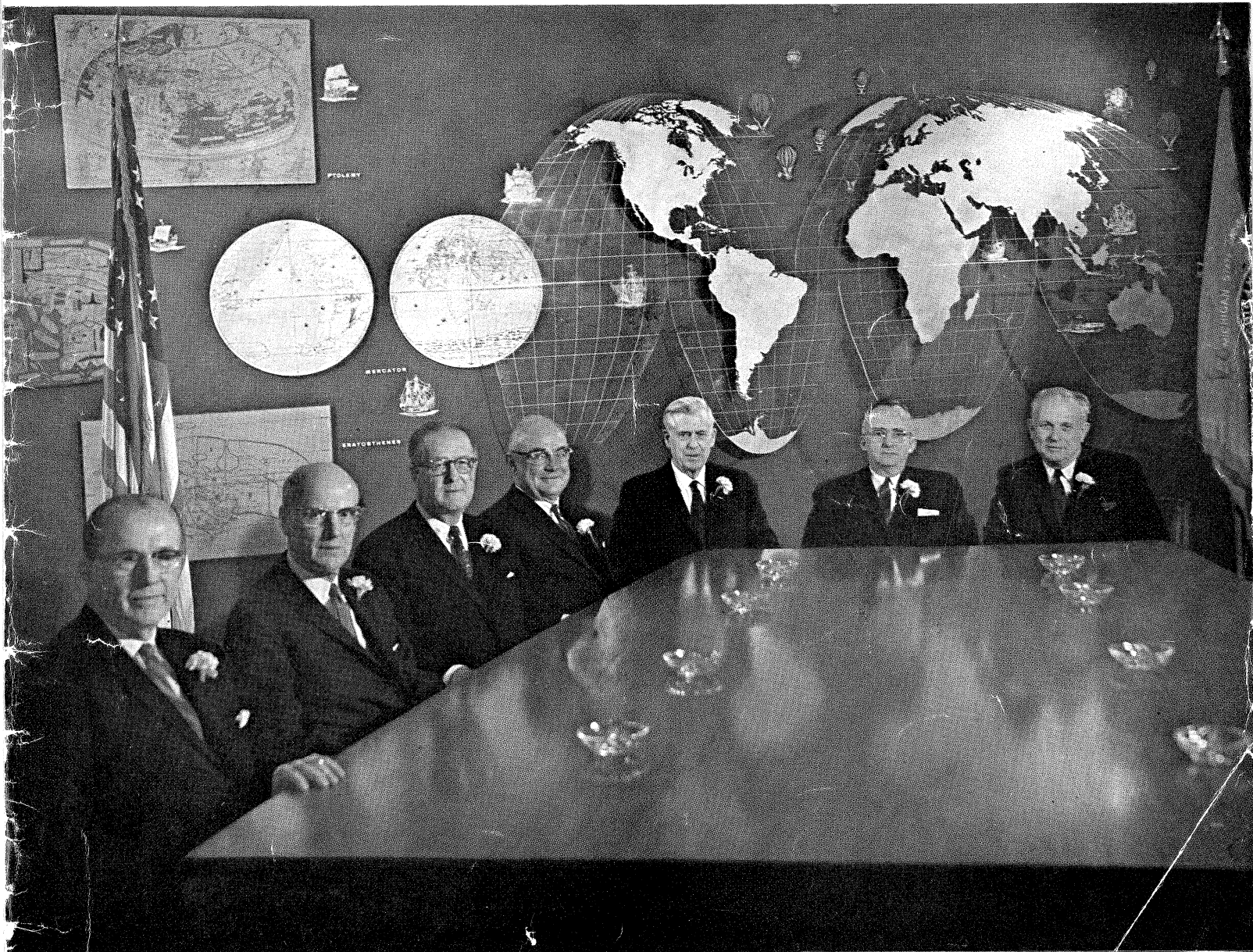


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MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

magazine



WE HOST FIVE SECRETARIES OF AGRICULTURE (Pages 2 and 12)

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WAR ECHOES: *Killed In Action At Gettysburg*

50 YEARS AGO: A LITTLE CHILD LED THEM

FIFTY years ago a young farm girl anxiously awaited arrival of the prize she had won in a contest on the Michigan State campus.

In January of this year the *MSU Magazine* had made a brief reference to that contest in its historical column, "Do You Remember?" It was reported that the Reo Motor Company of Lansing had offered a touring car to the young farmer who could raise the best corn in the state, judging to be on campus.

Well, someone did remember. Mrs. Florine Folks Plumb, '20, wrote from Jackson, Mich., to say that she had been the prize-winner in that event a half-century ago.

At the time, the alumna explains, she lived on a farm with her parents near Hanover, Mich., which is about 17 miles from Jackson. Her father had become interested in corn breeding through faculty members at Michigan State, and he urged his daughter to enter a county contest for farm youth.

"I had no brothers," the alumna says, "and therefore it was logical for me to enter the contest."

Her father plowed the land for her to use. She did the rest, planting and caring for the crop until finally she harvested it for the county corn contest at Jackson.

Such contests in the United States date back at least to 1856 when Horace Greeley was a donor for such

an event in New York. But until about 1900, contests for rural youth were scattered and repeated with little continuity.

Then progressive teachers in several states began out-of-school club programs in agriculture to help rural children. It was through such a program that Florine entered the county contest. She was the only girl to enter.

"The time of the county show was a great day for me," Mrs. Plumb says. "I remember it well because the men running the show took the club members to dinner. It was the first time I went out to eat."

During the county contest Florine's corn took first prize. The next step was to enter the state contest to be held at the East Lansing campus, where the sumptuous prize of a Reo touring car would be given to the winner.

The competition at Michigan State had been urged by the late Prof. J. A. Jeffery. He and other interested men wished to sponsor a statewide organization for rural boys and girls, to give the youngsters more social life while also training them for agriculture.

Professor Jeffery pushed for a statewide corn contest and he appealed to the Lansing motor magnate, R. E. Olds, for aid in arousing interest.

Olds, a pioneer auto-maker, was definitely interested in the boys and girls clubs—which, incidentally, were the forerunners of today's 4-H clubs. He thought the professor had a fine idea, and to encourage the work he offered to give a thousand-dollar automobile to the farmer under 20 who could raise the best 10 ears of corn in the state.

"My father took the corn to East Lansing and entered it for me," Mrs. Plumb relates. "I stayed home and did the chores. Going that far in those days would have meant missing two or three days of school, something my family wouldn't hear of."

MRS. PLUMB gathers some of her mementos. She and her father won enough prize ribbons to overfill a five-pound candy box.



The Michigan State *Record* for 1911 says that there were 120 entries in the contest.

The farmers assembled on campus undoubtedly were surprised when they learned that the prize-winning corn had been grown by a slip of a girl, age 11.

Today, it would be hard to assess the full impact of that 1911 contest. Doubtless, Florine's winning of the Reo touring car spurred many a farm youth to burn midnight oil and daytime elbow grease in hopes of attaining a similar achievement.

One newspaper editorial extolled the young girl for having "done something of more substantial benefit to mankind than the average senator, to compare the work of our kings of politics with that of our queen of corn growers."

Publications far and wide wrote of the farm girl who had topped all other entries with her White Cap Yellow Dent corn, a breed which her father had developed on his farm. The *Detroit Free Press* in early February, 1911, ran a long article on Florine, under the headline: "Michigan's Corn Queen Will Learn to Run \$1,000 Automobile She Won."

Although the alumna won the big Reo auto in January it was not until the following May that it could be delivered to her home, because of the condition of the roads.

"A neighbor and my father took the train to Jackson to get the car," she says. "I got permission to finish school early and then ran home to meet them."

There were only two cars in the nearby town of Hanover when Florine won her Reo. One belonged to the grocer and the other was the property of an undertaker. Her car was a snappy model in jet black with red

wheels, a lot of brass trim and a side crank.

Florine's father quickly taught her how to operate the two-cylinder touring car and she began to use it frequently around the farm. There was no driver-licensing in those days and it's a safe bet that there wasn't another farm girl in the land wheeling around in a flashy Reo, top speed 17 MPH. A local newspaper editor wrote:

"A toot, a rhythmic exhaust, a whirr of wheels in a cloud of dust, a whiff of incense to the god Mercury, and we nearly put our necks out of joint to get a glimpse of retreating Florine whose shiney face peers from the folds of an automobile scarf."

That same year Florine's prize corn was entered in the national exhibition at Columbus, Ohio. She took third prize.

In 1914, the last year she grew corn, she won the grand sweepstakes and as a prize made a trip to Washington where she was greeted personally by President Wilson.

"After that, my mother said to me that it was time I began to think of other things," Mrs. Plumb relates, "so I stopped competing with the farm boys and was soon preparing to go on to college."

Mrs. Plumb came to Michigan State and was graduated in 1920, despite an illness which set her back in her studies.

Her husband, Harold J. Plumb, '21, is an engineer with Consumers Power Company and is active in alumni work. An advisor to the board of the *Spartan Engineer*, he also is an executive board member of the Engineering Alumni Club of MSU.

The Plumb's daughter, Mary Plumb Fitch, is a 1954 Michigan State graduate who teaches school.



THE ALUMNA in a picture taken at the time when she was "corn queen" of the state.

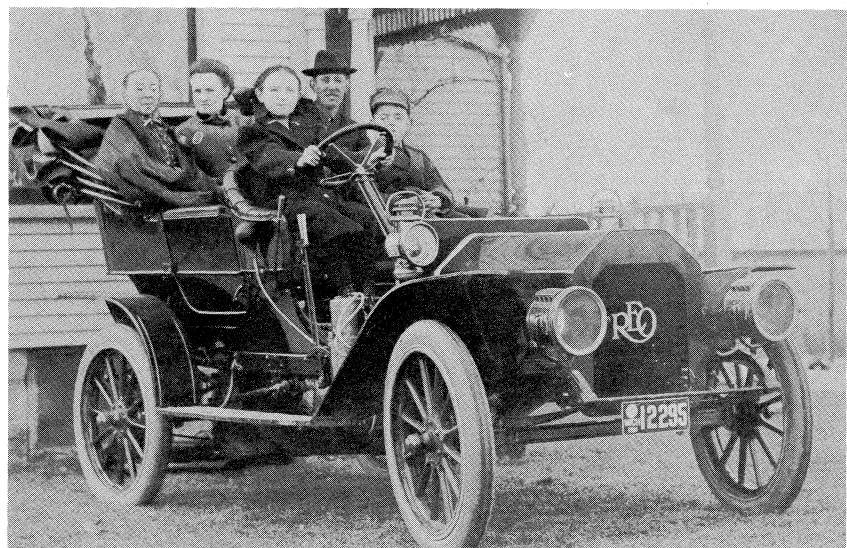
Mrs. Plumb's father, William Folks, continued for many years to grow the type of corn with which his daughter had won the contest in 1911. A few years before his death the corn was still winning prizes.

In 1952, at the age of 81 and in competition with fancy new hybrids, Mr. Folks' corn took first prize at the International Livestock Exhibition in Chicago.

Upon the urging of faculty members at Michigan State, the corn Mr. Folks grew was named Folks Whitecap, an open pollinated variety which Mrs.

(Continued on Page 31)

IT WAS 1911 and Florine sat behind the wheel of her new Reo touring car. In the back seat were her grandmother, mother and father. Next to her sat a visiting friend, Charles Burnett.



Civil War Echoes

(Continued)

Final examinations followed and the time for Commencement had come; but once more there was no Senior class. Two months earlier an officer had appeared seeking college-trained recruits for a company of engineers. General Frémont had asked E. P. Howland of Battle Creek to assemble men capable of technical work in surveying and signalling. The Seniors had studied surveying and mechanics with Abbot, chemistry and physics with Fisk.

"It was hard to cut them off before their time," Abbot wrote to a member of the new Board. Only the realization "that their education might fit them for posts hard to fill" induced the faculty to consent. And the anticipated scientific experience would, it was hoped, compensate for studies missed.

At the last moment one Senior could not go, but the other six (Albert Allen, Leonard Beebe, Henry Benham, Gilbert Dickey, Charles Hollister, and Albert Prentiss) were joined by George Haigh, a former classmate frozen out in the 1860 reorganization, his brother Thomas, a Freshman, and Junior Oscar Clute.

November 13 was the date set for Commencement and the diplomas had been prepared; but for lack of Seniors there were no exercises. In western Missouri they and their fellows were drilling as a signal company, constructing movable towers from which to telegraph with wig-wag flags. They even developed a method of night-signalling with charcoal-point electric lights. Electric lights were confined to the laboratory; but they had been taught to carry the lesson of the laboratory into the field. A student diary of 1858 recorded: "Prof. passed a

current between two charcoal points Hollister said the sun never thought of shining so bright as that did." Hollister was one of the Seniors repeating Fisk's experiments for the Army.

But their work was ahead of its time and when their patron General Frémont was removed, an inspector came to investigate their expenditures for mysterious materials that engineers had never needed. Whereupon Howland's Company of Engineers was mustered out of the Army and shipped home.

Five of the nine joined other units. Gilbert Dickey and George Haigh enlisted in the Michigan 24th and were a part of the Iron Brigade which, at Gettysburg, bore the brunt of the first Confederate attack. Lt. Dickey was killed in crossfire, the first officer to fall in a regiment that was all but destroyed. Sergeant Haigh received a battlefield promotion and was made Captain in November.

Sergeant Henry Benham, in the Michigan Seventh Cavalry, was a part of the mounted troops with which General Custer on the third day repulsed Stuart's Confederate Cavalry and rendered Pickett's Charge hopeless. In the following winter Benham became First Lieutenant in Michigan's First Colored Infantry. On duty in South Carolina, he died of disease on the first anniversary of Gettysburg.

Leonard Beebe joined the hospital staff of the U. S. Sanitary Commission. Thomas Haigh studied medicine, re-entered the Army as a Surgeon, eventually having charge of a hospital of over a hundred wounded men at City Point, Virginia.

Commencement in 1862 was only a little better than that of 1861. Some members of the class, like Samuel Alexander, had gone early to war. Charles Jewell and Frank Hodgman enlisted in August, 1862, when their November graduation was assured. Diplomas followed them to the battlefield. Three men appeared at the graduation exercises in November, one of whom was Oscar Clute who had returned from the Army to complete his studies.

In 1863 there were no Seniors; in 1864 there were five, with an average age of twenty-six. In 1865 there was again no class to graduate.

In 1858 Justin Morrill urged Congress to grant lands to state colleges such as ours in Michigan, promising that, as in the schools "of ancient Sparta," their "graduates would know how to sustain American institutions with American vigor." Michigan State had fulfilled that promise. ◀

A Child Led Them

(Continued)

Plumb believes still can hold its own against many of the modern hybrids.

The old Reo won by Mrs. Plumb was in regular use by her family for several years and then was stored in a barn on the Folks farm.

When World War II began the alumna decided that the touring car would be useful in the war effort, particularly because of its heavy brass trim. In 1942 she donated the car to a scrap drive in Jackson.

For years afterwards Mrs. Plumb believed the car had been melted down and used for American defense, but in recent years she has learned that the auto might still exist, the word being that it was quietly slipped away from the scrap pile and stored by a Jackson resident.

While Mrs. Plumb has lost her prize car, she can be certain that the corn variety grown by herself and her father still exists.

Professor E. C. Rossman of the MSU farm crops department reports that a number of years ago he obtained Folks Whitecap seed from Mrs. Plumb's father. It is still in use to develop new hybrid parents in the University's corn breeding program.

"We don't know of anyone using the variety in farming now," Dr. Rossman says, "although there might be an isolated case where someone is using it. We have seen to it that the United States Agricultural Plant Introduction Bank at Iowa State has seed of this variety."

Professor Rossman explains that the plant bank keeps seed from all over the world. This way a variety will not become extinct if the only source of the seed is lost.

Because corn seed will lose its viability in a short time, every few years the original Folks Whitecap is sown at MSU to maintain a seed stock for the experimental program. ◀

SCHAFFHAUSER'S COLLEGE DRUGS

Prescriptions

Drugs

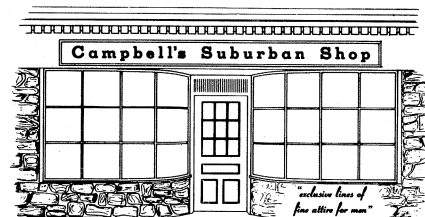
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