

January 1, 1919

World Agriculture Corporation

World Agriculture: Volumes 1-7

A NEW ENGLAND FARMERS' CLUB OF FIFTY YEARS' STANDING

The West Brookfield Farmers' Club, which has recently affiliated with the World Agriculture Society, has been an educational factor in Massachusetts agriculture during half a century. Among its notable members is the present State Commissioner of Agriculture, Dr. A. W. Gilbert. The Club was started in 1874 by Lyman H. Chamberlain at his home in West Brookfield with a membership of eight farmers. Mr. S. Newell White, a descendant of Peregrin White of Mayflower fame, was the first President.

The office of Secretary has had only two incumbents since the Club started, — its founder, a brother of Gov. D. H. Chamberlain, and its present Secretary, an expert in fruit and dairy farming and in cattle judging, Sumner H. Reed.

At the Golden Wedding celebration of its first Secretary on March 3, 1900, Mr. Reed gave an entertaining history of the Club from which we give the following extracts: "All the leading farmers in the vicinity soon joined the Club and were regularly present, so practical were the subjects under discussion, and so interesting and instructive the meetings. The membership grew to forty. Mr. C. N. Prouty drove three miles or more as a regular attendant; W. E. Stone, brother of the world-famed Lucy Stone, is said to have slept on his long homeward ride, but so accustomed was he to be broken of his

rest by calls from an invalid wife, that if his horse failed to keep the road, Mr. Stone would quickly awake.

"One evening in March, 1877, when the Club was meeting in an anteroom of the Town Hall, strange to relate, all these farmers' wives and daughters had errands in the village. For carrying sundry boxes and pails along they gave many a plausible reason. When the Club meeting was half through, a knock was heard. A messenger announced that we were all invited to the old Church Vestry. As we filed into the vestry, taking back seats, Mrs. Chamberlain was addressing the company on the 'Trials of farmers' wives.' Among the list she mentioned 'green wood.' Another sister expatiated on 'patches and buttons' or 'how to sew them on to stay.' A third, in giving a recipe for bread making, left out an essential ingredient. It was Mrs. Lynde who remarked, 'I usually add a little flour.' In a short time the doors that divided the vestry were thrown open and Oh ! the sight of those loaded tables! The last course of the feast was a generous slice of frosted and flower-bedecked pyramid cake, a cubit and a span being the height thereof. 'Grandma Armstrong' made it, she of 'New England Homestead' fame, otherwise known as Mrs. H. W. Hamilton. "Following this innovation, it was decided to meet at the houses and to let the ladies serve a dinner, each family carrying enough food for themselves and invited guests. Coffee was furnished by the entertainer. The Club gathered at 10.30 with a forenoon session and disbanded at 3 o'clock. Members came from a circuit of ten miles and we grew in numbers until at my home in February, 1891, there were 240 present; at Hon. Wilson Fairbanks home in Warren, 350; and later in the same year, 400, at the home of Ex-Gov. Daniel H. Chamberlain and his brother, our Secretary. Since the Club had outgrown the capacity of any house, it was voted henceforth to meet in halls in either West Brookfield or Warren, also to have a paid membership (for men) of half a dollar. The ten Winter meetings open with the report of the previous meeting. The essayist chooses his own subject which with discussion fills the time until dinner, which is followed by a short entertainment of readings and music. Then an agricultural subject is opened by an invited speaker. The custom of meeting in the day-time

with no postponement on account of weather and of taking one or all of the family along with the assurance of having a feast of good things to eat, sandwiched between the sessions of intellectual treats, makes a pleasant day always. The development among the members in speaking and writing has certainly been marked. The voluble drummer and his seat mate on the train is a parallel case. After trying his companion on almost every subject, the drummer declared in disgust, 'I think you can't talk anyhow!' The reply at once came. 'Try me on leather.' The drummer found the tanner fluent enough on his own ground. And so with our farmers on the practical matters by means of which they are daily seeking to make as much profit as possible. It is then they find voice and words to express their views.

"Our honored Secretary has been a man of firm health and it is a remarkable fact that he has been absent from the Club but twice during the 26 consecutive years of service since its inception. Invariably he has given a full report of the previous meeting, so complete, in fact, that it is often remarked that if a person is obliged to be absent, he can, in the Secretary's report, get all but the dinner of the last meeting." After the death of the first Secretary- in 1902, Mr. Reed was nominated his successor, serving continuously ever since, reporting the meetings as fully as his predecessor and furnishing reports to the papers. Mr. Reed writes, "A frequent visitor from the Connecticut Agricultural College remarked that 'every discussion in this Club is an institute and every dinner a feast.' The influence of our Club extends far. Its procedure and principles have been printed in city papers of wide circulation. Its secretary has been asked personally to start clubs in other localities. Our prospective list of subjects and our yearly programs are sought by committees of other clubs. "As the years pass, we note with pleasure improvement in presiding, speaking and writing. One successful farmer was fifty years old before he attempted to present a subject but developed into an acceptable writer and speaker. Many of our boys are prominent, as our present Massachusetts Commissioner of Agriculture, Dr. A. W. Gilbert (a West Brookfield boy), and scores of others whose maiden efforts were in our club. "The winter meetings and annual August picnic have occurred without intermission from the start and for fifty years the West

Brookfield Farmers' Club has been and still is a wonderful agricultural and educational factor." The secret of the success of the West Brookfield Farmers' Club would seem to lie along three lines: (1) A basic common interest among members, including whole families; (2) a continuity of policy on the part of officers, and (3) a desire to know and make use of the last word on the subject of farming through speakers and bulletins from the Agricultural institutions and government departments. To close with Mr. Reed's own words, "If you want to know anything, send to headquarters where they've made a study of it, and find out." — V. M.P.

"The world is full of starters, but both hemispheres are calling for men who will continue." — Newtown Messages, Harrisonburg, Va.