

THE SALONIKA AGRICULTURAL AND INDUSTRIAL INSTITUTE
(AMERICAN FARM SCHOOL)

SALONIKA, GREECE

NEWS LETTER

MAY 1946

One of the most important events since our News Letter, which Mrs. Bliss sent out in December 1945, just before her death, is the visit to the School of our new trustee, Mr. Frank Bailey of Mt. Holyoke, Mass. He was naval attache in Salonika for eight months after the liberation of Greece in 1944, and was stationed at the American Farm School. Here he became deeply interested in the School and its educational importance for Greece, as well as in the invaluable contribution it is making toward the recovery of the country after these devastating years of war. He returned to Greece this spring as one of the American Mission for Observing Greek Elections. Although this time he was stationed in Athens he was able to return to the School for a brief visit and had a number of conferences with Mr. House in Athens. Extracts of his report at the Trustees Meeting on May 14 follow, and give us the most recent picture of the events and progress at the School during the seven months since the return of Mr. and Mrs. House.

"I returned to the School on the 10th of March. The almond trees were in full bloom and the fields, green from the rains, promised an excellent crop of wheat, in contrast to last year.

I started on a tour of the property with Ann House, and was later taken over by Demeter Hadjis, when Ann was called away. Our first stop was at James Hall which had been half torn down; the debris had been removed, and all useable material neatly stacked by for further use. At the moment no work was going on this project, because a few days before a 250 pound bomb had been found in the cellar, and it was not known whether it was active or not. I am informed that a bomb disposal unit from the Greek Army came and examined the bomb, and after finding it non-explosive, removed it from the property.

We next proceeded to Princeton Hall and what has been accomplished during the past six months there is remarkable. Work had just begun in refurbishing Princeton Hall when I left the Farm School at the end of June last year. Today, windows have been repaired, rooms have been cleaned and whitewashed, all the partitions installed by the Jerries had been removed, and the building assumes its original likeness and purpose. At the present time all the students are housed in this hall, all classes are held here, and the boys are messed in a lower basement room where an attractive dining room and a practical kitchen have been established.

Directly north of the playing field was another project which sparked my imagination more than anything which I saw during my whole visit. It was the new dam which Mr. House began about two months ago. As you all know, the problem of water has always been a serious one. The wells did a good job but in dry years, such as 1945, they could not in any way provide sufficient quantities of water for the lower fields - in fact, there was barely enough to irrigate the vegetable garden. Mr. House, in his studies, discovered that approximately three square kilometers of watershed existed in the ravine on the northeast side of the farm proper and that a dam thrown across that ravine could store up some twelve million gallons of water which would water sufficiently in normal years a maximum of 100 stremas or in very dry years a minimum of 50 stremas (one strema equals 1/4 acre). There were several worthwhile motives which prompted the construction of this dam,- one of these, and a very important one, was the fact that at this time of the year many of the villagers in the neighborhood were completely without work and not only did not have enough money to feed their animals but barely enough to feed their own families. The dam would provide a work project which appealed to Mr. House from this point of view. There was also another reason for starting work at an early date and that

was the fact that if the villagers could build this dam and water could be stored up in sufficient quantity to irrigate during the dry summer months, this dam would be a shining example for the villagers themselves and perhaps might be the first of hundreds of such dams throughout northern Greece. This dam project is of a nature of which there should be many more in Greece at the present time - it is the kind of rehabilitation the country needs. (This project was made possible by the generous gift of the Greek War Relief).

SCHOOL

Another tremendous improvement and one which the School itself can use to good advantage at a later date is the complete refurbishing of the Jerry barracks in the pine grove on the southwest corner of the School property. These barracks and the recreation hall were cleaned up in a very small way by Theodore Litsas in the spring of 1945 when he wished to use them as shelter for his Boy Scouts. However, a great deal was left to be desired and all of this Mr. House has achieved with the help of the rental money which will come from the American Mission for Observing Greek Elections personnel, who are at present billeted there. A small heating unit for hot water was installed, the showers and the toilets were completely refurbished, the buildings were painted inside and out, and all three of them now have the appearance of first rate buildings. It is expected that the AMFOGE personnel will move out from those buildings early in April and then it is possible that the older boys can be moved down there, thus separating the older and younger boys now in Princeton Hall; or it might be advisable to use these buildings as a separate plant for tractor instruction. The final disposition of these buildings will be known at a later date.

At the cow barn a number of new arrivals were noticed, principally two new Guernsey bulls and six heifers, which have been given to the School by UNRRA. It is also expected that two new boars will be received from the English Bible Society at an early date. No other significant changes were noted here but it is pleasant to report that the herd was approximately the same size as it was before the war and appeared to be in excellent condition.

To the west of the farm in the direction of Salonika there are two barracks which the Jerries built for the families of the staff, who were moved out from their own houses when the Jerries took over the School property. As I have previously reported, these were temporarily fixed up and used as a Preventorium during the summer of 1945 but today many more improvements have been made and the buildings have been put in a much more satisfactory condition so that they are reasonably comfortable and practical for housing and training approximately forty girls. The girls are taught sewing and general housekeeping and child care. In fact, they have a small baby which is cared for by different students throughout the week, and I might say that the baby appeared to be in excellent health, though he was bawling his eyes out when I saw him, undoubtedly from too much handling. The neatness of the cot beds and the tidiness of the rooms where these girls were billeted was something to behold. As you all know, at the present time the Girls' School is being managed by Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Loch with funds from the English Friends Society.

The boys' unit at the present time has about 82 students - 52 of whom are new boys and 30 older boys who did not complete their work in 1940 and 1941. It is expected that the older boys will finish some time this spring and that with the coming fall a new class of boys will be taken in so that by the autumn of 1946 the School will again be running on a regular basis with two classes in attendance.

Some of you undoubtedly have wondered how Mr. House has been able to accomplish the feeding of 82 boys and I can tell you frankly that it has not been an easy problem. But with his usual ingenuity Mr. House has found ways and means; for example, he has killed off some of the stock without depleting it seriously. For instance, twelve sows are quite sufficient for breeding purposes at the School. One of the old bulls, who has long since passed the age of his usefulness, will be bumped off shortly and meat will find its way to the tables of the boys' dining room.

As I went around the School on that day and on the days that followed, I kept saying to myself over and over again - How could so much be accomplished in the short space of six or seven months? But always the answer followed the question almost immediately. The work has been accomplished by an engineer whose vision, foresight, and managerial ability is only surpassed by his faith and his spirit of Christian progress, which is without equal in any man I have ever seen. Of course, Charles would say that it was possible because of the loyal cooperation and devotion of the staff, and that I am not one to discount, having seen them remain at their posts last year when the future was uncertain and the returns were little. But in the last instance, all credit to the man, and his good wife, who have been able to generate such devotion to an ideal in the minds of their colleagues. Charles and Ann are a great team, and they have but one thought, namely, the School and how it can serve the farm boys of Macedonia.

Going about the farm and talking with all my old friends, I felt the new spirit which pervaded the atmosphere. A year ago we were down and try as we did we could not seem to raise ourselves up - the leader was not there. But today the situation is just the reverse - everyone is happy and buoyant and the American Farm School is moving forward to great days."

To the many friends who have been sending packages of food and clothing Mrs. House writes:

"Packages are coming through beautifully (53 packages in one week) and they are a great help. Ever so many have come to me to ask me to pass on their thanks to those who thought of them. It is not only the actual food and clothing, but the thought that friends in the United States are thinking of them and caring enough to send things to them that helps.

Our bedroom looks like three or four Christmases piled into one, and I spent a very happy day with Elizavetta, my general helper, unpacking, sorting and listing things. I am grateful to you for the care and effort you have taken in sending these gifts of food and clothing and other supplies, and I am happy to be interested with the pleasant task of giving where I know there is need. An old friend of ours, Baba Mara, told me of a girl whose only dress is made of sacking left behind by the Germans. I was able to send her a nice warm dress, coat and some underwear. One of our former students, living near the Bulgarian border, lost his animals, equipment and almost his life, and he is now trying to make a living for his wife and four children by cutting wood and carrying it to a town some distance away. His ten and thirteen year old boys can't go to school because he needs their help. We were able to send him aid through members of our staff, and they reported that he broke down and cried with emotion that we should have thought of him. I could go on with many more tales but this is enough to give you some idea of the help you are giving - the seeds of kindness thus sown are bearing rich fruit."

The Memorial Fund for Ethel House Bliss is now over \$10,000.00, and the gifts continue to come in. It will be a substantial help to the School, as well as a tribute to the love and devotion and rare ability that was given so generously.

Craig R. Smith
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President