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SCHOOL PROBLEMS IN ADAIR COUNTY.

(Paper by Mrs. H. Clay Harvey, before the Adair County Teachers'
Association, Patrons' and School Directors' day, Oct. 24, 1908.)

That you may know my knowledge of rural school conditions is not theoretical, I shall tell you that my childhood was spent on the farm; the first five years of my school life were spent in a one-room school on the east side of the state; and my first efforts at teaching were made in a rural school where conditions were typical, where I purposely remained during five successive undivided terms working at its problems with the enthusiasm and courage of youth, problems that I now know were not peculiar to that little country school but characteristic of the isolated one-room school over this state and other states to-day, in a greater or less degree. From that time to the present day I have had occasion to observe its struggles, its lagging, its inefficiency, but I have lost none of that first faith in the possibilities and rights of the country school; and it would be difficult for me to convey to you the satisfaction that I feel in noting that it is not only Adair county that is considering these vital elementary problems to-day, but the country at large has awakened to their importance as may be seen in the programs of most educational meetings, and in the organization of associations for the distinct purpose of considering ways and means to better elementary education everywhere. Therefore, it is expedient that we to-day consider

these questions with the courage and honesty their importance demands.

What are the most pressing of these problems depends entirely on one's viewpoint. The superintendent no doubt, sighs for more system, a closer following of a well-balanced course of study, such grading and classification as must result in economy of time and more efficient work; the director, who holds that thankless position because of a desire to advance the cause of education in his community, is most perplexed no doubt over the problem of furnishing all the educational facilities desired by his constituency with the finances they are willing to provide; the patron is most often perplexed over problems that he can solve usually without much outlay of money, that is, by manifesting interest and giving the teacher timely co-operation; and the teacher, I dare say, is vexing his mind over such questions as, "How can I grade the school when the attendance is so irregular, or graduate pupils from a course of study when the big boys and girls enter school late and leave early for the farm work? How conduct an orderly, good working school when I must crowd three in a seat, when parents refuse to furnish necessary books at proper times, etc.?"

Before going on it appears necessary to arrive at a common understanding of what the public school exists for, and what education we have a right to demand from it.

Looking at education from the utilitarian standpoint alone, we must face the fact that your child, to have a fair fighting chance for bread and butter must have a very different equipment from that required by his father and grandfather; he may not depend upon Nature's resources as did his forbears. The rapidly increasing population, the reckless waste of our national resources, the introduction of skilled labor through immigration, the great change in the life of the American people due partly to the development of our resources, but chiefly to such inventions as the telegraph, the perfected telephone system, the application of electricity as a motive power, the great printing

press, the building of great railroad systems, etc., and the increasing demands for skilled labor in all lines of human endeavor related to the foregoing mean that the state must provide such education for its children as will qualify them to compete fairly in this struggle for existence, and carry forward the work already begun. The populous centers from their necessities have made fair provision to meet this competition which grows keener with passing years. They are rapidly adding to their present equipment by providing night schools as well as day schools; by enforcing a compulsory education law; by rationalizing the course of study; by emphasizing manual training and the domestic arts; and by establishing trade schools; for they realize that money invested in the making of a good citizen is a far better investment than the care of the criminal or the pauper. This education just outlined is by no means all the training necessary to successful competition in the business world. In addition to the three R's, absolutely essential, and to the careful training of the head and the hand, there must also be an ethical training to-day, or the child will not measure up to his full stature of citizenship tomorrow.

In passing, I would not have you absolve the home from its responsibility, but the ethical training of the home and church must be supplemented by the school and the state under present conditions, for, as Judge Lindsey said recently, "The child is the state and the state is the child. Preserve the child, and indeed you shall preserve the state; for the citizenship of tomorrow will then take care of itself."

Thoughtful people are making provision also for the physical as well as the moral health of the child. "A sound mind in a sound body" is their slogan. In these same populous centers the best of architects are planning safe and sanitary buildings where effort is made to provide proper light, pure water supply, and pure air for these growing human plants. Even playgrounds are being regarded as an absolutely essential provision of a good school for the reason that the child's health and growth demand the same freedom and spontaneous activity as

does that fine calf, or that pedigreed colt that the owner would not dream of raising in box stall.

Fifty per cent. of Missouri's youth complete only the fourth grade—notice that I said the fourth grade, and then consider that equipment for the boy and the girl who must enter the struggle for a livelihood in a civilization so changed from that of even twenty-five years ago—when you reflect that fifty per cent. never have been introduced to the history and literature of their country; never have read the constitution of the United States, or have had any instruction in the government of their state (yet they will vote, and how?); never have had instruction in the sciences that would help them to the best living; never have had sufficient training even in business arithmetic to figure for themselves the interest due on their mortgage (for such citizens, if property owners at all, are certain to be burdened with mortgages) and I challenge contradiction of my criticism of the way arithmetic is being popularly taught; if you will picture for a moment the future lives and the far-reaching influence of this fifty per cent alone you must agree that we need a revival that will tend to organize all educational instrumentalities for the one common object, **the equalizing of educational advantages to the children of Adair county, yes, of every county in Missouri.**

Strong emphasis has long been laid on the graded elementary school, upon the high school, the college, and the university, which is all very well so far as it goes, but the spirit of our institutions is equality before the law, and I shall use statistics for the sake of accuracy, from a Missouri county where conditions are quite similar to those of Adair, to illustrate the **inequality of opportunity for the country children who it must not be forgotten have but one childhood.**

The superintendent's report shows 8,547 children enrolled in the public schools; of that number, 6,347 are receiving instruction in the one-and two-room schools; 6,347 boys and girls are trudging long distances, wading through mud and snow over their shoe-tops, while 2,200

are walking happily to school on sidewalks, or riding wheels; 6,347 are seated in rooms where walls and ceiling are dingy, light and ventilation poor, seats and desks placed there with no thought of the needs of growing children of various ages and sizes, two, and often three in a seat, regardless of individual needs and personal character, while the 2,200 are enjoying opposite conditions. 6,347 pupils are packed into these unwholesome quarters where the poor overworked teacher is struggling with from twenty-five to forty classes in three hundred and sixty minutes; the 2,200 in the four-room schools are grouped in classes from ten to twenty-five, two or three grades in a room, where recitations lasting twenty-five and thirty minutes occur regularly, where two years' work is completed in each room, where a rational course of study is pursued, and can be completed in seven or eight years, according to the pupil's ability. This course fits him for the high school, or gives him a fair preparation for the business of making an honest living in the event that a higher education cannot be afforded.

Let us view another condition. Here is a sparsely inhabited district where the valuation of property is good. Across an imaginary line is another district densely populated, but the valuation of the property is low. Adjoining these is a third district in which ample means under the control of the intelligent and patriotic citizens make it possible to give its children nine months' school under the direction of a good teacher. In the first district, unless the wealthy members have a personal interest in the school it reasonably follows they will not feel justified in the expense of a long term with a good teacher for ten or fifteen pupils. In the second case, the school house, an ancient landmark, has become inadequate to accommodate the rapidly increasing population. Here we see three children crowded into a single seat, seventy or eighty children under the control of one teacher, and that one from necessity, a cheap teacher. Here too, we see that wasteful plan adopted of dividing the term, which places two different teachers in charge of the same group of children during the seven or

eight months of school offered. Assuming this district has a board of directors who recognize the needs of a sanitary school house of two rooms and two well-qualified teachers, and who wish to provide these, do you not see they cannot do so, and why? The lack of finances is at the foundation of much of the trouble; therefore I remind you of what you already know that thoughtful people are generally agreed that Missouri's system of taxation is very defective, resulting in the grossest inequalities and inefficiency as is shown in its application to our schools for example. That the efficiency of the entire system of public schools, the district school, the high school, the state normal school, and the university is badly crippled because of an inadequate financial provision is undeniable, and we must dismiss this point with the hope that the voters and their representatives in the next general assembly will work out this phase of our problem.

Adair county has taken a long step forward in educational progress. This county is one of the twenty counties of Missouri that have adopted county supervision of schools. It has a larger percentage of professionally prepared teachers in its ranks, than a large majority of the counties. The superintendent is a factor in the scheme of education that can greatly advance or retard its progress. But despite your claims to progress just set forth, you must all be aware that the majority of these healthy, promising boys and girls from all parts of this county are not enjoying equal chances with those in town; that all the difficulties we have found in country districts are yours in varying degrees, namely, overcrowded schools, small weak schools, irregular attendance with all its accompanying ills, school buildings, I venture to say, that are unfit to house your children in, no library, or an insufficient library, etc.

I should take little pleasure in indicating these various difficulties if I were not in position to point out to you that remedy which with study, intelligent co-operation, and a reasonable time will equalize educational advantages for the children of this county. I offer "consolidation" of

districts as a means of relief from most of the ills now affecting the rural schools.

Permit me to quote the law:

Permitting certain schools to consolidate.—Three or more common school districts, or a village district having less than two hundred (200) children of school age by last enumeration, together with two or more adjoining districts, may be consolidated into a new district for the purpose of maintaining both primary schools and a high school by proceedings had in accordance with the provisions of section 9742 of article 1, chapter 154 of the Revised Statutes of 1899. When such new district is formed it shall be known as "Consolidated district No. . . of . . . county," and shall organize at a special meeting within fifteen days after the formation thereof; such organization and the government of such consolidated district shall be under, and in compliance with, the laws governing city, town and village school districts as provided in article 2, chapter 154 of the Revised Statutes of 1899. (Session Acts 1901.)

This law enables three or more school districts, one of which may be a village district with six directors, to unite and form a new district. This must be done at the annual school meeting by posting notices as in case of change of boundary line. The districts vote separately on the question of consolidation. If all districts affected vote "for consolidation" the new district is formed. If one or more districts vote for and one or more vote against, the matter should be appealed to the county commissioner and by him referred to a board of arbitration. The new district will be under the six-director system and may maintain a high school and as many lower grade schools as the board of directors may determine.

The first meeting of the newly created district should be called in the manner provided for in section 9748, and when assembled the organization should be effected as provided for in section 9861.

Now hear what State Superintendent Gass has to say in his recent report;

"So far the movement looking toward the consolidation of country districts and the centralizing of the schools has not spread to any appreciable extent in Missouri. Here and there in the State are instances of consolidated schools, all of them doing good work. Perhaps the reason why no more communities have seriously considered the matter of centralization is that the Missouri law makes no pro-

visions for the transportation of pupils in such consolidated districts. The fact that the increase in the size of the district would put the school house out of walking distance from many country children is an unanswerable objection to such consolidation as carries with it the abandonment of all the schools in the district save one, and the centralizing of all the school work in one place.

The State needs the enactment of a law by which the people of a district will be permitted to provide for the transportation of pupils in consolidated districts."

Because the thought is new to us, and not thoroughly understood, it is likely to be opposed by patrons on the ground of economy. I hasten to assure you that this is no longer an experiment; it has been tried since 1874 in Massachusetts, Ohio, New York, Illinois, and other states with such gratifying results that, to-day, a majority of the states have a law similar to the one just quoted.

To convince you it is not a theory I invite your close attention to the brief extracts I shall read to you from this "classic" on consolidation of rural schools, just out. It is the bulletin of information regarding Consolidation of Rural Schools by State Supt. E. T. Fairchild, of Kansas. In this we find: "The Dean of the Department of Agriculture of the University of Illinois caused a special investigation to be made of the consolidated schools in Indiana and Ohio and below are some of the extracts from the report:

The plan of centralization offers equal advantages to all the children of the township. It permits a better grading of schools and classification of pupils. It affords an opportunity for thorough work by adding more weeks of schooling and the addition of higher grades of study. Fewer but better and more capable teachers will be employed and retained; and, besides, it brings the stimulating influence of larger classes, with the spirit of emulation incident thereto. Small schools cannot have the vitalizing force that comes from larger numbers. Children who are transported in comfortable wagons are not exposed to the rigors of inclement weather. Tardiness and absence are almost unknown. The parents become more deeply interested in the schools. It results in better school buildings, better sanitary conditions, better equipment, and all of this at less aggregate expense than under the small district plan.

There are four things that are going to benefit this country: These are the telegraph, the daily mail, the electric car and the centralized schools in the county, and when you have gotten these you have all

the advantages of the city in the country, and all the advantages of the country besides. I do not think I can advocate too strongly the centralized schools.

In Connecticut, consolidation, as reported by the state superintendent, has been most advantageous to the state.

In Ohio the state commissioner of education is loud in his commendation of the plan.

In New Jersey the advantages enumerated in favor of consolidation are: (1) Economy; (2) better teachers and equipment; (3) better supervision; (4) regularity of attendance of pupils; (5) better educational spirit.

Wm. T. Harris, Ex-United States Commissioner of Education, in his report on the subject of consolidation, says:

Upon the success of this movement rests the chief hope for the improvement of the rural school. It is fortunate that a device which changes the ungraded school into a graded school involves a saving of expense.

E. Davenport, dean of the College of Agriculture of the University of Illinois, asserts, after an exhaustive investigation, that **No case is on record in which the change has been made back again from consolidation to the small school.**

Now let us consider the cost for a few moments, and be it remembered that our present system is probably the most extravagant and wasteful from a money standpoint that could be devised, since the average rural school that yields so little, costs the taxpayer anywhere from one hundred per cent. to several hundred per cent. more than the most elaborate system of city schools.

In almost every plan of consolidation, the cost after consolidation for the same number of months at the same wages for teachers is considerably less. For the same cost, the term usually can be materially lengthened and the wages of teachers increased.

In support of the statement that the consolidated school is less expensive per capita, the attention of the reader is called to the following additional facts:

1. Under consolidation there is no duplication of libraries, of apparatus, and of other equipment necessary.

2. A considerable saving in fuel and heating equipment is effected.

3. Less outlay is required for maintenance, repairs and janitor service.

4. Less capital is invested in buildings.

5. In practically every case the number of teachers needed is largely reduced, thus making a definite saving.

6. Ordinarily enough can be saved through the various means suggested to meet the extra cost of transportation. As a reward for this we have a more efficient school, better teachers, a longer term, the possibility of some high-school work, and the inspiration of numbers.

Now allow me to offer an illustration from our neighbor on the West. Assistant State Superintendent, C. C. Starr, makes the following report of a visit made to the consolidated schools of Milton, Sumner county, Kansas:

On January 16, 1908, I visited the Sumner county consolidated school. The Sumner consolidated district was formed by the consolidation of five separate school districts in 1904, and the central school is located in a small village containing, at the time of consolidation, probably 50 inhabitants, and containing to-day about 140 inhabitants. The thermometer registered about twelve degrees above zero the day I visited the school. In this district the parents provide their own transportation. I found at the schoolhouse twelve one-horse single-seated buggies, two saddle-horses, and a bicycle. Although the day was cold, the attendance was up to the average.

For the horses a well-arranged shed 24x48 feet, containing twenty-four stalls, has been constructed on the school-grounds.

The largest boys living within a radius of a mile or two walk to school. The parents living beyond two miles from the schoolhouse are paid fifteen cents per family per day for the transportation of pupils. The original plan was to transport the pupils in large wagons at the expense of the district, but that plan has not yet been tried, and thus far there seems to be a general satisfaction with the present mode of transportation.

The consolidation began by two schoolhouses being moved to the site of the central schoolhouse at Milton, with a view to moving them back if consolidation should not prove satisfactory. The remaining old houses and school sites were sold for something between \$600 and \$800.

An extensive inquiry revealed the fact that there is not a person in the consolidated district who would be willing to return to the old way. The general opinion prevails that the consolidated school is far superior to the district schools maintained before consolidation. It would seem that a more general satisfaction with the present system could hardly exist than that found in the district. There is but little tardiness, and those who drive are as prompt in attendance as those who live near the schoolhouse, and the school spirit is fine.

A high-school course of two years is being maintained, and a special high-school teacher employed, making four teachers in all in the school this year. In 1905 or 1906 a fine gray brick four-room schoolhouse was erected, at a cost of something over \$6000 for the building alone. The two rooms on the second floor are separated by a movable partition that can easily be raised to turn the rooms into a commodious assembly hall. A lecture course is maintained, and the assembly hall is used for the general assembly purposes of the town and community. The building is heated by a furnace.

The school has a well-selected library of over 200 volumes. The school is also supplied with dictionaries, encyclopedias and a good supply of material for the primary department. Sixty-five volumes were added this year.

The area of the school-grounds is between three and four acres. The chief game played by the boys is baseball, and the girls have been playing basket-ball preceding the present school year. The teachers are experienced, and most of them have had normal or college training. The length of term is eight months.

The advantages mentioned are: A much better school; teachers have fewer classes and have time to do the teaching much better; the pupils have high-school advantages at home and know that they have a much better school.

How to consolidate:

"The county superintendent, with the assistance of educators and others, should divide the county into proposed consolidated districts. A map of the county showing the boundaries of those proposed districts should be made. Separate maps of each consolidated district should be placed in the hands of each educator and others interested in the movement. On the map of each proposed consolidated district the residences from which pupils attend school should be marked, and proposed routes of transportation should be laid out.

In platting counties into consolidated districts strong graded schools usually are acceptable centers for the location of the schools. Where such schools are not available as centers, the schools will be centrally located in territory that is entirely rural. Territory of the size of a township usually is preferable for a strong, economical and efficient consolidated school, though the consolidation of even two weak districts is always an advantage.

An estimate of the expense of maintaining the school of a proposed consolidated district before consolidation should be made, and an estimate of maintaining it after consolidation should also be offered. The data for such an

estimate can be found in the annual report of the county superintendent.

The first outlay of the consolidated district should be for wagons, if the district decides to transport the children, and the moving of one or more of the best school buildings, and the erection of sheds for horses. That expense will be met in part, at least, by the sale of the abandoned school sites and some of the old school buildings.

In most cases it may be preferable to bring together the best of the abandoned schoolhouses for the use of the new consolidated district. Sheds for the horses may be constructed out of the schoolhouse that is least salable. The other school buildings and the abandoned sites may be sold, and out of the proceeds the wagons may be purchased, the expense of moving the schoolhouses paid, and a larger school site for the consolidated school building obtained.

In presenting the advantages of consolidation, the active assistance of those who are most interested in the education of their children can readily be secured. Literature available upon the subject should reach as many as possible. The local papers will be willing to publish articles on the subject. Evening meetings to study the proposition and to hear papers and addresses on the proposed measure by local talent are profitable. Local educators are usually very willing to deliver evening addresses on consolidation. Outside talent also is usually available for evening addresses.

After a community is quite generally informed on the subject active steps toward consolidation may be undertaken. The county superintendent should be consulted as to the requirements of the law as to notices, the election, and other matters in connection with the formation of such a district.

In short, study well the local conditions; become familiar with the arguments and advantages in favor of consolidation; get the people interested in the proposition, and then hold one or more public meetings. If the sentiment is favorable, strike while the iron is hot, and proceed at once

to an election. If two out of three districts are clearly in favor of consolidation, and the third district is doubtful, it is well to take action upon the first two, and let the consideration of the third district coming in be voted upon at some future time. The great point is to consolidate, and thus not only improve the schools concerned, but offer an object-lesson to others in the neighborhood."

Were this a meeting of patrons only, I would stress your duty at the annual meeting in levying a liberal tax to make the conduct of a good school possible; and urge that you exercise greatest care in the selection of school directors for they appoint the teachers of your children. The Missouri report for 1897 has this to say about school directors: "Prudent and successful business men, and such men only, ought to be nominated and elected school directors; men who will apply themselves to the consideration of all things affecting the schools; who will unselfishly work and plan for whatever promises to bring about the highest efficiency of the schools; who will rise above personal, commercial, and social interests, partisanship and sectarianism; who will use all reasonable means to prevent the school board from becoming a pension bureau to support broken down men and women who have failed in other occupations; who will even rise above making the school a place to reward worthy recent school graduates from the district, who are not yet possessed of any pedagogical attainments; who will rise above every thing except a disinterested, impartial, and business like management of the school funds and the school affairs," despite the common and almost irresistible argument: "I pay as much taxes as any one in this district, therefore my daughter is entitled to a position in this school."

Were this a meeting of school directors only, in addition to all that has been suggested, I would remind you that the school boards of Adair county have it in their power to solve many of these problems by a judicious selection of teachers, for after all the question of education is largely a question of teachers, and since the state has assumed

control of elementary education for its own sake, it follows that this elementary education should be made as effective as human skill can make it. The supply of skilled teachers is not equal to the demand, nor will it be until the public awakes to the fact that the teacher is the poorest paid public servant, and the pitiful picture of children in both town and rural schools under the daily influence of a teacher immature in years without scholarship, culture, or professional training, and alas! too often lacking in professional honor is too common a one. Honorable directors, the teacher must not be selected on the basis of scholarship only. He must have this, he must have skill in directing children, but he must have a good character and strong personality. Examinations cannot test this important qualification, hence school boards should give it their chief consideration. When the teacher with scholarship and a character that command respect and admiration will represent the spirit of rural life, and utilize the environment of rural life for the exercise of intellectual power and industrial skill, we shall not only have educational results, but we shall see agricultural life taking higher rank and given greater consideration.

To a meeting of teachers only I would say, it is self-evident that yours is the greatest responsibility in the early solution of these many problems. Do not remain in the profession unless supported by the spirit that moved Horace Mann. He went among the people, and preached the gospel of education; nothing deterred him from his work; nothing turned him aside from his mission. In the light of recent observations, I urge you to be students of the problems of your district, your county, and the state at large; on your desks should be found well worn copies of the revised course of study, the Missouri school laws, the State Superintendent's annual report of the public schools, and the Missouri School Journal. It is to you that your patrons have a right to look for information and advice and leadership that make for the uplift of your community, for the founding of the library, for the improvement and beautifying of

the school room and grounds, for an understanding of the possibilities of rural life. Tact, energy, and purpose will transform a district in a short time. I know it. I wish there were time to discuss these in detail. But this I emphasize: Be morally brave; never sacrifice a principle to hold a position or gain popularity; don't, as a young teacher recently confessed, wrong the majority of your pupils by giving them instruction in high school subjects because "they" said when she objected on rational grounds that "She doesn't know enough;" or be influenced as was the man who innocently stated in a teachers' meeting recently, "I was always in favor of county supervision; I believe it would be a good thing for our county, but the farmers down my way wouldn't have it because they thought it would be expensive, and so they got up a petition against it, and I had to sign it or lose my job." Director, parent, is that the man to train your children? Young teacher, be certain that moral courage is the best asset you can take into your work. There are plenty of "jobs" awaiting qualified, honest, courageous teachers.

If you as patron, school officer, or teacher, believe in the necessity of such education as was mentioned at the outset; if you define "progress" as did Henry Ward Beecher when he said, "We should so live and labor in our time that what came to us as seed may go to the next generation as blossom, and what came to us as blossom may go to them as fruit," and mean to contribute to that end; and if in your busy life you have paused long enough to note present tendencies in our government, and appreciate the relation of its citizenship to a representative government such as ours, then, it seems to me you will leave this meeting determined to renew your efforts; determined to create sentiment in the home, in the social gathering, and in the district at large; sentiment that will crystallize into concerted action in your community towards bettering educational conditions. You will instruct your representative and your senator to be watchful of all measures designed to improve the educational conditions of Missouri that come up before

the next general assembly, and require him to keep you constantly in touch with developments. You will create a sentiment in your neighborhood that will cause your district to make use of the annual school meeting next April for solving such questions as lay within its powers, and, meanwhile, you will co-operate fully, heartily, and intelligently with the teacher of your children and your neighbor's children to secure the best possible results for them under existing conditions, and begin a campaign of agitation and publicity that, within a reasonable time, must greatly improve those conditions of which we all rightfully complain.

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