

## The Farmer's Advocate AND HOME MAGAZINE.

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DOMINION.

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Quebec needs consolidation most owing to the scattered nature of the English-speaking rural communities, and here it is most difficult to secure because of the long routes that would be necessary for transportation. Probably the nature of consolidation and its advantages have not been properly understood. What then is Consolidation?

### The Old District School.

At the outset it should be stated that our rural schools first began by being built in outlying districts to serve the neighbors. Legislation created small school districts with elected school boards to supervise the instruction and appoint teachers and raise the money. This last function was the most important one, and, in the interests of the taxpayers' pockets, this was done as badly as it could be done legally. But thus arose the old rural school—the little red school house—with which we are all familiar. As the land was cleared and farmers got married, their children went to school together, and in some generations the enrolment was fairly large and the school prosperous. However, as the pioneer farmers were all of the same generation, the younger population came at first in waves with alternative depressions, during which periods the schools lost in average attendance, in public interest and in financial support, as the earlier settlers were now free from the direct parental interest in the school, and their chief concern became the financial one. Some district schools had such a small attendance that it was found uneconomical to continue them, and the pupils were sent to another neighbouring school which then became a union school.

### The Union School.

The union school, however, is still an ungraded, single-room school. It has no further advantages than the employment of one teacher to teach a small number of pupils for whom two teachers were formerly employed. The educational advantages are no greater unless we consider the greater sociability in the playground and the greater element of competition in the class work. There exists in this type no possibility of satisfactory grading and no higher work is attempted. In some cases such union schools might even be inferior in type, if overcrowding were permitted. In some American schools this actually took place, until an attempt was made to lighten the teacher's labors by adding another teacher to the staff. Sometimes the two teachers actually had to teach in the same room without partitions. In other cases a flimsy curtain or improvised partition divided the classes so that there was separation but no sound-proof isolation. Teaching under such conditions is, of course, unsatisfactory, especially as in numerous

cases an old district building was used without alteration or addition. This case of inferior consolidation is a mere makeshift and does not improve educational conditions. But it may prove to be the forerunner of a better state of affairs, as for example at Bridgenley, Manitoba, where the pupils of McKinley district were added to those of Bridgen and conveyed to the school at that place. This may be termed a partial consolidation and saved the ratepayers a considerable sum of money, as the expense was reduced from about \$75 a pupil to little more than half that sum. They do not have sufficient pupils yet to form a graded school, but expect to have them before long. This purely rural, consolidated school, situated four miles from the nearest village has an ambition to achieve the fullest measure of consolidation in time. Most of the consolidations in Quebec have been of this nature—mere partial consolidations—and it is noteworthy that no one-room rural schools are now being built.

### The Consolidated School.

The complete consolidation results only when two or three or more schools unite to form a graded school in some central or other convenient situation, to do higher grade or high-school work in some cases. The pupils from a distance of over a mile from the school are usually conveyed by some means to the school, generally at public expense in vans or sleighs or in private carriages, a small payment being allowed to the parents. In some instances the parents are willing to provide conveyance themselves, or the children arrive on horseback, stabling their horses in the school sheds. The essential point is, however, that more than one teacher is employed, better grading introduced and higher work provided. For example, Warren Consolidated School in Manitoba is a purely rural consolidation, comprising the three former district schools of Hanlan, Meadow Lea, and Invicta which were sold. Two teachers are employed, one of whom is a male teacher who acts as principal. These two teachers teach eight grades, and prepare also for second and third class teachers' certificates. The eighty pupils are nearly all conveyed by the vans every day at public expense. These covered vans which become sleighs in winter are heated with footwarmers and provided with robes. In the same province the Vermilion school was abandoned and the thirty children are conveyed in two heated vans to the town of Dauphin which lies to the southeast. There they have the advantage of a full collegiate course and manual training and sewing. Eight of these rural children took up entrance and collegiate work. The town has two schools and seventeen teachers. This makes possible a perfect grading, a condition which gives only one grade to a teacher. Yet the school tax in the rural district was only \$17.50 for the average quarter section. But surely the advantages were worth this!

### Two Types.

Thus we see that consolidation has developed gradually from the old district school and has two types which should be clearly distinguished. The first type is the union school which still remains a one-teacher, ungraded school and in some cases is no better than the original one, and may even be worse. Sometimes, however, it is an improvement and may ultimately become a real graded school, whenever the attendance justifies an addition to the staff and to the building. The union school, however, should not be confused with the higher type and should never be known as anything but a "partial consolidation." The second type is the real consolidated school combining three or more district schools of one or two rooms each. It provides at least two teachers, better grading, higher work and free public conveyance. This is the type to which all rural districts should endeavor to approximate. A good example is the Gilbert Plains School, of white brick, containing six class-rooms, assembly hall and basement. In this school the male principal assisted by an efficient staff of female teachers carries on entrance work with twenty-eight pupils very successfully. Here the children have all the advantages of education that city children have, without the dangers and also without being enticed citywards through the allurements of city life. There is no fear of their parents migrating to the city for the sake of giving their children a good education.

The difference of the two types is a fundamental one; it consists of a difference in standards of work and in efficiency of education. The union school is a combination school intended to promote economy and still remains an ungraded rural school. The real consolidated school is intended to secure higher standards of work, to promote higher education, to obtain a better staff of teachers and a more modern building with up-to-date equipment. It is a superior school doing advanced work.

### Elimination of Weak District Schools.

One of the most hopeful signs of progress for country life is the great impetus given to the consolidation of schools in nearly every state of the Union. Many of these states have now passed legislation which either gives permissive power to consolidate or compels consolidation. For example, several states have fixed an arbitrary standard below which rural schools cannot fall without running the risk of being closed. This standard is based on the average daily attendance and when this is less than the prescribed number, the schools may be closed. These figures for some of the states

are as follows:—Indiana 12, Louisiana 10, Maine 9, Ohio 12, New Mexico 25, Texas 20. There are noticeable variations in the limit set, but the intention clearly is to abolish weak and unprofitable schools. No teacher can be expected to teach more than two or three grades efficiently especially with the great variety of subjects now placed on the course of study. She cannot prepare adequately the work required for seven or eight grades, nor can she be expected to change with lightning-like rapidity from class management of children of five years of age to youths of fourteen who require such a different mode of handling. The problem contains too many difficulties and requires too great differentiation of treatment to be managed successfully by any young teacher. The work may easily become congested; pupils are neglected and know they must be; it is difficult to plan a workable daily timetable and each pupil gets little teaching or individual attention. It is no wonder that the boys and girls are glad when their school days under such conditions come to an end.

### New School Laws Necessary.

State or Provincial legislation will be required to secure progress for consolidation. Permissive legislation means very little to anybody unless there is an educational campaign to enlighten those who might take advantage of such permissive laws. But if these are unknown or little understood and appreciated, no progress will be forthcoming. No legislature has fulfilled its duty by merely placing favorable laws on the statute book and letting the matter rest there. Public opinion must be moulded and financial aid guaranteed. For instance, if there is a minimum limit for a school, any district which fails to meet the standard must be forced or aided to transport the children to some other school in the neighborhood. This is the case in Indiana. In other cases government aid of a substantial nature should be given to stimulate consolidation. The grants previously paid to the small district schools should continue to be paid without diminution to the enlarged school. An annual grant should also be paid in respect of each school consolidated, either increasing with the number combined or at a flat rate per school. As the transportation item is the heaviest part of the cost, a government grant of one quarter or one half of the cost should be given. The state would be amply repaid by the higher character of the education obtained by consolidation. A further good reason for giving a grant would exist if high school work were attempted, especially if candidates went on to take second or third class teachers' certificates or rural teachers' certificates. Thus the state or province would be provided with just the right class of teacher for the rural schools. At present we have too many city trained teachers in the country. They are neither happy nor successful there; but the consolidated school student, after professional training of course, would be just the ideal person to fit into country school conditions. The scarcity of teachers would rapidly cease and a sufficient supply of suitable teachers would be forthcoming who would not be the proverbial square peg in a round hole. Then again an opportunity would present itself for the efficient teaching of special subjects like agriculture, manual training, domestic science, including sewing and cooking, and physical training. These are bound to be neglected if one teacher is responsible for them all. But satisfactory courses in these subjects are worth a grant, and this is one of the methods adopted in Iowa to support consolidation once it is effected. It is a good method too. Just contemplate the possibilities for development of sports and games of all kinds. At Warren, Manitoba, the playground is six acres in extent on which it is the intention of the school board to provide spacious lawns, grounds for football, baseball, basketball, croquet and tennis, and large gardens and experimental plots. This is the way to look after the health, the play instinct, and the moral welfare of the rising generation. The saddest sight in some rural schools is the playground at recess, where eight or nine pupils wander around aimlessly, like bears in a cage, ignorant of simple games and not caring for them either.

### Larger Educational Districts Needed.

Wherever the county or township system of education prevails, the consolidation movement has made most progress. Indiana has 600 such schools in a township system, Washington has it in thirty out of the forty counties already, Florida in thirty-three of the forty-eight counties, North Carolina in eighty-two of the ninety-two counties. In Montgomery County, according to the report of the United States Commissioner, eighty-four per cent. of the schools are consolidated schools and only sixteen per cent. are district one-room schools. It must be clear that consolidation has proved its value wherever a township or county is the administrative unit. It would also prove its value even when the school district is the unit, if only the various boards would co-operate in giving it a chance. But in these places the school boards are hard to move. In Illinois where the district is the unit, there are fewer than fifty consolidated schools according to the last available statistics, whereas Louisiana has 300 and Ohio 200. Vermont sends one-fifth of her rural children to consolidated schools, and North Carolina has now about one fourth of her pupils attending consolidated schools of one or more rooms. And so the tale goes on. There is no doubt that consolidation is the only real cure for the education