

April 6th, 1910

Why Municipal Schools are Better

J. J. Dougan, Secretary-Treasurer, British Columbia Trustees Association, Tells of Their Many Advantages Over Rural Schools. These include Improvements in Management, Better Teachers, Less Cost Per Capita to the Government, Fewer but Larger Classes, and Better Training.

By request of a number of those interested, I beg to offer in brief the following observations on municipal school boards in British Columbia:

It may be pardonable to preface what I am going to say with a reference to my personal experience and observation, extending over the past four decades. I had the misfortune of just failing to be a native of British Columbia, but nevertheless I had the distinction of attending the first district (now called rural) school in the province; that school I shall long remember—it was a type of many others that followed, and may best be described as having for physical apparatus a broken stove, a wooden poker, the much-used ferule, and inartistic carving left on the long wooden bench by that combination known as "the boy and his jack-knife."

The schools grew in number, but not in quality for the most part, till some six years ago, when what we call the municipal school board superseded the rural, or individual school board.

It was an evolution—a big step to take, and naturally strong opposition was raised by many people and trustees, and even teachers. Being at that time in charge of one of the Vancouver city schools, I thought, as did nearly all, that ruin was sure to follow; few took any other view; but the change was made, and naturally no step since the organization of our schools was watched with keener interest.

In a brief time one hundred and twenty-seven rural school boards disappeared, their place being taken by twenty-one municipal boards, and where three hundred and eighty-one trustees had been required, only one hundred and five were necessary. Lately four more municipal school districts have been formed, and others will be formed as sections of the country become sufficiently settled.

The municipal boards were given increased powers, so that instead of being trustees in name, they became such by recognition by the people, the municipal council, and the council of public instruction. The trustees found that they now had to manage a business, and learned for the first time that they ought to be as well posted in educational matters as are the teachers.

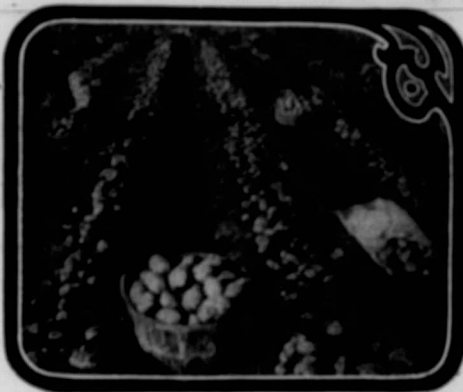
Soon, opinions favorable to the change were freely expressed by the trustees themselves, by the inspectors, and by ratepayers. The senior provincial inspector gave voice to his finding in these words: "The erection of the rural municipality into a school district has proven a very long step in advance of anything yet attempted in this province for the improvement of rural schools; and since the formation of the rural municipal school districts on this island (Vancouver), there has been heard on all sides, nothing but expressions of approval with the working of the new enactment. I have great pleasure and satisfaction in working with the new boards for the betterment of the schools."

Opinions of Educationalists

Inspector Allen C. Stewart writes as follows: "Since the coming into force of the new act, I have no hesitation in saying that there has been greater progress made in our schools, a greater awakening to the benefits and advantages of good schools and efficient teachers, than there has been in a greater period of time in the previous educational history of the province. The recent school act has been a great educator."

Inspector J. S. Gordon contrasts the rural and the municipal schools; of the former he remarks: "The conditions prevailing in rural districts are far from satisfactory. We find in many of these districts the minimum salaries, the poorest of teachers, and the school besides being small, poorly lighted, and poorly equipped, is dirty, cheerless and un-homelike. This regrettable condition of things may be attributed primarily to the apathy of the people in school matters." Of the

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