

editor's page

About the Word "Extension"

When you consider the word "Extension," what comes to your mind?

One way to learn about the meaning of words is to use a dictionary. You may be surprised at some definitions you'll find for "extension," but the first definition I found fits us: "an extending or being extended."

I don't recall when "Extension" began to mean to me "an extension of Ohio State." I knew about the county agent as early as that concept might have meaning to a young child. Extension, when it first became part of my vocabulary, was part of "Extension office" and meant "where the county agent was."

When was the term first used to refer to extending a university beyond its walls? That's hard to tell, but certainly well before the 1914 Smith-Lever Act. "University Extension" was used in England as early as 1866. Perhaps the earliest use of the term on a national level in the U.S., and in association with agricultural colleges, was during the 1894 meeting of the Association of American Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations.

In the Smith-Lever Act, a reader is two-thirds through Section One before encountering "agricultural extension work," and the first mention of "cooperative agricultural extension work" is at the beginning of Section Two. By defining the audience for extension work as "persons not attending or resident in said colleges," the essence of the word "extension" is defined by the Smith-Lever Act.

I wonder if Extension's founders anticipated how Extension workers have extended Extension itself—through the use of volunteers?

There's another meaning of "extension" that warrants some discussion. Marshall McLuhan, in his 1964 book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, introduced the concept of the extensions of man to many of us. Yet Emerson in his essay "Works and Days" said, "All the tools and engines on earth are only extensions of its [mankind's] limbs and senses." The true beginning of the extension of man was probably when he first used a stick to dig edible roots.

We've come a long way in a short time. I read this week that *Time* magazine is now set in type (including color pictures) instantaneously in Hong Kong by transmission signals via satellite from New York. We may have nearly reached the ultimate where a publication can be printed the day before it's transmitted (because of the international date line).

In his article in this issue, Bejot, after noting some possibilities and challenges of the age of electronic media, asks, "Will we be ready?" Perhaps a more appropriate question is, "Are we ready?"

Ray