Northwest School alumni were recognized for their leadership abilities again in 1960, when two graduates and three past students were recipients of the Valley Farmer and Homemaker Awards at the Winter Shows. Graduates Lawrence O. Peterson of Lockhart, '31, and Robert W. Larson of Crookston, '30, were honored, as were past students Laurence Ward, St. Vincent; Oscar Oswald, Newfolden; and Alfred Hallstrom.

Past school faculty member Retta Bede was honored in 1961, when the home economics building was named for her. Also that year, assistant professor and animal husbandman A.M. Pilkey retired after teaching at the school for 39 years. Past superintendent and professor emeritus T.M. McCall was busy in 1961 writing "The Centennial History of Polk County."

A new building housed the Red River Valley Winter Shows in 1962. Visitors during the week of the Shows totaled 29,733, breaking all previous attendance records. That year, too, the Experiment Station's annual Crops Day featured a Land-Grant Centennial program, remembering the act of 1862 that established Land Grant colleges, including the University of Minnesota.

Nine graduates out of a class of 20 attended the class of 1913 alumni reunion in 1963. Mrs. Nils Pederson (Teckla Erlandson) of Bejou was the only female in the class, and she was present 50 years later with her husband, also a 1913 grad.

Northwest alums continued to make news. Leonard Yutrzenka of Argyle, '42, was honored as King Agassiz IV during Winter Shows in 1964. Of the 11 county King Agassiz nominees, four were Northwest School graduates.

But times were changing. At one time, 118 schools similar to the Northwest School operated in the U.S., attaining peak influence during the 1920's. By the 1960's, only a handful were still in operation.

The trend away from county agricultural schools began after the initiation of the Smith-Hughes Act, which provided federal assistance for the teaching of agricultural extension and vocational agricultural classes in regular high schools. At the Northwest School, enrollment had lessened since transportation was no longer a big problem. It was unnecessary to board at schools after the development of the automobile and the improvement of roads.

Station-School superintendent B.E. Youngquist did an in-depth study of agricultural schools during the early 1950's, and concluded that schools of this type were outmoded. His study was published as a thesis, and it triggered subsequent studies by the University of Minnesota, and several governmental and private groups.

During the early spring and summer of 1963, the University of Minnesota Bureau of Field Studies made a study of the role of the Northwest School of Agriculture. Three principal recommendations were made. It was recommended that the Northwest Experiment Station be strengthened and expanded appropriately "to meet the needs of the evolving agricultural economy." The study also recommended that continuing education in the form of adult short courses for farmers and for persons who serviced farmers be expanded. Finally, the study urged consideration of the phasing out of the Northwest School and the launching of a college-level technical institute.

University President O. Meredith Wilson appointed an ad hoc committee to recommend plans for phasing out the high school and to recommend as specifically as possible the staff and facilities needed to open a technical institute.
Committee chairman was Stanley J. Wenberg, vice president of Educational Relationships and Development. The committee included several University of Minnesota faculty members and Northwest Superintendent Youngquist.

A meeting was held with the liaison committee on higher education, a coordinating body created by the State Legislature. The planning committee for the technical institute was charged to propose a curriculum for the college that would be considered by the University Board of Regents at their June meeting. The Regents would study the proposals and make their recommendations to the 1965 legislature.

The charge wasn't taken lightly. The Technical Institute Planning Committee visited other states to study schools with programs similar to what the institute would probably offer. The committee originally concentrated on two or three possible offerings, including agricultural production technology, agri-business management and sales, and health-related technologies, with supporting courses in general education.

“The open-dorm lifestyle of today was unthought of then. Of course, the students were younger, and for many this was the first time they were away from home. They went home for Thanksgiving and for Christmas, and for the rest of the time the campus was really the only world they knew.”

High school instruction continued amid the flurry of activity surrounding the proposed college. In keeping with the more technical farming methods, a course in aeronautics was offered for senior students. Bo Magnus Nordenswan of Finland arrived as a foreign exchange student at the Northwest School.

Links to the past were present, however. Past Superintendent T. M. McCall died on March 21, 1965 at the age of 77. His funeral was held at Kiehle auditorium on campus. A. M. Foker also died that year. He had been department head of agricultural engineering and supervisor of buildings and grounds, and had been with the school from 1917 to 1954. Austin A. Dowell, Station-School superintendent from 1927 to 1937, was named to the Red River Valley Winter Shows Hall of Fame in 1965.

In March 1965, 90 students graduated. That same month, action by the Board of Regents discontinued any more freshman classes at the School, and the ninth grade class of 1964-65 was determined to be the final high school class that would graduate.

Youngquist wrote in the Northwest School News that “The decision to close out the ninth grade is consistent with recommendations made by two 1959 Legislative interim commissions and with results of constant study of the role of the University's agricultural schools.” Being phased out at the same time was the North Central School of Agriculture at Grand Rapids. Only the Southwest School of Agriculture at Waseca remained as a high school.

Although it was generally agreed that with the rapidly expanding agricultural economy a college better fit the needs of the Valley, the merits of the high school did not go unrecognized. Youngquist said, “Every major agricultural practice in the Valley was either pioneered or tested by the school. The school brought the fruits of technology to the area despite the early skepticism of Valley farmers.” He noted that the first sugar beets grown in the Valley were harvested from the school’s test plots in 1910, and the school raised the first locally grown alfalfa.

Time of change—Superintendent Youngquist (left) poses with S.D. Sahlstrom, new director of the Technical Institute.

Stanley D. Sahlstrom was appointed director of the new institute in the fall of 1965. Sahlstrom had been director of field services at St. Cloud State College, and in his new position he was given the responsibility of directing the development of curriculum at Crookston, and of administering activities that would lead to the opening of the University of Minnesota Technical Institute in the fall of 1966.

Most important, Sahlstrom had the enthusiasm and energy necessary for forming a technical-collegiate school from the ground up. He and those working with him had the task of telling people what kind of education this new school would offer. He was busy recruiting faculty members to teach at the new school, and he was involved in working on the curriculum to be offered at the two-year college.

Initial courses would be offered in agricultural technology, agricultural operations, agri-business, accounting, marketing and merchandising, and small business management, plus an advanced secretarial program. Added to that would be a strong core of general education courses.

The technical-collegiate concept of education in Minnesota was a fledgling, with few guidelines to follow. By the time Northwest students arrived that fall, the transition from high school to college had begun. The many hopes of what the college would eventually become were being implemented. Target-date for the beginning of classes was one year away, and much had to be accomplished during that year to make people, and prospective students, aware that a college was beginning in northwest Minnesota.
Historic moment—the Torch of Education is passed from Northwest School representative David Bohnsack to Ron Tobkin, Technical Institute student.

Sahlstrom was the speaker at the 58th commencement of Northwest School graduates in March 1966. He addressed the 72 graduating seniors, speaking on “Tomorrow is Yours.”

Two years later, on March 22, 1968, the last class of the Northwest School of Agriculture graduated. The 60th and final commencement exercises were held in Kiehle auditorium, and 42 seniors received diplomas.

The Northwest School graduated 5,433 students during its 63-year-old history. In addition, between 500 to 600 completed the teachers' training course offered at the School between 1912 and 1919.

Superintendent B.E. Youngquist awarded the final diplomas. He commented “While closing this school is saddening, it’s necessary. Its closing is logical because the technical college concept makes it as old fashioned as the butter churn.” Regent Herman F. Skyberg suggested the final commencement of the Northwest School was further evidence of the evolution of education in Minnesota.

Before a packed auditorium audience, a moving ceremony took place on that March day. David Bohnsack of Hillsboro, N.D., president of the Northwest class of '68, transferred the lighted Torch of Educational Service to Ron Tobkin of Perham, Student Senate treasurer for the Institute. The ceremony marked the passing of the educational duties to the new institution.

A long and proud history had come to an end. A new one was beginning.