

Boy and Girl Farmers

An outline of the Agricultural Education work being done in the Public and High Schools of Saskatchewan

By A. W. Cocks, Director of School Agriculture, Province of Saskatchewan

Subsequent to the conference held in Ottawa in 1914 and attended by representatives from all the provinces of the Dominion, the Government of Saskatchewan decided that the annual increase in the Dominion subsidy for this province should be assigned for expenditure by the Department of Education until the Agricultural College, the Department of Education and the Department of Agriculture, was each receiving one-third of the total grant. This decision made it possible for the Department of Education to take steps towards the encouragement and organization of instruction in agriculture and household science in the public schools and high schools of the province.

In the year 1914 an Agricultural Instruction Committee was appointed by the Minister of Education to generally supervise the work carried on by the Department of Education. The committee is composed of: the Superintendent of Education (chairman); the Deputy Minister of Education, the Dean of the College of Agriculture, the Deputy Minister of Agriculture; the Director of Extension Work, College of Agriculture; the professor of Agricultural Engineering, College of Agriculture; the principals of the two Provincial Normal Schools and the two directors of School Agriculture. The latter, in the persons of F. W. Bates, M.Sc., and A. W. Cocks, B.Sc., were appointed in May on the recommendation of this committee. A director of Household Science, in the person of Miss P. A. Twiss, was also appointed earlier in the year.

Teachers Taught Agriculture

Since the formation of the province nature study has constituted a part of the public school curriculum and has also received attention in the Normal schools. During the past year agriculture has become an important subject at each of the Normal schools, F. W. Bates being responsible for the instruction at Saskatoon and A. W. Cocks at Regina. These gentlemen also conduct courses of lectures at the Third Class Normal sessions held at various points in the province during the first few months of 1916. To assist in the training of teachers for the work a short course in agriculture and nature study has been held at the university for the past two years. A special course for science teachers was provided in 1915, and it is intended to continue and to lengthen both of these courses in 1916. By means of the teachers' institutes and conventions the directors have been enabled to address large numbers of teachers and trustees on the importance of agricultural instruction and to give assistance in the formation of organizations which will be known as "Rural Education Associations." About 1,700 teachers have been reached by these meetings in addition to the large numbers met by the directors in the Normal schools. Several bulletins on tree planting, school gardening, distribution of trees, shrubs and seeds, suggestions for teachers, rural education associations, etc., have been prepared and distributed to the schools in the province, while others entitled "School Fairs" and "The School Garden" are in course of preparation.

School Gardens Numerous

According to the report for the year 1914 there were 370 school gardens in actual operation in the province of Saskatchewan, while preparation for the work of school gardening had been made in many other school districts. It was further stated that a large number of pupils operated home garden plots under the supervision of the teachers. Early in 1915 the Departments of Education and Agriculture endeavored to stir up enthusiasm for school garden work among the teachers of the province. The directors of School Agriculture addressed many teachers' institutes and various public meetings throughout the province. The inspectors of schools gave great assistance not only by arousing the interest of the teachers and trustees but by the organization of committees for school garden work and school fairs. The agricultural secretaries of the municipalities and the district representatives of the Department of Agriculture also lent their very valuable assistance to this work. The result of such a campaign was remarkably successful, for altho the Department has no definite information as to the exact number of school gardens which have been in operation during the year, yet from the reports of the inspectors of schools it is possible to estimate that at least 1,500

schools undertook the work. In some cases the work was carried on by the pupils in their own home gardens, but so long as this is under the supervision of the teacher the department recognizes it as school gardening. It is to be regretted that more than 50 per cent of these school gardens could hardly be considered successful. Many reasons could be given for these failures, such as destruction by gophers and drought; neglect during holidays; change of teachers and insufficient enthusiasm to carry the work to a successful conclusion. However, a great advancement has been made and one evidence of the progress is seen in the large number of school fairs which were held in the fall.

A Students' Parliament Garden

As usual, it was found that owing to the correlations of the garden work with the regular class work a greater interest in school life was exhibited by the pupils. The attendance was improved and the work of the school generally raised to a higher level. A few particular methods of conducting the work are worthy of attention. The splendid organization of the work at the Qu'Appelle high and



Professors of School Gardens, Weyburn

public schools is the result of the deep interest of the principal, R. F. Meadows, and his staff in the school garden movement. The following, which is a quotation from the report of the "Secretary of State" will adequately explain the organization:

"Each pupil of this school felt proud to consider himself a member of the students' parliament, under which with the general supervision of the teachers, the management of the school garden was placed.

"The house being restricted to five constituencies, namely: Qu'Appelle, Prairie, Muscowepung, Takehionwake and Valcartier, made it necessary to divide the garden into five rows, each one bearing the name of a constituency. These rows were divided into twelve plots each, leaving a small bed at the end for the constituency emblem. Besides the constituency rows, occupying the north end of the garden, were left three plots, two of which were alloted to grades I and II and the other for experimental purposes on four different varieties of corn and of potatoes. For protection, at the extreme north end, a triangular plot the width of the garden was left to grow sunflowers.

"The members of the parliament were given the privilege of an entire plot in their own constituency row. The numerous other plots which were not taken by the members were sub-divided in half and given to the care of the higher public school grades, making each pupil responsible for his special plot.



School garden at Weyburn, arranged geographically after the plan of the Province of Saskatchewan

"Now it must not be thought that each gardener seeded his plot in a haphazard manner. Each pupil was given a choice of flowers and vegetables to grow, suitable to his grade. Grade one seeded turnips, whilst grade two sowed beets and sweet peas, thus learning the difference of size and the depth in which each plant will thrive. The intermediate classes had a choice of three from four varieties, whilst grade eight sowed such seeds as tomatoes, cabbages and dahlias, thus learning the method of transplanting. The high school pupils devoted their plots principally to experiments on carrots, beans or onions.

"By offering a prize of twelve dollars to the constituency having the best showing of marks, the premier, on the advice of his cabinet, appointed a committee of judges to judge the garden every two weeks. The method of judging was done by the guidance of a score-card with the allowance of thirty marks for general appearance, fifteen for condition of cultivation, thirty for absence of weeds and fifteen for abundance of growth. Each judge was given a score card to fill in what he thought should be given under the different conditions. After every judging his card was handed in to award each constituency the average obtained. In this way the constant care of the gardens was made compulsory.

"At the close of the school term the minister of agriculture advertised for tenders to see to the general care of the entire garden during the holiday months at a small salary. Several applications were received and the applicants given authority to sell radishes and lettuce, the proceeds of which were put in the garden funds."

Garden Arranged on Municipal Plan

In several districts, notably at Indian Head and Weyburn, the garden work was organized on a municipal plan and the following description of the work in the Souris school, Weyburn, will be sufficient to indicate the system:

"The garden was surveyed and arranged geographically after the plan of the province of Saskatchewan. There were three rows of townships running east and west and three ranges running from north to south: thus the garden constituted a model municipality containing a specified number of townships and each township containing thirty-six sections. The section, township and range, with the name of the pupil owning that particular plot were marked on a small wooden tablet at the end of each section. Each pupil was supposed to have a farm of one section, that is, six feet square. One row of townships on the south and one row on the north were called 'forest reserves' and were planted with a variety of trees and shrubs. The experimental farm was located on the eastern side of the garden. In the centre of the school garden, which represented a rural municipality, was an urban centre—the City of Weyburn.

"The management of the garden was carried on by the pupils who early elected their officers. A lad of twelve was elected reeve and another of eleven secretary-treasurer. A councillor was elected by the members of each division. These officials appointed their weed inspectors, secretary-treasurer and other officials, while a set of books for the finances of the district was also provided."

It is interesting to note that in some portions of the province, particularly those parts settled by non-English speaking people from Europe, the produce of the school gardens was sold and the proceeds donated to the various patriotic funds. As the result of such a sale at the Yorkton school fair two beds were provided for the Saskatchewan Hospital Unit.

A supply of seeds of vegetables, flowers, cereals, trees and shrubs, amounting to over 25,000 packets, has been obtained by the Co-operative Branch of the Department of Agriculture and will be sold to teachers and pupils making application for the same. A circular which is being distributed by the Department of Education contains a catalog of these seeds with instructions and order sheets for the assistance of teachers and pupils. Trees and shrubs will also be supplied thru the directors, providing the school grounds have been prepared in accordance with instructions indicated in the publications

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