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CULTIVATING THE SCHOOL GROUNDS IN WAKE COUNTY NORTH CAROLINA

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ILLUSTRATIONS.

CULTIVATING THE SCHOOL GROUNDS IN WAKE COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA.

THE SCHOOL FARM.

1. *What it is.*—The school farm is a small plat of ground at or near the public schoolhouse, cultivated by a volunteer association, in the interest of the public school. The usual size of the plat is 2 acres, the smallest is 1 acre, the largest 4. These farm plats are usually a part of the school-building site, which varies in size from 2 to 10 acres. In some instances, where there is not enough room on the building site, land is secured from some neighboring farmer; nearly always gratis. Wherever practicable, the board of education purchases additional land for the school farm, where more ground is needed.

2. *How organized.*—Sometimes the farm has been conducted through the organization of the school betterment association. Where there have been no such organizations, interested people have called a meeting, or the county superintendent of public instruction has presented the plan at some general meeting; those willing to cooperate have chosen a school farm superintendent.

3. *How worked.*—The farm superintendent is usually one of the best farmers in the school district. His judgment may be relied upon to fix the time and the frequency of the workings. Consulting as far as practicable the convenience of the members, the superintendent calls them together when there is work to be done. Certain of the work requires only a small number of workers for a short while. For such work the members are called by small groups alternately. Other kinds of work, such as chopping and picking cotton, require a large number of workers. Men, women, youth, and children come together in large crowds, and frequently finish the work in from one to two hours.

4. *What is planted.*—Several considerations determine the choice of what to plant. Preference is given to—

First, the crops best suited to soil and climate, because they give larger money returns, and because teaching the cultivation and harvesting of only such crops has practical value.

Second, those crops the cultivation and harvesting of which lend themselves easily to the labor of women and children.

On the Wake County school farms cotton has been planted more than all other crops combined. Some of the other crops planted have been wheat, peas, potatoes, rye, clover, corn, and tobacco. Tomatoes will be added to the list for the ensuing year.

5. *The purpose.*—The purpose of the school farm is threefold: First, to give the school a new meaning as a factor in the socialization of rural life; second, to vitalize school life by the introduction of new practical subjects, or by improving the method of teaching old subjects, or by both; third, to supplement the school fund.

6. *A typical "working" day on a school farm.*—On a crisp October Friday morning there was a quicker movement in the homes of the Enterprise School District. The three-room school building of the consolidated district had just been completed, and the teachers had been in the community several days already. On this particular day all "hands" gathered at the schoolhouse to pick the 4-acre cotton farm for the third and last time. By 9 o'clock the work was well under way. Among the pickers were the new teachers and the county superintendent and the president of the county school betterment association.

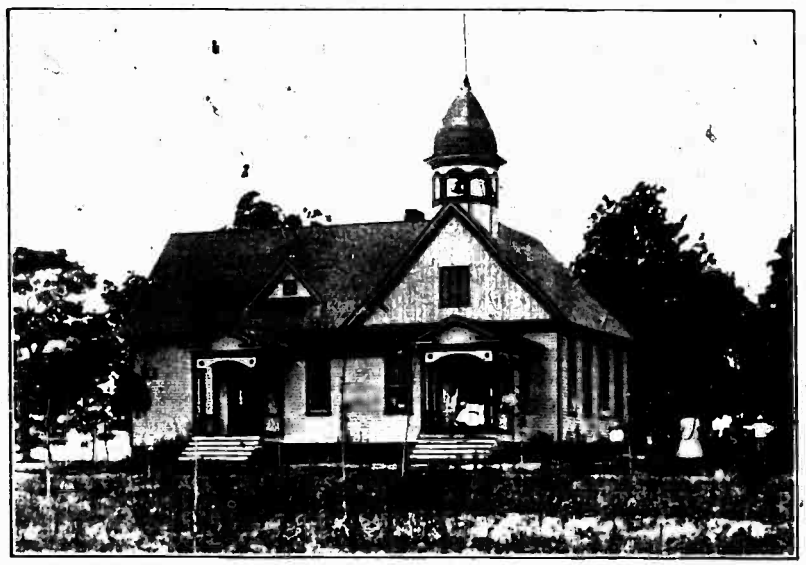
At half past 12 a bountiful dinner of hot brown barbecue and many delicacies was spread on the triangular table in the grove near the schoolhouse. After offering heartfelt thanks for the beautiful new school building, the abundant harvest of snowy white cotton, and the bright, enthusiastic teachers, all of which gave promise of a good school year, the repast was heartily enjoyed by all.

After a little rest the women and children returned to the picking and the men went into the grove to thin out the trees and to clear the ground of brush. These tasks finished, all gathered in the schoolhouse, where a few short spirited talks and some bright prophecies were made, a resolution of thanks to the school-farm superintendent voted, and a resolution passed to meet on the school farm again the following Monday morning to seed the ground in rye.

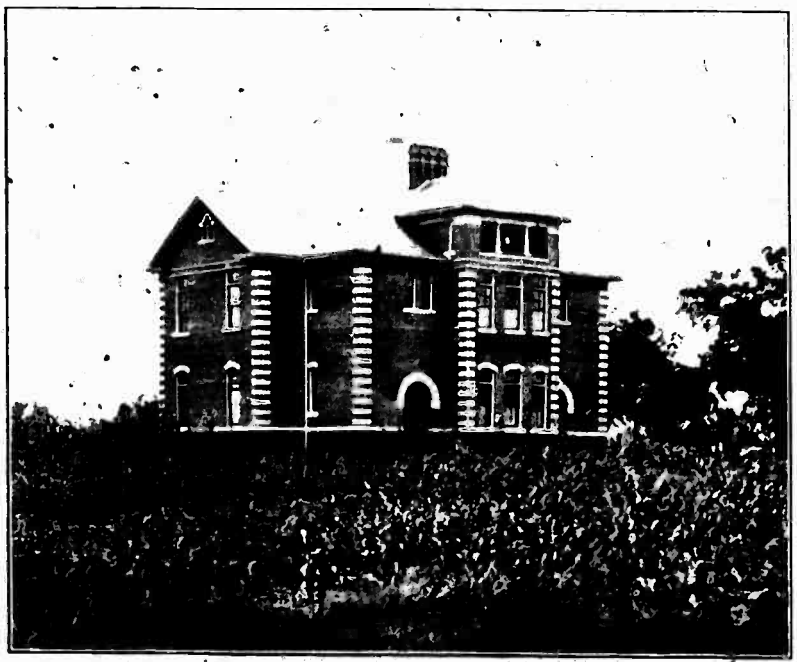
Some of the topics discussed at the school farm meetings are: The value of deep plowing, subsoiling, winter cover crops, the relative merits of fall and winter plowing, the analysis of commercial fertilizers and home-prepared manures, the best methods of selecting seed, the best methods of cultivating growing crops at their various stages of development, variety of soils, insects that harm growing plants, etc.

THEORY OF THE SCHOOL FARM.

The rural school, nonsectarian, nonpolitical, with its building and library and playground, should be a common rendezvous. Here, under general direction of teacher or some chosen head, children, youth, men, and women should find restful and helpful recreation.



A. NEW BAY LEAF SCHOOLHOUSE.



B. HOLLY SPRINGS PUBLIC SCHOOL.

A. CLEARING A SCHOOL YARD.

B. MAKING A CROP FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE SCHOOL.

In addition to the more formal school work, there should be a definite but easy plan for putting before the community interesting information on current topics and of conducting a course of study with a direct bearing upon domestic and industrial life.

The school farm was conceived to engage the instincts and impulses—human forces—which may be employed through the larger uses of the school plant. It was designed to aid the school in giving to the men and women of the community the opportunity, not to explore new fields, but to find new beauties and new values in the fields where lived their fathers and where they were born.

On one of his visitations among the schools the county superintendent stopped at Holly Springs, where the public school, owning neither house nor shelter, was conducted on the first floor of an old building which once answered to the name of Holly Springs Academy. The year before a few interested men had called an election to levy a special local tax to supplement the annual apportionment from the county. But the conservatives were in large majority. "Lack of faith in the educational process," said the superintendent, "is responsible for this failure on the part of our farmers to support the schools. Moreover, it accounts for the fact that with bounteous barns and comfortable homes these men cause 50 per cent of their children to stop school each year before reaching the third grade."

The superintendent called upon the president of the Holly Springs School Betterment Association and suggested the idea of cultivating 2 acres of a recently purchased 10-acre school site. The president, like the members of her association, was unaccustomed to labor in the fields, and so was somewhat taken aback at the suggestion. However, she promised to refer the matter to the association. She called a special session that evening, and the following day wrote: "The ladies are enthusiastic over the opportunity to do something for the school." Cotton was planted. The work was done in what has since been christened "school farm-working bees," the women and children doing the lighter, the men the heavier work. There was no charge for anything. Even the fertilizer was given. About 2 bales were made, and the crop was sold for $118.28. Holly Springs now has a $4,200 brick school building, four teachers, an eight months' term, three years of high-school work, a domestic-science class of 20 girls, a garden where vegetables are grown for the school kitchen, an active school betterment association, and a school farm increased to 3½ acres.

The next year there was no spread of the new movement. In 1909, 9 farms made $1,152.16; in 1910, 11 farms, $1,021.21; and in 1911, 14 farms, $1,550.20. Last year (1911) the number of persons working on these farms reached the maximum, 2,136.

The movement has enlisted the interest of the people of the county, as is shown by their hearty response and the increased acreage and number of farms. The interest has gone further. The State agricultural society offers each year three prizes of $25, $15, and $10, respectively, for the exhibit at the State fair by public schools showing the best methods of teaching agriculture. Several other counties in the State have adopted the school-farm idea.

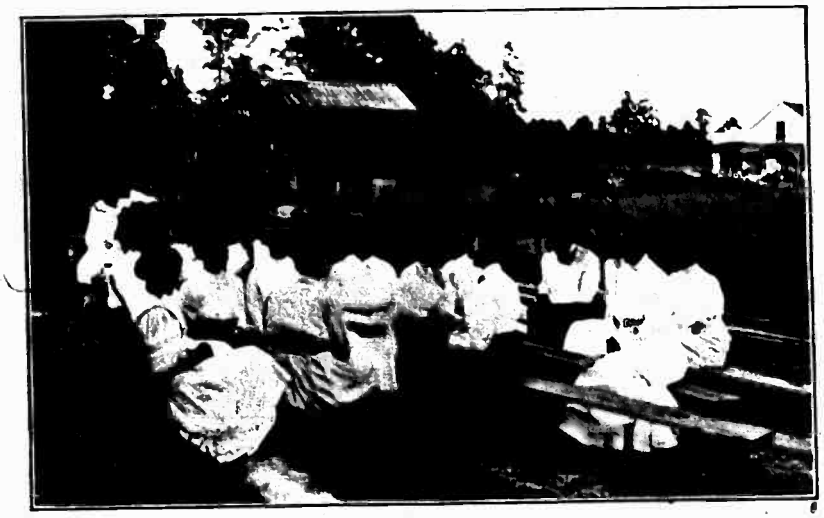
The general purpose of the school farm was indicated at the beginning of this paper. More specifically, the school farm may be regarded as—

1. *A means of increasing the school revenue.*—The rural schools of North Carolina need better buildings, better equipment, longer terms, and better salaries for teachers. These can not be had without more money. In Wake County during the past six years about 50 schoolhouses have been built and equipped, most of them ranging in cost from $2,000 to $15,000. The county board of education usually pays one-half the cost of the buildings, the other half being paid by the school districts. Frequently the committee borrows a part of this sum from the State loan fund. This loan, with 4 per cent interest, is to be paid in 10 equal annual installments. Of the 35 white schools that have borrowed money for building, and would thereby have had their terms shortened, all but one have through volunteer funds made good the deficit and more. At that place the public school was supplemented with a private school. In many cases the salaries allowed by the county have been inadequate, and schools have been unable to pay their half of the necessary equipment. The needed money has been supplied out of these volunteer funds, of which the school farms have been one of the main sources.

2. *A means of socialization.*—On the school farm, where gather men, women, and children of every religious and political faith and of every social stratum, under conditions as nearly normal as possible and with perfect freedom, society is at its fusing point. Here new friendships are made and old ones strengthened. The best thoughts of the community, whether on sewing, cutting, cooking, raising poultry, house decoration, housekeeping in general, gardening, cattle raising, orcharding, farming in general, magazine and newspaper topics, rearing children, morals, or education, are here standardized and stamped as free currency.

3. *A means of teaching.*—Every year thousands of experiments are made at the experiment stations of the State agricultural colleges of our country, testing theories of agricultural practice. Many of the theories tested are found to be useless and untenable. Those that prove of value are printed as bulletins and distributed among our farmers.

A. PICKING COTTON ON A SCHOOL FARM.



B. A MEETING IN THE INTEREST OF THE SCHOOL.

A. BARBECUING CHICKEN.

B. THE MIDDAY FEAST AT A SCHOOL-FARM WORKING BEE.

The question then arises. How can this valuable information be made available to those most in need of it? For the present, and probably for many years to come, a very small per cent of our young men will attend the agricultural colleges. Only the better farmers read the bulletins. How, then, shall the information be brought to the poorer farmer? In this is the opportunity of the school farm.

One of the best read and most successful farmers in the community is chosen to superintend the school farm. The best farm implements in the community are used in preparing the land and in cultivating the crops. The best methods known to the superintendent are employed. The less intelligent and less successful farmer sees the practical and successful application of the best agricultural thought. He comprehends; he goes home; he applies. Thus the school farm with its superintendent becomes the point of contact between the farmer and taxpayer and the agricultural college and experiment station, which are supported by his taxes and for his benefit.

As soon as our revenue from taxes and school farms is sufficient we expect to employ men as principals of schools having farms and to place in their hands the general direction of the farm work. The work will be extended, and wherever practicable pupils will be encouraged to cultivate patches at their homes under the general direction of the principal. At one of the county high schools this plan was followed in 1911. The farm on the school grounds will then afford the means of instruction to the people in mass. On the home patch the pupil will try out for himself what he has learned at school.

4. *An aid to consolidation.*—School patrons need to be informed as to the needs of their school. The school-farm "working bee" affords the medium of communication between patrons and superintendent. Through conferences as to the best methods of operating the school farm, to which many patrons are able to make helpful contributions, and by touching elbows in the middle of the rows, a basis of sympathy and confidence is established. Suggestions of the superintendent thus made are more effective than a platform speech.

The one-room school has been the bane of the country districts. Reform has been difficult because convenience to the schoolhouse has seemed to the patrons worthy of larger consideration than efficiency of instruction. How can the emphasis be replaced if the school superintendent does not know his people and if the people have not learned to have confidence in both his disposition and his ability to direct their schools for their best service?

A "working bee" held jointly by the patrons of two adjoining schools afforded the superintendent a desired opportunity. He addressed the people on the desirability of consolidating these two schools with parts of two other districts, and of building one large

school where a richer and a higher course of instruction could be given. The effort was successful and consolidation was accomplished. The movement spread and seven other small schools with a total enrollment of 417 were consolidated into three. In these domestic science and practical farming are taught.

SCHOOL FARM FOR NEGROES.

In the two negro communities where the school farm was tried in 1911 for the first time, there has not been time for large results, but certain improvements are evident.

At Method, where two districts had been consolidated, the work on the school farm created an enthusiasm which aided in allaying feeling created by the consolidation, and two rooms were added to the building for domestic science, and the district's share of the cost was paid out of the farm receipts. The attendance increased from 58 to 89.

At Apex the receipts from the farm became the nucleus of a building fund, one-half of which under the law must be paid by the district, and a three-room building is now under construction. One of the rooms will be used for domestic science. The attendance could not be increased in the old building for lack of room.

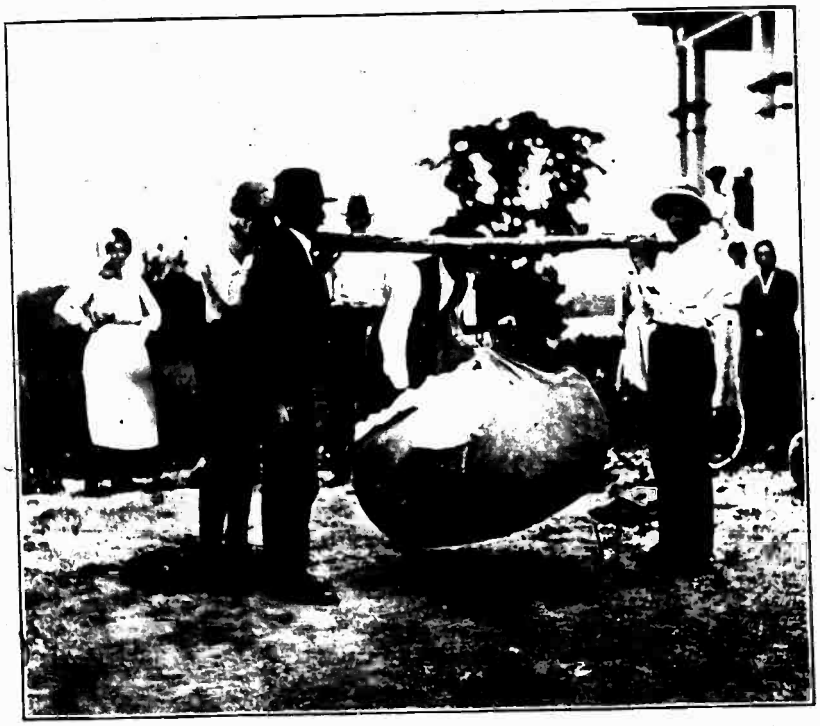
At both Method and Apex the school farm is responsible for a healthier school sentiment.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE SCHOOL FARM.

The number of school farms should be increased. Every school in the country should have a farm. This could be brought about with some attention and encouragement. An effective presentation of the movement to the people of a community usually results in its adoption. Stereopticon slides would be of great value.

The teaching feature should be strengthened. The school farm should be in every way a demonstration farm. Even in the ordinary rural schools, where a large farm, a barn, a kitchen, and well-equipped domestic science department can not be hoped for, there is no reason why there may not be special days for exhibits, with visiting experts to aid and direct the judging of stock, cattle, milch cows, the Babcock tester, corn and other crops, and also sewing and cooking.

With the aid of revenue from the farm, many of the schools ought to be able to build a teacher's home and to employ a man of broad training to conduct the school and have charge of the farm. He should so understand the life of the community that he could organize it and direct it. Problems of soil preparation, cultivation, drainage, mixing fertilizers, cattle and stock raising, dairying, gardening, canning, cooking, sewing, the care of children, personal hygiene, home sanitation, etc., should be added to the schoolroom topics. These would be particularly fitting for discussion on the public days.



A. WEIGHING COTTON AT THE MOUNT HOPE SCHOOL.

B. HAULING COTTON FROM A SCHOOL FARM TO THE GIN.

For certain phases of the teaching problem experimental plats should be provided. The methods of cultivation and the results from them should be very carefully tabulated. Certain other phases of the problem may be best handled through individual home patches. Here the work should be done under the supervision and direction of the school principal or school-farm superintendent.

Enriching country life and holding the people to the farm are problems in the solution of which the school farm is expected to aid. It has been stated that it is the gregarious instinct in men that causes the herding in cities, and that one of the means of relief is to provide for more frequent, more interesting, and more wholesome assemblages of people in the country. There should be provided in connection with the farm a playground for baseball, croquet, tennis, basket ball, etc., so that at intervals the whole community could come together and enjoy wholesome and helpful recreation.

The three lines of activity already started through the school farm—raising funds, teaching practical farm-life subjects, and socializing country life—need only to be extended and amplified to make the country school an effective means for preparing country boys and girls for a happy and contented life in the country.

Annual reports of Wake County school farms.

Schools.	Superintendents.	Number of acres.	Persons working.	Yield of cotton (pounds).	Cotton seed (bushels).	Value of product.
Year 1907.						
Holly Springs[1]	Mrs. G. B. Alford	2				$18.28
Year 1909.						
Bay Leaf	Geo. B. Norwood	2	67	548	25	88.64
Holly Springs	Mrs. G. B. Alford	2	260	946	46	140.18
J. Y. Joyner	Geo. R. Parker	2	68	586	32	103.90
Cade Springs	L. C. Yeargan	1½	164	425	11	74.01
Rock Spring	Furman Jones	2	300	1,400	80	250.00
Turner	Mr. Sauls	2		(2)		313.50
Mount Moriah	J. F. Pool	2	50	(3)		64.50
Pool	John Stephens	2	50	(4)		28.23
Mount Hope	Jas. Holder	1½	211	580	30	89.20
Total 9 schools		17	1,170	4,485	223	1,152.16
Year 1910.						
Bonsal	E. P. Wiggs	3	107	700	36	119.50
Holly Springs	Mrs. D. F. Norris	2½	155	776	45	134.73
Antioch	J. A. Watkins	2	150	515	25	84.39
Mount Hope	Jas. Holder	1	129	482	25	80.56
Judd Hill	F. J. Duke	2½	48	425	24	75.65
Auburn	Russell Powell	2	83	282	17	47.60
Shotwell	L. L. Doub	2½	60	300	18	54.00
Bay Leaf	R. C. Davis	2	58	1,105	63	183.91
Enterprise	Calvin Smith	3½	100	750	45	130.87
Clements	M. Z. Pearce	2	43	350	20	63.00
Wakelon	G. M. Bell	2½		(5)		47.00
Total 11 schools		24	933	5,685	318	1,021.21

[1] Only this school had a farm in 1908, for which no report was made.
[2] 1,502 pounds of tobacco raised.
[3] 60 bushels of corn raised.
[4] 20½ bushels of wheat raised.
[5] 50 bushels potatoes raised.

Annual reports of Wake County school farms—Continued.

Schools.	Superintendents.	Number of acres.	Persons working.	Yield of cotton (pounds)	Cotton seed (bushels)	Value of product.
Year 1911.						
Bonsal	L. E. Rollins	2½	107	700	40	$84.00
Holly Springs	Mrs. G. B. Alford	3	155	1,561	81	186.27
Oak Grove	H. G. Gurley	3½	200	1,474	76	167.92
Mount Hope	Jas. Holder	1½	104	668	34	77.00
Antioch	J. A. Watkins	2	120	820	45	92.12
Clements	A. H. Shearon	4½	100	1,470	88	187.00
Judd Hill	J. M. Jones	2	100	700	40	80.00
Pinehurst	J. S. Peebles	2	50	550	29	63.26
Shotwell	L. L. Doub	2	40	668	36	75.80
Bay Leaf	H. P. Thompson	2	88	6,241	64	139.76
Turner	J. W. Williams	2	10	50		46.00
Enterprise	J. E. Franks	3½	240	1,673	96	202.30
Method (colored)	Moses M. Williams	2	774	500	18	102.77
Apex (colored)	Willis Wrancher	1½	40	200	20	46.01
Total, 14 schools		35½	2,136	12,068	608	1,550.20

[1] 35 bushels corn raised.