

Trustees Were Lax At Farmingdale

Acted as "Rubber Stamps" In Approving Misuse of Funds

Elementary School Built for Johnson's Son With Federal Money Paid for Soldiers

By Harold A. Littledale

Trustees of the New York State Institute of Applied Agriculture are responsible for conditions at Farmingdale. They knew what was going on. They approved it. Some are trying to condone it now. That is true of the president, William M. Baldwin. It is also true of the secretary, William W. Niles. But it is not true of some of the others.

The trouble with the trustees is that most of them have let themselves be rubber stamps. There is an honorary position. They are appointed by the Governor. They draw no pay. They meet almost reluctantly. And like most boards of unpaid trustees they are willing to accept the honor but they are not willing to do the work.

Baldwin and Niles have done the work. Then have assumed control. They have dominated the meetings. The others have simply signed upon the dotted line.

And in the background has been the director, A. A. Johnson, placing his personal servants on the payroll of the State, using the Federal funds for State purposes that the State would not acknowledge; using those funds again in personal ways, paying himself two salaries and favoring the Soviet as against the disabled soldiers.

That the trustees knew what was going on and that they approved, it can be proved by the record. The trustees' minutes show it all. It is written down there. It is in black and white. It is inescapable. It can't be denied.

Take the elementary school, for instance. Johnson established the school primarily for his little son. That school was paid for out of the funds furnished by the Federal Government for the training of the disabled men. But the disabled boys do not attend the little school. Johnson's son goes there. Other children of the instructors go there. Some children of others than instructors go there. But the cost is paid from the Federal fund that the institute does not turn into

Trustees Approved School

Do you doubt that the trustees approved this school? Do you doubt that they sanctioned its cost? Well, here's the resolution itself, to be found in the minutes of the meeting of the board held on March 21, 1921, in Mr. Baldwin's office:

"Whereas, it is very important to the interest of the Institute that adequate elementary educational facilities be available to the children of the employees of the Institute; and, whereas the lack of proper educational facilities has been a great drawback to securing and retaining competent teachers for the Institute; and where as there are funds available outside of State appropriation for paying a teacher up to July 1; therefore,

"Be it Resolved, That the director be and he hereby is authorized to arrange for the installation of an ele-

mentary school in the northwest room on the first floor of the Mott House, formerly used as a kitchen, the said school to open as soon as arrangements can be made.

"Be it further Resolved, That the board authorize the expenditure from the contingency fund of not to exceed \$875 for the payment of a teacher's salary for the remainder of the school term.

"Be it further Resolved, That the expenditure of \$125 be authorized from the contingency fund for the purchase of necessary equipment for this school."

The contingency fund is the Federal fund. So there is the proof that the teacher was paid with Federal funds and the school was equipped with Federal funds. And later more equipment was bought with Federal funds, and the teacher was placed upon a payroll met with Federal funds.

But that resolution was not the first that the trustees heard of the little school. Some months before Johnson brought the matter up. He then wanted to turn one of the instructors out of his office and use that for the school room. Miss Hilda Ward, one of the trustees, felt, however, that the school should not be established and succeeded in blocking it. Later, however, Johnson brought it up again with the arguments outlined in the resolution and with the added argument that unless such a school was established, William Ryan, the farm manager, would resign. That settled it. Miss Ward withdrew her objections. The resolution, already typewritten, was placed in her hands. And she moved it.

"I have since been told," Miss Ward said to-day, "that Mr. Ryan made no such threat. I was deceived."

Insisted Upon Fee

But others than the children of the instructors attend that school. Miss Ward learned of that, too, and insisted that a fee be charged. That was at the meeting last November, and now "non-resident" children are charged the rate customary at an elementary public school for children from outside its district.

The records also show that Johnson a year ago had a plan to establish two or three "summer camps of applied agriculture," whatever they may be. He told the board all about it but nothing came of it.

But to come back to the trustees. It was at their meeting of May 23 that Johnson got authorization to place his personal servants on the payroll. That resolution already has been printed in the *Evening Post*. The actual transactions, however, are to be found in the minutes for October and last March. In the records for those months appear the names of Emma Bogel as "E. Bogel, laborer"; Bridget Kirkpatrick as "B. Kirkpatrick, laborer," and Rose Wickler as "R. Wickler, laborer."

March, 1921, shows approval of the expenditure of Federal funds for transportation of a Nash truck, for a glass cover for a model of the institute previously paid for out of the Federal tuition payments, and for a copy of "Club Members of New York" at \$25.

April shows that Federal funds went for the payment of a bill to the State Highway Commission, and for shade trees. May has this significant entry.

"On motion of Mr. Niles, seconded by Mr. Heineman, the following payments were authorized from the Contingency Fund:

"Sara Allen, matron and

dietitian, salary.....\$120.80

"This is the balance of Miss Allen's salary as per our agreement with her. Sufficient funds were not available under the State appropriation."

The June minutes show that the Federal funds went for moving material from Mohansic Lake. This was building material. It was for a dormitory not used by the disabled men. The cost of moving it was \$1,000. Then there are bills for the institute's then defunct publication, *The Furrow*; a salary for Miss Grace Tabor of \$3,200, as assistant to the director, although she was to do nothing for the disabled men, and equipment for the laundry to the extent of \$3,600, also to come from the tuition fees paid by the Federal Government.

November shows \$500 of the Federal funds spent for the Long Island Duck

Growers' Association, who keep ducks on the farm, and last March shows a gift to the carpenter whose salary the Legislature did not increase.

These are only a few of the items. There are hundreds of them. And they were not for the benefit of the disabled men. But the money was used and the trustees approved it.

Trustees Obeyed Orders

But most of the trustees did not know the real nature of the contingency fund. They were rubber stamps, you see. They did what they were told. The resolutions were all prepared for them. Then they were slipped in. Often everybody would be tired. And so it would all go through in a perfunctory way and everybody would be glad and then they would go home.

In a word, the trouble at Farmingdale is largely due to an unpaid board of trustees at the top who did not do their work.

(Some suggestions on what should be done at Farmingdale will be offered to-morrow.)