

# Simon P. Markle: The King of Corn

Corn fields are ubiquitous in the Wisconsin countryside. During the seasons of spring, summer, and fall, we can see corn being planted, growing, and being harvested until the first snow covers the ground.

As we begin this season of corn pickers and combines making their steady progress through acre after acre of brown cornstalks plucking the golden ears that feed livestock and people around the world, it is a good time to look back at Simon P. Markle, a farmer in the town of Shelby, who made news for his prize-winning corn in the early 1900s. His efforts to educate farmers on scientific farming methods also contributed to the advancement of agriculture in La Crosse County.



S. P. Markle, 36 years old

*(La Crosse Tribune, 1911 July 28, p. 76)*

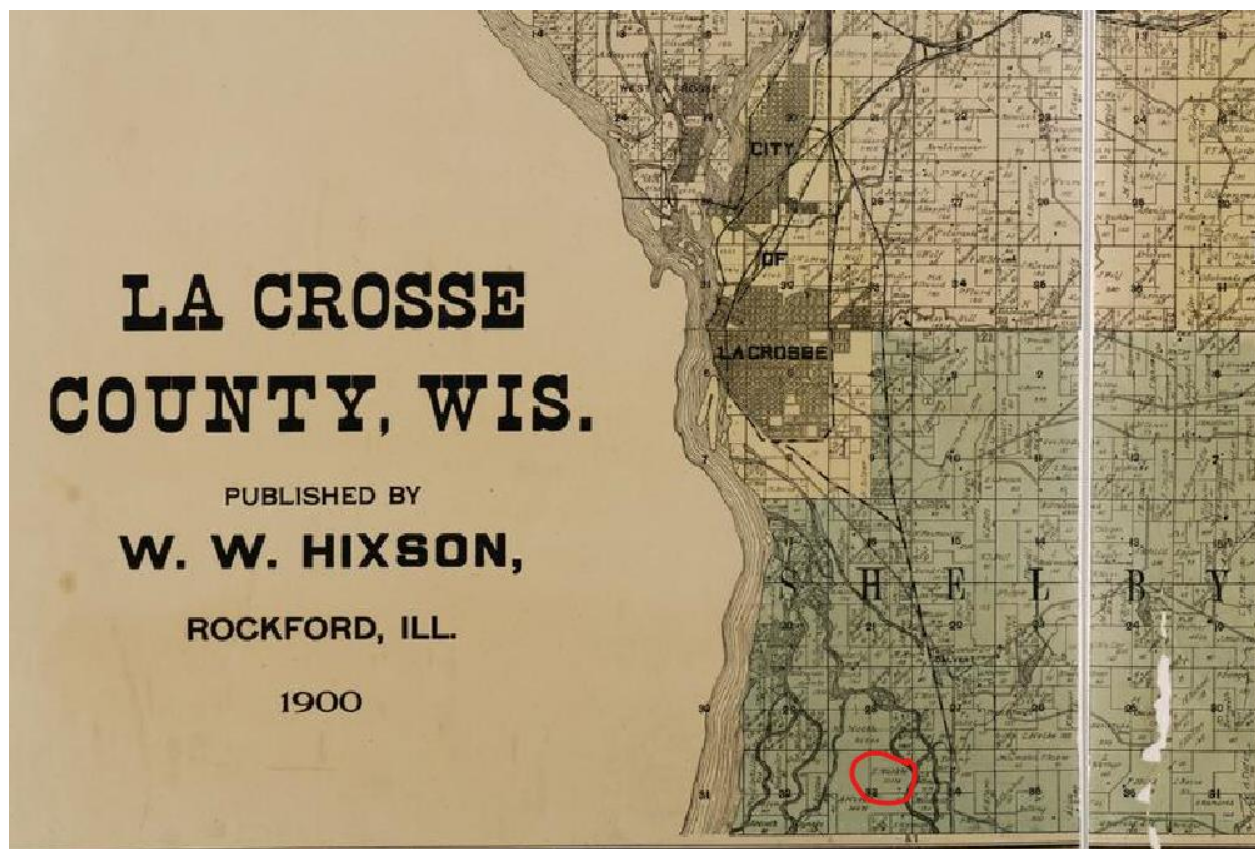
Simon's father, Emanuel Markle, was born in Ohio on December 17, 1837. When Emanuel was very young, his family moved to Indiana where they remained for 13 years. Emanuel Markle came to La Crosse County on October 20, 1851. He enlisted in the La Crosse Light Guard in 1861. This organization would become Company B of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wisconsin Infantry Regiment in the famed "Iron Brigade" of the Civil War. Markle saw action in the Second Battle of the Bull Run, Antietam, and South Mountain. During the latter, Markle was near company commander Captain Wilson Colwell when Colwell was fatally struck down. In the momentous Battle of Gettysburg, five bullets ripped through Markle's uniform, and two of them resulted in slight wounds. Markle also survived the Wilderness Campaign before being discharged in 1865. He then married Caroline Hanich, and they had seven children who were still living in 1915. Six of the children spent their adulthood in western states; only Simon Markle remained in La Crosse County.<sup>1</sup> Emanuel Markle was the last surviving member of the La Crosse Light Guard when he died in October 1918.<sup>2</sup>

Simon P. Markle was born on May 5, 1875, on his parent's farm in the town of Shelby, La Crosse County, Wisconsin.<sup>3</sup> In contemporary news articles, he was most often referred to as "S. P. Markle," or "S. Markle," and occasionally as "Pete Markle." His given name of "Simon" never saw print.

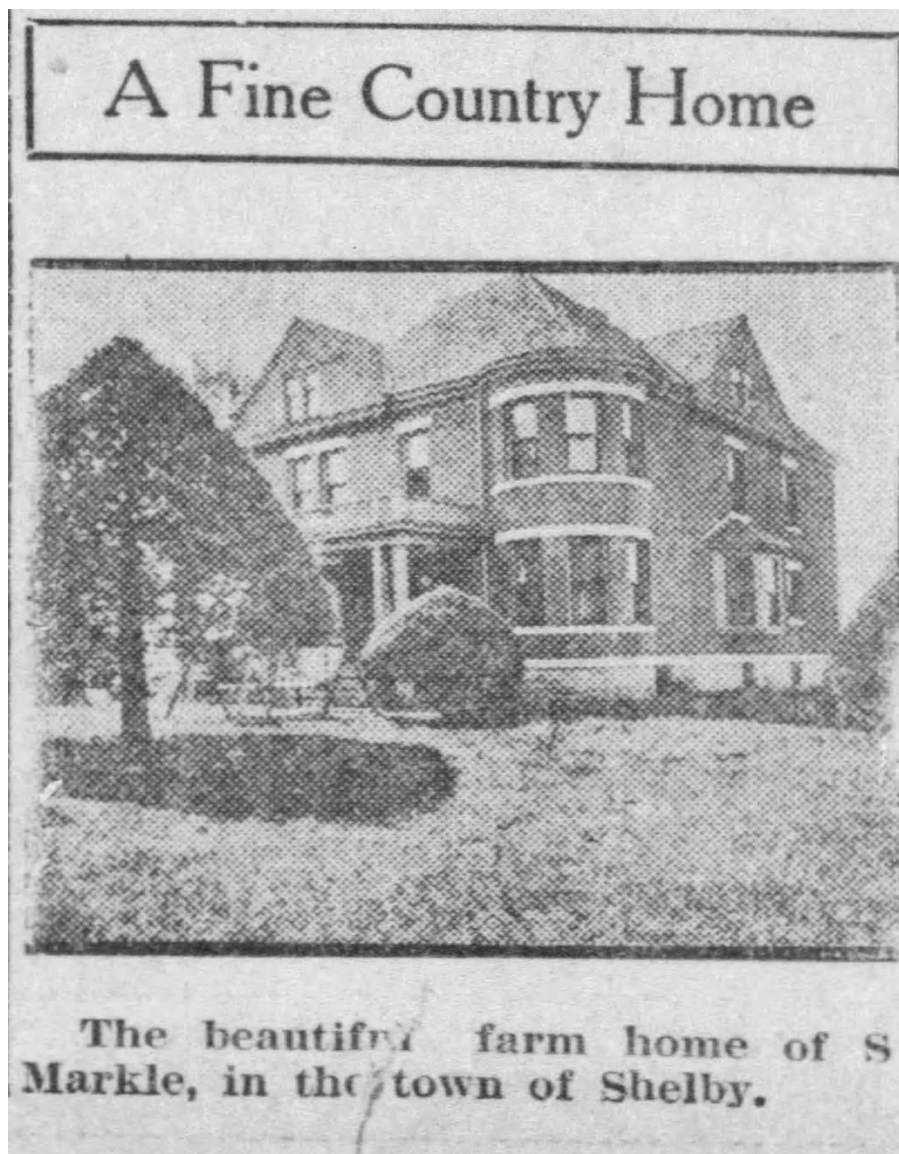
Simon P. Markle married Sophia Van Loon on November 22, 1924, at the parsonage of the West Avenue Methodist Church in La Crosse. After a honeymoon trip to Montana and Washington, they returned to the Markle homestead in the town of Shelby.<sup>4</sup> They would have five sons and two daughters together, none of whom remained in this area.<sup>5</sup>

Sophia's father was John Van Loon, who was born in the Netherlands in 1841. He came to the United States with his widowed mother and four brothers in 1855. They settled in New Amsterdam, near Holmen, in La Crosse County. John Van Loon moved to La Crosse in April 1884 where he was a florist until retiring in 1931 at the age of 89. He was 99 years old when he died in 1941. Besides Sophia Markle, he was survived by three other daughters and a son.<sup>6</sup> The Van Loon family was remembered as some of the first settlers of New Amsterdam.<sup>7</sup>

When Emanuel Markle retired in 1905, S. P. Markle started farming for himself on their 360-acre farm in the town of Shelby.<sup>8</sup> It was called one of the best farms in the county.<sup>9</sup>



Location of the Markle farm in the town of Shelby  
(Courtesy of University of Wisconsin Libraries)



*(La Crosse Tribune, 1911 July 28, p. 40)*

Farmers in the early 1900s were starting to show an interest in scientific methods of farming to improve their livestock and crops. Schools and farm associations helped spread this knowledge in the agricultural community. In 1907, Markle read a book on corn culture by Professor P. Houlden of the Ames College, Iowa, and continued his scientific study of corn growing at the La Crosse County Agricultural College in Onalaska.<sup>10</sup>

Wisconsin No. 7 corn was one of Markle's specialties. Also known as Silver King Dent Corn, A. J. Goddard brought a bushel of it from Indiana to Fort Atkinson, Iowa, in 1862. The Wisconsin Experimental Station propagated it in 1904. It has white kernels on a white cob, unlike yellow field corn that has a red cob.<sup>11</sup>

Local and state fairs featured exhibits of farm livestock and crops that competed for prize money. S. P. Markle started entering his corn in these contests and soon became known for his outstanding corn.

What are the criteria for judging ears of corn? According to the Manitowoc County University of Wisconsin-Extension, mature corn kernels are “bright and plump.” There should not be any insect, disease, or weather damage on the ears. The kernels should be tightly attached and in straight and regular rows, like soldiers in formation standing at attention. “The ears should have good tip and butt development.” No details are provided on what makes for good corn butts. Collections of ears should look “as much alike as possible in size, shape, color, and kernel type. The butt, middle, and tip of the ear should all have about the same diameter.”<sup>12</sup>

Markle first exhibited corn at the National Corn Exposition in Omaha, Nebraska, in 1908. Going up against the best corn from the rest of the country, his single ear of Wisconsin No. 7 corn won a third premium. His 10-ear dent corn exhibit earned seventh place.<sup>13</sup> In 1909, his Wisconsin No. 7 white dent corn won second prize at the national show in Omaha.<sup>14</sup> His exhibit of best ten ears earned a third.<sup>15</sup>

Markle regularly exhibited corn at the La Crosse Interstate Fair. At the 1910 fair, his Wisconsin No. 7 white dent won a second premium, and his best 20 ears of any variety took first. Markle was competing against his father-in-law, John Van Loon, among other county farmers.<sup>16</sup>

Later in 1910, Markle’s corn prowess grew when his Wisconsin No. 7 white dent corn took first prize for single ear, first prize for 10-ear exhibit, and the grand championship prize on his 10-ear exhibit at the Northwestern Corn and Grains Show in South St. Paul.<sup>17</sup>

His winning streak continued a few weeks later by winning the grand championship for his single ear exhibit, as well as his 50-ear exhibit at the state corn show at the University of Wisconsin. His winning single ear sold for \$15 (equivalent to almost \$500 today) at the after-show auction.<sup>18</sup> Markle bought it himself so that he could exhibit it at the national show in Ohio.<sup>19</sup>

Unfortunately, the championship single ear was damaged by handling during that auction and won only a second prize at the National Corn Exposition for the northern zone in Columbus, Ohio. The judges hinted that Markle’s single ear could have won first had it not been damaged.<sup>20</sup>

The La Crosse County Agricultural School in Onalaska held an annual corn school to educate farmers on weed control and “the raising of pure bred seed.” At the 1911 meeting, Markle was elected field inspector for a newly-organized branch of the state experimental association. Their goal was to make La Crosse County one of the leading corn producers in the United States. Markle’s 25-ear corn exhibit of any variety won first prize, and he received the grand championship on 10 ears of any variety.<sup>21</sup>

The progress of corn culture in La Crosse County was demonstrated in November 1911 when three county farm growers won prizes at the Northwestern Livestock and Grain Association

Show in St. Paul. Besides Markle winning a silver trophy for best Wisconsin No. 7 corn, John Van Loon and Louis Lemke won prizes for their corn.<sup>22</sup>

**MARKLE FACTOR  
IN CORN SHOWS**

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La Crosse Man Has Taken  
Top Prizes in National  
Expositions Since  
1907

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**BOOK GAVE INSPIRATION**

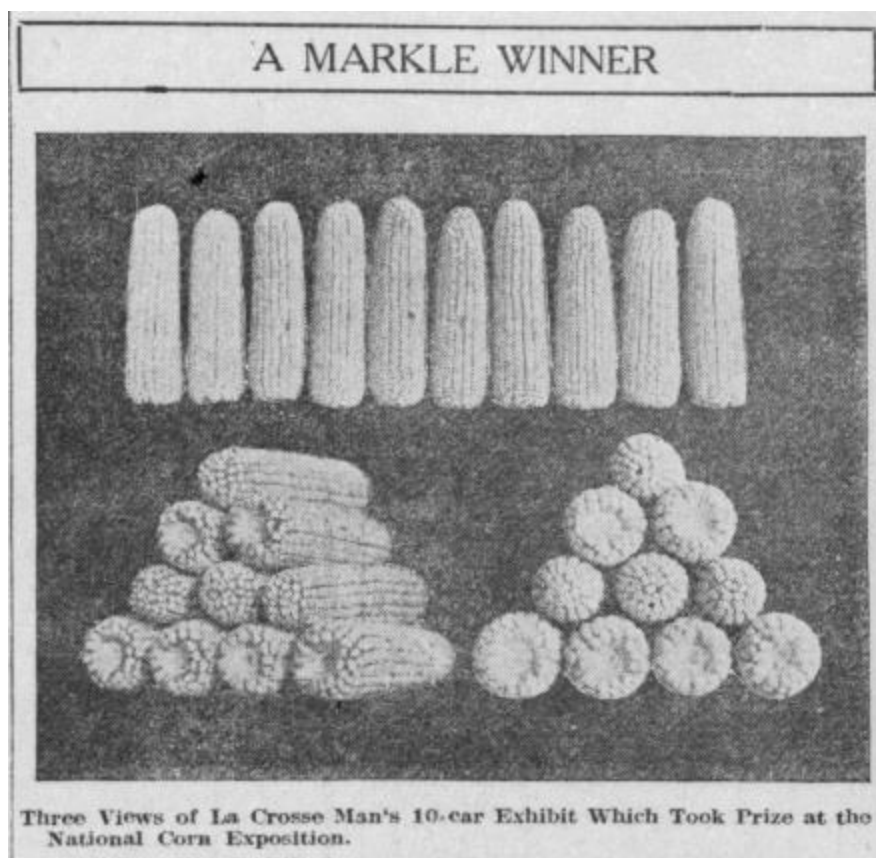
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After Reading Prof. Houl-  
den's Work He Studied  
in Onalaska Farm  
College

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Through the success of S. Markle,  
the well known and prosperous Shel-  
by farmer, La Crosse county has be-  
come a factor among the corn pro-  
ducing areas of the northwest. Four  
times has Mr. Markle exhibited in  
national shows corn grown on his  
La Crosse county farm, and has nev-  
er failed to carry off high prizes,  
his success growing with each suc-  
ceeding year.

*(La Crosse Tribune, 1911 July 28, p. 76)*



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La Crosse County corn built such a reputation for excellence that F. H. Raessler of Beloit bought his seed corn from S. P. Markle. Using Markle's seed, Raessler took first prize with his Wisconsin number 7 corn at the 1912 state fair, edging out Benjamin Hauser of La Crosse for the honor.<sup>23</sup>

By this time, Markle was teaching other farmers how to grow corn like that which he exhibited. He spoke on corn breeding at the Farmers' Institute at Bangor in January 1913.<sup>24</sup> Markle explained how to determine which corn rows had the highest ear yield and how to cross-breed two high-producing ears by detasseling lower-producing rows of corn to prevent self-pollination.<sup>25</sup> This method of selective breeding is still used by corn seed companies to produce better hybrids.

Corn is monoecious, meaning it has both the male part (tassel) and the female part (ear) necessary for reproduction. Tassels usually emerge from the plant first; silk will follow about two or three days later. In four to eight days, the ends of all the silk strands will be visible. Silk will keep growing for as much as 10 days after it first appears or until pollination. Each tassel has about 6,000 anthers, or stamens, containing pollen grains. A corn tassel will drop its pollen for five to six days, but it may take a whole cornfield 10 to 14 days to shed all its pollen. Wind assists in this process. Most pollen falls with 50 feet of the plant it originated from and is fertile for one to two hours. In a cornfield, about 97% of the pollination is from neighboring plants.

When a pollen grain lands on any part of the silk, a pollen tube grows down through the hollow core of the silk until it reaches the female ovule. The ovule eventually becomes a kernel of corn on the ear.<sup>26</sup>

Seed companies improve the quality of corn seed by detasseling. Different varieties of corn are planted in the same field. Machines go through and cut tassels off one of the varieties. Human workers follow behind to remove the tassels that the machines missed. With their tassels gone, there is no pollen to fertilize these plants. They are instead fertilized by the other variety to maximize the desirable traits of both varieties producing hybrid seed of higher quality.<sup>27</sup>

Markle's role in promoting agricultural improvement was recognized when he was elected president of the La Crosse County Order of the State Experiment Association at the annual farmers' week of classes and training at the La Crosse County School of Agriculture and Domestic Economy in Onalaska. About 1,000 people attended the 1913 event.<sup>28</sup>

The education effort produced results at the Wisconsin Experiment Association contest in Madison early in 1914. Markle's corn won several first prizes, and so did Jippe Wiellinga of Midway. Peter Bengel of Mormon Coulee won prizes for his grain.<sup>29</sup>

At the 1914 national corn show in Dallas, Texas, Markle placed second with his single ear of Yellow Dent corn, while his ten ears of White Dent corn won first.<sup>30</sup>

Besides educational presentations, exhibits were also part of the annual La Crosse County School of Agriculture conference. At the February 1915 conference, Markle took the top prize for Best Ten Ears of Wisconsin No. 7 and the grand prize for ten ears of any Dent variety.<sup>31</sup>

In December 1915, Markle's Wisconsin No. 7 corn claimed the first prize at the first annual corn and grain show at Sparta. This event included 258 farmers from Vernon, Jackson, Juneau, Trempealeau, Monroe, and La Crosse counties. La Crosse County farmers took almost half of the prizes at this contest, so the educational efforts in the county appear to have contributed to that success.<sup>32</sup>

At the First National Corn Show in St. Paul in late 1915, Markle's corn won first prize. John Van Loon, also of La Crosse County, won a third prize for his corn.<sup>33</sup>

At the 1916 Farmers' Institute and Home Makers' conference in the La Crosse County School of Agriculture, Markle's corn took the top prize in six categories.<sup>34</sup>

Corn raised by La Crosse County farmers made an impressive showing at the 1916 Wisconsin State Fair. Markle, along with Jipp Wielinga, John Van Loon, and John T. Hauser won prizes. Markle garnered top prize for his ten and fifty-ear exhibits.<sup>35</sup>

In January 1921, at what was called the largest corn and grain show ever held in Wisconsin, with 900 exhibits, Simon Markle's exhibit of fifty ears of Silver King corn won the top prize for the sixth consecutive time.<sup>36</sup> A local newspaper editorial commended Markle for sharing his expertise and knowledge with other La Crosse County exhibitors, even though they were



competing against him, in a team effort for La Crosse County at the state event.<sup>37</sup> Another article described Markle as . . . “famous all over the northwest for his Silver King corn, and winner of prizes innumerable.”<sup>38</sup> Not only did Markle win prizes for his corn at the state grain show, but his sorghum seed and heads earned two first prizes.<sup>39</sup>

Markle championed a cooperative spirit among farmers because he believed sharing knowledge and helping others produced bigger and better crops for everyone.<sup>40</sup>

The fruits of that spirit were realized at the 1921 State Fair where exhibitors from La Crosse County earned over 5,000 prizes in everything from cattle to horses to hogs to crops.<sup>41</sup>

Markle showed his versatility by winning first place for Best Ten Ears of popcorn at the annual corn and grain show at the La Crosse County School of Agriculture in 1922.<sup>42</sup>

At the 1923 State Corn and Grain Show in Madison, La Crosse County topped all other counties in total points for its winnings. Markle was in the mix with a first place for Fifty Ears of Silver King corn.<sup>43</sup>

La Crosse County came away from the 1925 state fair with more winnings than ever. Markle sent exhibits to the fair, but Otto Wolf and Jippa Wielinga were listed as winners in the corn exhibits.<sup>44</sup>

Markle had Jersey cattle and Chester White hogs on his farm.<sup>45</sup> A 1911 newspaper article related how Markle saved a litter of eight piglets after their mother died. Markle collected beer bottles from La Crosse breweries (“every brewery in the city contributing”), filled the bottles with milk and fitted each with a rubber nipple. He inserted the beer, now milk, bottles into notches in the pig trough so the piglets could feed all at once.<sup>46</sup> Markle was a director of the La Crosse County Jersey Breeders’ Association.<sup>47</sup>

Markle also raised chickens, and he was a member of the Western Wisconsin Poultry Association.<sup>48</sup> At their November 1910 meeting, the association decided to allow “women poultry fanciers” to be members of the group.<sup>49</sup> Markle sold Barred Plymouth Rock and White Wyandotte eggs.<sup>50</sup> Markle was president of the Gateway Cooperative Egg and Poultry Association, which had plant in La Crosse. In its first year (1927), the cooperative processed 387,823 dozen eggs and 177,643 pounds of poultry.<sup>51</sup>

Markle’s farm was known as “Cedar Lawn Fruit Farm.”<sup>52</sup> He sold strawberry plants.<sup>53</sup> He also sold raspberries.<sup>54</sup> He even sold minnows for fishing bait.<sup>55</sup>

Besides teaching other farmers how to grow better corn, Markle made presentations on such topics as “Efficiency in Farming”<sup>56</sup> and “Starting Alfalfa in Sandy Soil.”<sup>57</sup>

When a county horticulture society organized in 1920, Markle was its first president.<sup>58</sup> He continued as president until August 1923.<sup>59</sup>

He was elected vice-president of the La Crosse County Farm Bureau at its establishment in 1921.<sup>60</sup>

In April 1923, a fire destroyed the barn and a haystack at the Markle farm, as well as three automobiles and some farm equipment stored in the barn. His cattle and horses were saved.<sup>61</sup> By early July of that year, a large new barn was built to replace the destroyed one.<sup>62</sup>

Markle was also involved in local governmental bodies.

In 1914, he was elected to the La Crosse County school board.<sup>63</sup>

As chairman of the Shelby town board for many years, Markle was a proponent of tightening the regulation on taverns by requiring them to close at midnight. After the town of Campbell passed a similar ordinance, the town of Shelby did the same so that late-night revelers would not invade Shelby.<sup>64</sup> During his tenure, a new school was built for Shelby.<sup>65</sup> In the 1939 spring election, Markle lost the town chairmanship to Fred Hass by a vote of 291 to 169.<sup>66</sup>

Markle proposed a county board resolution in August 1923 to allocate \$500 in a campaign against “vice” in the county. Most of the roadhouses in the county were in Shelby. The county board imposed a \$10 license fee for every dance. The board also named 78 people to act as deputy sheriffs enforcing highway traffic laws outside the city of La Crosse. These deputy sheriffs could make arrests for speeding and other state law violations on public highways.<sup>67</sup>

A short time later, Special Deputy Sheriff Markle was the first deputy to make an arrest under the crackdown. Ed Kendhammer, a farmer in Mormon Coulee, was arrested and fined \$10 for driving over the 30-mph speed limit.<sup>68</sup> Markle was also part of an investigation that nabbed three men who were illegally seining fish from the Mississippi River in the town of Shelby.<sup>69</sup>

Deputy Markle was especially vigilant in enforcing Prohibition. A local columnist wrote: “Supervisor S. P. Markle of the town of Shelby, in which is located the Winter Gardens, keeps an eagle eye agleam for violators of the Volstead act. If there are any ‘hippers’ getting past Pete they have to go some. In fact, Pete is such a nemesis to the hip pocket bottle brigade that one of the unluckiest bets a fellow can take is to partake of liquor ‘off the hip,’ in the dance pavilion.”<sup>70</sup>

The Winter Gardens in the town of Shelby provided Deputy Markle with plenty of enforcement opportunities. In another incident there, Markle apprehended one of two men who were stealing straw hats from parked cars. Clothing had been stolen from cars on previous occasions.<sup>71</sup> While ejecting a drunken Jack Kendhammer from the dance hall, Markle was confronted by his friends, Harry Puent and Carl Fuchs. Markle required the assistance of Officer John Fitzpatrick to haul the three to jail for intoxication and resisting.<sup>72</sup> Markle and Fitzpatrick teamed up for another arrest of a drunken trio who also resisted in November 1927, Fred and Wenzel Schroeder of Bangor, and John Desmond of La Crosse.<sup>73</sup>

The Winter Gardens was the venue for the first annual chicken dance, sponsored by the Gateway Cooperative Egg and Poultry Association. S. P. Markle was the chairman of that event.<sup>74</sup>

Bendel's Orchestra performed for 1,200 people at the chicken dance on December 3, 1926, and their music was broadcast over the radio by the Callaway Music Company.<sup>75</sup>

Markle served on the county draft board during World War I.<sup>76</sup>

Two years later, in 1916, Markle won election to the La Crosse County Board.<sup>77</sup>

Soon after his election, Markle found himself in a fight to preserve the La Crosse County School of Agriculture. At a November 1916 meeting, the school's annual report revealed that the cost per student was \$300, and the total annual cost of operation was \$20,014 (almost \$564,000 in today's dollars). Supervisor John Kindley suggested that the school of agriculture was not important to the county, and it should be turned into a hospital for tuberculosis patients. When some other supervisors voiced support for that idea, Simon Markle spoke out in defense of the school of agriculture. He credited the school with teaching him and others progressive methods of farming. "The entire state of Wisconsin is afraid of La Crosse county corn breeders," he declared. A three-man committee was appointed to study the issue.<sup>78</sup> The mere idea of an investigation of the possibility ignited a fierce debate in the county boardroom. Some supervisors argued that the school was not cost effective and had originally been promoted by supervisors representing city districts, while others said enrollment at the school was increasing, and they had seen students benefit from its training. Markle was one of nine supervisors voting against the investigation, but 25 other supervisors voted to proceed with the study.<sup>79</sup>



La Crosse County School of Agriculture and Domestic Economy (no date) that was in operation from 1909 to 1925. Then the building was part of the Onalaska High School until it was razed in 1989.<sup>80</sup>

The contentious debate over a sanitarium versus an agricultural school continued into 1917. At a February board meeting, Markle voted against bonding money to buy a site and build a sanitarium, along with 12 other supervisors. But 20 votes in favor carried the day. Markle rose to face his fellow supervisors and spectators, . . . "swung his arms wildly and shouted so loudly that

he could be heard in the basement of the building” and spoke for two minutes about the board’s lack of consideration for 1,200 county taxpayers who had asked for a referendum on the issue.<sup>81</sup>

But by 1925, even Simon Markle, once a staunch defender of the county agricultural school, conceded that his constituents wanted the school closed. County and district high schools had started to teach agriculture, and farmers were not traveling to county agriculture schools any longer.<sup>82</sup>

After the end of the June 1925 school term, the La Crosse County School of Agriculture and Domestic Economy closed “on the fact of non-support by the people and pupils of the county and the non-attendance of pupils for whom the school was instituted, due to the changed conditions since the school was started,” according to a county board resolution that was adopted unanimously in January 1925. The board hoped that the city of Onalaska would buy the building. At the same board meeting, S. P. Markle rose against another supervisor’s proposal, in what must have seemed like another attack on agriculture education, that the county agent and county agricultural committee be abolished. Markle was not alone in his defense of County Agent W. C. Spreiter. When the votes were counted, 30 supervisors voted for keeping the office against only four votes in favor of eliminating the position.<sup>83</sup>

Another county board controversy occurred in late 1927 when some supervisors objected to \$12,000 in the budget for old age pensions. S. P. Markle maintained that the people who then needed financial assistance in their twilight years were pioneers of the area who had endured many hardships, “and it is the duty of the present generation to help them.”<sup>84</sup>

Rat bounties were another lively topic of discussion at a county board meeting in 1934. Markle pointed out that the city of La Crosse had paid out \$1,000 in rat bounties by mid-year, and the county was going to have to repay that amount. People were paid five cents per rat, so that means 200 rats had been turned into governmental authorities for a cash payment. Markle introduced a resolution to reduce all bounties to five cents, except for 25 cents on rattlesnakes because of the danger involved. This proposal was tabled.<sup>85</sup> The subject came up again in November 1934 because there was concern that bodies of non-resident rodents were being imported into La Crosse County for cash payments because surrounding counties did not pay bounties for them. Some supervisors even claimed that dead rats were being imported from Minnesota in as part of a bounty black market. The board voted to eliminate all bounties for at least one year.<sup>86</sup>

By 1935, Markle’s seat on the county board was under threat. He won re-election in the spring election by just four votes over Fred Hass.<sup>87</sup> In the spring election of 1936, Fred Hass gathered 267 votes to Markle’s 222. Thus ended S. P. Markle’s twenty years on the La Crosse County Board of Supervisors.<sup>88</sup>

After the Great Depression enveloped the country, S. P. Markle was one of three men on the county board of mediation for mortgage foreclosure actions.<sup>89</sup> Markle was also the La Crosse County representative to a conference in Madison called by the governor to create an action plan to rehabilitate agriculture in the state.<sup>90</sup>

In 1934, Markle was named a director of the Sparta Production Credit Association (PCA). A subsidiary of the Federal Land Bank in St. Paul, it started with \$300,000 to loan to farmers in La Crosse and Monroe counties to help them weather the vagaries of the Great Depression. It was also a permanent credit institution that would allow farmers to get short-term loans in exchange for a [chattel mortgage](#).<sup>91</sup> Farmers could use the loans to buy machinery, repair buildings, or buy livestock.<sup>92</sup> Markle was elected as the first president of the Sparta Production Credit Association.<sup>93</sup> In 1934 alone, the PCA loaned about \$90,000 to 164 members of the association.<sup>94</sup> Markle touted production credit associations as a good way for deserving farmers to get loans for their farm operations that they could repay more easily than loans from other institutions.<sup>95</sup>

Another Great Depression organization devised to help farmers were county corn-hog control associations. Markle was elected president of the La Crosse County chapter.<sup>96</sup>

Markle was a member of the La Crosse County Drought Relief Committee. This group provided no-interest, two-year loans of \$100 to farmers to purchase feed and seed.<sup>97</sup>

Two members of the La Crosse County Board also served on the La Crosse Interstate Fair Board. In 1922, county board supervisor Simon Markle was elected to begin what would become many years of service on the fair board.<sup>98</sup> Besides being a member of the fair board, Markle was superintendent of the horse exhibitors for several years.<sup>99</sup> He later became superintendent of cattle exhibits at the fair.<sup>100</sup> One of the features of the fair in those years was a livestock parade, and Markle was the organizer of it.<sup>101</sup>

By early 1935, some in the community were questioning the value and viability of the Inter-State Fair. Businessmen in the city thought the fair should boost their businesses, and several claimed that the fair needed new energy and new blood. There were suggestions that the city and/or county take it over from the nonprofit association that had been running it since its inception in the 1800s. S. P. Markle, as a member of the fair board, wanted the fair to continue, but he said the main problem was having enough money to put on a good fair.<sup>102</sup>

Despite losing his county board seat in 1936, S. P. Markle was re-elected to the Inter-State Fair Association Board in 1937.<sup>103</sup> He continued to serve on the fair board until his death.<sup>104</sup>

Early during World War II, Markle was the coordinator of Victory Gardens in the town of Shelby.<sup>105</sup>

His other community involvement was in sporting and conservation organizations.

Markle was a member of the Sportsmen's League that had their clubhouse near Oehler's Cave.<sup>106</sup> He was also a member of the Mormon Coulee Gun Club for many years and made headlines in the local newspaper in May 1915 when he unintentionally shot an English sparrow with the same shot that brought down a clay pigeon.<sup>107</sup> His wife was a member of the Mormon Coulee Gun Club too.<sup>108</sup> A 1916 newspaper article lists him as a member of the Pioneer Gun Club.<sup>109</sup> When Simon Markle was the president of the Mormon Coulee Gun Club in 1922, it had 142 members.<sup>110</sup>

As a member of the La Crosse County Conservation Club, Markle attended the Wisconsin Game Protective Association annual meeting in 1920.<sup>111</sup> He also worked with neighboring farmers to restore game birds in his area of the county. In 1934, Markle proposed establishment of a federal-state forest and wildlife refuge in northeastern La Crosse County. He picked that area of the county because it was not agriculturally productive, and the county already owned several hundred acres of land there because of tax foreclosures.<sup>112</sup>

Markle was on the board of the La Crosse chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America.<sup>113</sup> One of their projects was stocking fish in local streams. Markle and another man released 4,000 fish in Mormon Coulee Creek in May 1924.<sup>114</sup>

Markle was also a leader in farmland conservation. He helped initiate petitions to the U.S. Soil Conservation Service asking for conservation projects in Mormon Coulee, Dutch Creek, State Road Coulee, and the La Crosse River Valley. Farmers requested government assistance to restore forests, construct terraces, and adopt contour plowing and strip cropping.<sup>115</sup>

He also found time to be an auctioneer.<sup>116</sup>

Markle was in poor health as he entered his late 60s. He suffered a heart attack on May 25, 1943, and died in a La Crosse hospital on May 31. He was 68 years old.<sup>117</sup> He was buried in Woodlawn Cemetery.<sup>118</sup>

In La Crosse County alone, 32,200 acres of corn was planted in 2021, yielding 4,531,000 bushels of corn for grain. That does not count corn that was chopped for corn silage.<sup>119</sup> Farmers today owe a debt of gratitude to pioneers in scientific and progressive agriculture such as Simon P. Markle.



Corn harvest at the Dummer Family Farm, Holmen, Wisconsin

(Photo by Jeff Rand, 2023 October 3)

S. P. Markle was a successful farmer who gained national recognition with his corn exhibits, but he did so much more. He was heavily involved in local government and agriculture-related organizations. He was a steward of the land and the natural resources of La Crosse County. But most of all, he believed in sharing knowledge and working together for progress. Simon “Pete” Markle lived by a creed: When everyone does better, we all do better.

Jeff Rand  
La Crosse Public Library, Retired

#### Sources & notes:

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- <sup>1</sup> “This Veteran is 78 and He’s but a Boy at Heart,” *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1915 December 18, p. 4. Emanuel Markle’s brother, Peter, was killed in action on May 10, 1864, in the same battle that claimed the life of Captain Robert Hughes, who had succeeded Wilson Colwell as commander of Company B. See: “Writer’s Son Given Tragic Civil War Letter Sent Family In City,” *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1941 October 12, p. 4.
- <sup>2</sup> “Emanuel Markle, Last Survivor of Light Guard, Dead,” *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1918 October 8, p. 1. See also: “Masons to Bury Veteran Markle Friday Afternoon,” *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1918 October 9, p. 10.
- <sup>3</sup> “S. P. Markle, 68, Dies in Hospital,” *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1943 May 31, p. 3.
- <sup>4</sup> “Twenty Years Ago Today,” *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1924 November 24, p. 3.
- <sup>5</sup> “Obituary, S. P. Markle,” *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1943 June 2, p. 13.

- <sup>6</sup> “Dies At 99,” *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1941 April 16, p. 1. See also: “94 Years Old,” *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1935 August 18, p. 4. “99<sup>th</sup> Birthday,” *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1940 August 16, p. 3.
- <sup>7</sup> “New Amsterdam,” *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1941 June 3, p. 2.
- <sup>8</sup> “Markle Factor in Corn Shows,” *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1911 July 28, p. 76.
- <sup>9</sup> “Science on Farm Proves Its Value,” *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1912 August 30, p. 95.
- <sup>10</sup> “Markle Factor in Corn Shows,” *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1911 July 28, p. 76. For a detailed description of the La Crosse County School of Agriculture in Onalaska, see: A. A. Johnson, “La Crosse County School of Agriculture,” *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1910 July 29, p. 24.
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