What Arcadia Can Teach — The Village to the City
(Excerpt From Report on 1943 Brooklyn College Farm Labor Project)

Take one hundred and fifty young people from the sidewalks of New York, from the crowded subways and streets, and the hurried hordes of people, and set them down in an idyllic village of a few hundred people where trees, grass, and spaced homes predominate, where people are not in a rush, and where backyards face, not whitewashed brick walls, or tiers of fluttering washing, but on hills verdant with crops and woods. What could these young people learn from weeks of living in so totally different an environment? How did they react to these scenes and to the people? How did the village people impress them and how did they impress the local residents? No complete answer can be given to any of these questions but some impressions are possible, and some picture of the town and its unhurried and uncomplicated regime is important in any analysis of this Brooklyn College venture.

Morrisville may not be the "loveliest village" of the hills, but our group, staff and students, are convinced that it is. With its Main St., a half mile stretch of the Cherry Valley Turnpike, with a chief cross street, Eaton St., and a few lesser diverging roads, the village is nestled nearly 1400 feet above sea level in the center of Madison County. Every road leaving Morrisville climbs, at least briefly, as it leaves the village. From the east, the Turnpike curves and dips rather steeply as it enters the town, only to rise again at the western exit. The main stream, Callahan Brook, pauses briefly at the old grist mill pond before it drops down toward the south, becoming the Chenange River within two miles. Almost within the village limits to the north, a swamp lies on the water shed from which other streams start their long northward course toward the St. Lawrence.

Morrisville has no single outstanding architectural structure, but it has many well-kept homes of dignified lines. Those on Eaton and Main Streets are fronted by such wide lawns as to give the effect of broad village greens. The town has no "poor section", although one piece of idle store property distresses the citizens by its neglected appearance. Its tall, sturdy sugar maples do not possess the ever-
arching grace of elms, but they give comfortable shade. In March of each year, almost every tree is decorated with from one to six sap buckets to make its contribution to the food supply. In October, the maples are a flaming glory of reds, oranges, and yellows, something no elm can approach. There are no advertised "historic" houses nor tablets commemorating battles fought within its limits, but at Cedar Street, a marker points northward toward the Nichols Pond site where Samuel de Champlain failed in his attempt to split the Iroquois Confederacy, and so failed to leave our territory with a legacy of French settlement and control.

The town impresses one with an air of quietness and repose, particularly now that the Turnpike is no longer the speedway for thousands of touring automobiles. Formerly the county seat, Morrisville had the court house, the county jail, hotels of considerable size, its panels of lawyers, doctors, and dentists. Now the war has taken one doctor and left one other who began his practise in the village fifty years ago, succeeding a long practise of his father before him. One lawyer's shingle hangs in the second story window through which the lawyer may be seen occasionally. There is a drugstore where prescriptions are no longer compounded; a bakery with a large oven in which no bread and cake have browned for a long time. The nearest regular movie houses are eight, eleven and eighteen miles away, but once a week an old picture was shown last summer in the fire house. A small cluster of friendly stores, where "they tell you where you got what you want if they happen to be out of it" completes the general picture of the setting for the Brooklyn College Farm Labor Project.

Morrisville's chief and only "industry" aside from the farms which stretch back of many village houses, is the New York Agricultural and Technical Institute, one of six State schools of this type. In ordinary years, the Institute has been the living, working, and studying center for some two hundred high school graduates from all over the State, enrolled in agriculture, auto-mechanics, home economics, or horology. At the present time its register during the regular year is only a fraction of its usual quota. Headquarters last summer for the Brooklyn College contingent of one hundred and fifty, who used it almost entirely for the Brooklyn program of courses,
the Institute in its own right could offer a planned program of inestimable value to city youth during summer sessions.

Even a brief catalog of Morrisville impressions would not be complete without some reference to the town's canine population. Apparently the dogs are all well adjusted to each other and to visiting strangers. Chico, a great Newfoundland, is one of the characters of the village. When first seen, he was coming down the hill with a "whistle pig" in his mouth, woodchuck in more common parlance. The zealous guardian of the children of his family, he has been known gently to pick up a kitten which had wandered to the middle of the road and carry it safety out of traffic. An aging dignified Scotty almost daily walks his solitary way down the hill to a restaurant, and as undeviatingly returns, usually with a bone in his mouth. Properly approached, he will condense to stop and have his ears rubbed, but a predilection for certain pasture deposits does not lead to prolonged fondling. Freckles, a pointer type, makes up in body wiggling for the inadequacy of a short tail. A black cocker spaniel adopted the Brooklyn group from the start and would nearly burst his skin in his exuberant efforts to ingratiate himself.

Of dangerous animals, there is almost nothing to report for the village or the vicinity. Mosquitoes were practically non-existent. Despite a summer of excessive rainfall, and a large swamp within a mile or two, this observer recalls not more than two during the ten-weeks' stay. There are no poisonous snakes in Madison County. One bull of un-Ferdinandlike disposition was rumored to hold sway in a pasture full of wild blackberries. The story was that this bull was not satisfied merely with repelling intruders, would jump fences in guardainship and follow to the purlieus of the village itself. Three dignified, visiting members of the Brooklyn College Faculty who climbed the hill for its superb view, reported a quick exit, which they ascribed to a pursuing heifer.

In the last analysis, a town is made by its people. Morrisville's were not only the daily farm visitors of the neighborhood, and the town's business people, but the considerable staff of the Agricultural Institute, who contributed to it much of
the atmosphere of a college town. An Institute staff member was head of the local Grange. Others were active in the political life and government, in the churches. A former head of the Institute was Chairman of the School Board, and active on the Selective Service Board.

The townspeople received the Brooklyn visitors most hospitably. The first week, a cordial invitation was given to all our group to attend any of the three local churches, Methodist, United (Baptist and Congregational), and Roman Catholic. This invitation was accepted throughout the summer by not a few of staff and students. The third Sunday of our stay, a quartette of Brooklynites served as choir for the United Church Sunday service. Later, when a group of our students were arranging to hold Jewish services on Friday evenings, the United Church extended an official invitation to them to use their edifice. (See end of this section). The local Grange welcomed them every Saturday evening to its weekly dances and many strong partisans of square dancing were developed during the summer, partly at the Grange parties, and also the Brooklyn group's own Saturday evening parties where Mr. Howard Harter, of the Institute staff, and Mrs. Harter were patient and indefatigable coaches in the mysteries of "Allemund richt", "Do-si-do," etc.

All in all, the village of Morrisville was an exceptionally favorable site for the initiation of such a group of city young people into the habits and mores of a rural community. What may be the persisting increments of the ten weeks of contacts with the village and its people is scarcely susceptible now of appraisal. Now two months away, many students speak of the village and its quiet charm as outstanding in their recollections. While only one small class was actually enrolled in a formal course in Rural Sociology, everyone was daily face to face with the circumstantial data of the subject. Our Brooklynites took special note of the habit of country people of greeting strangers. "They seem glad to see us. They don't have a chip on their shoulders as New Yorkers do." "They listen to what you have to say as if they were interested." "The farmers like their work, the land, their crops. They wouldn't want to work at anything else, even if it paid more." "Farmers say they like to work
for themselves; not under bosses."

It is a pleasure to report that our students made an equally favorable impression on the residents of the village. As the summer wore on, it became obvious that anticipation had been rather on the pessimistic side. We had not been there long before unsolicited favorable comments began to be offered. These continued in increasing number to the end of our stay. This was perhaps partly a reaction to anticipatory doubts, but it was none the less gratifying to have a wide range of people, from the mayor of the village to the maintenance workers at the Institute, go out of their way to be complimentary about the general deportment of our Brooklyn students. Morrisville offered instruction in the art of living without tension, and in friendly relations with strangers and neighbors. Certainly many of our students gave every evidence of being not pupils.

(The foregoing paragraphs should not be taken as resort advertising. Morrisville is "pure" country village, uncommercialized, with no summer boarding houses or 'front-porch' hotels, with few rooms for tourists and fewer facilities for transients to get meals. From the standpoint of a country work-study project where city young people may savor most completely the distinctiveness of rural life, this deficiency in accommodations for visitors was a strong point in favor of Morrisville as a place for informal instruction.)