

File News Letter P.1

AMERICAN FARM SCHOOL • THESSALONICA, GREECE

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News-Letter

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HOW THE AMERICAN FARM SCHOOL CAME INTO BEING

Two anniversaries this autumn have led us to recall the beginnings of the American Farm School.

EIGHTY YEARS AGO, on Oct. 5, 1872, Rev. John Henry House, of Painesville, Ohio, and his bride, Adeline S. Beers of Brooklyn, set sail for their life work as missionaries in the Balkans.

FIFTY YEARS AGO, on Thanksgiving Day in 1902, title passed to the first plot of land for the American Farm School.

The idea of the School had been germinating in Dr. House's mind during the 30 years between those dates. "The seed was sown in my mind," he wrote, "by my father-in-law, Henry Newell Beers. Mrs. House and I were about to sail ... when he remarked, 'If I were to start out on a mission ... I should take with me some good artisans and tools.'"

It was in Samarkov, Bulgaria, that Dr. House first noticed that farmers' sons were not willing to work with their hands after they had had an education in the "gymnasias," and it was in the Samarkov School that he introduced a few carpenter's benches which he later called "the first step towards my ideal of a school which was to be realized some years afterwards in Macedonia." The funds for this work were appropriately donated as a memorial to Mr. Beers; perhaps they provided the first instance of what is now called "technical aid." Certainly carpenter's benches were unheard of in mission schools at that time.

The Houses moved to Salonica in 1894. Wars and insurrections were commonplace, and for years they "lived in a reign of terror." During this time Miss Ellen M. Stone was sent out by the Woman's Mission Board to work among the Macedonian women. When traveling thru mountainous

country, she and her companion were captured by brigands and held for ransom. For six months Dr. House and others negotiated for their release, while back in America \$65,000 were collected thru the churches. Early in 1902 Dr. House spent 9 weeks in the mountains, met the bandits 3 times in secrecy, finally managed to turn over the money (in Turkish gold coins weighing 230 pounds) - and the ladies were freed.

Work in the villages was impossible under such conditions. Dr. House and an associate, Dr. Edward B. Haskell, began to think that if they couldn't go to the villages, the village boys ought to come to them. The time had come to start the American Farm School.

Three miles south of the city they found "a desert-like piece of land of 52 or 53 acres, bare of trees or buildings and so poor that the owners thought it was not fit for successful cultivation," and Mother House imagined she saw "lurking bands of foes in every fold of the earth." But Dr. House was sure that it was suitable. Here he would establish his school, "to train the whole man, the mind and hand, as well as the soul."

There was no money; that must come from America. Dr. Haskell sent a letter to Rev. Irving W. Metcalf of Oberlin, a letter which began, "I want to talk with you about an investment in the interest of the Lord's Kingdom," which described their plan as "a Hampton Institute over here" and asked, "Is it a wrong ambition brother, to wish to establish an institution which will serve as a model in all the Levant, and possibly in all the Missions of our Denomination?"

They asked for a loan of \$1000, outlined a plan of repayment, suggested he consult Miss Stone, and cable a reply.

After the letter was sent they began to have misgivings. Were they forcing their own desires, or was this the Will of Providence? Dr. House, strong in his faith, said, "We will leave the decision to our Heavenly Father, who can see the end from the beginning;" and they prayed that if it was God's Will, the cable might say "yes," but if it was not His Will, they prayed it might say "no."

Mr. Metcalf did not have the money, nor did he know where he could borrow it; but on the morning he was going to cable "no" a man came to his office and paid a debt he had had no hope of collecting.

Quotations are from "A Life for the Balkans," the story of Dr. House's life, published by Fleming H. Revell Company (N.Y. and London) in 1939, from The Missionary Herald of June, 1929, and from letters on file in the N.Y. office.

The School in the summer of 1952 as seen by Ralph L. Thomas of Baltimore, Md., a Princeton classmate of Charles L. House, son of Dr. House and present Director:

"The School takes boys from the villages of Greece, which is predominantly agricultural, and gives them instruction in modern farming methods, together with some academic training and religious instruction. Efforts are made to have the boys return to their own villages to put into practice and pass along to others what they have learned.

"The main school, with an attendance of about 150 boys, was not in session in August. However, there was in session a short course in the operation and use of earth-moving machinery, tractors, etc.

"Charlie House has astonishing versatility. He leads devotional services, hobnobs with the King and Queen and government big shots as well as the personnel of the American Mission and military representatives, wangles financial help, shows the staff a few tricks in the erection and operation of machinery, actively supervises the construction work of his native masons, carpenters, etc., and keeps his eye on the general affairs of the School.

Then, having \$500 to lend, he went home and said to his wife, "I believe the Lord means these people to have their School." And when Ellen Stone heard of it, she donated the other \$500 as a thank-offering for the part which Dr. House had played in saving her life.

So the cable said "yes" and the land was bought.

And that is how it came to pass that on Thanksgiving Day in 1902 a deed was placed in Dr. House's hands; and that was the beginning of the American Farm School.

"Last spring Charlie and Ann were both decorated by King Paul at a ceremony in connection with a conference held at the School by the Boy Scout leaders of Greece."

To which should be added that in October, at a convocation at Mt. Holyoke College, Mrs. House was one of 29 alumnae honored for "service to society." The citation reads: "Active in community interests in college and after graduation, enthusiastic in work with boys and girls in school and out, you have found increasing satisfaction in cultivating human values at the American Farm School in Salonica, Greece, where, with your husband, you are giving invaluable international service."

Mr. and Mrs. House have asked me to add to this News-Letter a word of greeting to the many readers they know personally. Their thoughts and best wishes go out across the miles to each of you at Christmas time.

Olive L. Sawyer

Executive Secretary