

Teachers in Tents: Eighth Annual Rural Science Summer School in New Brunswick, 1922*

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Teachers in Tents: Eighth Annual Rural Science Summer School in New Brunswick, 1922

**“No other summer exceeded in fame the
fourth year of the reign of King Alexander”**

INTRODUCTION

THROUGHOUT THE EARLY YEARS OF THE 20th century, the proportion of rural-dwellers in the Maritimes' overall social fabric steadily declined. At the time of Confederation, 90 per cent of the people lived in the countryside beyond incorporated cities, towns and villages. By 1901 the proportion was about 75 per cent; in 1921, 63 per cent and still rapidly shrinking.¹ For the most part, these folk found their livelihood in industries directly dependent upon natural resources, especially agriculture. Their way of life seemed gravely threatened as industrialization and technological change pulled people off farms. The response, aiming to reverse decay of the countryside in both the United States and Canada, was the Rural Life Movement.²

One aspect of the movement targeted the curriculum of ordinary schools. Combining impulses towards nature study and industrial or vocational training,³ reformers tried to ensure that organized educational efforts were properly designed to value, understand, strengthen and perpetuate the rural (agricultural) way of life. In

* Some of the research for this article was funded from an internally-awarded research grant at Memorial University, gratefully acknowledged. Thanks also to colleague Joe Cherwinski for valuable comments on an early draft.

- 1 Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *The Canada Year Book 1921* (Ottawa, 1921), p. 101; E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muise, eds., *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation* (Toronto/Fredericton, 1993), pp. 139, 169.
- 2 Major documents describing the movement include the report of the 1908-1910 Country Life Commission in the United States; rural-oriented sections in the 1913 report of the Canadian Royal Commission on Industrial Training and Technical Education; and Rev. John MacDougall's *Rural life in Canada* ([1913], Toronto, 1973). See also Carl C. Taylor, "Country life movement", *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, IV (New York, 1930), pp. 497-9.
- 3 Harry G. Good and James D. Teller, *A History of American Education*, 3rd edition (New York, 1973), pp. 208-14, 234-5; Carroll Atkinson and Eugene T. Maleska, *The Story of Education* (Philadelphia, 1965), p. 109; J.D. Wilson, R.M. Stamp and L-P. Audet, eds., *Canadian Education: A History* (Scarborough, 1970), pp. 298-300. According to Charles E. Phillips, "A sentimental or propaganda value appeared also to have been attached to agriculture in the elementary schools, especially in Nova Scotia, where much was done to foster a love of rural life". Charles E. Phillips, *The Development of Education in Canada* (Toronto, 1957), p. 491.

Malcolm MacLeod, "Teachers in Tents: Eighth Annual Rural Science Summer School in New Brunswick, 1922", *Acadiensis*, XXV, 2 (Spring 1996), pp. 82-91.

New Brunswick, the Department of Agriculture, taking up some slack which provincial educational authorities had let slip, in 1915 inaugurated an annual summer school in "rural science" for practising teachers.

New Brunswick's creation of specialized programmes promoting agricultural education — later repackaged with the more comprehensive title of rural science — occurred within a continent-wide context in which ideas moved easily across provincial and national borders.⁴ Nova Scotia often pioneered improvements which New Brunswick later copied; both Maritime jurisdictions looked to Ontario for a model; and Ontario itself was strongly influenced by innovations in the United States, especially Michigan and New York.⁵

In Nova Scotia, serious and sustained development along these lines began in 1885 with an "Act to encourage agricultural education". Under its terms, a lecturer in agriculture was added to the faculty of the provincial Normal School at Truro.⁶ For the next 20 years H.W. Smith, an American and a graduate of Cornell University, was a one-person school of agriculture attached to the teacher-training institution.⁷ From 1888 on, an experimental farm (at Bible Hill) was part of his operation. Smith's core responsibilities were basically three-fold: courses in agricultural chemistry and botany for budding teachers; courses in agricultural science, offered three times per year for young farmers who were gathered into Truro for an eight-week session; and extension lectures to farm groups across the province. A July-August summer term, and a special class during the two-week Christmas vacation, both aimed largely at teachers, were added to this programme by the mid-1890s.⁸

Meanwhile, the Nova Scotia Fruit-Growers' Association, with some financial assistance from the provincial government, operated a School of Horticulture at Wolfville from 1894 on.⁹ This was phased out, and its personnel moved to Truro, when N.S. Agricultural College (two years of degree-quality courses) was established there in 1905. During 1901-4, the province inaugurated two travelling

- 4 The most thorough scholarly description of the process, for any province, is Douglas Lawr, "The Development of Agricultural Education in Ontario", Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1972. In Ontario, the basic chronology began with the insertion of nature study into the curriculum, with a linked summer school for teachers in 1904, followed by the appointment of a director of elementary agricultural education (headquarters at Guelph) in 1911. See Royal Commission on Industrial Training and Technical Education [RCIT] *Report* (Ottawa, 1913), I, pp. 306-10.
- 5 Richard Jarrell, "Science and Public Policy in 19th Century Canada: Nova Scotia Promotes Agriculture", in Paul Bogaard, ed., *Profiles of Science and Society in the Maritimes Prior to 1914* (Fredericton, 1990), pp.221-3, 237-41.
- 6 *Nova Scotia Agriculture Report* [NSAR] (1886), pp. 46-7. The Normal School had originally been situated in that semi-rural location in 1855, so that an experimental model farm could eventually be attached to it. Such a farm did operate briefly during the 1860s. Judith Fingard, "Alexander Forrester", *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, IX (Toronto, 1976), pp. 270-2.
- 7 Robert F. Harvey, *Alexander Forrester and the Establishment of a Normal School* (Truro, 1989), pp. 14-15; Harvey W. MacPhee, *The School of Agriculture 1885-1905* (Truro, 1985).
- 8 NSAR (1893), pp. 53-6, and (1895), p. 32; J.P. McCarthy, "100 Years of Teacher Education", *Nova Scotia Journal of Education* (November 1955), pp. 18-19.
- 9 NSAR (1895), p. 34.

dairy schools, organized by an expert (Laura Rose) imported from Ontario.¹⁰

In 1908 the two colleges in Truro cooperated to launch an annual Rural Science School, of six weeks duration each summer. The object was to promote first-hand study of “soils, plants, insects, birds, weather phenomena and everything of that sort which constitute the environment of their rural scholars”.¹¹ Teachers could enhance their salaries by gaining the certificate, and implementing the curriculum suggestions, of this school. The whole Rural Life Movement then received a big boost when Ottawa embarked on a 10-year, \$10 million programme outlined in the Agricultural Instruction Act (1913). It was the first major piece of enabling legislation whereby federal funding assisted, and to a certain extent guided, policy decisions by provincial authorities. Quickly taking advantage of this opportunity, before the year was out Nova Scotia appointed a director of rural science schools, responsible for laying “elementary foundations” for “scientific and practical agricultural training in our public schools”.¹²

New Brunswick had its own travelling dairy school by the mid-1890s, but otherwise seemed to lag behind Nova Scotia and look to the neighbouring province for certain forms of assistance, while following a similar line of development. A special 1895 course for cheese-makers at Sussex — which nearly all the New Brunswick target group attended (with half their train fare paid by the government) — was directed by J.E. Hopkins of the Dominion dairy station, Nappan, Nova Scotia. There was also some talk about the other Maritime governments subsidizing or helping to operate the agricultural college which Nova Scotia planned to establish.¹³ What finally emerged, however, was the institution at Truro, funded and controlled by one government, that of Nova Scotia, but which nevertheless invited attendance from the whole region.

In 1908 New Brunswick school Inspector R.P. Steeves produced a curriculum outline, *Nature study and agricultural course for country schools*, containing monthly teaching suggestions for grades up to Eight. Grade One children in mid-winter would consider what trees were still green, while the oldest pupils compared New Brunswick’s climate with that of Manitoba or British Columbia, or planned the school garden.¹⁴ The 1909 provincial Royal Commission on Agriculture favoured nature study in the schools, along with other elements of practical

10 Jarrell, “Science and Public Policy”, pp. 236-7.

11 RCIT *Report*, IV, p. 1737.

12 Wilson, Stamp and Audet, eds., *Canadian Education*, pp. 454-5; Jane Margaret Norman, *Loran Arthur DeWolfe and the Reform of Education in Nova Scotia, 1891-1959* (Truro, n.d. [1992?]), pp. 35-9.

13 *New Brunswick Agriculture Report* [NBAR] (1895), pp. 12, 221, 248. The possibility of New Brunswick participation in operating an agricultural college at Truro was under discussion in 1902. James M. Thomson, *A history of the Sussex and Studholme Agricultural Society, 1841-1980* (Sussex, 1982), p. 68. There was a precedent in the subsidy — \$50 per provincial student attending — which New Brunswick extended to the Nova Scotia School of Horticulture from 1896 on. NSAR (1896), pp. 38-9; E.E. Faville to Hon. James Mitchell, 19 November 1896, RS 625, file A1a, Provincial Archives of New Brunswick [PANB].

14 See 25-page booklet, RS 735, file 1, PANB.

education: domestic science, animal husbandry, fruit growing.¹⁵ In the first few years, however, progress in implementing Steeves' concrete suggestions regarding the introduction of nature study and the establishment of school gardens proved very slow. New Brunswick school authorities judged that, without gardens, teaching related to agriculture was "a failure, chiefly because it has been all theory".¹⁶

Steeves was then named director of elementary agricultural education, stationed in Sussex, where, in 1914-15, a small, solid building to house the province's first School of Agriculture was constructed. Both these initiatives, spurred by the Nova Scotian example, resulted from the federal enabling funds recently made available. The school's official opening, 15 July 1915, was attended by Principal M. Cumming of Truro Agricultural College. The new School of Agriculture immediately began offering courses, of up to four weeks duration, in livestock, crops, dairy, horticulture, poultry and bees.¹⁷

At this stage — although in competition with Woodstock which also hosted farming courses of up to six weeks duration, but in a borrowed building — Sussex seemed to be emerging as the New Brunswick version of Truro: an all-round centre for practical agricultural leadership and education, at a certain safe remove from the provincial capital where bureaucrats, theories and regulations abounded, often in fatal combination. Apart from the programmes initiated by government, Sussex was already home to a genuinely regional institution of a type which even Nova Scotia's farm capital did not have. The twice-monthly newspaper *The Maritime Farmer*, editorially controlled and published in Sussex, although owned by the same private interests as the chief daily papers in Saint John, wielded a far-flung influence as the official organ of a dozen farm organizations in all three Maritime provinces.¹⁸

In 1915, at Sussex, Steeves called together New Brunswick's first rural science school for teachers. It built upon a regional tradition of enthusiastic professionalism which was already well-established. The Maritime summer school of science — a genuinely inter-provincial initiative which attracted teachers and government funding from all three jurisdictions — had flourished from 1887 until

15 In addition, the Royal Commission supported aid to agricultural societies, establishment of model farms, and increased immigration to help replace rural population drifting away to the cities. Forbes and Muise, eds., *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, pp. 176-7.

16 Evidence given, 1910-1911, to the Royal Commission on Industrial Training. Representatives of Prince Edward Island made a similarly discouraging presentation, indicating that very little school gardening or nature study occurred in their jurisdiction. RCIT *Report*, IV, pp. 1757, 1783.

17 RS 187, file 1, PANB.

18 The *Maritime Farmer*'s influence was probably most weighty during the incumbency of its most durable editor, Malcolm MacLeod (native of Cape Breton and the author's grandfather) who edited the paper during 1906-35. While serving as editor MacLeod doubled as New Brunswick's superintendent of agricultural societies, 1916-25, and as deputy minister for a period in 1920. In 1934 he became the first out-of-province recipient of the honour farmer award from the Nova Scotia Farmers' Association, capping a period when the circulation of his newspaper grew to be the third largest in the region. "M.A. MacLeod called by death", *Kings County Record*, 7 November 1935.

the era of World War I.¹⁹ The New Brunswick rural science school became a spirited annual assembly which lasted until the depression of the 1930s interfered with every kind of government-sponsored activity. Duration of the school was always four weeks, starting in mid-July. Subjects, usually four per summer, rotated in a tight little list, highlighting nature, farm physics, soils, gardening, agricultural chemistry, livestock and cereals. Instructors were recruited from the provincial Department of Agriculture, or other sources of expertise in the region, with the occasional visitor from Guelph or another central Canadian locality. Licensed teachers were invited to attend and given modest financial assistance to do so; typically there would be two to three dozen. A salary bonus of \$20 was offered to those who, having attended the rural science school, taught agriculture based on the cultivation of a full-fledged school garden the following year.²⁰

In 1920, upon Steeves' retirement, Alexander Gorham became director of elementary agricultural education. He introduced an interesting innovation. To reduce the cost of attendance, rural science camp would accompany the four-week school. "Not only will many of the classes be held out of doors but staff and students will have the privilege of living under canvas during the time the Course is in session".²¹ Tents with wooden floors (two or three cots per tent), and indoor kitchen and dining facilities, were provided by the 8th Hussars, who had been permanently bivouaced just outside Sussex since 1891.²² It was a five-minute hike to the agricultural building. Three students per day did kitchen duty. Electricity and water came from town systems. One of the instructors served as chaperon; students chose committees to oversee camp arrangements, entertainment and sports; and those who preferred comfort to adventure could write in advance for a list of Sussex boarding-houses.²³

Besides reducing costs, summer school camping was also encouraged for the sake of promoting recreation and social interaction among participants. The plan certainly seems to have worked. Files on agricultural education at the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick include a lengthy, high-spirited account of camaraderie and good fun enjoyed at the third such camp, held 12 July to 9 August 1922. A record number of 42 teachers attended, two-thirds of them women. There were five instructors: two from the provincial Department of Agriculture, two brought in from Nova Scotia, and Gorham himself (school and camp director, instructing in school gardening and method).

Gorham, in his annual report, declared himself greatly satisfied with the summer of 1922.

19 Katherine F.C. MacNaughton, *The Development of the Theory and Practice of Education in New Brunswick, 1784-1900* (Fredericton, 1947), pp. 247-8. Annual grants were \$200 if the school were held in the province, otherwise \$100 from each of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and half that amount from Prince Edward Island. Average attendance was 200, even though teachers did not receive improved licence or salary for attending. *RCIT Report*, IV, pp. 1655, 1664.

20 RS 187, file 11, PANB.

21 RS 187, file 6, PANB.

22 Douglas How, *The 8th Hussars, A History of the Regiment* (Sussex, 1964), p. 45.

23 1920 prospectus, and notes on 1929, in RS 187, file 11, PANB.

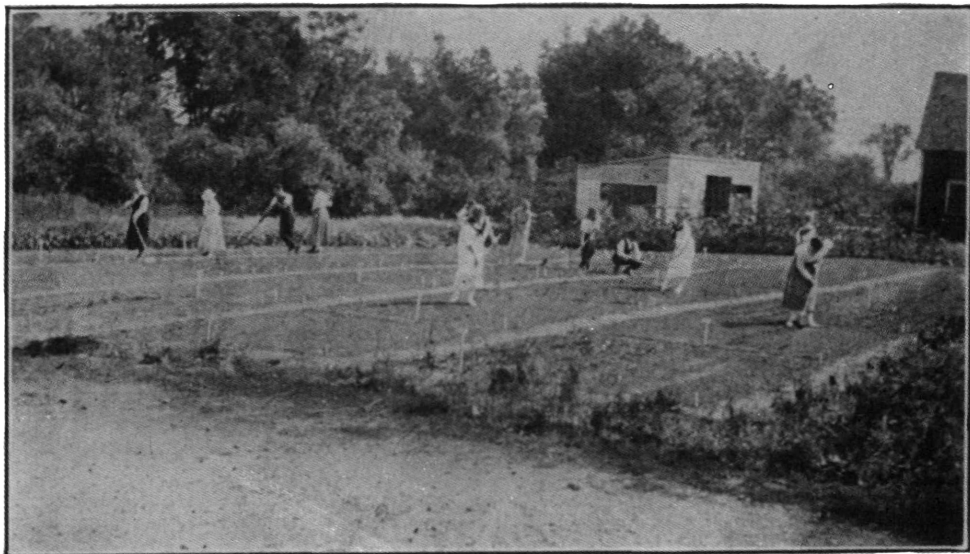
[Camping] is the ideal life for a student body attending a school of Nature....The teachers learn to know each other much better than if they boarded at various places in town. After the activity of the day no one need pass a lonely hour or pine for congenial company. Music, games, singing and pleasant conversation....keeping everyone in good humour...add much to the tone of the school.²⁴

The following document, in its entirety, is a 2500-word account of the 1922 rural science camp which mentions each participant, usually with some good-natured teasing. For the purposes of this presentation, it has been edited to half that length, eliminating repetition while retaining comments on the camp's leading personalities and the best jokes. The authors of this *tour de force*, written in par-Old Testament style, were three of the teacher-students at the camp: Samuel Smith of Fredericton, Ruth Thurber of Sussex and Harry Wiley of St. Stephen (these last two being identified as the Major and Minor Prophets).

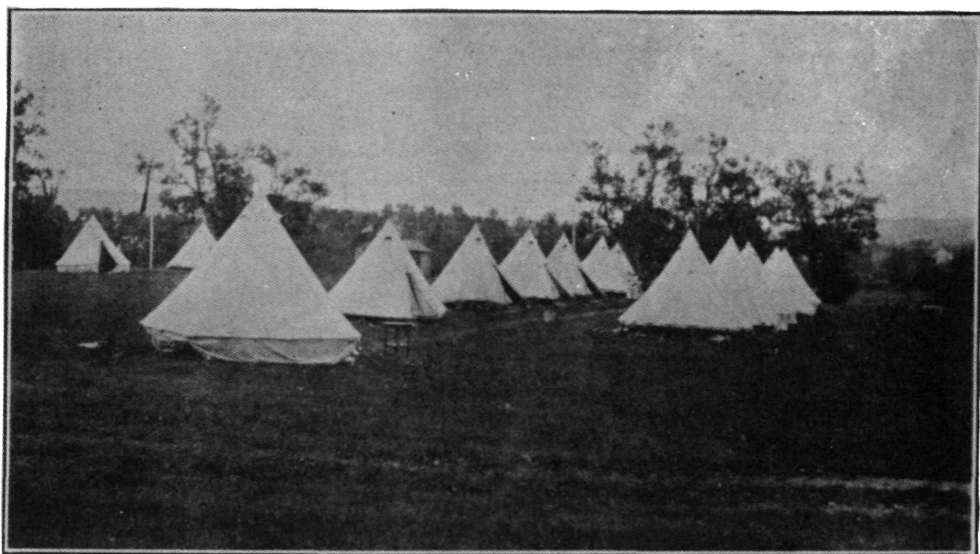
Their commentary is more than just an interesting curiosity. Besides ranking high in entertainment value, it also serves to remind us of often-hidden complexities — a rearguard action defending rural values, development of new bureaucracy at the interface of provincial Departments of Agriculture and Education, new curriculum for the schools, and special summer schools for teachers — involved in the adjustment process that was experienced as the region went through the significant transition from a chiefly rural to a predominantly urban society.

MALCOLM MacLEOD

24 NBAR (1922), p. 24.



Rural Science Garden, Sussex, 1920



Students' Camp, Rural Science School, 1920

Source: New Brunswick Department of Agriculture, *Report* (1920), p. 29.

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Here beginneth the first chapter of the first book of the Chronicles of the Sons and Daughters of the Agrarians. In the reign of Rufus (R.P. Steeves) King of the Agrarians, there was a great war and the King was much troubled....When the war was ended, the King who was stricken in years, spake unto the Agrarians saying: "Choose from among the Sons of the Agrarians a young man to be ruler over you and he shall be even as my son and I shall bestow upon him my castle in the city of Sus" [Sussex]. And all the people of the Agrarians lifted up their voices and wept, but they chose unto themselves a young man small in stature but mighty in wisdom. His name was Alexander (A.C. Gorham) and in all things he followed in the steps of the wise King Rufus.

Once every year in the seventh month did he call unto himself the Sons and Daughters of the Agrarians and they did meet within his castle and he gave them of his wisdom. And while they sojourned in the city of Sus they did lodge with the inhabitants thereof and did eat at their tables. King Alexander did gather unto himself the wise men of the court of King Rufus,... the wisest of all the wise men was William (Dr. Mac)^a and he was like unto no other man, for he knew the time and the seasons and understood the language of all the beasts and animals, including the Sons and Daughters of the Agrarians.

Now King Alexander was greatly troubled because the Sons and Daughters of the Agrarians did make merry with the sons and daughters of the inhabitants of the city of Sus. And he called his wise men together and spake unto them saying: "I shall pitch many tents up on the hill outside the north east wall of the city of Sus, and it shall come to pass that when the sons and daughters of the Agrarians come to gather wisdom at the castle, that they shall abide in the tents. And I shall hire unto me a cook and he shall prepare meat and drink for the Sons and Daughters of the Agrarians and the Sons and Daughters of the Agrarians shall pay the bills."

...The wisest of all the wise men was William and he spake unto King Alexander saying: "I will take up my abode in the camp lest the Sons and Daughters of the Agrarians should become a trouble to the King. I shall teach them to capture the flying locusts, to dive in the waters of the river Ken [Kennebecasis], and I shall instruct them in the ways of tent-dwellers."

Then spake another of the wise men and his name was Frank (Dr. Wheelock)^b

- a William MacIntosh, MSc, born in Edinburgh 1869, educated Saint John. After building a collection of 30,000 insects, he was appointed curator of the New Brunswick Museum, and provincial entomologist. Associated with the rural science school from its inception, his course was nature study. *Prominent People of the Maritime Provinces* (Saint John, 1922), p. 116.
- b Dr. F.E.Wheelock. Born in Nova Scotia in 1877, he taught school for several years before attending Acadia University and Yale (Ph.D. 1910). He was a professor of physics at the University of Missouri and Mount Allison — where he also headed up the officers' training corps for most of World War I — before becoming Dean of engineering at Acadia in 1917, and provost from 1923 on. At New Brunswick's summer camp, he instructed in physical nature and environment. B.M.Greene, ed., *Who's Who in Canada 1938-9* (Toronto, 1939), p. 300. See also John G. Reid, *Mount Allison University: A History, to 1963*, Vol. II (Toronto, 1984), p. 9.

saying: "I shall teach the Sons and Daughters of the Agrarians to measure the heat by day and the cold by night and to read the signs from the sky and clouds." Then spake Ora (Mr. Hicks),^c another of the wise men, saying: "I shall come and abide in the tents and I shall teach the Sons and Daughters of the Agrarians to discover the weeds that grow by the wayside and to know the grasses of the field, whether or not they be good for food...."

And it came to pass in the fourth year of the reign of King Alexander that the King added to his council a wise woman from the land of the horticulturalists and her name was Mary (Miss Jennison).^d And she was wise in the ways of youths and maidens. She instructed them in the ways of grace and beauty and she taught them to make merry among themselves....And the King spake unto the Sons and Daughters saying: "Shall we keep this wise woman with us to teach us the delights of comradeship, or shall we send her back to the land of the horticulturalists never to return?" And they gazed upon the countenance of the wise woman, and she was fair to look upon, and with one voice exclaimed, "Let the wise woman return to us every summer from the land of the horticulturalists."

No other summer exceeded in fame the fourth year of the reign of King Alexander. It came to pass that when the tent-dwellers were gathered together their countenances did shine, and the wise men looked upon them and loved them for they were diligent in their studies, and they did love the wise men. Once a day did they wash in the waters of the river Ken and the fishes of the water did much rejoice.

....There were two sisters (Clyde and Jean Campbell) who did dwell in the tent nearest the city and the young men as they passed to and from the city did stop and talk with the sisters and they were much beloved by many of the Agrarians. But the youngest sister was beloved most of all by a mighty young man of valour (McGinn). His strength was as the strength of two men so that when he walked smoke did issue from his mouth and from his nostrils.

....Two of the daughters of the Agrarians who dwelt in the tents had been like upon the colour of the oak leaves in autumn, and the one was tall (Edith Blakney) but the other was shorter in stature (Marjorie Burgoyne). They played in all the games of the tent-dwellers, but the taller was the mightier in the game of ball, and the shorter danced much with the young men and her feet suffered much pain by reason of being trampled by the Sons of the Agrarians....And there was another of the daughters of the Agrarians who had left behind her in the land where she dwelt, an husband, and he became weary of waiting for her and came to fetch her (Mrs. DeGrasse). And he came nigh unto the Camp at night-fall and all the Sons and Daughters of the Agrarians and all the wisemen did leave their tents to welcome him. And they made merry round the tent of the newly united, making a joyful

c O.C. Hicks, B.Sc.Ag., shown in the 1917 list of New Brunswick Agriculture Department personnel as "Instructor — soils and crops", which is what he offered at the summer school, along with cereal husbandry and plant physiology. NBAR (1922), p. 25.

d Mary T. Jennison of the Edgehill School for girls, Windsor, Nova Scotia, instructor in "rural recreation" — a telling sign that "rural science" intended a genuine expansion of interest beyond basic agricultural education. NBAR (1922), p. 25.

noise with cymbals and instruments of music....

Four of the Sons of the Agrarians did spend much time during the evening hours in making merry with the daughters of the inhabitants of the city of Sus. Now among the maidens was the daughter of the chief ruler of the city, and she did smile upon them all, but chiefly upon the youngest of them (Harry Dysart). And the second of the young men (George Gregg)... was very wise in the ways of women. But the remaining two who were tall, with the silky locks like unto the tassels of the corn in the gardens of the Agrarians, were not so wise...and they (Morris and Turner) allowed themselves to be vamped by the daughters of the inhabitants of the city of Sus.

....And one of the young ladies excelled at the game of cards (Hale) and when the sun was set she played with the wiseman William, and she did please the wise man so that he put her upon his waiting list, for he already had a wife in the city of rocks.... There was one of the daughters of the Agrarians (Thurber) who was older in years than some of the Daughters of the Agrarians. She was single and she danced with the Sons of the Agrarians. And because she was wise in the ways of youths and maidens, then did the youths and maidens take counsel with her regarding the affairs of their hearts.

....And there was a magic box set in the walls of the banquet hall of the King. And every day during the King's banquet did one of the daughters of the Agrarians (McAuley) speak unto the magic box. Even to three times during the banquet did she speak unto the magic box and she heard the voice of her lover speaking to her through the magic box and they did converse together.

...But there were two of the tent-dwellers (Stultz and Lawrence) of youthful and small stature and very fair to look upon. One was a young man and one was a maiden. And they did walk circumspectly and spake few words among the Sons and Daughters of the Agrarians. But when they walked together in the even, the corners of the eyes of the Sons and Daughters of the Agrarians were upon them and they did whisper among themselves, "Ain't they cute?"

....And it came to pass that on the eighth day of the eighth month that the Good and Noble Alexander made a great and wondrous feast for the Sons and Daughters of the Agrarians and they made merry with their friends, and the King spake unto the Sons and Daughters of the Agrarians saying: "Tomorrow shall the Sons and Daughters of the Agrarians return to their homes." Then the Sons of the Agrarians did fall upon the necks of the Daughters of the Agrarians and they did weep bitterly. Then the King stood upon the banquet table and cried in a loud voice, louder than the voices of weeping. "Ye Sons and Daughters of the Agrarians be of good cheer for before another twelvemonth ye shall meet again with the King and his wise men without the walls of the City of Sus."

So the Sons of the Agrarians ceased their weeping and they shouted with a shout that did fill the valley and did rock the walls of the city of Sus. And they cried, "Long live the Good and Noble Alexander — for he's a jolly good fellow."