Agricola Collection

Background

In 1980, the Nova Scotia Agricultural College celebrated its seventy-fifth anniversary. Throughout the year, it became apparent that among the College's faculty, students, alumni and friends there has always been a profound interest in Atlantic agricultural history. Quickly, this interest defined itself as a determination to begin a small collection of old agricultural implements and to develop the College Library's archives.

A faculty Historic Collections Committee, under the chairmanship of Professor Peter Sanger, was set up. Providentially its formation coincided with the decision to build a new College Library. The NSAC Executive Committee and the Library Committee agreed that the new building had to contain a separate archival area, built to proper standards of environmental control, with adequate area for storage, display and work.

Money to develop the historic collections and archival holdings came and continues to come from various sources. The Humanities Department has used its library budget allocation extensively, for example, to buy old agricultural, scientific and rare Maritime books, as well as new complete sets of works of writers such as Charles Darwin, Thoreau, John Burroughs, Audubon, and W.H. Hudson.

However, the bulk of acquisitions funding has come from two grants, of $3000 each, by the NSAC Alumni Association. These grants have been used to purchase books and to buy old agricultural implements, which are now on permanent display in the Library's main entrance area and in the Archives.

There have also been a number of private donations of books and material to the archives during the last few years, in particular three very generous ones by Professor Emeritus A.E. Roland, by Dr. E.I. Hancock, and by the late Alex Palmer.

At the suggestion of the Alumni Association's Executive Committee, the archival area has been named the Agricola Collections. "Agricola" was the pen-name used by John Young (1737 - 1837) in a series of letters published in the Halifax "Acadian Recorder" in 1818. In his letters, Young analyzed the state of Nova Scotian agriculture and forcefully recommended improved practices of cultivation, technology and agricultural organization. The justice and accuracy of Young's letters led directly to profound changes in Nova Scotian agriculture. Among them was the development of that tradition of agricultural research, innovation and education of which NSAC has been a part since 1905.

Fittingly, among the volumes on display today is a copy of the first edition of Young's collected Letters of Agricola, published in Halifax in 1822. This copy was purchased with the aid of an Alumni Association Grant and represents symbolically NSAC's continuity with the past and commitment to the future.