

## *Innovation in Extension*

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C. M. FERGUSON

AS WE TORE off the May page of our office and kitchen calendars, how few of us realized we had just discarded the record of the date of Extension's Golden Anniversary! Not that Extension started on May 8, 1914; it was already a husky youngster by that time. It had two parents who were not living together, although they seemed to have had cordial relations. One was in Washington, the other our own Land Grant institutions. When President Wilson signed the Smith-Lever Bill, for better or for worse, the two were joined in a wedlock that has lasted half a century.

This analogue may be frightening to many who have attended other golden weddings where young, active, vigorous youngsters gather round to do and say nice things for aging grandparents. After fifty years of productive married life they may now live in the past, passing their days in a rocking chair built for two.

Extension in 1914 was a sturdy, young, newly married couple (the U.S.D.A. and the Land Grant institution) who saw a world to conquer and set about it with enthusiasm, imagination, and determination. They could not let it fail. It was too important, too vital a thing to let die in its infancy. There were few road markers to indicate the best way to go. Seaman A. Knapp had been successful in his venture with the practical demonstration as an educational device. Kenyon L. Butterfield, W. O. Thompson, A. B. Graham, Perry G. Holden, Liberty Hyde Bailey, Martha Van Rensselaer, O. B. Martin, Ella Agnew, and Jane S. McKimmon were a few of

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that small company of explorers of this new world of education called Extension. They were among the early innovators who drove or rode horses, showed, persuaded, and convinced the curious few to try the new—while their neighbors looked on from the other side of the line fence, shook their heads in skepticism, but cautiously followed suit with some misgiving as they joined the thin ranks of the early adopters of new technology.

Extension's history has been one of innovation—in methods, in subject matter, in audience. Its birth was an innovation. Its early growth was nourished by innovation. Its success was measured by the innovations it succeeded in getting adopted. What a tragedy it would be if at the golden age of fifty this great spirit of adventure and venture was to be lost and it was to become the victim of paralysis of the status quo!

#### EXTENSION SUCCESS

In describing a bureaucrat O. Glenn Stahl uses a definition which, if applied to any public servant (and the Extension worker can not disclaim this categorization), would picture him as

a fellow who fears the highly creative, spontaneous individual; he's one who holds his own expertise sacred; he is suspicious of everybody else's, but feels there is one door to wisdom and knowledge and that's his field of expertise; he is preoccupied with trivia; and is always concerned with *feasibility* before he examines *desirability*. . . . The traditional concept of the bureaucrat is not one in charge of innovation but one in charge of the status quo.<sup>1</sup>

My optimism convinces me that I will find no great number of adherents to such a philosophy among the ranks of Extension, be they directors, supervisors, specialists, or agents. The kind of people described by Stahl is not the dynamic kind of people who built the reputation of Extension. They are the kind who will design and build a greater structure on a foundation so well laid.

Extension's laurels have been won largely in the field of technology—the application of science to the everyday farming, home-making, and marketing of the products of our farms. Of no less significance is the less easily identified change in the people who became the masters and adopters of technology. While Extension's success has often been measured in terms of bushels, pounds, hours saved, and dollars earned, there remains the fact that had it not

<sup>1</sup>O. Glenn Stahl, "Democracy's Expectations of Its Public Executives," in C. M. Ferguson (ed.), *Collected Papers on Administration in Government* (Madison, Wisconsin: National Agricultural Extension Center for Advanced Study, 1964), p. 4.

been for the changes in people, their knowledge, skill, and thinking, none of this would have been possible. Then it is trite to say Extension's greater contribution has been in the development of human values. Innovation in the non-technical world has been and will in the future form the base line of a design for living as well as for earning a living.

Well over a century ago de Tocqueville commented that "it would seem as if the rulers of our time . . . sought only to use men in order to make *things* great; I wish they would try a little more to make great *men*; that they set less value on the work and more value upon the workman" (italics added).<sup>2</sup> How well has Extension done in helping realize de Tocqueville's hopes? How successful are we in raising a 4-H boy with a sense of sound values in addition to a steer whose value is measured in cents per pound. Have we succeeded in helping the farmer and the homemaker better understand the "why" than to be content to follow a recipe that tells only "how"? Have we, through involvement, built leaders, not just followers; thinkers, and not just robots? Is this what Congressman Lever, while defending the Smith-Lever Bill on the floor of the House of Representatives fifty years ago, wanted when he said: "The itinerant teacher (Extension agent) is to assume leadership in any movement, whatever it may be, the aim of which is better farming, better living, more happiness, more education and better citizenship."<sup>3</sup>

This charter is as valid today as it was fifty years ago. The acclaim for its accomplishment in the years ahead as in the fifty which have passed will go to those in charge of innovation and not the masters of the status quo.

As I retire from my title as editor of the *Journal* (I can not in good conscience claim to have become an editor) I do so with an inward feeling that the *Journal*, too, has been an innovation in the Extension profession and I have the fondest hope that it will prove its value by breaking new ground—deep, fertile soil capable of sustaining a lush growth of intellectual curiosity, the hallmark of the Extension excellence.

<sup>2</sup> E. Digby Baltzell, "Bell Telephone's Experiment in Education," in Robert A. Goldwin (ed.), *Toward the Liberally Educated Executive* (White Plains, N.Y.: The Fund for Adult Education, 1957), p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> U. S. Congress, *Hearings Report and Debate, Smith-Lever Act of 1914*, U. S. House of Representatives, p. 2068.

THE MEN of the past had convictions, while we moderns have only opinions.—HEINRICH HEINE.