

# Municipal School Boards

## A Solution of the Rural School Administration Problem in B.C.

Six years ago a prominent educationist made the statement that the twentieth century is for the country child; if this was true then it is a hundred times more true today, when civilization is pledged to employ all its resources in achieving a victorious termination to the present war. Whether that victorious issue is reached sooner or later, there can be no doubt but that at its close a strenuous period of national reconstruction and reorganization will face us, and we shall be forced to fall back more than ever before upon the basic industries for the up-building of our national life and prosperity. Our education will be colored by this fact, and the problem of the improvement of our rural schools will emerge as one of the most urgent in its demand for prompt attention. This rural school problem is not wholly educational—in the general meaning of the term, for while it involves the work of the school-room and the administration and supervision of school affairs, it has also to do with the great economic and social questions which are vital to our existence and which confront every community.

### A Modern Conception of Education

It is important at the outset that we make some attempt to view the work of education from a proper standpoint: no longer is the education of the child held to consist of "pouring in" knowledge or information. It is not merely a matter of "telling" or "being told." It does not even involve the supplying or filling up of a "lack," except in so far as the normal condition of natural growth implies a lack. The education of the child is an active and constructive process. The child's condition—as regards mental life and disposition—is strictly analogous to his condition as regards his physical life, for in either case we are concerned with the question of growth, and with the responsibility of providing suitable conditions of environment so that there may be that growth which is so distinctively a feature of all animate existence.

Education, therefore, signifies a specially selected environment, the selection being made on the basis of materials and method specifically promoting growth in the desired direction. There is, moreover, today an increased regard for whatever has to do with manual labor, commercial occupations and the rendering of definite services to the community, and it is these activities that furnish the educational conditions of daily life and direct the formation of mental and moral disposition.

The consequences of accepting this view of the work of education are far-reaching. We talk of the personal influence of the teacher and of the supreme importance of employing men and women of culture (using the word in its best sense), of broad outlook and of sympathetic insight into the life and interests of the child; and we are quite right. The success of any efforts toward providing education will depend absolutely upon the calibre of the teachers we employ, and no body of trustees should regard the appointment of the teacher as anything but the most serious and important duty devolving upon them. But second only to this comes their responsibility for conditions under which school work is carried on. Not merely physical conditions of sanitation, but such matters as size of classes, grading of children into classes, provision of materials and equipment, adequate supervision of children out of school hours, organization of games and recreative exercises, provision of opportunity for training in social and community life,

By Arthur Austey, B.A. L.C.P.  
Inspector of Schools, Vernon, B.C.

Introduction of modern and optional branches of study, and so forth, in so far as these matters come within their purview as school trustees. And it should be noted that it is the parents and rate-payers who are ultimately responsible. Our Canadian school systems are essentially democratic and the trustees are merely representatives of the people, entrusted with the definite responsibilities in the matter of education.

In direct proportion to the amount of responsibility assumed by the people will be the value of the services rendered by the trustees; their zeal and public spirit have impelled them to serve the community as trustees, but it is for the community to see to it that a high standard of educational service is maintained.

### Consolidation Sometimes Unsuitable

The enormous extent of the Dominion, with its sparse population and its widely scattered rural communities, is responsible for the existence of that most prominent feature of rural education—the isolated one-room school. Experience has shown that with a good building, proper equipment and a

farm, but will keep them on it; a system which will in every way meet the needs and conditions of our rural life. Of its advantages there is no need to speak further; the system has long passed the experimental stage, and is in successful operation at numerous points in Canada and the United States.

And yet there are undoubtedly many areas where, for various reasons, such as extreme isolation and sparseness of settlement, unusual configuration of the country and so forth, consolidation is impracticable or unsuitable, and it is these cases that demand the most careful consideration with a view to alleviating some of the disabilities under which these isolated rural schools are laboring, and of conferring upon them some of the benefits attaching to corporate effort.

### Municipal Districts The Solution

In British Columbia many of the rural districts have taken advantage of legislation passed in 1897, permitting the formation, for the purpose of local self government, of incorporated rural municipalities. Without going into the details of this measure it may be briefly explained, so far as rural districts are concerned, as follows. The government may incorporate into a district municipality any unincorporated rural locality upon receiving a petition signed by the owners of more than one half in value of the land so to be included; and upon the grant of incorporation municipal rights of self-government are conferred upon the district, assessment and taxation powers are vested in the municipal council and reeve and the new district ceases to be liable for provincial land-taxation. Simultaneously, under the Public Schools Act, the municipality becomes a rural school municipality district with power to elect a board of five school trustees. This board assumes full responsibility for all schools within its area, possesses the power of taxation for school purposes and continues to receive the provincial education grant based upon the number of teachers employed in its schools.

Possessing such wide powers and untrammelled by vexatious bureaucratic interference, these larger units of educational administration occupy an unique position of advantage: the central education department at Victoria practically leaves them a free hand to work out their own destinies, and as a result they have been enabled to follow divergent lines of development and even to experiment to an extent that would have been impossible under a less enlightened and sympathetic central authority.

### Educational Experiments in B.C.

As instancing the variety and scope of the different methods that have characterized their administration during the last few years, the following facts will be found interesting. Some rural municipalities are trying the plan of ordinary consolidation, while one has organized a system of partial consolidation, the older children being conveyed to a central school and the primary grades attending ward schools, all being under the supervision of the Principal of the central school. Another municipality has arranged for supervision of its rural schools by an experienced male principal, who exercises control through regular teachers' meetings and visits to the schools. Another has organized a system of supervision of the schools by a "municipal inspector." Another carries on the

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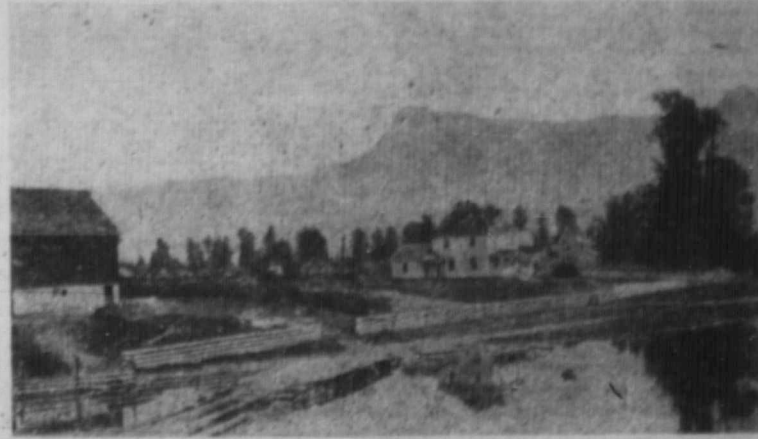


The Ellis School, Penticton Rural Municipality, B.C.

capable, sympathetic, well-paid teacher, these schools have done, and are doing, excellent work. But without under-estimating the value of such schools to the life of the community it must be remembered that their success depends wholly upon the energy, enterprise and resourcefulness of the teacher. The educational standard demanded is ever rising and the services of properly qualified teachers are with difficulty obtained, and with still greater difficulty retained. Hence the movement, so prominent within the last 10 years, towards the consolidation of rural schools, which implies the amalgamation of school districts with the object of securing (a) more effective and perhaps more economical administration, (b) a higher standard of work by the teaching staff, (c) greater advantages to the child (for whom, after all, our educational machinery exists) by reason of the facts that ordinary school subjects can be better taught; additional branches may be introduced; the social and community side of education can be emphasized and better buildings and equipment can be provided than in the case of the one-room school. Consolidation seeks to introduce a system of education which will not drive our children from the



Manual Training Applied. Boys in Manual Training Building the School Garden Fence, Saanich Rural Municipality, B.C.



An Ideal Rural Environment. View from Camp Slough, Chilliwack Rural Municipality, British Columbia