without you. The name of “Art” Johnson and Mr. May were synonymous with River Falls agriculture, and I'm sure it will always be that way with your “boys”.

A letter to A.N. Johnson from Wallace L. Mehlberg a Spring Valley farmer, Oct. 7, 1960.

Dear Art,

In a very small way I hope to pay tribute to one of Agriculture's most respected Professors I have ever had the privilege to associate with as a student and as a farmer.

Your most sincere interest in my education at the college and your deepest concern for my morale in the Military Service are items, which can never be measured in a few words. The personal letters to servicemen during World War II when you were already overburdened with responsibilities is just one example of the dedication and self-sacrifice, which are so much a part of your faithful service to your students and the college.

I recall in the winter of 1941 when I hauled straw at the College Farm on Saturdays, it was you who came to my rescue at 7:00 A.M. each morning because I was too short to buckle the collars on old Barney and Charley. Much water has passed under the bridge since then, but never once have I known you to fall short of expectation in anything you attempted.

I shall always regard and remember you as THE PROFESSOR WITH THE HUMAN TOUCH.

A letter to A.N. Johnson from Marvin Thompson (UWRF Professor of Ag Education) October 17, 1960.

It would appear that two men, you and Professor May, were in major part responsible for the development of many young men who caused River Falls to be known as the "Ag" school. I have yet to meet one of those graduates who did not show respect for your teaching and for your judgment as well as an appreciation for knowing you as an individual.

...Lest you feel that we are treating you too kindly, we could mention some of those things about which you need not feel too proud. For instance, a good deal of truth has emerged in recent years regarding your actual prowess as a fisherman. Your ability to steer a boat and to select suitable fishing baits can be questioned. Your incessant promotion of the Democratic Party and of the Guernsey cattle has not helped your reputation. It has also been rumored around River Falls that you have somehow cheated in raising roses – that real rose bushes do not actually grow that tall or have that many flowers.

In 1951 the university was formally organized into three colleges, Agriculture, Education and Arts and Sciences. Richard Delorit, a 1942 grad of River Falls, joined faculty in 1953 along with Marvin Thompson and Russell Gerber. Gerhardt Bohn joined the faculty in 1957.

In 1956 the historic retail milk route was discontinued after 35 years. New state regulations made continuation too costly to maintain.

By 1960 the School of Agriculture consisted of 11 faculty members, 260 students. A new dairy and livestock facility, located southeast of the campus bordering on Cemetery Road, consisted of over 200 acres of land. Later to become known as the Campus Farm, this facility housed the dairy herd until 2007 when a new facility was constructed in Mann Valley.

Leland Wittwer joined faculty in 1958 in the Animal Science area. He was followed in 1960 by Vern Elefson in Agricultural Economics, John Foss in Soils, James Dollahon in Animal Science, and Edwin Ebert in Agricultural Engineering and Industrial Arts. Delorit was selected as the Director of the new College of Agriculture.

In the early 1960's construction of the present Ag Science Building was selected as a campus priority. This seems to have been a compromise between President Kleinpell, who favored a science building, perhaps in keeping with the national response to the Soviet Sputnik launches, and Delorit, who encouraged Kleinpell to build an agriculture facility. It was on record that as early as 1955 President Kleinpell lamented the fact that the campus had no facilities for food processing, livestock sanitation and animal hygiene, and for the preservation of meats and dairy products. The designated name of the building, Agriculture-Science Hall, is most likely a product of the compromise between Kleinpell and Delorit. Central Administration and the state Building Commission approved the building in 1964 with a construction budget of 2 million dollars. It was completed, dedicated, and put in use at the beginning of the fall quarter in 1966. The Agricultural Science building is a four-story structure with more than 20 laboratories that were originally used for instruction in agricultural biochemistry, mathematics (and later computer science), earth science, meats, nutrition, dairy products, animal physiology, radioisotopes, and agricultural engineering. It also housed a planetarium, a greenhouse and an aquatic animal room on the fourth floor. The math dept moved to North hall in ????, and the third floor became the domain of Agricultural Education and the Plant and Earth Science Departments. The Biology Department occupied the fourth floor.

With the opening of the new building, the College was formally organized into five departments, each having its own Chairman.

Agricultural Economics – Vern Elefson

Agricultural Education – Marvin Thompson

Agricultural Engineering Technology Thorvold Thorsen

Animal Science – Don Hargrove

Plant and Earth Sciences – Mel Wall or Al Beaver (not sure)

The 50-year anniversary of agriculture at River Falls was celebrated in 1962. An article marking this important milestone was written in the Milwaukee Sentinel by Gene Devine on April 22, 1962. In 1963 a graduate program in Agricultural Education was launched. This program began with assistance from a grant for scholarships from the National Science Foundation.

The school name was changed from State College to State University in 1964. In that year Dick Delorit became the university's Academic Vice President, and Jim Dollahon was appointed Dean of the College.

The Youth Leadership Congress was begun in cooperation with the Wisconsin Rural Electric Cooperatives in 1963. The stated purpose of this still ongoing program was "to inform young people of the changes taking place in agriculture, provide them with the knowledge of problems in rural and community development, and to show the impact and responsibilities of agriculture on a national and world-wide scale."

Dean Dollahon inaugurated the "Horse Science School" under the direction of Dr. M.E. Ensminger, former chairman of the Animal Science Department at Washington State University. This later became known as "The Horse Science School of America", and at a still later date took on its present designation as "the Horse Science Institute". Originally the course was offered on a rotational basis with Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro, TN.

Mel and Ray Wall were both popular teachers in the 1950's and 1960's; Mel at the University and Ray at River Falls High School. Mel Wall died in plane crash in Vietnam in 1966 following Ray's death the previous year. Ray was the vocational agriculture instructor at River Falls High School, but he also served as the original coordinator of the UW-river Falls Agriculture Technology Contest. The first contest was held in 1961 with 18 schools and 168 students participating in 10 contests areas. After Ray Walls' death, Marvin Thompson took over. Dale Edlin, an agriculture teacher from St. Croix Central in Hammond replaced Ray Wall as the at the high school.

In 1966 Gerald "Doc" Matteson joined faculty. He administered a grant/gift program of \$4000 to establish the Instructional Media Center (IMC), a library resource for high school agriculture teachers. This was originally housed in room 114. During the same year the University Curriculum Committee voted to establish an Agriculture Cooperative Internship Program, a program that provided 6-quarter credits for 12 weeks of practical professional work experience. Gary Rohde was the original director of the program. Gerald Matteson became Director after Rohde left the campus to serve as the State Secretary of Agriculture in Madison. 15 interns were placed during the first year. By 1976 there were 75 students. By 1987-79 there were 160.

The first meeting of the College of Agriculture Advisory Council was held in 1968. There were 18 regular members from the agribusiness community and 5 ex-officio members from the university.

In 1964 the Herbert Turner Farm in Mann Valley with 293 acres was purchased for \$55,000. There were 185 acres of cropland and 108 acres of pasture. Plans were immediately begun to build a steer feeding barn, a farrowing house, brood cow housing, a hay storage building, and 2.5 miles of fencing. The sheep facilities were moved from the Campus Farm to Mann Valley. The existing buildings were quite old; one predated the Civil war. It was 104 feet long and had supporting timbers that measured 54 feet that were fastened with wooden pegs.

At about this time Byron Koch retired as Farm Manager and was replaced by John Claycomb who served for about one year. William Benjamin succeeded him. The Farm Managers' duties consisted of coordination of farm facilities for use by instructors and students, purchasing or leasing farm equipment, selling and purchasing livestock, scheduling crop rotations, meeting fertilizing requirements, and basic farm management. Rudy Erickson became Director of Farm Operations in 1969. After Rudy's retirement in ----, Bill Connolly was appointed to replace him.

In 1965 the first college sponsored rodeo was held on May 8 and 9 with teams from North Dakota, Nebraska, and Iowa. This was the 1st student intercollegiate rodeo to be held east of the Mississippi. The facilities for the rodeo had been built in 1964 at a site on highway 65 South next to the newly constructed dairy.

In 1970 the North Central Columbia Sheep Breeders Association presented a gift flock of 13 purebred Columbia ewes and a ram to the College, providing impetus for the construction of a 32 X 96 pole barn. This facility also provided housing for a flock of sheep, which came to River Falls from the Arlington Experiment Station near Madison. This move was referred to at the time as "Operation Hampshire". Three 16 X 50 foot silos were erected on the Mann Valley Farm shortly thereafter.

A 1972 road project provided conveniently connected buildings on the Mann Valley Farm, and a swine-finishing house was also completed along with a feed processing and mixing center. This facility had the capability to mix, grind, and roll, and to produce palletized rations. It was connected to the existing silos and grain bins.

In 1976 a 360 ft well was drilled on the southeast corner of the farm and a center pivot irrigation system was installed. The well delivered 1750 gallons per minute at 180 psi. The system was designed to irrigate a 200 ft radius.
