

# Bethinking of Old Orleans

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Learning to Do  
Doing to Learn  
Earning To Live  
Living to Serve

It came as a surprise last week to learn that the Albion Board of Education is considering a proposal to eliminate the whole Vocational Agricultural Program from the Albion High School curriculum. In light of this I thought it would be of interest to take a look at the program and its history, since farming is still all important in our county.

It was in 1910 that Professor Howard E. Babcock came to Albion and started teaching a class in agriculture. In particular, Prof. Babcock taught buying, grading and packing of apples for shipment along with many other aspects of farming. After leaving Albion, Prof. Babcock went to Cornell and became instrumental in the organization of GLF. Presently the Albion High School Agriculture Department is the oldest one in the State. Early attempts at teaching agriculture in progressive school systems such as this predated the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917. It was then that courses in vocational agriculture under the National Vocational Education Act were formally established in the United States. Within a few years many local agriculture departments developed so-called "Agriculture Clubs". Enterprising local teachers began to recognize the importance of banding together and doing things in an organized way. Between 1923 and 1928 State wide organizations were formed out of local agriculture clubs. Then in 1928 the Future Farmers of America was organized in Kansas City, Missouri. Today, there are over 500,000 FFA members. In fact, the National FFA convention is the largest student convention in the nation attracting over 20,000 members annually.

Locally, students enrolled in Vocational Agriculture learn about animal husbandry, small gas engine repair, welding, care of live stock, fruit production, silage and fermentation, electrical wiring, wood working and farm management including banking and taxation. Local students enrolled in the agriculture program raise a pig or beef calf, hatch and raise chicks

and have projects in raising grain such as corn. Since 1964 girls have also been enrolled in Vocational Agriculture at Albion High School. Through the FFA international programs students are provided with opportunities to travel to foreign countries. Recently, Kenny Brown of Albion has spent six months in Panama to learn about their customs and agriculture. Students enrolled in agriculture classes also get a chance to take field trips to contests, conventions, fairs and shows. Presently, at Albion, a student can take agriculture 1, 2, 3, and 4 covering the four years of highschool. About 50% of the BOCES students come out of Vocational Agriculture.

Vocational Agriculture teaches many practical and every day useful skills. Skills which can be applied to many aspects of living over a life time. Through FFA members are encouraged to improve scholarship, practice thrift, participate in cooperative efforts with others, foster patriotism, improve the home and its surroundings and to participate in worthy undertakings for the improvement of agriculture. The photo included here shows a Vocational Agriculture class in the early 1970's with their teacher Frank VanAppledorn planting a tree on the Albion High School Campus.

Surely, there is much to be learned through Vocational Agriculture and perhaps more than just agriculture related skills. As a former Art and Mechanical Drawing teacher I can testify to the broader sense of this. As an example a former student recently gave me an outstanding compliment. It went something like this: "I didn't learn anything about Art in your class, but I did learn one thing from you, and that is we should be kind to everyone." I was overwhelmed. Indeed, kindness is an important thing for students to recognize, perhaps more important than any subject matter. No matter what specific subject we teach, students learn about other things important to life and getting along with others. Indeed, FFA and local Vocational Agriculture exposes students to the higher ideals of life. Although the number of people going into farming is diminishing, there are many things to be learned between the interaction of teacher and student in a non-academic class such as Vocational Agriculture. Skills yes, but more importantly ideals which are greatly beneficial to students no matter what their chosen career may be.