

Banishing the Little Red School House

What Manitoba is Doing in the Cause of Rural Education

By M. HALL-JONES

Inspector of Schools, Manitoba

THE long distances children in rural districts are frequently compelled to walk to reach school over bad roads and in inclement weather work seriously against the success of the one-room school. In addition to this there is an element of unfairness just here for while many have far to walk, others have much less and still, all alike pay the same rate of taxes. After these long walks, children are often not in a proper condition to pursue their studies satisfactorily. With these drawbacks there naturally follows an unsatisfactory kind of education, mental, moral and physical, and it is not to be wondered at that the best thinking people of our country have set themselves to bring about, if possible, a better condition of affairs.

As a consequence, what is known as "Consolidation of Schools" has been brought forward. Consolidation simply means the merging of two or more small, inefficient school districts into one larger and more efficient one, large enough in numbers to produce a school, graded, if possible, with energy and spirit so strong that with added life, good work can be done and large enough in territory that the burden of taxation may not be too heavy and at the same time may produce sufficient funds to carry on the work in an up-to-date and progressive manner.

A necessary accompaniment of consolidation is the conveyance to and from the school each day at the public expense, all children of school age who live over a certain distance from the school house, thus eliminating the element of unfairness that now exists in the rural schools owing to the different distances at which the children live from the school, and at the same time placing the cost of conveyance on the whole district. In Manitoba consolidated districts, all pupils are conveyed who live over one mile from the school house. It has become customary to use covered vans for conveyance. These are not always heated, but in some cases, carbon foot warmers or soapstone are used.

Just when and where consolidation on a small scale began, cannot be told, but the first law of which we read was passed in Massachusetts in the year 1869, and to-day it forms a part of the rural school system of 32 states. Eight hundred completely consolidated, and not less than two thousand partially consolidated, schools attest to the remarkable adaptability of the system to the peculiar needs of agricultural communities.

In Eastern Canada, consolidation was introduced as part of the "Macdonald Scheme" in Nova Scotia in 1903; in New Brunswick and Ontario in 1904; in Prince Edward Island in 1905. For a time it bore good fruit, but has not apparently taken hold of the people with any great force.

According to this scheme the extra expense entailed for three years over the old one-room, small, district plan, was to be paid out of the "Trust Fund," provided by Sir Wm. Macdonald, and after the expiry of the three years the districts were to take over the consolidations and run them themselves. Some districts continued the consolidation, but others thought it too expensive and dropped out.

Manitoba may properly be termed the "Mecca" of consolidation in Canada. Here, the people have taken hold of the plan from the first voluntarily, and aided only by grants from the Department of Education. This class of school, judging from appearances, has come to stay, in the West.

The Department of Education, in 1905, realizing that it is better, both on economical and on pedagogical grounds, to unite the many small and weak schools, dispersed over a large extent of territory, in a few strong, well-equipped and well-conducted graded schools located at convenient points, had an amendment to the School Act passed, to permit of this being done, and Virden was the first consolidated school formed, followed in 1906 by Holland.

For a few years the system was slowly adopted, but at the present time the air is full of consolidation and the whole province is alive to the question. More consolidated schools have been formed in the past year than in the three years previously, the total number now formed being 26, while there are probably over a dozen in course of formation.

One of the strong points in the consolidation system is the successful conveyance of the school children. It has been conclusively proven that where the children are conveyed to and from school they attend more regularly. While the average attendance in rural schools in Manitoba is from 30 to 55 per cent. of the enrolment, in the consolidated schools it runs from 60 to 95 per cent.

On the introduction of the system there were those who believed that in a new country such as this, where the roads of necessity were likely to be

poor and owing to sparse settlement but little travelled in many parts in winter, the scheme of transportation could not be carried out successfully, but the contrary has been the experience. Of the 50 vans employed in the year 1911 by 20 schools in operation in the various parts of the province representing all kinds of geographical conditions, only 30 trips were missed during the whole year; but little more than one trip for every two vans, and these vans travelled over routes varying in length from 2 to 9 miles. One route travelled was 11 miles in length. It is claimed by those who have had the most experience that between 6 and 7 miles is the satisfactory maximum distance for a van route. This, of course, means one way. No complaints are heard of children suffering from cold in these vans, as they are covered in and, if necessary, heated by foot-warmers and provided with robes.

The cost of operating the vans has not been considered expensive. In all cases the vans are owned by the school district, and from \$2.25 to \$3.50 a day is paid for a team and driver on the routes of average length. Only one driver in the province received as high as \$4 a day. The drivers must, of course, be selected with as much care as the teachers, for the success of the consolidation depends largely on the transportation. The vans cost from \$150 to \$200 each, complete with wheels and runners.

Teachers report that much more work can be done in a day and far more satisfactory work when the children are driven to school, as they arrive there dry, warm and untired, ready for immediate work.

Consolidation, which in almost all cases means a graded school and always means better and more experienced teachers, gives the farmer's child all the advantages of a high school education at his own home, for even if the school be located in a small village or town, the pupils in being conveyed to and from it do not remain there after school hours and are consequently free from any of the evils of town or village life. They grow up under the watchful eye of the parent on the farm in a wholesome atmosphere while they participate in all the advantages of the High School. This gives the farmer's child equal opportunity with the child of the town or city resident.

These schools are larger and in charge of experienced male principals, and consequently there is more enthusiasm displayed and there are sufficient numbers to engage in all healthful games, while the larger boys and girls have plenty of companionship of their own age and are thus induced to remain longer at school during that mysterious and critical period of their lives when boys and girls are so hard to understand. The fact that these schools and such large numbers of pupils are much more likely to be under the discipline of men than the smaller schools, counts for a great deal in the character-building of the future rulers of our land. The serious aspect of our education to-day is that so many young, inexperienced girls, with but little knowledge of human nature and the ways of the world, are found in charge of our schools.

One fear that possesses some of the people when considering consolidation, is that by the removal of the little, old, weather-beaten school house, the value of their property will be depreciated, but this fear has proven, in actual experience, to be groundless, and the man who once advertised when wishing to sell his farm, "A school house near," now advertises, "Children conveyed to a good school." Not unfrequently, the first question asked by a purchaser of land from the United States of a Manitoban is, "Have you a consolidated school in your district?"

Consolidation is a broad and deep question, and those who once enter into the scheme have their ideas broadened and deepened. Magnificent, large school buildings, well-equipped and situated on large



Gilbert Plains Consolidated School and Vans at 4 p.m. Twenty-seven Thousand Dollar Plant and Three-acre Site.



Rural School in South-eastern Manitoba.



8.45 a.m. Van on Its Way to Gilbert Plains Consolidated School.



Starting on a One and a Half Mile Walk in Winter From a Rural School on the Prairies.