

A Brief History of ACE

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Abstract

The American Association of Agricultural College Editors (AAACE) was created on July 10, 1913, when six land grant college agricultural editors met at the University of Illinois.

The Illinois gathering was so successful that the founders decided the conference should be an annual affair. The second meeting was a two-day conference, June 25 and 26, 1914, at the University of Kentucky, with seventeen attending. At the Wisconsin meeting in 1915, the AAACE constitution was adopted and the name “American Association of Agricultural College Editors” was established. AAACE was renamed Agricultural Communicators in Education (ACE) in 1978. Since its beginning, ACE has met in 41 states, Washington, DC; and Canada.

Some of the more important documents in the archives include: copies of every issue of the newsletter, beginning with Vol. 1, No. 1, November 1919, except three—one each in 1924, 1947 and 1958; copies of every issue of the *ACE Quarterly*; nearly every annual meeting program since 1914; “The Presidents of ACE,” book; board minutes, directories, regional reports, an AAACE Style Book, and other materials. The materials are a part of the Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library at Beltsville, Maryland. [continued]

The Journal Board expresses appreciation to three anonymous reviewers who provided helpful comments on the manuscript.

William E. Carnahan has been the ACE archivist since 1980. This paper presents some of the key elements of ACE. It is based on ACE materials in the ACE archives, which are a part of the Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library in Beltsville, Maryland.

The first AAACE archivist was Clara Bailey Ackerman, in Extension Information in USDA's (United States Department of Agriculture) Federal Extension Service. She was named archivist at the 1939 AAACE meeting and served through July 1954. The next archivist was Ralph Fulghum, Assistant Director of Extension Information. Other archivists to serve AAACE/ACE include James H. McCormack (1975-1980) and William E. Carnahan (1981- present).



Figure 1. "Seated on the running board of a 1926 'Model T'ford are Reuben Brigham, left, of USDA, and AAACE president in 1924-25; and Emmett R. Price, right, of Virginia Polytechnic Institute, Blacksburg, VA. Price was AAACE president in 1930-31. The gentleman in the center is Charles G. Burr, state agent for boy's club work in Prince Edward County, Virginia. The photograph was made on a farm in Virginia, probably in 1927 or 1928. The significance of 'Martha' is unknown." Source: ACE Archives.

The Beginnings of ACE

In June 1913, Dr. Burt E. Powell, agricultural editor at the University of Illinois, sent a call to “editors of publications or those in charge of publications” at all the land grant colleges and universities. From this call, publications editors from six colleges of agriculture responded. They met at the University of Illinois on July 10, 1913, to organize what was to become The American Association of Agricultural College Editors (AAACE). Attending this historic meeting were T.R. Bryant, Head of the Department of Agricultural Extension, University of Kentucky; A. B. Graham, Head of the Department of Agricultural Extension, Ohio State University; Frederick W. Beckman, editor, Iowa State College; G. M. Frier, Department of Agricultural Extension, Purdue University; Andrew W. Hopkins, editor of bulletins, at the University of Wisconsin; and Powell.

First AAACE Conference

The first AAACE conference was very informal. It was a one-day meeting focusing on six topics:

- (1) How important is it for our agricultural colleges to reach the people through the newspapers—that is, by specially prepared matter supplementing the regular bulletins and circulars?
- (2) Will it be best in the long run for the colleges to deal directly with the papers of the state?
- (3) Are the newspaper syndicates rendering satisfactory services?
- (4) Ought an effort be made to furnish special material for the farm papers?
- (5) Is it desirable that the agricultural colleges cooperate in furnishing material for any of the above purposes? If so, how may it be done?”
- (6) Is the custom of furnishing a page to only one paper in a town desirable and necessary?

The editors attending this first meeting did not record their answers to these questions but concluded the conference was so successful that they voted unanimously to meet annually.

At that first meeting, Powell was elected executive secretary “with power to act in deciding upon the time and place for the next meeting, and to look after the matter of arranging a program.”

Powell selected the University of Kentucky for the second annual AAACE meeting in 1914. It was a two-day meeting, June 25 and 26, at Lexington. A program committee was appointed and met at Madison, Wisconsin, November 28, 1913, to plan the Kentucky meeting. Today, these planning committee meetings often take place by teleconference with E-mail playing a significant role.

Committee members included Hopkins of Wisconsin, Powell of Illinois, and Beckman of Iowa as chairman, all destined to become AAACE presidents. This second meeting set the pattern for many AAACE meetings to come. It included a welcoming address from a college official, in this case, the director of the experiment station, and presentation of several papers followed by discussions. On the afternoon of the second day, the 17 men attending the meeting, had “a visit to Elmendorf farm and to the Kentucky Agricultural Experiment Station by special interurban car.”

In 1943, on the 30th anniversary of AAACE, Andrew Hopkins wrote in a 1943 ACE newsletter.

.... As I recall, it (the meeting) was called by B.E. Powell, who was in charge of public relations work at the University of Illinois. Although agricultural editing was somewhat of a sideline with Powell, he was so impressed with the opportunity for service that he wrote those of us who were engaged in the work inviting us to Urbana.

On a pleasant day in July 1913, six of us attended. With Powell calling the plays, we conferred in a rather informal manner speculating as to the possibilities in the field and planning how we might be mutually helpful. The day was so profitably spent that before we broke up someone suggested we repeat next year.

the 1930s was rural verse. Only the first three places were announced with ribbons going to the top exhibits.

During World War I, the editors focused on their part in the war effort with an emphasis on food production. A speaker from the U.S. Food Administration at the sixth conference at Knoxville, Tennessee, talked about the opportunities for agricultural editors to get much needed information to the people.

The Annual Conference

Copies of nearly every annual conference program, going back to 1914, are in the archives. Early printed programs do not exist. However, in 1916 AAACE published *Proceedings of the Third Annual Conference of the American Association of Agricultural College Editors*. This 62-page publication also includes the proceedings for the first conference at Illinois and the second conference at Kentucky. There are two copies in the archives.

The following year, AAACE published *Proceedings of the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Annual Conferences of the American Association of Agricultural College Editors*. These proceedings include detailed programs for those years, including many of the papers presented. These proceedings also include the secretary's minutes, the presidents addresses, the names of those attending each conference, and photographs of groups attending each conference. The photograph of the delegates at the sixth conference included for the first time, two women—Marion Butterworth from Delaware and Nellie Tracy from Indiana. There are eight copies of this 84-page publication in the archives.

Programs for 1913, 1919, 1920, 1929, 1933, 1934 and 1958 are missing. However, there are references to them in the newsletters, and in many instances, the newsletters include the full program.

The focus of AAACE/ACE meetings has changed dramatically since 1913. The first meeting, a one-day affair, consisted of a round table discussion. Papers presented in the early days of AAACE focused mostly on agricultural bulletins and to a lesser extent on newspapers and news writing. Two papers presented at the Kentucky meeting were "Cooperation Among Agricultural Editors in the Use of Publicity Material," and

As Powell served as chairman of the Illinois meeting, perhaps we should give him the credit of being the first chief executive of our organization. [Powell did not become the first chief executive, but was elected executive secretary.]

It has always seemed to me, Hopkins wrote, that we all owe a very deep debt of gratitude to Powell. He had the vision to see what might be done through cooperative efforts. He had the initiative and enterprise to call us together and the courage to suggest a program of action for the editors of the colleges of agriculture, the experiment stations and the United State Department of Agriculture.

Following the second annual conference at the University of Kentucky, AAACE has met every year since, except 1932 during the Great Depression, and in 1942, 1943, and 1945 during World War II.

At the 1914 Kentucky meeting, a Committee on Permanent Organization, Constitution and Resolutions was appointed. This group also served as a nominating committee. Their first agenda item was the establishment of a permanent organization that was to meet annually. The second agenda item was the development of a provisional constitution with a permanent one to be adopted at the third annual conference.

The third annual conference, held June 24 and 25, 1915, at the University of Wisconsin, drew representatives from 19 states and several from USDA. It was on June 25 that the first permanent constitution was adopted and the organization was officially named, "The American Association of Agricultural College Editors."

What eventually became the Critique and Awards Program, began at the Wisconsin meeting with "an exhibit of bulletins, circulars, agricultural pages, placards and similar publications from many of the agricultural colleges and stations ..." At some of the early meetings, an entire day was devoted to the "exhibits program." In the mid-1920s there were 12 classes, many of which continue today. One that fell by the wayside in

Panel moderators at the 1950 Texas conference, at Mo-Ranch, near Hunt, Texas, were called “foremen.” At this conference, breakout sessions began to be used. The sessions covered press, radio, visual aids, and publications. During the 1950s, we began to see sessions on television and more emphasis on programs for the wives. From my early days in AAACE, many families brought their children and there were special programs for them including baby sitters for the youngest. Very few children attend AAACE/ACE conferences today.

Program titles do not tell in detail what was discussed. By the mid-1950s however, there was increased emphasis on radio and television. “How Can Radio Hold Its Own?”, “Putting TV in Its Place,” “A New Look at Television,” and other related topics were covered. At the Nebraska conference in 1955, breakout sessions were held on press, radio and television, public relations and visual aids. The Nebraska meeting also had special programs for the wives including a style show, and trips to Boys Town, the stockyards and Offutt Air Force Base.

By the mid-1980s, technology began to creep into ACE conferences with a teleconference at the Alaska meeting in 1985. The session was a Pacific Rim seminar with participants in Washington, D.C. (the Secretary of Agriculture), and Australia. By the 1990s, conference topics covered the Internet, distance learning, developing a World Wide Web site, applications of CD-ROM, hypertext and multimedia, electronic publishing and other technical topics. What would our founding fathers think?

The Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow (ACT) came into being at the 1970 Cornell meeting. According to the conference program, “To these future communicators, who are now planning the development of this new student affiliate, AAACE extends a hearty welcome.”

Evolution of the Newsletter

The primary vehicle for keeping AAACE members in touch has been the newsletter. Six years following the founding of AAACE, the first newsletter was issued. Volume I, Number I, November 1919, was published at Cornell University by Millard V. Atwood, AAACE president in 1922-23. The first newsletter was a single sheet, two-sided publication called “The A*C*E.”

“Enlarging the Usefulness of Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations Thru Publicity.” At the third annual meeting, the Committee on Resolutions resolved, “that this association recommend that the words ‘information service’ be substituted for the word ‘publicity.’”

By the ninth conference in 1922, at Missouri, there was a session on “The Agricultural Movies.” At this conference, there were also three sessions on advertising. The program does not detail what these sessions covered.

At the South Dakota conference in 1924, Reuben Brigham led a session on “An Agricultural Picture Service.” According to the August 1924 newsletter, “Reuben Brigham showed some of his good pictures and told something of the difference between good and poor photographs.” Discussions on radio began to show up in the early 1920s. At the 10th annual conference at Virginia Tech in 1922, Professor H. E. Dudley of Wisconsin discussed “Movies and Radio.” This was only two years following the advent of commercial radio by Pittsburgh station KDKA.

Regional meetings were first mentioned at the fifth annual conference in 1917 at Cornell University. “In his opening address, President McClintock ... raised the question of holding small sectional meetings yearly, with perhaps a national conference every two years.”

By the mid-1920s, conference topics focused mainly on publications, newspapers, “an agricultural picture service,” and motion pictures. At one or two sessions the speakers discussed training for agricultural college editors and teaching agricultural journalism. The program committees relied heavily on AAACE members for speakers. Only two or three speakers were from sources other than AAACE or the agricultural colleges.

Radio began to play a larger role at AAACE conference during the 1930s. At the Cornell conference in 1935, an entire morning was devoted to “The Function of the Radio in Colleges and Universities.” In the early days of AAACE, women editors dealt almost exclusively with home economics journalism and other subjects related to the home. At the Cornell conference, a morning session was devoted to “Women’s Place in the News.”

The newsletter opens with: “Make the acquaintance of The Ace, which, being interpreted, means Agricultural College Editors.” The editor continued, “Somebody once apologized for being such an unconscionably long time in dying. The Ace is sorry to have been such a long time in getting born....”

The original of this first issue is not in the ACE archives. However, there are several ditto (spirit duplicator) copies in the archives duplicated exactly as the original. Volume II, Number 2, December 1919, was also missing as were all copies for 1920.

Since “The A*C*E” was born at Cornell University, I wondered if Cornell might have the missing copies. With this thought in mind, a letter went to the Cornell University archives in the Krock Library at Ithaca, New York. A second letter went to the Rare and Manuscripts Collection in the Krock Library. Neither responded. A letter was then sent to William B. Ward, Professor Emeritus at Cornell, to see what he could find. Ward was ACE president in 1954-55.

In November 1997, Ward wrote to say the early ACE newsletters were in the Special Collections of the Mann Library, in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, not in the Krock Library. After six months of correspondence and telephone calls, the original newsletters were sent to the Special Collections at the National Agricultural Library at Beltsville, Maryland, for copying.

The original newsletters were photo-copied, then returned to Cornell. Now, there are copies of every ACE newsletter in the archives except three—July 1924, April 1947 and August-September 1958.

We like to think of ourselves as professionals (i.e., we do not make (too many) mistakes). The early editors and writers of our newsletter were not infallible. There have been many inconsistencies. Issues have been mis-numbered, or not issued, some have been issued monthly, others have been issued bi-monthly.

In 1968, newsletter volume and issue numbers were discontinued when AAACE headquarters moved to Auburn University. From then until the advent of *Signals* in January 1990, newsletters showed only the month and year of issue.

From the beginning in 1919, until Vol. 26, No 1 (February 1943), newsletters were reproduced by mimeograph. Beginning with the 1943 issue, the newsletter announced with a banner headline, "ACE Goes Highbrow." It was the first newsletter "printed from set type." According to the lead article, printing was less expensive than mimeograph or multilith, and produced a better product. The next month, photographs were used for the first time.

From December 1959, through May-June 1968, two newsletters were published. One was mimeographed at the University of Illinois, the other was printed at Auburn University. The Auburn edition was called a magazine. However, since it is newsletter format, it is classified as such in the archives. The two newsletters do not duplicate each other.

Over the years the newsletter has been called "The A*C*E," "ACE," "AAACE Newsletter," "The ACE Communicator," and "Signals."

The earliest issues of the ACE newsletter were from two to four pages with some as many as a dozen pages. Content included details of the annual conferences, including verbatim copies of papers presented, a list of those attending, a roll call of the states with someone from each state itemizing what was going on in his/her state, and many personal items about what AAACE members were doing. Also included were survey results and the ever-present reminder about paying your dues. One item in the September 1923 newsletter said, "Dues are Due - Please Do." In those days, the dues were \$2 a year. (More on dues on page 19).

Today, the ACE newsletter, *Signals*, includes much more information on technical subjects, such as electronics, World Wide Web sites, digital photography, telecommunications and digitized images. These are techniques unheard of 25 years ago.

Evolution of the Quarterly

The first quarterly, named "aaace", is Vol. 51, No 1 and was issued in October 1968. The issue you are reading is Vol. 84. You wonder, where are the other 50 volumes? They do not exist. When newsletter volume and issue numbers were discontinued following Vol. 50, No. 6, May-June 1968, the editors picked up the sequence by numbering the quarterly,

Vol. 51, No. 1. No one knows why.

On the quarterly's 10th birthday, its name was changed to *ACE Quarterly*. In 1990, it became the *Journal of Applied Communications*.

The ACE Board

Minutes of every ACE board meeting beginning with the second meeting in 1914, are in the archives. Minutes for that meeting are in the *Proceedings of the Third Annual Conference*.... Minutes for the next three annual conference are included in the *Proceedings of the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Conferences*....

Some early newsletters include minutes of board meetings. Beginning in 1954, board minutes were routinely kept for every meeting and are in the archives. In 1978, the board began conducting meetings by teleconference. Minutes for these meetings are also in the archives.

In the early days of AAACE, there were only three officers—a president, a vice-president and a secretary-treasurer. Eventually, a headquarters coordinator was appointed and assumed many of the duties of the secretary-treasurer.

ACE Directories

ACE is fortunate to have very good records of its members. Early newsletters listed members as they paid their two-dollar annual dues. In the June-July 1933 newsletter the first “directory” was published. It listed members by regions. There were four regions: Eastern States (35 members), North Central States (41 members), Western States (38 members) and Southern States (28 members). USDA was not a region then, but its 86 members were listed. Membership “lists” continued to be published in the newsletter until 1982, when the first official directory was published.

Critique and Awards Program

Exhibiting our work has been an integral part of AAACE/ACE almost since the beginning. The first such exhibit was at the third annual conference at Wisconsin in 1915. According to the proceedings of that meeting, “There was an exhibit of bulletins, circulars, agricultural pages, placards, and similar publications from many of the agricultural colleges and sta-

tions, in one of the buildings near the place of meeting of the Conference.”

In the early 1920s, there were 13 classes in the exhibits program. They were, Class 1, exhibit as a whole; Class 2, popular bulletin; Class 3, technical bulletin; Class 4, syndicated press service; Class 5, extension service news periodical; Class 6, published agricultural or home-economics newspaper; Class 7, published feature or human-interest article; Class 8, best weekly service or short paragraphs; Class 9, photograph; Class 10, poster; Class 11, most effective piece of advertising printed matter; and Class 12, rural verse. In 1925, Class 8 was dropped, and two new classes were added: Class 11, light rural verse; Class 12, serious rural verse; and Class 13, handbook for county agents. The September 1924 newsletter includes a four-page paper on “Poetry and Agriculture.”

The third meeting also included a report of “The Committee on Use of Words.” The report is excerpted here. The opening paragraph recommends: “The committee on the common-sense use of words advocates in general, any tendency toward simplicity in the matter of usage and specifically recommends the following:

- (1) The omission of hyphens and use as single expressions of such words as livestock, cornmeal, bluegrass, cornfield, etc....
- (2) As a rule, make all breed and variety names lower case unless plainly derived from a proper name; and in the latter case the tendency should be to decapitalize as rapidly as possible.
- (3) When two words ordinarily used separately are combined in an adjective sense, they should be connected by a hyphen; as, nitrogen-free extract.
- (4) Use “plot” rather than “plat” to designate a small space of ground.
- (5) Write “bur clover” rather than “burr clover.”

The committee concluded in its report, “that the proceedings of this association be printed in accordance with the above regulation.”

The ACE Archives

The material in the ACE archives is organized into 22 series, newsletters, the journal, annual meetings, board minutes and so on. These valuable documents are stored in 51 acid-free boxes and more than 400 acid-free file folders (An example is shown in Figure 1.). There are also two oversized boxes for larger materials. ACE is fortunate to have had archivists for more than 60 years. The first was Clara Bailey Ackerman of USDA's Extension Service. She was named archivist at the 1939 AAACE meeting at Purdue University. When she retired in July 1954, Ralph Fulghum, Assistant Director of Extension Information was appointed. He was followed by James McCormack, an assistant director in USDA's Office of Information. He served from 1975 to 1980 when I was appointed by Lorraine Kingdon.

Dues

When AAACE was organized in 1913, the annual dues were \$2. They remained \$2 for 35 years until 1948, when they were increased to \$3. In 1950, the dues were raised to \$5 and stayed at this rate until 1957 when they were again increased to \$10.

Over the next 23 years, dues gradually rose to \$15 (1972), \$25 (1978), \$45 (1982), \$75 (1990), and to the current rate, \$100 in 1999.

In 87 years, ACE has grown from a core of six men meeting in Illinois to more than 700 members meeting in every state except nine—Arkansas, Connecticut, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Montana, Nevada, West Virginia and Wyoming. ACE has met in Washington, D.C., seven times and in Canada once. It is a growing, viable organization, and its members should feel proud of what ACE has accomplished.

Key words

ACE, AAACE, agricultural editors