

ONE

## Chartering the New York State School of Agriculture on Long Island



Physiography, climate, and location have all combined to make Long Island a farming country.<sup>1</sup>

THROUGH ITS ONE-HUNDRED YEARS OF EXISTENCE, Farmingdale State College, a campus of the State University of New York (SUNY), has adapted to the demographic changes of Long Island's transition from rural to suburban and from agriculture to high technology in its development as an educational institution. It has been a microcosm of local history. More than 80,000 alumni have joined the public and private sectors of American society, and beyond. Chartered in 1912, at a time when William Howard Taft was president and the population of the United States was 92,228,496, as recorded in the 1910 census, its original name was the New York State School of Agriculture on Long Island and its mission was to provide agricultural training to high school boys and girls from New York City, and the counties of Suffolk, Nassau, Westchester, Dutchess, Rockland, and Putnam. At the beginning of the twentieth century, in the southeastern section of the state, an attempt was made to preserve a lifestyle of the past, and to benefit from the prevailing economic and social conditions. Today, in the twenty-first century, Farmingdale State College has established itself as the oldest public college on Long Island, and is older than SUNY itself, which was established 1948. The college has contributed to the present high socioeconomic status of the combined population of Nassau and Suffolk counties, which counted 2,832,882, according to the 2010 U.S. Census.

Since its founding, change has been a constant factor in how the college has met the needs of an evolving society. This can be seen in the various names the college has assumed throughout



its history. The following list reflects the official titles used in the official college bulletins and catalogues, which are held in the College Archives:

New York State School of Agriculture on Long Island, 1912  
State Institute of Applied Agriculture on Long Island, 1920  
State Institute of Applied Agriculture, 1924  
State Institute of Agriculture, 1939  
Long Island Agricultural and Technical Institute, 1946  
SUNY Long Island Agricultural and Technical Institute at Farmingdale, New York, 1953  
Agricultural and Technical College at Farmingdale, 1966  
SUNY College of Technology at Farmingdale, 1987  
SUNY Farmingdale, 1993  
Farmingdale State College, 2006

The drive for an agricultural school on Long Island did not emerge out of a vacuum. Even before 1912, leaders stepped forward to provide the impetus for organization and planning to achieve that goal. They possessed the knowledge and experience to preach, publicize, and promote the need for a school. They used their political expertise to lobby effectively. As early as May 3, 1909 in a letter to *The New York Times*, Frederick H. Cox, a congressman from Queens County who was to serve as a trustee for the Farmingdale school, had called for an agricultural school on Long Island. Cox pointed out that in addition to the State College of Agriculture at Cornell University, there were three similar farm schools existing at Canton, Alfred, and Morrisville, but none in the downstate area where the majority of the population resided. Because of this “unfairness to our part of the State,” he demanded that an agricultural school be established on Long Island.

Among the other outstanding leaders were Hal B. Fullerton, special agent of the Long Island Railroad (LIRR), who also advocated for a downstate school of agriculture and who served as LIRR director of its Agricultural Department; Franklin W. Hooper, director of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences (the Brooklyn Museum); John M. Lupton, state assemblyman from Mattituck; George L. Thompson, state assemblyman and later senator from Smithtown and Kings Park; Dennis J. Harte, state assemblyman from New York City; Dr. James S. Cooley, superintendent of schools in Nassau County; Charles H. Howell of Riverhead, district



superintendent of schools; Elwood V. Titus, pioneer in the cooperative movement among farmers and sponsor of the Nassau County Farm Bureau; Ezra Tuttle, a leading Long Island lawyer and expert in agriculture; Benjamin F. Yoakum, railroad executive who had a farm in Farmingdale; and Austin Corbin, William H. Baldwin, and Ralph Peters, all presidents of the LIRR who had a vested interest in transportation expansion.

The LIRR is one of the oldest railroads in the nation, and its development was an important part of the expansion of the region's transportation infrastructure that would inevitably influence the establishment of an agricultural school in Farmingdale. As Edwin L. Dunbaugh has stated regarding the railroad's original transportation goal:

Probably few of us who have ridden it would be surprised to learn that the Long Island Railroad was not built with any thought of servicing the people on Long Island. The Long Island Railroad was in fact originally conceived solely as a major link in a combined rail and water route between New York and Boston.<sup>2</sup>

The LIRR was chartered in 1834 to transport passengers originally from Manhattan by ferry to Brooklyn, eastward through Long Island, then to Greenport-Orient Point, and by ferry to Stonington, Connecticut, where they would board another train to reach their destination in Boston. (A ferry was used until 1910 to cross the East River to reach the LIRR.) It was intended to use this route to reduce travel by five hours between New York City to Boston, the two major cities on the north east coast. Initially, the route achieved profitability carrying passengers and mail during the years 1844 to 1847. However, a competing all-land route was soon completed that extended from Charleston, South Carolina to New York City to Boston, rendering the Long Island connection to Boston unprofitable.

The LIRR turned to developing traffic at the local level, eventually merging various short trunk lines. Austin Corbin, the railroad's president from 1881 to 1886 even attempted to expand a large bay at the southern tip of Long Island called Fort Bay Pond to be converted to a transoceanic seaport. This venture for an American harbor at the east end of Long Island was unable to raise capital and it failed. In 1902, the LIRR became a part of the Pennsylvania Railroad and in 1910 was connected directly to New York City via a tunnel under the East River to the newly constructed Pennsylvania Station. As a result, the LIRR was relegated to local interests, concentrating on expanding local travel. Because Long Island was primarily



an agricultural region, food products also would be shipped to the city, thereby sustaining its population while the city developed into a manufacturing, corporate, and financial center. It became obvious to the railroad leadership that lobbying for construction of an agricultural school would generate business and hopefully profits.<sup>3</sup>

The vision of Hal B. Fullerton (1857–1935) contributed significantly to the development of Long Island. In 1897, the LIRR appointed him to the position of special agent, and in 1905 assigned him the title of director of its Agricultural Department. His photographs—upward of 10,000—writings, and lectures made the public aware of Long Island as a growth extension of the New York City metropolis, as a place that could foster seaside resorts, recreation, tourism, suburban population growth, and agriculture, which in turn could influence the local demand for a school that specialized in farming. Fullerton’s goal was to secure a profitable environment for the railroad. For more than thirty years he guided the railroad’s promotional activities that emphasized Long Island “as an ideal vacation destination, a recreational paradise, an ideal home for commuters, and a fertile land for agricultural pursuits.”<sup>4</sup>

As the head of the railroad’s agricultural department, Fullerton guided the successful experimental farms in Suffolk County at Wading River from 1905 to 1910, named “Peace and Plenty,” and at Medford from 1907 to 1927, named “Prosperity Farm,” containing eighty acres, whose purpose was to demonstrate that fruits, vegetables, flowers, and foliage plants could be profitably grown and marketed from Long Island’s less productive soils. The area was considered a wasteland. LIRR President Ralph Peters justified the program by pointing out the most undesirable parcel of Long Island land could be made fertile to produce every species of vegetables, fruit, and flowering plants. The success of the Wading River experiment was then extended to Medford where “scrub waste” was cleared and converted into productive agricultural soil. Long Island’s experimental stations for years proved that farming could succeed through proper cultivation and fertilization. *The New York Times* commented in 1912 that because agriculture was largely responsible for Long Island’s prosperity in the past, it would “become a more potent influence in the future.”<sup>5</sup>

Fullerton combined his enthusiasm with staging publicity events to achieve his goals. As a friend of former President Theodore Roosevelt of nearby Oyster Bay, Fullerton organized a media extravaganza on August 10, 1912 by inviting him to the Medford farm. The LIRR set up a special train, with accompanying reporters and photographers. The event was well publicized. In all his endeavors, his talented wife, Edith Loring Fullerton, assisted him at fairs, expositions, trade shows, and public lectures. She produced a popular account of the Wading River experimental farm

venture in a book, *The Lure of the Land, A Call to Long Island* (New York: Long Island Railroad, 1906), later revised and expanded into several more editions. The book included her husband's photographs. This successful husband–wife team established close connections with editors, publishers, and journalists who willingly cooperated in publishing articles extolling the benefits of agricultural and country life on Long Island.<sup>6</sup>

Theodore Roosevelt voiced support for the farmer. He believed that the future of the nation rested on conserving natural resources and the quality of rural life. Each was interdependent. In a speech he delivered to the State Grange during an August 1910 picnic at Oriskany, New York he stated, “In any great nation the prime physical asset—more valuable than any other—is the fertility of the soil.” He went on to say that cities drain the nation of its resources. He admitted that the growth of cities may bring prosperity, but it must not be at the expense of the country. “Cities prosper and the men decay.” The rural life problem is to make the career of the farmer as “attractive and remunerative as corresponding careers in the city.” Roosevelt asserted that the great industrial leaders employed “expert and technical knowledge” to succeed, while farmers lagged behind. Farmers, therefore, also should benefit from technical advances. He called for an educational system “more turned toward the farm and the shop.” Fully aware of the experimental farms on Long Island, he praised the work of Fullerton and the LIRR for cultivating farmland, using modern methods, and adding value to the soil. The Grange attendees were pleased with the former president's remarks that advocated the preservation of country life in a growing industrial society. The expansive Roosevelt personality provided creditable support for agriculture in general and specifically for an agricultural school on Long Island.<sup>7</sup>

From 1907 to 1914, Hal and Edith Fullerton wrote and published the *Long Island Agronomist*, an influential monthly publication boasting 14,000 readers that was used to promote local farming. The publication praised the well-attended agricultural educational programs in Riverhead during the 1911–1912 years. On numerous occasions it made reference to the “Long Island Agricultural University” and the “Long Island Agricultural College” even before the school was chartered. The *Long Island Agronomist* highlighted achievements of local farmers proudly stating that Long Island products had won high honors in every important competition at the 1912 State Fair in Syracuse. Gold medals were won for butter; milk earned the highest award. Long Island's fruit and grapes won thirty-eight prizes, while its vegetables won forty-one. Additionally, the local fairs at Huntington and Riverhead demonstrated progress resulting from the application of modern methods on Long Island farms.<sup>8</sup>





FIGURE 1-1. Melville Road, then called Sweet Hollow Road, captures the rural nature of Long Island in this pre-1912 image. The horse and carriage are having difficulty traversing this unpaved road. The New York State School of Agriculture was built on land to the north.

Fullerton seized every opportunity to advance his goal. In fact, he was such an enthusiastic booster for Long Island that the contemporary term *Fullertonize* entered the vocabulary. For example, he promoted bicycling at a time when cycling was a very popular sport in geographically flat Long Island. He conceived the dramatic “Mile-A-Minute-Murphy” promotion in 1899, the result of his friendship with Charles R. Murphy (1871–1950), who was a champion bicyclist. Fullerton arranged the construction of a two-mile plank “roadway” between the tracks on a stretch of the LIRR east of Farmingdale. The plan was for Murphy to ride a mile on this level plank in less than one minute. Fullerton controlled the publicity, organizing special excursion trains, highlighting Murphy’s training program and practices, and generating interviews. Journalists and photographers were invited. After a preliminary run, Murphy successfully bicycled the mile in 57.8 seconds on June 30, 1899, at the appropriate time when the League of American Wheelmen was meeting at Patchogue.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout his busy and creative life, Fullerton maintained the vision that agriculture would continue to play an important part of the economic and social life of Long Island. In 1927, the year he retired from the LIRR, in an interview at his home in Medford he clung to this vision. A reporter from the *Brooklyn Eagle* recorded his vision in this way:

[Fullerton] foresees a tremendous residential growth for Long Island, with New York working its way eastward at a rapid gait and the many villages becoming more and more urban in character. But tilling the soil is to be the main industry . . . “God, Providence, or whatever you may call it, put Long Island here to feed New York, and it has to carry out that purpose . . .”<sup>10</sup>

Despite the advances in transportation, suburbanization, and recreation on Long Island, so evident toward the end of his life, the agricultural ideal prevailed in the mind of this romantic-progressive leader. His “blessed isle” reflected the Jeffersonian ideal of an agrarian society that he believed was conducive to democratic civic virtue, sustained by unencumbered farmers, superior to a less free life style in urban-industrial society. In this view, farmers were regarded as the chosen people of God. Fullerton was conscious of the high tide of immigration covering the period from 1880 to 1920 when 18,638,406 immigrants entered the United States, most having settled in the cities and providing the labor for an expanding industrialized society.<sup>11</sup>

Changes were occurring rapidly in America. From 1870 to 1930 the nation’s rural population had declined from 80 percent to less than 40 percent of the total population. For Nassau County





FIGURE 1-2. The Mott House in 1916 was part of the original farm purchased by New York State for the Agricultural School on Long Island. It faced Melville Road. Mott House served as an office, dormitory, and classrooms in the early years.

alone estate and real estate expansion had reduced the 1,658 farms in 1900 to 618 in 1950, and to 55 in 1977. Similarly, in 1900, in Suffolk County there were 3,277 farms, in 1950 there were 2,187, and in 1977 there were 311. In 1950, New York State boasted 124,977 farms on 16,016,721 acres; by the end of the century the number of farms had declined to 31,757 on 7,254,470 acres. The New York State 2000 census figures counted 54,372 (.06 percent of the labor force) working in agriculture, including forestry and mining. Despite a very different future that lay ahead, Fullerton enthusiastically promoted his pristine vision of Long Island as an agrarian society that dated back to the nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup>

Franklin W. Hooper (1851–1914), educator, scientist, and civic leader, was just as important as Hal B. Fullerton in setting the agenda for a Long Island school. As a respected educational reformer, he heralded the benefits of scientific farming and the need for an agricultural school. He, along with local leaders, recognized the importance of Long Island in the context of the region's overall economic and social development. It was Hooper who was the driving force in the struggle to establish an agricultural school at Farmingdale.

Hooper was known throughout the scientific world for his achievements as a scientist and educator. Born in Walpole, New Hampshire, on February 11, 1851 he grew up on his parents' farm. He was educated in common schools in a rural environment. At the age of seventeen he entered Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. After two years there, he enrolled at Harvard where he completed his studies under such scholars as Asa Gray, Louis Agassiz, and Josiah Cook, and he received a bachelor of arts degree in biological studies. In 1872, he attended the Agassiz Summer School of Natural History at Penikese Island off the coast of Massachusetts. Swiss American Louis Agassiz had started a school for natural history at this time. In 1876, Hooper was an agent for the Smithsonian Institution studying algae and coralline formations on the Florida coasts. Hooper married Martha Holden of Augusta, Georgia, whose father was an abolitionist during the time of slavery. This marriage produced three children. From 1877 to 1880, he served as principal of a high school in Keene, New Hampshire. He then accepted a professorship of chemistry and geology at Adelphi Academy in Brooklyn from 1880 to 1889. In 1889, Hooper was appointed curator at the Brooklyn Institute, which he helped reorganize to make it the newly established Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences. He had served there as a fellow. His work earned him the right to be appointed as the first general director in 1899, holding this position until his death in 1914. The Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences became the forerunner of the prestigious Brooklyn Museum of Art (1897) and included the Brooklyn Academy of Music, as well as the Brooklyn Children's Museum and the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. The institute had



been founded in 1823 to provide a library for working boys as the Brooklyn Apprentices' Library Association. Two years later, on July 4, 1825, the great Frenchman who had served the American revolutionary cause, Gen. Marquis de Lafayette, while visiting Brooklyn, laid the cornerstone of the first building for the Apprentices' Library. The institute evolved into one of the most important cultural and educational institutions in the United States. Hooper provided the leadership in expanding the functions of the institute because of his keen interest in education, horticulture, botany, and civic responsibility.<sup>13</sup>

Hooper also served as a member of the Board of Education and as a trustee for the Brooklyn Public Library. As an important educator, leading citizen, and director of the institute, he assumed a prominent position in the community. He was aware of the emergence of new schools and courses developing toward the end of the nineteenth century. The agricultural high school was first established in 1888 at the University of Minnesota. By 1898, ten such high schools were in existence in the United States. After 1900, the development of agricultural high schools was more rapid than any other previous type of secondary school. The number of these agricultural high schools had reached sixty by 1909. Moreover, 346 other secondary schools were offering agricultural courses. Hooper would have been amazed, had he lived past 1914, by the number of secondary schools offering agricultural instruction. By 1934 the number had surpassed ten thousand.

The Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences was nearly seven decades old when Hooper became director, and from this vantage point he worked to broaden the democratic base through educational reform. He extended the reach of the Institute by quadrupling its membership. He developed a philosophy of education that would have an important societal impact during the Progressive Era. He merged this philosophy of education with his influential leadership position to lobby effectively for the agricultural school in Farmingdale.

Toward the end of his life, having accomplished so much in public service, Hooper refined and articulated a philosophy of which he considered to be an advanced American educational system. In a paper he presented at a conference in Philadelphia, in 1913, his position was made clear when he stated, "Our educational ideals and institutions have been undergoing a very great change and that change has not at any time been more rapid or far reaching than at present."

He pointed out that the American system of public and private education had been greatly influenced by colleges and universities. According to his educational philosophy, the old system prepared students for postsecondary education, rather than for life, in a chiefly agrarian society. Hooper termed it *artificial* because it focused on the classics and it had little relation to life. This



put boys and girls living in the city at a disadvantage. He said nearly all American statesmen, painters, poets, and industrial leaders had come from a farm, a hamlet, or had country origins. He continued:

The life of the boy or girl on the farm or in the village workshop was a liberal education in itself superior to any substitute that could be devised. . . . The youth on the farm learned more of botany than the city-trained college professor of botany. . . . Our schools need to be revolutionized that each boy and girl has a real training—industrial, intellectual, and moral.

Hooper called for the formation of industrial and vocational schools; more high schools should focus on manual training and technical skills. He praised such contemporary educational institutions as Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, Drexel Institute in Philadelphia, Armour Institute in Chicago, and the Carnegie Industrial School in Pittsburgh. Although there were those who would disagree with this viewpoint, it did influence the growing trend of American education and helped guide the establishment of an agricultural school in Farmingdale.<sup>14</sup>

The interest in scientific farming to reclaim farms had been supported by agricultural societies in New England since the eighteenth century, while interest in the South had declined since the invention of the cotton gin because virgin land was more accessible and profitable. Agricultural societies flourished in the northeast and were some of the most prominent of the rural organizations. By 1867 there were more than nine-hundred such societies in existence. Famous Americans as Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and John C. Calhoun were members of agricultural societies. *The American Farmer*, issued in Baltimore in 1819, became the first journal devoted to farming. In 1860, there were fifty farm newspapers being published primarily in the North as progressive farmers sought new ways to reclaim and protect the land. The Department of Agriculture was created in 1862, allowing the federal government to broaden its support for farming. It is clear that the institution of farming played an important role in the development of the United States. This trend continued into the twentieth century when the need, indeed the demand, for an agricultural school on Long Island emerged.

The passage of the national Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862 became the most important piece of agricultural legislation in American history as it applied to education. The law appropriated public land to the states for the establishment of agricultural and industrial



colleges. Congress enacted the Hatch Act of 1887, which further subsidized farming by providing agricultural experiment stations in every state of the Union. Thus, by the turn of the twentieth century, scientific farming had been established as public policy with the goal of eliminating plant and animal diseases, overcoming natural obstacles, adapting plants to American conditions, and applying science to improve production.

At the same time, in the middle of the nineteenth century in New York State, the legislature established the official State Fair. Huge crowds came to see the exhibits. *The Rural-New Yorker* and *The American Agriculturist* were several of the leading publications that promoted the agricultural fair and spread knowledge extolling the benefits of scientific farming. In 1832, the New York State Agricultural Society was founded and the *Cultivator* became its official voice. Other periodicals such as the *Plough Boy* (Albany, 1819), *Genesee Farmer* (Rochester, 1831), and *American Agriculturalist* (New York, 1842) gained readership in the tens of thousands by informing its readers of fairs, rural life, farming conditions, and methods of improvements. The first New York State Fair was held in Albany in 1841 with endorsement and support of the state government. Huge crowds have traditionally attended the event. Since 1890, the State Fair was held in Syracuse. In 1841, the Queens County Agricultural Society was founded with Nassau and Suffolk counties. As one of the oldest agricultural organizations in the nation, the society has sponsored an annual fair since 1842. Now known as the Long Island Fair, it has been held at the Old Bethpage Village Restoration since 1970. In 1865, under the Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862, New York State chartered Cornell University with a small agricultural department, and it became the New York State College of Agriculture in 1904, now the New York State School of Agriculture and Life Sciences. An experiment station was set up in Ithaca, in 1879, and it became affiliated with the Cornell Agricultural College. The following year, a second experiment station was instituted in Geneva and placed under the Agricultural College in 1923. The college sponsored New York State's first Farmers Institute in 1886. These were among the major developments that led to the formation of agricultural schools at Canton (1906), Alfred (1908), Morrisville (1908), Farmingdale (1912), Delhi (1913), and Cobleskill (1916).<sup>15</sup>

Thus, such widespread interest in promoting farming set the stage for aggressive lobbying activity to achieve this goal. Other leaders who joined with Fullerton and Hooper in this endeavor were John M. Lupton, Ezra A. Tuttle, Elwood V. Titus, George Lincoln Thompson, Dennis J. Harte, Frederick Cox, Charles H. Howell, James C. Cooley, and those executives representing the LIRR. The press also voiced support. As a result, twenty-one bills establishing



agricultural schools were passed in the New York State Legislature in 1908. Gov. Charles Evans Hughes (1907–1910), however, vetoed all of them because they were considered too numerous and too costly. In 1909, Assemblyman Lupton introduced a bill that would create a school under the general education law. It was passed by the legislature, but vetoed this time by Gov. John Alden Dix (1911–1912). In 1910 and 1911, similar bills were passed, and Dix vetoed them as well. Nevertheless, Dix accepted an alternative bill that authorized him to appoint a committee to develop a specific plan for the formation of agricultural schools. The committee gathered the relevant information and recommended that two schools be established: one in the Finger Lakes district and the other in the southeastern part of the state.

Opposition to a downstate school remained, especially from upstate interests. For example, the editor of *The Rural New Yorker* argued that such an agricultural school in the southeastern region of the state was not needed. With Canton, Alfred, and Morrisville already chartered, the New York State government also was reluctant to increase the number of schools. Congressman Cox had warned of such opposition. Now, more than ever, effective lobbying was imperative. On April 6, 1912, Franklin W. Hooper (president), Frederick Cox (secretary), and John M. Lupton (treasurer) organized the Agricultural Education Association at the Brooklyn Academy of Music Building to further the goal of promoting agricultural education in the New York City metropolitan area and to assist in the establishment of a farm school. This development coincided with the emergence of the Harte-Thompson bill in the state legislature to create a farm school on Long Island. On April 9, Agriculture Education Association (AEA) president Hooper and secretary Cox sent letters to officers and members of agricultural organizations, boards of trade, and civic groups to urge Dix to sign the Harte-Thompson Bill into law, which he did on April 15. A week later, at a meeting at the Brooklyn Academy, Hooper and Cox asked all members of the AEA to promote the welfare of the new farm school and to inform local citizens of its importance. The AEA Nassau County branch officers were Elwood V. Titus (Glen Cove), president; Adolph Bausch (Farmingdale), vice president; Dr. James S. Cooley (superintendent of schools), secretary. Titus also served as vice president of the main organization. A special committee was formed to recommend trustees for the school while invitations were sent out to prominent community leaders, including former President Theodore Roosevelt, to assist. The Queens and Nassau County branches of the AEA went even further by offering a Free Winter School of Agriculture and Allied Subjects in Jamaica during the winter of 1913. The AEA continued to maintain close ties with their legislative representatives.



In addition to the work of the AEA the New York State Advisory Board on Agricultural Education and Country Life, created in 1911 by the legislature for the purpose of studying this entire issue, reported to the governor and the legislature in March 1912 and recommended the chartering of a farm school. Responding to this official report, State Assemblyman George L. Thompson, Republican from Smithtown, introduced a bill in the same month for the creation of a state school on Long Island. The bill was co-sponsored by Senator Harte, Democrat from Long Island City. Hooper had actually written the bill with the assistance of Queens Congressman Cox, Fullerton, Nassau County Superintendent of Schools Cooley, and District Superintendent of Schools Howell of Riverhead. Following passage by the legislature, Dix signed the bill into law on April 15, 1912. Babylon's newspaper, *The South Side Signal*, praised Thompson for his leadership. Superintendent Howell, representing the sentiments of his colleagues, stated his support.

An agricultural school on Long Island is an institution to which southeastern New York has long been entitled. . . . Some Long Island fathers' sons have taken advantage of agricultural schools [in northern and central New York State] but they have been too far away from the average farmers' sons. Then, too, these [upstate] institutions cannot specialize along lines, which are engaging the attention of Long Islanders most extensively.<sup>16</sup>

Even the influential *New York Tribune Farmer*, which described itself as "A National Illustrated Agricultural Weekly for the Farmer's Home," reversed its earlier opposition to the school. In a letter to Gov. John A. Dix, the editor of this weekly publication now supported the agricultural school because "this section of the State has been neglected and that it has not been treated fair." Since the agricultural problems of the New York City area were different from other areas in the state, he asserted, "there should be an institution provided by the State to work specifically on these problems."<sup>17</sup>

The Harte-Thompson Act became Chapter 319 of the Laws of New York of 1912 and stated in its opening paragraph that the act's purpose was to amend the education law in relation to the creation of the new school, and to provide for its control, management, and to provide an appropriation. The following are excerpts from the new law:

*Section 1185.* . . . There shall be established on Long Island an institution to be known as the New York State School of Agriculture on Long Island. *Section 1186.* . . . Such



school and the property shall be under the immediate supervision, care and management of a board of nine trustees, of whom the governor shall appoint one from each of the five boroughs of the city of New York, two from the county of Nassau and two from the county of Suffolk. They shall be so appointed that the terms of office of three trustees shall expire each year. All trustees shall serve without pay. . . . Students bona fide residents of the state shall have free tuition.

*Section 1187.* . . . Such school shall furnish instruction and training in agricultural science, manual arts and domestic science; courses for public school teachers and others; winter courses for farmers and others, and such other operations as may be approved by the trustees and the commissioner of education.

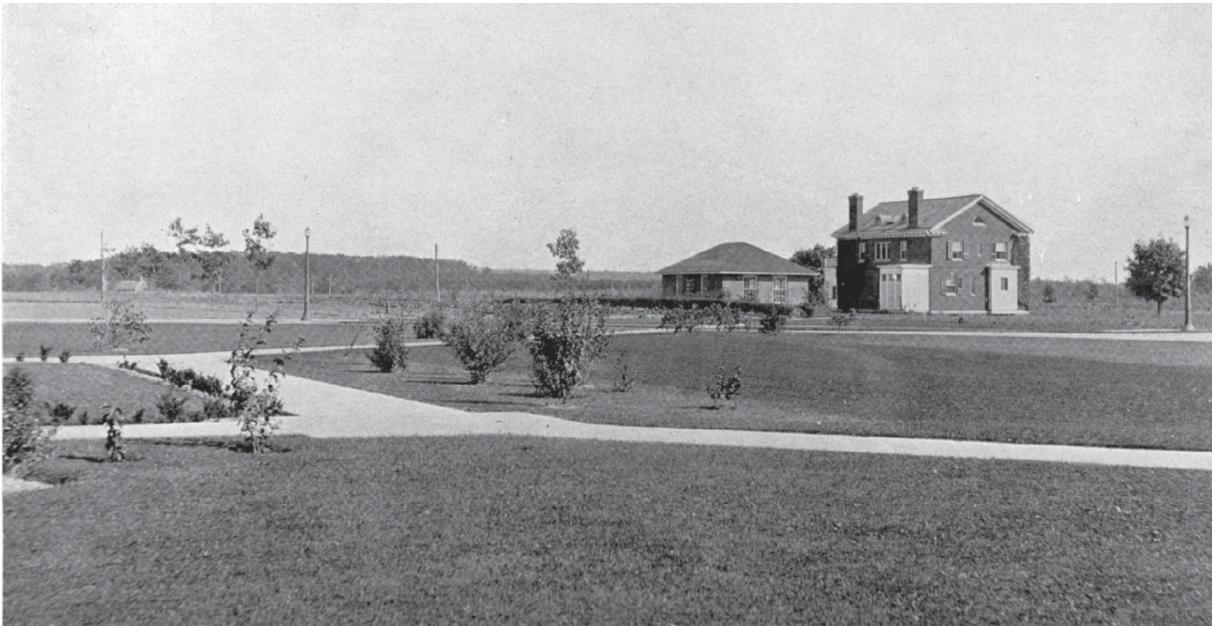


FIGURE 1-3. The Director's Cottage was one of the original buildings and cost, with garage, \$15,89.00. Completed in 1915, it housed all the directors, including President Charles W. Laffin, Jr. who moved to a home in nearby Dix Hills. Today it is used for administrative purposes.





FIGURE 1-4. Dormitory I, under construction in the distance, was renamed Ward Hall in 1962 in honor of service rendered to the school by Hilda Ward as student, alumna, and member of the College Council.

The Harte-Thompson Act mandated the governor appoint a board of trustees within thirty days after the act took effect. Furthermore, land was to be acquired in either Nassau or Suffolk counties, “suitable for the purposes of such school.” Fifty thousand dollars was appropriated to carry out the act. The sum of \$10,000 was added to acquire school lands, and “the remainder of such fifty thousand dollars for constructing and equipping a suitable school building and minor structures.”<sup>18</sup>

Based on the philosophy of those leaders who lobbied for the school, a year-round calendar was to be established enabling students to acquire the science and practice of agriculture under real farm conditions. Instead of hiring employees to do the gardening and farming and care for the livestock, students were to do the work as an essential part of their education. The plan was to organize the course of study to emphasize a maximum amount of fieldwork, supplemented



FIGURE 1-5. Newly enrolled students in the agricultural program gather for a 1921 group photo in front of the Horticultural Building, now Hicks Hall. As one of the original buildings on campus, Hicks Hall is closed and awaits renovation.

by study of the theory of agriculture and its underlying sciences. This goal intended to assure students of a thorough training in practical and scientific farming. Thus, the original mission of the school was to train high school boys and girls from New York City and surrounding counties in agricultural training. The principle of instruction and learning in agricultural science, with hands-on experience, was to predominate. Theory was to be subsidiary to practical education and training. Additionally, courses in English, history (citizenship), economics, and mathematics (arithmetic) were planned to round out the educational program.



With the official chartering of the agricultural school, new challenges lay ahead. An official site had to be located, buildings had to be designed, and an infrastructure constructed. Would the campus be in Nassau County or Suffolk County? Would enough funds be appropriated? Community leaders had to be appointed by the governor to serve on the board of trustees. Administrators and faculty had to be chosen.

Local publications praised the establishment of the new agricultural school. For example, in the issue of September 9, 1914 *The Long Islander* expressed great satisfaction by noting one of its most important goals had been achieved for the advancement of the Long Island region and the agricultural industry. It articulated its sentiments in noteworthy fashion:

The Island is coming a-running all right. We have proof of this fact. It took many a year and innumerable hard fights to get the original appropriation for the establishment of the much-needed agricultural college on Long Island, but we got it right. It is going to be the real thing. It won't be an emporium for the distribution of fancy initials for the attachment to the end of somebody's name. It won't be a place where someone will poll-parrot year after year the words of some agricultural dreamer of the past. It won't be a sacred edifice for the development of fads and fancies. It will be a practical, vitally necessary institution for the turning out of competent, capable, self-supporting outdoor men and women. Theories will be put to the practical test and if they don't make good will be handed back to the laboratory investigator for embalment, amendment or revampment. Say-sos will not be accepted as facts. Prophets, soothsayers, wizards and know it alls will have to make good in the open before a jury of disinterested and closely observed unsubsidized men and women.

Now that an agricultural school had been chartered on Long Island, its social and economic impact was expected to be immense. High expectations abounded.<sup>19</sup>

There could be little doubt the southeastern region of New York State needed such an institution in this period of local history. None had existed to serve the vast metropolitan area. The seed was planted for the growth of a new practical agricultural school that aspired to train young boys and girls for the future. There were few models to follow. The New York State School of Agriculture on Long Island would experience unprecedented change in its early years to the extent that its survival would be at stake. Problems arose that appeared insurmountable. In fact, its very existence would be challenged.



The Farmingdale School's origins arose as part of the "Country Life Movement in America" and the "Back to the Soil Movement" during a reformist era in American history. It was an "extraordinary idea to train urban young people to become farmers and homemakers . . . [and] would relieve overcrowding in city neighborhoods and schools, and thus benefit both urban and rural interests." The school matured into an institution of higher learning, offering degrees in applied arts and sciences at the associate and bachelor levels, and it became a microcosm of Long Island's growth. The transition was complete when the agricultural program ended in 1987. The early history of Farmingdale State College, as it is known today, illustrates an aspect of Long Island, which has all but vanished.<sup>20</sup>

