

# THE FARM AT THE LACONIA STATE SCHOOL LACONIA, NH

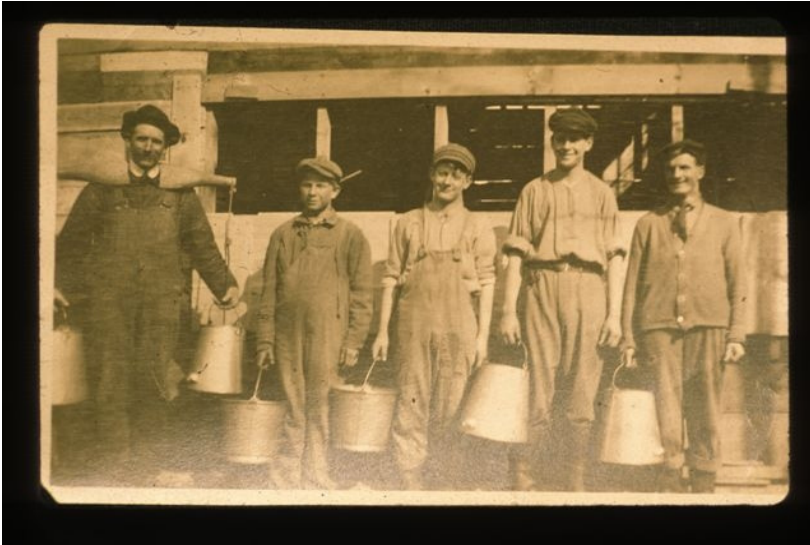


In 1901, legislation was passed by the New Hampshire Legislature creating the New Hampshire School for Feeble-Minded Children. The Legislature with the passage of this bill was responding to public sentiment that feebleminded children would be better served if they lived at a special residential facility rather than in overcrowded almshouses or county farms. The original law affected only those children considered feebleminded between the ages of 3 and 21. Subsequent amendments to the law broadened the eligibility, first to include girls over the age of 21, then to include any feebleminded people of any age.

*"The state shall establish and maintain a school for the care and education of the idiotic and feebleminded, between three and twenty one years of age, which shall be known as the New Hampshire School for Feebleminded children. All children supported by towns or counties in the state, who, in the judgment of the selectmen of towns or county commissioners of the county of state board of charities, are capable of being benefited by school instruction, shall be committed to this institution."* **Law of 1901, chap. 102, sect I, establishing the legal authority of the state to operate an institution for feebleminded children.**

The site selected by the Board of Trustees for the school was in Laconia and it consisted of 250 acres of farm land owned primarily by the Colonel Crockett Family. The photo above shows one of the original farmhouses and barn on Parade Road, which served as the home of the first farm manager, B.M. Towle. Another larger home formally occupied by the Crockett family was converted to the residence of the Superintendent. It also served as the administrative offices of the School. The state built two buildings: a brick dormitory for boys and girls, and a school building. A second dormitory was constructed

in 1907. The first Superintendent was Dr. Charles Sherman Little, a nationally prominent physician. The institution was opened in 1903 with 57 children being moved there from almshouses and orphanages around the state. By 1906, there were 82 “inmates” (no longer referred to as “children”), and there was a waiting list of 117 individuals. Of the 82 people at the Home, 57 came from the almshouses, and 25 came from family homes. Prior to the opening of the New Hampshire Home for the Feebleminded, most children with mental retardation lived at home. It was only the poor children without families who lived in the almshouses.



As with many of the almshouses or county farms a working farm was maintained as part of the school for the production of food for its residents as well as to provide residents with the benefits of “hard labor” and contributing to their board and keep. The farm was an integral part of the institution. In

a 1921 booklet describing various facilities is stated, *“The Farm Group: The farm house of J. Frank Crockett is now the Farm Foreman’s cottage. This, together with the old barns and out-buildings of both farms, repaired, rearranged and added to by new buildings, constitutes the Farm Group. Many boys from the cities, as well as those from the country, find interesting and instructive occupation in helping care for the live stock, which consist of 13 horses, 100 cattle, 150 hogs and 400 hens.”* Pictured below is the Farm Group including garage, barns, carpenter, blacksmith and paint shops, cottages of farm foreman and plumber.

The Superintendent and Board of Trustees took a great deal of pride in the production of food sources on the farm. The Annual Reports of the Board always contained an extensive list of farm produce including bushels of potatoes, squash, beans, peas, maple syrup, lumber,

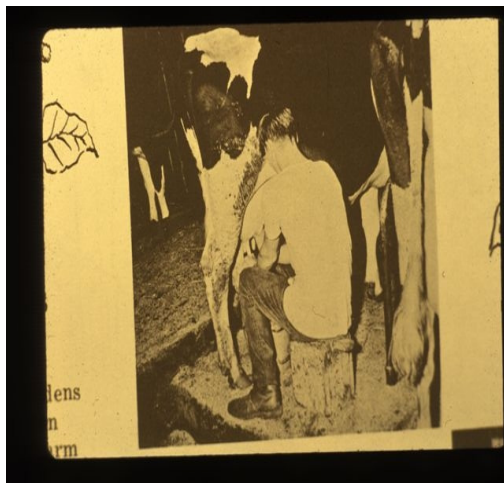


eggs, veal, beef, milk, etc. A 1962 public relations brochure stated: *“The School farm not only provides a training area for the residents but produces (annually) more than \$100,000 worth of produce each year: 28 acres of vegetables, 166,000lbs potatoes; 71,000 lbs. of pork; 27,235 eggs, 12,900 lbs. poultry, 276,000 qts. of milk, 15,285 lbs. of beef, 1,844 lbs. of veal. Mr. Arthur Fowler is the Farm Manager.”*

It is interesting to note that the dairy herd was recognized as one of the finest in the state and had several cows prized for their milk production. In 1961 the farm milked 130 Registered Holsteins. The milk was processed by Weeks Dairy in Laconia, then used at the Laconia facility as well as other state operated institutions such as New Hampshire Hospital and Glen Cliff Home. There was also an active 4-H Club on the campus.

**ESTIMATES OF PRODUCTS OF THE FARM.**  
From October 1, 1906, to September 1, 1908.

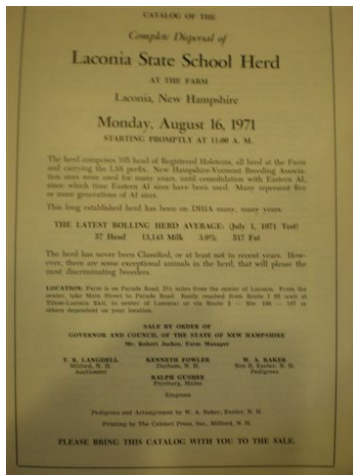
Quarts of milk.....	28,000
Tons of hay.....	140
Tons of ensilage.....	250
Calves.....	29
Pigs.....	125
Bushels of potatoes.....	800
Bushels of onions.....	200
Bushels of beets.....	100
Bushels of carrots.....	200
Bushels of turnips.....	150
Bushels of parsnips.....	75
Bushels of cucumbers.....	175
Bushels of tomatoes.....	200
Bushels of sweet corn.....	250
Bushels of peas.....	85
Bushels of string beans.....	150
Bushels of beet greens.....	100
Bushels of salsify.....	30
Pounds of squash.....	2,000
Pounds of pumpkins.....	3,000
Heads of cabbage.....	3,500
Heads of lettuce.....	1,500
Bunches of celery.....	1,500
Barrels of apples.....	40
Quarts of cultivated strawberries.....	75
Quarts of wild strawberries.....	125
Quarts of wild raspberries.....	300
Quarts of wild blackberries.....	400



The dairy herd of 105 head of Registered Holsteins was sold at auction on August 16, 1971, marking the end farming operations at the State School. The auction catalogue stated, *“All bred at Laconia State School and carry the LSS prefix. NH-VT Breeding Association sires were used for many years until consolidation with Eastern IA. Last tested 7/1/71, 57 head, 13,143 milk, 3.9% and 517 fat; sale by order of Governor and Council.”* Above is Robert Jackes, the Farm manager.



With the end of farming operations agricultural land was allowed to return to fields and woods. The barns and sheds were converted to other uses or fell into disrepair. Farming at one time was seen as a meaningful occupation for people, but with the decline of the



New Hampshire agriculture base and a change in economics it was becoming a limited occupation for individuals living at the institution. This meant there was a decreased need for farm labor; consequently a decreased need to train residents in farm labor skills. Many of the residents who were capable and wanted to work on the farm were being discharged: from 1967-1970 122 individuals were placed in community residences, most of these were the more capable farm laborers. The majority of individuals with more significant disabilities who remained were not capable of working on the farm and it became a liability for the state.

In addition the state could purchase food from large food distributors for less than the cost to operate and maintain the farming operation. In 1968 farm expenditures exceeded income by \$29,187. Food products could be purchased at the same price or below what LSS cost was for production. Consequently many individuals who enjoyed and benefited from working on the farm lost their jobs.

It should be noted that up until 1969 individuals who worked on the farm or had other “jobs” at the institution such as ward aides, bakers, painters, housekeepers, were not paid for their time worked on the job. All individuals capable of working were expected to work at the institution and support themselves. In 1969 The US Department of Labor mandated that all people working at an institution must be paid a fair and equitable wage. This was another reason to cease farming operations...it would cost the state more money to keep maintain the farming operation.

By the early 1970’s all farming and gardening operations ceased. And by the early 1980’s the only vestiges left of the Laconia State School Farm were the dairy barn, which was converted to a warehouse, the maple sugaring house (which was used to boil maple syrup into the 1980’s) the and the neglected pastures on the shores of Opechee Lake.