
Crookston residents didn't appreciate the song, "How High's the Water, Mama?" in 1950, and the flooding was no joke. In the April-May edition of the Northwest School News, it was stated, "The Red River Valley area has been visited by the most disastrous floods in more than 50 years. The damage from the floods of the Red River of the North and its tributaries will run into stupendous figures, the total amount of which cannot be determined for some time." Farm land had from three to ten feet of water standing, and there was no possible way it could all be drained in time for full-season crops.

During the flood of 1950, "We took a boat up to where we were met to be taken to campus. Then on campus, we took a boat to the Kiehle building to work."

Dormitory facilities on the campus offered temporary facilities for area evacuees, and 63 persons were housed in Stephens Hall. "The greatest damage to the farm land came from the duration of the flood (four to seven weeks), which delayed, and in many instances, prevented the seeding of crops," it was stated in the paper. Even land that wasn't flooded by overflow waters was kept wet because of frequent rains. Seeding in the heavy soil areas of the upper Red River Valley ran from three to five weeks behind schedule.

The 1950 floods did not occur entirely because of the precipitation which fell during the winter of 1949-50 and the spring of 1950. Since 1939, lakes, marshes and natural reservoirs had been filling and were filled to overflowing in 1949. The School News called for "coordinated action" between agencies working for water conservation and drainage. In 1949, the Northwest School and Station began a study of water run-off. Much more study and information was needed, the School News writers stated.

Agriculture and the Northwest School and Station were always in close contact. The School held a welding clinic and more than 275 attended. A Soil Improvement Forum brought more than 375 farmers, and 1,000 attended the Crops and Soils Day. A Women's Camp was held on campus annually for years. In 1950, 111 women attended from 11 counties in northwestern Minnesota, and from two counties in North Dakota. Topics of general interest to farm women were discussed at the camp, which was held from June 12 to June 15.

C.G. Selvig, who was superintendent from 1910 to 1927, wrote a history of the Northwest School and Station. The book was titled "A Tale of Two Valleys" and dealt with his life in the Root River Valley in southern Minnesota and in the Red River Valley. The artwork was done by Harold Grandy, a 1915 graduate who became a commercial artist in Detroit. Thorval Tunheim, class of 1916, was a former newspaper editor and he was employed to do the editing for the book. The book was well-received by area residents, and was for sale during various campus events. That same year Selvig, whose first wife had died some years earlier, married Mabel Sewall, who had taught at the School from 1912 through 1917.

Members of the school's crops judging team, with coach Olaf Soine (top right), 1955.
The school yearbook, The Aggie, received a first class honor rating from the National Scholastic Press Association in 1950. Editors were John Johnson of Pelican Rapids and Janet Schaefer of Angus. Another student from Angus, Roger Kasprick, won the extemporaneous speaking contest in early 1951 and received a gold medal.

C.G. Selvig and Adolph Skyberg at the dedication of Selvig Hall, 1951.

On June 30, 1951 the 45th anniversary of the Northwest School was observed. On that day, Selvig Hall was officially dedicated by University Regent Herman F. Skyberg, graduate of the class of 1916.

O.M. Kiser retired in 1952. An instructor in animal husbandry, he received an award for serving 25 years or more. That same year, 170 women attended Women’s Camp, and Mrs. Ella Anderson of Crookston received the “Silver Bowl” award for outstanding attendance. She had attended 25 of the 27 Women’s Camps held.

An even 100 students graduated from the regular four-year course in March of 1953. Robert Hausmann of Hillsboro was valedictorian and his brother Darrel was salutatorian. That summer, over 300 students were enrolled for home project work. The student who enrolled as a freshman at the School was required to complete three summers of home project work before graduation.

Again, farmers were well-represented throughout the summer. More than 4,000 attended “Hay Field Day.”

Students at the Northwest School had several areas of involvement from which to choose. A school newspaper, the Rouser, was published six times each quarter, and the annual, The Aggie, was published by students each year. There were judging teams, chorus and band, a class play, homecoming activities and sports. Football, basketball, cross country, swimming and wrestling were offered for the boys.

The 1955 yearbook was dedicated to Mrs. Alice Baker and to Mr. and Mrs. Henry Lysaker, who served as preceptors at the Stephens Hall dormitory. “We enjoy the boys in spite of their many tricks and pranks,” said the Lysakers. In that same yearbook, a headline announced, “We learn to live while acquiring knowledge—and skill.” The senior section began with, “As seniors we have learned to live; the world lies before us.”

Those statements summed up the philosophy of the Northwest School. Over the years, that philosophy had been proven, for many graduates moved forward in worthwhile careers and in personal achievement.

The 47th annual commencement at the Northwest School of Agriculture was held March 25, 1955, with 105 students receiving diplomas. Wendell Kelm of Neche, N.D. was valedictorian and Paul Tollefson of Crookston was salutatorian.

In September, the 50th school year opened, with about 400 students enrolled. A new staff member that fall was William Menzhuber, who was employed as an instructor in agricultural engineering. Menzhuber, now director of UMC’s plant services, was hired in 1955 as the “fourth man in the department” to teach carpentry, farm shop and mechanical drawing.

Janice Michaelson of Euclid was crowned Homecoming queen that fall, and the football team’s record was six wins and one loss.

At the January 1956 meeting of the University Board of Regents, B.E. Youngquist was appointed superintendent to succeed T. M. McCall, who would retire in June after 45 years with the Northwest School. Youngquist had been principal of the Southern School of Agriculture in Waseca and was a 1939 graduate of the University of Minnesota. The retiring superintendent presented diplomas to 102 graduates in March, and in June at the alumni reunion and commemoration of the founding of the Northwest School of Agriculture 50 years before, McCall was the special guest of honor. The Northwest School Alumni Association presented an organ to the school, dedicated to McCall and his wife.

“McCall’s name has literally become synonymous with agricultural progress in the Valley, and rightly so, because he has carved a special niche as a leader, advisor, and teacher since 1911. His 45 years of service to the area is a record of which we are all justly proud.”

McCall, born in 1887 in Iowa, was graduated from Iowa State College in 1910 and joined the Northwest staff in 1911. With the exception of one year when he left Crookston to earn his master’s degree at Iowa State College, McCall had been continuously associated with the school. He was appointed superintendent in 1937.
Always in close conjunction with the School were the Red River Valley Winter Shows functions. The 47th annual Winter Shows took place in 1957. The theme for one day during the meetings was "Use of Airplanes in Agriculture."

Another long-time faculty member, Retta Bede, retired in July of 1957, after 32 years of teaching home economics at the School. That same year, Mrs. Alice "Ma" Baker retired as counselor in Stephens Hall, where she had been employed for 12 years. "These boys came away better equipped for life after living in 'Ma' Baker's dormitory," Northwest writers declared. Retta Bede was honored during the alumni reunion in June.

Ebenhard S. Gandrud, president of the E.S. Gandrud Company, manufacturers of farm equipment in Owatonna, was honored by the University of Minnesota in 1957. A graduate of the Northwest School in 1926, "Gandy" became the operator of a farm equipment company titled, appropriately, the Gandy Company. Gandrud still owns the Gandy Company, and his equipment is distributed worldwide. He now has 65 patents and is well-known for such inventions as the Gandy granular chemical applicator.

The old Robertson Hall building was renovated in 1958, with the interior almost completely rebuilt. A new classroom building, now known as the Hill Building, was in the process of being constructed in 1958 and 1959.

In 1959, there were 89 graduates at the March commencement, and that summer, during the alumni reunion, the women's dormitory was renamed McCall Hall in honor of the retired superintendent. The new Hill classroom building was dedicated that fall at Parents' Day ceremonies.

As the 60's dawned, many changes were occurring at the Northwest School of Agriculture. Class size was leveling off and transportation had become easier. A new decade offered promises of the Space Age, Camelot, and exciting innovations. In December of 1959, Louis J. Quijada of Venezuela came to study at the School under a foreign exchange program. This was a first for the School, and it pointed the way to what was to come—a greater realization of the world beyond the Red River Valley.