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School Fairs in Saskatchewan

A new era dawning--64,000 in attendance--Farmers' Organizations Helped

By A. W. Cocks, B.Sc.

The discussion of educational matters during the past two or three years in Saskatchewan has created considerable interest and has resulted in the government arranging for a survey of the educational system by Dr. Foght, of the Bureau of Education, Washington. While no great changes in policy will be made until the survey is completed, yet improvements in certain directions have been effected and progress is continually being made. The operation of The School Attendance Act, passed at the last session of the legislature, is doing much to improve attendance, particularly in the rural districts. By directing more attention to such subjects as agriculture, household science, manual training and hygiene, much has been done to help the schools of the province to better adapt themselves to the needs of their particular communities. It is, however, increasingly evident that some rather radical reforms will be necessary before our educational system will be able to perform its proper function in this province, and that some of these reforms will result in considerable increase in the expenditure for educational purposes.

Are the people of Saskatchewan prepared to pay for these improvements to their educational system? There are indications that more interest is being taken in and more financial support being given to the schools today than ever before. The one agency which has done most during the last two or three years to direct the attention of the public to educational affairs in the locality is the school fair. The splendid support given by the people of the province this year to school fairs in every inspectorate has been most encouraging. About 160 school fairs have been held in Saskatchewan this fall. On an average 10 schools have co-operated for the purposes of the fair, which has been held at some convenient centre in the district. The average attendance has been about 200 children and 200 adults, and the average number of exhibits 500. For the whole province this would mean that approximately 32,000 children and 32,000 adults have taken part in the school fairs in the province during the fall of 1917.

The following quotation from a letter, describing the interest taken in one of these fairs is typical.

"Some of the results of the school fair movement in this community have been so interesting and significant that I want you to know of them."

"The children, on the day of the fair, were bubbling over with happiness from the time they began their sports at ten in the morning until they closed their chubby fists over their prize money at six in the evening. There were ten schools represented. . . . Not a shirker or a fault-finder in the group—all did good team work."

"Every school board contributed \$10 and the rural municipality \$25 toward the school fair fund. Besides this, many patrons gave special prizes for exhibits in which they were more particularly interested. One patron gave a framed certificate to the school obtaining the greatest number of points at the fair. Three men, interested in athletics, gave a basket-ball outfit to the school obtaining the most points in sports."

"Labor was scarce and all the farmers were busy, but many took time off to do their share in the preparations. One man, with very little hired help, laid the new walks about the grounds and set up a part of the school fence. It was interesting to see two old men helping to dig the post holes, paying no attention to the rain. The fair was near

at hand and they meant to have at least a part of the fence up. One old gentleman, nearly 70, brought a team and nearly pulverized the tree plot surrounding the school yard. A board member from each of two other districts disced, dragged and levelled the sports ground. A store-keeper put in a broken window and put the gas lamp in readiness for the evening. Another merchant took over the work of decorating the hall for the concert. A mother wrote most of the entry cards and envelopes, that the money might be saved for prizes instead of going to the printer."

"Our friends say that the fair was a success. It was so largely because they all did so willingly and so well the parts assigned to them."

Parents and Ratepayers Do Their Part

From all parts of the province come reports indicating great interest on the part of parents and ratepayers generally. Did one ever hear of a farmer stopping his harvest work for anything other than a break-down or bad weather? This



Reading Operations in the School Garden at Qu'Appelle, Sask.

fall several farmers stopped their outfits, hitched their horses to the waggon and drove the children and their exhibits to the local fair. One such man was heard to say: "This half day has cost me \$80, but it's worth it." In another case the teacher and pupils of a rural school were taken by the owners of automobiles a distance of 72 miles to the fair. These children, who started from home at 5 a.m., were so full of enthusiasm and energy that they were able to win prizes in the singing, spelling and athletic contests after their long drive.

The committees in charge of arrangements had little difficulty in enlisting financial aid. Usually each school board contributes five or ten dollars and the municipal council often gives a small grant. The business men of the towns and villages are quite generous with special prizes. One merchant offered a pony worth \$125 as the first prize in a spelling contest.

Judging Watched—Decisions Awaited With Interest

The judging is done by farmers, business men, teachers and representatives from the department. This judging is not always an easy matter, and the ability of the farmers, their wives and other judges is often severely tested, but no judge at the provincial exhibition at Regina ever gave more serious consideration to his decisions and no de-

cisions were ever awaited with more eagerness or received with more general approval than those made by judges at school fairs. The beautifully generous way in which children congratulate one another without a trace of envy or jealousy, and their absolute faith in the judges' decisions leads one to give of one's best in making the awards.

There is no doubt that the school fair has aroused more interest and sympathy for the children and their education than anything else has done in recent years. One teacher, who had undertaken the greater part of the burden of organization at one very successful fair, said: "I don't know what I should have done but for the splendid help from the people of the community," and as she described it and thought of the sympathetic interest which had been shown, and which she had, perhaps, little suspected before, and looked at the scores of happy faces around her, tears of thankfulness and joy came to her eyes as she said: "You know, I wanted something done this morning. But Mr. B—said: 'Don't you worry, ma'am, I'll fix it,' and although he is an old man and lame, he was down early this morning and has been helping ever since." The bank manager was attending to the financial end, receiving subscriptions and paying out the prizes. The Red Cross Society was attending to refreshments. The farmers and business men and their wives were acting as judges, while the teachers as a committee were in charge of the general organization.

The Biggest Day of the Year

And what does the school fair mean to the children? Without doubt it is the best day of the year. It is their day. For weeks and months they have been preparing their exhibits from the garden, from the class-room and from the great outdoors. They have been practising spelling, reading, singing, reciting, writing and physical exercises, and at last everything is ready for the fair. With happy faces, shining eyes and busy tongues they are driven in decorated waggons, buggies, democrats and autos to the chosen centre. While the judging of exhibits is in progress the athletic contests are the centre of attraction, and this seems to introduce the pupils from one school district to those of another, and for the rest of the day there are no strangers. When the prize ribbons have all been attached pupils, parents and friends commence a tour of inspection. What a scene! One little fellow discovers he has a prize for his collection of weeds. His eyes sparkle with excitement and he exclaims: "Oh look! Where's mother?" He must show mother, and then with justifiable pride mother's eyes brighten too, and together they continue the search for more delightful surprises. The sewing and cooking naturally attract mother's eye and she comments on the good work accomplished. "They only started this last spring, you know, after they knew there was to be a fair," she informs an interested neighbor. "I wish we had done some of this work when I was at school." Next comes a splendid collection of insects. One of the teachers explains that the boy who made it was hardly interested in nature study at all a year ago, but the thought of the fair had spurred him on to work for his school, and now he was a nature enthusiast. A few days before he had been heard to say: "Well, if our bugs don't get a prize, I'll eat 'em." The art work reveals much latent artistic talent, while the compositions indicate the power of clear expression and lucid thought seldom credited to our prairie pupils.

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All Phases of Fairing are Represented at the Boys' and Girls' Club Fairs. Left—Display of Vegetation at Grimsby, Ont., School Fair. Right—Proud Prize-winners in the Gift Show.