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Seventy-Five Years of Public Education in Nemaha, County, Nebraska

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SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN NEMAHA
COUNTY, NEBRASKA

by

Kenneth Stiers

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in the

GRADUATE SCHOOL

of the

UNIVERSITY OF OMAHA

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CHAPTER I

The Problem

Purpose of the study

This study has been undertaken for the purpose of providing a body of data upon which an adequate program of rural education can be founded. It, therefore, dedicates itself to the task of providing the basis for a public-relations program designed to re-kindle in the minds of lay people a sincere and genuine interest in public education in Nemaha County, Nebraska. Certain minor problems presented themselves. First, the problem of determining trends which, when woven together into a composite whole, have made significant contributions to the general program of education in the county. Second, to trace these trends through the certified records which are on file in the different offices in order to build up the body of data needed. The study attempts to define the present status of the school in a manner which will be understandable and meaningful to the layman.

Delimitations

The study has been limited to an examination of the elementary school with emphasis upon the one-room rural school in Nemaha County. Two reasons exist for this limitation: 1. The rural elementary school has been under vigorous attack during recent years. 2. It was felt that the secondary school constitutes the basis for a similar study in itself.

Two reasonably well defined philosophies are brought into sharp focus almost daily. One view holds that the rural school is inadequate to meet the challenge of modern society and the other believes that the rural school is good enough as it is today. Since these two philosophies outline the thinking of a great majority of rural people, it seemed necessary to confine the study to the rural school.

Need for the study

At the close of the nineteenth century, the eastern states were beginning to view their public school systems quite critically. As the pioneer moved westward in search of a place to build his home, he brought with him an earnest zeal for a decent educational opportunity for his children. Because of the many hardships, problems and difficulties which had to be faced, the pioneer did not provide an adequate system of school records; each school seemed to exist as a tiny empire within itself and the variance in procedures was determined by the people themselves. Each school was different in many respects. Information pertinent to the general problem of rural education has been scattered throughout the records in such a manner as to make it valueless to the layman. It may be concluded with reasonable certainty that many of the concepts influencing rural education in Nemaha County, Nebraska are based upon inadequate and incomplete information.

If the assumption is accepted that a knowledge of what has been done in the past is essential to the development of future plans, a thorough study of the schools needed to be made. During the past three quarters of a century the schools of Nemaha County have made notable contributions to society. An understanding of the schools of the past should assist in re-capturing their worthwhile elements and characteristics for the schools of the future.

Sources of data

The chief source of data for the study was the official records which are on file in the office of county superintendent of Nemaha County. Considerable examination of similar records in neighboring counties was made in order to evaluate the stability of these records. The biennial reports of the state superintendent of public instruction to the governor of the State

of Nebraska have been very useful in the preparation of the report.

Six generations of the writer's people have lived in Nemaha County. Throughout the years, the story of education in the county has been a source of constant interest and enthusiasm to him. As a result of this curiosity, some of the detail for the study has been obtained from personal interviews. In almost every instance, accounts obtained through these personal interviews have been validated by the different records.

The History Of The State of Nebraska, published in 1882 by the Western Historical Company of Chicago, Illinois, has been an invaluable source of general and statistical data. The book is massive consisting of several thousand pages and, although specific editorship is not clearly shown, it is believed that various individuals associated with the University of Nebraska¹ assisted with the editing of the work. Researchers visited the different communities to gather the information upon which the literature of the book is based. A very considerable portion of the book is purely documentary in nature.

A History of Nemaha County written by John W. Dundas has been used extensively. This work is based upon newspaper accounts of the various happenings within the county dating back to the earliest period of the county's history. The book is written, primarily, from the standpoint of a small-town publisher and is colored somewhat by what seemed to be personal interpretation; however, the factual detail stands up very well.

The Commissioner's Reports are the official reports of the Commissioner of Education in the executive branch of the federal government. These reports have served as a stabilizing force in evaluating local data.

1. Statement verified by letter from Librarian, University of Nebraska.

The data contained in the Commissioner's Reports have not been used extensively for the reason that these data, although accurate, were sometimes incomplete as to detail.

Definition

The rural school is defined as a school located in the open country and serving only the local community. The unit is the small local district consisting, generally, of four sections of land.

CHAPTER II

Backgrounds of Education in Nemaha County, Nebraska

"The first thought of a large majority of those who came to the Territory was not one looking to permanency of residence or the ultimate prosperity within the limits of the new West. It was the purpose of nearly all to find sudden wealth that they might return to the East and spend the remainder of their lives. And under such burdening weight began the existence of a region, in its social character and civilized progression, which has proven its powers to be greater than the accumulated force of adverse circumstances."

1

The above quotation was taken from an address delivered by A. S. Paddock before the Board of Agriculture during the Nebraska State Fair in the year 1878. Apparently, the dominating force behind the earliest settlement was to gain wealth quickly and return to a more settled country where living would be less hazardous and burdensome compared with the rigors of the West. Only a few white men had traversed the upper reaches of the Missouri River prior to the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Those who had gone before were hunters and trappers interested only in the taking of a harvest of furs. Doubtless the vivid and glowing accounts which the men of the Lewis and Clark party carried back with them had contributed greatly to the beginning of the first great movement of people into Nebraska. Unrest throughout the country as a result of the growing intensity of the slavery question caused many to turn their faces westward.

The hardy and reckless came first. Their enthusiasm for civic and social development was measured only in terms of the extent which such activity would increase their personal gain. Some historians consider the Panic of 1857 as the end of the era of speculation and the beginning of a new period of westward extension.

The first attempt to create a territory west of the Missouri River was

1. A. S. Paddock was an early social and civic leader and an authority on Agriculture.

1
 made in the year 1851.¹ Due to the seriousness of the slavery question at this time, the Congress failed to consider the possibility of a new territory. In 1853, a bill was drawn in the House of Representatives designed to create the "Territory of the Platte". The bill included nearly all the territory which is now Nebraska. Representatives from the southern states were most vigorous in their opposition to the bill because they felt that the new territory would be free soil. The forces which were opposed to the bill prevailed and it was tabled. The thirty-second session of Congress convened on December 5, 1853, with a large democratic majority in both houses. Considerable pressure was being brought to bear upon the legislators by those who were clamoring for the right to locate in the new land. These people felt that they could not risk the hazards of the country until they could be partially protected by territorial law. By this time, the Indians of the plains were beginning to awaken to the significance of so many white men in their country. The bill creating the Nebraska Territory finally passed and was signed by President Pierce on May 30, 1854.

Educational matters received early attention. At the first session of the territorial legislature Simpson University of Omaha, Nebraska University at Fontenelle and the Nebraska City Collegiate and Preparatory Institute were founded and incorporated. In 1822, the first school in Nebraska was opened at Fort Atkinson in territory which later became a part of the state. 2
 In a tiny log school house, Sergeant Mumford directed his school for the Indian children in a study of the Three R's. The era which followed this humble beginning seemed to have been a steady progression of effort on the part of various religious orders to bring education to the Indians and the few

1. History of the State of Nebraska Western Historical Company, Chicago, 1882 page 101

2. Hughes, Hayden D. Beginnings of Formal Education in Nebraska Master's Thesis, University of Nebraska, 1934, page 8

white children who had come to the new territory. The literature of this period indicated quite strongly that this educational work was stimulated by a desire on the part of the missionaries to bring Christianity to the savages and, at the same time, to offer a stronger inducement to the immigrant family to settle in the area.

The desire to found institutions of higher education burned strongly in the minds of the pioneers. Within two years from the time the first legal settler entered Nebraska, provision had been made for seven universities¹ and colleges.

Mount Vernon College, located at Peru in Nemaha County was a private school under the auspices of the Methodist Church, founded in the year 1866. After one year of operation the property of the college was given to the Normal Board. The first term of school devoted to the training of teachers² opened October 24, 1867. The fact that the normal school was the property of the State of Nebraska seemed to have given rise to a very notable increase in enthusiasm for education in Nemaha County. Many of the people felt that a more abundant supply of trained teachers would be available for the schools.

There is to be found in the literature of the settlement of Nebraska a summary of the early schools of Nemaha County. This account covers the schools from the earliest date as a territory to the year 1880. Because this account seemed to have been based upon fact and was accurately supported by other information, it has been presented in its exact form:

The earliest schools in Nemaha County of which the old settlers have any recollection was taught by Miss Angelina Cole, in the summer of 1855, three miles west of Brownville, in what is now known as London

1. Siampos, Helen Early Education in Nebraska Nebraska Historical Society, quarterly bulletin, Nebraska History, June, 1948, page 119.
2. Sheldon, Addison E. Semi-centennial History of Nebraska page 147.

Precinct. The school house was built of logs. She taught thirty pupils for three months. The first teacher in Brownville was H.S. Thorpe, who taught twenty scholars in the autumn of 1855, in a cottonwood edifice, 18'x18' feet, located on Main Street between First and Second. His first term was of three months duration.

The first house erected in the county, designed especially for school purposes was completed in October of 1857 and built at the corner of Sixth and Atlantic Streets, at a cost of \$950. On Monday, July 18, 1859, the High School of Brownville was opened by T. W. Tipton in charge of advanced classes. The Congregational Church building was used as the school house. Public notice was given that tuition was free again to all actual residents of the Brownville School District. Non-residents admitted on moderate terms....

On the 15th of April, 1867, the Brownville High School commenced a six-month's term in the large new building under the supervision of Charles A. Baker an experienced Principal and a graduate of Harvard University. Over two hundred scholars were enrolled in this first term of high school.

Brownville College was organized in December 1859, with the Rev. T.W.Tipton as President; D. C. Sanders, Chairman of the Board of Trustees; R.W. Furnas, Secretary; R. Brown, Treasurer. The Medical College was organized at the same time, and a course of lectures delivered to a class of twenty-five. But one course of lectures was delivered.¹

The individual who had been more concerned with the problem of gaining immediate wealth than with genuine civic and social development did not long remain as a leader in the community; either he moved on west, returned to the East or became a believer in the future of the new land. As the state developed from a vast and unexplored region into one where at least a semblance of stability existed, social and civic development began anew. An overwhelming majority of all classes of people seemed resolved to remain and face the hardships of the wilderness in order to have their own homes.

One of the first thoughts of this early citizen after his house had been completed was to build a school house for his children. Regardless of

1. History of the State of Nebraska, Western Historical Company, Chicago, 1882, Page 1142

station in life or standing in the community, the people were almost universally of the common opinion that the first community enterprise should be the organization of a school. The story is told of how a band of desperadoes, sometimes called, "Jayhawkers", joined with the men of the community to exterminate a fire which threatened to destroy the tiny log schoolhouse.¹ The leader of the band stood guard with loaded pistol in order to guarantee the safety of his men as they battled the blaze. History does not accurately record the final outcome of the fire but the chronicle does serve to show that even the most lawless character of the frontier was willing to subscribe to the belief that a public school was of considerable importance.

The years from 1854 to 1867, referred to as the territorial period, saw a sharp increase in population. The Civil War had been brought to a conclusion and many people throughout the country found themselves faced with the serious problem of rehabilitation. According to Dundas,² as many as fifty families arrived in Brownville during a single week. The new arrivals were no longer driven by the zeal for quick and easy wealth; the concept had changed. These people were resolved to face the dangers of the new land in order to "grow up with the country".

Usually their worldly goods consisted of a yoke of oxen, a few simple household tools, a plowshare and a musket. The problem of building and furnishing a school must have seemed tremendous in its proportions. Despite the many difficulties and hardships, churches were erected almost simultaneously with the school and home. When it became evident that the new community was to be permanent the price of farm land rose rapidly and the railroads were extended to the various communities. Thus a ready market for the farmers'

1. Statement based upon personal interview with a person who was an eye witness to the event described.

2. Dundas, John W. History of Nemaha County, Page 5.

grain and livestock was created. The door of progress in the new land had
been opened.

SUMMARY

The early citizen of Nemaha County was an adventurer. His primary purpose in coming to the wilderness was to gain wealth as quickly as possible and return to his former home. This type of person did not long remain.

As the period of speculation ended the type of settler changed from one dominated by the zeal for adventure to the family unit which was interested in building a home. Educational matters received early attention. Schools were erected almost as soon as the last log was laid into the cabin wall. The zeal for higher education burned high in the new community. Within a short time after the founding of Brownville this community had established a college.

The pattern of progress soon became clearly defined. Railroads penetrated the wilderness. The railroad brought into the community an element of lawlessness reminiscent of the early period but it also brought to the wilderness farmer a ready market for his grain, livestock and fruit.

CHAPTER III

The Significance of Population Trends in Nemaha County, Nebraska

The trend in population in Nemaha County has not always followed the general pattern of settlement throughout the state of Nebraska. Doubtless the fact that the "Territory of the Platte" lay directly in the route to the gold fields of California and the Oregon Territory had a significant influence upon the early settlement of the county. The settlers came in waves. It was not uncommon for an entire wagon-train to locate on one community simultaneously. Thus, almost over night the population of a community might be doubled. One may readily appreciate how much local activity must have been intensified. It seemed that the resultant confusion had a marked effect upon the school.

The first census of the Nebraska Territory was taken in the year 1854. The area was divided into six districts with a deputy marshal in charge of each district. Writers of the period were inclined to discount the accuracy of this census for two reasons: 1. a great many people were not particularly anxious to have their whereabouts known to the general public. 2. The facility for taking an accurate census was greatly limited thus causing many of the remotely situated families to be overlooked. However, allowance for these factors does not destroy the importance of the fact that, at the mid-point of the nineteenth century, the area which was to become Nebraska was practically an unexplored and uninhabited wilderness.

An effort has been made to maintain a constant comparison of population between the state and Nemaha County. The county is situated on the west bank of the Missouri River and for many years Brownville was the last outpost to the West. The first official census is presented in Table I to support the statement that the growth in population during the early period was very rapid.

Table I

The First Census of the Nebraska Territory Taken in the Year
1854

District	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	236	26	181	190	214	4	851
2	185	24	138	127	127	9	614
3	95	16	101	44	97	0	353
4	250	29	131	115	120	0	645
5	74	1	8	13	10	0	106
6	89	7	12	27	27	0	163
	929	103	560	533	594	13	2,732

Explanation of headings: 1-white males over 21 years of age; 2-white males from 16-21; 3-males under 16 years of age, 4-females 16 years and upward; 5-females under 16 years of age; 6-slaves; 7-total for all districts.

The discovery of gold in California doubtless caused many people to embark upon the long and hazardous journey to the West. The "Land of the Platte"¹ was in the direct route to the gold fields. The traveler, weary from his long trip up the river, may have been in a receptive frame of mind as he viewed for the first time the boundless extent of rich growth of grass and wild fruit along the Missouri River. This extensive growth may have suggested to him the great possibilities for agriculture in the area. Tales of wild lawlessness and the dangers posed by the savage Indians of the plains probably tended to discourage the less hardy from continuing the journey. Men who had brought their families were more strongly influenced by these conditions than the others and as a result the number of children and youth among the settlers was greater than the number of adults. Much of the equipment was badly worn and in need of repair. It was not uncommon for a wagon train to set out from Brownville only to return in a short time, the leaders having decided to settle in the country.

¹ The name given to the territory which was to become Nebraska.

In the year 1855, the recorded population of the entire state of Nebraska¹ was less than five thousand persons. Table II presents the population figures for Nebraska from the year 1855 to 1950.

Table II
Population of Nebraska From the Year 1855 to the Year 1950

1855	4,494	1900	1,066,300
1860	23,341	1910	1,192,376
1870	122,993	1920	1,296,376
1880	482,402	1930	1,377,963
1890	1,062,656	1940	1,315,834
		1950 ²	1,297,000

Table II indicates rather clearly that the growth in population for the state of Nebraska was rapid during the early years. By the close of the nineteenth century the peak of the trend had been reached. The economic depression which gripped the nation during the years between 1930 and 1940 reduced the employment possibilities on the farms to a very low level and many people were forced to move to the cities where the possibility for government sponsored employment was much greater. It is reasonable to assume that many of these people who were forced to move may have migrated to other states.

During the early years the settlers came to Nemaha County in great numbers. Entire communities came into being almost over night. As a consequence of this trend, the demand for the better farm land became great and as the selling price of land rose, many of the local school districts found themselves in possession of considerable sums of money. During the period when the value of taxable property was increasing rapidly the tax rate was being steadily lowered.

1. History of the State of Nebraska Western Historical Company, Chicago, 1882
Page 170

2. Unofficial estimate of the Bureau of the Census, 1950

At a comparatively early date a new trend emerged. People were beginning to leave the rural areas and move to the cities and villages. In the absence of definite research data, the reason for this migration became a matter of conjecture. It is known that farming during the early years was difficult. Much of the labor was performed by hand involving long hours each day. Usually, the farm home was almost devoid of the conveniences common to the city dweller. The rural school played a vital role in this trend in that very little of its program was designed to develop the advantages of rural life. An analysis of the trend of movement toward the cities and villages is presented in Table III.

Table III

Population of Nemaha County by Precincts During the Years 1870,
1880, 1920, 1930, and 1940

Precincts	1870	1880	1920	1930	1940
Aspinwall	572	735	649	523	442
Auburn, city			2863	3068	3639
Bedford	195	580	688	696	579
Benton	456	951	867	871	812
Brownville	2386	1601	645	638	836
Brownville, city	2100	1200	463	426	581
Douglas			598	623	564
Glenrock	393	880	921	785	727
Julian, village			181	156	136
Island		187	129	133	98
Lafayette	618	1072	1254	1157	1077
Brock, village			274	328	373
Peru	1164	1187	1434	1373	1590
Peru, village			783	835	1024
St. Derooin	276	190	55	57	23
Washington	373	789	1262	1196	1175
Johnson, village			255	288	301
Nemaha	628	908	820	731	808
Nemaha, city			320	396	379
London		699	572	510	411
Totals	9111	10979	15033	14790	15575

Except for the village of Brownville, there appeared to be a definite trend toward an increase in population until the year 1920. Brownville was,

in the early years, a landing point for the river steamers. Also, ferries operated at this point as a service to the wagon trains and during the period when the river was either frozen over or at a low state it could be crossed with comparative safety. Many of the westward trails focalized at this point. As a result of these combined influences, Brownville had attained a population of several thousand inhabitants at the time of its incorporation. The period from 1880 to 1920 was omitted from the study for the reason that the trend during these years was so indistinct that inclusion of the figures did not seem justified. The conclusion that migration away from the rural areas of Nemaha County was continuing as late as 1950 was further supported by the fact that eighteen houses in the rural areas of the county were vacant despite the fact that an acute housing shortage existed in nearly all of the towns of the county. The trend away from the rural areas has had a significant effect upon the schools; the rural school found itself almost without students and the village school was crowded beyond its normal capacity.

According to official census reports¹ the per cent of rural population as compared with urban population in Nebraska changed from approximately 95 per cent rural in 1870 to 60.9 per cent rural in 1940. The trend away from the rural areas has been somewhat stronger in Nemaha County. In 1920 the per cent increased to exactly 50 per cent. An examination of the population trend in Nemaha County clearly indicated that while urban population was increasing, the total population of the county had fallen from a high of 13,000, in 1900 to 11,201 in 1950.

1. Bureau of the Census, Nebraska 1940

Table IV has been introduced at this point for the purpose of demonstrating how distinctly this trend had manifested itself during the first forty years of the twentieth century. There appears to be a discrepancy between Table III and Table LV for the year 1940. The statistical data for Table III was taken from the records in the office of the county clerk of Nemaha County. A thorough study of this discrepancy revealed that during the decade 1930 to 1940, river improvement work sponsored by the Corps of Engineers, United States Army, had brought into the county an estimated two thousand persons who were included in the data used in Table III but not included in the records of the county clerk.

Table IV¹

Census of Nemaha County From 1860 to 1940

1860	3,139	1910	12,887
1870	7,593	1920	12,547
1880	10,451	1930	12,356
1890	11,250	1940	12,781
1900	13,095	1950	11,201

These temporary citizens had established homes in the county, their children attended the public school yet many were not recorded on the tax rolls.

The trend in school population followed the general population trend rather closely until 1920. Thereafter, the loss in rural school enrollment was far in excess of the loss in population. It seemed logical to conclude that the stress of the depression years added to the general trend away from the rural areas had accounted for the sharp decrease in enrollment in the rural schools.

1. Data secured from the Bureau of the Census, Nebraska, 1940

The decline in rural school enrollment became distinct in the year 1893. Prior to this time the change had not been sufficiently distinct and uniform to be considered a trend. Table V is an analysis of the enrollment of the rural schools of Nemaha County from 1893 to 1949. A comparison of these statistics with the data contained in Table IV indicates that the decrease in rural school enrollment was considerably greater than the general downward trend in population.

Table V
Rural School Enrollment of Nemaha County
From 1893 to 1949

Year	School enrollment	Per cent of Decrease
1893	3,573	0
1900	2,198	36
1910	2,152	2.5
1920	1,776	17
1930	1,252	29
1940	691	81
1949	648	6

Except for the years 1942 to 1946, the city and village schools have shown a slight increase in enrollment each year. During the war years¹ many residents had moved to the production centers throughout the nation to work in defense plants. Approximately seventy per cent of the people who left Nemaha County to work in the war production effort returned to the county at the end of the war.²

1. World War II
2. Statement based upon a personal survey.

SUMMARY

Nebraska developed from an uncharted wilderness into an important state within the period of half a century. Many forces were at work to direct the stream of emigration toward Nebraska. Nemaha County was a focal point for this tide of movement toward the West and as a result, the county was settled very rapidly.

The number of schools increased in proportion to the rapid increase in population. During the early years the great problem of the school was to find sufficient space to house the children. For many years the population trend seemed stable. The effect of powerized machinery and the great economic depression of the decade 1930 to 1940 contributed materially to the migration away from the rural areas of Nemaha County. Because of this trend the enrollment in the rural schools declined steadily down to the year 1949.

CHAPTER IV

Local Support of the Schools of Nemaha County

The general trend in local support of the schools of Nemaha County was interesting from the standpoint of this study. An adequate comparison of this trend with other counties was extremely difficult because many of the early records of neighboring counties were not available for study. Based upon incomplete data, it may be stated that the general trend in local support in neighboring counties has been much the same as the trend in Nemaha County.

Despite the lack of money and the physical hardships which the pioneer was called upon to face, it seemed evident that the early citizen of Nemaha County and Nebraska was willing and anxious to support his school adequately. Table VI presents significant data concerning this matter covering the early period of the state's history.

Table VI

The Per Capita Expenditure for Education in Seven Mid-western States
For the Years 1870 to 1913

State	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910	1913
Nebraska	\$2.61	\$2.45	\$3.19	\$4.13	\$6.27	\$7.48
Dakota ¹	1.29	1.81	3.15	4.00	6.56	6.30
Missouri	.99	1.23	2.03	2.52	3.97	4.63
Iowa	2.70	2.76	3.34	3.81	4.76	7.04
Wyoming	.71	1.37	3.71	2.74	5.46	6.47
Colorado	1.44	2.03	4.08	5.18	6.52	7.39
Kansas	2.24	1.85	3.48	3.14	5.81	6.41

In the year 1870 Nebraska was expending for education an amount almost equal to the educational expenditure in Iowa, a state which had been organized many years earlier. In 1913 this expenditure was the highest of the group

1. North and South Dakota reported jointly until 1900. After this date the figures used in Table VI are averages.

of states under consideration. The per capita expenditure for education during this period in Nemaha County was considerably lower than the statewide expenditure.¹

The value of farm land in Nemaha County rose steadily from 1870 to 1913. During World War I farm land rose in price to almost astronomical heights. This steady increase in the value of real estate together with the sharp increase in the price of farm commodities during the war period had a resounding effect upon the fiscal policy of many of the schools. As additional funds were made available to the school the general levy was reduced with little consideration given to a program of improvement of the school or school site.

In 1912, the sum of \$8,700,008.04² was expended for public education in Nebraska below the secondary level. In 1920, \$19,563,064.19³ was expended for education at both the secondary and elementary level. Of this amount, approximately 68 per cent was expended for the secondary school program in Nebraska. A remainder of slightly more than six millions of dollars was applied at the elementary school level. During this eight year period population increased approximately 8 per cent. The question arose: Has a program of general improvement and development as reflected in the amounts expended for education kept pace with the increase in the value of physical and human resources in Nemaha County? In 1912, the assessed valuation of real and personal property in Nemaha County was \$5,768,274.00; in 1949, this figure had risen to \$26,152,820.00. In 1912, \$58,751.75 Dollars were expended for rural education and in 1949, this figure had risen to \$117,813.78. During the period under study assessed valuations had increased approximately five times while expenditure for education in the rural school had doubled. These data point

1. Expenditure for Nemaha County for 1870 was \$1.51 per capita; for 1913, \$6.43

2. Report of the Commissioner of Education for the year ended June 30, 1912, Vol.

1. Washington, Government Printing Office, 1913

3. Twenty-Sixth Biennial Report of the State Superintendent to the Governor of The State of Nebraska.

rather conclusively to a lag on the part of the rural schools to maintain a general improvement program in keeping with the progress of the community.

What constitutes the general expenditure of a school? Teacher's salary, books and supplies, and general maintenance and repair comprise approximately 95 per cent of the total expenditure for the rural school. In order to show the direction of this trend in Nemaha County since 1912, Table VII has been developed.

Table VII
Expenditure Per Rural School in Nemaha County From 1912 to 1949

Expenditure	1912	1922	1932	1942	1949
Teacher's ¹ Salary	\$355	\$700	\$630	\$645	\$1,430
Textbooks ¹	.97	5.30	2.10	2.04	.96
Repairs and Maintenance	5.50	4.90	2.00	.94	52.00

The tendency toward increasing the teachers' salary seemed to have met constant resistance. In 1912, the rural teacher earned approximately thirty dollars per month. By the year 1942 this figure had increased to \$58.75. This rate of increase was entirely inadequate to meet the increase in the cost of living, personal needs and continued education. The acute shortage of rural elementary teachers in the years 1948 and 1949 brought into sharp focus the extremely low rate of pay. When the local board fully realized the significance of the impact of the teacher shortage, salaries were increased sharply. It was startling to discover that, in the year 1942, one rural district expended for instructional service the sum of two hundred and fifty dollars. The expenditure for textbooks followed the same general pattern. Many of the schools did not recover from the effect of the depression of 1932. During the years between 1912 and

1. The figure in this column is the cost per pupil.

1932, Nemaha County enjoyed a period of considerable prosperity; board members were more willing to supply the necessary teaching materials. By 1932, the trend was sharply downward and in 1949, despite the increase in manufacturing and production costs of school books and materials, the expenditures per pupil had fallen to ninety-six cents.

Very little attention has been given to the maintenance and repair of the school building. Buildings are old.¹ In a few instances money which had been raised by school programs was used to redecorate the interior of the school house; occasionally, people of the district furnished the necessary materials and labor to redecorate.² In 1949, the Legislature enacted a law designed to equalize taxation within the rural districts. The influence of this legislation may have caused a number of districts to expend considerable sums in the belief that such expenditure could be applied on the refund under the law. Several districts where school had not been held for many years made plans to redecorate the interior of the building completely even though the probability that school would never again be held in the building was great. Inasmuch as the Blanket Tax Law does not permit a district to include in its refund claim and expenditure for repair of the building, very little of this proposed work was done.

The trend in the city and village school has been different. The long and tedious process of expansion of the secondary school had its beginning in Nemaha County at the turn of the twentieth century. The challenge of a changing society caused many parents to develop a strong and virile interest in their school. People lived somewhat closer to the activities of the village school and, as they became increasingly aware of the many possibilities of an expanded curriculum, their willingness to pay for such improvement correspondingly

1. The average age of the rural school building in 1950 was sixty-seven years.
2. The Blanket Tax Law, 1949

increased. Since 1912, the expenditure for general improvement of the village schools of Nemaha County has increased steadily. Table VIII, which is similar to Table VII, has been presented for the purpose of comparison.

Table VIII
Expenditure Per City and Village School in Nemaha County From 1912 to 1949

Expenditure	1912	1922	1932	1942	1949
Teachers' Salary ¹	\$650	\$1260	\$1330	\$1377	\$2260
Textbooks Per Pupil	3.15	6.50	2.80	1.60	4.00
Maintenance and Repair	305	630	523	640	690

In considering the total cost of maintenance it seemed worthy of mention that every village and city school in Nemaha County had during the period under consideration either erected a new building or made major repairs upon the old structure. Careful personal investigation revealed that a certain amount of maintenance and repair has been in process almost daily. Usually, the custodian was engaged on a full-time basis and was able to make minor repairs as needed.

The selection of materials and supplies to be used in the schools was, as a general rule, in the hands of the superintendent or some other responsible administrative officer who was trained to do this work. As the school program broadened in scope to meet the needs of the youth of the community the cost of the service increased.

The procedures followed in supplying textbooks and general school materials to the rural schools were subjected to the consideration of a number of variables. Quite often, a teacher who was new to the school would set about in a systematic manner to secure the necessary supplies. Sound and careful planning and a strong personal public-relations program seemed to be the strongest factors of influence in the local community. In a few instances a vigorous drive to

1. The figures used in this table are based upon salaries of all teachers except administrative officers.

obtain adequate teaching tools proved embarrassing to the teacher. Although no objection was raised at the time the materials were purchased, the teacher sometimes failed in re-election on the grounds that she was "too expensive".

There seemed to be no valid source from which information concerning the supplies used in the earliest schools could be found. During the pioneer era transportation facilities were very limited. The teacher and pupil alike were adjusted to the task of conducting a day of school with the slate and the blackboard. The year 1895 was selected as a reference point upon which an analysis of this phase of the problem could be based for two reasons: 1. There appeared to be an educational awakening throughout America at this time. 2. The Free Textbook Law was passed in the year 1891. Table IX presents pertinent data concerning this problem in a composite form as a convenience in evaluating the significance of the trend.

Table IX
Total Expenditure For Supplies and Textbooks Per Year In The
Rural Schools of Nemaha County From 1895 To the Year 1945

Year	Total Expended	Number of Pupils	Cost Per Pupil
1895	\$2,141.02	2,741	\$0.77
1905	3,588.71	1,950	1.83
1915	3,554.83	1,664	2.13
1925	1,123.23	1,630	.69
1935	1,136.33	877	1.29
1945	2,180.50	588	3.72

A marked decrease is shown for the year 1925. Extended investigation and personal inquiry led the writer to surmise that the economic depression which followed World War I had re-activated the tendency on the part of many people to vigorously attack all expenditures for public services. Apparently, from 1920 to 1925, the pressure to reduce school taxes had been great because each year this expenditure had been decreased materially.

Many of the districts did not list an expenditure for textbooks in the annual report. Pressing this matter somewhat farther, it was determined that the schools showing no expenditure for textbooks and supplies contained 32 per cent of the total rural school enrollment during the years under study. This fact gave rise to the conclusion that the schools having larger enrollments tended to spend less for supplies and books than the schools with small enrollments. Some influential people in the local district objected to the purchase of books and supplies for the children of migrant workers. The reason given for this objection, in one case, was stated in a letter to the county superintendent: "These people do not pay taxes and will leave the district when corn-shucking is over."

For many years it has been a common practice for boards of education to authorize the teacher to purchase supplies through local channels. This practice seemed to have the effect of simplifying the procurement of materials. Many rural districts, in 1950, carried an open account with local firms. When the teacher purchased supplies the amount was either added to her salary check or charged to the district. An audit of the fiscal reports of the districts revealed that when the teacher paid for the supplies and was reimbursed later by the board, the amount shown as actual salary was in excess of her rate of pay by the exact amount of the supplies purchased. The accounts had never been correctly classified. Basing an opinion upon this evidence it seemed reasonable to assume that the amount of money expended for books and supplies was greater than the amount shown in the certified records. There can be no doubt, however, that the children in many of the rural districts were forced to attend school day after day without an adequate supply of textbooks and general supplies being available to them.

The real significance of the procedure which has been outlined in the foregoing paragraph was not that the amount of money expended for textbooks had been greatly limited but rather, the manner in which the selection of these books was often made. Many times the problem of selection of a textbook was placed in the hands of a clerk in the local store. In order to demonstrate the extremity to which this careless practice has been carried, a specific situation is described in detail. The teacher of a rural school had submitted an order for supplies and textbooks to a local firm. Within the body of this order was found the following statement: "Reading, any good book". The selection of the basic reading text for this school had been placed in the hands of a local business man.

The textbook libraries of the rural schools of Nemaha County were carefully inventoried and evaluated in 1949 on the basis of an accepted check-list. It was found that the quality and quantity of satisfactory textbooks in the schools which followed the practice of consulting with the county superintendent before selecting the book was much higher than in the schools where no organized system of procurement of supplies was used.

The literature dealing with the subject of free textbooks for the public schools contained many statements leading to the conclusion that this law met with stern resistance when it was first proposed. Direct resistance to the law has lessened greatly in recent times. The tendency toward careless procurement of textbooks resulting in unsatisfactory selection was apparent in Nemaha County in 1951. Many of the rural schools do not own a sufficient number of textbooks to enable the teacher to plan and develop an adequate program based upon modern concepts of curriculum-making.

1. Check-list provided by the office of the state superintendent.

Crabtree stated:

"The argument which State Superintendent Thomson made in his first biennial report, 1878, for free text-books was a voice crying in the wilderness to prepare the way for our splendid text-book law passed by the legislature of 1891 under the administration of State Superintendent A.K.Goudy to whom the law will always stand as a monument."¹

The arguments set forth by Goudy were of considerable interest. It seemed clear that this educator was aware of the problems facing education in Nebraska at this early date. Goudy's arguments were:

1. The necessary books are ready at the beginning of the term.
2. Every pupil has the right kind of books and enough of them.
3. Absolute uniformity is secured.
4. More pupils go to school where books are free.
5. Needed changes can be made without additional cost.
6. It is much cheaper.
7. Where free text-books are furnished, if a man moves into a district his children can go into school at once without further expense.²

The principle of free textbooks for all children has not yet been universally accepted by the several states. Doubtless the set of arguments shown above constitute the foundation for the free textbook law in Nebraska. The ultimate aim of the law has not, in 1950, been achieved because every pupil does not have an adequate supply of well-selected textbooks from which to study. In Nemaha County in the year 1948, one school with four children enrolled in the beginner and first grades did not have a single textbook for these children. The investigation which led to the solution of this problem revealed that all available money had been expended. The actual cost of the materials necessary to supply these children was less than twenty dollars. The average general fund levy in this particular district from the year 1925 to 1950 was 3.2 mills on the dollar of valuation. The valuation of the district in 1950 was in

1. Crabtree, J.W. (Served a part of biennium as state superintendent) Twenty-sixth Biennial Report of the State Superintendent to the Governor.

2. Op.cit. page 403-404

3. The annual report of thss district indicated an expenditure of \$295.00 for playground equipment. \$3.79 were expended for textbooks.

excess of a quarter of a million dollars.

1

Corbett made a study of the problem of free textbooks in 1895. His questionnaire consisted of a series of inquiries concerning the free textbook law. One of the questions asked was: "Is the average condition and care of books better or worse than it was in the same school under individual ownership?" Eighty-six of the replies indicated that the general condition was "better"; thirty-six indicated that the condition was "worse" and forty-three indicated "no noticeable difference". Nearly half of the people who replied to the questionnaire were not in vigorous support of the law and it seemed reasonable to assume that approximately one-fourth of the replies demonstrated hostility to it. By 1900, general objection to the law had diminished greatly.

2

Jackson reported that in 1897 only 18 per cent of the replies to an inquiry concerning the law were in favor of repealing it. The chief argument advanced in favor of repeal was: "Individual ownership would result in better care of books".

1. Corbett, H. R. Fourteenth Biennial Report of the State Superintendent To The Governor of Nebraska.

2. Jackson, W. R., State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1897-98

SUMMARY

During the early period of the state's history the people of Nebraska and Nemaha County were anxious to maintain an adequate school for their children. The problem of maintaining a school was constantly before the community. It was not possible for the early citizen to become complacent about his school. Population increased very rapidly; the enrollment of the school might be doubled almost over night. The school was the nerve-center of the community.

As communities became stabilized this universal zeal for a good school waned. Great economic changes were taking place; farm land increased in value very rapidly and the railroads and communication systems followed closely in the footsteps of the pioneer. The "Spelling Bee" no longer held the interest of the citizen. His horizons of interest widened greatly.

Chapter IV is not intended as an indictment against the people of Nemaha County. Great technological changes were taking place in every community and because of these changes the interest in the local community seemed to assume a position of secondary importance in the minds of many influential people. The lack of professional leadership in the office of county superintendent over a long period of time had permitted this concept to become deeply imbedded in the thinking of a great many community leaders.

Statistical data dealing with this important matter clearly indicated that the rural schools of Nemaha County have not been improved in accordance with the general improvement in rural life. Many farm homes have been modernized extensively but generally, the rural school is neither modern, efficiently equipped or attractively appointed. Many rural schools are dark, drab and unpleasant in appearance.

CHAPTER V

The Development of the Rural Schools of Nemaha County

The Legislature of 1875 repealed a major portion of the original school law and enacted in its stead much of the law upon which the common school rests today. This new legislation provided for the annual meeting of the electors of the local district, established qualifications for electors, provided the structure for the organization of a district, provided for the qualifications and hiring of the teacher and the purchase of school property. Aside from minor changes, the language of the 1875 laws and the laws of the present is almost identical. Complete local autonomy seemed to have been the chief purpose and intent of the law and when this goal had been achieved, the law was permitted to stand almost unchanged for many years.

Within a short time after the first settlers arrived in Nemaha County, the "little school house on the hill" began to dot the countryside. Many interesting historical chronicles were found which, when woven together, served to tell the story of how the early communities had their beginnings. An example of how thinly the thread of circumstance had woven its pattern across the new land is presented at this point because of its great interest. In 1862,¹ only a few years after the first settlers had come, a wealthy merchant and his wife from the East purchased a major portion of the land on which the present city of Auburn now stands. These people immediately began making plans for the founding of a city. The wife was very enthusiastic until she discovered, with considerable emphasis, that her closest neighbor objected forcefully to the new city because it "would interfere with her chicken range". The good lady, it is related, was crestfallen and unhappy at such frail objection. In many

1. Dundas, John W. History of Nemaha County, 1895. Page 8

cases the selection of the school site was the subject of objections such as the one related here. Despite the conflict, the year 1863 saw a grist mill erected on the Nemaha River near the present city of Auburn; soon a blacksmith shop was established with the postoffice and a lumber mill following in order. The new community was launched and as it grew the thoughts of its citizens turned toward the building of a school house.

The concensus seemed to be that the ideal district should consist of four sections of land. At this early date, the four sections probably were adequate. Roads were little more than trails and some of the section lines had not yet been established and developed. With the passing of time, a few of the district boundaries have been changed. Usually these changes have been brought about by the condition of the roads and the changing of natural barriers.

The trend in building construction has been easy to study. Many of the present school buildings are the original buildings erected when the district was organized. Generally, the school site is located at a point near the crest of a hill as a safeguard against the hazards of flood and to provide adequate drainage. Further, nearly all the residents were very proud of the school and were desirous that all travelers should be able to identify it immediately. The school seemed to have been the trade-mark of the community. Construction varied only slightly. Most of the buildings are of wood construction. A few were made of brick probably because of the presence of a local brick factory. Two buildings are of native stone. Dimensions vary from twenty-six to thirty-two feet in width and from thirty-six to forty feet in length. Except in the case of the more recently constructed buildings, the sides contain only two or possibly three small windows. A survey made in 1948 revealed that only 18 per cent of these buildings met the minimum requirements for light.

When the natural light was supplemented by electric lighting of the newest type. Approximately 75 per cent of the total expenditure at the school site has been upon the exterior of the buildings. The interior of many of the buildings is unattractive, drab and dirty. A name inscribed upon the wall of one of the rural school rooms was accompanied by the date: December 16, 1908.

Careful examination of this detail revealed that the student whose name appeared on the wall was a student of this school at the time. It has been assumed, since the writing was legible and in view in 1948 that this room had not been redecorated for forty years.

Outbuildings consist, in the main, of a fuel house often located at the far end of the site and two toilets. As late as 1900, the annual report of the director to the county superintendent contained space devoted to reporting the general condition of the outbuildings. Many of these early reports contained the comment, "no privies". The matter of repair and maintenance has been a problem for many years. A letter found in the files of the office of county superintendent summarizes the problem quite well.

To School Officers:

School will begin in a few weeks. Now is the time to look after the repairing and papering of the school room, and getting supplies.

Many school houses need painting, the walls of some need papering and some rooms need new seats. The outbuildings should be looked after. It is against the law for boys' and girls' outbuildings to be together, under the same roof. They should be in opposite corners of the school ground. The outbuildings in some districts are so defaced with profanity and obscene pictures that they must be torn down and replaced by new ones. Others need new vaults. Please attend to these buildings especially. Your children learn more evil in outbuildings at school than in any other place. The greatest work of the school is to make the children good citizens with clean morals and pure thoughts. Directors, teachers and superintendents should always bear this in mind.

Supply the school with wash basin, soap, towels, comb and looking glass. A water tank should be in every school especially those which

have no well. Much sickness comes from the school water bucket.

The Nemaha County Teachers Institute will be held August 14-18. On Friday afternoon, August 18th, State Superintendent J.M.McBrien will address the institute. Other prominent school men will be present at the time and are invited to attend all sessions of the institute.

Very Truly,
Signed
County Superintendent,
August 2, 1904

Approximately 60 per cent of the schools have a water supply at the site. Many of the wells tested failed to pass the bacteriological tests. At one school site the well was insulated, in 1948, against freezing by a framework built around the pump and securely packed with barnyard manure.

In a few instances the school site has been landscaped in such a manner as to make the campus very attractive but generally, no attention has been given to this important detail. One district insisted upon allowing the school ground to grow up to tall native grass because, it was stated, the hay is sold. The selling price of the hay has been \$1.50.

Nearly all of the titles are warranty deeds stating that for "one dollar in hand paid"¹ the title to one acre, more or less was transferred to the school district. Often the language of the deed stated that, should the district be dissolved or fail to maintain itself as a distinct entity, the title to the site should revert to the land from which it had originally been set aside. One district holds a title in fee simple.

The records in the office of county superintendent of Nemaha County contain very little data concerning the training and experience of the rural teacher. Teachers employed in the Class I districts for the years 1940-1950 had earned an average of 36.7 hours of college credit and had taught an average of 3.4

1. Data taken from the deed record in the office of the County Clerk.

years. In 1947, 39 per cent of the teachers of the rural schools were temporarily certified, 47 per cent held a third grade elementary certificate and the remaining 14 per cent held a certificate of higher rank. A rather striking detail of the study of certification was brought to light. During the period under consideration the temporarily certified teachers had earned nearly four times the college credit and had slightly more than five times the experience as the regularly certified teachers.

The lack of an adequate physical plant and equipment seemed to have had a significant effect upon the length of the school term of the early school. Table X is placed in the study in order to demonstrate the trend during the first fifty years of our existence as a state.

Table X

The Length of the School Term in Days in Six Mid-western States From 1870 to 1913

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910	1913
Nebraska	72	82	140	135	174	169
Kansas	116	120	135	126	163	172
Missouri	90	104	129	144	155	161
Iowa	130	148	156	160	172	173
Wyoming		119	120	110	140	135
Colorado	92	132	144	149	156	175

The slight decrease in the number of days taught in the year 1900 seemed to have been due to the fact that many of the rural schools in the western portion of the state of Nebraska were being organized during this time and, in the process of organization, many schools were unable to maintain a full length term. This explanation assumed a higher degree of validity when the trend in other frontier states was examined.

Attendance in the early schools was spasmodic and irregular. Students attended school "in season" which has been interpreted to mean a brief period

1. The Third Grade Elementary Certificate is the lowest grade of certificate issued under Nebraska law.

during the winter months. The problem of discipline was often serious and vexing; it was sometimes dangerous. An account is found of a student in one of the early schools who, becoming provoked, quietly drew a pistol from his pocket and shot the teacher in the thigh.¹ The accuracy of this report cannot be validated except that one of a similar nature was recorded in the records of the county court. Inasmuch as the plaintiff was not present to press the charge the case was closed. Early newspapers contain many vivid accounts of the various disciplinary difficulties encountered in the early school. Quite often, a serious problem of this nature resulted in the closing of the school for a period of several months.

Many of the early teachers were men. In order to secure the services of a male teacher who possessed the physical equipment and a slight knowledge of the Three R's, it was necessary to pay a salary somewhat higher than the rate paid to common labor. For many years during the pioneer era the salary of the rural teacher was adequate when measured in terms of general economic conditions prevailing at the time. When the school had become sufficiently stabilized to enable a female teacher to conduct a school for a few months the salary was reduced. Many school officers felt that since the work was done indoors it should be done for less. Further, since the work was of a sedentary nature it was felt that only a minimum of physical energy was required to conduct a day of school. In fairness to the people who pioneered Nemaha County it should be stated that the problems the citizen called for a practical solution. There seemed to be no other yardstick by which to measure the worth of the teacher but to compare the job with common labor. The general philosophy outlined in this paragraph has been carried down through the years as evidenced

1. The account of this incident taken from the diary of a person who was a scholar in this school at the time of the incident.

by the fact that in the year 1934, the average salary paid to the rural teacher of Nemaha County was less than the rate paid under WPA.¹

It has been a fundamental aim of this study to attempt to maintain a sense of complete fairness in the interpretation of the data. Little evidence was found to show that effort had been made to develop a reasonable understanding between the teacher and the layman relative to the question of salary. A study of the files of local newspapers showed that the first front-page article dealing directly with the problem appeared in the year 1934. Professional leaders and a few lay leaders had long recognized the grave inequalities which existed but, unfortunately, the general public had never been given a decent opportunity to read the writings of professional leaders. The Nemaha County Teachers Association has existed for many years;² the county institute is a matter of legal requirement yet neither of these two professional agencies have approached the problem. An examination of the printed programs of the meetings of these organizations failed to show a single instance where teacher welfare had been a consideration of the group.

Salaries declined sharply during the decade 1930 to 1940. The economic depression prostrated agriculture during these years. Many of the farms did not yield sufficient cash income to pay current operational expense without consideration for other fixed expenditures. The grim spectre of families losing their homes caused rural people to be extremely cautious concerning the expenditure of public funds for any purpose.

A lack of vigorous and informed leadership on the part of the school administrator was clearly demonstrated by the fact that in 1920 the per cent of taxable wealth in Nemaha County which was being devoted to education was almost

1. Work Progress Administration

2. The Nemaha County Teachers Association was organized in 1887.

1

exactly the same as for the state of Nebraska as a whole yet, by the year 1949, the state was expending 1.8 per cent of its wealth for education at all levels and Nemaha County was expending .786 per cent of its wealth in support of the public schools.

The many different accounts which have been written to explain the manner in which communities throughout the country brought about their own recovery from the depression attribute much of the success to local leadership and cooperation among professional and lay people. In nearly every case, the office of county superintendent by the force of a sound public relations program and vigorous leadership, played a leading role in this recovery and rehabilitation. Because of the sharp competition among teachers for positions during this period of economic stress, the boards were able to engage the teacher at a very low salary. As a consequence, the teachers' salary has been forced to absorb much of the lag accounted for during the period between 1920 and 1949.

When the local community has clearly understood the problems of the rural teacher it has shown a willingness to meet the challenge of changing economic conditions. Only a few people have resisted progress. In 1947, the average salary of the rural teacher of Nemaha County was among the lowest in the entire state. However, when parents realized the significance of the impact of the teacher shortage upon their schools, they were willing to pay a salary which would attract a capable teacher.

The value of an adequate school library is almost universally recognized by all persons interested in the educational welfare of youth. Data concerning the school libraries in Nemaha County during the early period has been difficult to obtain. Records were poorly prepared and kept. The problem of providing food, clothing and shelter for the family occupied a prominent place in the

1. In 1920, 1.7 per cent of taxable wealth was devoted to education in Nebraska; At this time, Nemaha County was devoting 1.5 per cent of its wealth to education.

daily activities of the family. Transportation facilities were limited and as a consequence, the plowshare, hardware, seeds and the like occupied a place of high priority on the river steamboat. There seemed to be no place and little disposition for books.

Schools were organized very rapidly during the early years and the task of supplying each pupil with textbooks was extremely difficult if not impossible. Very few of the schools were graded and the general tendency seemed to have been to use whatever books could be obtained. Table XI represents a complete inventory of the supply of books in a certain rural school in the year 1876.

Table XI

Textbooks of a Rural School in Nemaha County in
1876

Subject	Author	Number
Spelling	Webster	12
	Sanders	not given
	National	1
Readers	McGuffey	4
	National	12
	Sanders	1
	Willard	1
	Payson	1
Writing	Dunton	1
	Scribners	6
Arithmetic	Ray's	6
Geography	Mitchell	3
Total		48

The census enumeration which accompanied this report indicated that fifty-eight youth of school age resided in the district and that forty-two of them were regularly enrolled in the school. The director stated that most of the remaining students attended "in season".

The various legislatures of Nebraska have been slow to recognize the importance of the school library in the normal function of a school. Local control of the school has kept this important detail in the hands of board members who are not trained in the internal administration of the school. The concept of

complete local autonomy has had the effect of retarding progress in that it has tended to deny rural youth the privilege of adequate working tools and it has contributed to the tendency to make vital and necessary legislation difficult to obtain. The general failure to meet the needs of rural youth may be attributed in part to inadequate law. An old law which remained on the statute books for many years stated that a district might, at its discretion, set aside annually from the general fund of the district the sum of ten cents per pupil for a library fund. Such legislation merely enabled the local board to purchase these books if it so desired. In 1920, the state superintendent of public instruction made the following recommendation:

"A more effective library law is needed in Nebraska, one that will produce results. As it is, the purchase of books is discretionary with the board. During the last few years very few books have been bought by the fund provided by law. The law should be changed so as to make the purchase of library books obligatory upon the board, except districts where a public library is maintained at public expense."¹

A survey conducted in 1920 by the state superintendent revealed that 63 per cent of the schools in Nebraska had a library. In Nemaha County, according to the 1920 biennial report, 40 per cent of the schools had a library. Approximately all the money used to purchase library books had been earned by the schools. In this same year only one third of the rural schools of Nemaha County owned reference libraries. Twelve of these sets had been published prior to 1900. In many instances this set of so-called library books was found in an obscure place in the school room; the books were found to be in excellent physical condition which fact led to the conclusion that the books were not being used. In 1948, many of these same reference books constituted the only material of its kind available to the student.

The survey referred to in the preceding paragraph indicated that the estimated

1. Crabtree, J.W. Twenty-Sixth Biennial Report of the State Superintendent To The Governor of the State of Nebraska, 1921 Page 49

value of the rural school library, exclusive of textbooks, was fifty dollars. A careful examination of this detail revealed that the cost of this type of reference book was considerably less than fifty dollars. No allowance had been made for obsolescence by the person making the 1920 estimate. Evidence clearly indicated that this estimate was very arbitrary and not based upon research. It was much too high. The value of the library of the normal rural school in Nemaha County in 1949 was eleven dollars per library. This analysis was based upon retail costs less depreciation assuming that the library would be valueless in ten years. Incidentally, many of the same reference sets reported in the 1920 survey were reported in the 1949 survey.

There seemed to have been a tendency on the part of many rural people to treat the problem areas of the rural school with a minimum of consideration. This trend may be traced into the rural school districts throughout the entire middle west. An editorial published in the Iowa Homestead of June, 1905, carried a significant message.

"The farmer is no exception to the rule which makes the welfare of one's children one of the prime aims of human existence. Blessed with an environment which all experience proves to be best for the training of youth, he can hardly fail to realize how vast is the loss involved in a failure to give his sons and daughters the best possible school. It is convincing proof of this consciousness that the farmers of this country have every where established school as an early day after the opening of their homes.

But in the strenuous and arduous labor incident to a pioneer life and a period of rapid development, the rural school has remained more nearly on the level with a generation ago than any other institution associated with farm life. Every other phase of agricultural conditions have shown improvement of the most pronounced extent.

Inferior building, badly cared for grounds, teachers poorly paid and poorly trained for their duties, a large per cent of the schools poorly attended, many others over-crowded, yet ungraded....is the plain unvarnished statement of facts as they exist in seven eighths of the rural schools of the Middlewest."

The records used in this study contained little data concerning the training of the rural teacher. The prospective teacher came to the new community

armed with a simple statement that he or she had taught for a brief period in a certain county or state during the preceding year. If further evidence of qualifications was required, such person would demonstrate his academic accomplishment at a ciphering match or a spelling bee.

It was interesting to discover that a careful examination of the records and reports over a period of many years revealed that only two teachers had taught in Nemaha County without being legally qualified in terms of the requirements defined by law.

SUMMARY

The school was among the first social institutions to be established in the community. In view of the fact that nearly all of Nemaha County's first citizens were residents of the rural areas, the rural school very soon assumed a position of great social significance in the community.

Perhaps no segment of society has shown so little constructive development and improvement during the past fifty years as the rural school. Farm homes have been improved and modernized; farming practices, techniques and equipment have been improved greatly yet the rural school has remained much as it was a half century ago.

As a symbol of progress the antenna of a television set extends majestically from many a rural housetop yet the school house which serves the children of the district is drafty, poorly lighted and sometimes drab in appearance. None are modern. Many of the schools are inadequately supplied with textbooks, the condition of the supplementary library is worse and there is little to motivate and stimulate either the pupil or the teacher.

Salaries have never been at a professional level. In 1950, the average salary of the rural teacher was nearly two hundred dollars below the statewide average. Each year, the task of staffing the rural schools of the county with competent teachers becomes increasingly difficult.

CHAPTER VI

The Certification of Teachers

The practices and methods of certification teachers have been relatively uniform throughout the midwestern states. As population moved westward and a new state was formed this state usually borrowed many of the certification laws from its neighbors. Quite often, this practice had led to the perpetuation of the unsuccessful as well as the successful legislation relating to schools. The importance and necessity of improving the system of certification of teachers was recognized at an early date by educational leaders throughout the nation. The Education Report states:

"A system of examination and certification of those who wish to engage in the occupation of teaching has long been considered an essential part of the public school machinery of a state."¹

A comparison of Nebraska certification law with those of Iowa and Missouri indicated a definite likeness which led to the conclusion that much of Nebraska school law had been adapted from the laws of these states. This trend was significant. It failed to consider the problem of certification from the standpoint of conditions peculiar to Nebraska and further, the mechanics of laws designed for states which had been organized many years before were not always practical or workable in the new community. In the early years, very little attention was given to the problem. The legislature delegated the responsibility to local authorities.² It was not until the abuses of the privilege of certification by local authorities became so apparent as to be inescapable did the legislature make a move toward improvement. Normal schools, both public and private, were empowered to issue certificates. Considerable criticism was voiced concerning the practice for the reason that the county or city

1. Report of the Commissioner of Education, Education Report, 1893-94

2. Local authorities as used here refers to county and city superintendents.

superintendent often found it possible to pay his political debts or exercise favoritism in the matter of certification. Further, teachers who had long since retired could be certified upon the discretion of the county superintendent. Very little attention was given to professional and personal qualifications.

Thus the door was opened to the migratory teacher who dominated the rural school in Nemaha County for many years. For approximately forty years this type of teacher occupied nearly one half the schools of Nemaha County.¹ The migratory teacher was comparable to the "tramp" blacksmith or leather-worker. He came to the community and by demonstrating his superior knowledge of academics at a ciphering match or by means of a set of tricks of legerdemain was immediately engaged by the local school board. Upon the recommendation of this body the county superintendent would usually grant the candidate a certificate. In many instances the formality of an examination or personal interview was waived.

Valid data concerning the certification of the early teacher in Nemaha County² was almost non-existent. The annual reports which were required of each district contained a section entitled, "Name of qualified teacher". In view of the fact that these reports were sworn statements, it has been assumed that the teachers whose names were placed in this section were qualified in accordance with existing law. An examination of 211 reports covering the years from 1870 to 1910 revealed but two cases where an unqualified teacher had been employed. Both situations were explained by the statement that the regular teacher had resigned and time had not permitted the certification of the successor.

The Reading Circle was the chief means of qualifying candidates for

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1. Statement based upon personal interviews with people who attended these early schools.
 2. The first certificate registry was begun in 1910.

certification. Under the leadership of the county superintendent prospective teachers were enrolled at various points throughout the county in an evening class. This activity was usually placed in the hands of the local school principal. As the group completed a specific area of study, an examination was given and those who were able to make a satisfactory grade were given credit points which could be applied toward a certificate of higher rank. Such books as Arnold's, "How To Teach Reading", White's "School Management" and Kern's "Among Country Schools" formed the nucleus of the study program. A printed bulletin issued by the office of county superintendent of Nemaha County on March 4, 1904, gave consider emphasis to the general question of certification.

"All certificates issued by ex-supt. Parriott and not expiring in 1904 will be honored until the time of expiration without question. State Normal Certificates will be honored until expiration. All teachers whose certificates expire in 1904 will be requested to take an examination in the following subjects: Orthography, Reading, Mental Arithmetic, Written Arithmetic, English Composition, English Grammar, Physiology, U.S. History, Theory and Art of Teaching and Elements of Agriculture."¹

At this early date the number of students pursuing a college course leading to a teachers certificate was far short of the demand. Table XII shows the number of students enrolled in teacher training institutions in seven mid-western states in 1896.²

Table XII
Number of Students Enrolled in Normal Training Course
In Seven Midwestern States in 1896

Nebraska	1,501
Missouri	3,510
South Dakota	665
Kansas	2,823
Wyoming	33
Colorado	5,599
Iowa	5,465

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1. This legal requirement was discontinued in 1949.
 2. Report of the Commissioner of Education, Education, Report, 1896

Auburn, Nebr Sept 28/08

The teachers holding

Emergency Certificates:-

Only two were present for the September examination on the 18th. Not being present at that examination is a direct violation of the rule which requires holders of Emergency Certificates to be present at the first examination after the issuance of the certificate. One candidate got dates confused and was absent Sept 26th.

This letter is to urge you to be prepared and present at the October examination, Oct-16-17. If necessary, you had better dismiss school for Friday, 16th, for it will be absolutely necessary for you to finish the examinations at this time. It is my earnest desire to see you continue your schools, and your teaching which, from all indications, is successful, but you must finish your examinations now, for Emergency Certificates are for emergencies only. A time comes when emergency ends and imposition begins. You will be expected Oct-16-17.

Very truly

Geo D Carrington Jr

County Superintendent

In the year 1900, approximately 3,500 rural schools were in operation in Nebraska. The city and village schools claimed nearly all graduates of a teacher training program so it seemed reasonable to conclude that very few of the rural schools were taught by college trained people.

Emergency certificates were issued to those people who did not possess the necessary requirements for a regular certificate but who were willing to improve their professional status by joining a reading circle or attending a normal school.

Changes in the certification laws were made only after the need became very apparent and had worked an extreme hardship on rural youth for many years. In 1921 the Third Grade County Certificate was eliminated and the requirements for the other grades of county certificate were increased materially. The laws were revised in 1938 and again in 1949.

SUMMARY

The certification of teachers was almost completely in the hands of local authorities for many years. It was not until a comparatively recent date that certification became a state function.

During the early years of the state's history the major requirement for a certificate seemed to have been a willingness to teach plus a slight knowledge of the elementary subjects. Scientific methods of teaching were almost completely unknown and unheeded in Nebraska. No attention was given to professional and ethical concepts. There can be little doubt that laxity in facing the problem of certification of teachers contributed very materially and significantly to the general condition which has prevailed in many of the rural schools for many years. The different legislatures have been very reluctant to approach the problem. The legislator has steadfastly answered the question by stating that the law should emanate from the teaching profession and the layman.

Within the framework of the law, the teachers of Nemaha County have been certified during their tenure in the schools. At the present time there is a definite inclination on the part of some board members to almost completely disregard the quality of a certificate as a medium of evaluation of a teacher's worth to the school. The tendency on the part of many teachers has been to comply with the certification laws on a minimum basis.

CHAPTER VII

School District Reorganization

The inclination to reorganize the school district manifested itself many years ago. As early as 1837,¹ Horace Mann advocated the re-establishment of the old town system with the schools organized into larger and more efficient units. It was not until fifty years later that the old district system was abolished in Massachusetts. Throughout the South schools were, on the most part, organized on the county basis due probably to the economic and social conditions peculiar to the region. As the West was settled many of the states followed the Massachusetts system of small local districts even though, at this time, many of the eastern states were ready to abandon the system for a better type of organization.

Some progress has been made in the reorganization of school districts throughout the United States. In the year 1930, there were 150,000 one-teacher schools in the entire country.² By 1944, this number had decreased to 96,000. Very little reorganization has been done in Nemaha County. The same number of districts existed in 1944 as existed in 1930. Many schools were contracting on a temporary basis for the education of their children. In 1930, sixty-three rural schools were in operation in the county; in 1938, at the close of one of the most serious economic upheavals in the history of the nation, the number of one-teacher schools remained almost the same. Enrollment had fallen to less than seven pupils per school.

General public sentiment for a critical re-examination of the public school system grew very slowly in the eastern portion of the country. This growth

1. Encyclopedia of Education Research, revised edition, page 1084
2. op. cit., page 1084

has been even slower in the middlewest. An editorial in the June, 1905, issue of the Iowa Homestead had this to say:

"Is not the present a good time for the farmers to digest the school question and mature plans for consolidating their schools into efficient, modern, graded schools?"

Many professional and civic organizations, realizing the need for a study of the public schools, were able to bring sufficient pressure to bear upon the public mind to pave the way for legislation dealing with the problem. In 1919 the legislature of Nebraska enacted a law entitled, "Consolidated School Districts" which was designed to meet the problems posed by the one-room rural school. The law stated:

All territory in any county of the state shall be districted into districts for the consolidated grade and high school purposes according and under provisions of this act.¹

The apparent intent of this legislature was to pass a law which would unify the elementary and secondary school program. The law created an educational program for the state for all pupils from the kindergarten grade through the twelfth grade. The county committee consisted of three members definitely charged with the responsibility of making preliminary studies, surveys and plans. It further provided that the county board² should meet immediately following passage of the law for the purpose of appointing two electors to serve with the county superintendent as the committee.

The county committee was empowered to make plans for consolidation and when these plans were completed, they were to be submitted to the public for hearing and objection. The law further provided that twenty-five per cent of the electors of the district involved might file an objection with the state superintendent. Upon receipt of this appeal or objection this officer was empowered to call a meeting at the office of the county superintendent of the

1. Compiled Statutes of Nebraska, , 1929 Page 1607

2. County board as used in this sentence refers to the board of county Commissioners

county involved for the purpose of making an investigation of the plan and the objections to it. If sixty per cent of the voters were favorable to consolidation, the proposed new district was established.

Plans covering Nemaha County were worked out and submitted for consideration. No new districts were formed immediately as a result of this law. Two districts resting wholly within the county were formed at a later date and a portion of the county was incorporated into a consolidation in an adjacent county. All of the original plans are on file in the office of the county superintendent; attached to each plan was found petitions of remonstrance. Nearly all of the plans met immediate and vigorous opposition. One of the remonstrances was selected for inclusion in the study because it seemed to embody nearly all of the major objections to reorganization. The remonstrance presented at this point was copied exactly as it appeared in the files of the office of county superintendent of Nemaha County.

"We the undersigned school electors object to the location of the proposed consolidated district for the following reasons:

1. That the intention of the Law as first contemplated and those that have been organized heretofore were for the benefit of the rural districts absolutely, and not for the benefit of the schools in the town or city.
2. And that the great question now today is "How to keep the boys or girls on the farm". We claim that you put our boys and girls in the town or city schools 180 days each year, from the time they are of a school age until they have completed the 12th grade they are not much of Farm Boys and Girls, as they would if they attended one located in the country. The Good Book says train the child in the way he should go, and he will not depart therefrom". If these schools are located in the country they will have absolute rural training, and at recesses and noons they are not on your streets, no errands to run or excuse to be on your streets when school is out they will have no other place to go but to home, and furthermore, who are the men today that are managing our farms, they were raised and educated on the farm, they were not educated in town, think if you will how many that were born on the farm and were educated in town or city while were young that ever went back to the farm and made good farmers.
3. That the proposed district is too large, and it being on one side of the district throws many of us a great distance from school, and that you are increasing the value of Real Estate adjacent to the town which is already the most valuable and decreasing the value of a large part of it away from town. Then on the other hand where some of us that can and are able to, that are a long distance from the school we will provide or move to town and not have the exposure of bad weather and roads in going such long distances. Then if we do and they will not be inclined as well

to go back to the farm Now you claim that we in the country will not have the territory and pupils enough to support and maintain a 12th grade school. You have mapped out for St. Deroin with less than 12 sq. miles with its valuation the least of any in the County to support this same kind of school, And the Great City of Auburn with 53 sq. miles with the most valuable land in the county. Why not give us what the law intended us to have.

Many of the patrons of the consolidated districts have been asked the question: "Would you be willing to return to the old system of local districts?" None have indicated a willingness to do so because they have felt that the educational opportunity for their children was much greater in the consolidated school. The vigorous opposition to the proposed plans for consolidation seemed to have the effect of almost completely suspending activity in this direction.

World War II and its aftermath assisted in creating an education crisis in Nemaha County. During the war the shortage of teachers at the elementary level became acute. Town and city schools were faced with this same problem and were forced to lower the standard requirements somewhat in order to obtain a complete teaching staff. A very considerable number of the good teachers were drawn away from the rural school to work in the defense effort.

As a result of this general condition and because of the steady decrease in enrollment in the rural schools, a new plan of reorganization was introduced in the sixtieth session of the Nebraska Legislature. This plan was defeated by a relatively close vote. On the seventy-second day of the sixty-first session of the legislature, legislative bill number 27 was enacted into law by a vote of thirty-one for the bill, five against and seven not voting. The bill as reported out for final reading read as follows:

A bill for an act relating to education; to define terms; to provide method for reorganization of school districts; to provide for county committees and a state committee for the reorganization of school districts; to prescribe powers and duties of county committees and the state committee; to provide for payment of expense of county and state committees out of state funds; to provide manner of submission to electors

of proposed plans to reorganize school districts; to provide for school boards of reorganized districts and to provide manner of citation of this act.

This law bears a close resemblance to the former consolidation law. It carefully safeguards the thesis of complete local autonomy. The intent of the legislature seemed to be to place the entire responsibility for initiating a plan of reorganization in the hands of the local school district. Trends resulting from this law cannot be analyzed for the reason that the law has not been in effect for a sufficient length of time. The resistance to a plan is almost certain to be vigorous.

The first step in the program of reorganization as defined by the law is the selection of a county committee. This activity met with limited enthusiasm in Nemaha County. Forty-seven per cent of the members of the various boards of education attended the reorganization meeting called to select the committee personnel. Many of the schools were not represented at the meeting. An unofficial poll taken before the meeting indicated that an overwhelming number of board members were opposed to any form of reorganization. Some were inclined to qualify their opposition with the statement that roads must come first.

SUMMARY

Interest in school district reorganization in Nemaha County has been very limited. Nearly 30 per cent of the rural schools are contracting with another district for the education of their children. This procedure is less expensive than the operation of the school and seems to meet with the satisfaction of the rural patrons.

A great sentimental value is placed upon the 'little school house on the hill'. The desire to maintain the school without regard for cost in educational efficiency and accomplishment is a dominant force at the present time. A few people are beginning to sense the significance of the exodus away from the rural areas so far as it applies to their school. The general tendency seems to be at the present moment to "wait and see".

CHAPTER VIII

Conclusions and Recommendations

The story of the development of Nemaha County is very interesting. The great driving force behind this development from an uncharted wilderness into an important community seemed to have been dominated by personal leadership. Many of the early citizens were adventurers who sought to gain quick and easy wealth and, having done so, return to their former homes to spend the remainder of their lives in comparative ease. This type of individual did not long remain. Many moved on to more fruitful fields, others returned to their former homes without the fortune and some remained to become the most ardent supporters of the new community. It was from this last group of people that much of the leadership emanated.

Zeal for a system of education burned brightly in the mind of the early citizen. Many of these people had attained great academic achievement. The mores of the community accepted the idea that upon the shoulders of the educated few rested the responsibility for social and civic development. As a result of this philosophy the customs and social practices of the eastern community became a part of the new frontier. The New England philosophy of education had been based upon the principles brought to this country from England by the colonists. Much of the fundamental philosophy upon which social institutions in Nemaha County were founded was borrowed from the New England states. The unsuccessful as well as successful legislation automatically became a part of Nebraska's law and was perpetuated as such. An under current of autocracy has been present almost constantly. The first session of the Territorial Legislature¹ made provision for several colleges and universities in Nebraska. Very little consideration was given to the problem of preparing youth to enter

1. The first session of the Territorial Legislature was held in the year 1854.

these institutions because only the sons and daughters of the more wealthy were considered as candidates for higher education; these youth could be trained by private tutors.

The responsibility for establishing the common schools in the local community rested upon the shoulders of local people. The task was difficult. Because it seemed to have been accomplished in a reasonably competent manner as evidenced by the fact that the local school has made notable contributions to every phase of community living, an intense feeling of independence was born at this early time and has continued down to the present. At first the community was bound together by a very strong bond of mutual protection against the dangers and hazards of the wilderness. The tiny log school house became the nerve-center of the community. Although the adventurer soon passed from the scene his influence, artificial and mercenary as it may have been, continued to be felt. These forces seemed to have intensified the feeling of local independence in the school district.

The population trend in Nemaha County has always been significant. During the early years the settlers came in great numbers. It was not uncommon for a community to be doubled in population almost over night. Many of the early trails converged at Brownville. The Missouri River could be forded with a reasonable degree of safety during a portion of the year. As the stream of immigrants became a mighty tide ferries were chartered and operated at this point thus removing one of the greatest hazards of the entire journey to the West. Lawlessness was rampant during the early years and the Indians of the plains soon realized that the presence of so many white men posed a serious challenge to their way of life. As a result, they became very savage in their attacks upon the wagon-trains. Many of the pioneers who had brought their families with them feared to continue beyond the Missouri. These forces

had the effect of damming up the stream of migration in Nemaha County. The number of children and youth exceeded the number of adults and in many instances posed a very serious problem so far as school facilities were concerned.

People were forced by circumstance to adjust their standards to the condition dictated by the frontier. School supplies, books and building materials were scarce and difficult to obtain; the community was forced to establish its schools without many of the physical necessities commonly associated with a school. Thus a certain standard of evaluation began to define itself.

In 1870, good farm land in Nemaha County could be acquired very cheaply. As people came to the county the demand for the land increased until the better farms were selling at a relatively high price. Local school authorities found themselves in possession of considerable sums of money which was difficult to spend. As these surpluses increased the tendency seemed to develop to decrease the rate of taxes because of the fact that it was almost impossible to secure the necessary supplies. Thus, it was reasoned, a smaller amount of school revenue would suffice. This rather singular circumstance seemed to have helped to lay the foundation for the tendency on the part of many people to resist the expenditure of public funds for school supplies and equipment. Perhaps no portion of this study suggests more clearly the need for leadership in the office of county superintendent than the general conditions outlined above. The local community was forced from necessity to make its own decisions relative to the administration of the school and as standards by which the school was to be measured became fixed, the philosophy which supported complete local autonomy became dominant.

Once the flurry of settlement had ended, people again began to yield to the irrepressible impulse to migrate. Improvement in the methods and techniques of farming reduced the work opportunity of the 'hired man' thus giving

impetus to the movement away from the rural areas. As a result of this trend, the enrollment of the rural school has decreased steadily since 1900. This decrease has had a significant effect upon the rural school during the last decade.

At first the people were very enthusiastic about their schools. When educational standards had become fixed the interest in the school waned. Farming practices were changing very rapidly; these changes posed conditions which seemed to occupy nearly all of the farmers' attention. In a sense, the school became the 'step-child' of rural society.

Recommendations

Legislation should be enacted to provide for a county board of education. The responsibility of this board should be to clearly define the general school philosophy, policy and objectives throughout the county. The county superintendent should be selected and appointed by this board.

The tax laws should be re-written. Present laws are no longer adequate to meet the needs of modern society. This statement should not be interpreted to mean that new and increased taxes are recommended. A more efficient taxing system will support the schools adequately with no additional taxes being placed upon those who are at present paying a fair and just share. A state tax should be levied on all property on an equal basis for the foundation program. Communities desiring to add special services could so provide for them by additional levy.

The office of county superintendent should be placed upon a sound professional basis. It should be so constituted as to command the interest of the leading school administrators in the county. The time has passed for this office to be considered as being only of minor clerical importance.

The facility for constant scientific research dealing with the local school problems should be made a definite function of the county superintendent's office.

This approach has brought to the other professions a degree of success unequalled in the history of civilization. There is no sound reason why research will not open the door of progress to public education in the open country of Nemaha County.

A general public-relations program founded on a written statement of philosophy, policy and objectives is recommended. Such procedure will protect the student, patron and teacher and should have the effect of giving stability and a sense of fitness to the school. Public education is the last bulwark short of military force standing between the principles upon which the American civilization is founded and the ideology which has been developed to defeat and destroy the concept that man is sacred as an individual.

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