

# How a Community Spirit was Made to Grow.

**B**ROWNSVILLE, in Oxford County, Ontario, is not numbered among the cities of the Province, nor even among the towns; in fact, a list of the police villages in Ontario would not reveal the name of this interesting little hamlet. On the map it appears as a little round dot just south of Ingersoll and there is nothing to distinguish it from the hundreds of other little dots that are to be found on every self-respecting map of our fair Province. As a hamlet it serves no very important purpose politically, but socially it affords worthy material for the best efforts of a scribe. Although situated in the heart of one of the best counties in Ontario, it can offer no inducements to large manufacturing establishments and, in fact, boasts of none except a combined creamery and milk product factory which employs about thirty hands and by so doing, contributes very materially to the support of the residents. If it is not big enough to make a big stir in industry, it is just the right size to serve as a nucleus for the upbuilding of a strong community spirit and because of this fact and because it has developed just such a community spirit the praises of its people, or rather the spirit of its people, which after all amounts to about the same thing, are to be sung in these pages.

Talking the other day with one of the older residents, and a man who is the very essence of the Brownsville spirit, he said:

"There is one thing about our people. If the majority once decide in favor of one way of doing a thing, the remainder are always good sports, with the result that everybody gets behind it to make it go. All persons have, of course, opinions of their own and naturally, very naturally, we have our kickers—like original sin they are always with us—but the spirit of all our people is the same, the community spirit is very much alive; if it weren't we could not have built up a very good community library nor conducted very successful garden parties regularly for fifteen years"—But more of that after a while.

Here seems to be the keynote of this community spirit agitation about which we have been hearing so much for the last few years from the community club enthusiasts. It seems after all to be a very simple matter to develop community spirit, if all it means is "pulling together." The same thing can often be seen in a gravel pit or the harvest field when a heavy load is put behind a willing team. Horses seem to catch on to this community spirit thing easier than some people; at any rate they pull together and the load is lifted. Of course some horses balk and even kick, but so do some people, and there is the rub. With horses you can wait patiently or use a twitch over the ear, but with people it's more polite to wait; and nearly always less troublesome.

Most people, like horses, need to be trained to forget their selfishness and pull together and in the Brownsville district the people have been in training for a long time. Away back in 1866, a long time before some of us were born, there used to be a man driving around the vicinity of Brownsville in a one-horse wagon, carrying two big milk cans. A little girl drove the horse and the man got off at each farm house and filled the cans with milk, which he weighed on a common pair of stilliards. He was very obliging and if the milk was not ready when he called, it was easy to turn in and help milk while he waited. Pretty soon, however, somebody got an inkling of the community spirit and the first cheese factory in Ontario having been established in Oxford County only two years previous, the idea of a factory for Brownsville was conceived and bore fruit the following year. This old factory was started with a lady cheese-maker brought from Utica, New York, and cheese was made twice a day. Soon, branches of the Brownsville Cheese Manufacturing Company sprang up until these were located at Tillsonburg, Culloden, and Bayham.

Years later, H. D. Crossley, the famous evangelist, taught school at Culloden and at the same time there was in existence there, a branch of The Independent Order of Good Templars, to which everybody belonged and which served as a splendid starter for the spirit which is in evidence at the present time. Back in the early nineties the influence of this social spirit began to make

itself manifest in the actions of those hardy pioneers who braved the newness of the great West, leaving the quiet security of Oxford County for the newer agricultural regions of the far off prairies. Brandon was still a tented city, while away to the west farther still was splendid ground for the seed of co-operation. Shipping grain in those days was a difficult procedure for the settler. Cars were provided at shipping points and became the property of the first man who could dump a bag of grain on the floor. Settlers used to load grain from the bins at home and haul it to the station, there to pounce upon the first empty car sighted, whether at midnight or morning.

Revolting from this condition of things, one or two early settlers from Oxford County, Ontario, saw the need for storage space and initiated what we believe to be the formation of the first co-operative elevator company in the West, situated at Boharm, six miles west of Moosejaw. A forerunner of a wonderful movement which since has given rise to one of the greatest examples of co-operative enterprise the world has ever seen, this early project sprang from the germ of co-operation planted in the Brownsville dairy district in 1866 and fostered for years by a close bond of social intercourse and fellowship. The old-time milk gatherer, the brave spirits who formed the first co-operative cheese factory, the one-time school teacher, and the local lodge, each played their part in the development

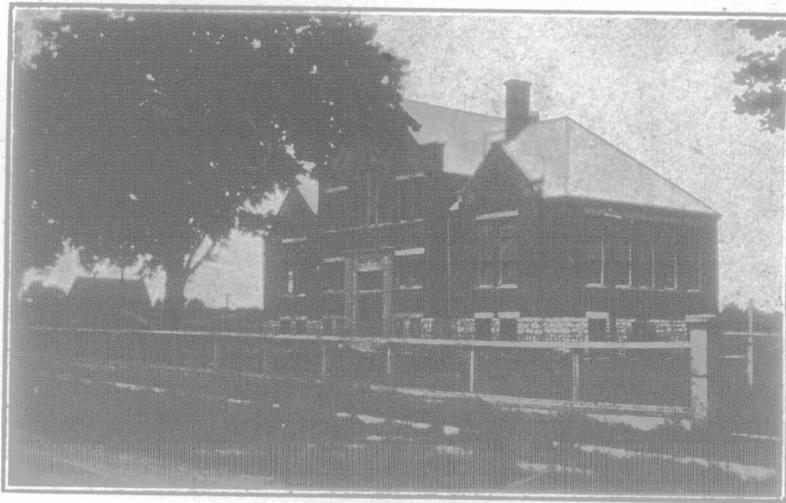
mittees. In 1917 the net proceeds of the garden fete were \$1,200, ample evidence in itself of wide popularity. In pre-war times the proceeds were all devoted to community improvement, but now community development must share equally with support for the Red Cross, of which more later.

For a number of years there has been a "Young People's Improvement Society," fostered originally by some of the older people who foresaw safety for the young people in numbers, and, knowing that young people are bound to get together, sought to bring this about under proper auspices. This Society is actively interested in the garden festival as a community enterprise and through their efforts sufficient money was raised to purchase three acres adjoining the school grounds, to be used as a community park. Last year, for the first time, the garden party was held on these grounds, which have been fitted up with complete electric wiring and are lighted upon occasion by Hydro-electric power. Previous to last year the community also supported a Literary Society to which, in addition to the Young People's Improvement Society, membership could be secured upon payment of twenty-five cents annually.

An important part in the community life is played by the library, for which a special building has just been secured. The Library Board is chosen annually and is representative of the various classes of people in the community so that the books purchased may be read with profit by all. A large majority of the Board are farmers, who are responsible for placing suitable farming literature and books on agricultural science on the shelves of the library. The membership fee for the library is fifty cents annually for the first member of every family to join and twenty-five cents for each additional member. A librarian is engaged and the building is open two evenings and one forenoon each week. Membership to the library is sometimes secured by means of a contest among members of the Board who work in pairs and, each pair taking a certain district, they endeavor to secure as many memberships as possible. The winning pair are then given a dinner by the other members of the Board. At the present time the new library building is not quite paid for, a deficit of four hundred and fifty dollars hanging over the heads of the Library Board. It is hoped, however, that the 1918 garden party will be successful enough to provide this sum, in addition to an equal figure for Red Cross purposes.

One other feature remains, the community Hall. This was originally an old church, which was induced to come to Brownsville and officiate in its present capacity for social uplift by working bees and the sum of two hundred dollars, gathered by general subscription and entertainments. From the foregoing it may be gathered that the people of the Brownsville community have successfully developed the community spirit. Many of the young men are away now and war-time economies and projects have, for the time being, taken the place of much that formerly was concerned only with social betterment. Red Cross meetings and the Girls' Knitting Club now overshadow all else, and even the garden party has a patriotic aim.

To attempt to estimate the value of the work done in this community would be an exceedingly difficult task. It would be difficult in any community where similar efforts have been made; in fact, when one tries to place a value upon any social improvement it can only be done in such a way that one gets a sense of the real value rather than a definite opinion of its actual worth. The "community centre" idea is being given encouragement of late years, and there is evidence to show that it is being received favorably at least by a few sections so that it would be foolish indeed to prophesy what the future may hold in store for us in this regard. The best evidence of its success will come when farmers themselves decide that a community spirit is a desirable thing, and one that can be cultivated and made to grow. Most farm families would enjoy a fuller social life, but are, perhaps, at a loss to know just how it can be brought about. Any force or plan which will co-ordinate the various social factors in the community would be a help in case the people themselves desired to put the plan into operation

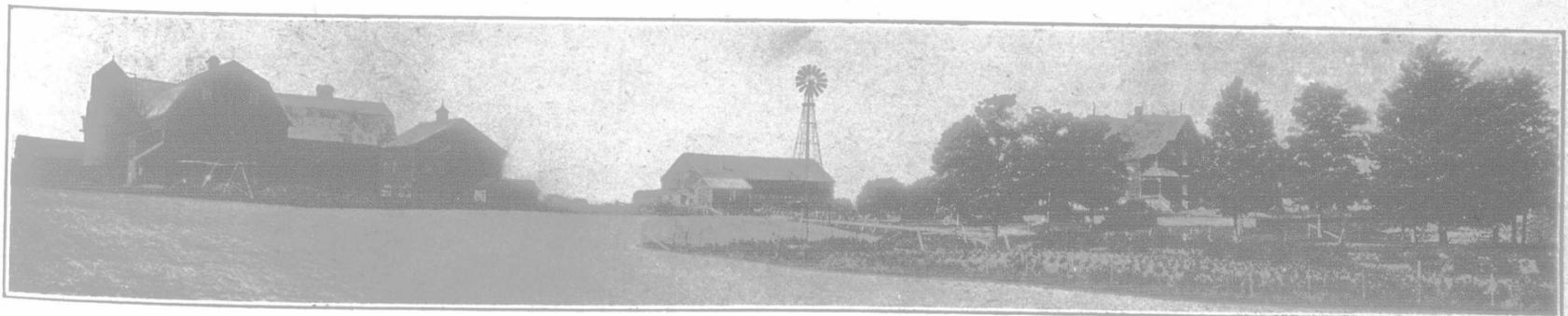


The Three-roomed Modern School, Built Six Years Ago.

of that spirit of neighborliness which characterizes the Brownsville community to-day.

One of the features of the Brownsville district which places it aside from the ordinary and is indicative of the progressive nature of its people, is the three-roomed modern school built about six years ago, an illustration of which accompanies this article. This school was erected at a cost of eleven thousand dollars and, besides being located on an original site, two acres in size, the school is very modern in design, inside and out. The three rooms are extremely well lighted and comfortably equipped. Hot water heating takes the chill from the winter weather, and two large playrooms together with unusual forethought in providing toilet and lavatory equipment, take away the misery usually attending inclement weather in most rural schools while coils of heating pipes under the rows of hooks in the cloak rooms bespeak considerateness rarely met with. Special teachers' rooms and a good piano mark a further desire to provide the best for both teacher and children, while an abundance of flowers and well-placed shrubs take care of external appearances.

Perhaps the one thing of fundamental importance as regards the financing of community improvements is the annual garden party, which for sixteen years has been held regularly and supported by large crowds and unflinching good weather. Never has there been a bad night, and visitors from districts fifteen, twenty, and even thirty miles distant annually testify to the excellence of the program provided. No expense is spared in the way of talent, the average expenditure being about one hundred and fifty dollars for the evening's entertainment, backed by the hearty efforts of strong local com-



One of the Fine Farm Homes in the Brownsville District.