

# History of the New York State Agricultural Society

The first agricultural association in the state of New York was the “Society for the Promotion of Agriculture, Arts, and Manufactures,” which was organized in New York City in 1791. This was succeeded in 1804 by the “Society for Promotion of Useful Arts,” which in turn was followed in 1820 by the “Board of Agriculture.”

**February 15, 1832 saw the inception of the present “New York State Agricultural Society.”**

-Reprinted from “History of the New York State Agricultural Society,” published in 1916.

*The following timeline highlights milestones in the Society’s history....*

## 1832

A small group of farmers met in Albany to organize the Society. This was the time and location the Legislature convened for a few months. They wanted a voice for agriculture in guiding government policy... “Agricultural Leadership”. The Legislature was comprised largely of farmers from the rural agrarian society; however, there was a need for farmers to be heard. They sought involvement without party affiliation.

## 1833

At their next meeting in Albany, they recommended to the Legislature the establishment of a College of Agriculture. Eight additional attempts were denied by the Legislature. The college was finally established in 1865 following the Morrill Act of 1862 due to the efforts of the members of the NYS Agricultural Society.

## 1834

The Society started a monthly publication, *The Cultivator*, which was the farmer’s communication media throughout the state for many years. In 1840 the Society began publishing annual proceedings in hardcover book form titled *Transactions of the Agricultural Society* that included articles and stories of potential value to farmers and their families.

## 1841

Although the Directors of the Society started asking the Legislature for a state fair since the 1830s without success, it was 1841 when the Society held the first State Fair. The society continued running them for nearly 60 years until the Legislature authorized the State Fair under the Department of Agriculture and Markets in 1899. The fairs were held in a number of sites from New York City, Poughkeepsie, Albany, and across the state to Buffalo. Gold, silver and bronze medals were awarded for 50 years in lieu of ribbons.

This organization made other significant contributions by promoting the county fairs and financing the short winter courses around the state prior to the formation of the Cooperative Extension Service. The Society took the lead in getting the State to create the Department of Agriculture and Markets, as well as a number of the farm cooperatives and the six State Schools of Agriculture. By virtue of its accomplishments and prestige, the

organization was granted a seat on the Cornell University Board of Trustees. (*Today there are two Directors of the Society who are Cornell Trustees*)

The Society spearheaded the ideas, the contacts and the leadership to establish many of the institutions serving agriculture today. The organizations they gave birth to carry out many of the functions of the Society.

## 1928

The Daniel Parrish Witter Museum was built on the State Fairgrounds in Syracuse to share the heritage of New York’s agricultural development. It was dedicated on August 30<sup>th</sup> of that year to Mr. Parrish, a 19-term legislator and farmer from Tioga County who had an intense interest in agriculture and the Society. He served as its president in 1929. A Memorial Room in the museum was dedicated to the Society for its contributions.

## 1937

The Century Farms program was started to honor families who had owned and operated the same farm for 100 years or more. Ten farms were awarded the first year and between two and 20 farms have been recognized annually (four farms most years) with the exception of 1943 & 1944 when no awards were given. To date, 322 NYS farm families have received Governor Citations with this coveted award.

## 1956

The Distinguished Service Citation was initiated to recognize individuals for outstanding service to agriculture in the state. With one to three citations presented each year, 61 individuals have received the award since the program’s inception.

## 1978

The “Cap” Creal Journalism Awards were initiated to inspire more coverage of the positive aspects of agriculture in New York State. This program recognizes outstanding writers of agricultural news articles appropriately dedicated to Harold “Cap” Creal, a farmer, Society Member, Assemblyman and the only individual to receive the Distinguished Service Citation twice.

## 1985

The Society, along with the NYS College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and Cornell Cooperative Extension, developed and sponsored the Empire State Food and Agriculture Leadership Institute, now known as LEAD NY. With a critical need for capable, trained leadership at local, state and national levels, the Institute was designed to broaden the leadership skills of our brightest and most capable young agriculturists. Since the program started, there have been 285 graduates from 10 two-year classes.

## 1996

A State Fair committee was appointed by the Society to evaluate the Witter Museum's needs. In **1997** the Society adopted a resolution supporting a Friends organization and provided a grant to assist in the development of exhibits and the program. In **1998** the State Board of Regents approved the "Friends" as an official non-profit educational entity. The Friends of the Daniel Parrish Witter Agricultural Museum organized and elected directors and officers in **1999** and the corporation was granted 501(c)(3) status.

## 2000

26 Bicentennial farms were awarded honoring families who have owned and operated the same farm for 200 years or more. In 2001 ten Bicentennial Farm awards were presented.

## 2001

The Business of the Year Award was developed to recognize the quality, leadership and innovation demonstrated by New York agribusinesses. To date, 12 awards have been given.

## 2005

The Society co-sponsored the first Cornell Farm Safety Award presented to deserving farms at Empire Farm Days.

**Every year...** our annual meeting and agricultural forum explores topics critical to the future of New York agriculture.

## *New York State Agricultural Society Archives*

Materials relating to the history of the Society can be found at various libraries, museums and institutions throughout New York State. A sampling of locations and items are as follows:

### **Albany Institute of History and Art- Albany, NY**

#### ***McKinney Library***

NYS Agricultural Society records (59 items):  
1792-1840

### **Cornell University Ithaca NY**

#### ***Olin Library- Archives/***

#### ***Kroch Library- Div. of Rare & Manuscript Coll.***

The Cultivator: 1841

Transactions of the NYS Agricultural College,

Ovid: 1859

Proceedings: 1910-1918

History of the Society: 1916

Program for dedication of memorial tablets at

Witter Museum: 1929

Catalog of Society items, Witter Museum: 1932

Records 1947-1953

Summary: 1841-1990: Records include

correspondence, citations and resolutions, speeches, membership lists, an 1859 catalog from the Society's museum, and printed and mimeographed copies of proceedings and minutes of annual meetings.

#### ***Library Annex (Orchards)***

Transactions of the Society: 1841-1895, 1898, 1899

Proceedings of Annual Meetings: 1910-1916

#### ***Mann Library***

The Cultivator: 1834-1838, 1839-1865

Transactions of the NYS Agricultural Society: 1841

Proceedings of the NYS Fair & Pomological

Convention, Buffalo: 1848

Journal of the NYS Agricultural Society: 1850-1855,

1855-1860, 1860-1866, 1869-1870,

1871, 1873

### **Geneva Historical Society Museum Geneva, NY**

Robert J. Swan papers (33 items): 1873-1889

### **NY Historical Society Library Cooperstown, NY**

#### ***Library***

Addresses by Society Presidents: 1858-1859

"The Connection Between Science and

Practical Farming": 1850

Trial reports of various plows: 1867

#### ***Archives***

Exec. Committee proceedings: 1861-1887

Records 1936-1940

### **NYS Dept. of Agriculture and Markets Albany, NY**

Century Farm Books

Constitution and Bylaws

Annual Meetings 1955-1973

Correspondence 1947-1986