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The School of the Future

R. P. Crawford

Associate Editor of *The Nebraska Farmer*

(Excerpts from an address delivered before the National Rural School Conference, Iowa State Teachers' College, Cedar Falls, Iowa, February 19, 1920.)

You have already heard that the school of yesterday is not the school of to-day, but I want to bring to you the message that neither will the school of to-morrow be the school of to-day. Right at the present moment we are at the threshold of the biggest revolution in educational progress that we have ever met in the history of this country. I say this after the most careful study of the system in the most prominent of our middle western states. The school of the future will not be the school of the metropolitan city — it will be the school of the tiny village and the open country. The last thirty years have seen the development of some of the greatest schools of the world in our cities; the next thirty years will see these schools even surpassed by those for our country boys and girls.

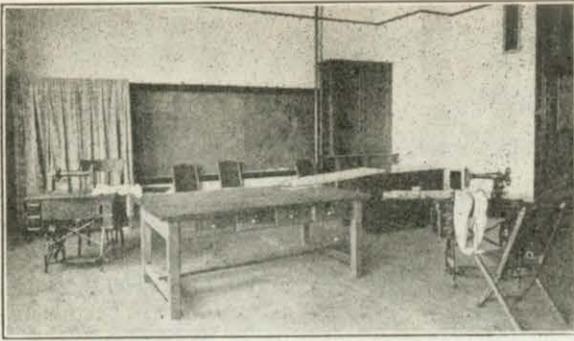
To those who feel that I am over-optimistic and who are unwilling to accept this statement, let me call attention, only briefly, to some of the facts upon which I am willing to base this assertion. The farmer is prosperous, more so than at any other time in the history of the country. His prosperity will continue, with perhaps only intervening periods of depression, which will affect other lines of business as well. Only a few thousand acres of vacant government land lie here and there in our country for settlers. The next thirty years will show better farming than ever before, the larger ranches will in many cases show a tendency to be broken up into smaller farms, and the open country will grow more populous. Better roads will bring the city closer and closer to the country, and perhaps even the airplane in years to come will play a part which we little realize now; in fact, I know of one Nebraska ranchman who to-day has purchased one with which he covers his ranch. On every side are farmers' organizations pulling for better marketing facilities. Just as the immediate

past has been in many respects an age of manufacture, so I believe the future will be one especially favorable to farming, with more advances and prosperity than any of us now dream. The farmer is going to be rich. He will forget the poor years that he suffered and he will be willing to spend money. No longer will he be content to see his children go to a school one whit less modern or up-to-date than his brothers' city children. The aristocrat of the future may be the man who controls the world's food supply.

Consolidation, in my opinion, is the greatest educational movement of the present day. The city schools have about run the length of the chase in trying to find something new for their school systems, but the country field is so wide and so inviting that almost any educator who will devote himself to it for a year or so, can show definite, tangible results. Just as the farming business is going to become one of the greatest businesses in the world, so the rural and village schools are destined to become some of the greatest educational institutions in this country.

A Great Opportunity for Consolidation

But this look into the future will not by any means permit us to forget the present. Right now is perhaps the greatest time to pull for rural consolidation. It is true that there are many problems to be solved, such as teachers' salaries, building costs, and the like. To a large extent, however, the richer land valuations will care for the increased costs of these things. Even if any of us feel we must wait for lower building costs, I think it is not an unwise plan to have the consolidation campaign under way, everybody wanting it, and the plans drawn ready for use the minute things do get lower. I do not want to go into

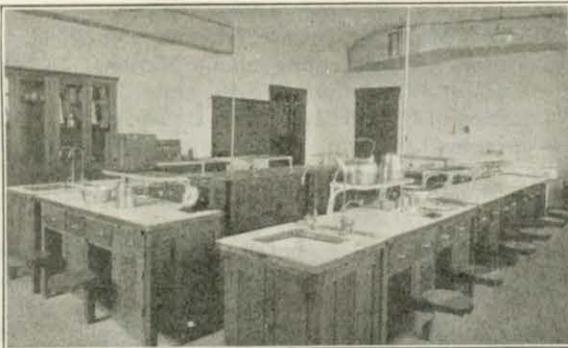


Sewing-room in Blackhawk Township Consolidated School

a discussion of building costs and the prospects for lower prices right now. There are so many factors intimately connected with the entire matter that it would take considerable time to explain all of the conditions affecting the disturbed prices.

If there is one big overshadowing problem in the entire consolidation movement it is this: to convince people that they want the schools. I have just said that the time is at hand when farmers want such things. That is very true, and Iowa is a state where you could not keep the consolidation movement down with the militia. But in many states the people are not so anxious — they are just a little cautious as to what they do. They are honest in their convictions but want to be shown.

My personal opinion in the matter is that a great deal of the opposition goes back to the natural feeling between town and country. The people in the country are afraid that they may be consolidated with the neighboring village. That is the worst contention and apparently the worst fear.



Domestic Science Classroom
Blackhawk Township Consolidated School

It is true that in the past the village and the small towns have not in every case accorded the farmer his rightful due. But I believe that when the consolidated school is located in a small village it may ultimately be made one of the most potent means of cementing friendship between the two. This by no means discredits the open country school, and I think that there are hundreds of cases where the latter is by far the best solution of the entire problem. At least a town probably should not try to take in too much of the surrounding country.

There is no getting around the fact that consolidation is going to cost more money in dollars and cents, and in certain quarters that is the principal argument against the schools. When a farmer talks that way, I say, "Look here, you paid \$300 an acre for that land you have, didn't you?" And he will say, "Yes, it was a bargain at that, too." Then I ask him: "Why didn't you buy that other section down by the creek? It was only \$150." "Oh," he says, "one can never tell when that will overflow." He thinks I know nothing about farming, and yet he will turn down a four-times-as-good education for his boy and girl be-

cause it costs only twice as much. So I say it is a good deal a matter of education, and now that the schools have been proved a success in so many of these great Cornbelt states, we have some precedent to go on that makes it easier for all of us.

Fine Schools in the Middle West

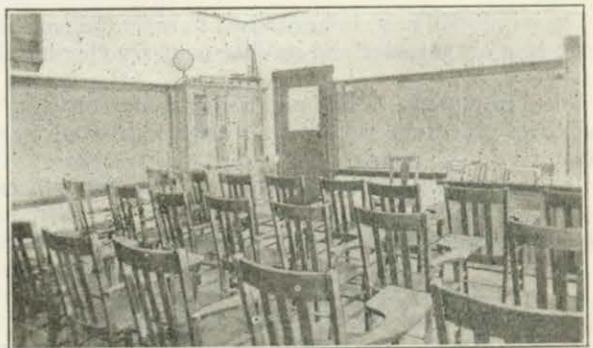
Every time I think of Iowa and Minnesota, I congratulate myself for exploring the schools in these two states. You don't need to go thirty miles from Waterloo, Iowa, to find two of the finest consolidated schools in this country. One is the Orange township school just five miles out of Waterloo, and the other is the school in the village of Jesup, about twenty miles the other side of Waterloo. I would commend the Orange township school especially to you because here you will have an opportunity to see



Residences of Retired Farmers in Blackhawk Township

one of the finest country churches in all the United States and a unique community of retired farmers who, instead of moving to town, have settled down on an acreage near the school and church. This school, with its bright cut-stone trimmings and its fine grounds, would be a credit to any city, however large. The Jesup school cost \$110,000, so one may judge that it is an unusually fine structure. This school has an attendance of about 400 pupils and the district embraces forty-eight sections, so it is a big undertaking.

Iowa's record in consolidation is little short of marvelous, since it is all the work of the taxpayers in the individual districts themselves. There is no great amount of state aid, as in the case of Minnesota. Whatever the district gets, it pays for. It seems almost incredible when one recalls that it took Iowa seventeen years to obtain its first seventeen consolidations, but only about six years to secure the next three hundred. The effect of these schools in this



Classroom in Blackhawk Township Consolidated School

state is going to be felt in a very remarkable way in the future education of the boys and girls, and in ten years it will be almost impossible for other states to catch up.

I would just like to call attention for a moment to Buena Vista county in the western part of Iowa. For instance,

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in that county there are thirteen consolidated schools. The Alta school in that county is one of the most famous in the United States, and when it was erected a few years ago at a cost of \$110,000 it was everywhere hailed as the greatest consolidation in the country.

One thing is remarkable and that is the fact that as soon as one community gets the rural school fever, the next community gets it too. It is quite as catching as the smallpox.

Aurelia, the next town to Alta, decided that it would spend about a quarter of a million for a consolidated school, which will perhaps be the most expensive consolidation in the entire country to date. I might talk for almost any length about Iowa and then I would not be able to say the half of what I think ought to be said. Why, right down here in Marshall county they have over a dozen consolidated schools and over in Woodbury county, where Sioux City is located, they have more consolidated schools than some of our backward counties have one-room schools.

I don't want anyone to think that since I have been talking about Iowa, I have nothing to say for Minnesota. In scores of towns throughout that state the only place where they have running water and electric lights is the schoolhouse. Pequot, Pine River, Mildred, Backus will furnish you a good school to study.

Perhaps the finest school that I have visited on my recent tour of the Middle West has been the one at Bloomington, about eight miles out from Minneapolis. With its open, spacious grounds, its style and general equipment, I think it would be hard to surpass.

North Dakota is not a rich state financially, and so it has not always been possible to spend money there as lavishly as in the other states, but in many sections there are unusually fine schools. One interesting fact, as Mr. N. C. MacDonald, who has taken a leading part in boosting consolidation in that state, told me, is that consolidation does not necessarily go with the rich communities. Up in the northern part of the state are the poorest settlers and the most consolidated schools. In that state the law recognizes as a consolidation any school that serves eighteen contiguous sections and employs two or more teachers, regardless of whether there has been any actual joining of territory. The state now claims over five hundred consolidated schools, but of course many of these would be eliminated by a stricter definition of consolidation as employed in other states.

I would not have you forget the state of Colorado. For the last six or seven years Mr. Sargent of the State College and Mrs. Bradford of the State Department of Education have been working to develop some great schools. The Sargent School is already almost too well known to need further discussion here. There are a number of institutions just growing up in the last few years in the great plains region of eastern Colorado, such as the Burlington School and the Dailey School, which are potent factors in the development of that country.

Some Suggestions

After having visited some thirty of perhaps the best consolidated schools in various sections of the country, I feel that perhaps I might make some definite recommendations based on my own observations. As I have said before, I am not an educator; I am entirely impartial to all of the arguments, but I do feel that there are some things very necessary to the success of consolidation in this Middle West. A state that really expects to accomplish anything in the consolidation movement should provide state aid. This is done in such a big way in Minnesota that the state aid is perhaps more largely responsible for the success of consolidation in that state than is any other

factor. Many schools there receive more money from the state than schools in neighboring states receive from all sources combined. Almost any good consolidated school in that state will draw around \$4000 or \$5000 state aid every year. The big bugbear of transportation is entirely done away with, because \$2000 is given every school for this purpose and three-fourths of whatever sum is expended in excess of this up to \$4000. North Dakota has state aid, so has Iowa, and Nebraska, although of course by no means to the extent of Minnesota. Minnesota also has the big advantage of supplying large amounts of money at low interest for the erection of school buildings, which is again a big advantage. Its school fund now amounts to approximately \$30,000,000, due to the state's holdings in the ore lands of the north, and good management of school lands. State aid makes schools live up to the state's requirements.

First of all, I would put state aid, and many of the difficulties connected with consolidation will immediately disappear. Another thing I would point out, and that is, that most consolidated school buildings are too small. It seems to be the universal experience that a consolidated school grows rapidly and in a brief time will have double the number of pupils formerly in the one-room country schools. So make it a little larger than you think necessary.

If the rural community is not thickly populated, one will be up against the problem of a small school and a short distance to haul the pupils, or a long distance and a big school. The solution will depend largely on local conditions, especially on the roads, but if automobile trucks can be used the year round it will be only a minor trouble.

It is my personal feeling that a consolidated school without a high school is practically nothing accomplished. I know of just such schools, but they have all of the disadvantages of consolidation without any of the advantages. They might as well be one-room schools for that matter.

Another point that I might speak of, and that is the establishment of open-country consolidations too close to a town. I know of one case in northern Minnesota, where a wonderful little four-teacher building has been erected about two or three miles from a thriving little city. But they can only keep about two teachers there and the high school students are being transported to the city high school. It would have been much better to have not had that school at all, or to have built it much farther out in the country.

How a town or village school may take care of the country boy and girl was well illustrated by one school in Minnesota. You know that often the country boy feels backward about going to school late in the fall when he has been kept out by necessary farm work. In this school at Pequot, Minnesota, they have a special coaching teacher whose sole duty consists in helping these boys to catch up with their back work. That is certainly a plan worth trying out anywhere. Another interesting plan for rural schools is the short course for farm men and boys maintained for a few months, each winter, as at the Alta, Iowa, school or the Fairview school, north of Alta.

In the next few years the automobile is going to play a great part in the success of consolidated schools, and so I say that the present road-building program of the state and national governments is the greatest boon to consolidation of anything in recent years.

The next ten years is going to be a pivotal ten years. We shall see the greatest turning point in rural development that we have ever witnessed. Ten years from to-day the rural school children in Iowa and Minnesota will be young men and women on the farms. They will be educated and will know their business. The other states which have fallen down in this matter of rural school development will be far outstripped in their race for supremacy. The educated community in this country is going to be the consolidated community.