

RELEASE: AT 12:30 P.M., THURSDAY, JAN. 3, 1957

Mr. and Mrs. Alfred G. Wilson are giving their 1400-acre estate near Rochester to Michigan State University as a site for a branch college to serve Oakland County and adjoining areas, it was announced Thursday. They are supplementing the gift of Meadow Brook Farms with a cash endowment of \$2,000,000 to underwrite the construction of academic buildings. The value of the total gift is estimated conservatively at \$10,000,000.

The announcement was made by Mrs. Wilson at a luncheon given at the Bloomfield Hills Country Club for a number of industrial, business, educational and political leaders from Oakland County and for representatives of Michigan State University. Robert Swanson, Sr., Bloomfield Hills architect who as chairman of the Oakland County Planning Commission was active in the negotiations to assure a four-year college for Oakland County, presided at the session at which the announcement was made.

"It is difficult to put into appropriate words the gratitude all of us feel towards Mr. and Mrs. Wilson for the generous gift of what has been their home for many years, and for the additional endowment to get this new educational project underway," President John A. Hannah, of Michigan State, said after the announcement. "It is a gift which surely comes from their hearts, for no one lightly gives into the care of others a property which means what Meadow Brook Farms has meant to them."

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President Hannah recalled that Mrs. Wilson was a member of the State Board of Agriculture, the governing body of Michigan State University, from 1931 through 1937, and had an opportunity to develop an intimate knowledge of Michigan State and its educational philosophy.

On this point he commented:

"This, the most generous benefaction ever received by Michigan State, reaffirms the abiding interest in young people and the desire to help them achieve their full potential which characterized her service as a board member and her subsequent activities on behalf of Michigan State."

This continuing interest in higher education of Mrs. Wilson was recognized by Michigan State University when it conferred upon her the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws at the 97th Annual Commencement on June 5, 1955, in one of the major events of the Centennial Year. Both Mrs. Wilson and her husband have been members of the Board of Trustees of Beloit College for many years.

Speaking for her husband and herself, Mrs. Wilson said: "We are very happy to turn Meadow Brook Farms over to Michigan State University. My long association with Michigan State University has shown me the tremendous contribution it is making to our educational and cultural life. Mr. Wilson and I have admired the policies adopted in East Lansing and we believe the institution has a tremendous future in this area. We are very happy to be of assistance."

The offer of Mr. and Mrs. Wilson has been discussed with the governing board of Michigan State, and accepted unanimously and enthusiastically, subject to legislative approval, President Hannah said.

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Only the most general plans have been made for the branch college, President Hannah said, pending consultation with local interests as to how the needs of the area could best be met. It is probable that the emphasis, at least originally, will be in the fields of engineering, business, science, and the arts.

It was pointed out that within a fifteen-mile radius of Meadow Brook Farms -- considered by educational authorities to be a reasonable commuting distance -- the population is now about 516,000. Reasonable projections show the population of this area, including a portion of Macomb County, increasing by 1960 to 632,000, by 1965 to 753,000, and by 1970 to 926,000. The college age population (18-24) is presently estimated at 44,000. This segment is expected to increase to 54,000 by 1960, to 73,000 by 1965, and to 103,000 by 1970.

Oakland County -- estimated to have a population well in excess of 500,000 in 1955 -- is by far the largest county in Michigan without a public institution of higher learning. It produces the second largest number of high school graduates each year (3,219 in 1955) and has the second largest number of high school graduates in college (1,112 in 1955).

"Unaccountably, Oakland County has been bypassed in the development of Michigan's outstanding system of higher education," President Hannah commented. "Despite this handicap, it has grown in population and wealth. I am sure the legislature, which must approve the establishment of branches of existing institutions, will agree that it is high time that the young people of this major economic area had educational opportunities equivalent to those provided in other parts of the state.

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"Michigan State University welcomes this great opportunity to extend its operations into an area of tremendous importance to the state, and to improve upon its long and unbroken record of service to the people of Michigan. People have always been accorded a position of first importance at our university, which was created originally to meet an unmet need, and has always operated on the premise that it could have no finer mission than to help people learn how to live richer, more satisfying lives.

"It is to the eternal credit of those who live in this area that they have combined their thinking and their resources to make available for the young people of Oakland County and vicinity what can, in time, become one of our state's outstanding educational, cultural, and technical centers."

Meadow Brook Hall, considered to be one of the outstanding private residences in the World, is in itself an art treasure, and housed within it are some of the world's most famous paintings and valuable objets d'art. Mr. and Mrs. Wilson are retaining a life interest in the residences on the estate, but these, too, will eventually become a part of the campus of the branch college.

Agriculture, particularly the breeding of fine livestock, has been practiced actively at Meadow Brook, and there are several modern farm centers on the estate, lending to the possibility that some of Michigan State's agricultural research operations might be carried on there.

In relation to this situation, it is pointed out that Miss Sarah Van Hoosen Jones, of Rochester, also a former member of the governing board, recently conveyed her home farm of more than 300 acres to Michigan State. Her estate, in the possession of her family for more than a century, is situated less than five miles east of the Wilson estate, suggesting that the two operations could easily be correlated.

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Meadow Brook Hall is the result of many years of planning on the part of Mr. and Mrs. Wilson. It was built more than a quarter of a century ago. Mr. and Mrs. Wilson took with them to Europe an architect, with whom they visited many of the outstanding residences of England and other countries. When they found features which appealed to them particularly, the architect took careful measurements of room dimensions and made notes of decorative details on which to base what are in effect reproductions of many famous rooms. The building is of brick, stone and timber construction, and measures 410 feet from end to end.

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