

The Farm Goes to College

History of the Land Grant College

In 2012, land grant colleges and universities celebrated the sesquicentennial of the signing of the Morrill Act by President Abraham Lincoln. The Morrill Act granted federal land to establish colleges “in order to promote the liberal education of the industrial classes.” This meant that the sons and daughters of farmers had access to the kind of education offered to their wealthier counterparts at the nation’s elite colleges. In essence, it was nothing less than the democratization of higher education, providing access to students who previously did not have the funds to attend college. The key text of the act (which appears shortly in its entirety) is this:

... without excluding other scientific and classical studies and including military tactic, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts, in such manner as the legislatures of the States may respectively prescribe, in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life

The original mission of these new colleges included teaching agriculture, military tactics, and the mechanic arts but also classical studies, so that students could obtain both a liberal and a practical education. By *liberal education*, we mean in the classic Roman sense—education that is not only for a free human being but also education that sets a person free by imparting knowledge to think analytically. Thus, a citizen must have a liberal education in order to be a worthy participant in a democracy who is able to behave ethically, participate civically, and make decisions based on reason and logic. Studying the classics—learning Greek and Latin—and exploring the humanities make someone a liberally educated person. The land grant college also provided pragmatic education in sciences and commerce.

Who was responsible for this paradigm shift in the American educational model for higher education? Justin Smith Morrill (1810–1898) was a member of Congress from Vermont when he sponsored legislation that came to bear his name. He believed that “agriculture [is] the foundation of all present and future prosperity.” Iowa was the first state to act on this legislation and created the institution that came to be known as Iowa State University.

Note the date of this act: 1862. What is historically relevant about this time in US History? The War Between the States. The Morrill Act in its original form did not include those states that had seceded; that came only after the conclusion of the Civil War. Although the land grant colleges were to provide access to the sons and daughters of the working class, admission was not guaranteed for black citizens in the South. As a result, a second Morrill Act of 1890 provided funding for what has

come to be known as historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). In 1994, tribal colleges were added to the land grant family although for both of these latter two types of institutions, cash rather than land provided the endowment.

An important mission of the land grant colleges was to provide up-to-date research to farmers and ranchers. As a result, Congress authorized Agricultural Experiment Stations in 1887 through the Hatch Act, which was signed into law by President Grover Cleveland. The purpose of this farmers' legislation was to promote "scientific investigation and experiment respecting the principles of agricultural science." The federal-state partnership that arose from this act resulted in dramatic increases in food and fiber production. College researchers sometimes loaded train cars with animals and crops to take lectures about enhanced methods of farming directly to the people. The tripartite mission of a land-grant university—teaching, research, and service—is a result of the imperative to share knowledge with the people. Experimental farms, generally on or near college campuses, tried out new farm practices. For instance, the University of Illinois has a cornfield in the center of its campus. When there was an effort to replace it with a new library, a massive protest resulted in the new building being placed underground, leaving the Morrow Plots, which had been established in 1876, untouched.

Although some farmers looked askance at "book farming," there was no doubt that scientific understanding of farming practices helped economically and environmentally. George Washington Carver, who received much of his education at Iowa State University and its experiment station and who led Tuskegee Institute, focused on new crops, such as peanuts, that could replace the soil-depleting cotton crop, which had also been devastated by the boll weevil.

The role of the land grant college continued to evolve with Congress passing the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, authorizing cooperative extension offices at the county level in the states, with the express purpose of sharing knowledge not only with farmers but with homemakers. Extension agents had the important, if sometimes delicate, job of transmitting university knowledge to the people. In many states, women formed extension clubs for education and socializing.

Their programs included nutrition, sewing, and gardening, but they also provided a way for women, often living in some isolation on their farms, the opportunity to come together as a community. As Wayne D. Rasmussen put it in his *Taking the University to the People: Seventy-five Years of Cooperative Extension* (1989), "No other country has focused such attention to the practical (applied) dimension of education by extending and applying the knowledge base of our land-grant universities to the laboratories of real life where people live and work, develop and lead. Extension has been copied by many countries, but is yet to be duplicated" (viii).

The national organization that brings together all land grant colleges and universities is the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), headquartered in Washington, DC.

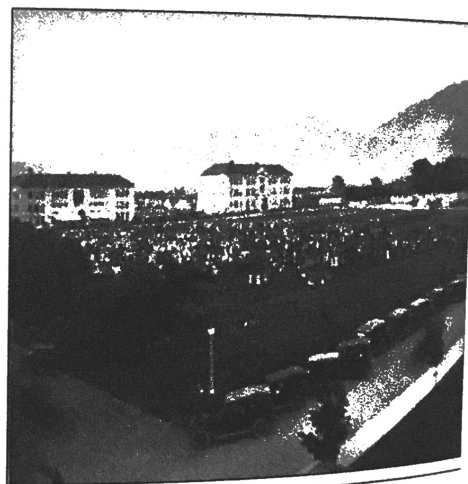


FIGURE 7.1. Farmers and Homemakers Encampment (1924) at Utah State Agricultural College. A daily newspaper was distributed during the encampment. Tents numbered 164 on the Quad. (Used with permission of Utah State University Archives and Special Collections.)

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Enrollment in agricultural classes in colleges has steadily increased although enrollment began declining in the 1980s in the wake of the farm crisis. Distance education became increasingly important as a way to make cooperative research and extension resources accessible, particularly to remote sites.

In this chapter, you'll explore documents from the farmers' legislation, but you'll also read an essay that asks if the land-grant college remained true to Jefferson's vision of an agrarian economy and an educated citizenry.

The first document is the actual legislation for the establishment of land-grant colleges. As you read, be particularly sensitive to how Jeffersonian ideals influenced this legislation. And, how does it differ from Jeffersonian ideals?

Transcript of Morrill Land-Grant College Act (1862)

Chap. CXXX.—*AN ACT Donating Public Lands to the several States and Territories which may provide Colleges for the Benefit of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts.*

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That there be granted to the several States, for the purposes hereinafter mentioned, an amount of public land, to be apportioned to each State a quantity equal to thirty thousand acres for each senator and representative in Congress to which the States are respectively entitled by the apportionment under the census of eighteen hundred and sixty: *Provided,* That no mineral lands shall be selected or purchased under the provisions of this Act.

SEC. 2. *And be it further enacted,* That the land aforesaid, after being surveyed, shall be apportioned to the several States in sections or subdivisions of sections, not less than one quarter of a section; and whenever there are public lands in a State subject to sale at private entry at one dollar and twenty-five cents per acre, the quantity to which said State shall be entitled shall be selected from such lands within the limits of such State, and the Secretary of the Interior is hereby directed to issue to each of the States in which there is not the quantity of public lands subject to sale at private entry at one dollar and twenty-five cents per acre, to which said State may be entitled under the provisions of this act, land scrip to the amount in acres for the deficiency of its distributive share: said scrip to be sold by said States and the proceeds thereof applied to the uses and purposes prescribed in this act, and for no other use or purpose whatsoever: *Provided,* That in no case shall any State to which land scrip may thus be issued be allowed to locate the same within the limits of any other State, or of any Territory of the United States, but their assignees may thus locate said land scrip upon any of the unappropriated lands of the United States subject to sale at private entry at one dollar and twenty-five cents, or less, per acre: *And provided, further,* That not more than one million acres shall be located by such assignees in any one of the States: *And provided, further,* That no such location shall be made before one year from the passage of this Act.

SEC. 3. *And be it further enacted,* That all the expenses of management, superintendence, and taxes from date of selection of said lands, previous to their sales, and all expenses incurred in the management and disbursement of the moneys which may be received therefrom, shall be paid by the States to which they may belong, out of the Treasury of said States, so that the entire proceeds of the sale of said lands shall be applied without any diminution whatever to the purposes hereinafter mentioned.

SEC. 4. *And be it further enacted,* That all moneys derived from the sale of the lands aforesaid by the States to which the lands are apportioned, and from the sales of land scrip hereinbefore provided for,



shall be invested in stocks of the United States, or of the States, or some other safe stocks, yielding not less than five per centum upon the par value of said stocks; and that the moneys so invested shall constitute a perpetual fund, the capital of which shall remain forever undiminished, (except so far as may be provided in section fifth of this act,) and the interest of which shall be inviolably appropriated, by each State which may take and claim the benefit of this act, to the endowment, support, and maintenance of at least one college where the leading object shall be, without excluding other scientific and classical studies, and including military tactics, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts, in such manner as the legislatures of the States may respectively prescribe, in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life.

SEC. 5. *And be it further enacted*, That the grant of land and land scrip hereby authorized shall be made on the following conditions, to which, as well as to the provisions hereinbefore contained, the previous assent of the several States shall be signified by legislative acts:

First. If any portion of the fund invested, as provided by the foregoing section, or any portion of the interest thereon, shall, by any action or contingency, be diminished or lost, it shall be replaced by the State to which it belongs, so that the capital of the fund shall remain forever undiminished; and the annual interest shall be regularly applied without diminution to the purposes mentioned in the fourth section of this act, except that a sum, not exceeding ten per centum upon the amount received by any State under the provisions of this act may be expended for the purchase of lands for sites or experimental farms, whenever authorized by the respective legislatures of said States.

Second. No portion of said fund, nor the interest thereon, shall be applied, directly or indirectly, under any pretence whatever, to the purchase, erection, preservation, or repair of any building or buildings.

Third. Any State which may take and claim the benefit of the provisions of this act shall provide, within five years from the time of its acceptance as provided in subdivision seven of this section, at least not less than one college, as described in the fourth section of this act, or the grant to such State shall cease; and said State shall be bound to pay the United States the amount received of any lands previously sold; and that the title to purchasers under the State shall be valid.

Fourth. An annual report shall be made regarding the progress of each college, recording any improvements and experiments made, with their cost and results, and such other matters, including State industrial and economical statistics, as may be supposed useful; one copy of which shall be transmitted by mail [free] by each, to all the other colleges which may be endowed under the provisions of this act, and also one copy to the Secretary of the Interior.

Fifth. When lands shall be selected from those which have been raised to double the minimum price, in consequence of railroad grants, they shall be computed to the States at the maximum price, and the number of acres proportionally diminished.

Sixth. No State while in a condition of rebellion or insurrection against the government of the United States shall be entitled to the benefit of this act.

Seventh. No State shall be entitled to the benefits of this act unless it shall express its acceptance thereof by its legislature within three years from July 23, 1866:

Provided, That when any Territory shall become a State and be admitted into the Union, such new State shall be entitled to the benefits of the said act of July two, eighteen hundred and sixty-two, by expressing the acceptance therein required within three years from the date of its admission into the Union, and providing the college or colleges within five years after such acceptance, as prescribed in this act.

SEC. 6. *And be it further enacted*, That land scrip issued under the provisions of this act shall not be subject to location until after the first day of January, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three.

SEC. 7. *And be it further enacted*, That the land officers shall receive the same fees for locating land scrip issued under the provisions of this act as is now allowed for the location of military bounty land warrants under existing laws: *Provided*, their maximum compensation shall not be thereby increased.

SEC. 8. *And be it further enacted*, That the Governors of the several States to which scrip shall be issued under this act shall be required to report annually to Congress all sales made of such scrip until the whole shall be disposed of, the amount received for the same, and what appropriation has been made of the proceeds.



EXPLORE: Do the math. Is there a region of the country that benefitted from the formula to grant land?



COLLABORATE: Working with a partner, choose one of you to argue that the Morrill Act was the natural outgrowth of the Jeffersonian perspective, while the other will argue that it departed from Jefferson's beliefs. Support your argument with evidence from the text.



WRITING: It might be expected that a wartime President and Congress would be able to do little else but oversee the conflict; however, during President Lincoln's terms, western lands were opened for free settlement through the Homestead Act; the Department of Agriculture was established; the construction of a transcontinental railroad was authorized; and the National Academy of Sciences was founded. These acts indicate forward-thinking leaders. Choose one of these developments, read about its history, and then in an essay, demonstrate how it fits (along with the land-grant act) as a logical piece of a presidential vision.



VIEWING: Is there a Morrill Hall on your campus? If so, what is its architectural style and date of construction? If not, look on the Internet for examples of Morrill Halls on other college campuses. Do they have similar architectural styles? Choose three Morrill Halls, and for each one, give a description, and then offer your analysis of how they are similar and how they differ. Why is it doubtful that Morrill Halls will appear on western campuses, particularly in Utah?



RESEARCH: Land-grant colleges may feature agricultural themes for their mascots. How many colleges or universities in the USA use *Aggies* as the name for their sport teams?