# The Foundation of Colorado Agricultural College – Early days of Colorado State University

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Only a few years after the location had been established, the history of the Colorado's land-grant institution started. The territory of Colorado was organized in 1861, and Colonel Collins established a camp site in 1864 at the place now called the city of Fort Collins. Although the army left Fort Collins in 1867 to move to Cheyenne, Wyoming, there were already farmers and merchants there. The movement to establish a college there had emerged from them around the time of the moving of the camp site. The first attempt was made by Harris Stratton. He was elected to the territorial legislative assembly in November, 1867, and tried to introduce a bill that would establish a land-grant agricultural college at Fort Collins, but he gave up because he thought federal regulation did not allow the attempt. However, in next legislature session, Representative Mathew S. Taylor submitted a bill to establish the Agricultural College of Colorado at Fort Collins. This bill passed the legislature and was signed by Governor Edward McCook on February 11, 1870. At this time, there was no guarantee that the College was able to obtain land-grant support by the Morrill Act in 1862 because Colorado was not a state yet. According to Hansen, local politicians moved to establish a college because "[t]hey probably assumed that a claim on the agriculture college during the territorial period would result in federal land-grant support"[1]. Competition to invite public institutions was also common at this time and this competition accelerated the movement as well.[2]

The act of 1870 appointed twelve trustees and they were authorized some power to manage the College, such as purchasing property and establishing rules. Other than receiving a few land donations, however, the trustees were not able to do anything without proper

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1. Hansen, *Democracy's College*, 23.

2. Ibid., 19-23.

appropriations from the territory. The support from the territory was only sporadic, such as the fund appropriated by the legislature in 1874 to support universities in the territory – the College was given $1,000 for building. When Colorado became a state in 1876, the College was referred to in the constitution as the state institution. Harris Stratton examined other state laws of agricultural colleges and found the Michigan law was the most appropriate to needs of the state. In fact, "[w]hen the bill passed, specifying the organization of the agricultural college as a state institution, the Michigan State Agricultural College's statement of purpose was copied verbatim"[3]. The law established a State Board of Agriculture of eight members, with the governor and the president of the College as ex-officio members, as the governing board of the College. The governor selected the first three members, including Harris Stratton, and he asked Stratton to choose the other five members. At the first Board meeting, Stratton was appointed secretary. By then, although the College has some land, it still lacked a stable financial base. In the legislature session of 1877, Representative Nathaniel C. Alfred of Larimer County (where Fort Collins is located) worked for a bill to authorize a state mill levy for the College. Although there were some conflicts, such as the objection by Representative Jim Carlisle – according to Alfred, he said "I feel as if it was throwing the money away, for you never can make Colorado an agricultural state. It is only fit for a cow pasture and mining"[4] – the bill passed and it gave the College one-tenth of one mill on all taxable property in the state. Owing to the bill, the Board was able to start to construct buildings. Later, in 1879, the Colorado General Assembly finally accepted the provisions by the Morrill Act of 1862, but the land was not available until the

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3. Ibid., 25.

4. Ibid., 26.

required Congress legislation was enacted in 1884, and the income from the land was not available until 1886.[5]

On May 1879, the Board unanimously appointed Elijah Evan Edwards as the president of the College. Edwards was a graduate of Asbury University (the institution is now known as DePauw University) and taught at several colleges and universities, and was president at Whitewater College. He was also a minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church. By the opening of the College at September 1879, professors for practical agriculture and chemistry joined as well. On the opening day, five students were present, and number rose to twenty by the end of the semester. The first semester was called as the initial term, and classes of reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic, geography, and grammar were held. Formal freshman class instruction began on February, 1880. The course of study included algebra, physical geography, rhetoric, bookkeeping, botany, geometry, general history, and practical agriculture. Daily two-hour labor requirement was also included as an educational activity. This curriculum was soon improved in 1881, adding a full preparatory year and more diverse classes such as agricultural chemistry, mechanical engineering, and household economy.[6]

Contribution to the local community was not only the college education. The Board approved unusual schedule as follows: Spring Term, February 16 – May 21; Summer Term, June 1 – August 27; Autumn Term, September 6 – November 26. The Board wanted to save time for farmer's education and they assumed winter was the best time to disseminate knowledge to farmers because they had usually more spare time in winter. In fact, the first farmer's institute

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5. Ibid., 23-28, 89.

6. Ibid., 30-47., Steinel, *History of Agriculture in Colorado*, 589-593.

was held on November 26 and 28, 1879, just after the College finished its very first semester. In the institute, as well as practical agricultural subjects such as "Soils and Their Analyses," "Cheese and Butter Making for Colorado," and "Veterinary Science for Farmers," there was a talk by President Edwards titled "The Relation of the Agricultural College to the People of the State." In the talk, he "sought to reconcile the older and newer views of American higher learning, preserving the humane values of the classical system while applying the democratic and utilitarian methods of the present"[7]. The institute was held also at other places in the state during winters.[8]

Around the summer of 1880, a conflict between President Edwards and practical Board members emerged. Although Edwards sought to educate his students with general knowledge as well as agricultural practical knowledge, the Board, monopolized by farmers, preferred practical agricultural school. After several conflicts on the issues over a dormitory, a literary society, students' conduct and so on, the Board finally fired him in April 1882. The Board appointed Charles L. Ingersoll, a graduate and former faculty member of the Michigan Agricultural College, in July of the same year. By then, the financial situation of the College was desperate and there were several movements in the General Assembly to merge the College with other public institutions in the state, such as the University of Colorado, the School of Mines, the School for the Deaf and Dumb, and even the State Reformatory, for the sake of economy. All of

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7. Hansen, *Democracy's College*, 42.

8. Ibid., 40-44.

these attempts failed (and even ruled unconstitutional later) but the harsh financial situation continued until the enactment of the Hatch Act and the Morrill Act of 1890.[9]

When Ingersoll took his office, the College "bore little resemblance to a bonafide institution of higher learning"[10]. Only a single course without any electives offered to the students, and no department existed other than the new Department of Mechanics and Drawing, which Ingersoll himself insisted to establish. Despite of financial difficulties, Ingersoll made use of his human capital to expand the institution. He contacted his acquaintances in Michigan and other colleges and secured some qualified teachers, such as James W. Lawrence, professor at the newly established department. He arrived at Fort Collins in March 1883 and worked at the College until 1917, with developing a mechanical engineering program and becoming building superintendent later. Ingersoll also committed to improve curriculum. By the 1890-91 academic year, student was able to obtain a B.S. degree with a major in agriculture, irrigation engineering, the mechanical course, or the ladies course. The ladies course enabled female juniors and seniors to pursue a major that included drawing, stenography and typewriting, foreign languages, landscape gardening, and psychology. The Board was reluctant to introduce non-practical subjects, but Ingersoll somehow opened the door to liberal education by introducing the ladies course.[11]

The College had eagerly coped with practical agricultural issues. Ainsworth Blunt, a supervisor of the College Farm and professor of practical agriculture was hired even before the

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9. Ibid., 48-59.

10. Ibid., 62.

11. Ibid., 62-63, 78-81.

first President Edwards. He was in the College for 11 years and conducted experimental research on crop management, which produced significant benefit for Colorado farmers. He was also involved in the development of Defiance wheat, which became the dominant spring wheat in the state and added nearly $14 million to the wealth of the state by the First World War. Based on his research, the College published several bulletins to benefit local farmers. Perhaps these achievements led the Colorado General Assembly to enact a bill for establishing experiment sub-stations in a few locations in the state just a month after passage of the Hatch Act. The Hatch Act of 1887 provided federal funds for the experiment stations at each land-grant college and the College established its station at Fort Collins with a few sub-stations. As a consequence of the Act, the importance of agricultural research had increased and a need for researchers who can handle the subject had risen as well. Therefore, the College established a faculty committee by members who headed research at the experiment station. The committee made a plan for establishing a master's degree program in 1888 and the Board soon approved the program. In the program, the College provided two options to obtain a master's degree. One was a one-year course of study. A student required to study in two departments and to write an acceptable thesis at the College. The other was for graduates of the College. They were able to obtain a degree without spending additional terms at the College as long as they demonstrated excellence in study and submitted an acceptable thesis.[12]

The Morrill Act of 1890 also helped the College with significant amount of money and helped President Ingersoll with his intention of a college that instruct "in agriculture, the mechanic arts, the English language and the various branches of mathematical, physical, natural

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12. Ibid., 28-30, 85-91.

and economic science"[13]. Ingersoll repeatedly talked to the Board members with his intention of establishing liberal education, but "the narrow educational outlook of certain Board members"[14] had not been changed. Finally he conflicted with the Board and resigned in 1891.[15]

During the first two presidents' terms, financial situation had been harsh and perhaps the tension between President and the Board more. They had to convince farmers of ideas of liberal education. Their attempts were not always in success, but the College somehow survived its tumultuous foundation term. The fruit now becomes Colorado State University, which is recognized as a Carnegie doctoral research university with very high research activity, as well as community engaged university.[16]

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13. The Second Morrill Act, 7 U.S.C. § 322 (1890).

14. Hansen, *Democracy's College*, 62.

15. Ibid., 90-94

16. Beers, 2015.

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