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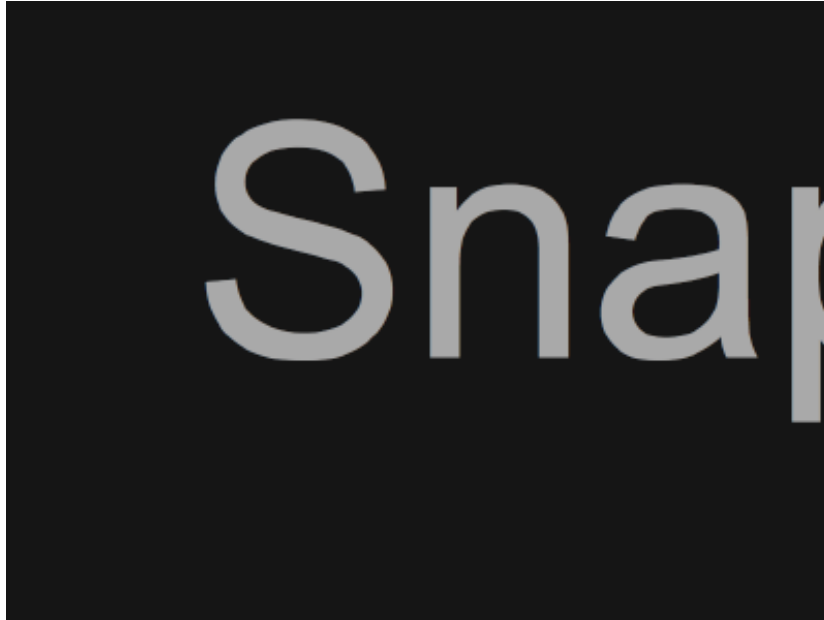
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One day out of the year, a fair came to Craftsbury, Vermont. Adelard and Mary Paquette lived on a modest farm about five miles from Craftsbury Common, where the fair was held. Their seven children looked forward to the fair, and though the Great Depression wringed wallets dry, Mary gave her third son Lucien a quarter to spend on sweets at the festival. Lucien returned later that day with 20 cents and a five-cent pack of chewing gum for his mother.

That's just the sort of person that Lucien Paquette, now 92, is. The longtime Middlebury resident is perhaps best known in the area for founding the Addison County Fair and Field Days, Vermont's largest agricultural fair, 41 years ago.

It all started with a one-day fair in Craftsbury and a love of agriculture.

Back then, one-day fair was a welcome sight in town. To encourage townspeople to exhibit cattle, fair officials offered 50 cents per animal. Lucien's father, who owned Brown Swiss cattle, decided he would enter just over half a dozen cattle into the exhibition — the only problem was getting there. So the family settled on driving the small herd on foot five miles down the highway to Craftsbury Common.



“One of the principle reasons we did this was to get 50 cents per head,” Lucien said.

The family’s farm was a long walk from town and during the school year, Lucien and his siblings rented a room in a private home near Craftsbury Common and worked while attending classes. In wintertime, the road leading to the Paquette’s farm closed with heavy snowfall and was accessible only by sleigh. Lucien worked as a janitor at Craftsbury Academy and Senior High School, where he graduated from high school in 1935.

One summer job brought Lucien to a nearby dairy farm where he was immediately put to work cutting hay by hand, or “hand mowing.” He and two grown men spent the daylight hours cutting down grass with a scythe.

“And here I was green out of school and not in very good physical shape,” said Lucien. “I felt I ought to keep up with them for the whole day and I’m telling you that first day was terrible. I was pooped. But I took a liking to hand mowing.”

To this day, Lucien still hand mows and has been in charge of the hand mowing competition at Field Days, which the county celebrated this week, since 1978.

After high school, Lucien enrolled at the University of Vermont with an interest in civil engineering, but quickly switched his major to science and agriculture. During the school year, Lucien worked at the UVM Dairy Farm for 35 cents an hour and spent some time conducting research for the UVM Forest Department.

“I had to keep my nose pretty close to the grindstone working like that,” he said.

At the time, tuition at UVM was \$300 and the first year he attended, Paquette had a \$100 HP Hood Milk Company scholarship. To blow off steam, students ventured into the heart of Burlington to catch a movie, which cost 25 cents. When invited to come along, Lucien, for the most part, politely declined. In his mind, 25 cents saved was 25 cents earned.

“I was very conservative, and I still am,” Lucien said.

In 1940 Lucien graduated magna cum laude and went immediately to work as a UVM Grand Isle County Extension Agent in agriculture and youth. Every land grant college in the United States has an extension program that was created by congress in the early 1900, said Lucien.

“It’s really an educational outreach arm of the University of Vermont,” Lucien said. “Extension is the link between research and the use of it out in the field. Extension being an educational institution, I knew it was to try and be informed in the area I was working, so in turn I could be helping the farmers themselves.”

As the only extension agent in the county, Lucien was responsible for three areas of interest: agriculture, youth education and homemaking, though Lucien admits the latter category received little attention on his part. He circulated newsletters about agriculture, made farm visits to exhibit new technology, and conducted meetings, tours and demonstrations. Most farmers were not filing their income tax returns at the time and when the government required that farmers file their returns, the farmers were at a loss. Lucien put out letters informing the farmers about how to file their income taxes correctly, occasionally filling out the forms for them.

In 1946, Lucien became the UVM Addison County Extension Agent in Agriculture. In addition to circular letters, farm visits and a column in the Addison Independent dedicated to agriculture, Lucien began a daily broadcast on WFAD Middlebury. As farmers worked in their barns early in the morning, they tuned into Lucien’s 15-minute agriculture program.

“During the summertime and the spring, you’d be talking about what’s going to be happening out on the land,” said Lucien. “In the winter months, when you’re not out on the field and you’re spending more time with the dairy, it’s about income tax. On the educational face of things, getting word out to people by various media is just so important.”

Two years after moving to Addison County, in 1948, Lucien gathered the other extension agents together to form a committee to plan a yearly event that could bring farmers together to share technology and ideas.

“Technology for the farm, the home and the family was way behind because everything went to the war effort,” Lucien said. “(Finally, new technologies) were beginning to emerge.”

The first Addison County Farm and Home Field Days, currently called Addison County Fair and Field Days, was held on East Munger Street in Middlebury on Aug. 6 and 7 in 1948 on the David Brothers Farm. It was a two-day event with one tent for the indoor exhibits and no admission charge. Two thousand people attended the event in its first year — farmers, families and passersby stopped in to check out equipment demonstrations and learn about agriculture. The earliest ride consisted of the local farmers towing children on their ponies.

The event was a hit. Charles Mraz put on one of his several bee-handling demonstrations, Theo Sawyer demonstrated home pasteurization of milk and George Devoid showed the new method of cry-o-vac packaging of poultry for freezing.

Lucien’s favorite demonstration was Al Quesnel’s exhibition of his low flying technique of farm fertilizer spread by air on the Scarborough farm in Leicester in 1953.

“There were so many different things that were new, and they worked so well!” said Lucien.

The small fair traveled from farm to farm until 1961, pulling from each farm's unique design that would lend itself to a particular kind of demonstration. Gerald Sawyer, William Butler, Keith Bicknell and Edgar Butterfield were some of the few farmers that volunteered their land for the newborn fair.

The fair's present site on Route 17 in New Haven was purchased in 1967, and with the new site came permanent buildings, water, roadways and electricity. But today, the fair has expanded past its original purpose as an agricultural fair to include more rides and numerous vendors. Since Lucien retired from his position as the chair of the committee of Field Days in 1984, he has noticed a decline in agricultural education, which was the original idea behind the fair.

"Now at the permanent site, it's very limited in what you can do ... as far as demonstrations are concerned," Lucien said. The biggest type of agricultural demonstration that takes place now is reaping and threshing grain with horse drawn equipment behind the antique farm equipment exhibit, said Lucien.

But one institution that Lucien hopes to hold onto is the hand mowing competition that takes place each year at the fair. At 92 years old, Lucien still oversees the competition and normally competes, however, a broken elbow has slowed him down and this year he is looking for a replacement to pass the torch. And though there have been few takers, Lucien remains positive that his small piece of agricultural history will live on.

"Here is something that is basic to New England agriculture," said Lucien. "Why not bring it back and get some people involved?"

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