

Henrico County Extension Office

History

The agriculture industry in Henrico County underwent major changes in the latter part of the 1800's. What had been a plantation style of agriculture changed due to a decreasing supply of labor. Many of the large plantations were subdivided and the land sold to small farmers. At that time agriculture societies and farmer institutes provided printed materials and sponsored fairs and contests that kept the interest in farming at an intense level for many farmers.

A major event that promoted agriculture was the passage of the Hatch Act in 1887. This federal program provided money to establish agriculture experiment stations at the land-grant colleges. This program promoted agricultural experimentation and advanced dissemination of the results. The college was responsible for the local field demonstrations.

An early educator, Seaman Knapp was concerned that many small rural farmers were not using the latest techniques that were emerging from the experiment stations. Knapp was convinced that a teaching method called local "farm demonstration" was the answer to assisting small and low-income farms to become profitable and self-sustaining. This program of farm demonstration became so widely accepted that the program was expanded to include home demonstration as well. The first farm demonstration agent in Henrico County was J. T. McDonald and the first home demonstration agent was Myrtle Rhea. They were active in Henrico in 1911, 1912 and 1913.

This program of local farm demonstration became so popular that in 1914 the Smith-Lever Act was passed by Congress. This Act required that the Agriculture Extension and Demonstration module be added to the Land-Grant Colleges responsibilities of teaching and research. The first extension agent in Henrico County under the new system was J. C. Hunter.

Sylvia Slocum was a home agent in Henrico from 1913 to 1921. She began some of the first youth programs which later became known as 4-H Programs. Sylvia was instrumental in the summer camp program for 4-H Clubs. She was the driving force behind the C&O Railroad's gift of Jamestown Island to the 4-H Camping Program. The Camp was later moved to its present location when the Commonwealth of Virginia began to develop Jamestown Island.

Extension Agents have been active in Henrico County since 1911. Here is a list of those agents and the dates that they served, as available.

"Farm Agents" (present-day title is Extension Agent, Agriculture and Natural Resources)

J.T. McDonald 1911-1912

J.C. Hunter 1914-1915
W.L. Kirby 1917-1926
L.M. Walker 1926-1938
Curtis Mass
H.E. Hutcheson 1940- 1942
Graham Coulter 1943-1946
H.E. Hutcheson (2nd time)
Guy Davis 1947-1962
Bill Griffin 1962-1985
Charles Curry 1976-2002
Keith Balderson 1985- 1988
Bill Dimock 1988 to 1991
Karen Carter 1989 to present
Lisa Sanderson 2007 to 2015

“Home Agents” (Present-day title is Extension Agent, Family and Consumer Sciences)

Myrtle Rhea 1912-1913
Sylvia Slocum 1913-1921
Belle Ferguson Dory 1921-1923
Virginia Swink 1923-1930
Edna Draper 1930-1931
Marion Lawrence 1931-1940
Marion Lawrence 1942-1944 (2nd time)
Ms. Soloman 1944-50
Eula Pruitt 1950-52
Heidi Ford 1952-55
Hilda Johnson 1955-1959
Wilhelmina Baughan 1959-1961
Elaine M. Washington
Madge Bush
Bettye Thornton 1971-1991
Betty Parker 1976-1995
Mary McDearmon 1997-1999
Kim Edmonds 2001 to present

4-H Agents

Randall Thrope
Charles Hall
Malcolm Andrews
Noelle Draine
Debra Powers
Steve Dagwell
Clyde Jackson
Valya Vincell
Lloyd Hicks 1980-2006
Ernestine Scott

Cathy Winchester
Alice Joyner
Cynthia Walker
Debra Jones
Kendra Young 2001 to present
Reggie Morris 2009 to 2013
Kristina Yager 2013 to present

This history was extracted from College of the Fields, published by Virginia Tech and Virginia State, and the personal recollections of Jack Ferguson, Norwood Nuckols, Bettye Thornton, Betty Parker, and Charles Curry.