Historical Sketch of the Northeastern Branch of the American Society of Agronomy 1930-1958

T. E. Odland

One of the most important functions of a national professional organization such as the American Society of Agronomy is the sponsoring of active regional or local subdivisions. These subdivisions can give more detailed consideration to local problems than can the national organization. It is also more feasible for members to get together in the smaller groups. Active and vigorous subsections make for a stronger national organization.

Often a weak point of the small organization is that the records of their proceedings are not kept as carefully as might have been desirable. After a number of years it becomes difficult to find records showing place and date of meetings, type of programs, names of officers, and other items desirable for future reference and guidance.

The purpose of this paper is to present for ready reference a brief summary of operations of one of the most active and successful subdivisions of the American Society of Agronomy. It has been functioning effectively for more than 40 years and is still growing.

Unfortunately there are gaps in our records, necessitating some omissions in this sketch. It is hoped that there will not be too many of these and that the essential facts will be recorded completely enough for most reference purposes.

The Northeastern Branch of the American Society of Agronomy was formed as an outgrowth of the New England Section of the Society. The New England Section was organized December 11, 1915. Because of increased membership in adjoining states the Northeastern Section was formed on November 29, 1930. At a subsequent meeting of the section the name was changed to Branch for the sake of uniform terminology.

In 1933, George E. Simmons, then agronomist at the University of Maine, prepared a mimeographed report on the origin and history of the Section and Branch from 1915 to 1933. This report gives a very complete history of the New England Section including dates, places, officers and programs. It has been very helpful in getting the present material assembled. Dr. Simmons had been one of the organizers of the New England section so he was very familiar with its early history.

The meeting in December 1915 resulted from a call sent out to the agronomists in New England by W. L. Slate, Jr., of the Connecticut Agricultural College, suggesting that a section of the Society be organized. This proposition had been discussed informally a number of times at meetings by Agronomy teachers in the area. The meeting was held at the Parker House, Boston, and the section was formally established by the Northeastern Experiment Station directors who had been contacted by W. L. Slate regarding a possible regional organization.

The first 10 meetings were held at the Parker House. From 1925 to 1930 meetings were held at Boston, Springfield, and New York. Prof. F. W. Taylor served as president from 1915 to 1920; Prof. Earl Jones from 1921 to 1925; Dr. A. B. Hartwell from 1926 to 1928, and Dr. Henry Dorsey, 1929 to 1930. Prof. Simmons was the secretary-treasurer from 1915 to 1920; Prof. A. B. Hartwell 1921 to 1925; F. S. Prince, 1926 to 1930; and Mrs. E. Cubbon 1929 and 1930. Dr. Cubbon continued as secretary-treasurer for the new Northeastern section after 1930.

The records of the meetings of the New England Section show that this was a very lively organization. The meetings usually were of one or two days duration. Papers were presented on current crop and soils research, teaching and extension methods. Among those frequently in the records of the programs were: Slate, Connecticut; Haskell and Beaumont, Massachusetts; Adams Prince, New Hampshire; and Hartwell, Rhode Island; Prince, New Hampshire; and Simmons, Maine.

The annual meetings were held without interruption for 16 years. Also summer meetings were held at the New England experiment stations.

One of the major accomplishments of the New England Section was the adoption of the "New England Standard" fertilizer grades in 1922 in cooperation with the experiment stations in adjoining states. This served to reduce the chaotic number of fertilizer grades and ratios being offered in the area. This was a big step of much benefit both to the user and manufacturer of fertilizers. The concentration on fewer grades reduced fertilizer costs and simplified usage. This endeavor was continued by the New England agronomists.

Other areas where co-operation was attained were teaching methods, extension procedures, crop variety recommendations and research methods. These endeavors have been continued in the larger expanded Northeastern Branch of the Society. Many of the ideas originated by this section have been adopted by the National Society.

At the 1929 meeting the question of expansion came up for consideration. A number of agronomists in adjoining states had made informal inquiries about the possibility of joining the Section. Inquiries were made of their state experiment stations and it was decided to extend the jurisdiction of the meeting to include all the states east of the Missisippian Divide. Prof. F. W. Taylor, launched the Section which became a very fruitful career. There were papers on many crops, including soybeans, corn, and forage crops.

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