Muresk Agricultural College

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WHEN the West Australian Government established Muresk Agricultural College in 1926, it added a new chapter to an interesting story of land settlement and utilisation which had its origin in the early years of the Swan River Colony. Much of the present College land was included in a 4,400-acre grant made to Henry Reveley in 1838, but portions of the grant were forfeited in the same year and taken up by Du Bois Agett, the property then being known as Down Farm.

To Down Farm in 1856 came Matthew Oliver with his bride. It was he who planted the large pepper tree which still stands in front of the West Dormitory. Old records indicate that wheat was grown on Down Farm a popular variety being Clubhead. Although no superphosphate was used, yields of from nine to twenty-six bushels to the acre were obtained over long periods.

Large quantities of sandalwood provided settlers with a means of augmenting their incomes. This fragrant wood was in keen demand in China, where it was used in the manufacture of joss-sticks, and many dray-loads were carted to Perth for export. The son of Matthew Oliver members journeying to Perth in a dray drawn by a horse and a bullock yoked in tandem.

For some years prior to 1890, Down Farm had been owned by Andrew Dempster, one of the sons of Captain James McLean Dempster, master of a schooner trading between Australia and Mauritius in the 1830's. Captain Dempster had become a farmer on the Bucklands Estate at Iringtown near Northam and his sons maintained the family's amphibious traditions by establishing a sheep station at Esperance and annually capturing the sailing ship which took their wool-clip to Adelaide and returned with stores.
In 1887, Mrs. Andrew Dempster became seriously ill at Esperance. With his sick wife, his eldest daughter and two blackfellows, Andrew Dempster set off in a buggy and, with only a small compass to aid him, travelled 600 miles across trackless and virtually unknown country to Northam in order to obtain medical advice. The trip took about three weeks and was accomplished in almost incessant rain. Such a magnificent piece of bushmanship deserved a happy ending but unfortunately Mrs. Dempster died after an operation had been performed.

Perhaps it was this bereavement which influenced Andrew Dempster to take up his abode at Down Farm which had been rented to a man named Smith. In 1899 he built the magnificent homestead which now contains the College dining-room, kitchen and administrative block, and in the following year he renamed the property Muresk after the Dempster's family estate on the River Esk in Scotland.

Andrew Dempster died in 1909 and the portion of the estate on which the homestead stands passed into the possession of his daughter, Mrs. E. W. Cotton, whose husband was sole administrator of the property. They lived at Muresk until its purchase by the State Government in 1925.

**MANY ADVANTAGES**

The College lands are 2,222 acres in area and are located between Northam and York, nine miles from the former and 15 miles from the latter township. Situated as it is on the verge of the wheatbelt, it has an assured rainfall and its location permits of practical instruction being given in cereal-growing, dairying, fruit-growing and the production of root and forage crops.

The property is located in excellent stock country and affords opportunities for students to receive instruction and practical experience in most branches of animal husbandry.

The College buildings are on rising ground commanding a noble view of the Avon Valley. The Avon River flows through the property, adding to its beauty and affording the students facilities for swimming.
The surrounding country is undulating and well-wooded and the average elevation of the property is 600ft. above sea level, an altitude which makes the location a particularly healthy site.

Being only 64 miles from Perth, the College is readily accessible by road or rail, which facilitates the close association between it and the Department of Agriculture.

Muresk is similar in standard to other Australian agricultural colleges, such as Dookie, Gatton, Hawkesbury, Longeronong, Roseworthy and Wagga, and has already made worthwhile contributions to tertiary education in our State.

Its aims are:

1. To train students in the science of agriculture and farming practices, or in dairy factory work, and at the same time to provide opportunities for continuing with some aspects of general education.

2. To raise the general standard of efficiency in farming by holding short courses of instruction for farmers.

3. To carry out research work.

4. To raise the standard of stock in farming areas by breeding and distributing pure bred stock.

Wheat, oats, barley and peas are grown on the College lands and, in accordance with the rotation which obtains at the College, certain of the paddocks are laid down to pasture, principally subterranean clover and Wimmera ryegrass. To provide green feed in summer for the dairy herd, pigs and poultry, a plot has been laid down under irrigation.

For instructional purposes, the College has an orchard, vineyard, vegetable garden and apiary.

The Muresk dairy herd consists of pedigreed Guernsey cattle and is noted as being one of the finest herds of that breed in Australia. Pigs herds of improved Berkshire and Tamworth have been founded on foundation stock imported from Great Britain, New Zealand and elsewhere and these are two of the leading pig studs in the State.

The College sheep flock consists of Merino ewes run as a commercial flock. Border Leicester x Merino ewes are also
bred from these for mating with British breeds in connection with the raising of fat lambs for export and the local market.

In the poultry section the main breeds are the Australorp, White Leghorn and Rhode Island Red.

A complete building scheme has been laid down for the College and subsequent additions will conform generally to this plan. The present College buildings consist of two dormitories, a science block, lecture rooms, a domestic block, and residences for members of the staff. In the dormitories each student has a separate room and in the bathrooms hot and cold showers are installed.

A large common-room, a library and reading rooms and a dark room are set apart for the use of students. Radios have been installed.

The science block contains senior and junior laboratories and a lecture room. An up-to-date gas plant is now in use in the laboratories. A carpenter's shop and blacksmith's shop are provided in which technical instruction is given to the students. A modern butter and cheese factory fitted with the latest machinery and equipment is provided for students taking the dairy factory course.

The College has its own power house to provide light and power for the buildings, and for its water supply the establishment is connected to the Goldfields Water Scheme. The septic tank system has been adopted for the treatment of sewage.

NEW ARRANGEMENTS

Some changes in the two courses conducted at the College were introduced last year. Formerly, the Junior Certificate standard was sufficient to ensure consideration for admission to a three-year course. The first year of that course was, of necessity, largely a secondary school training in order to ensure that all students would be sufficiently grounded in essential subjects.

Many did not have the opportunity to study subjects such as chemistry before entering the College. Those who had already received an adequate educational background were admitted direct to the second year of the three-year course.

Under the new arrangements it is possible for all students to take the necessary preliminary course before entering Muresk, or in other words exemption from the first year of the old course now applies to all and the Diploma course is now of only two year's duration.

Applications for admission to Muresk should be made during the Junior Certificate year or earlier. The selection is made after the Junior Certificate results are available and the successful students proceed to their Sub-Leaving Certificate study at the school of their choice.

For example, students who are chosen after the 1954 Junior Certificate results are available, proceed to Sub-Leaving work in 1955 and, provided they perform a satisfactory year of study and are favourably reported upon in other respects during that year, they are eligible for admission to Muresk in 1956.

Some students may wish to complete the Leaving Certificate and enter the College in 1957. That arrangement is possible provided that the Principal is informed of the position. Others may not make application until their Sub-Leaving year but provided that they are taking the correct course of study and that there are vacancies available, their applications will be considered for the following year.

The Sub-Leaving studies should include English, Maths A, Geography, Physics, Chemistry, Biology (or Physiology and Hygiene) and a junior standard in Bookkeeping and Commercial Methods should be achieved if that subject was not included in the Junior Certificate year. Students who are unable to take the correct Sub-Leaving course at their Junior Certificate school may enrol at the Northam High School for that year. At this school a special class is conducted to meet the requirements of Muresk Agricultural College.

THE DIPLOMA IN AGRICULTURE COURSE (M.D.A.)

The M.D.A. Course.—It will be seen from the foregoing that the academic course at the College has not been changed, but the year of preparation for that course is taken elsewhere. To avoid a reduction in
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the amount of practical work (students normally spent a proportion of each of the three years at the College on practical farm work) it has been laid down that first-year students must remain at the College during four weeks of the eight weeks' summer vacation and second-year students will be similarly occupied during two weeks of the four weeks' winter vacation.

Lectures and demonstrations are given to the students in the lecture room and laboratories. Records are kept by the students of all work performed and a farm diary course covers routine work on the farm.

Excursions are arranged to places of agricultural interest, and in addition to theoretical and laboratory work, students must cover the full range of practical work. They take part in all field operations on the farm and work in the smithy and carpenters' shops. Their training covers the handling of tractors, various implements and different types of machinery.

Each student is given practical instruction in building construction and blacksmithing and in turn they spend time in the dairy, piggery, poultry sheds, orchards, vineyard and garden. They also gain practical experience in the breeding and management of stock, and work in the sheep yards and woolshed. Students are engaged in class work and practical farm work on alternate weeks.

Applications.—Applications for admission must be completed and reach the College by December 31 of each year. These should include completed application form, medical certificate as to general fitness, two testimonials including one from the Headmaster of the applicant's school, the applicant's own statement as to interests, ambitions, etc., and, where desired, an application for inclusion in the scholarship selection.

Marks must be applied for when the applicant enters for the Junior Certificate examination.

Fees.—The fees charged are very low—in accordance with Government policy—and are approximately £80 per annum.
Scholarships and Assistance.—Several scholarships for Muresk are available and awarded each year and the selection of applicants is made at the end of the year immediately prior to the year of entry to the College.

Education Department Scholarships and allowances may be continued at the College and the “living away from home” allowance of £40 per annum is available to students entitled to it.

The McCaughey Bequest and the Canteens Services Fund’s assistance apply to Muresk College students who come within the provisions of the scheme.

General.—The College year is divided into two terms of 20 weeks each; the first term begins late in February and ends early in July and the second term commences in August and concludes at Christmas.

Students have the advantages of a residential college and facilities are provided for sports. General recreation committees are elected for the control of cricket, football, tennis, swimming, athletics, rifle shooting, gymnastics, etc. The annual sports meeting is held just prior to the Royal Show and a swimming carnival is held annually in the attractive college pool.

For indoor recreation there are two reading rooms, piano and radios, a billiard table, table tennis outfits and a technical and fiction library provides literature to meet the needs of the students.

Hobbies such as photography are encouraged and facilities are provided. The College has a cinematograph with a sound track and films are shown frequently.

The College conducts its own savings bank agency, book store, tuckshop and post office.

The majority of the students are farmers’ sons who return to the family farms but there are many other avenues of employment open to Muresk graduates. Those with good academic qualifications may proceed to the University in order to study for the degree in agriculture.

The College is a sub-department of the Department of Agriculture and copies of the College prospectus may be secured from the Principal, Muresk Agricultural College, Muresk, W.A., or the Department of Agriculture, St. George’s Terrace, Perth.

DAIRY SCIENCE COURSE

Due to several causes it has been found necessary to suspend the Diploma course in dairy science but, provided there are a sufficient number of students available, a shorter course in dairy science (butter and cheese factory procedure) will be conducted from late February until early July in each of two successive years for butter and cheese factory operatives with suitable educational backgrounds.

The cost of each of the two periods of the course is approximately £41 and includes board and residence, laundry, sport and medical charges.

Text books, etc., costing approximately £14, would be needed and certain equipment such as sheets and blankets must be provided by the students.

A deposit of £3 must be lodged, which is returnable at the end of the course provided all accounts have been met.

Scholarships valued at £15 per period are available in order to assist students.

Successful students will be awarded the Muresk Certificate of Competency in Dairy Manufacture subject to their obtaining (a) Milk and Cream Grade Certificate, (b) Milk and Cream Testing Certificate, and (c) Butter and/or Cheese Making Certificate.

If these are not held by the conclusion of the course the award of the Competency Certificate will be held over until the other certificates are gained.

The Muresk dairy factory contains accommodation in separate manufacturing rooms for butter and cheese making. It is equipped with dairy factory machinery of the latest design and with cold storage rooms for butter and cheese. A large well-equipped bacteriological laboratory is incorporated and the factory is supplied with milk and cream from the College dairy herd. Where necessary, supplies are also augmented by purchase from selected sources.

Further details of this course may be obtained from the Principal, Muresk Agricultural College, Muresk, W.A.
FARMERS' WINTER COURSES

During the winter vacation (four weeks in July-August) two short courses for farmers are conducted. The subjects of the courses vary from year to year and details are announced in the press and on the radio. The 1954 subjects included a three-day course on sheep and wool and a second course of similar duration covering "The Role of Pastures in Animal Production."

Students go into residence at the College for three or four days and the chosen topics are thoroughly discussed and illustrated by demonstrations, the showing of suitable films and slides together with lectures and practical demonstrations.

Intending applicants are advised to apply early as accommodation at the College is limited and each year many applicants have to be refused admission on this account. A nominal fee is charged.

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