

## PROFESSOR P. G. HOLDEN - THE CORN FOUNDATION

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Today I want to share with you a visit I had last week with Prof. P. G. Holden at the Michigan State Agricultural College. The older people listening in will remember P. G. Holden who 50 years ago ran the corn trains and was known as the corn man. To younger people I may say that Holden started the first mass educational effort in the United States to reach all farmers with agricultural facts. He also in cooperation with the farmers of Sioux County established a system of conducting county extension work which has since spread over the United States. He wrote or helped write the first specific legislation in the United States providing state support for agricultural extension work.

I was in distinguished company on this recent visit. Professor M. L. Mosher of the University of Illinois drove up from Urbana and M. L. Wilson flew out from Washington D. C. Mosher and Wilson were both on the corn trains with Holden fifty years ago. Both have since made distinguished records in agricultural work. Mosher organized Iowa's first county for county agent work and later organized the first farm management association in the United States in Illinois. He is recognized as a national authority in his field. M. L. Wilson became United States Under Secretary of Agriculture and for many years was National Director of the Cooperative Extension Service. For 20 years I have considered M. L. Wilson the chief idea man and philosopher of the United States Department of Agriculture. I am giving you this brief account to let you know that I was in distinguished company.

At the present time Prof. Holden is busy organizing the National Corn Foundation. This Foundation is being sponsored by the Michigan State College. One day we met in conference with Dean Emeritus Anthony and Professor Davidson of Michigan State College along with Prof. Holden relative to the Corn Foundation.

Three years ago when I was at the Michigan State College the librarian showed me a section of the library in which Holden's work was being shown and made available for use. It was a most impressive exhibit of bulletins, charts, circulars, newspaper clippings, books, etc. The librarian told me that it was the largest exhibit of newspaper clippings on one man's work that had come to his attention. These clippings were obtained from the state wide educational campaigns which Holden carried on in several states. There are about a dozen large volumes of these clippings. None came from Iowa because when the corn trains were run in Iowa no effort was made to get them but from my own recollection the Iowa publicity was tremendous and included items in practically all of Iowa's papers. The new library on the Michigan State Campus which is now being built will have a section for the Corn Foundation.

During the past three years the Holden exhibit has expanded into the National Corn Foundation. Holden has had much to do with this expansion. Dean Anthony rather smilingly told Mosher and me that perhaps a state with a comparatively small corn crop like Michigan could establish a national corn foundation with more cooperation than



big corn states like Iowa and Illinois where some rivalry might exist. At any rate Michigan has good reasons for going ahead because of the early scientific work in plant breeding done by Prof. Beal of Michigan State College and the great significance of Holden's mass educational work in improving corn. Last year the National Corn Foundation placed a marker on the campus commemorating the great work of Beal. It is planned to place markers throughout the United States where significant events in the development of corn have occurred. Some day one will be placed in Sioux County Iowa commemorating the establishment of the Sioux County Demonstration Farm which in fact was the beginning of the first mass effort to reach farmers with information concerning the improvement of seed corn. It also was the beginning of modern county extension work.

Within in a few days Holden will be 89 years old. He has a creative mind, always looking to the future. Now he is working on the National Corn Foundation. And what a worthy objective. Corn has brought prosperity to the middle west. It is our most productive grain crop. Holden has always had the faculty of selecting the really important things and what could be more important than a record in permanent form for future generations giving the story of corn and how it is used. While I was in Lansing Prof. Holden along with Dean Anthony and Prof. Davidson made a trip to Battle Creek to see the Kellogg people about support for the Corn Foundation. They had a friendly reception and support is assured. The Kellogg people provided funds to the college to build the Kellogg Center which cost a million dollars. It is called the Continuing Education Building. Continuing education by the way is for the benefit of people who can get away from home for short periods. It is a form of extension work conducted on the campus.

Three years ago when Mosher, Wilson and I visited Holden he was living in northern Michigan. At that time we wanted in addition to having a visit to delve into his philosophy of life. It was a most interesting and profitable experience. I reported on it over the radio at that time. This last trip we were especially interested in the methods and procedures that made his extension work so outstandingly successful.

In our discussions we started with the corn trains. At the time the corn trains were run in Iowa 50 years ago book farming was not in high favor with farmers. Yet the corn trains were highly successful. Farmers often came into the train as doubters but left the train convinced as to the importance of the teachings, and that in 30 minutes. I recall one place where much opposition literature was circulated but after the corn train with its message was delivered the opposition vanished. Now what quality in Prof. Holden made this change of opinion so quickly, made people so willing to accept what he said. Perhaps if we could find out and state it briefly it would help public speakers and teachers today.

We analyzed the corn train method of procedure about as follows:

1. Prof. Holden gave his corn lecture with entire sincerity. Everyone was immediately impressed with his earnestness. He believed thoroughly and completely in what he was advocating. There was no doubt about it.



2. Corn was of vital interest to Iowa farmers then as now. Holden emphasized this interest in the beginning of his talk--how dependent all Iowan's were on a good corn crop. This was excellent procedure. It started at a point where all could agree.

3. He then developed the importance of good seed. In those days most farmers saved their own seed. He proceeded in this field with great care. He had a large roll of charts held high in the end of the car with printing and figures on them so each person in the car could see. There were large photographs of corn on the charts. They were fitted skillfully into the lecture.

In addition there was the saw dust boxes some with sprouted corn, some empty to show how they were made. The boxes were held high so all the people in the car could see the sprouting corn. Wilson says he remembers how his arms ached from holding these boxes up so the people could see.

But Holden went further. He was definite and direct. He showed step by step how the test box could be made--anyone could make a box. He took a piece of muslin and marked out the squares in which six kernels from each ear could be placed. Anyone could do that too. Next he showed how the muslin with squares was placed in the box.

He took an ear of corn and with his knife took out six kernels, two on each side of the butt of the ear, two on each side of the middle and two on each side of the top. Anyone could do that.

As he took these kernels out he pointed out how important it was that they should grow. If a farmer planted a dead ear it meant some 300 stalks of corn missing. If he planted a weak ear it might mean some 300 weak stalks "fooling around all summer doing nothing" as Holden said. In short the best way to get a good crop of corn was to plant good seed, no farmer could afford to do otherwise.

The whole process was made easy and simple by actually doing each part before the audience. No one could argue against planting good seed. Holden advised going into the field and selecting the corn in the fall before it frosted. He urged selecting the right kind of a stalk as well as a good ear, then hanging them on strings or wires in a well ventilated place where they would dry out. But in addition to this he insisted on testing six kernels out of each ear and using only those for seed where six kernels grew strong.

4. During the talk and usually at the close Prof. Holden always appealed to the human, the moral and the spiritual side. In fact, his seed corn trains were called Corn Gospel Trains. This was literally true. He held that good seed corn meant better corn crops, better corn crops meant better homes, better boys and girls and a stronger America. Holden never forgot to emphasize the better living side.

When the Country Life Commission met in Omaha in 1909 Holden was invited to meet with them. He was asked the question: Why are you so anxious to have people plant better seed corn. His answer was



to save men's souls. The Committee immediately wanted to know how it saved men's souls. Said Holden, one must get a contact with people to actually help them and it is much easier to get a contact with people by approaching the "corn end" than through the moral end. How true.

Miss Jessie Field (Mrs. Shambaugh), County Superintendent of Schools in Page County who gained a national reputation in rural schools and boys and girls club work and who was visited once by 15 state superintendents of public education from southern states to study her work once wrote me concerning Holden in part as follows:

"I am glad I had a chance to know and to work under the guidance of Prof. P. G. Holden in those interesting years when he was our leader as we pioneered for all the best of Iowa farms. He gave us vision--and tied that vision to every day living and then showed us simple and intelligent ways of making the vision a reality. I was a very young Superintendent of Page County, Iowa schools at the time." - - -

"The truths he taught us spread like leaven. There was life and light in his teaching. But the most wonderful trait he had was his ability to carry visions through to reality. He carried the torch of better farming and better farm life high and he never failed to light the same torch for others who had a chance to know him."

The foregoing is a very brief account of why Prof. Holden's extension work was effective. It appears now that the greatest forward step in education in the United States in the 20th century was the taking of higher education to the masses of people. If so then Prof. P. G. Holden must be regarded as one of its greatest architects and builders.