

“We cannot allow it to be run by those who do not understand education” —

## Agricultural Schooling in the Twenties

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“Our princes and captains of industry with all they control — the high built factories and titanic mills — might all disappear without man disappearing, but cut away men from the fields and the fruits of the earth and in six months there will be silence in the streets.”<sup>1</sup> Thus federal agriculture minister Martin Burrell, quoting agrarian advocate George W. Russell, registered the national disquiet in the early twentieth century over the flight from the countryside. It was time to halt urbanization. As Burrell said, it was time to see that the “solitary figure in the distant furrow, that stooped form tending the hearth of the isolated home” was a symbol of “our national necessities, our national virtues, and our national strength.”<sup>2</sup>

Later that year, on 6 June 1913, the Canadian government passed the Agricultural Instruction Act which Burrell had so graphically introduced. The principal assumption of the Act was that education would stem the tide to the cities by enhancing life on the land. Improved agricultural colleges, new dairy, horticultural and agricultural schools, and new agricultural programs in the schools were suggested by Burrell. Subject to his approval, the specific program was left to each province.

Throughout the country the Act had an important effect on the schools. From the beginning, programs focused on school gardening, a movement already underway in many provinces. Related activities included school grounds beautification, the establishment of a “rural science” course in special summer schools for teachers, and the hiring in several provinces of Directors of Elementary Agricultural Education.

The director and author of the program in British Columbia was John Wesley Gibson. Son of an Ontario farmer, Gibson became a travelling teacher in Carleton County in 1902, supervising school gardens as part of the Macdonald Rural Movement.<sup>3</sup> At Queen’s in 1908 he completed a

<sup>1</sup> Canada, *Debates of the House of Commons*, 1912-13, vol. CVIII, p. 2149.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2155.

<sup>3</sup> Belle Gibson, *Teacher Builder: The Life and Work of J. W. Gibson* (Victoria:

Master's degree, winning medals in biology and botany. Following graduation he was appointed Science Master at Ottawa Normal School, where he stayed for six years.<sup>4</sup> From 1914 to 1929 he served as Director of Elementary Agricultural Education in British Columbia. For most of that time he was also Director of the Summer School for Teachers in Victoria, an institution fundamentally connected with his attempt to introduce agriculture into the schools. In 1928 the new Conservative government appointed Gibson head of correspondence education, a position he held for more than a decade. In 1929 the post of Elementary Agricultural Education was discontinued.

One of a group of messianic school promoters, Gibson believed that the rural areas could be regenerated through the schools. Like the Ryersonian promoters in Ontario before him, he feared man's physical nature, despised materialism and cities, idealized rural environment, and stressed spiritual and character elevation as the finest outcome of schooling.<sup>5</sup> Following the example of R. H. Cowley, his "educational godfather" and Inspector of Schools in Carleton County, James W. Robertson, head of the Macdonald Rural Movement, and Liberty Hyde Bailey, the mystical nature study enthusiast and author at Cornell, Gibson fervently believed in the moral benefits of gardening.<sup>6</sup> "I stand for the spiritualizing of agriculture" — this was Bailey's claim, and it was Gibson's too.<sup>7</sup>

School gardens were not for producing gardeners, nor was school agriculture for producing farmers. Tainted with grubby matters of production, economics, materialism and money-making, vocationalism in the

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Morriss Printing, 1961), pp. 17-19; Gibson to S. B. Sinclair, Agricultural Education Microfilm, Reel 6 Series 4, Public Archives of British Columbia, hereafter R6S4; R. H. Cowley, "The Macdonald School Gardens," *Queen's Quarterly*, XII (Apr. 1905): 391-419; Gibson C.V., n.d., circa 1918, R3S4.

<sup>4</sup> B. Gibson, *Teacher Builder*, p. 49; Gibson C.V.; Gibson to Anna Comstock, 19 July 1924 R5S4.

<sup>5</sup> Alison Prentice, *The School Promoters* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977), *passim*. See also Douglas Lawr, "Agricultural Education in Nineteenth-Century Ontario: An Idea in Search of an Institution," in *Education and Social Change*, Michael Katz and Paul Mattingly, eds., (New York: New York University Press, 1975), pp. 169-92; and Lawr, "Development of Agricultural Education in Ontario 1870-1910," Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1972, *passim*.

<sup>6</sup> Gibson, "The Educational Value of Agricultural Instruction in Elementary and Secondary Schools," in *Teacher Builder*, B. Gibson, p. 135. This article was reprinted from *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 8 (1926): 14-18, and was also printed in *Scientific Agriculture*, 8 (Nov. 1927): 184-89.

<sup>7</sup> Gibson, "The Educational Value of Agricultural Instruction," p. 137.

schools was to Gibson a curse.<sup>8</sup> Schools were for creating a viewpoint, a set of principles to live by, and the purpose of school gardening was no different. The goal was character — in the form of love of nature, joy in controlling her, ingenuity, persistence, recognition of property rights and the duties of citizens, and an understanding of the values immanent in the work of the soil.

The hallmark of Gibson's program was a system of district supervisors, trained agricultural specialists, stationed in the rural municipalities to act as founts of information and beacons of light for the teachers and communities in the surrounding rural areas. In selecting these men Gibson sought zealots after his own image, men determined to bring the work of schools and communities together in the interests of anchoring the program and providing community leadership. Relying upon the judgment of such agrarians as G. C. Creelman, principal of Ontario Agricultural College, L. S. Klinck, president of the University of British Columbia, and E. A. Howes, dean of the Faculty of Agriculture in Alberta, Gibson gathered round him a dedicated and determined band of followers.<sup>9</sup> Most of these recruits were graduates of Ontario Agricultural College.<sup>10</sup> Most were in their prime and all were obsessively service-minded. They performed in the field from 1915 to January 1925, when the discontinuance of the federal Agricultural Instruction Act and a crisis in provincial and municipal finance in British Columbia forced their dismissal.<sup>11</sup>

The program these rural leaders participated in had two distinct though overlapping phases. The first was a gardening mission centring on the city and town elementary teacher and the transient rural school marm. Although achieving some notable successes, the mission was wracked from the outset with difficulties. Drought, frost, hail, summer care problems, marketing problems, vandalism, marauders, and infestations of mice and cutworms incessantly plagued school gardening.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138; British Columbia, *Annual Report of the Public Schools*, 1921, p. F56, hereafter *AR*; Gibson, "Agricultural Instruction in Secondary Schools," *The Agricultural Gazette of Canada*, 10 (July-Aug. 1923): 344-47, hereafter *TAG*; *AR* 1926, p. R67.

<sup>9</sup> G. C. Creelman to Gibson, 19 July 1916 R1S4; Creelman to Gibson, 29 Apr. 1916 R1S4; Klinck to Gibson, 14 Feb. 1919 R3S4; Gibson to W. H. McInnes, 23 Dec. 1919 R3S4.

<sup>10</sup> D. C. Jones, "Agriculture, the Land, and Education: British Columbia, 1914-1929," Ed.D. thesis, 1978, pp. 98-102.

<sup>11</sup> J. M. Shales to Gibson, 4 Jan. 1925 R3S3. See Jones, "Agriculture, the Land and Education," ch. 12.

<sup>12</sup> See for example Gibson to J. E. Britton, 17 Sept. 1917 R1S3; Gibson to Britton

The second phase in the program, and chief concern of this paper, stressed livestock. Prepared by a shift from school gardening into home gardening, the new focus seemed less problematic since animals required no separate summer caretaker and were less susceptible to the weather. As Gibson told district supervisor J. B. Munro, referring to the great frost at Armstrong in 1921 — “It almost emphasizes the need for centring

TABLE 1

*District Supervisors of Agricultural Education in B.C. Schools, 1915-1925*

	<i>Appointed</i>	<i>Locality</i>
J. C. Readey	1915	Chilliwack
J. E. Britton	1916	Kelowna
E. L. Small	1916	Surrey and Langley
W. J. Austin	1917	Kelowna and Vernon
S. H. Hopkins	1917	Duncan and North and South Cowichan
H. E. Hallwright	1917	Victoria and Saanich
J. M. Shales	1919	Langley
W. M. Fleming	1919	Duncan
A. M. McDermott	1920	New Westminster
J. B. Munro	1920	Armstrong and Enderby
V. B. Robinson	1920	Vernon
T. H. Jones	1921	Summerland and Penticton
W. H. Grant	1921	Salmon Arm
F. J. Welland	1923	Langley

more on livestock.”<sup>13</sup> “They do not freeze . . . in the winter,” a trustee once observed.<sup>14</sup> Understandably, in concentrating on animal projects the district supervisors sensed that they were wresting control from the ele-

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8 June 1918 R1S3; AR 1919, p. A48; AR 1920, pp. C59, C61; Gibson to J. R. Wigglesworth, 8 June 1922 R3S1; AR 1924, p. T80; Annie Ligertwood to Gibson, 16 Sept. 1916 R2S1; Britton to Gibson, 28 Sept. 1917 R1S3; J. B. Munro to Gibson, 30 May 1921 R1S3; Munro to Gibson 20 Sept. 1920 R1S3; Gibson to Munro, 3 Oct. 1921 R1S3; J. J. Ackerman to Gibson, 21 Mar. 1918 R3S1; Miriam Peck to Gibson, 22 Mar. 1922 R3S1; Edith Cook to Gibson, 1 June 1917; Gibson to Cook 5 June 1917 R2S1; Mrs. E. G. Simms to Gibson, 16 Feb. 1916 R1S1; Lillian Hood to Gibson, 5 Mar. 1920 R3S1; AR 1916, p. A31.

<sup>13</sup> Gibson to Munro, 2 June 1921 R1S3.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

ments. In command, they believed that they were better able to link the interests of school and community, and thus better able to lead.<sup>15</sup>

Underlying all projects was a common means of instruction known simply as the project method. While the method was new in the schools, it was as old as humanity, said Gibson, because it was "the method by which all progress towards individual as well as social betterment has been made." "It consists mainly in fixing upon certain worthwhile things to be investigated or to be done and then in a purposeful and orderly way to work — mentally and manually — towards the realization or accomplishment of those things." The method had two chief advantages: it harmonized "the interests of the two greatest and most democratic organizations of all time — the home and the school";<sup>16</sup> and it motivated "the whole round of school studies."<sup>17</sup>

While home projects had been conducted in a minor way since the beginning of the program, it was not until 1920-21 that any supervisors made projects a compulsory part of the high school course. In that year both V. B. Robinson in Vernon and J. C. Readey in Chilliwack announced a mandatory project supplementary to classroom work.

In *The Agricultural Gazette of Canada* Readey outlined his high school work in Chilliwack. He divided his projects into "majors" and "minors" and he awarded a maximum of 20 per cent of the course mark for the successful completion of one major or two minors. He split the work into six fields — agronomy, poultry, livestock, farm management, rural economics, and horticulture — and for each he gave examples of minor and major projects. In agronomy, a minor consisted of spraying a field of potatoes not less than  $\frac{1}{4}$  acre for late blight, or of surveying and supervising the drainage of at least one acre. A major consisted of growing a corn crop for ensilage on a minimum area of two acres. In livestock one minor consisted of halter-breaking, fitting and shoeing a draft colt at the Chilliwack Exhibition, and a major of raising at least six hogs from weaning to marketing. A major in farm management consisted of disposing \$8,000 in purchasing equipment and managing a twenty-acre farm near Chilliwack in its first season. A major in rural economics involved

<sup>15</sup> For the great emphasis on community leadership in the period see W. B. Varley, "Country Life Objectives," *TAG*, 7 (May 1920): 379-81; J. B. Spencer, "Rural Leadership," *TAG*, 7 (Oct. 1920): 785-86; F. M. Clement, "The Obligation to Prepare Leaders," *TAG*, 7 (Jan. 1920): 28-29; Gibson, "Elementary Agricultural Instruction in British Columbia," *TAG*, 3 (Jan. 1916): 74-77; *AR* 1924, p. T83.

<sup>16</sup> *AR* 1921, p. F52.

<sup>17</sup> British Columbia, Department of Education, "School Supervised Home Gardening and Home Project Work," Circular 8, (Victoria: King's Printer, 1921), p. 5.

finding the crop yields and market prices of three crops within a three-mile radius of home. A minor in horticulture involved making a hot bed of at least forty square feet and caring for at least twelve trees, by cultivating, pruning, grafting and spraying. These projects and others, said Readey, had three main objects: "first to link up the interest of school and home; second to develop ability in independent effort; and third to give concreteness to the class discussions."<sup>18</sup> More than a piece of the neglected history of teaching methods, Readey's projects reflected the current state of agriculture in the province with its emphasis on poultry, pure breeds, scientific farming, expert guidance and farm accounting.

Almost as quickly as the program focused on home projects, Gibson's men began to organize agricultural clubs. The proliferation of clubs began about 1920 and occurred most rapidly in the first half of 1921. The rapid spread was due partly to the greatly increasing numbers of students doing similar projects, partly to the proliferation of other agriculture-interest clubs and societies, like the Seed Growers Associations and the Canadian Society of Technical Agriculturalists, and partly to the work carried on by the Department of Agriculture.<sup>19</sup> Clubs grew out of boys' and girls' crop competitions established by the Department of Agriculture when Readey was Provincial Soil and Crop Instructor. "The object of these competitions," Readey wrote in 1914, "is to train the heads and hands of the boys and girls; to give them broad minds and big hearts; to improve their health by giving them an interest in out-door life; and to encourage on the part of all British Columbia citizens a stronger and more intelligent interest in Agriculture." The motto of the scheme developed that spring was — "Better Boys and Girls — Better Crops."<sup>20</sup> In 1915, after Readey left the Department of Agriculture, for Chilliwack, the department extended the organization — preparing a bulletin with hints and regulations, appointing instructors and judges, and providing prizes for winning exhibits. At first the competitions were limited to potatoes, but in 1917 they were extended to include corn, pigs, poultry and calves.<sup>21</sup> Also at first the competitions were not directly tied to schools.

<sup>18</sup> J. C. Readey, "School-Home Projects in the Chilliwack High School," *TAG*, 8 (Mar.-Apr. 1921): 203-04.

<sup>19</sup> For a discussion of the Canadian Society of Technical Agriculturists see Jones, "Agriculture, the Land, and Education," ch. 11.

<sup>20</sup> J. C. Readey, "Boys' and Girls' Crop Competitions," *TAG*, 1 (June 1914): 501.

<sup>21</sup> "Boys' and Girls' Club Contests: British Columbia," *TAG*, 4 (June 1917): 482; "The Agricultural Instruction Grant in British Columbia, Summary of Activities, 1913-1922," *TAG*, 9 (Nov.-Dec. 1922), p. 486.

The club system was thus already organized by the time most district supervisors became interested. They naturally enough fitted themselves into the existing organization and registered their clubs with the Department of Agriculture. The liaison with that department was strengthened by the practice begun in 1918 of appointing men to dual positions to act half-time as agricultural representatives for farmers and half-time as district supervisors for the schools.<sup>22</sup> S. H. Hopkins, W. M. Fleming, J. E. Britton and V. B. Robinson all acted in this capacity and it is not surprising that one of them, Robinson, seems to have begun the supervisors' involvement in club work. In 1920 Robinson established a boys' and girls' club at Vernon, aimed at fitting the child for his "civic and social duties" and offering membership to those "interested in agricultural education." The group met twice a month, held debates, and listened to special lectures.<sup>23</sup>

Early in 1921 Readey developed the club idea further by organizing a Jersey calf club in Chilliwack in co-operation with the local Jersey breeders and the Merchants' Bank. Each student was given a pure bred calf to raise for the rest of the year. To assist the supply of pure bred animals the club imported a number of young Jersey heifers from Oregon. The bank financed the operation and accepted the students' notes without parental endorsement. A management committee of local breeders was given the power to require the sale of animals improperly attended. As well, Readey noted in *The Agricultural Gazette* that a well-known breeder of Yorkshire pigs had agreed to supply "pure bred sows six to eight weeks old at \$10 each to club members." In all cases applications came through the schools and club members were required to exhibit at the school fair during the annual Chilliwack Exhibition.<sup>24</sup>

By May 1921 district supervisor Munro was organizing Jersey calf clubs in the Armstrong-Enderby area and taking up the judging of dairy cattle and heavy horses.<sup>25</sup> In June Gibson praised him for stressing stock judging and reminded him of the coast exhibitions — "If you could send a winning team it would be a great thing for you and for your work in the

<sup>22</sup> AR 1918, p. D62.

<sup>23</sup> AR 1920, p. C67.

<sup>24</sup> Gibson to J. E. Britton, 7 Mar. 1921 R1S3; J. C. Readey, "Boys' and Girls' Club Programme in British Columbia," *TAG*, 8 (May-June 1921): 348-49. For similar arrangements in Salmon Arm see W. H. Grant, "Salmon Arm Boys' and Girls' Jersey Calf Club," *The Agricultural Journal* (British Columbia), 6 (Dec. 1921): 245.

<sup>25</sup> Munro to Gibson, 2 May 1921 R1S3.

district.”<sup>26</sup> A few days later Munro announced that he was handing out pigs for a new Berkshire pig club. Half the boys did not have to raise loans, Munro said. “They wrote out cheques and looked proud as millionaires when we took their payments.”<sup>27</sup> The rest made arrangements with the Bank of Hamilton and the Bank of Montreal in Armstrong which financed the clubs. Further expansion of the club idea was necessary preferably in the Salmon Arm area, Munro believed, so that his stock judging teams could compete “against outsiders before they go to the Coast Fairs.”<sup>28</sup> The news pleased and excited Gibson and he praised Munro for “starting something very much worth while in the Okanagan.”<sup>29</sup>

From these beginnings the club work expanded rapidly.<sup>30</sup> The natural show place for the work was the local school fair — and later the Provincial Exhibition. Beginning in 1919 the supervisors’ reports highlighted the fairs.<sup>31</sup> In 1920 Gibson’s report featured fairs, noting that they were “steadily growing in popularity as they improve in quality.”<sup>32</sup> In that year the fairs began to respond to the shift into livestock. J. M. Shales, for example, reported that “a stock-judging competition was a new departure” at the school fair in the Langley Agricultural Exhibition.<sup>33</sup> In 1921 Readey reported a substantial addition of home gardening produce and livestock exhibits including poultry, Yorkshire and grade bacon pigs, and Jersey calves.<sup>34</sup> In general, this diversification meant that school fairs, especially those handled by the supervisors, grew rapidly.

Most successful of all was the Chilliwack Fair. There the entry jumped from 343 in 1917 to 876 in 1919, and remained slightly below that level until 1923, when it was 1,119.<sup>35</sup> Significantly, Langley and Salmon Arm school fairs also peaked in 1923, reflecting the fact that ’23 was the

<sup>26</sup> Gibson to Munro, 17 June 1921 R1S3.

<sup>27</sup> Munro to Gibson, 22 June 1921 R1S3.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Gibson to Munro, 25 June 1921 R1S3.

<sup>30</sup> See *AR* 1921, F57, F58; *AR* 1922, pp. 58, 60-63; *AR* 1923, pp. 67-68; V. B. Robinson to Gibson, 7 Apr. 1922 R2S3; W. H. Grant to Gibson, 30 Mar. 1923 R2S3; Gibson to W. A. MacDonald, 3 Dec. 1923 R5S4.

<sup>31</sup> See the reports of Readey, Small, Austin, and Shales. (*AR* 1919, pp. A59-A60, A63-A64)

<sup>32</sup> *AR* 1920, p. C56.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. C64.

<sup>34</sup> *AR* 1921, p. F57.

<sup>35</sup> *AR* 1917, p. A58; *AR* 1919, p. A60; *AR* 1921, p. F57; *AR* 1922, p. C58; *AR* 1923, p. F62.



banner year for fairs in the province's history.<sup>36</sup> In Chilliwack, the school fair was instituted under Readey's direction and later taken over by the Chilliwack Teachers' Association, which appointed Readey manager.<sup>37</sup> As early as 1918 Gibson described the exhibition as "one of the most popular and without doubt the largest school fair held in the Province. . . ."<sup>38</sup> In 1923 he dubbed it "probably the finest of its kind in Western Canada . . . the natural culmination" of all Readey's home project and club work.<sup>39</sup>

Gibson described the 1919 fair in *The Agricultural Gazette*. Held September 23-25 as part of the larger Agricultural Exhibition, the celebration featured fourteen schools and the slogan — "Every pupil a competitor."

In addition to numerous exhibits representing the usual classroom work, such as writing, drawing and handwork, there were competitions in nature study collections such as insects, wild flowers, and native fruits. Manual training exhibits included collections of commercial woods and also woods damaged by insects, models of farm buildings, bird houses, articles for use in kitchen and dining room, together with working drawings. Domestic science exhibits included the various kinds of cooking and canning, sewing and needlework.

The school garden exhibits formed the most spectacular part of the show inside the main building. Each of the fourteen schools was allowed a certain space and the awards were based upon variety, quality, and arrangement. Special nature study entries included collections of wild flowers, life history of the oat plant, life history of the cabbage butterfly, and collections of nature photographs. Special agricultural exhibits included pigs, dairy calves, poultry, largest pumpkin, collection of garden vegetables and plan of [a] dairy barn.

The prize list called for 77 classes representing altogether 876 entries, with a total prize value of nearly \$700. The prize list and all details of management were handled by a committee of the Chilliwack Teachers' Association.

On the evening of the closing day a grand concert was given in the opera house by the teachers and pupils of the city and municipality schools. A character parade was also arranged for children's day and proved to be a very attractive feature.<sup>40</sup>

*The Chilliwack Progress* also reported horse racing, a bucking contest and athletic sports as part of the general exhibition. Gambling features, it said, "have been suppressed." In the agriculture and vegetable sections, the

<sup>36</sup> *AR* 1923, pp. F63, F68.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. F62.

<sup>38</sup> *AR* 1918, p. D56.

<sup>39</sup> Gibson to W. A. MacDonald, 3 Dec. 1923 R5S4.

<sup>40</sup> Gibson, "British Columbia: School Fairs in 1919," *TAG*, 7 (Feb. 1920): 157.

paper noted, "the children outclassed the growers of the district in number of entries and quality . . ." Premier John Oliver and Minister of Agriculture E. D. Barrow attended the exhibition, and Oliver delivered an address advocating the improvement of social conditions on the farms and the elimination of drudgery. These measures were necessary to keep the children on the farms, for farm life, he said, was better than city life.<sup>41</sup>

The success of this local fair and others, along with the subsequent growth of clubs, helped turn Gibson's mind toward a grand culmination of fairs, organized provincially, and held at the coast. The university showed the way in 1920 when the animal husbandry department conducted a stock judging contest for returned soldiers and for boys under 21 at the New Westminster Provincial Exhibition.<sup>42</sup> The provision for juniors attracted Gibson. In concert with Professor Harry King, who organized the judging, Gibson laid plans for "a stock judging competition for boys and girls at the . . . Exhibition. . . ."<sup>43</sup>

To Gibson's satisfaction the original competitions were modified in two important ways: girls were allowed to participate and the competition involved teams. The inclusion of girls was more than a ploy to occupy them once the boys were busy. Female participation in farming activities was a key to improved rural living. As J. B. Spencer, editor of *The Agricultural Gazette*, explained,

The framers of the Agricultural Instruction Act had a further object than the development of proficiency in the art of agriculture. Better crops, improving livestock and greater prosperity for the rural community were but incidental to the achievements looked for from the work. . . . The development of a rural citizenship was the ultimate aim and on this depends not only a better economic condition in so far as the activities of men are concerned but a womanhood better equipped to fulfill the destinies that belong to her.<sup>44</sup>

It was Gibson's contribution to broaden the area of useful participation by women to include activities which formerly were male prerogatives.

The notion of high school students on *teams* also reflected the strong belief of Gibson, his men and others across the country that another key

<sup>41</sup> "All Entry Records Smashed to Pieces," *The Chilliwack Progress*, 25 Sept. 1919, p. 1; "Record Crowds Throng the District Exhibition," *The Chilliwack Progress*, 2 Oct. 1919, p. 1. For a description of the 1923 fair see "Fair Week," *The Chilliwack Progress*, 6 Sept. 1923, p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> "British Columbia: Livestock Judging Competition," *TAG*, 7 (Nov. 1920): 894.

<sup>43</sup> Gibson to J. E. Britton, 7 Mar. 1921 R1S3.

<sup>44</sup> J. B. Spencer, "Training School Girls for Domestic Proficiency," *TAG*, 6 (Jan. 1919): 6.

to rural improvement was co-operative effort. Gibson's entire program stressed co-operation. The system of grants for school ground beautification, the idea of class or community garden plots, of groups of schools in competition, and even of correlation of subjects and grants to teachers — all stressed social or educational advantages of working together. Not surprisingly Gibson and his missionaries opposed individualism. As Readey wrote in 1919, "it may be that we have erred in emphasizing too much the individual competitions in the higher grades. This may tend to develop individualism on the part of the student and might be better replaced by contests between groups consisting of schools or classes."<sup>45</sup> All this was not to contradict the strong sentiment Gibson and his men held for individual students. But when Gibson dubbed the twentieth century the century of the child he was advocating the importance of the child as a *social* being — that is, as one who had to work with others before social advances could be achieved. Strengthening this view was the mulish individualism exhibited by farmers which had been such an unreasoning obstacle to the introduction of co-operatives in particular and scientific farming in general. At bottom, Gibson hoped that students learning co-operation through the schools might practise it as adults.

Following the efforts of Gibson and King the major fairs in New Westminster and Vancouver began junior team competitions in 1921. The regulations stipulated that a team could come from "any unrecognized district in the Province," was "preferably to be under the supervision of a local breeder, farmer or representative of any branch of the government service," and was "to have received some instruction in livestock judging in preparation for the competition." A team comprised three boys or girls under age 18 who judged three classes of livestock — heavy horses, beef cattle and dairy cattle. In each class were four animals which all team members rated according to merit in fifteen or twenty minutes. The members took the same length of time to give written reasons. Three qualified judges then rated the same animals, informing the competitors of their reasons. The judges then compared their placing and explanation with the competitors', awarding fifty points for correct placing and fifty points for explanation. Finally, prizes were awarded for the total points "made by the members of each team."<sup>46</sup>

Teams competing in Vancouver and New Westminster from 1921 to

<sup>45</sup> *AR* 1919, p. A60.

<sup>46</sup> British Columbia, Department of Agriculture, Report of the Department Secretary re Fall Fairs, *Sessional Papers* 1921, p. U10. See also *AR* 1921, p. F54; *AR* 1922, p. C55.

1924 were predominantly from districts served by supervisors. As Gibson said, "most of the competitors were members of the high school agricultural classes in the Province."<sup>47</sup> The prize lists show well the domination of these classes and their teachers who were now coaches.<sup>48</sup> As time passed Gibson focused more attention on the Provincial Exhibition, which he considered the best agricultural fair in the province.<sup>49</sup> Following the initial breakthrough in team stock judging in 1921, field crop judging was introduced in 1922 and poultry judging in 1925.<sup>50</sup> By 1924 Gibson noted that "the prize-list has grown to large proportions and seems destined to still greater development." There were then over 200 classes competing in "almost every branch of school-work," with "special prominence . . . given to agricultural exhibits. . . ."<sup>51</sup>

From the beginning, the Provincial Exhibition was supported by many agricultural associations throughout the province. The first prize for team stock judging at Westminster was a challenge cup donated by the British Columbia Stock-breeders' Association and a gold medal presented to each member by the organizing body of the exhibition, the Royal Agricultural and Industrial Society of British Columbia.<sup>52</sup> The British Columbia Dairymen's Association offered a special prize of \$30 for the team scoring highest in judging dairy cattle. Interested individuals like F. M. Clement, Dean of Agriculture at UBC, A. D. Paterson, MLA, and Gibson often presented special cash prizes worth \$10 to \$12 for judging beef cattle, dairy cattle or heavy horses.<sup>53</sup> As well, the Royal Agricultural and Industrial Society presented a provincial shield and cash prize of \$100 for best school garden exhibit.<sup>54</sup>

By 1922 the focus of Gibson's program had shifted measurably, but not completely, from the garden. A pyramid-like structure had been established with a multitude of school-supervised home project work at its base. This work funnelled into the local fair and from there the best of it went

<sup>47</sup> AR 1921, p. F55. Note Gibson's reference to the *Vancouver Daily Province*, 20 Aug. 1921, hereafter VDP. In 1921 there were 400 students taking high school agriculture in fourteen high schools; in 1924 there were 516 students in eleven high schools and one superior school. (AR 1921, p. F55; AR 1924, p. T82)

<sup>48</sup> See AR 1921, pp. F54-F55; AR 1922, pp. C55-C56; AR 1923, p. F59; AR 1924, pp. T81-T82.

<sup>49</sup> Gibson to D. E. MacKenzie, 17 Nov. 1923 R5S4.

<sup>50</sup> AR 1922, p. C56; AR 1925, p. M65.

<sup>51</sup> AR 1924, pp. T81-T82.

<sup>52</sup> AR 1921, p. F54.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*; AR 1923, pp. F59-F60; AR 1924, p. T82.

<sup>54</sup> AR 1923, p. F60.

to the Provincial Exhibition. The structure, however, possessed contradictory tendencies. On the positive side it entailed harmony and cooperation, and seemed perfectly suited to ensure the success of agricultural education. On the negative side it entailed discord and strife, and seemed likely to subvert everything Gibson and his men sought to achieve.

Consider first the positive. There were many advantages to clubs. They created great interest in agricultural projects among both students and adults. No doubt they did much to extend the sympathy of the people for the work of the land and the school. In a very real sense they united the school and home in common pursuit. Stimulating the learning and inquiry of their members, they brought together interested people with similar problems and aspirations. They assisted the spread of pure-bred stock at a time when the agriculturalists of the province were advocating better methods of selection.<sup>55</sup> Finally, the clubs and their projects were the raw material which fed the fairs and gave them life.

There were many advantages to the fairs too. Fairs were places where people could learn more about life on the land by listening to addresses, observing competitions in exhibits and judging, and paying attention to the many educational demonstrations.<sup>56</sup> Fairs served to arouse interest in neglected phases of farming.<sup>57</sup> They boosted school gardening in the minds of the people and the school trustees.<sup>58</sup> Not all school fairs grew like the Chilliwack one "from very small beginnings to be one of the important annual events in the activities of the schools and in the life of the district. . . ."<sup>59</sup> But as Gibson noted, all school fairs served "a useful purpose educationally and socially," for they were places where the community gathered and reasserted its commonalty and sense of purpose and satisfaction.<sup>60</sup>

When the work reached out to the Provincial Exhibition the promise of the local school fair expanded enormously. As never before the school,

<sup>55</sup> See Shales report, *AR* 1920, p. C64 and Hopkins' report, *AR* 1921, p. F61.

<sup>56</sup> For educational displays at the Armstrong fair, including an observational hive of bees and a cross pollination of corn display with explanation see Munro to Gibson, 29 Sept. 1921 R1S3.

<sup>57</sup> See for example Hopkins' report in *AR* 1921, p. F61; and "Provincial Exhibition Adds More to Chilliwack Laurels," *The Chilliwack Progress*, 7 Oct. 1920, p. 1, re addresses by the Royal Agricultural and Industrial Society and UBC Professor Asmuden to poultry exhibitors.

<sup>58</sup> See J. M. Shales to Gibson, 2 Nov. 1920 R1S3; E. L. Small to Gibson, 2 Nov. 1920 R1S3.

<sup>59</sup> *AR* 1923, p. F62.

<sup>60</sup> *AR* 1921, p. F53.

the home and the community stood together in their concern and exuberance for the work of the land. The contests elevated agriculture and made it exciting and respectable. As Gibson said in 1923, "the students have come to regard it as an honour to have won by good work a place on the judging team chosen to represent the district at the Provincial Fair."<sup>61</sup>

By attracting girls, the contests broadened the involvement of the community. A notable feature of the coast exhibitions, indeed, was the participation by girls.<sup>62</sup> "We must all . . . confess to a certain amount of surprise at the remarkable degree of success which has attended the study of agriculture by the girls," said Gibson in 1923. "In the class-room, in the experimental gardens, and in the judging pavilion they have more than held their own, for they have succeeded on more than one occasion in carrying off the premier honours in examinations and in agricultural judging competitions in which more boys than girls participated."<sup>63</sup>

Moreover, partly because Gibson was a director on the Exhibition Board, the New Westminster fair paid close attention to educational features.<sup>64</sup> Supervisor A. M. McDermott, who considered himself "singularly fortunate" to be centred in New Westminster, remarked that "the management . . . spared no effort" in perfecting the educational features. He noted that "a beginning was made" in 1924 "in something approaching organized tours through various departments of the exhibitions by teachers and students." When the educational significance of the Exhibition was fully realized, he felt, "one can scarcely visualize the future breadth and value of this department to the schools of the entire province."<sup>65</sup>

This then was the positive side of the structure involving livestock clubs, local fairs and provincial exhibitions. There was unfortunately a gloomy side.

The transfer from gardening to home projects had been an attempt by the district supervisors to wrest control over the program from the elements and the summer care problem. The transition diverted attention to the high school and placed more weight on the supervisors and less on the transient rural teachers. With the movement in their own professional

<sup>61</sup> *AR* 1923, p. F59. Professor Harry King and Mrs. King, interview, Vancouver, B.C., 25 Apr. 1977; W. C. Gibson, interview, Vancouver, B.C., 9 Nov. 1976. W. C. Gibson is J. W. Gibson's son.

<sup>62</sup> See *AR* 1921, p. F54; *AR* 1922, pp. C55-C56; *AR* 1923, pp. F59-F60; *AR* 1924, pp. T81-T82.

<sup>63</sup> *AR* 1923, p. F58.

<sup>64</sup> See Gibson's commendation of the Royal Agricultural and Industrial Society in Change of the Provincial Exhibition in *AR* 1924, p. T81.

<sup>65</sup> *AR* 1924, p. T90.

hands they believed that less could go wrong and that the mission of rural regeneration was more certain to succeed. What happened, however, was that the attempt to wrest control backfired when the supervisors tried to consolidate agricultural education among the people. The very process of making the school's agricultural activities part of the community life meant that the school relinquished some of its control over those activities. Put another way, what was happening was the inevitable working out of two incompatible purposes in Gibson's program which were inherent in much of so called "progressive" education. On the one hand there was the desire to have the work of the school, in this case agricultural education, sustain itself by becoming part of the community; on the other was the desire to have the work lead the community to something beyond itself, something greater.

Gibson wanted his missionaries simultaneously to be part of the community and to lead the community. The dual task was exceptionally difficult, for the process of leading usually involved being *apart from* rather than *a part of*. The role Gibson's men had to play is important to characterize, for in many ways it was one which befell all educational innovators whenever they performed in a system which depended upon local support and where decisions affecting their welfare were handed down by referenda. It was not startling that the constant harangue on democracy in educational monographs of the period coincided with the introduction of new courses. The role that innovators were forced to play was decidedly democratic. Unhappily, democratic leadership was no easy chore. To be specific, the fate of the work rested upon elected school boards, and in the last days of the work, upon referenda. Wedded to the professional principle of "do it yourself and it will be done right," the supervisors had to convince the people and their representatives that the work was in their interest and worth their expense. Transiency of school boards, as much a problem as that of teachers, placed tremendous strain on the innovators, for new boards demanded a continual proving, a never ending test and ordeal.<sup>66</sup> The innovator's role thus required a mind

<sup>66</sup> For more information on school board transiency, a neglected aspect of the rural problem in general and the innovator's problem in particular, see Small to Gibson, 9 Jan. 1917 R1S3; Readey to Gibson, 11 Jan. 1917 R1S3; Readey telegram to Gibson, 3 Feb. 1921 R1S3; Readey to Gibson, 11 Jan. 1924 R2S3; Readey to Gibson, 10 Jan. 1925 R3S3. These sources reveal the fear caused by changing school boards. Note also that board transiency caused an informational problem. As Inspector P. H. Sheffield wrote, "It would seem that in the rural areas it is necessary to circularize the school boards every spring in order to maintain any interest in school ground improvement as the personnel of the school boards changes so frequently." (Sheffield to Gibson, 12 Sept. 1925 R5S4)

beyond the average, a true missionary's mind, one devoted to teaching principles of a higher life and which was undismayed when so few learned, one which saw the foibles of people and dealt with them constructively, one which took unfair criticism without anger and turned it to positive account. It was a role that could not be autocratic. It accentuated co-operation, group agreement, and group enlightenment in a milieu in which every man's opinion was crucial.

If by some miracle a man could play this role, the part was greatly complicated by the fact that these schoolmen were on ground previously untouched by the school. Their efforts to lead involved not only the democratic problem of convincing people in general, but also a control problem of convincing pre-established interests and community elements that it was time to step aside. Each facet of the livestock mission — the clubs, local fairs, and provincial exhibitions — involved struggles for control, struggles which for the most part never flared into the open. And in each case Gibson and his men lost.

As early as 1919 Gibson realized that there was something wrong with the new pig clubs. In an article in *The Agricultural Gazette* he tried to crystallize his own thoughts and to warn agricultural educationists across the country. The chief danger he saw was the confusion of purpose. "What we seem to need and need badly," he said, "is a philosophy of agricultural education." Agricultural education was developing pell mell — advancing, regressing, transforming itself — all in a hopeless welter of chaos. And "many who know more about agriculture than about the true function of schools," Gibson wrote, "are leading rashly and blindly on." It was this same type of instructor who was ignoring "the great question of the evolution of interest in children," and who was operating on the false educational principle of — "If it is a good thing to know, then the sooner they learn it the better." Gibson wanted teachers "to think with the children and to appreciate their mental processes and above all the normal development of their interests, attitudes, and tendencies." Agriculture started in the primary grades with the "direct observational study of the things that surround the children and which enter into their daily experience and activity. . . ." It was nature study and it preceded "vocational and economic agriculture. . . ." To teach the scientific feeding of hogs and the economic production of pork to very young children was inappropriate. ". . . To the little boy of ten," said Gibson, "pig clubs are mainly nature study clubs and to the big boy of 18 they are young farmers' pork raising clubs." There was something incongruous about the little boy who "manages to fatten up his pet in order that in its death both



he and it may make a record for the country or for the province and receive in connection therewith a prize and a halo of glory." What Gibson wanted in the public schools was, he said, "more 'piggy' and less 'pork.'" "At present," he concluded, "we are trying to be all-inclusive in our agricultural programme to the detriment of permanency of interest and of good pedagogy."<sup>67</sup>

The central message of the article was that the success of agricultural education depended on intelligent organization. Gradually and with greater clarity Gibson saw that the chief obstacle to such organization was the control which elements beyond his department exercised over his department's activities. Common to these elements, in particular to the breeder associations and the Department of Agriculture, was the fact that they were "non-educational." They paid little or no attention to what Gibson believed clubs were all about. Clubs were part of the broad purpose of inculcating the right knowledge and the right character in the interests of rural regeneration. Ironically the very allies which supported the clubs undermined this purpose. Gibson had been grateful for the participation of the breeder associations, for without them the organization of clubs would have been much slower. But he began to see that these associations had their own interests which transcended educational and community interests. The "zeal of livestock breeders for the ascendancy of their favorite breed," he observed, led to the exploitation of school children and to the subversion of the fundamental purposes of the clubs.<sup>68</sup>

Exercising even more control over club activities and purposes was the provincial Department of Agriculture. That department had organized clubs in the first place and when the district supervisors formed new clubs in 1921 and 1922 they registered them with the Department of Agriculture. By 1923, though, Gibson had become very dissatisfied with this arrangement. Like the breeder associations, the Department of Agriculture had its own interests and what concerned it first was agricultural production. This strong vocational and economic orientation contrasted sharply with the educational ideal which Gibson held out for the clubs. Club work under the Department of Agriculture tended to become little more than a brief show, an economic "stunt," an exercise in acting without thinking. "The club idea in clubs organized under that department," Gibson concluded, "was practically nil."<sup>69</sup> If people in clubs never thought about the

<sup>67</sup> Gibson, "Education in and through Agriculture," pp. 912-13.

<sup>68</sup> "Report of the Sub-committee on Agricultural Education Policies in Public and High Schools," J. W. Gibson, Chairman, *Scientific Agriculture*, 5 (Nov. 1924): 72.

<sup>69</sup> Gibson to J. E. Britton, 16 Mar. 1923 R2S3.

higher educational purposes, the clubs, Gibson was sure, would lose their great potential. The idea was not to say "Look how well I judge horses!" but to reflect that the process of judging horses contributed to understanding a way of life which served the country and which had to continue if the country were to continue. It was to reflect on the value of character which sprang from the land. When these reflections were done, the idea was to implant them in other minds so that they might actively possess the virtues of the land.

The whole problem, Gibson was convinced, could be solved by placing the clubs under the Department of Education, for "divorced from regular and constant school supervision the club project has little value. . . ." <sup>70</sup> The plan he advanced required all clubs to be approved by the Department of Education and closely linked with the schools by a "Council of League Advisors" which would ensure that the educational purpose of the clubs was kept foremost. The council's main aim would be "to bring everyday education more closely into touch with everyday home and community life." <sup>71</sup>

Unfortunately Gibson had little power to implement these changes. While no record has been found indicating that he approached the provincial Department of Agriculture to transfer the club work to his department, his reports, correspondence and articles all indicate a lively interest in the issue and certainly he must have spoken with senior members in Agriculture. For reasons surely including heavy commitment to junior club work the Department of Agriculture did not relinquish control of the clubs. The failure to gain control left Gibson in the frustrating position of having a "solution" but no means of implementation. Over and over he repeated this solution, often to influential people, but nothing happened. <sup>72</sup> In 1923 his men discontinued organizing clubs under the Department of Agriculture in an attempt to dissociate themselves from the falseness. <sup>73</sup> But that department, sometimes through its district agriculturalists, continued to organize clubs. And no substitution of a "true" club or improvement of an individual club organization would have had the

<sup>70</sup> *AR* 1922, p. C57.

<sup>71</sup> Gibson to W. H. Grant, 3 Dec. 1921 R1S3 and Grant to Gibson, 10 Dec. 1921 R1S3.

<sup>72</sup> See for example his letter to the editor of *Farm and Home*, W. A. MacDonald, 3 Dec. 1923 R5S4. See his comment in *AR* 1922, p. C57 and the support of this view by Dr. Bricker, Professor of Agricultural Education at the State University of Ohio on the same page. More importantly, see the Report of the Subcommittee on Agricultural Education Policies, pp. 69-74.

<sup>73</sup> Gibson to J. E. Britton, 16 Mar. 1923 R2S3.

beneficial effects of a broad controlling mechanism such as the Council of League Advisors which Gibson proposed. Without the council, students of supervisors would still come in contact with groups who saw judging and other agricultural activities as isolated "stunts," and the attitudes of these uncontrolled others would have a pernicious effect on those who had been properly schooled.<sup>74</sup> It was a perplexing problem and Gibson never solved it. Even in the supervisors' last year he was calling for an agency which would stimulate and direct the club movement in the province.<sup>75</sup>

The struggle for control of the local fairs was waged over similar issues. Ironically, it would have been unnecessary had school fairs developed as institutions separate from the regular fairs. But without an initial policy some developed separately and others developed combined with regular fairs.<sup>76</sup> Not until 1920 did Gibson state publicly that he favoured the latter form.<sup>77</sup> By then the combined fair was a *fait accompli*, having been established most prominently at Chilliwack and Surrey, but elsewhere as well. As a *fait accompli* it posed serious problems which were not immediately apparent when the form began. These problems involved relations between the fair authorities and Gibson's men and they involved the decidedly different viewpoints of the two groups.

Consider first the Chilliwack case. In January 1920 district supervisor Readey informed Gibson that an "old antagonism" was preventing the fair board from appointing him to the directorate.<sup>78</sup> When Gibson cautioned him that "the school fair is not at all a departmental function," Readey responded vigorously in a classic statement of the tensions inherent in the combined fair,<sup>79</sup> arguing that

as far as the school fair at Chilliwack is concerned, it has been a Department of Education function in the minds of the people. . . . It visualizes the work of teachers, school boards and the Department of Education. We cannot afford, therefore, to allow it to be run by those who do not understand education, by such men, for instance, as some of those who comprise our Fair Board. This is not a reflection on them. It is not their business.

It was critically important for the Department of Education not to allow

<sup>74</sup> The use of the word "stunt" to describe what happened to agriculture in the hands of the Department of Agriculture is Gibson's. See for example *AR* 1922, p. C57.

<sup>75</sup> *AR* 1924, p. T80.

<sup>76</sup> In 1918 of the twenty-two school fairs conducted twelve were separate. (*AR* 1918, p. D55)

<sup>77</sup> *AR* 1920, p. C56.

<sup>78</sup> Readey to Gibson, 3 Jan. 1920 R1S3.

<sup>79</sup> Gibson to Readey, 15 Jan. 1920 R1S3.

the school fair movement to fall into the hands of local organizations or the Department of Agriculture which would surely "misinterpret our work and ideals." "Should we not rather assume the leadership in this movement," Readey asked, "working through local organizations and co-operating with them whenever and wherever possible but not leaving an institution with such potentialities for good or evil to the vagaries of chance?"<sup>80</sup>

Readey's commentary shed light upon difficulties inherent in the hope of educators across Canada that informed leadership would lift rural areas to a new plane. He was depicting the dilemma of educational professionalism in the interest of the community. Throughout the century, the tendency of professionalism has been to reduce public participation in educational matters on the grounds that the public is unqualified. On the other hand, Gibson's men were convinced that rural regeneration could occur only when the public took up their tools and participated. When the supervisors failed to motivate the public or its elected bodies, they often did things themselves. That completed the job, but did not involve active popular support. Often when they got the support it was given in the wrong way, or emphasized the wrong ideals. Professional intervention in such cases threatened to reduce public support. Either way, if the men did things because they could not interest the commoners, or if they tried to change things the commoners were already doing, they were in trouble. Professionalism in the interests of the community thus ran a serious risk of alienating the community.

Readey weathered this crisis as he had others. Before the year was out Chilliwack united behind him in constructing a school fair building and a combined fair was again held. Tensions remained, however. In February 1922 he again informed Gibson that the Agricultural Association was proceeding "without any reference whatever to us." He was "at a loss" to understand the association's attitude when they depended "so much upon our efforts as a contribution to the success of the Fair." He lamented:

I have been very depressed over the situation, since it has been a continuous struggle to co-operate with the Fair Board and convince them of the necessity of sufficient support. They seem perfectly willing to take all our efforts but seem to think that we should be able to carry the financial obligations without much dependence upon them. . . . They seem perfectly willing to spend considerable sums of money on so-called attractions but are unwilling to give to us the same measure of support.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Readey to Gibson, 19 Jan. 1920 R1S3.

<sup>81</sup> Readey to Gibson, 24 Feb. 1922 R2S3.

In October, after another "successful" fair, Readey informed Gibson that it was "becoming increasingly difficult to finance the institution" and that the job of managing and financing constituted "a considerable load" in addition to his other duties.<sup>82</sup> In 1923, following the largest school fair ever, Readey noted that the operation costs per year were \$800. The next year the Agricultural Association "felt unable to pay the usual grant" and an exhausted Readey cancelled the fair.<sup>83</sup>

The Armstrong story centred on the same theme. As district supervisor Munro said, "We are not in charge of the situation when we are under the exhibition association, no matter how indulgent they may be."<sup>84</sup> Munro's experience, however, led to the crystallization in Gibson's mind of an "ideal fair," and this led Gibson to present the ideal to the rest of the nation.

As so often happens, Munro's decision to abandon the combined fair was triggered by a small incident. In December 1921 he informed Gibson that the local agricultural society had reneged on its promise of prize money for the school division. "Naturally our prize lists are a little upset," he fumed. He then went on a tirade pointing out other disadvantages of the joint fair. "We have fought for sufficient space for several years at the fair. This year we were stuck in several parts of the grounds. The children's work has been a feature of the fair but the children themselves are entirely overlooked in the bustle. There has not been absolute satisfaction in any way." In view of these problems the teachers and Munro decided to hold a separate fair in early summer. That way, said Munro, "teachers who have taken up the work are still here," pupils could "show the things in classes they still belong to," and certain manual training and domestic science products could be shown "before they are taken home and scuffed around."<sup>85</sup>

Gibson initially opposed Munro's suggestion, saying that he was "sure there would be a greater loss from separation than any gain. . . ."<sup>86</sup> Later he warned Munro of the grave risks in shifting from a combined fair to a separate fair. "I am particularly anxious," he said, "that the holding of the school fair in June should not result in an implication that we were not ready to co-operate with the Agricultural Association in their fall

<sup>82</sup> Readey to Gibson, 13 Sept. 1922; 3 Oct. 1922 R2S3.

<sup>83</sup> *AR* 1924, p. T91.

<sup>84</sup> Munro to Gibson, 29 Sept. 1921 R1S3.

<sup>85</sup> Munro to Gibson, 3 Dec. 1921 R1S3.

<sup>86</sup> Gibson to Munro, 3 Oct. 1921 R1S3.

fair.”<sup>87</sup> Six days later, in a remarkable about-face, Gibson bestowed his blessing on the separate fair idea.

I have always felt that the fall fairs have had “inflicted” upon them a certain amount of rather trivial school exhibits, exhibits which would be quite all right in connection with a strictly school function which seem rather out of place and in the way at a thorough-going agricultural fair. I have felt this for some time as a direct result of my observations at fall fairs and therefore I feel that the action of your teachers has served to crystallize my own feelings in relation to this whole question.

Furthermore, in support of the separate fair idea he informed Munro that he had just written an article for *The Agricultural Gazette*. The article argued that it was time to make the school fair a permanent institution tied to the regular school program. It presented the advantages which Munro had mentioned concerning a separate school fair in June, and it stated that the chief advantage was the “increased educational value,” for not only would the school be the centre of attention, but the fair would get the parents out to see the school, the rooms, the grounds, and the gardens. The article recommended that school participation in fall fairs continue in view of the fact that late garden crops, poultry, and livestock projects were best exhibited then. It warned, however, that “if our agricultural fairs are to fill the important place in the agricultural life of the country which they were originally intended to fill, more drastic measures will have to be adopted to protect the people and particularly the school children from the unwholesome influences of the ordinary ‘midway.’”<sup>88</sup>

Gibson’s response to Munro in this article and in private correspondence contributed to the development in his mind of an ideal fair. An ideal fair, like an ideal club, was primarily educational in purpose. For Gibson that meant that fairs must build character. Consequently he later encouraged interschool sports competitions as well as vocal, musical, and dramatic competitions which he considered healthy forms of entertainment. At the same time he continued his attack on “such blatant and disgusting fakirs and sideshows as up till now have held sway. . . .”<sup>89</sup>

The implementation of this ideal faced serious difficulties. As part of an attempt to consolidate agricultural education in Canada near the end

<sup>87</sup> Gibson to Munro, 9 Dec. 1921 R1S3.

<sup>88</sup> Gibson, “The School Exhibition — When and Where,” *TAG*, 9 (Mar.-Apr. 1922): 132-34.

<sup>89</sup> *AR* 1923, p. F59. See also the “Report of the Sub-committee on Agricultural Education,” pp. 69-74.

of the Agricultural Instruction Grant and to ensure a renewal of the grant, Gibson hoped to get national support for a June fair. The response across the country, however, was mixed. L. A. DeWolfe, the Director of Rural Science for Nova Scotia, favoured the June fair despite the fact that "the garden work is lacking." Some teachers, he noted, were trying to hold two fairs, one in June and one in September, but this practice entailed the "danger . . . of both teacher and pupils tiring of such work." "Before School Fairs can be successful . . ." DeWolfe wrote, "we must make the school year coincide with the calendar year" so that the same teacher would be present "at seed time and harvest." The recommendation, he was aware, entailed the simultaneous solution of the problem of teacher transiency.<sup>90</sup> A. C. Gorham, Director of Elementary Agricultural Education for New Brunswick, also favoured the June fair. He noted that too often fairs were "mere spectacular events instead of . . . intellectualized purposeful activities." Furthermore, he said that "when the fair was held as part of the larger exhibition many an educational opportunity was lost." He noted, however, the ingrained tendency for school fairs to be held in September and October.<sup>91</sup>

F. W. Bates, Director of School Exhibitions for Saskatchewan, S. T. Newton, Director of the Agricultural Extension Service for Manitoba, and J. B. Dandeno, Inspector of Agricultural Classes for Ontario, were all against the June fair. Bates pointed out that most of the local agricultural fairs in Saskatchewan were held in July and early August, the least busy times of the summer. School exhibitions were not held then because most village schools were closed. June was inopportune because roads were poor, a great deal of work on farms took place, and many country schools had been open only since March, reducing the number which could take part. The result was that most school fairs were held in September and October.<sup>92</sup> "On the prairie, or any place else for that matter," Newton wrote, "a fair held at the end of June cannot possibly serve its purpose if the agricultural features are to be emphasized."<sup>93</sup> Dandeno was even more opposed to Gibson's plan. He stated that in Ontario "the 'Fair' idea is strictly agricultural and is concerned altogether with agricultural products and activities. . . . If a fair were held . . . as early as June, there would be little or nothing to exhibit." Further, he noted that separate school fairs

<sup>90</sup> L. A. DeWolfe, "The School Exhibition — When and Where," p. 138.

<sup>91</sup> A. C. Gorham, "The School Exhibition — When and Where," pp. 139-40.

<sup>92</sup> F. W. Bates, "The School Exhibition — When and Where," pp. 136-38.

<sup>93</sup> S. T. Newton, "The School Exhibition — When and Where," p. 136.

were the norm in Ontario (as they were in most parts of the country) and that Ontarians were not troubled by "fakirs" or "the Midway."<sup>94</sup>

In general, the response showed Gibson the great many forms agricultural education had taken in the province, and the variety frustrated his attempt to provide national uniformity. It was surely irksome to him that other provinces already had separate fairs and that the institution of such fairs in his province was fraught with unique difficulties. There was the difficulty of fracturing the traditionally combined fairs without incurring the wrath of community leaders and thereby isolating school and community rather than linking them. And once that fracture had occurred, there was the impossible task of exhibiting all the schools' work in June. Certain garden crops and animals simply did not mature by then. School involvement in fall fairs, consequently, was still required. How that involvement would be regarded by the fair executive after the desertion of most of the school products was an open question. Further, school fairs were already becoming burdensome to finance, and the proposal to add another fair in June would add to the burden.<sup>95</sup>

Partly because of these difficulties, the separate fair does not appear to have been implemented in British Columbia. Munro, the principal proponent, became involved about the time Gibson's article was published in an energy-draining and abortive struggle to keep his job. Readey, the other proponent, continued to conduct a combined fair until 1924, when he cancelled the school participation rather than implement a separate fair.

The struggle for control of the fairs thus ended in frustration and failure. By the end of 1924, when the district supervisors were dismissed, Gibson strongly felt that the fairs were distant imitations of the ideal fair and that the means of implementing the ideal fair were not readily at hand. As the arch proponent of school-community union, Gibson had paradoxically admitted that certain exhibits of the school's work did not belong in the community's greatest celebration. This admission pointed to the differences between the crop year and the school year and between the agricultural community and the educational community. These differences in turn suggested some of the problems inherent in linking the interests of schools and communities through agricultural fairs.

<sup>94</sup> J. B. Dandeno, "The School Exhibition — When and Where," p. 135.

<sup>95</sup> In 1918 there were forty-one agricultural fairs; in 1923, seventy-seven. In the latter year the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture suggested that too many fairs were being held, that entries were very small and did not attract competition, and that the many small fairs were reducing the amount of government funding available for the stronger exhibitions. (*Sessional Papers* 1924, p. 117)



The struggle for control of the major exhibitions also ended in frustration and failure. The involvement of Gibson and his men in the major fairs at New Westminster and Vancouver followed the same pattern as their involvement with the livestock clubs and the local fairs. At first they were pleased and excited with the interest of the large fairs in junior work. When Vancouver began team judging in 1921, Gibson wrote W. M. Fleming, supervisor in Duncan, that "the Vancouver Fair is going forward with a sensational addition to their prize list. . . ." Noting enthusiastically that the first prize was \$100, he urged Fleming to participate.<sup>96</sup> He urged other supervisors to participate too, and his correspondence with the men indicates how seriously some of them took the first competitions. Munro, for example, was very proud that one of his students, Dudley Pritchard, was the "highest man in the whole competition in Heavy Horses," but he was most upset with his team's general performance. He stated that none of the boys had been to the city before and that they were awestruck. "Ivan Hunter lost his head about half way through the competition," he moaned, "and fell down badly. I'm afraid my choosing him on the team was a mistake, but he was the only other man whom I could expect to pay his way there."<sup>97</sup> When the fair was over Gibson wrote his supervisor in Salmon Arm that it was "a first rate contest for the beginning and will help to arouse a much wider interest in the New Westminster and Victoria contests." Noting the victory of the Kamloops team, coached by George Hay, a district agriculturalist, he said, "I think and I hope that they will have a run for their money at New Westminster."<sup>98</sup> In his annual report Gibson printed the Vancouver *Province's* impression of the team judging: "There has been no better indication recently of the value of agricultural fairs nor no more hopeful sign for the agricultural future of the Province than the scene in the pavilion . . . of six district teams of boys and girls under 18 years of age in a stock-judging competition."<sup>99</sup>

Following the Provincial Fair a few weeks later, Gibson was even more ecstatic. He said:

The executive . . . could not have done more than they did to make the stock-judging contests successful. . . . Not only did they pay the transportation of the contesting teams to the fair, which they had promised to do, but they

<sup>96</sup> Gibson to W. M. Fleming, 1 June 1921 R1S3.

<sup>97</sup> Munro to Gibson, 23 Aug. 1921 R1S3.

<sup>98</sup> Gibson to W. H. Grant, 25 Aug. 1921 R1S3.

<sup>99</sup> *AR* 1921, p. F55.

also granted free admission to the fair, provided meals and lodging during their stay, and finished by tendering a complimentary banquet to the teams and their coaches and to many others who had been actively interested in the competitions.

In his annual report Gibson printed the editorial of the *New Westminster British Columbian* which described the banquet as "one of those really stimulating and inspiring affairs which will have an influence far afield." The paper also declared the junior stock judging as "one of the successes of the exhibition."<sup>100</sup>

After this initial exuberance Gibson had second thoughts about the Vancouver Fair. He became involved in the struggle between that younger, upstart institution and the more established Provincial Exhibition, and after 1922 he never again printed the results of the Vancouver Fair in his annual report.<sup>101</sup> "I have come to the conclusion," he wrote Robinson after the 1923 Provincial Exhibition, "that this fair is the only one that we can be proud of in this province and I would like to see it strongly and widely supported."<sup>102</sup> It seems that Gibson began to see the Vancouver Fair as the epitome of the false ideal he saw in many local fairs. Lured into the Vancouver Fair by large cash prizes, he later recoiled from such enticements, believing that they commercialized what was supposed to be an educational experience.<sup>103</sup> He no doubt felt badly that both he and his missionaries had become so involved in competition that they too had forgotten that the events were supposed to be educational. By glorifying competition certain human and character values had been neglected.

Character values, however, were menaced by more than commercialization and competition. Notorious for its shows, gambling and horse races, the Vancouver Fair was attacked at least three times in the period

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> The first Vancouver Fair was held in 1910 and the first Provincial Exhibition in 1869. ("The Exhibition Comes of Age," *VDP*, 3 Aug. 1930, pp. 1, 10; D. E. MacKenzie to Gibson, 4 Oct. 1926 R6S4) By 1919, the year of New Westminster's golden jubilee, Vancouver Fair records indicated a strong sense of competition with New Westminster and a feeling that New Westminster unjustifiably received more grants and publicity. Vancouver Manager H. S. Rolston compared entries at Vancouver and New Westminster that year and Vancouver came off better in most classes. He noted that Vancouver, with a larger overall fair, got only \$5,000 from the provincial government compared to \$10,000 for New Westminster. (Manager's Report on Fairs Visited in 1919, P.N.E. Records, add. mss. 281, vol. 6, Vancouver City Archives, hereafter VCA.)

<sup>102</sup> Gibson to V. B. Robinson, 15 Sept. 1923 R2S3.

<sup>103</sup> See "Report of the Sub-committee on Agricultural Education," p. 71.

on moral grounds.<sup>104</sup> The Civic Bureau of the Board of Trade in 1919 was especially condemning. "The Hula-Hula show," it charged, "was . . . both immoral and disgraceful and should not be tolerated in the community . . . Children of all ages were permitted to attend, and the result could be nothing but demoralizing." "The gambling devices," it added, "were absolutely no chance games, being a dead sure thing for the operators. . . . While the hope of winning a large kewpie doll, a leg of ham, or a camouflage watch might be thrilling, it is neither intellectual nor instructive . . ." <sup>105</sup> Apparently the problem was not new for Vancouver Manager H. S. Rolston. "With reference to the Carnival Company," he reported on 17 July 1919, "we examined this very carefully, and found that no criticism could be justly levelled at this show from a moral standpoint. They were clean and free from objectionable or suggestive features. The Hawaiian dances are always suspicious, *but these were visited by me on a dozen occasions*, and at no time did I see anything objectionable."<sup>106</sup>

The attack nonetheless was renewed in June 1923 when fair officials held a special meeting to entertain views of various organizations concerning Exhibition affairs. Representatives of the Local Council of Women, the Women's Civic League and the Society of Friends all condemned horse racing with gambling. A man claiming to represent the workers of Vancouver objected to games with little or no chance of winning. A representative of the Child Welfare Association wanted to overhaul skid row, to eliminate gambling, and "to exclude everything derogatory to the child life of the city." The meeting ended with a motion, unanimously carried, thanking the Exhibition Board for their interest in local opinion and pledging the meeting's support to the Management in eliminating "all objectionable features."<sup>107</sup> Little seems to have been achieved, however, for a year and a half later one irate champion of local fairs labelled the Vancouver Fair as "a skinflint tinhorn gambling outfit." The man contrasted it with the Alberni Fair, where "a visitor is given a free pie,

<sup>104</sup> Interview, Professor and Mrs. Harry King, 25 Apr. 1977. Professor King was a member of both fair boards in this period, regularly judged at both fairs, and had inaugurated the junior team judging along with Gibson.

<sup>105</sup> Report of the Board of Trade, 1919, P.N.E. Records, add. mss. 281, vol. 6, VCA. See also attached clipping from the *Province*, "Board of Trade Criticizes Features of the 'Skid Road,'" 15 Oct. 1919.

<sup>106</sup> Manager's Report, 17 July 1919, P.N.E. Records, add. mss. 281, vol. 6, VCA, italics added.

<sup>107</sup> Report of Special Meeting, 8 June 1923, P.N.E. Records, add. mss. 281, vol. 8, VCA.

free butter milk and runs no chance of being horn-swaggled in a shell and pea game, or in the slicker game of throwing balls into a bath tub."<sup>108</sup>

The fact that New Westminster also had a midway did not deter Gibson from levelling a broadside at "the executives of our largest fairs" who "have not had the courage" to eliminate such "disgusting" forms of entertainment.<sup>109</sup> It is clear, however, that he considered New Westminster's midway less dominating and less pernicious than Vancouver's and that he was most disgusted with Vancouver. To add to this disgust, Gibson's dealings with the Vancouver Fair executive do not appear to have been cordial. One of the chief promoters of the fair, Peter Moore, was in many ways Gibson's antithesis. According to Professor Harry King, Moore "did not rate Gibson highly." The feeling was mutual and the result seems to have been that Gibson had less and less to do with Moore and the Vancouver Fair.<sup>110</sup>

The Provincial Exhibition was far closer to Gibson's ideal fair. Unlike the Vancouver Fair, which was more a manufacturing exhibition, it was a genuine dirt farmers' exhibition<sup>111</sup> Notwithstanding Vancouver claims, New Westminster possessed a superior agricultural fair. Using a marking scheme which exhibited a clear agricultural bias, the Department of Agriculture consistently ranked New Westminster's fair above Vancouver's.<sup>112</sup> The reason, as the Department Secretary explained, was that the Vancouver dates (usually August 9-16) were "not really suitable for the bulk of the agricultural population of the Lower Fraser Valley. . . ." It was too early for grains, field crops, potatoes, fruit and vegetables to be properly represented.<sup>113</sup> Gibson's conclusion was that New Westminster

<sup>108</sup> "Vancouver Fair Dubbed Tinhorn Gambling Outfit," *Victoria Colonist*, 10 Dec. 1925, p. 2. R. J. Burde was criticizing the \$111,000 grant for the Vancouver Fair compared to the \$47 for the Alberni Fair.

<sup>109</sup> *AR* 1923, p. F59.

<sup>110</sup> Interview, Professor King, 25 Apr. 1977. See note 104. King claims that the two men were opposites. A trained bacteriologist, Moore was manager of Colony Farm in the Fraser Valley which performed internationally important livestock experiments in this period. He was an acknowledged expert in livestock production, and especially in Holstein cattle. He later was inducted into the Agricultural Hall of Fame in Toronto. He also enjoyed alcohol. With this background, King argues, it was easy to see why he stressed the productive and economic aspects of agriculture and why he irritated Gibson.

<sup>111</sup> Interview, Mrs. H. King, 25 Apr. 1977.

<sup>112</sup> See Board of Control Minutes, 29 Feb. 1928, P.N.E. Records, add. mss. 281, vol. 15, VCA; W. J. Bonavia to J. K. Matheson, 12 Apr. 1926, Minutes, P.N.E. Records, add. mss. 281, vol. 13, VCA.

<sup>113</sup> W. J. Bonavia to J. K. Matheson, 12 Apr. 1926.

had "the premier agricultural fair in this province, and the beauty of it is that it is wholly the people's fair and is not made an excuse to pull off a big race track meet with its gambling orgies." "In my opinion," he wrote the Manager of the Provincial Exhibition, "the New Westminster fair should not have to compete for financial assistance from Dominion or Provincial sources with other fairs where most attention is paid to the flesh pots of the race track."<sup>114</sup>

The Provincial Exhibition was run by the venerable Royal Agricultural and Industrial Society of British Columbia (the RAIS), which comprised prominent citizens of New Westminster and important agriculturists of the province. Its manager, D. E. MacKenzie, stated that the RAIS

is a public spirited organization the purpose of which is to encourage the cultivation of the soil, the livestock industry, and the general development of all the agricultural resources of the Province, to foster every branch of mechanical and household art calculated to increase the happiness of home life, to extend and facilitate the various branches of mining and mining interest, to encourage educate and inspire the junior agriculturists on behalf of the economic agricultural progress of British Columbia and to promote the general industrial and commercial welfare of the country.<sup>115</sup>

Despite this broad sweep, the RAIS had an abiding concern for agriculture and education. "Each succeeding year," said MacKenzie, "sees new features of educational value added and it is gratifying to note that agriculture — the basic industry of the world — is attracting that greater degree of attention in the world's affairs, which it so rightfully deserves." He reminded Gibson that one of the Exhibition's "greatest missions is to lift to a higher sphere the [best] ideals of life and . . . methods of living."<sup>116</sup> Such concern for agriculture, education and good living impressed Gibson. Accordingly he sat on the Exhibition executive.<sup>117</sup> While he seems not to have exercised much direct control, it is clear from his comments and McDermott's that they were pleased with the intentions of the Exhibition.<sup>118</sup>

When the supervisors left in 1924-25 they perhaps realized that they had participated in a struggle between New Westminster and Vancouver. In siding with New Westminster Gibson believed he was supporting a

<sup>114</sup> Gibson to D. E. MacKenzie, 17 Nov. 1923 R5S4.

<sup>115</sup> MacKenzie to Gibson, 16 Jan. 1925 R6S4.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> MacKenzie to Gibson, 16 Mar. 1925 R6S4.

<sup>118</sup> *AR* 1924, pp. T81, T90.

closer approximation to his ideal fair. The irony was that he backed a compromise and that the Vancouver fair was destined to triumph.<sup>119</sup>

The theory that informed leadership employing participatory democracy could elicit social change in the country thus failed to take account of what would happen when the experts encountered pre-existing leadership in the social structure. Probably the naive hope was that the locals would recognize the supervisors' ability, step aside in the interests of community, and allow the supervisors free rein. No such thing occurred, however. In some ways the opposition to supervisors marked a triumph of local participation over educational professionalism. It kept leadership roles in community fairs and exhibitions open to the non-expert and the general public. The supervisors, alas, had over-extended the school's reach and found it impossible to take control. As for their own state of mind, they faced the unnerving tension of all evangelicals who see the truth and wish others to see. More than that, they bore the frustrations encountered by those attempting social change using the ploys of expertise and service. Their service mentality drove them to use their expertise, and when certain community institutions would not accept that expertise, they were doubly frustrated.

Being part of the community but unable to control it had serious consequences for the mission of rural regeneration. It entailed participation by Gibson and his men in forms and structures they had not created. It meant involvement in falseness — in false clubs, imperfect fairs, and "corrupted" exhibitions. In this process there was the danger of mindlessness, of forgetting fundamental purposes, and of making ends rather than means the activities which superseded the garden. In some ways the involvement of Gibson and the supervisors in clubs, fairs and exhibitions was the story of the corruption of a mission. In other ways it was the story of grave impediments thwarting aspiration and denying accomplishment. The corruption and impediments were part of the broader process of compromise which undermined the reforming impulse by exorcizing its energy, its sense of righteousness. Motivated by ideals, the supervisors looked at what they had done, saw imperfection, and realized that if this were their lot they were no longer striving for ideals but paltry imitations. When they were not doing what they believed to be right, they lost the messianic zeal which had driven them. By the time the supervisors were dismissed, something like this process was taking place.

<sup>119</sup> In 1929, Gibson's final year as director of the program, the Provincial Exhibition suffered a disastrous fire and was never rebuilt.

As these draining experiences took their toll the federal Agricultural Instruction Act — amid post-war depression and charges of duplicated effort, inefficient use of funds, poor administration and poor results — was terminated by Mackenzie King's government. At bottom, the Act had been a Conservative measure and King opposed the principle of subsidies. Engulfed by economic distress which ravaged agriculture and land settlement, the province of British Columbia was unwilling to assume the burden of financing Gibson's supervisors. When the axe fell on New Year's Day 1925 the heart of Gibson's program, already dispirited by the encounter in the livestock phase, was stilled. Some of the supervisors became regular high school teachers, most left the Department of Education, and the best, including J. C. Readey, departed forlornly and reluctantly for the United States.