

# The Development of the Consolidated School Idea

The Experience of Forty Years in the United States—By Richard Lees, M. A.

SOME time ago it was the privilege of the writer to furnish for Farm and Dairy, a series of articles on educational conditions in the country districts of Ontario. While engaged in the investigation required by that work, an opinion, entertained for some time, grew into a settled conviction, that the only really efficient solution of the problem of rural education is the consolidated country school. With a view to gaining accurate and personal knowledge of the working of these schools in places where they have been tested, a visit to some of the schools of the United States was planned. After consultation with the Bureau of Education at Washington, certain sections of Indiana and Illinois were chosen. Winchester Co., Ind., was recommended as being an example of what is being done on a large scale, under a school law and form of administration that are especially favorable to consolidation, and some individual schools in Illinois, that have made national reputation, under conditions quite as unfavorable as exist here, so far at least as difficulties of administration go.

Readers of Farm and Dairy may be interested in knowing something of what is being done in these places, and as the surest and most efficient way of bringing the benefits and advantages of any system to the notice of the public is to relate what it has done and is doing, it will therefore be a pleasure to comply with a request for a "report" and give some account of the impressions gained from the trip. Before doing so, however, it may be well to devote some time to a brief history of the movement and an outline of present conditions.

## Types of Consolidated Schools

There are in the United States at present, three fairly distinct types of what are known as consolidated schools. In many of the states, there are laws which compel the closing of the district schools if the attendance falls below a certain fixed number. This number varies in different states, being, for example, 12 in Maryland, Ohio and Indiana, 10 in Louisiana and nine in Maine. In these cases provision is made for the education of the children in adjoining schools to which they are conveyed, either in "school wagons," or by the parents, at public expense. In some cases a grant of so much per day per pupil, is made to parents to meet the cost of transportation. In this way there has grown up a very large number of schools, with one or two teachers, that are consolidated in the sense of having pupils from more than one district, in attendance. The only advantages they possess over the ordinary district schools are a saving in cost in most cases and the assurance of a sufficiently large number of pupils to secure emulative interest and keep alive a school spirit.

The second type is what is known as "Township High Schools." These are schools, maintained by a whole township or other considerable area and generally equipped for the teaching of agriculture and other subjects of special interest to rural communities, besides the regular high school courses. To these schools the pupils are sometimes transported at public expense, but frequently they provide their own conveyances.

The third type is that of the real consolidated school, where the district schools of an area of suitable size, have been abandoned and in their place there has been established a central school



The Average Rural School is Poorly Equipped to Supply the Educational Needs of Children Today.

to which the children are conveyed. These schools usually contain both public school and high school departments, and are conducted with a view specially to the requirements of rural communities. The buildings are usually modern in design, sanitary, well appointed and thoroughly equipped. Some of the buildings visited will be described in detail at a later stage.

## Historical

The first consolidated school in America of the last type described above, was established at Montague, Mass., in 1875, and has now been in existence for 40 years. This school was formed by the union of three districts, two of which gave up their schools and have transportation at public expense. This school has never been large, serving a district of about 20 square miles, and having an enrolment that never exceeded 175. In 1912-13 there were 85 children transported in five wagons. The drivers were paid \$1.70 a day and furnished both horses and wagons. They are under contract, have authority over the children and enforce proper conduct, and must make their trips on schedule time. This school has had a career of unbroken success. It has provided for the children an education greatly superior to what they could otherwise have got, and the claim is made for it that it has saved the territory it serves at least \$900 a year.

The second school of this type was established

at Concord, Mass., in 1879. It serves an area of 25 square miles in which there were formerly five village and seven rural schools. It was some ten years after the establishment of the central school before all the districts came in, but the superior educational advantages at last prevailed. Extracts from a recent report in regard to this school say:

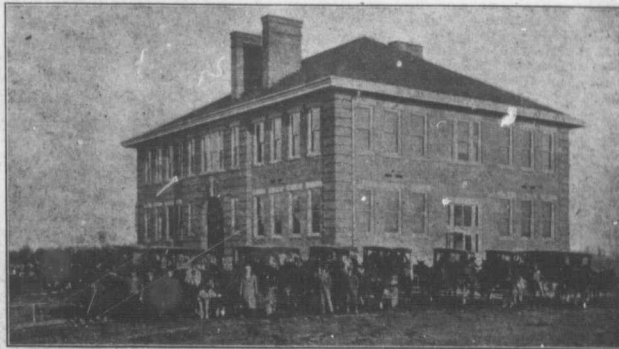
"The apprehensions of owners of real estate that depreciation of values would result if the schools were closed have proven groundless. The children are conveyed in comfortable vehicles fitted up for their accommodation. They are in charge of trusty drivers en route, and at noon they are under the especial care of one of the teachers, who has an extra compensation for this service. When it is practicable, a farmer living near the extreme end of the district is employed to convey the children. Often the

farmer's wife drives—an arrangement that meets the entire approval of the school committee, and is perhaps the most satisfactory one possible. As a rule the committee do not approve of entrusting the duty to the hired man. The attendance of children conveyed is several per cent better than that of the village children, and is far higher than it was in the old district schools."

From these beginnings progress in Massachusetts has been steady and rapid. In round figures, there was paid for transportation in 1889, \$22,000, in 1896, \$77,000 and in 1913, \$394,000. In the whole state there are now less than 900 one-room schools, only about one in every 20 of the teachers being employed in that class of school.

Next to Massachusetts, the greatest progress has been made in Ohio and Indiana, where the movement though more recent is gaining ground very rapidly. Both these states, like Massachusetts, had the township unit of administration, which lends itself much more readily to consolidation than does the district unit. Last year Ohio abandoned the township and adopted a county unit as being still more progressive and permitting an easier union between portions of adjacent townships when that proved to be the best and more economical arrangement. There

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The Consolidated School at Mayesick, Kentucky. A Modern Method of Bringing Modern Educational Facilities Within Reach of Rural Children.