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History

The story of the Storrs Agricultural School

First of two parts

In 1663, Samuel Storrs of Nottinghamshire, England, immigrated to America. He settled in Mansfield in 1719. On Jan. 24, 1822, Charles Storrs, a direct descendant of Samuel, was born on the Mansfield family farm. As a young man, Charles traveled across New England selling Mansfield-made silk. In the 1850s, Charles Storrs settled in Brooklyn, N.Y., and organized a manufacturing and commission firm with his brothers, Augustus and Royal O. Storrs. In 1879, the Storrs brothers retired "with a competency." Charles Storrs was widely known and popular in the New York City borough, and was endorsed by the Brooklyn Eagle and Brooklyn Times newspapers to run for mayor. He was also a close friend of Horace Greeley, the founder of the New York Tribune who challenged Ulysses Grant for the U.S. presidency in 1872.

The Storrs brothers resided in Brooklyn, N.Y. They knew of thousands of farm boys from across the nation who had arrived in New York City to earn their fortune. Unlike the heroes of Horatio Alger's dime novels, the vast majority failed miserably, unprepared for city life. They lacked an education and their agrarian upbringing left them totally unprepared for urban life. In 1880, the Storrs brothers deeded to the state some

170 acres of land with buildings, and \$5,000 in cash for the establishment of a school of agriculture in northern Mansfield. If this idea spread, such schools would encourage farm boys to stay on the land, and stay out of the cities.

On April 21, 1881, the General Assembly established the Storrs Agricultural School. It was officially opened on Sept. 28, 1881. A library was established and



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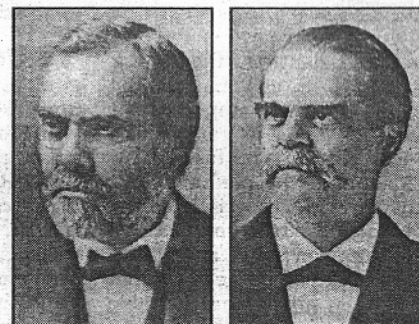
the old Storrs farm buildings were remodeled into classrooms and laboratories. The school grew quickly, and the Storrs brothers' original deed seemed inadequate. A movement began to move the school from Mansfield. It was considered isolated, being 3 miles from the nearest railroad, and the farmland was considered too stony and rocky. Those who wanted to keep the school in Storrs asked the state for support. This drew the wrath of *The Willimantic Chronicle*. On March 7, 1883, it published the following editorial:

"The great Storrs agricultural hippo-

drome of North Mansfield seems to languish. Double the amount of last year's state pap is called for this year. The dissection of tomcats and superannuated "yaller" dogs is a somewhat expensive job for the state. The ostensible purpose for which the school was created has been defeated by unpractical management and the interest of agriculture would be about as well promoted should the money be used in sending the revised New Testament to the uneducated Patagonians.

"The trustees modestly ask the present legislature to appropriate \$10,000 for the coming year, \$1,000 for a heater, \$2,000 for a debt contracted large in furnishing the house and \$2,000 to improve and increase the productiveness of the farm, and the balance \$1,000 is supposed to be needed for incidental expenses. All this money requested for a school of nineteen boys, at an expense of \$526.31 each yearly, although Mr. Barstow tells us that most pay their tuition and some pay their board in part."

"Now if there was the remotest possibility of the institution ever becoming permanent and self-supporting there might be some excuse for asking this appropriation. But under its present stupid management, the money appropriated for its support is simply wasted



Charles (left) and Augustus Storrs, the benefactors of the agricultural school that evolved into the University of Connecticut.

so far as public benefit is concerned. The shrewd millionaires whose princely estates lie adjoining the school farm and who so generously donated the property to the state for the exclusive purpose of an agricultural school foresaw in the failure of the experiment the return of their gifts, with a big rent in the way of improvements. Would it not under the circumstances be expedient, rather than feed the elephant longer at state expense, to return him to the original proprietors and save a large outlay for his keeping which grows fearfully with every year's support?"

Next week: The Yale-Storrs controversy.