

News Article

By: John E. Woodmansee, Extension Educator, Agriculture/Natural Resources

E-mail: jwoodman@purdue.edu

Date: February 5, 2018

Please use by: February 15, 2018

Purdue Extension – Whitley County

Whitley County Courthouse Annex

115 South Line Street

Columbia City, IN 46725-2325

Phone: (260) 244-7615 or (260) 625-3313

www.extension.purdue.edu/whitley

What is Purdue Extension? Birth of land-grant institutions

For some time now, I've wanted to divert from my normal article topics to offer a look at what Purdue Extension actually is. Last week I wrote about Purdue Extension as a source of research-based information. To more fully understand what Purdue Extension is, today we go back to the birth of land-grant institutions, which led to the Cooperative Extension System. The story involves one of our most beloved presidents, Abraham Lincoln.

America declared her independence in 1776. A decade later, agricultural education became a priority.

The Philadelphia Society, an agricultural group organized in 1785, was one of the first organized efforts to provide information to farmers. In 1792, the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture recommended meetings for farmers to discuss agricultural improvement. In 1812, this group sent out 1,000 letters to be read to civic and church groups.

In 1863 the first recorded "Farmers Institute" was held in Springfield, Massachusetts, under the sponsorship of the Massachusetts State Board of Agriculture. However, prior to 1862 most colleges in the United States were patterned after European traditions, emphasizing the Classics and catering to the elite. Obviously, the education of America's farm people, then about 85 percent of the population, and industrial workers, was neglected.

May 2, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Act establishing the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), which was raised to cabinet status in 1889.

In 1862 the Morrill Act was also passed. It is known as the Land-Grant Act, since each state was given an area of public land to be sold and the proceeds invested, with the interest to be used to endow, support and maintain "at least one college". Signed by President Lincoln on July 2, 1862, the Act stipulated that the primary objective of the colleges would be: "to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts in such manner as the legislatures of the states may respectively prescribe in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life."

The Indiana state legislature formally accepted the grant in 1865. The land sold to provide the grant to Indiana was in northeastern Nebraska. The exact location was never determined, since only land scrip was issued. It was sold to private interests. Some time was required to locate the college in Indiana, as several proposals were received. These included offers by Butler University, Indiana University and other entities.

In 1869, the legislature accepted an offer made by John Purdue and other Tippecanoe County residents. Purdue contributed \$150,000 and 100 acres of land. The new institution was called Purdue University in honor of the benefactor. The first students were enrolled at Purdue in 1874.

Today, Purdue University remains as Indiana's one and only land-grant institution.

To find out more about Purdue Extension's early years, consider purchasing books authored by Dr. Frederick Whitford and others, available at: <https://mdc.itap.purdue.edu>. Some of the information in today's article was sourced from the book, "The Grand Old Man of Purdue University and Indiana Agriculture, A Biography of William Carroll Latta," by Whitford and Andrew G. Martin.

Next week we will explore the establishment of the Cooperative Extension System and its relationship to land-grant institutions.

It is the policy of the Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service that all persons have equal opportunity and access to its educational programs, services, activities, and facilities without regard to race, religion, color, sex, age, national origin or ancestry, marital status, parental status, sexual orientation, disability or status as a veteran.

Purdue University is an Affirmative Action institution. This material may be available in alternative formats.