made my first trip to the Red River Valley in mid-July, 1910. On July 11 a telegram was received from Dean Albert F. Woods stating my appointment as superintendent of the Crookston School of Agriculture (as it was then called) and Northwest Experiment Station had been approved by President Cyrus Northrop of the University of Minnesota and the Board of Regents. Dean Woods suggested I go to Crookston at an early date and informed me Regent A. E. Rice, Willmar, chairman of the Regents’ Agricultural Committee, had agreed to make his annual visit to the School and Station at the same time.

Dean Woods gave me a letter of introduction to former State Senator, Andrew D. Stephens, stating I had decided to accept the superintendency and that, “Mr. Selvig is a man who can secure the hearty cooperation of all our workers here in the various departments. He is an excellent organizer and administrator and is in sympathy with the development of this school.”

I met former Lieutenant-Governor A. E. Rice for the first time on this visit to Crookston. He was deeply interested in the Agricultural College and the Schools of Agriculture. He gave me much good advice and continued to be my trusted friend as long as he lived. I have at times felt he has not been given full credit for his valuable services to Minnesota. He never put himself forward but remained in the background with unswerving loyalty to the University and particularly to its Department of Agriculture. He died in 1921 after a long service as a member of the University’s Board of Regents.

There had been various attempts to separate the Agricultural College from the University but President Northrop successfully resisted these moves. In this he was abundantly justified as was definitely proved by the events of the next few years.

From Crookston I went to visit the Grand Rapids Station where Arthur J. McGuire was superintendent. We became fast friends. He was a leader in the organization of cooperative creameries and of the now famous Minnesota Land-o-Lakes central organization of cooperative creameries. He was a graduate of the Central School of Agriculture, St. Paul, and of the Minnesota College of Agriculture. He wielded great influence in the state and the northwest.

I found myself confronted with new responsibilities. There were moments of doubt as to whether I could successfully meet them. Yet here I was. I could only do my best. Faint heart never won anything. I would go to work and grapple with the problems. I hoped Lady Luck would attend me.

2.

In physical characteristics the Red River Valley, 250 miles long and about 100 miles wide on the Minnesota side of the Red River of the North, south of the Canadian border, in many respects is unique. Only in a few areas of the world has nature been so prodigal with her gifts.

There is no space for a scientific treatise as to how the valley was formed. Much has already been written about it. Suffice it to say it was made by one of nature’s
great plows—a glacier—which slid down from the north. The glacier—"Nature's chilled plow"—as The Country Gentleman's associate editor, John E. Pickett*, termed it, began melting and as the ice retreated northward the land behind it filled with water and became the glacial Lake Agassiz. The old lake bed is now the Red River Valley. The old shorelines which mark the successive borders of the lake can easily be recognized when crossed.

Those who know me will readily agree Selvig has practiced restraint at this point by writing so little about the valley's soil, its richness, its productivity and so on. The fact is that during my seventeen years at the school and station it came about one could always count on a few words about this wonderful valley from Selvig on any and all occasions.

This reminds me of an incident which happened when my son, George, was about twelve years old. I had been scheduled to speak over radio station WCCO, Minneapolis, on "The Red River Valley." We had no radio in our home at that time so George ever anxious to tryout a new thing, trudged down to the home of Professor and Mrs. Arnold M. Foker, on faculty row at the school to hear the speech. At 7:30 o'clock, sharp, he pulled the ear-phones over his head and listened. Then he said, "It's pop, all right, and it's the same old stuff."

3.

It was in 1892 that the idea of having an experiment station and subsequently an agricultural school in the Red River Valley came to that brilliant and indefatigable leader in agriculture, Professor Willett M. Hays, who was the father of the Crookston Station.** His first public mention of the plan for regional agricultural high schools was made in New Orleans, in 1893, before the American Association of Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations. Later, as Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, he was a strong advocate of the regional agricultural high school project which Alabama had adopted in 1888.

This led to establishment of such institutions in a number of states, notably, during the early years, in Alabama, Georgia and Oklahoma. The Minnesota School of Agriculture, at St. Anthony Park, St. Paul, was opened in 1888. The school at Crookston opened in 1906 was the first in Minnesota located away from the Agricultural College.

It was while Mr. Hays was a student at Drake University, 1882-83, he became convinced that education should be made more practical, or as we later came to say, "in closer coordination with the vocational life the person is to lead." He changed to Iowa State College, Ames, in 1883-84 and entered the agricultural course. There, under the leadership of Dr. S. A. Knapp (later president of Iowa State College, and during 1905-11, the definitive leader in founding the county farm bureau plan), Prof. J. L. Budd, Dr. C. E. Bessy, and, later James Wilson (who became U.S. Secretary of Agriculture) a group gained ascendancy which resulted in that Iowa State College became one of the leading strongholds of education of "farm youth for the farms" as well as for professional agriculture.

*John E. Pickett, in the Country Gentleman, on The Red River Valley, April 10, 24 and May 1, 1920. See article in the appendix.

**From letter author received from Professor Willett M. Hays, Eldora, Iowa, dated April 28, 1926. At the same time he sent me his notes dealing with his activities in connection with the Northwest Station. I have the letter and notes in my library.
Professor Hays came to the University of Minnesota, March 1, 1888, as assistant in agriculture under Dr. Edward D. Porter, then Professor of Agriculture and Director of the Experiment Station. The Department of Agriculture of the University of Minnesota, had a single student in agriculture. The School of Agriculture was in its period of incubation. Dr. Porter was one of the great pioneers, according to Professor Hays.

Out of discussions during this period a temporary experiment station was started at Lynd, Minnesota, in cooperation with Rev. O. C. Gregg, Superintendent of Farmers' Institutes, and to the establishment of branch experiment farms in northwestern and in northeastern Minnesota.

While Hays was Professor of Agriculture and Agriculturist of the experiment station of North Dakota Agricultural College, Fargo, in 1892 and 1893, he traveled widely on both sides of the Red River Valley. He also visited the branch station at Brandon, Manitoba, accompanied by Dr. William Saunders of Ottawa. He became greatly impressed by the idea of “spreading the University” to parts of the state then securing but little benefit from its resources and courses in education. The plan of having regional agricultural high schools to be established at the branch experiment stations went further than the Dominion “experimental farms,” Mr. Hays states.

As a condition of Mr. Hays' returning to Minnesota in 1893 he received a general consent from the Agricultural Committee (a very powerful group) of the Board of Regents to make a survey of the state with a view to beginning the development of regional stations and schools.

In 1894 he traveled extensively in an effort to secure legislative authority under which the University would establish such regional institutions. On one of his trips he met by appointment with James J. Hill, president of the Great Northern Railway at his office in St. Paul. Mr. Hill had on his desk the company’s land book in which was recorded the description, and a map, of the section of land owned by the G.N. Railway adjoining the city of Crookston.

Mr. Hill said he would give ¾ of this section to the state for the purpose of an institution such as Mr. Hays proposed. Mr. Hays stated he was in no position to consider gifts of land as the Board of Regents had not even formally considered this project. Mr. Hill placed his hand on Mr. Hays' shoulder and said, “Young man, you go ahead."

The Legislature in 1895 created two branch experiment stations in Minnesota. Mr. Hill helped, also, to secure legislation establishing courses for farm girls at the Central School, St. Anthony Park. He helped stop a movement to dismiss Mr. Hays for having helped secure the enactment of that measure, in spite of opposition within the Board of Regents. Co-education began from the first in both the Crookston and Morris Schools of Agriculture, subsequently established.

Mr. Hays accompanied the University Regents' Committee on Agriculture, consisting of Col. Wm. M. Liggett, Hon. S. M. Owen and Ex-Lieutenant-Governor A. Barto, to Crookston to inspect the farm offered by James J. Hill. The committee's favorable report was ratified, title to the property was acquired by gift from Mr. Hill which was formally accepted by the Board of Regents on October 4, 1896, 3 months and 4 days after the law establishing the Northwest Station went into effect.
Before the law could go into effect it had to be passed, of course. This proved to be no easy task. Polk County's Senator at that time was Peter M. Ringdal, Crookston, who later became a member of the Minnesota Board of Control. He, too, had a vision as to the benefits that would accrue to the farmers of the Red River Valley by the establishment of the Northwest Station. Naturally, he wanted it near Crookston. When Mr. Ringdal, in 1924, learned I had made some inquiries as to the legislative history of the bill establishing stations in northeastern and northwestern Minnesota during the session of 1895, he wrote me a letter* from his home in Santa Cruz, California.

I had attempted several times during my residence at Crookston to secure the facts regarding the establishment of the Northwest Station. Mr. Ringdal was a very able and conscientious legislator and his letter tells for the first time the complete story of this legislative proposal. It begins by referring to an interview published in the Crookston Times after his election as state senator in November, 1894. Senator-elect Ringdal stated he would introduce a bill for the establishment of an Experiment Station to be located near Crookston. He did this soon after the senate convened.

M. E. Craig, representing the 38th legislative district in the House of Representatives introduced a bill to establish an experiment station in the northeastern part of the state.

Senator Ringdal had a conference with Prof. Hays a few days later. As a result of this conference the Ringdal bill and the Craig bill were dropped and in their stead two identical bills were introduced which included both stations in both bills. There were no definite locations named and this touchy detail was left to be decided by the University's Board of Regents. Prof. Hays and two or three members of the Board stated they would favor location of one of the stations at Crookston. The plan adopted united the friends of the two bills.

Mr. Craig was a member of the majority party and all, therefore, put their main efforts behind the House bill, using the Ringdal bill "as a road-breaker through the mazes of the Senate" as Ringdal described it, "in order to clear the way for the House measure when it should come over from the House." The plan worked out according to calculations, but only after a long and arduous campaign. When the House bill late in the session made its appearance in the Senate, Senator Ringdal moved its substitution for his own (the Senate) bill and the motion prevailed. The bill became a law.

Senator Ringdal specifically names Prof. Hays, Prof. Hoverstad, N. P. Clark, Col. Liggett, S. M. Owen and Lieutenant Governor Barto as deserving a great deal of credit in securing the bill's enactment. He also commented on choice of the site and agreed the decision, though criticized at the time, was a wise one. He mentions a proposal to establish simultaneously an agricultural school in connection with the station, but decided if too much was asked, at one time, the whole plan would be defeated.

It was generally believed that the experiment farm, once established and successfully conducted for a few years, the school would follow as a natural sequence. Subsequent events proved the correctness of this view.

*Former State Senator Peter M. Ringdal, October 15, 1924 to the author.
The first superintendent of the newly created Northwest Experiment Farm was Torger A. Hoverstad. His was the task of converting a veritable swamp, north of Crookston, that raised nothing much besides ducks, into an institution that was to benefit Minnesota farming immeasurably. The idea was conceived in the astute mind of Prof. Willett M. Hays and carried out by the vigorous and successful legislative service of Senator Ringdal.

Superintendent Hoverstad made his first visit to the Red River Valley during the winter of 1890-91. Minnesota’s Governor, William R. Merriam, had sent a communication to Professor C. D. Smith, director of the State Experiment Station, St. Paul, asking him to do something to eradicate smut from the wheat fields of the Red River Valley. Professor Smith asked Mr. Hoverstad to accompany him to a public meeting to be held at McIntosh, east of Crookston. Mr. Hoverstad, in reporting on this meeting in 1923, gave the following version of that conference.

“Prof. Smith asked me to accompany him, not that I knew anything about smut, but because I knew something about Norwegian. In order to save time, he suggested we both speak from the same platform at the same time; that I talk in Norwegian and he would talk in English. We did, with the result that the one who spoke in Norwegian got the entire audience. I may not have killed any smut on that occasion, but I did kill a speech prepared in the language of the country. I did this in all innocence.”

He began his work at Crookston on July 1, 1895 which date marks the birth of the Northwest Experiment Station. The state appropriated $15,000.00 for the first two years. This fund was supplemented by donations of $1000.00 each from the citizens of Crookston and from Polk County. During the first year a barn, a dwelling house, a farm shop and a pasture fence were erected. 175 acres of land were broken and backset the first year.

An interesting sidelight on the first season’s operations comes from a letter sent me by Professor Andrew Boss of the Minnesota Experiment Station.

“In the early spring of 1895 Professor W. M. Hays, who had assisted in the establishment of the station, and who was charged with responsibility in investigational work, collected together at University Farm, four horses, one or two cows, and possibly other livestock, also implements, machinery and seed for the new station. These were all loaded in an immigrant car and shipped under the care of James Boss, brother of the writer, who had, that winter, been a student at the School of Agriculture.”

“The carload, with Mr. Boss in charge, arrived at Crookston in due season, the implements unloaded, the horses hitched to one of the wagons, and as much material as possible hauled out to the farm. An old barn was on the place when donated, with room for the livestock, and a loft for hay above. James arrived at the farm in the evening, stabled his horses, and retired to the loft for a night’s rest.”

“During the night a heavy rain fell, and the next morning upon looking out of the loft door, James could see only one or two spots of the so-called Crookston Farm above water. He said it looked like a discouraging proposition for farming, and a very much better one for ducks. Later in the season, however, the land dried sufficiently to put in crops.”

What James Boss discovered that morning when looking out of the barn-loft door was an old story to the citizens of Crookston. “Why that was my favorite duck pond,” Tom Morris of Crookston often said. “We would hunt ducks a few miles
northeast of the farm, and return home through the farm and there were almost certain to bag a few ducks."

8.

The area did provide for a good experimental drainage project which was not, however, established until 1908, 13 years after the station's birth. Superintendent Hoverstad's own published reports present vividly his trials and tribulations during the first ten years of that doleful period. Always, there were messages of hope and idealism backed by a firm faith in ultimate success. We talked about his service as superintendent many, many times. I informed him his patience must have made him kin to the angels.

The farmers grew dissatisfied but Hoverstad's patience supported by his faith in the Red River Valley was sublime. This outlying unit of the University, however, appeared for years to be an unwanted waif. It was the state's "white elephant," a member of the Board of Regents termed it when we discussed the new position I assumed on August 1, 1910.

A meeting called to consider farm drainage in the Red River Valley was held at Breckenridge in 1895. At this meeting Mr. Valentine, of that city, made a remarkable address which created much discussion and led to action. Very soon the U.S. Bureau of Soils undertook to make a topographical survey of the Crookston area.

Mr. Hoverstad had been a member of the State Farmers' Institute corps. He continued this work during his superintendency at Crookston. Many experimental projects were established at the station and in years of normal rainfall valuable information was secured. He was both missionary and apostle. He preached dairying and poultry, and talked of crops, even if it was impossible to raise crops at the station, or even drive there, during the frequent wet seasons. Diversified farming was his main theme.

"Poultry Culture in Minnesota" by Charles S. Greene, was the first bulletin published by the Northwestern Experimental Farm. Annual reports were included in the report of the Minnesota Experiment Station, St. Paul. Trees for a windbreak were planted and fruits, vegetables, root crops, grasses and clovers were successfully grown.

9.

An important organization was formed in 1903 in the area where Colonel R. A. Wilkinson once said when he came to the Red River Valley there was only one cow between Crookston and Grand Forks, North Dakota, and that single specimen was tied on the windward side of a barbed wire fence out on the prairie. This organization was named the Red River Valley Dairymen's Association.

At a later meeting of this organization Superintendent Hoverstad told the story of that meeting. His statement follows:

"The organization of the Red River Valley Dairymen's Association was a very brief and simple affair. We held a Farmers' Institute in the Bjoin's Opera House in Crookston. When the morning session adjourned I announced that all who were interested in the organization of a Dairymen's Association should meet in the Opera House at one o'clock. There were only three persons that reported. We thought that we did not need a constitution or by-laws. All we needed would be a name and officers. Levi Steenerson, Climax, suggested that the name be 'Red River Valley Dairymen's Association.' This was adopted."

"The officers elected were T. A. Hoverstad, President, Levi Steenerson of Climax, Secretary. I do not remember that any record of the meeting was made. The following
year we called the first meeting of the Association. A program was prepared. The attendance and interest were all that could be expected. ‘Dad’ Cort, in his usual effective way, undertook to write-up memberships and collect membership fees. The later history of the association is a matter of record. It has grown in strength and influence beyond the dreams of its founders. It has become an agency for good because the members as well as officers have worked faithfully to put the dairy and creamery industry on a high plane.”

10.

During Superintendent William Robertson’s administration (1905-1910) the main drainage ditch leading to the Red Lake River in a course running northwesterly from the Station was completed; the Station land was drained; an experimental installation of tile drainage was included for several fields; crop tests were begun and varietal tests of alfalfa from five different seed sources was started.

Reference has already been made to the proposal suggested to Senator Ringdal that he include both School and Station in his bill offered in 1895. He wisely decided to confine his efforts to the establishment of the Station only. On January 10, 1904, the Polk County Farmers’ Exchange, of which Elias Steenerson was president, held a meeting to discuss the establishment of a branch school of agriculture at the Northwest Station. Mr. Steenerson, some years ago, furnished me with a copy of the minutes of that meeting, which indicates the members of that group went to work in earnest.

At the January 1904 meeting, the Exchange members were informed James J. Hill, president of the Great Northern Railway, had been requested to provide free transportation for a delegation to visit the State Agricultural College at St. Paul. Mr. Hill agreed. Mr. Steenerson, president of the Exchange, urged that a large delegation take advantage of the trip. He urged the members to strike for securing a branch School of Agriculture at the Northwest Station.

At a meeting held on February 13, 1904, the committee appointed at the January meeting made its report. Mr. Steenerson acted as spokesman for it and said, as reported in the minutes “that the officials at the Agricultural College did not appear to be interested in the proposal to establish the Crookston School of Agriculture; that they seemed mainly interested in the affairs under their own charge at the College, but that they could give no good reason why the School should not be established at the Northwest Station.”

Superintendent Hoverstad then spoke in favor of the proposal to establish a branch school at Crookston. He gave most liberal encouragement and predicted success if the proposal received the proper support from this area.

On March, 1909, the members of the Exchange met in the same hall where five years earlier they had met to organize support for the School. They then decided to visit the school that afternoon to celebrate the successful outcome. All present voted to do so.

11.

Agitation, largely led by Prof. Hays had continued since the establishment at Crookston of the Northwest Experiment Farm in 1895, to urge the establishment of a School there. Professor William Robertson, a member of the faculty at the Central School, St. Paul, had faith in the possibilities of such a so-called “regional” school. He worked in and out of season for it.

Here statecraft enters. The members of the Legislature from the Red River Valley were naturally interested in the project as has been noted. When A. D. Stephens was elected State Senator the campaign began in full force. He was chairman
of the powerful Senate Committee on Finance which was a position of great importance to this project. His interest went deeper than merely to use this position as a motivating influence.

I have spent many pleasant hours with Mr. Stephens. He was deeply interested in education, in young people on farms and had a vision of things to be, in his views as to the services an agricultural school could provide.

On one occasion at a meeting he asked me, "How many are there on your school faculty?" I informed him. "Now, how many students are enrolled at the school?" I informed him of the number. "Now let's add those two figures together (he was good at figuring for he was a bank president)." I do not recall the exact number but it was nearly 200. "You have 200 in your faculty. The teachers teach at the school and at meetings. The students teach every day on their return home at their farms and in their homes." He was right.

The Legislature voted $15,000.00 for a building in 1905. When this had been voted, I am informed Lieutenant Governor A. E. Rice, later University Regent, informed one of the senators, "You would save the state hundreds of thousands of dollars, if you would give 'Andy' Stephens the $15,000.00, just voted for the Crookston farm school, and then send him back to Sweden." Andy Stephens chuckled often when told this story. It, too, would have been true.

The so-called "School Building" the first school building provided, had three floors. The first floor was devoted to the school's dining hall, cooks' quarters and the heating plant; second, the school's assembly room (used also as a class room), a second class room, an office for the superintendent and secretary and a library room; third, nine dormitory rooms and a bathroom. Eat on first, teach on second, and sleep on the third floor. The girls' dormitory was located at the farm house. Thus the Crookston School of Agriculture made its debut in the fall of 1906. Thirty-one students were enrolled that year.

Crookston citizens provided $2,500.00 as a loan to the school for maintenance during the first school year, 1906-07. Some of the instructors were members of the Station staff with payment of salaries from station funds.

The school considering everything made good progress during its first year. Mrs. Robertson was of great help. The undaunted faith and the tireless energy of Superintendent Robertson and his wife made an impression on the students, on Crookston citizens and elsewhere. Soon local committees were formed to acquaint the people of the Valley with the facilities provided for farm youth at the school.

Every student I have met of those who attended the first four years before my arrival in 1910, recall the days spent at the school with genuine pleasure. "We were a happy family and had many, many pleasant hours together," they all said.

The second year 41 students enrolled. The Legislature voted funds for maintenance, for a boys' dormitory (later named Stephens Hall), a science building (later named Owen Hall) and for miscellaneous Station structures. The completion of the Station drainage project facilitated operations and led to inauguration of experimental projects. Alfalfa trials were begun in 1908.

Superintendent Robertson died suddenly in January, 1910, while on a train to St. Paul where he had been called to confer regarding the needs of the institution. During the four years he was the administrative head the School which had been established. He had fought a good fight and left a rich heritage in the work he, his wife and the staff had done so well.