

# Consolidation of Rural Schools.--- By Sinclair Laird.

**H**OW can rural children get a better education than the old-fashioned school can give? The best answer that experience has given is the consolidated school. The old-time rural school belonged to pioneer life, and represented the best educational ideal of its time. But it is now as out of date as the sickle, the scythe, the flail and the flint-lock gun, which themselves are replaced by reaping, binding and threshing machines, and the rapid-fire machine gun. The old rural school is as old-fashioned as homemade shoes and tallow dips.

But what is consolidation? Well, a consolidated school is simply a centralized school with a better organization, larger number of class-rooms, better teachers, a more specialized course of study, more efficient methods of teaching with a larger enrolment of children, who either walk or are transported to this centralized school. In other words, it is education on a larger scale, with more efficient equipment and staff.

There are three kinds altogether. The simplest is sometimes only called a union school or a partially consolidated school, because although several one-roomed one-teacher schools have been merged to form one school, yet the number of pupils in the new consolidated school does not warrant the employment of more than one teacher. Some consolidations of this nature have already taken place in Quebec, but the public should not believe that there has been anything achieved along the line of educational improvement in such a partial consolidation. The only result has been economy of teaching staff and of expenditure. There really has been no improvement in the kind of teaching or in the grading of the children.

Secondly, there is the consolidation of several small schools to form a rural school with at least two teachers. Several of these are in existence in Quebec, and are, therefore, called consolidated model schools, because the words "Model School" mean a school with two teachers and a superior course of study going up to the first year of high-school work. In this case, a consolidated school has a better chance to organize more completely and to grade the children more minutely. Even a two-teacher school is such an improvement over the one-roomed school that it should be encouraged, because in time the tax payers may be induced to form a more completely graded school with a larger staff when the number of children warrants such a staff. The two-teacher consolidated schools in Quebec have been such a success that now no one-roomed rural schools are being built.

Thirdly, the real consolidated school is a school of improved type, and usually is the result of abandoning two or more schools to build a graded high school in a central situation to serve a larger area and do higher work. Children living at a distance of more than one mile from school are conveyed by special school vans or sleighs, or a motor van. Indeed, the motor van is likely to displace horse conveyances where the roads and weather permit their use. The essential features of these consolidated schools are the larger staff employed, the better opportunity to grade children according to ability or attainment, and the higher work which can thus be provided. In such consolidated schools, rural children received educational advantages equal to those provided by city schools.

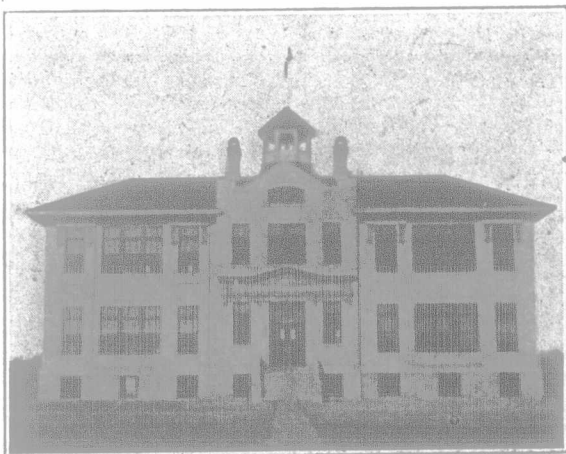
The educational trend towards consolidation is not a new fad, but a tried and tested practical plan which has been adopted in our Western provinces with excellent results. Where it is given a trial, it is never displaced, and the patrons refuse to go back to the old state of affairs. In the United States, consolidated schools have spread from New England to the Middle West and to the Pacific coast. Three-fourths of the States in the Union have officially adopted the policy of consolidation as a part of their school system. Consolidated schools are successfully managed from New England to California, and from the Dakotas to Texas.

In Canada, the policy has had greatest support and the most outstanding success in the Province of Manitoba. In 1905 consolidation was accomplished at Virden and Holland. In December, 1917, there were 74 consolidated school districts, which comprised more than 3,000 sections of land, each school serving an

average of 41½ sections each. In Manitoba, consolidation as an educational policy has come to stay. The advantages are overwhelmingly in its favor. The benefits are evident. There has been an increase in the enrolment of children of school age, and increase in regular attendance of those on the roll, an increase in the number of days that each child attended the school during the scholastic year, and an increase in the number of years that each child stays at school. In addition, each child reaches a higher grade and gets a better education than he would have received had he merely attended the old-fashioned district school.

The consolidated school at Wellwood contains three old districts now managed by one school board. Formerly the three districts had an enrolment of 94 children, of whom only 55 on an average attended daily. In other words, the school only expected 58 per cent. of the children to attend on any one day. But under consolidation, the new school increased the enrolment from 94 to 110. From 55 pupils in attendance, the average rose to 85 children. In other words, more than 77 per cent. of the children attended regularly.

Another method of calculating the benefits of the consolidated school is to investigate the number of days attended by each pupil in various kinds of schools. Manitoba has all kinds, from ungraded schools to graded consolidated schools with more than four teachers. A comparison shows that the better the school, the larger number of days will a child attend.



Wellwood Consolidated School.

Class of school.	Average number of days attended by each pupil enrolled.
1. Ungraded rural school.....	115.65
2. Ungraded consolidated.....	118.25
3. Graded elementary.....	127.53
4. Graded consolidated, 2 teachers.....	132.87
5. Graded consolidated, 3 teachers.....	139.94
6. Graded consolidated, 4 teachers.....	140.02
7. Graded consolidated, more than 4 teachers.....	149.63

This table from a special report of the Educational Department of Manitoba, shows a very striking progress in the number of days' education which a child gets throughout the year. Another calculation brings out the fact that only 53 out of every 100 children in rural schools attend for more than 100 days, but in the consolidated schools 74 out of every 100 children get more than 100 days' education per year.

Why is it that the attendance is so much better and the enrolment so much greater? There surely must be some reason why in the same three districts more children go to school when there is a large, centralized school instead of the old, three school-houses near their homes. The answer to this question is found in the

fact that consolidation involves the transportation of the children to the centralized school. By this means the children are conveyed in all weathers with the utmost safety to their health and morals, and without discomfort, which would be impossible if they had to trudge from home in bad weather.

Then again, there is a larger number of children in a consolidated school, and consequently great sociability, rivalry and stimulus to do good educational work. In other words, a consolidated school is more attractive to children, not only because the building is new and better adapted for its work, but because there is a better opportunity for play and games. Furthermore, it is possible to employ a better type of teacher and have a better system of grading children with others of similar ambitions and attainments.

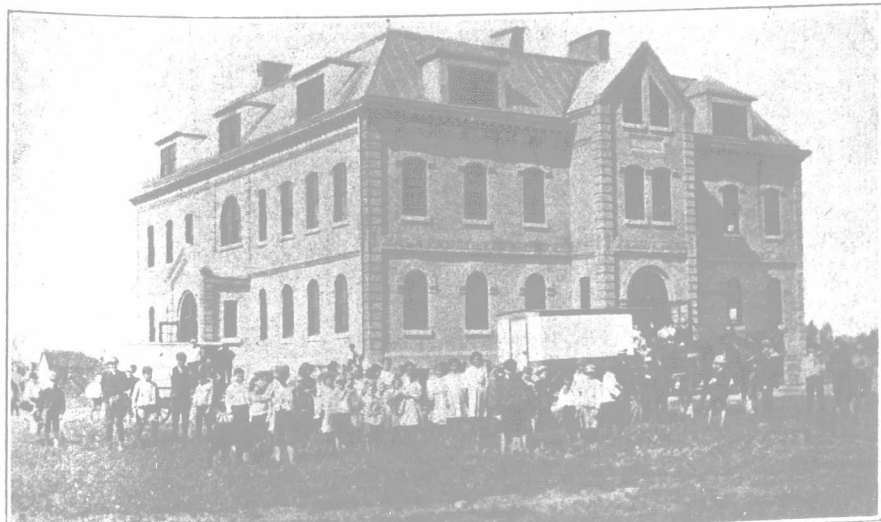
Children who are transported in vans from the more remote districts of the consolidated area, attend more regularly than the children in the village or town, who are naturally able to walk to school from their homes. Investigation has shown that in Manitoba the transported child gets from 15 to 20 days more schooling during the year than a child in the same district who lives near the school and is expected to walk. Similarly, in a consolidated district, which has been made out of several rural districts, the transported child gets 27 to 39 more days at school than the country child formerly received in the old-fashioned district school. Naturally the educational advantages due to this extra attendance are much greater than the figures would lead one to believe.

Not only do transported children enjoy better health, but they make better educational progress, because they are in a good physical condition to pay attention to their work during the day. They are not obliged to walk to school, and, therefore, do not arrive exhausted. When the school day is over, they are not faced with a long and wearisome walk homewards, and do not arrive home completely tired out. They are thus able to devote more of their energy to their studies.

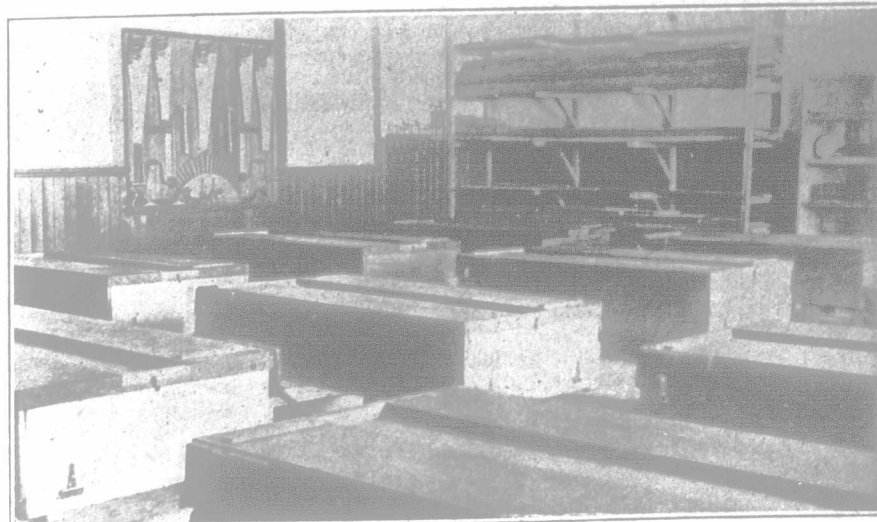
Of course, the cost of transportation adds very considerably to the expense of a consolidated school, but this expense gives a good return in the form of additional educational benefits. In Manitoba in ungraded rural schools, the cost of a pupil per annum is about \$55, and in a consolidated school the cost rises to about \$88. Consolidated schools cost more, but they are also worth more. In order to encourage better education, the Department gives an initial grant not exceeding \$500 for equipment, and an annual grant for transportation amounting to half the cost. This is generous.

In the Province of Saskatchewan consolidation is being urged as a provincial policy as a result of the survey of school conditions made by H. W. Foght, specialist in rural school practice at Washington. He found 18 consolidated schools which had been started by means of local initiative. All of them comprise very large areas ranging from 42 to 57 sections each. Village consolidated schools are in the majority, because the centralized school was built near the homes of the greatest number. But there are also consolidations in the open country where school districts have been united to form an improved consolidated school. The taxes in Saskatchewan are higher under consolidation because of the greater expense of maintenance and transportation, but the consolidated school attracts older pupils and keeps them at school longer, it increases the enrolment and shows a marked improvement in attendance. In the Cupar District School, the percentage of attendance rose from 44 per cent. in 1912 to 68 per cent. in 1914, and 86 per cent. in 1918. The school rate was 9¼ mills for the rural section and 9¾ mills for the village. Six transportation routes with four vans were necessary, because the consolidated district comprised 57 square miles of land. This tax rate is higher than is paid by many other districts, but a larger number of children are reached, there is a better attendance, high-school classes are available for children, and it is less expensive per child for each day actually in school than under the old system.

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Gilbert Plains Consolidated School and Vans.



Manual Training Room in the Virden School.