

Town Schools for Country Scholars

How the Roblin Consolidated School serves 115 square miles of territory and meets the problem of education for farm children

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We hear much nowadays about the back to the land movement, and how to make country life attractive, and how to keep the boys and girls on the farm. It is a deplorable fact that during the last two decades the rural population of Eastern Canada has decreased to a considerable extent by the cityward movement of the country boys and girls. Some of the older sections of Manitoba have lost their brightest boys and girls in the same way. Meanwhile the population of the cities has increased by the influx from the country, so also have vice, crime, poverty and wretchedness increased to an alarming extent in the cities. This desertion of the country for the city would not be so lamentable a fact if all succeeded who went there, but for one who succeeds, ninety-nine go down under the temptations which confront them.

The rural population is the backbone of the nation. From the country come the great majority of our ablest men and women. The wealth of a nation, or country, or community, depends not so much on its natural resources as on the character of its citizens. The future wealth and welfare of our country depends on the boys and girls who are now growing up on the farms. It is the duty of each generation to see that the succeeding generations are properly prepared to take their place in life. This is patriotism in its highest form. The problem then before us is how to keep the boys and girls on the farm and how to give them the advantages that will equip them mentally, morally and physically to be the future citizens of our country. It is a problem the solution of which may well test the abilities and best endeavors of our country's wisest men and women. In seeking the solution of the problem we must ask why the boys and girls desire to leave the farm and go to the city. One of the principal reasons is to obtain better educational advantages. If, then, we wish to keep them on the farm we must provide them with better schools. The next question is how to do this.

Roblin Consolidated School

In the pretty little village of Roblin, in northwestern Manitoba, snugly situated at the foot of the Duck Mountains and between the Assiniboine and Shell rivers, a movement is in progress that goes very far to being a solution of this difficult and perplexing problem, namely, the Roblin Consolidated School.

To the uninitiated the term "Consolidated School" may need explaining. By the system of consolidated schools several rural school districts are merged into one, with one central school building, and the pupils are transported to and from school. Before stating the benefits and advantages of this system, I will give a brief history of Roblin Consolidated School.

The district was organized and began operations on January 1, 1912, five districts being consolidated into the new one. At the midsummer holidays another

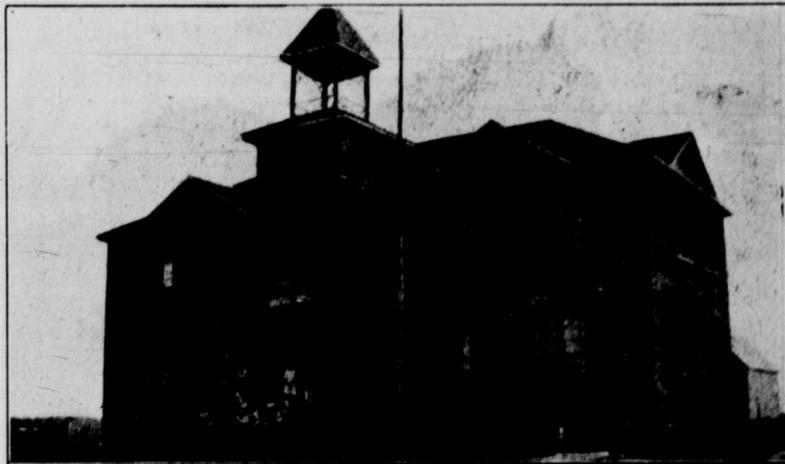


ONE OF THE VANS

district, seeing the great success which attended the consolidation, came in. From time to time other districts and lands have been added until the district, as it now stands, comprises 115 sections of land and the village of Roblin, having, I believe, the largest area of any school district in the Dominion of Canada. Fourteen vans are employed for the transportation of the children. The longest van route is about nine miles and the shortest six miles. The vans cost \$160.00 each. They are heated in the cold weather by ordinary foot warmers, and

have found by our experience where consolidated schools are a very great improvement over the one-roomed rural school.

First of all there are fewer "lates." Ninety per cent. of the "lates" in our school are the village children. Rarely have the vans been late and only on one or two occasions have they missed a trip. Another advantage is better attendance. The average attendance of pupils enrolled in the schools of the province is, I believe, 55 or 56 per cent. For consolidated schools it is 72 per cent.



ROBLIN CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL BUILDING

are also well supplied with robes. The children do not suffer from the cold. The school has been operated now for four winters and no complaints have been made of children being cold. A van will hold from twelve to fifteen children comfortably. The average wages paid to the van drivers is \$3.80 per day. One half of this is paid by the Provincial Department of Education. The total enrollment of pupils in the school is 240, of these 186 are transported from the country, the remaining 54 live in the village.

Advantages of Consolidation

Following are some of the facts we

For the Roblin School for the year 1914 it was 75 per cent., and for the month of January, 1915, the coldest month of the year, it was 81 per cent. In one of our districts, before consolidation, during the last half of the year 1911, the average attendance was 1 1/2%. The inspector finally closed the school. Since we have been transporting the pupils the average attendance from that district has been 20. Another district had an average attendance of 3 1/2%. Since consolidation the average attendance from that district has been 19. Many children were found in the district 9, 12 and 14 years of age who had scarcely been at school.

Now, with consolidation, they all go. There is not a child in the district of school age who is not attending school.

An incentive is formed, too, for the older pupils to attend school. When a boy or girl reaches the age of fourteen or fifteen years in the average country school it is a difficult matter to get them to attend. There does not seem to be any incentive. In the Roblin school there are about 30 pupils between the ages of 15 and 21, all working like beavers and anxious to succeed. Why this difference? There is life in the consolidated school. Pupils mingle with others of their own age. They are in classes by themselves. Teachers are there to instruct them in the higher branches of education. There are literary societies, debates, etc. They feel at home and not out of place. And then there is precedent to follow. Pupils are graduating every year from the school and going out into the world as teachers or farmers or to engage in other occupations. Six have gone from our school this year as teachers. This is something for the younger pupils to look forward to. It fires their ambition, makes them strive to succeed, and gives them a broader view of life.

Organized Play Possible

All educational authorities agree that play is a necessity in the natural development of the child. It is as necessary as food or sleep. Where there are few pupils attending school and they are of all ages and sizes, it is impossible to have organized play. The writer very well remembers attending school for several months as a very small boy, where among the dozen pupils he was the only boy. There was no fun. A term in Sing-Sing prison would be preferable to that experience in the life of a boy. Now, in a consolidated school where there are several hundred pupils, it is possible to have organized games of all kinds, football, baseball, basket-ball. Where forty boys play football or forty girls play basket-ball there is going to be some fun.

With consolidation it is possible to have better buildings, better ventilation, better heating facilities, better seats, maps, charts, physical and chemical apparatus and library. The Roblin school has quite a large library now and additions are being made to it from time to time. The children do considerable reading, one-half of the books being out all the time.

The benefits of a graded school can also be taken advantage of. Teachers have two or three grades and consequently have more time for teaching. In a one-roomed school where one teacher has all the grades, it is impossible to teach them properly. This can be easily proved by taking the number of recitations on the program of studies and dividing it into the number of minutes in a teaching day. Consequently, in a graded school the pupils make more rapid progress. The ambition of the pupils is stimulated.

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AGRICULTURAL STUDENTS



PUPILS AT WORK IN MANUAL TRAINING ROOM