

# The Consolidated School and the Community

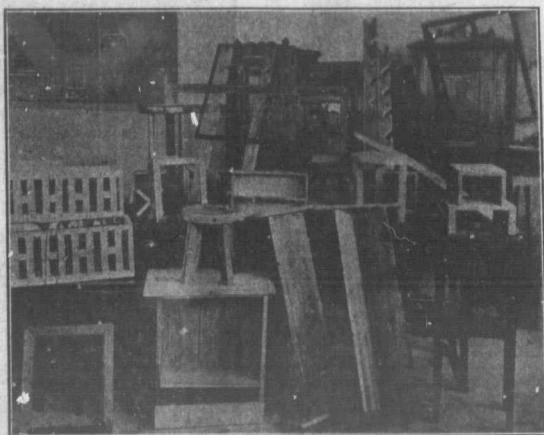
The Advantages of the Centralized School over the District School Clearly Shown.—By Richard Lees, M.A.

**A** LONG with the movement for the improvement of the rural school, is growing up the conviction that the schoolhouse should be the means of a larger service for the community than simply providing for the children certain branches of learning during some 15 or 30 hours each week for 40 odd weeks in the year. In most places the school is used for no other purpose than that to which it is devoted during the school days, and the question why it should not be used for other purposes, at times when school is not in progress, is being seriously considered. Some of the wider uses to which the school plant might be put are, the holding of night classes for the study of either the ordinary branches of learning or others more closely related to the lives of the people. Short courses in agriculture or kindred subjects might be taken up. Farmers' Institute meetings and meetings of Women's Institutes might find suitable and stimulating environment there. But as a matter of fact, we never think of using our school buildings for such purposes. They are too uncomfortable, dreary and uninviting. They make no appeal in any way to the community, and are not looked upon as being good for anything except what the law makes obligatory, and perhaps a Sunday school or a political meeting. The latter is not greatly favored by the authorities, because it often happens that the young men of the community make use of the occasion to show for the place the contempt they were restrained from showing in the days when they "went to school." So there is generally something wrong next morning, and repairs are necessary. It has been said that the surest and most efficient way of cultivating in children a respect for their surroundings is to make the surroundings respectable. That doubtless explains much of the lack of regard for our rural schools that is so common, as well as the impossibility of utilizing them for any supplementary educational purposes.

## What of the Consolidated School?

Here is one of the ways in which the consolidated school exhibits its superiority. The buildings are large, comfortable and suitable for community gatherings. They command the respect and admiration of the people whose interests they were intended to serve. They minister to a district large enough to make possible the holding of good institute meetings and furnish material for clubs or short courses. And not of least importance, they command the services of teachers who have the capacity for leadership in these movements.

Throughout these articles it has been the purpose of the writer to refrain from theorizing and to deal only with what has been demonstrated by experience. Reference has already been made to the success of farmers' institute meetings at some of the consolidated schools of Indiana, where the average attendance was over 500. The girls of the school utilize the household science department of the school to supply lunches at these



An Exhibit of Boys Work in Manual Training Department of a Consolidated School.

meetings, a nominal charge being made and the proceeds devoted to increasing the efficiency and attractiveness of the school equipment. Some idea of the value of that sort of thing, entirely apart from the institute, can be gained if we think of a class of school girls, planning for and preparing a lunch for some 500 people, keeping strict and accurate account of all the outlay and proceeds, and devoting the surplus to school purposes.

We are happily getting away, in theory at least, from the idea that the exercises of the school should be removed as far as possible from the things of real life, and are beginning to realize that the very best training for boys and girls is to be found in learning to do properly the things they will be called on to do as useful citizens.

## Outside of School Hours

The Women's Institute, the Mothers' Club, and the parent-teacher meetings that are held in these buildings are also important factors in their service to the community. The question may be asked as to why the present schools cannot be used for all these purposes just as well as the school in the larger unit. Perhaps the only positive answer to that is that they are not being so used. While the Women's Institutes are doing a most important work along many lines, there has come to the knowledge of the writer in an experience of ten years, only one case in which the improvement of the school has received consideration at one of these meetings. Do the girls, like the boys, get so thoroughly disgusted with the school during the years of their attendance there that they want to have nothing more to do with it? Is it that the school is so unimportant a factor in the life of the community as to be unworthy of notice, or is it simply that they have no ideals along that line, have not had a vision of better things? Whatever may be the explanation, of one thing there is no shadow of doubt, and that is that the women of any rural community could not possibly devote themselves to any cause with greater opportunities or larger possibilities for magnificent returns. Let the wo-

men in the majority of our rural school sections hold their monthly meetings in the school, and for one-half day every month experience its discomfort, see its worn, dirty, unscrubbed floor, gaze on its bare, smoked, dust-laden walls, get out into the yard, and take in the beauties of the fences, sheds, playground and general surroundings. One can hardly imagine what the result might be even if they did no more than talk about it as women are supposed to be able to do when nothing else is possible. But, you say, school would have to be closed and the teachers would get a half-holiday with full pay. That might not, however, be so serious a matter as it looks. Perhaps the teacher would join the institute, and both she and the women might be benefited by getting together on common ground, and surely there ought to be plenty of common ground for teachers and mothers. As it is though, how many mothers

ever visit the school unless to find fault, quarrel with or abuse the teacher?

## Consolidated Schools Are Busy Centres

These and many others are things that we might have in our present schools, but have not to any extent so far. In the consolidated school, as the writer found it in Randolph Co., Ind., the Women's Institute meets in the school. Mothers' meetings are held regularly. Provision is made for these meetings without interfering with the work of the school. The girls of the domestic science classes serve lunches, the teachers and mothers meet in social intercourse and in consultation in regard to the interests of the school and of the children. The school becomes the chief social centre of the district, and in return is enriched by the interest, assistance, and cooperation of the people. In short, the school becomes a place of importance in a social sense. Not only is this so, but its enlarged equipment enables it to perform many other functions of vast importance in the life of the people.

Milk testing and seed testing are done there. The progressive farmer of the district finds there a library containing the latest available information on any branch of agriculture he may be interested in. There is at least one member on the staff who can direct and advise him when in search of information. Short courses in dairying, stock judging, and other branches are held there. With our schools even at their very best, such things are out of the question. Quite true, the objectors and theorists tell us that all this is impossible, that people will not go five or six miles to community gatherings of the kind indicated. The reply to that is that they actually do in numbers quite beyond anything we are familiar with for meetings of the same kind.

## Sanitary Arrangements

One respect in which the consolidated school is a great improvement on the ordinary district school, is in the provision made for the health and comfort of the pupils. While progress is

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