

Patrick Browne "Cultivation of the Higher Self: William Smith Clark (1886-1926) and Agricultural Education" *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* Volume 36, No. 1 (Winter 2008).

Published by: Institute for Massachusetts Studies and Westfield State University

You may use content in this archive for your personal, non-commercial use. Please contact the *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* regarding any further use of this work:

masshistoryjournal@westfield.ma.edu

Funding for digitization of issues was provided through a generous grant from MassHumanities.



Some digitized versions of the articles have been reformatted from their original, published appearance. When citing, please give the original print source (volume/ number/ date) but add "retrieved from HJM's online archive at <http://www.westfield.ma.edu/mhj>.



Cultivation of the Higher Self: William Smith Clark and Agricultural Education

By

Patrick T.J. Browne

William Smith Clark (1826-1886) founded two small agricultural colleges on different sides of the globe. In Amherst, Massachusetts he took part in the establishment of the Massachusetts Agricultural College (MAC). As president of the college from 1867 to 1879, Clark staked his career on the success of a new type of institution and the system of agricultural education. Residing in Amherst for the majority of his life, he became a leader in town and state affairs, striving not only for the improvement of the college but for the enrichment of rural New England society.

His success in Massachusetts earned him international attention. Leaders of Japan were most impressed by Clark's remarkable energy. By invitation of the emperor, Clark came to Japan to found the Sapporo Agricultural College (SAC). Clark spent eight months in Sapporo. In that time he oversaw the design and construction of the campus, the shaping of the curriculum, and led the first students of the SAC as professor of botany and president of the college.

Both colleges have grown to become major universities. The MAC is now the University of Massachusetts-Amherst and the SAC is the University of Hokkaido. The great irony of Clark's legacy lies in the fact that, in Massachusetts, where he devoted most of his life to the betterment of his society, he is all but forgotten. However, in Japan, where he resided only months, his fame is well established. His visage overlooks Hokkaido from several statues. Japanese children learn his name from schoolbooks and repeat his parting words to his Japanese students, "Boys, be ambitious!"

The fact that Clark's memory has all but died in his hometown while

it is reverently maintained on the other side of the Pacific presents a dilemma that begs exploration. To understand Clark's life and legacy, we must first acknowledge that the reform movement of agricultural education bore significant cultural and social ramifications. Both proponents and critics of agricultural education stressed the cultural and moral impact of the movement. Its success or failure depended on the social and cultural atmosphere into which this revolutionary system was introduced.

By advocating agricultural education Clark pressed for social change. In a study of modernization, sociologist M.D. Shipman observed that the revolutionary changes in society are facilitated by energetic individuals, "ready to innovate, willing to take risks, prepared to challenge interests vested in traditional ways...The success of the innovators depends on the existence of a social order that not only tolerates their disruptive efforts, but enables them to build up their influence."¹

Japan was just such a society. For many reasons, the Japanese were ready for change and willing to cooperate with Clark's efforts. The social order in Massachusetts, however, was such that modernization took place along different lines. Clark's ideas met with increasing resistance to the point where he was finally criticized into retirement and quickly forgotten.

William Smith Clark was born in Ashfield, Massachusetts on July 7, 1826 to a country doctor named Atherton Clark. Soon after his birth, the family moved to Easthampton where William was raised and schooled. He entered Williston Seminary in Easthampton and received a classical education in preparation for college.

In the fall of 1844, Clark enrolled as a freshman at Amherst College. There he began his studies in chemistry, a decision that set him on the long path towards Hokkaido and fame. At Amherst he studied in an atmosphere charged with the spirit of evangelical revival. He would take with him a devout ambition to explore the truths of science and to better himself in the eyes of God. Clark graduated Amherst with a Bachelor of Science degree in 1848, and then returned to Williston Seminary as a

¹ M.D. Shipman, *Education and Modernization* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972) 13.

teacher.

In the summer of 1850, William Smith Clark embarked for Gottingen, Germany to attend Georgia Augusta University and ultimately to earn a doctorate in chemistry. After traveling across Europe, he returned to America, deeply influenced by his European education.

From 1853 to 1867 Clark was professor of chemistry at his alma mater, Amherst College. His professorship was interrupted for two years by the Civil War when he served with the 21st Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, quickly earning the rank of colonel and the command of that regiment. The 21st Massachusetts, commanded by Clark, took part in the Battles of Second Bull Run, South Mountain, Antietam and Fredericksburg, among others.

By the time he returned to Amherst in 1863, the MAC had been established by an act of the state legislature. Clark immediately sought involvement in the new venture. He became president of the college in 1867 and within two months of accepting the presidency Clark had driven a construction program to completion, gathered a faculty, and opened the college doors.²

The Japanese Ambassador to the United States, Mon Arinori, was particularly impressed by Clark's efforts and arranged for him to establish a similar institution in Japan. Clark was brought to Sapporo in the Japanese frontier province of Hokkaido, where, from the summer of 1876 to the spring of 1877, he swiftly organized and opened the SAC.

Upon his return to Amherst, he resumed his presidency of the MAC. However, due to growing adversity, Clark would not enjoy the same cooperation he had received in earlier years. Frustrated with his opposition and eager to move on to other enterprises, he resigned in 1879.

For the next three years, Clark engaged in a mining business that would eventually fail in 1882. The disaster destroyed Clark's estate and his health, and ruined the investments of many families in Amherst. He remained confined by ill health in his home for four years. The heart disease that weakened him resulted in his death on March 9, 1886.

² Massachusetts Agricultural College, *Annual Report*, 1867.

The system of education that would define Clark's career developed at the end of the eighteenth century in Europe. At that time, various European governments began to realize that increasing population mandated the strengthening and diversification of agriculture. If civilization were to continue its advance, new crops would be needed to feed the population. Working against the suspicion of traditional farmers, agricultural reformers sought to introduce better livestock, new farm implements and better farming methods.³

This budding agricultural movement achieved greater significance when it became associated with the growth of the natural sciences. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the foundations of modern botany and agricultural chemistry were laid by such men as English zoologist Charles Linnaeus, French chemist Antoine Lavoisier, and German chemist Justus Liebig. As true agricultural science came into existence in Europe, educators sought a means of spreading this new form of knowledge. Agricultural colleges quickly sprang up across the continent. American educators, intrigued by the phenomenon, made voyages to Europe to inspect these schools and to determine the best means of replicating them in the United States.

One such educator was Edward Hitchcock, President of Amherst College, accomplished geologist and mentor to William Smith Clark. In 1851 the Massachusetts legislature, desiring to found an agricultural school of its own, sent Hitchcock to Europe, charging him to "visit as many of the Agricultural Institutions in Europe as would enable him to understand the method of instruction."⁴

His findings share a common criticism. At the premier agricultural school in England, Hitchcock found that "the object of this college is not to fit men to become laborers on the farm, but to prepare them to be the intelligent proprietors of the farms." In France he found that the institutions "were intended to teach the higher principles of agriculture to proprietors of farms...in a word, to prepare the officers of the agricultural army." The schools were not aimed at educating farmers at

³ Alfred Charles True, *A History of Agricultural Education in the United States* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1929), 2.

⁴ Commonwealth of Massachusetts, *Report of the Commissioners Concerning an Agricultural School*, House of Representatives No. 13, 1851, 9.

all, rather they trained an elite class of landowners to manage their emerging agricultural industries. Hitchcock did note that a few schools had made an attempt at educating the lower classes, but had failed. One such institution was the Hofwyl School in Switzerland, commonly known as the first agricultural school in Europe. The school failed, in Hitchcock's view, because the "sons of princes and nobles" refused to work along side sons "of the peasantry and orphans."⁵

Another American educator, Henry Flagg French, first president of MAC, made similar observations but put them more bluntly. In 1866, as he struggled to shape the curriculum for a college which had yet to be built, he wrote, "A careful reading of the recent report on the Agricultural Schools of Europe must satisfy anyone that we shall in vain look abroad for a model. The curse of aristocracy is upon them all."⁶

Agricultural education in Europe was a scientific revolution, but not a social one. It was a shortcoming that Hitchcock, and many other Americans, could not accept. If agricultural education were to be replicated in America, it would have to be done in a different spirit and with a different aim. That European colleges refused to educate common farmers, or had attempted to do so and failed, did not discourage Hitchcock. Agricultural education, he felt, was more likely to be successful in America "where the sons of the rich do not think themselves degraded by forming a part of the same school with those of the poor who have equal talents." His observation proved to be prophetic. This spirit of egalitarianism would become the driving force behind agricultural education in Massachusetts.⁷

Young William Smith Clark also noted the influence of aristocracy on European education. In 1850 he arrived in Gottingen, Germany to study chemistry. In a letter to his father he wrote, "The facilities for acquiring knowledge in Europe are of course vastly superior to those in America...It requires a long series of years and a vast amount of wealth to bring institutions of learning to any degree of perfection." Although

⁵ Ibid., 14-15.

⁶ Henry Flagg French, *Third Annual Report of the Massachusetts Agricultural College* (Boston: Wright & Potter, State Printers, 1866), 6.

⁷ Commonwealth of MA, *Report*, 50.

education seemed to be the enterprise of the wealthy, Clark believed this could be different in America. He goes on to reveal insights that foreshadow his success as an educator. Clark felt that if agricultural education were to be transplanted to American soil, and nourished by the values upon which he had been raised, such as enlightened religion and egalitarianism, it would surely produce a more successful fruit. “Though we must acknowledge the superiority of Germany in science,” Clark wrote, “we must allow New England to be the home of religion. Happy indeed will that land be where true spiritual religion shall be combined with the highest attainments in learning. This will one day be done, I believe, in America first.”⁸

Clark’s career would be dedicated to the realization of this ideal. His efforts would produce remarkable results. He would help to create a new kind of education in Massachusetts, one geared, as Hitchcock recommended, to both rich and poor and steered by a belief that any individual could better himself through learning and religion. It was a formula for social and cultural change that would have an important impact on New England and eventually Japan.

Agricultural education in Massachusetts differed from its European counterpart in two major respects. First, it emphasized egalitarianism, a vital aspect of American republicanism. It was an educational movement meant for the farmers themselves, to elevate their social and cultural status. Second, the movement, at least in Massachusetts, carried a moralistic component that, like so many of the reform movements of the nineteenth century, owed its punch to the evangelical revivals of the 1830s and 1840s.

On his return from Europe in 1852, Clark was offered a professorship of chemistry at Amherst College. He wasted no time in joining the efforts to establish agricultural education on American soil. In the year of his hiring, the Amherst College catalog announced that a new Division of Science had been organized, meant to attract “any who may wish to study the elements of Agriculture, theoretically and practically...A laboratory is being fitted up for the reception of students in analytical and

⁸ William Smith Clark, Letter to Father, March 27, 1852, University of Massachusetts Archives, 1.

agricultural chemistry, under the direction of a Professor who has spent two years in some of the best laboratories in Europe.” That professor was, of course, Clark, who was apparently instrumental in the establishment of the new curriculum.⁹

The program, despite Clark’s leadership and the active support of college president Edward Hitchcock, who would continue to promote agricultural education, was not very successful. The students, many from elite families, lacked interest in agriculture, and the program was discontinued in 1857. It was apparent to Clark that a new type of institution was necessary. He would bring the issue of agricultural education directly to the farmers and urge them to support a state agricultural college.

Clark became actively involved in the Hampshire County Agricultural Society, offering lectures and instruction to groups of farmers across western Massachusetts. In 1859, he became a member of the Massachusetts Board of Agriculture and in 1860 became President of the Hampshire Board of Agriculture. He used his position in these organizations to urge for an agricultural institution. A later address to the Massachusetts Board of Agriculture reflects his ideology:

In the good time coming, the refining, elevating, and strengthening influences of high intellectual and aesthetic culture will be considered as desirable in the agricultural profession as they are in medicine, law or theology...If practical farmers are to remain ignorant of all the higher branches of learning, and to have only the mental discipline and culture of the country public schools, they can never occupy their proper position in society.¹⁰

⁹ John Maki, *William Smith Clark: A Yankee in Hokkaido* (unpublished manuscript, University of MA Archives and Specials Collections), II-41.

¹⁰ William Smith Clark, “The Works and Wants of the College” address in the Massachusetts Board of Agriculture *Annual Report 1868* (Boston: Wright & Potter, State Printers, 1868), 17.

Several other men advocating for an agricultural college had employed this egalitarian theme. The beginnings of the movement in Massachusetts can be traced the report of Henry Colman, a commissioner charged by the Massachusetts legislature in 1836 to conduct the first agricultural survey of the state. Colman wrote, "In order to render the agricultural professional more attractive and respectable, we must seek its intellectual elevation. Improvement of the mind confers a rank which wealth cannot purchase, and commands a respect which the proudest aristocracy may envy."¹¹

Marshall Wilder, a successful Boston merchant who had an interest in agriculture, made perhaps the most successful use of this rhetoric. While president of the Norfolk County Agricultural Society, Wilder was instrumental in the creation of the Massachusetts Board of Agriculture. In 1849, at a meeting of the Norfolk Agricultural Society attended by Governor Briggs, Daniel Webster, and Horace Mann, Wilder made a stirring plea for agricultural education:

Let our agricultural papers and periodicals continue their noble advocacy of this cause, let the voice of the eloquent advocate it in the halls of legislation, and throughout the length and breadth of our land let efficient hands and warm hearts engage in it, and then the public mind cannot slumber, and we shall have among our yeomanry such farmers as the world never before witnessed, men who will honor their vocation and therefore be honored by society — the chiefs of our land, the bulwark of our nation.¹²

The Massachusetts Agricultural College would ride this egalitarian concept into existence. The elevation of the farmer became the

¹¹ Hal S. Barron, *Those Who Stayed Behind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 10.

¹² Frank Prentice Rand, *Yesterdays at Massachusetts State College* (Amherst: Associate Alumni of the Massachusetts State College, 1933), 28.

watchwords of the movement and would define the mission of the college. Later, as Judge Henry Flagg French worked to define the college curriculum, he wrote:

In deciding on a course of study and discipline for such an institution, we must ever remember that we live under a republican and not an aristocratic government...The foundation stones of republicanism...are the ideas of Equality, Progress, and the Dignity of Labor...The poorest graduate of a Massachusetts high school, with no capital but his brains has rightfully more interest in government...than the son of any man...in the aristocratic countries of Europe. Republicanism has undertaken in America to recast society into a system of equality.¹³

Linked as it was to such revolutionary philosophy, agricultural education signified more than a new branch of science. Men like Colman, Wilder, French and Clark all believed that agricultural education was necessary as a means to “recast society” to ensure that the farmer gained his “proper position.” Clearly, these men perceived a threat to New England farmers as a class. What, then, was that threat? What circumstances propelled the elevation of the farmer to a cultural imperative?

As the nineteenth century progressed, the communities of rural New England experienced radical changes. The forces of industrialization changed labor patterns, and increasing urbanization altered patterns of population throughout New England. This crisis is described by historian Hal Barron:

Rural society...had lost its place as the fount of independent, republican virtue. Before urbanization...life in the country was as “refined and cultured as that of the towns...In short, farmers constituted a class from which men could be selected

¹³ French, *Report*, 4-5.

who were, by virtue of their intellect and learning, competent to fill public position.” By the end of the century, many observers were convinced that people of that caliber had left the countryside for the city...In place of sturdy Yankee yeomen, America would soon have an illiterate rural peasantry.¹⁴

The force that threatened to transform farmers into an “illiterate peasantry” was the massive emigration of rural New Englanders. The rapidly growing urban centers represented a major pull for farmers. As urban industries flourished, economic growth in rural communities slowed, and population in many communities decreased as families uprooted and moved to urban centers. The vast tracts of fertile land in the west represented another pull. Spurred on by the promise of cheap land, many New England farmers migrated to the states of Indiana, Ohio, Illinois and Michigan. This exodus was extreme in many communities of western Massachusetts and northern New England. The quality of life in communities, which experienced depopulation, decreased markedly. As population and economic prosperity declined, land values decreased and local infrastructure deteriorated. It appeared to many New Englanders that rural America was falling victim to calamitous social change and moral decay. This was the crisis to which agricultural reformers reacted. As Barron observed, “In addition to pointing out the moral...failings of those who left, New England agriculturalists tried to stem the tide of this exodus by improving...local agriculture through agricultural reforms.”¹⁵

Clark witnessed this depopulation as it occurred around him. The hill towns of western Massachusetts, with little fertile soil, saw a dramatic decline in population during the nineteenth century. In 1834 a writer for the *Hampshire Gazette* lamented, “How injurious, therefore, to New England has been this emigration westward!...the value of property is reduced here, to say nothing of the loss of capital and men...that has left

¹⁴ Barron, 39.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 32-38.

farms upon the hills without tenants, without purchasers, and without price. Bleeding at every vein for a succession of years, will reduce any subject to depletion.” In radical contrast to the hill towns, the growing industrial villages of western Massachusetts, such as Springfield and Palmer, saw a seven-fold increase in population over the course of the century.¹⁶

Clark, like other agriculturalists, was greatly bothered by this westward migration. He was quick to praise the moral superiority of stalwart Yankees who chose to avoid the rash of western speculation: “Will a wise man exchange the beautiful and diversified scenery of New England...for the monotonous and malarious regions where crops are said to grow almost without cultivation? Will he forsake the school and churches and the social privileges of prosperous communities for the semi-barbarous condition of newly and sparsely settled districts?..We think not, sir.” The key to combating this migration, according to Clark, was science and superior Yankee culture. In order to overcome the adverse conditions of Massachusetts farming, the Yankee farmer “must be industrious, intelligent, and prudent, and to secure more than a bare subsistence he needs all the aid which the highest science can afford.” Or, as one writer of the *New England Farmer* put it, the Yankee farmer must adapt to modern science “or he will go either to the poorhouse or the state of Ohio.”¹⁷

Agricultural reformers’ efforts to preserve the status of farmers as “the bulwark of our nation” may ring of Jeffersonian agrarianism, but in reality it was far more. The old agrarian ideal of subsistence farming ceased to be a reality in western Massachusetts, and reformers instead promoted commercial farming. Hand in hand with this, reformers like Clark were interested in far more than science and economics. There was a moralistic component to their appeals for a State Agricultural

¹⁶ Maragaret Richards Pabst, “Agricultural Trends in the Connecticut Valley Region of Western Massachusetts, 1800-1900,” *Smith College Studies in History*, vol. XXVI No. 1-4, October, 1940-July, 1941, (Northampton: Dept. of History of Smith College), 26, 35, 68.

¹⁷ William Smith Clark, “The Agricultural Interests of New England,” *Proceedings at the Centennial Celebration of the Battle of Lexington*, (Boston: Lockwood Books, Co., 1875), 83; Clark, “Professional Education the Present Want of Agriculture,” 68; Pabst, 25.

College. It was not just the livelihood of the Massachusetts farmer that was at stake, but his moral condition.¹⁸

In attempting to gather support for the college, Clark spoke before agricultural societies throughout the state. Farmers appreciated his tutelage and efforts on their behalf — a local paper proclaimed that, “in Professor Clark the farmers of Amherst have a valuable friend and instructor.” Convincing farmers of the necessity of an agricultural college, however, was a difficult task. In a speech before the Housatonic Agricultural Society Clark lamented that supporters for the college among the farming population were few. He continued:

It calls to mind the almost incredible fact in the history of the South Sea Islands, that, in 1797, thirty-nine English missionaries...began their earnest and devoted labors for the elevation of the native population, but did not succeed in making a single convert during the first sixteen years. It was the belief among the pioneers in the missionary work that if men could but see the advantages to be derived from Christian civilization, they would readily accept it. But experience has demonstrated that efforts for the improvement of a people are most wisely directed to the mental and moral culture of the young.¹⁹

Clark saw himself as a missionary to the farmers of western Massachusetts. His foremost goal was to elevate their position in society to allow them to attain a higher state of morality through education. As he had earlier written in Germany, “Happy indeed will that land be where true spiritual religion shall be combined with the highest attainments in learning!” This was the best means preserving a class of people in economic and moral jeopardy.

For Clark, the influences of spiritual religion extended back to his days as a student at Amherst College. Exposed to the evangelical fervor

¹⁸ Pabst, 57.

¹⁹ Maki, IV-6; Clark, “Professional Education,” 71.

of the campus, Clark initially refused to participate in the religious zeal that surrounded him, a fact that greatly distressed his professors. But finally, in 1846, Clark sent a deeply emotional letter homewards. “Mother, blessed be God. Your prayers for a long lost son are as I humbly hope and trust answered. This blessed night 5 hours since I believe I submitted to my Redeemer...The way is so plain that the wayfaring man though a fool need not err therein. Yet how many go down to destruction...”²⁰

The letter is typical of fervent conversions that took place by the thousands throughout New England in the 1830s and 1840s. As historian Ronald Walters has argued, an evangelical spirit of this sort would permeate so many antebellum reform movements and even exert its influence on national politics. Most reform movements, whether antislavery, education reform or temperance, were often “mixed with the rhetoric about moral decline and...a genuine belief that things could improve, that people could and should be helped, and that a better world would be the result.”²¹

The efforts of William Smith Clark and other agricultural reformers indicate that such moral rhetoric was a major component of the agricultural education movement, and a useful tool. The initial success of the movement was due in part to the moralistic agenda of its proponents. Clark used such arguments before agricultural societies, during his term on the state Board of Agriculture, and even before the State Legislature.

“Now,” Clark wrote, “to assert that a young man cannot be immensely strengthened and benefited by special, scientific preparation to practise [sic] agriculture, is to admit, though so loudly praised as the first, last and noblest occupation of the race, it is really degrading in its nature, and designed...only for those poor, stupid, ignorant or unfortunate persons.” Clark was not a farmer, but, like the missionaries of the South Sea Islands, he endeavored to safeguard the moral state of a class of people to which he did not belong. In the changing hierarchy of

²⁰ William Smith Clark, Letter to Mother, March 16, 1846; University of Massachusetts Archives and Special Collections.

²¹ Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 23.

Massachusetts, farmers needed to rise to a higher intellectual position. If not, then the Yankee farmer would indeed fall to the position of an illiterate peasant.²²

Ultimately, the proponents of agricultural education in Massachusetts triumphed with the help of the Federal government. In 1859, Vermont Representative Justin Smith Morrill brought a Land Grant bill before Congress. Like reformers in Massachusetts, Morrill was concerned with elevating a class of society that, in the changing hierarchy of the nineteenth century, had been neglected. He made use of the same rhetoric of egalitarian principles and moral reform. In a later visit to MAC, Morrill described his motivation in writing the bill:

The land grant colleges were founded on the idea that a higher and broader education should be placed in every State within reach of those whose destiny assigned them to, or may have the courage to choose industrial vocations where the wealth of nations is produced...and where a much larger number of its people need wider educational advantages and impatiently await their possession.²³

President Buchanan, appeasing southerners who felt that education was a matter of states rights, vetoed the first Land Grant bill. Morrill drafted another that was brought before a very different Congress in 1862. With the southern states in rebellion and their representatives absent from Congress, the bill passed with little opposition and was signed by President Lincoln on July 2. Allotting Federal land in the far west to each state, the act provided that the monies from the sale of such land should be appropriated by each state to the establishment of "at least one college where the leading object shall be...to teach such branches of

²² Clark, "Professional Education," 78.

²³ True, 108.

learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts...in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes.”²⁴

In March of 1863, the Massachusetts Legislature voted to accept this opportunity, and on April 29 it passed an act incorporating the Massachusetts Agricultural College. A month later, after nearly two years of service, William Smith Clark resigned from the 21st Massachusetts, his regiment having been so thinned by what he called “the cruel fate of war” that he could no longer remain their colonel. Returning to Amherst, Clark immediately sought involvement with the fledgling institution.

During 1864, the newly established Board of Trustees sought a suitable location for the College. Possible sites included Springfield, Lexington, Northampton and Amherst. Some, including Governor Andrew and educator Louis Agassiz, even suggested that the institution be made a division of Harvard College.²⁵ Clark, more than any other individual, can be credited with persuading the trustees to locate the school in Amherst. The town of Amherst elected him to the General Court by a vote of 754 to 7. He was sent to Boston with the mandate to secure legislation that would enable the town to raise the \$50,000 necessary to present to the Board of Trustees for the construction of the College. After several orations from the State House floor, Clark obtained approval for Amherst’s bond and proudly presented the same to the Board of Trustees. He guided them on a tour across farmland just north of Amherst village which he believed to be the most suitable location and urged them to make a decision. Writing of this meeting, Frank Rand, a historian of the Massachusetts Agricultural College, depicted Clark’s plea in a somewhat dramatized, but probably accurate fashion: “How he can talk, this Colonel Clark — rapidly, ardently, irresistibly, his voice under perfect restraint but still vibrant with life and rather too loud for the room. And how the light of his eyes reaches out and captures, one by one, the spirits of these still uncertain men.”

²⁴ Maki, IV-8.

²⁵ Rand, 3-5.

Ultimately, the trustees gave in. The College would be located in Amherst.²⁶

The task of planning and building proved laborious. Three years later, in the summer of 1867, the College had been through two presidents and still did not have a finished building. In his resignation letter, the first president, Henry Flagg French, attributed his difficulties to one man. Although French did not name him, the source of his troubles was undoubtedly Clark. French, even for all his republican principles, wanted towering gothic structures for the college, located atop a high ridge. This was too reminiscent of the old universities in Europe for some. Clark insisted that the college be constructed in military fashion, with the students barracked in more modest brick buildings near the farm. After months of debate and much tension among the trustees, Clark's proposal won out, and so French resigned.²⁷

The second president, Paul Chadbourne, who had served as professor of science at Williams College, had overseen the beginning of the construction of the college along the lines of Clark's plan. Due to ill health, however, Chadbourne was forced to resign. The presidency now fell to Clark in August of 1867. Only months previous he had agreed to accept a professorship in botany, finally making his way onto the payroll of the college with which he had been unofficially associated for years. Immediately upon receiving the presidency, Clark named a faculty and made recommendations for completing the stalled construction program. About a month after he became president the unfinished college had five completed buildings, four faculty members, and opened its doors to 49 students.

His strong leadership and success in opening the college was highly praised. Despite the acclaim, Clark sensed a disturbing reaction from the local farmers. He had labored in their interest and yet they returned his efforts with indifference. As the college opened, Clark wrote, "There can be but one serious impediment in the way of making a true professional agricultural school in this state prosper, and that is a want of

²⁶ Maki, IV-8, 10; Rand, 7-13.

²⁷ Rand, 13.

interest in it among the agricultural population.”²⁸

In 1825, a writer in the *New England Farmer* observed “the great body of agriculturalists are less open to the influence of improvement than any other class of the community. They are indeed singularly adverse to innovations and view every change that is suggested with alarm and contempt.” Many farmers believed that education made a person “lazy and unwilling to perform manual labor.” Clark himself observed, “from present indications it would seem that scientific attainment and professional training for farmers are not very highly esteemed in this part of the Commonwealth.”²⁹

The first class to enter the college in 1867 gave reason for optimism. The number was higher than expected, and the background of the students was diverse. As William Bowker, one of the first students and a future trustee of the college, recalled, “Some of the Old Guard were dressed in home made clothes, faded at that, and some in broadcloth and fine linen; for they came from town and city and every station in life.” In practice, as well as theory, the college had corrected the wrongs of European aristocracy and embodied republican principles.³⁰

However, enrollment as the 1870s progressed was minimal. Farmers showed little interest in the experimental farming taking place there. As the decade went on, the college began to mount considerable debt. The financial Panic of 1873 made matters worse. Many demanded the closing of the college, and few came to its defense. Seeking support, Clark continued to speak before local agricultural societies. In an address to the Housatonic Agricultural Society, he expressed his frustration: “To one who understands fully the greatness of the work which has been done in Amherst the utter indifference in regard to the college manifested by most of the 75,000 farmers of Massachusetts is truly astounding.”³¹

²⁸ Clark, “The Works and Wants of the College,” 77.

²⁹ *New England Farmer*, August 12, 1825, 21; June 2, 1871, 4; Clark, “The Works and Wants of the College,” 80.

³⁰ Maki, IV-24.

³¹ Clark, “The Works and Wants of the College,” 77.

Clark's greatest concern was "The manifest disregard of the agricultural community for their college." It "affords the most unanswerable argument to those who for any reason wish to defeat the legislative appropriations necessary for its development and support."³² Those who wished to defeat the college began to express their views loudly. Blaming Clark for what looked to be a financial disaster, newspapers across Massachusetts demanded the closing of the college. The MAC was labeled an "ill conditioned and profitless enterprise," a "hungry buzzard," and a "water-logged and beggardly institution." This constant criticism from the press deeply disturbed Clark. It reached its height just as Clark departed for Japan in 1876. On the other side of the globe, he would enjoy far greater support, and commented in a letter to his wife, "Thank God, in [Japan] editors are held responsible for what they print, and a considerable number of them are kept where most of ours ought to be — in jail."³³

When Clark returned from Japan in 1877, he found that the college's situation had only grown worse. The debt had grown to \$20,000 and the graduating class of 1878 had dwindled to a pitiful eight students. Despite his successful use of egalitarian rhetoric, Clark could not overcome the popular opinion that farming in Massachusetts was simply not profitable. The work being accomplished at the college could not slow the exodus of farmers to the west nor stop the remarkable growth of urban centers. Clark continued to insist that, through science and hard work, Massachusetts could yield a great abundance. Social sentiment and economic reality were against him. Clark himself admitted that in Massachusetts, "we find only one twentieth of the population devoted to rural pursuits."³⁴

Matters came to a head in 1879 when the debt reached \$32,000. Deeply concerned, forty- three Massachusetts legislators, comprising the committees on agriculture, education, and military affairs, came to Amherst to inspect the MAC, to hear from President Clark, and to make

³² *Ibid.*, 81.

³³ Clark, Letter to wife, October 22, 1876, University of Massachusetts Archives and Special Collections, 5.

³⁴ Rand, 46; Clark, "The Agricultural Interests of New England," 83.

a decision on the future of the college. After much deliberation, the committees finally agreed to recommend that the Commonwealth assume the debt. This recommendation raised a storm in Boston. In the House, representatives caricatured and ranted against the college for an hour. A representative from Springfield announced, “The college has abused our confidence, it has violated its pledges, it has broken the law whenever it could, and it comes here annually as a beggar.” In the Senate, a legislator from Hampden County called the MAC “a financial, educational and military failure.”³⁵

As criticism of the college continued, Clark announced that he could not continue in his duties “so long as the newspapers continually scatter and broadcast false statements.” He railed against what he called the “prejudices of the ignorant and the jealousy of the educated” and “timeserving politicians and unprincipled newspapers seeking only to float on the tide of public opinion.”³⁶ Finally, in 1879, he resigned from the presidency of the college.

In 1869, before the MAC had encountered such difficulties and while Clark was still enjoying good publicity, “a young Japanese prince,” as the *Amherst Record* later called him, arrived in Massachusetts to attend the agricultural college. In order to understand how this event came about, and the repercussions it would have on Clark’s life, one must first examine the remarkable changes that occurred in Japan at the time.³⁷

As Clark was returning from his education in Europe, a two and a half century legacy was coming to an end in Japan. The Tokugawa Shoguns had ruled there since 1603. It was a society dominated by samurai warriors, much in the same way medieval Europe had been dominated by feudal lords. Status was defined by birth, and social mobility was almost non-existent. Education was reserved for those members of the samurai class. Even after the collapse of the Tokugawa Shogunate, the samurai would persist, not as a warrior class, but as elite bureaucrats. By the mid nineteenth century, however,

³⁵ Rand, 46-53.

³⁶ Miki, IX-1; Clark, “The Works and Wants of the College,” 81.

³⁷ *Amherst Record*, July 17, 1872, 5.

this age of rigid hierarchy came to an end.³⁸

Despite the fact that the Tokugawa Shogunate had long since outlawed any contact with the West, the threatening growth of western imperialism caused Japan to rethink its policy. The British defeat of China in the Opium War of 1842 demonstrated to the Japanese the dangers of attempting to shut out the European powers. As historian Richard Storry observed, the Shogunate “took warning from what was happening in China. That massive country, too proud and disdainful to copy the methods of the West was humiliated again and again.” Therefore, when Commodore Matthew Perry from the United States appeared in Tokyo Bay with a squadron of ships in 1853, the Shogunate agreed to his demand for trade. Ironically, the Shogunate believed the best way to meet the military threat of the West was to “westernize.”³⁹

As trade relations began, internal social factors set not only the process of westernization and modernization in motion, but brought about the complete overthrow of the feudal government. At the center of social change in Japan was the idea of individualism, or self-betterment. Education, now increasingly available to commoners, allowed individuals to achieve a measure of status that was not related to family or class. Ordinary peasants began to show signs of ambition and self-assertion that led to upheavals in many parts of Japan. Ultimately, this culminated in the overthrow of the Shogunate in 1867 and the restoration of imperial power under young Emperor Meiji.⁴⁰

The new government set out upon a path of rapid modernization. An improved educational system was seen as instrumental to this process. One of the new imperial government’s first acts was to draft the “Order of Education.” In this document, education was identified as “the key to success.” The Emperor swore that “knowledge was to be sought throughout the world” so that Japan could craft the greatest universities

³⁸ Kobayashi Tetsuya, *Society, Schools and Progress in Japan* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1976), 11.

³⁹ Richard Storry, *A History of Modern Japan*, (Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc., 1960), 84-106.

⁴⁰ Tetsuya, 20.

and boast the most enlightened and productive citizenry on the globe.⁴¹

The sudden change in the international scene prompted an unusual article in *New England Farmer*:

The policy of Japan appears to be to profit by the adoption of the improvements of modern civilization. It is stated that the emperor has ordered that two men from each of the nearly four hundred provinces of his empire shall be sent to this country and to Europe, in order that a knowledge of the western civilization may be spread abroad among all his subjects.⁴²

Among these men was Mori Arinori, who became the Japanese minister to the United States. He began to look for schools in America where the future leaders of Japan could be educated.

In 1869, William Smith Clark opened a letter from Horace Capron, Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture that read, "I have deemed it proper, in answer to the anxious inquiries of His Excellency Mori Arinori, the Japanese Ambassador [sic] to this government, for the best educational institution for a Japanese youth of high rank, to recommend the Massachusetts Agricultural College." The "young Japanese prince" enrolled that fall, and two more followed the next fall.⁴³

At the 1872 commencement exercises of the MAC, the Japanese prince, Saitaro Naito, read an address entitled "Progress in Japan" in his native language. Initially, those in attendance failed to appreciate the significance of the address. The *Amherst Record* wrote that the "strange confusion of unintelligible sounds...completely convulsed the audience with laughter." Clark, in English, then read the address, and it remained unclear whether or not the discourse, declaring the Japanese need for

⁴¹ Shipman, 15; Don Adams, *Education and Modernization in Asia*, (Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1970), 35.

⁴² *New England Farmer*, July 2, 1871, 3.

⁴³ Maki, V-7.

education and agriculture, was written by Saitaro or Clark. It was clear to many at the time, however, that Clark had taken a great interest in the progress of the developing nation.⁴⁴

Japanese students attended many schools in the United States. However, Minister Mori took a particular interest in the MAC. After Commissioner Capron's endorsement of the school, Mori went to Amherst for an inspection. The Japanese ambassador was openly enthusiastic about what he saw there. During an infantry drill demonstration, the instruction of which was mandated by the Morrill Act, Mori exclaimed to Clark, "This is the kind of institution Japan must have! An institution that shall teach young men to feed themselves and to defend themselves!" Further, Mori insisted that the man who was responsible for the MAC should create the same institution in Japan.⁴⁵

Clark was brought to Washington to negotiate a contract with the Japanese government that he signed on March 3, 1876. His salary totaled a remarkable \$7,200. On June 1, he boarded a steamer in San Francisco and set off for the Far East. His success in Japan would rely on the new spirit of individualism that thrived there. Clark's lofty ideas of social change, which had failed to impress Yankee farmers, fired the imaginations of a people who were just beginning to appreciate the concept of personal ambition.

In Japan, Clark's strategy did not change. He set out, once again, to build a college that would elevate farmers to their proper position in society through science and higher learning. As he confessed in a letter to his wife, "I am actually rebuilding MAC...on the other side of the earth."⁴⁶ His ideology, and the principles upon which the college would be founded, once again centered on egalitarianism and the moralism of evangelical religion. This time, however, the people to which his message was aimed would be far more receptive. Because of the mindset of the Japanese people, Clark would have few restraints on his

⁴⁴ *Amherst Record*, July 17, 1872, 5.

⁴⁵ Maki, V-7.

⁴⁶ Clark, Letter to wife, October 22, 1876, University of Massachusetts Archives and Special Collections.

creativity. And in this foreign land, the Christian component of his message would have greater significance.

When his steamer arrived in Tokyo, Clark and the two MAC graduates he had brought with him received an enthusiastic welcome from the Japanese. “We had our official reception in swallow tails and white kids,” Clark wrote. “You should have seen the procession as we dashed through the streets, each drawn by two men tandem in a fine *jinriksha*.” The days following were so full of elegant dinners, receptions and gifts that Clark grew anxious that “the year will pass away before I can get to work.” The receptions did come to an end, and Clark would soon find himself sailing for Sapporo.⁴⁷

The social and political atmosphere of Sapporo, capital of Hokkaido, the northernmost island of Japan, was well suited to Clark’s message, and a key to his success in Japan. Hokkaido was the frontier of the Japanese Empire. Sapporo, in 1876 a town of only three thousand people, had been founded only seven years prior to Clark’s arrival. The island was predominantly a wilderness, and its Japanese citizens were eager for progress. The Colonial Department of Japan, or *Kaitakushi*, had located the agricultural college in Sapporo for that very reason. Scientific agriculture was imperative to the island’s development. Unlike Massachusetts, where farming was viewed as unnecessary and backwards, in Hokkaido 90% of the population were farmers. The need for development was made even more pressing by the Russian military threat. Russia had colonized the island of Sakhalin just to the north and would undoubtedly subjugate Hokkaido if the Japanese did not occupy it first. For these reasons, Clark’s proposals were in harmony with the needs of Japan, especially where Hokkaido was concerned.⁴⁸

Clark received unbounded cooperation from a Japanese government eager to see the development of its northern frontier. The SAC was organized in one month. To Clark it must have been immensely gratifying after the agonizing four years in shaping the MAC. In Tokyo,

⁴⁷ Clark, Letters to wife, July 1, 1876 and July 5, 1876, University of Massachusetts Archives and Special Collections.

⁴⁸ Maki, V-11.

Clark had consulted with the Governor of Hokkaido, General Kuroda, who, as Clark wrote to his wife, “promised to do everything I want.” Clark and Kuroda greatly respected each other, and Kuroda frequently asked Clark for his views on the development of the island. “Governor Kuroda consults me constantly,” Clark wrote, “and always follows my advice.” Clark’s advice covered broad ground, from strategies on converting the migratory fishermen of Hokkaido into permanent settlers, to suggestions on the development of a textiles industry. He received so much cooperation, in fact, that he wrote, “I tremble to think how much confidence is reposed in me and what responsibilities I am daily assuming.” In another letter he stated, “I believe I am the first foreigner with such power.”⁴⁹

The confidence was well warranted, as Clark’s influence on Hokkaido was profound. As he had stated in the first report of the SAC, “An active, energetic people cannot long be contented with clumsy wooden clogs.” To the people of Japan, Clark brought technology and agricultural techniques that had never been seen. The college, including a plant house and the first American model farm and barn in Japan, had been constructed according to his plan. Clark introduced the first collegiate military unit in the country. He set the curriculum for advanced research in agriculture, geology, fishing, and animal husbandry. Under his direction new crops were planted throughout the island, including 30,000 Concord grape vines and 100,000 American fruit trees.⁵⁰

The college, when finished, consisted of five buildings, including lecture rooms, a library, a chemical laboratory, and a dormitory. The college farm he designed consisted of 250 acres, and within a year was already producing excellent crops including wheat, barley, oats, Indian corn, potatoes and flax. The students were trained in a diverse range of western sciences and engaged in them enthusiastically. They responded particularly well to Clark’s exercises in the collection of specimens in

⁴⁹ William Smith Clark, *First Annual Report of the Sapporo Agricultural College* (Tokei: Department of the Kaitakushi, 1877), 2-4; Clark, Letters to wife, July 1, 1876, September 10, 1876, October 22, 1876, University of Massachusetts Archives and Special Collections.

⁵⁰ Clark, *First Annual Report of the SAC*, 3; Rand, 43.

botany, zoology, and entomology. These excursions into the hills of Hokkaido represented far more than just an opportunity to escape the tedium of the classroom. During long hikes filled with conversation, the students became acquainted with Clark's western views on personal ambition and came to regard him as a great mentor.⁵¹

The students who attended SAC were nothing like the bucolic farmers' sons who attended MAC. The purpose of the college was to prepare young men of the samurai class to become officers of the Colonial Department. As Clark examined potential students he observed, "Many of them can write and read English better than the average of our MAC candidates for admission." As the school year progressed, he wrote, "The students are as good and enthusiastic as possible and so polite and grateful for instruction as to make American students seem like savages."⁵²

In educating the aristocratic sons of the samurai, Clark had, in a way, compromised his republican principles. Rather than attempting to directly involve the farmers of Hokkaido in the work of the college, he was instructing the farming officers along the lines of the European agricultural colleges. His message, however, constantly stressed the virtues of personal achievement, and was heard throughout Japan. Clark knew that the possibility of self-betterment, an important principle to so many in America, would now hold a particular significance for the Japanese as they broke free from centuries of oppression. In his address during the opening ceremonies of the SAC, he said:

This wonderful emancipation from the tyranny of caste and custom, which in ages past has enveloped like a dark cloud the nations of the East, should awaken a lofty ambition in the breast of every student to whom an education is offered. Let every one of you young gentlemen strive to prepare himself for the highest

⁵¹ Clark, *First Annual Report of the SAC*, 8-10.

⁵² Clark, Letters to wife, August 5, 1876, 8; September 10, 1876, 1, University of Massachusetts Archives and Special Collections.

positions of labor and trust and consequent honor in your native land, which greatly needs your most faithful and efficient service.⁵³

To those young men in Hokkaido who heard Clark's words, ambition was a gift that brought blessings long deprived of their forefathers. His egalitarian message, a tired one in Massachusetts, resonated with the 50 young men who entered the SAC in 1876.

Clark's principles of Christian moralism were also more successful in Japan than in Massachusetts. As Clark parted from his students in the spring of 1877 to return to America, he told them, "Boys, remember that of all the work I have done in Japan none gives me so much satisfaction as that of teaching you the Gospel." With social status and moral improvement in mind, Clark had said that he felt like a missionary to the farmers of Massachusetts. In Japan, he was a missionary in the truest sense.⁵⁴

Clark assumed this role with great enthusiasm, and also a sense of irony. Thirty years earlier, he had struggled with his own faith as a student. "Who would have thought," he wrote to his wife, "that I would become a successful missionary!" However, Clark, perhaps mindful of the fact that his wife was the daughter of a famous missionary who became an advisor to the King of Hawaii, felt such work was a responsibility. "You may be sure," he assured her, "I shall not allow such a glorious opportunity to do missionary work to pass unimproved."⁵⁵

While in Tokyo, he met with Reverend L.H. Gulick, a leading missionary in Japan. Gulick gave him 30 bibles to take with him to Sapporo. While on the steamship from Tokyo to Sapporo, Clark and Governor Kuroda traveled together. One evening, several of the boys from Tokyo who were to be examined for entrance to the college were

⁵³ *Hokkaido Imperial University Semicentennial Celebration*, (Sapporo: Hokkaido Imperial University, 1926), 10.

⁵⁴ Rand, 44.

⁵⁵ Maki, p. V-8; Clark, Letter to wife, November 21, 1876, University of Massachusetts Archives and Special Collections, 4.

cavorting on the deck. Clark and Kuroda, in a cabin below, could hear their antics. Kuroda observed that the boys should be taught morals. Clark suggested the use of the Bible as a textbook. Kuroda at first objected. The government of Japan outlawed Christianity, viewed as subversive. It is, however, a credit to Clark's strong will that he was able to convince a government official to condone its teaching at Sapporo.

Months later, Clark was proud to observe, "Though there is not a minister within 150 miles and we dwell among heathen, yet every one of my boys seems to be truly converted and living a most exemplary life." Thirty of these students would sign an important document drafted by Clark. By signing the "Covenant of Believers in Jesus," these students converted to Christianity and agreed to accept baptism. He and his students together agreed to forgo alcohol, tobacco, and gambling and profane language. The document is the first of its kind in Japan and is today enshrined in the William Smith Clark Memorial Church, just outside of the Hokkaido Imperial University that he founded.⁵⁶

On April 16, 1877, Colonel Clark left Sapporo on horseback to begin the journey that would bring him home to Amherst. Dozens of Japanese students accompanied him as far as the village of Shimamatsu where they finally parted with their teacher, Clark-sensei. In parting, Clark told them to remember to write, that he wanted to keep track of them all, and shook each of their hands. Then, from the saddle, he shouted to them, "Boys! Be ambitious, like this old man!"⁵⁷ The words have made him famous in Japan. They are inscribed on the base of the bronze bust of Clark at Hokkaido Imperial University. The seal of the university today carries three cryptic letters: "BBA." They are Clark's parting words and his message to a generation of Japanese just discovering the importance of ambition.

In Massachusetts, when he was pleading with farmers to take an interest in the MAC, he said to them, "Knowledge is power, and its conscious possession must render the farmer, as well as every other man, more ambitious, more energetic, and more efficient." It was Clark's

⁵⁶ Clark, Letter to wife, March 5, 1877, University of Massachusetts Archives and Special Collections, 3; Clark, *First Annual Report of the SAC*, 33.

⁵⁷ Rand, 45-46.

great hope that the farmers of Massachusetts would awaken and understand his message. Through higher learning the farmers of New England would be as no other yeomanry in the world — prosperous and enlightened. His efforts were in keeping with the New England traditions of egalitarianism and moral reform. As moralist Henry David Thoreau wrote, “moral reform is the effort to throw off sleep...The millions are awake enough for physical labor, but only one in a million is awake enough for effective intellectual exertion...We must learn to reawaken ourselves and keep awake...I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavor.” Clark’s life work was dedicated to this principle, the theme resounds in so many of his writings — life held no greater promise than the possibility for the cultivation of the higher self.⁵⁸

In many ways, Clark said to the sons of Massachusetts, “Boys, be ambitious!” His words, however, failed to inspire many. Modernization in Massachusetts took place along industrial lines, and agriculture failed to maintain the significance for which Clark hoped. The great westward migration of farmers left behind a small few who were suspicious of innovation. The lack of support from farmers, and the contempt of politicians in Boston, nearly caused the Massachusetts Agricultural College to close down and Clark was quickly forgotten in Massachusetts.

However, in Japan, as two hundred and fifty years of tyranny came to a close, the opportunity for a man to elevate his life was not taken for granted. It was instead a new and cherished form of freedom. Clark’s message was also delivered on the right ground, a place where agriculture and science were vital to the growth and well being of a colony, as well as the advancement of a nation struggling to swiftly modernize. For those in Hokkaido, Clark was the harbinger of new freedom, security and progress. For that reason, William Smith Clark has remained a legend throughout Japan.

⁵⁸ Clark, “The Works and Wants of the College,” 79; Henry David Thoreau, “Walden”, *Heath Anthology of American Literature*, (Lexington: DC Heath and Co., 1990), 1986.

