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I recommend acceptance of this seminar paper in partial fulfillment of this candidate's requirements for the degree Master of Science in Education: Teaching.

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A HISTORY
OF THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS
IN THE TOWNSHIP OF MELROSE
1854-1948

by

Margaret M. Stetzer

ABSTRACT

Statement of the Problem

This study is concerned with the elementary school in the Village of Melrose, Wisconsin, and with the three one-room rural schools in the township of Melrose in Jackson County, Wisconsin from 1854 to 1948.

It is the purpose of this study to (1) describe, inasmuch as possible, the establishment of the village and rural schools of Melrose, (2) to record information concerning the facilities, curriculum, student body, and philosophy of these schools, (3) identify early instructors, their training, and their methods, (4) recount memorable incidents in relation to local instruction, and (5) to describe events, in the area and state, which led to the closing of the rural schools and overall changes in the local instructional center.

Importance of the Study

Prior to this study there was no organized collection of information regarding the history of education in the Melrose area, with the exception of a single chapter in A. D. Volleys' book,
Stories of Pioneer Days in the Black River Valley, it was the desire of the researcher to collect and preserve as much as possible of the local history which had any pertinence to the four schools involved in the study.

Both a major change in local school administration in the 1940's and the subsequent phasing out of the rural one-room schools indicated to the writer that knowledge of this type of instruction at the elementary level would soon tend to disappear from local consciousness unless it was formally recorded.

Summary of the Findings

Rural schools were an integral part of the westward migration and settlement of our country which began in colonial times. The settlement of west central Wisconsin in the middle of the nineteenth century brought about the establishment of community schools which were designed to meet the educational needs of the children of frontier families. These schools were administered by local district school boards consisting of a director, clerk, and treasurer. These boards were elected locally and operated under Wisconsin state law. Early schools became the focal points of the communities and were frequently used as meeting places for religious, political, and social gatherings. From the time of their establishment there was continued effort to maintain and improve the quality of education in these schools. This progressive effort was aided by state and county governments.

The basic operation of the schools, however, changed little until the beginning of World War II. By that time modern technology,
a changing economy, and broader educational demands made these early centers of basic education increasingly obsolete.

Locally, the change from rural districts to a consolidated area school district with the center at Melrose took place within a three year period following World War II. It was one of the earliest consolidations in the state of Wisconsin.
PREFACE

In an effort to help students study their own local history it became apparent that there was very little written material available to them. Further discussion with junior high students showed that although many of their parents had attended rural schools, most of the youngsters in school today had very limited knowledge of the type of elementary schools which had served the area for nearly one hundred years. Further, since the rural schools and the village school which had operated in the local township were quite typical of those throughout Wisconsin, and perhaps throughout the midwest, it seemed important to record something of their operation for the enlightenment of future students. As a teacher of history the writer is keenly aware of the influences of the past upon the present, and of a need for any society to be knowledgeable and proud of the institutions it has established.

As a former student and teacher in Wisconsin schools the writer believes that this paper will provide enjoyable and informational reading to students of all ages, particularly in the Melrose area.

This account cannot be all-inclusive concerning events of importance to the four schools concerned since in the span of time covered many records have been destroyed and many things forgotten. The information used was acquired from interviews, correspondence, newspaper articles, old school records, and the writings of a former local historian, Abner D. Polleys.

Special thanks are due Grace Webb for her helpful interviews.
and assistance in locating much information. Interviews and correspondence with former students and teachers also provided invaluable aid. The local editor, Tom Besl, school officials, and county officers were all most cooperative in aiding the search for information. For constructive and helpful advice concerning the work, the writer is indebted to Dr. Bernard Young, Professor of Education at the University of Wisconsin at La Crosse. To all who aided in any way in the preparation of this paper, my sincere thanks.
A HISTORY

OF THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

IN THE TOWNSHIP OF MELROSE

1854-1948

A Seminar Paper

Presented to

Dr. Bernard J. Young

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by

Margaret Stetzer

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Chapter 1

RURAL SCHOOLS - AN AMERICAN HERITAGE

INTRODUCTION

The following verse, by L. A. Norken, probably epitomizes many of the remaining rural school buildings in Wisconsin today.

Two tall green sentinels
Guard
A crouching ghost
In dirty white
Whose lonesome soul
Still dreams
Of giggling girls
And lads who left
To haunt the halls
Of higher learning.

The silent bell
Shelters a robin's nest.  

Rural schools are, without a doubt, a part of our American Heritage. However, the past three decades have seen our educational system in rural areas shift from the one or two room rural schools to the larger educational centers, capable of handling ever larger numbers of children, and at the same time provide facilities for extracurricular activities, and enrichment to the basic curriculum that was not possible in the smaller outlying schools.

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THE PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem

This study is concerned with the elementary school in the Village of Melrose, Wisconsin, and with the three one-room rural schools in the township of Melrose in Jackson County, Wisconsin, from 1854 to 1948.

It is the purpose of this study to (1) describe, inasmuch as possible, the establishment of the village and rural schools of Melrose, (2) to record information concerning the facilities, curriculum, student body, and philosophy of these schools, (3) identify early instructors, their training, and their methods, (4) recount memorable incidents in relation to local instruction, and (5) to describe events, in the area and state, which led to the closing of the rural schools and overall changes in the local instructional center.

Importance of the Study

Prior to this study there was no organized collection of information regarding the history of education in the Melrose area, with the exception of a single chapter in A. D. Polleys' book, *Stories of Pioneer Days in the Black River Valley*. It was the desire of the researcher to collect and preserve as much as possible of the local history which had any pertinence to the four schools involved in the study.

Both a major change in local school administration in the 1940's and the subsequent phasing out of the rural one-room schools
indicated to the writer that knowledge of this type of instruction at
the elementary level would soon tend to disappear from local conscious-
ness unless it was formally recorded.

EXPLANATION OF TERMS USED

1. The years 1854 to 1948. The year 1854 was selected as a beginning
point since the first formal instruction of a group of students in
Melrose with a paid instructor took place in 1854. In 1948 the one-
room rural schools of the area were joined with the village elementary
and secondary schools in a newly organized district. This district
became the Melrose Area Schools, and eventually a part of the Melrose-
Mendoro Area Schools.

2. Rural Schools. The rural schools were one-room schools, providing
basic elementary education to children of farm families for a one to
two mile radius, depending on the geography of the area. The three
rural schools with which this study is concerned are the West Indies
School, the Ox Bow School, and the Red School, all of which were
located in the Township of Melrose, Jackson County, Wisconsin.

3. Village School. This term refers to a succession of three school
buildings located in what is now the village of Melrose, even though
the village was unincorporated when the first two were in existence.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Both primary and secondary sources have been used in compiling
materials. Primary source material included interviews with several
local persons who had been students or teachers in the schools from the turn of the century until 1950. Included also was an interview with Grace Webb, a native of Melrose, who besides being a student and teacher in Melrose, served as county Superintendent of Schools in Jackson County from 1933 until 1950.

Other primary sources included local school records, county records, and student compositions. Items and clippings from local newspapers, and material from writings by A. D. Polleys, local writer in the early 1900's, and materials from the Jackson County and Wisconsin State Historical Societies were used.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study is limited to the information available concerning the earliest known establishment of the schools, the functions and activities of the schools as determined from interviews, county records, and newspaper articles, and records and recollections concerning the gradual changeover to the consolidated districts due to economics and technological developments. The study is also limited by the memories of persons interviewed, by the degree of accuracy and extent of news reporting and record keeping, and by interpretations made by the researcher.

BASIC ASSUMPTION

It is assumed that all materials used are accurate and unbiased, and that the interpretations made by the researcher are valid.
Chapter II

MELROSE VILLAGE SCHOOLS

FIRST IN COUNTY

The first white settler in the Melrose area was Robert Douglas who came to the region in April, 1839. He claimed about 300 acres of land on the lower table of the Black River in an area just north of the present bridge across Black River on Wisconsin state Highway 108. First called Bristol, the village was platted by a younger brother of Douglas in the early 1850's. It was located about a mile north of the river on the upper table of land. Until 1850 there were few white settlers in the area. The following decade, however, saw a great influx of pioneers, first from Massachusetts and other eastern states, and later from Europe.

In 1852, thirteen years after making his original claim, Robert Douglas went to Illinois and married Louisa Hurd, who returned with him to what was then known as Douglas Settlement on the Black River. By the summer of 1854 Louisa's two younger sisters had come to live with her.

"In 1854 the first school house in the county was built, located just south of the village limits of Bristol. The first teacher was Lottie Hurd, sister of Mrs. Robert Douglas."2

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Early records indicate that Miss Hurd was employed as a private instructor, being paid by persons who sent pupils to her. The building was owned by Robert Douglas.

PUBLIC EDUCATION ESTABLISHED

Two years later, in 1856, when the town of Bristol was organized, the newly elected town board proceeded to organize two school districts, with the demarcation between the two being the lines between sections 5 and 6 and 17 and 18, township 19, range 5 West. This is presently a town of Melrose road know as Kunes Road. It continued to be the line between the two districts as long as they operated as individual school districts.

On April 28, 1856 a school board which included Jerome B. Jones as director, B. F. Wright as treasurer, and Hugh Douglas as clerk, was elected in the eastern district, which included the Village of Bristol. A school site was selected and $75.00 voted to buy a certain house from Hugh Douglas for use as a schoolhouse. This building was located at the south end of the village slightly south and west of the home presently owned by Mr. and Mrs. Dan Adams.

Helen N. Sims was hired as the first public school teacher at $18.00 a month and school was held for six months during the first year. In January, 1857, records show that thirty-seven students were enrolled, two of them over 'school age,' which would be over the age of twenty. 3

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This building served the community for over ten years, both as a school and as a meeting house for religious services. It also served as a community center for town meetings, caucuses, and debates. During the Civil War meetings were held to arouse public sentiment and to encourage volunteer recruiting for the Union Army.

Harry Jones, a former student of this school, wrote in 1941, "There were no desks the first year. Seats were slabs and placed around the sides of the room. Pretty primitive, but the children were as happy as the Melrose school children of today. We could look out the window and see them cutting a fine crop of wheat with a bright red John F. Nanny reaper. We picked wild strawberries all around the school house and had such a fine place to slide down hill in the winter time and the 'ol' swimmin' hole in the summer time."#4

Jones also remembers using McGuffey's Reader and Sander's spelling book. Public speaking was stressed as an important skill, with students memorizing declamations and patriotic pieces.

EXPANSION

"By 1865 the need for a new building was keenly felt. At the annual meeting of that year it was proposed to raise $800.00 for the purpose of building a new school house. The proposition was voted down. The following year (1866) it was voted to raise $600.00 to build a new school house."#5 Research could not determine definitely, but it seems that lack of adequate funds and community disagreement delayed the building of the new school until the summer of 1970.

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#4 Ibid.

#5 State Historical Society of Wisconsin, School Service Division, Jackson County School Histories, 1938
The new school was a two story structure erected on the corner of third and N. streets. It was a white wood frame building. The younger children met in the lower room, and the older children in the upper room. Two teachers were hired, one for the 'lower department' and one for the 'upper department.'

Edwin Horswill, born in 1886, attended school in this building and states that his first teacher was Miss Sheppard and that the building was heated with two stoves, one upstairs, and one downstairs. He says there was a truancy problem in those days with boys who often 'played hooky' when their parents thought they were in school. Quite often, too, parents kept the boys at home to work. Either way, they missed a lot of school.

By 1898 the town boasted a weekly publication which carried a short column entitled "School Notes." Penmanship was stressed and quotations were often copied and recopied. During the week of October 7, 1898, the column states that several pupils wrote the following quotation: "Hard work is the secret of success."

In December of that year storm windows were put on the school in an effort to make the building easier to heat. It was also decided to hold the Christmas program "in the primary department, because it

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6Ibid

7Interview with Edwin Horswill, Melrose, Wisconsin, July 8, 1975.

8The Melrose Chronicle, Melrose, Wisconsin, October 7, 1898.
would not do to risk the lives of so many people in the upper department."\(^9\)

In the daily operation of the school, each department was divided into classes designated by letters, with the A class in the upper department being the highest class. Students completing the work required here then took county examinations to qualify for graduation. In addition to the three R's, subjects studied included algebra, physiology, physical geography, and botany. Many pupils, especially boys, dropped out of school long before graduation. But those who completed the courses and took the examinations (usually around age fourteen) were very proud of their accomplishment, and their graduation was an exceedingly important occasion. It was probably more formal than many high school graduations today.

The purchase of library books was not a part of the regular school budget. Hence, local citizens made donations of books to the school library.

Public debates by students of the upper department provided entertainment as well as information and 'food for thought' to the interested members of the community. On January 27, 1899, the following notice appeared in the Melrose Chronicle.

"The school announces a public debate to be held Feb. 3 - boys against girls of A class - 'Resolved - that U. S. Senators should be elected by the people.'
Everyone invited. 7:30 P. M."\(^10\)

\(^9\)Ibid., December 23, 1898.

\(^10\)The Melrose Chronicle, Melrose, Wisconsin, January 27, 1899.
The teachers at this time were Miss Bowman in the primary department, at a salary of $32.50 per month, and Mr. A. H. Wright in the upper department, with a salary of $50.00 per month. In March Mr. Wright was rehired for the following year and was praised for his good work as principal and teacher. He announced at this time that he planned to visit his old home in England the following summer.

NEW CENTURY – NEW SCHOOL

Although townspeople seemed generally well pleased with the teachers and curriculum, there was growing concern over the condition of the building. The following statements appeared in the local paper.

"...the shameful condition of the schoolhouse...condemned two years ago as unfit..." The janitor informs us that he has been compelled to start the fires at 6 o'clock in the morning and keep the stoves red hot until the hour school was called, but still the rooms would be cold and uncomfortable. The health of the scholars, its dire necessity, and because the district cannot afford it, are three good reasons why every voter in the district should turn out at our next school meeting in July and assist, by their vote, in bringing to Helrose a three or four room modern building for next year's use."11

At the annual meeting in 1899 the voters did vote to raise funds to construct a new school. Plans were made to accept bids on the construction, which would take place the following spring and summer.

In August, 1899, the Helrose teachers, along with other teachers of the county, attended a two week teachers' institute at Black River Falls. This was arranged by County Superintendent F. E. Dell. The institute was a yearly training session which gave county teachers a

11The Helrose Chronicle, Helrose, Wisconsin, March 10, 1899.
chance to hear leading educators of the state and area speak. It was also an opportunity for them to learn the latest methods of instruction. For many, it was the only formal training they received.

There were no state requirements as to educational background, but in order to qualify as a teacher, and obtain a license to teach, a person was required to take a state test. These tests were given periodically at Black River Falls, the county seat. Although many taught with no formal education beyond elementary school, there is evidence that some young ladies from the area journeyed to Platteville to attend Normal School in the 1890's. Later, when the La Crosse Normal School began operation, many aspiring teachers from the area attended there.

In the fall of 1899 the village citizens were looking forward to the building of a new school, which seems to have been a part of a 'building boom' including a half dozen new homes, and two or three new business establishments.

Work on the new building began as soon as possible in the spring of 1900, and by May twenty fifth the excavation for the basement was completed. Some taxpayers, noting the size of the new building, and discussing contract costs, were quite alarmed. They felt that the new school would be larger than needed and too costly.

The annual meeting of 1900 was held the first week in July in the old schoolhouse, but it was so crowded that it had to be moved to the Baptist church. At this meeting Samuel Krahenhill was given a contract to furnish the district with 25 cords of three foot wood to heat the new school. For this he was to be paid $40.00. The citizens
also voted to hold nine months of school the following year, and operate three departments instead of two. Also approved was an operational budget of $900.00 for the coming year, and a special levy of $1600.00, one thousand of which was to be used to defray the expense of completing the new school.  

At the end of July the old schoolhouse and woodshed were sold to the highest bidders. The school was bought by Ed. Button for $154.00, and the woodshed went to E. N. Hubbard for $35.50.

Carpenters on the new building were E. D. Bartlett, N. W. Bartlett, Mark Beach, William Cotton, Edwin Button, and E. N. Hubbard. A bell was obtained for the school at a cost of $35.89 plus $4.65 freight charges. Work did not progress quite as rapidly as planned, however, and the usual September opening of the fall term was postponed until October first. The new building consisted of the basement plus two stories. There was a furnace, with heat piped to the two large classrooms on each floor. Besides the classrooms, each floor had a small room at the west end which could be used as a library or storage area. The east end of the building contained stairways and wide hallways with places for coats, boots, lunches, etc.

The school was apparently in use before all finishing was done. Edwin Horwill remembers that the building contained wainscoting throughout, but that the cap was not on the wainscoting. He remembers getting slivers in his hands from the top of it along the stairwell.

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12The Melrose Chronicle, Melrose, Wisconsin, July 6, 1900.
In May, 1901, Arbor Day was observed with a program by the primary grades, and older students planted trees on the school grounds. To add to the festivities, Mr. H. H. Polleys brought several pounds of candy to treat the students.

At this time records show that the students were enrolled in eight grades, with a primary room containing grades one, two and three. There was an intermediate room for grades four, five and six, and the upper room for grades seven and eight. The first graduates of this new building were Eva Jones, Lulu Stelpflug, Gracie Ostrander, Bessie James, and Phillip Bartlett. The commencement exercises were held in the Methodist Church and consisted of musical selections, essays by students, and a formal presentation of diplomas.

Eva (Jones) Jensen, who resides in Black River Falls, remembers both the old two room school and the one built in 1900. She says they had double desks, and adds, "I sat with Bessie James all my school days."

In 1902-3 an eighth grade student was hired as janitor at a salary of $10.00 a month. His duties consisted of building fires and tending the furnace, as well as sweeping the entire building after school each day. He went to the schoolhouse at four a.m. in the winter to build the fire, and even then had difficulty getting the building comfortably warm before other students arrived for classes. There were no sidewalks. In the spring when the grounds became muddy, the sweeping became a major task. It sometimes took the young man
until ten P.M. to finish the job.  

In September of 1903 regular board meetings were established. The decision was made to hold the meetings at the schoolhouse at eight P.M. on the first Monday of each month. Returning students that fall also found a new wooden sidewalk had been installed in front of the school. Mr. N. Bartlett had been paid $20.00 for the work of building the walk, and the cost of the lumber was $20.95. This walk was used until 1908, when a concrete one was laid.

In 1906 the village organized a high school and rented one of the upstairs classrooms plus the upstairs library room from the elementary school. High school classes were held here until 1915, when the elementary enrollment required the use of the entire building.

In 1909 a full-time janitor was hired at a salary of twenty-five dollars a month. In 1912 a telephone was installed in the building.

The water supply at the school was provided by a pump near the front of the building, and bathrooms were of the outdoor variety until 1930. At that time a more modern water system was installed, including flush toilets in the basement.

Some remodeling was done in the building in 1923. A part of the basement was converted into a kitchen and dining area to be used for serving hot lunches to the students.

By the late 1930's there was developing a teacher shortage. Because of this, teacher's wages had risen somewhat, and in Nelrose at

13Interview with Edwin Horwill, Nelrose, Wisconsin, July 8, 1975.
least, there was a slightly smaller school enrollment. Thus, from 1933 until 1942 only three of the four classrooms were in use.

In 1941 the Ox Bow district was annexed to the village as a result of state statutes regarding districts with less than ten thousand dollars in property evaluation. The Ox Bow students were transported to the village, and the district received state aid for this transportation.

From 1942 to 1948 there were again four rooms in operation, with two grades in each room, and the seventh and eighth grade teacher acting as principal. In this way, operation of the elementary school district at Melrose continued with a first class state graded school until it was absorbed in the fall of 1948 into the reorganized school district. This new and larger district included the local high school and several surrounding schools and came to be called the Melrose Area Schools.

The village elementary building, however, continued to be used for elementary grades until January of 1960. At that time the elementary addition to the high school was completed and ready for occupancy. The old building was then sold to Leo Brown and Lloyd Young for demolition, and the land was subsequently sold as residential lots.
Chapter III

WEST INDIES SCHOOL

A COMMUNITY SCHOOL ESTABLISHED

Two miles directly west of the village of Melrose at the crossroads of West Indies Road and North Road stands the West Indies School. This is one of the oldest buildings in the area, since it was built in 1856. The pump near the front door is rusted and has not been used since the last students left in 1953. There is a minimum of maintenance on the building, however, since it is used as a meeting place for a local community club, and also as a town hall for the township of Melrose. The land has reverted to the farm from which it was leased over one hundred years ago, and the building was purchased by the owner of that farm when the school was closed. An old jacketed wood stove still heats the building when there are elections, or when meetings are held.

The community club is made up of farm families in the neighborhood who meet once a month during the summer and fall. Adults visit and play cards while children play ball and other games, often running in and out slamming the doors of the old building. Several of the youthful members of the club can claim grandparents who slammed those same doors.

The name West Indies seems to have been acquired in the early 1850's when for some unknown reason there were strong differences of opinion between the new settlers in the eastern and western sections of the community. For awhile the eastern section (where the village was
platted) was called East Indies, and the western section, West Indies. As the village grew, the name East Indies quickly died out, but the villagers continued to call the farmers west of town the West Indians, and the school, West Indies.

Although it is known that the school was built in 1856, there is no written record of activities until 1867. The minutes of the annual meeting that year indicate that the elected school clerk was absent and that R. S. Chichester was appointed clerk pro-tem. The voters decided at that time to have 4 ½ months winter school and 3 ½ months summer school. They also decided to raise $100 for the teacher's salary, and to buy eight cords of wood. The teacher hired was Marian Hawley.

Teachers generally boarded at farm homes within the district. However, if their homes were in the village, or in neighboring districts, they sometimes walked to school, or occasionally drove a horse and buggy. In cold weather, the teacher came early to build a fire in the stove, so the building would be warm when students arrived. Over the years, sometimes a teenage boy living near the school would be hired to come and build the fire early in the morning. Janitorial duties were the teacher's responsibility. However, student helpers often dusted and swept floors under the teacher's supervision. A local housewife was hired to thoroughly clean the building each year before school started in the fall, and in later years this was done on a monthly basis.

The earliest school records show that the 'winter term' usually ran from October or November until March, with some time off at Christmas. This was the term attended by most students. Older boys
sometimes up to age twenty-one, attended only this winter term. They frequently cared little for learning and much for pranks. Teachers generally felt this was the more difficult term to teach.

The 'spring term' (sometimes called summer term) convened through April, May and the first part of June. There were fewer and younger students. As time went on, school sometimes started earlier in the fall, and then the year was divided into three terms, which were designated as fall, winter, and spring terms. Sometimes there was a different teacher for each of the three terms in the year, and sometimes the same instructor would stay for all three terms.

THE GAY 90’S TO THE ROARING TWENTIES

In 1897-98, there were nineteen students in West Indies during the winter term. In the 'teacher's report to successor' the following spring there was a note saying that "Carl Buss, age 7, has only been in school a short time, and understands very little English." This was, apparently, a common problem.

During the 1899-1900 school year there was a total of twenty-three students attending the school, aged four through fifteen, with the youngest being Esther Sims. The fall term that year was from September 4 through November 4, the winter term, November 20 through March 23, and the spring term April 16 through June 8.

14West Indies School Register, 1897-98.
15West Indies School Register, 1899-1900.
In 1903-04 there was a different teacher for each of the three terms. Thirteen students attended the fall term, sixteen were enrolled during the winter, and only twelve during the spring term, which ended on June 3.

The following year Verne Button taught all three terms, and the winter term again had sixteen students enrolled between six and fifteen years of age. Also attending this term, however, was a twenty-two year old adult, Willie Bahnub. Whatever education the school had to offer was not denied because of age. The teacher's report for this year indicated that the school used the "latest idea of alternating classes in ungraded schools." That year the school finished the work of the first, second, fourth, sixth, and eighth years. Next year's work would include the requirements for the first, second, third, fifth, and seventh years, or grades. The writer notes that this 'new' method of alternating class work in grades three through eight in ungraded country schools was followed in many Wisconsin schools for the next forty years.16

Four years later, in 1909, there seems to have been much individualization and grouping of students. The teacher's report for the year gives each student a number, then goes on to state the following:

"Numbers two, three, four and five all recited during the same period, but numbers two and three have finished Light to Literature, book four, and are reviewing. Number eight was unable to take book three, but I had her recite with six and seven. Numbers nine, ten, eleven, twelve, and thirteen have

16West Indies School Register, 1904-05.
the addition table thoroughly learned - also most of the subtraction tables. Numbers two, three, and five have just begun factoring ....... Numbers six and seven need a text in Geography ....... Number one's work was mostly reviewing this term - she wrote for a diploma."17

In 1910 the fall term convened on September 12. The daily program began at nine o'clock, and school was dismissed at four P. M. There was an hour at noon for lunch and games, and a short recess mid-morning and mid-afternoon. Classes were not listed as grades, but as class A, B, or C, Primary Form, or Class A, B, or C, Middle Form, with some combinations within the form. For example: "Middle Form A & B - Spelling - 3:55-4:00; Primary Form B & C - Numbers - 10:45-11:00."18

In 1914-15 the teacher was a young lady who had been the youngest student in the school in 1900. This year, in addition to the usual Reading, Numbers, History, Geography, Grammar, and Spelling, a new course was added for the upper grades. Agriculture was taught and included a study of types of soil, germination tests for seed corn and other grains, soil conservation, and crop rotation. Since a majority of the students would not continue their education beyond the country school, and many would stay in the community to become farmers and farmers' wives, this course became a requirement throughout the county.

Although there was much practicality in the rural school, cultural things were not neglected. The older students, between the years 1910 and 1920, read such classics as "Evangeline," "The Courtship

17West Indies School Register, 1909-10.
18West Indies School Register, 1910-11.
of Miles Standish," "Lady of the Lake," and "Merchant of Venice."

In Numbers class there was no text for the primary children. The teacher taught the basic math using only the blackboard. More advanced students used Milne's Elementary or Milne's Standard math texts. The title of the grammar book used was, Mother Tongue.

During the years between 1910 and 1920 a letter grading system was used for report cards and school records. Observant teachers noted students who had trouble with pronunciation, and who were performing poorly, probably due at least in part to poor eyesight. There was also concern for a student who did only fair school work, but much manual labor at home.

About 1910 the use of terms in the school year was discontinued, and the school year from then until 1926 consisted of eight months of instruction, usually convening the second week in September, and ending during April or the first part of May.

In 1926 the West Indies School closed the year with a picnic on April 16. The teacher was Ruth Olson. A parent and teachers meeting was held, followed by a picnic dinner. There was an afternoon program including an address by Mr. Jean F. Rolfe of the La Crosse Normal School. There was also Victrola entertainment by Miss Davis, the county supervising teacher, and community singing, led by Mr. Rolfe.19

The following summer, at the annual school meeting, the voters decided to operate the school on a nine month basis. This continued to

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19West Indies School Register, 1925-26.
be the pattern until the school closed in May, 1953.

During the early years of the school's operation, water was carried from a nearby farm for drinking, but eventually a well was dug and a pump installed on the southeast corner of the building. A wood stove was always used to provide heat. During the winter of 1910 the county superintendent became concerned about ventilation in county schools, and convinced the school board to made an opening in the wall behind the stove. In extremely cold weather the west wind blew in mercilessly, and the young lady who was teaching at the time covered the hole, deciding there was entirely too much ventilation. 20

The building originally had windows on both the north and south walls, but that, too, was changed at the county superintendent's suggestion. The north windows were closed up, and additional windows were added on the south side. This was supposed to make the room warmer and also add more light. When evening activities were held at the school, which was only for special occasions such as Halloween or Christmas, kerosene lamps in wall brackets provided illumination.

Except for an occasional ride in a horsedrawn wagon or sleigh, children walked to school. Upon arriving at school, coats and caps were hung on hooks in the entry way at the front of the building. Overshoes, or other outdoor footwear were arranged along the wall beneath the coats, and lunch pails were placed on shelves. It was the assigned duty of

20 Interview with Grace Webb, Jackson County Superintendent of Schools, 1933-1950, Black River Falls, Wisconsin, July 17, 1975.
one child to see that the entry room was neat and orderly before classes began. In the early years of the school, thirsty students shared a common dipper in a bucket of water. Later a more sanitary 'bubbler' was used. This consisted of a covered container which held about ten gallons of water, mounted on a stand about two and one-half feet high.

On the side of the container, and near the bottom, was a spout fastened with rubber gaskets, and containing a valve. It operated in such a way that when a child pressed a button, he could get a drink of water in much the same way a person would from a modern drinking fountain. A pail stood beneath the spout to catch the overflow. It became the job of one of the older students to fill the bubbler from the pump each day, and to empty the bucket of overflow water.

Lunches were carried to school - some in two quart tin syrup pails - some in 'store bought' lunch pails with pictures on them - and some in paper bags. Typical lunches consisted of sandwiches, cookies and fruit. However, there was sometimes infinite variety, depending on the creativity of the mothers and the likes and dislikes of the children.

In the 1930's an oil stove was provided. The children brought foods such as soup or hot dishes to school in small glass jars. These were placed on the stove in a pan of warm water and thus heated to be eaten with the noon meal. On a cold day this was a welcome addition to a cold lunch.

Each year some of the students best work was exhibited at the county fair in competition with entries from other schools in the county. In 1924 the West Indies pupils won sixteen dollars in prize money.
The fair was held in September, and when the check arrived in December, the students decided to use the money to make purchases of small items needed in the classroom.\textsuperscript{21}

During the fall of 1924 the older students contributed a weekly article to the Melrose Chronicle entitled, "West Indies School Items." It contained notes about school happenings, as well as comments on the progress of farm work and activities in the community.

PROGRESS AND PHASE-OUT

The late 1920's and early 30's was a time of financial stress in the little community, as it was in the entire country. The school continued to operate, but with no money spent on major changes until 1938. By then rural Electrification had brought light and power to the farms of the area, benefitting the school. A former student assisted a local electrician in wiring the school building for lights and a few outlets. Soon after this a small radio was purchased, and students enjoyed weekly educational programs from the Wisconsin School of the Air.

The school continued to be the social center of the community, with the Christmas program and the annual school picnic being the highlights of the year. When school district consolidation was advised, there were mixed feelings in the district concerning such a move, but by 1948 the West Indies School had become a part of the Melrose Area

\textsuperscript{21The Melrose Chronicle, Melrose, Wisconsin, December 19, 1924.}
School District. Classes for grades one through eight continued to be held at the school until 1953 when a low enrollment made it impractical to hire a teacher and continue to maintain the building. The children were then transported to the school in the village of Melrose.
Chapter IV

THE RED SCHOOL

SYMBOLS AND BEGINNINGS

A few decades ago, in the middle of the twentieth century, the 'Little Red Schoolhouse' had become a symbol of rural American education. Perhaps one reason that symbol entered the consciousness of the American public at that time was the fact that its demise was imminent.

The 'Little Red Schoolhouse' was more than a symbol in Red School District #3 of the Town of Melrose, Jackson County, Wisconsin. It was a reality of everyday life for students and teachers who worked there from around 1860 until the school was closed in the spring of 1951.

Although the writer could not ascertain exactly what year the original school was built, early records indicate that the schoolhouse had been built, and the district was operational sometime before 1867. It is known that one of the earliest teachers in the school was a young lady who was to become Mrs. Arad Stebbins. She was paid ten dollars a month in wages, and given room and board in the district on a rotating basis, by spending a week with each family in the district.

By 1870 this process of 'boarding around' had been discontinued, and teacher's wages were around twenty-five dollars per month. The teacher usually found lodgings close to the school and paid for them.

Records of the annual meeting for 1867 show that it was held
on September 30. Voters decided to hold a winter school term of four months beginning the first Monday in November, and a summer term of four months beginning the first Monday in April. They also voted to raise $175.00 to cover the teacher's salary for these eight months.

The wood supply for the winter term was to be supplied by Donald McDonald at the rate of one dollar per cord for 'stove length' wood.

James Baird, teaching the 1870 winter term, piled wood around the stove late in the afternoon, in preparation for the next day. After fixing the stove for the night he walked to his boarding house. Some time during the night, Sandy Mair, a farmer living a few hundred yards from the school, discovered the school was on fire, but it was too late to save the building.

A special district meeting was held on January 21, 1871 at the home of R. D. Wilson. It was decided to follow plan number two of the state building code at that time, with the size of the new building to be twenty-two by thirty-six feet. The new school was to be the same color as the old building (red) but the trim on the new one was to be white. A building committee was appointed consisting of Y. D. Young, Gilbert McAdam, R. D. Wilson, Donald McDonald, and George Lutz. A special tax of two hundred dollars was to be raised to build the new school. The decision was also made at this time to update the textbooks of the district. The following texts were adopted: Willard's School History, McGuffey's readers and spellers, Clark's Grammar, Davies Arithmetic, and Montieth and McNelly's
Geography.22

While the new school was being built, it is believed that a building south of the school site on what is now the Lyle Rommel farm, was used as a temporary school. Thus the winter term continued.

LAUGHTER, SADNESS, AND PROGRESS

In the late 1800's children at the Red School, just as children of today, looked forward to noon and recess. A ball and bat, sometimes homemade, were the only equipment available, but great times were had playing such games as one-o-cat, anti-over, fox and geese, Old Miller, and needle's eye. Back in the school room, minor misbehavior was often punished by a whack with a ruler.

Between 1867 and 1938 the school had seventy-eight teachers, and the highest wage paid during that time was $100 per month, which was paid in 1928-29. After 1938, especially during and after World War II, salaries rose rapidly, so that by 1948 salaries at the school were over $200 per month.

Anna Emerson Huber, who taught at Red School in 1918-19 recalls November 11, 1918. She states, "The weather was perfect - a very nice sunshiny day. Everyone was out for a good time - so happy World War I was over."

She also states that the schools were closed for a month

22State Historical Society of Wisconsin, School Service Division, Jackson County School Histories, 1938.
because of the flu epidemic that fall. Many died, and she remembers much sadness. Although schools did not make up the days they were closed, teachers in the area received their salaries.

Anna Emerson, who was of a Scandinavian background, boarded with a German family, the Rommel's, near the school. She learned a great deal about the making of German sausages, and enjoyed all the good food. Each morning she carried a pail of water from Rommel's to the schoolhouse, since there was no well at the school. Then in cold weather she built the fire in the old wood heater. During the afternoon recess the older boys would carry enough chunks of wood from the woodshed into the schoolhouse to last until the next afternoon. She did her own sweeping and dusting each day, and a farm wife, hired by the district, scrubbed the floor and did other necessary cleaning once a month.²³

By the mid twenties a well and pump had been installed, and a cooler for water was used such as the one described in the previous chapter. The teacher was still responsible for building the fire in the jacketed wood stove, and the building was bitterly cold on sub-zero mornings. Because enrollment had risen to over thirty students, the small building became quite crowded. As had been the case at West Indies, windows were removed on one side of the building and added on the other side. Desks always faced the front of the room,

²³Correspondence with Anna Emerson Huber, Black River Falls, Wisconsin, June 15, 1976.
and light was always supposed to come over a child's left shoulder as he worked.

At this time the school had an organ, which could be used for singing and musical instruction, if the current teacher knew how to play it. If the teacher did not know how to play the organ, there was usually a parent or someone in the community who did know and could be prevailed upon to play for special occasions.

Former teachers have noted that the people of the community were very friendly and cooperative. Cora Hanson Ramsey stated, "I was invited out to almost every family each year I taught there." 24

Childish pranks were a part of every school year and teachers reacted in various ways. On one occasion the students locked their teacher in the outdoor toilet. He was apparently not too upset, and everyone just had a good laugh. At another time a young man was hired during the winter to finish the school year, and the weather was extremely cold. He had been teaching a short time when one of the older boys noted aloud that the teacher hung his coat and hat near the stove in the classroom and placed his rubbers by the woodpile next to the stove. The student asked if he could bring his coat from the entryway and place it near the stove where it would be warm, too. The teacher answered curtly, "No." He added, "If you do, I'll throw it outside."

At recess the student brought his jacket and cap into the room

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24 Correspondence with Cora Hanson Ramsey, Melrose, Wisconsin, July 9, 1976.
hidden beneath his sweater, and stuffed them under a pile of kindling wood. The teacher saw this and promptly threw the coat and cap outside, where they had to be picked up from the snow and replaced on the hook in the entryway. This brought other boys into the fray, and at the next opportunity they took the teacher's rubbers from the warm spot by the stove. They filled them with water at the pump outside, and set them by the corner of the school where they froze solid. When the teacher prepared to leave the building late in the afternoon he found his ice-filled footwear. Since the students had long since gone home, he angrily reported the problem to one of the school board members. A consultation was held with another board member, and when the men got the whole story they decided that, while the boys should be reprimanded, they would probably have done the same thing themselves under the circumstances.25

In the late 1930's electric lights were installed in the building and by that time some playground equipment had been added. Also, close supervision by the county superintendent and a supervising teacher had resulted in a fairly unified curriculum in all county schools. Thus the Red School board, as other local boards in the county, had followed suggestions from the county office. The school had been modernized as much as was economically feasible, new textbooks were purchased as needed, and books had been added to the small school library each year.

25 Interview with Mrs. Ella Spors, Melrose, Wisconsin, August 10, 1976.
Each spring seventh and eighth grade students took a conservation tour arranged by the county office. On the first such tour in the mid 30's students and their parents toured a county CCC (Civil Conservation Corps) camp located at Irving, about seven miles north of Melrose. Later tours took them to creameries, a cheese factory, and to view soil and water conservation practices throughout the county.26

By 1937 most eighth grade tests for graduation were given by the local teacher, but geography and history tests were still administered by county office personnel at Black River Falls. All eighth grade students gathered in the study hall of the Black River Falls Junior High on a specific date and wrote the two tests. They were notified by mail concerning their grades. Late in May all rural county graduates gathered in Black River Falls for a short program and a parade down main street. The graduates of each country school dressed in their Sunday best and marched carrying a banner bearing the name of their school. The three graduates of Red School in 1937 were Lyle Rommel, Doris Larson, and Kathryn Johnson.

By 1940 both the county administered testing and the county-wide graduation festivities at Black River Falls had been dropped.

During World War II Russell Spors left Red School Valley to serve in the armed forces. He was killed in Germany, and students at the school planted a tree in his memory. Later, when the school was

26Interview with Grace Webb, Jackson County Superintendent of Schools, 1933-1950, Black River Falls, Wisconsin, July 17, 1975.
no longer in operation, the tree was moved to the lawn of the Wesley Spors' home near Onalaska.

THE CLOSING

By the time the war was over there was talk of school consolidation in Jackson County, and especially in the Melrose area. In 1946 meetings were held at the Red School and while some families were mildly in favor of consolidation, others were strongly against it. Their fear was that the local school would be closed and their children bused to other communities. They felt a closeness to the school, the teacher, and their children's friends which they did not want to lose. They also believed that consolidation would mean they would have less control of their school. An annual meeting of citizens in the rural district was well attended, and the group was small enough so that no one was ill at ease or afraid to speak. It was thought that many would not attend a large area meeting several miles away, and even if they did attend, would probably not speak freely, and thus would have little influence.

Proponents of consolidation argued that the cost of operating the rural schools was becoming prohibitive, especially in view of decreased enrollments, which was true of Red School. Another cost factor was due to a decided teacher shortage, which had caused a substantial increase in salaries. This made the per pupil costs very high. They also argued that a consolidated district could provide many special types of instruction in areas such as physical education
and music, which could not be offered in the one-teacher rural schools.

By the fall of 1948, however, opposition had fallen to the rule of the majority. In three years the Red School had closed, and a short time later the building was sold. It still stands, in a state of disrepair. Fond memories will linger as long as there are people who spent many hours of their childhood in the Little Red Schoolhouse.
Chapter V
OX BOW SCHOOL

ORGANIZATION

Records indicate that the Ox Bow School district was organized in 1884. It included that part of Jackson County which is south of the Black River in the Township of Melrose.

The school building was one that had been built by W. H. Polleys as a fish hatchery. It was moved to the school site where it was remodeled and an entry-way was added. Ernest Webster donated the land, a plot of ground east of the present Melrose Rod and Gun Club property, and slightly east of present Highway 54. The first school board members were A. M. Howard, Ernest Webster, and John Stetzer. The school was named Ox Bow because the Black River turned like an ox bow at that point.27

OPERATION

Very little information is available concerning the operation of the school between 1884 and 1900. The teacher's salary in 1884 was twenty-four dollars per month and by 1910 had risen to only thirty dollars.

Mrs. Blanche Stetzer, who attended the school in 1906 as a first grader, recalls feeling frightened when an Indian unexpectedly

27 State Historical Society of Wisconsin, School Service Division, Jackson County School Histories, 1938.
entered the school. He spoke to the teacher and left as quickly as he came. It seems the Indians quite often visited the school. There was an Indian burial ground along a creek a short distance from the school, and Mrs. Stetzer remembers that over each new grave there was constructed a small wooden peak or roof-like structure. She and her brother have said that their mother attended school with Charlie Low Cloud, who later was a reporter for the Banner-Journal at Black River Falls. This would have been in the 1880's about the time the district was organized.

In 1906 there were twenty or more students at Ox Bow. The school was as modern as any at the time. Besides the schoolhouse there was the ever present woodshed, two outdoor toilets, and a wooden fence. There were kerosene lamps for the two or three times during the year when there was an evening program at the school. The pump near the front door provided water, and the jacketed wood stove kept the building warm in winter. When the weather was very cold students hung their coats in the entry-way, but placed their lunches on a shelf behind the stove so they would not freeze. Sometimes older students would make cocoa or soup and keep it warm on top of the stove until it was served at noon.28

Preparing for the annual Christmas program took a part of the school day for several weeks, sometimes taking as long as two months. Songs, recitations, and plays were memorized and practiced over and over. Decorations were made for the room and the tree. Parents and

28Interview with Mrs. Blanche Stetzer, Black River Falls, Wisconsin, August 25, 1976.
all members of the community looked forward to the Christmas program. It was a night to view the program prepared by the children, to talk with neighbors, and generally to share the Christmas spirit.

By 1920 the enrollment at Ox Bow had grown to thirty-two, and the teacher's salary was sixty-five dollars a month. School board members at that time were Andrew Vogel, clerk, Ned Millard, Director, and Joe Bruley, Treasurer. 29

In 1926 the board hired the first male teacher at the school. There were only eleven students. Light for programs that year was provided by gasoline pressure lamps, which were better than kerosene lamps. As usual, the school lawn was mowed with a horse drawn mower before school started in the fall. This once-a-year mowing which left a stubble not unlike a hay field, was all the care the school lawn received. At the time, this was standard procedure at all rural schools.

Although there was no organized physical education class, everyone got plenty of exercise. The children, and often the teacher, walked to school, and at noon and recess they all played ball together. Mr. Bekkelund, the young man hired in 1926, remembers that while he taught there, much rain fell one winter and formed a large pond of ice on the school yard. Everyone enjoyed the skating as long as the ice lasted. 30

A student who was in the upper grades at that time recalls the

29Annual Report of School Clerk, Ox Bow District, Melrose, Wisconsin, 1920.

30Correspondence with Lloyd Bekkelund, Black River Falls, Wisconsin, August 20, 1976.
years spent at Ox Bow as most enjoyable. At that time the school had a small oil stove with an oven. The children would sometimes bring potatoes, which they would bake in the oven while the morning classes were in session. Another treat prepared by the upper grade girls at that time was vegetable soup, with all students bringing some vegetables to put into it.31

Arbor Day was important at the school for many years. As early as 1905 this seems to have been an established day for all sorts of cleaning and organizing. The older students catalogued and repaired the books in the small library. All children who could do so brought rakes to school and raked the school yard. Often this day ended with a bonfire and roasted hot dogs or marshmallows.

The last day of school often featured special festivities honoring the graduating eighth graders. A souvenir program printed for this occasion in 1916 at the Ox Bow School shows that there were twenty-nine pupils in the school that year. Dorothy Polleys was the teacher. The four eighth graders were Blanche Bruley, Eunice Stetzer, Gladys Millard, and Gythern Dayton. These four had taken county tests, given at the Melrose Grade School, in order to graduate. Three of the four went to High School in Melrose the following year.32

Teachers at Ox Bow drove a horse, or later, a car to school if

31Interview with Mrs. Luella Instenes, Melrose, Wisconsin, June 4, 1976.

32Correspondence with Mrs. Blanche Stetzer, Black River Falls, Wisconsin, September 3, 1976.
they lived in Melrose or nearby. Those whose homes were further away boarded in the district. Some teachers boarded with the Vogel family who lived on a farm south of the school. In 1926 Mr. Bekkelund boarded with the Ned Millard family, who lived where the present Hiway Inn is located. His room and meals cost twenty dollars a month.

From 1932 to 1934 a young lady from Melrose, Cleo Wensel, taught at Ox Bow. It was her first job. She had ten students the first year and only six the second year. Those were depression years, and since the enrollment dropped so low the second year, the teacher's salary dropped, too, from $75.00 to $65.00 per month. At the end of each monthly pay period, checks did not arrive in the teacher's mailbox. She went to the school clerk to get an order and from there to the district treasurer for the check.

There were other problems due to economics. The teacher and six students worked very hard in 1933 to prepare a good Christmas program. When the important evening drew near, two of the girls indicated they could not come to the program. They did not have appropriate dresses, and their father could not afford to buy any. After a bit of planning, the teacher and her mother bought pink checked gingham and made new dresses for the girls. The Christmas program apparently was a success.

During this time, also, a bit of 'special education' was attempted. A family who operated a tavern in the district had a retarded son about twelve or thirteen years old. It is not known whether the child had previously attended school. However, it is
known that the mother asked if her son could attend school for part of the day in the hope that perhaps he could learn to read and write, if only a little. She indicated that anything the teacher could do to further the boy's education would be appreciated. So for part of the year he attended school and was given reading instruction at the first grade level. He was unable to get along socially with the other children. After several months the teacher felt the boy had made no progress, so he was again kept at home.

During the winter the teacher arrived early to build the fire, and while waiting for the fire to get started and the heat to warm the building somewhat, she wrapped up in a blanket and sat on a bench with her feet up off the cold floor. The school was in an area of light, sandy soil and in the spring or fall on very windy days, going outside to pump a pail of water was like heading into a sand storm. In spite of such problems, the children were generally pleasant to work with and learned very quickly.\(^{33}\)

The last teacher at the school started her teaching career there in 1937, and stayed until the school closed for the last time in the spring of 1941. She remembers that there were only ten or twelve students during those years. One year all of the students were in grades one through four. Those were the years when a sand table was a 'must' in every primary classroom. Much time was spent developing a project each month for the sand table display. For example, in

\(^{33}\)Interview with Mrs. Cleo Galston, Black River Falls, Wisconsin, August 25, 1976.
October the children made tiny corn shocks, bringing real small pumpkins to depict the autumn harvest.  

THE LAST YEARS

The geography of the area undoubtedly contributed more than anything else to the closing of the school. The district was composed entirely of very light soil on the southeast side of the Black River. The lower level was subject to flooding, and the upper level to drought and wind erosion. It had been settled in the late 1850's and early 1860's. By the 1930's crop losses due to dry weather and low prices for farm produce during the depression years had driven many farmers out of the area, either to work in cities or to farm elsewhere. Thus the tax base of the district was lowered as was the school enrollment. The dilemma facing this district was common to many in central and northern Wisconsin and was particularly true of all areas south and east of the Black River in Jackson County.

In an attempt to provide a better education for children in these areas, a state law was passed in the late 1930's stating that any district with less than ten thousand dollars evaluation must be annexed to a district with more than ten thousand evaluation. This was to be implemented by 1940. The Ox Bow district fell into this category.

In spite of the financial burden of keeping the school in

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34 Correspondence with Mrs. Irene Erickson, Alma Center, Wisconsin, September 8, 1976.
operation, the district residents did not favor closing the school, nor
did they favor annexation to another district. The school board
members went to Madison to talk with the State Superintendent of Schools
and area lawmakers in the hope of somehow acquiring special state
authorization to keep their school in operation. However, the low
enrollment plus factors discussed earlier made this impossible.

In May, 1941, the last Ox Bow school picnic was held. The
district was officially annexed to the Melrose Village School district.
Usable equipment and books were transferred to the village school, and
in September of that year the students were transported there. In
1942 the school building was sold. It was moved to a farm in Mill Creek,
about ten miles away, and used as a granary. Now, more than thirty
years later, the Ox Bow School exists only as a memory.
Chapter VI

CONSOLIDATION

RURAL SCHOOLS MET A NEED

Although the first white settler arrived in Melrose in 1839, and his family arrived from Scotland six years later, there seems to have been little other settlement here during the 1840's. The government survey of land was completed in the area in 1848, the same year Wisconsin became a state. By that time the growing lumber industry north of Melrose on the Black River brought many people traveling through the area. Thus, the following decade brought rapid settlement, with the largest numbers arriving about 1854. At that time the area was still known as Douglas Settlement, since the Township of Bristol (later called Melrose) was not organized until 1856. Although some private instruction had been provided for children of the area through the efforts of the Douglas family, the first two official schools were organized along with the township.

The educational needs of the children in the area were very basic and always secondary to the business of everyday living. Therefore, early schools operated in the 'off seasons' so that children could help with the planting and harvesting. The winter term was a slack time for everyone, so most children were sent to school then. The summer term was often poorly attended, and only by the younger children, since older ones were needed for work at home. The three R's were stressed. Usually some importance was placed on good spelling,
fine penmanship, articulate speech, and the appreciation of classical literature and poetry. Musical instruction depended on the talents of the current teacher. Physical education was unheard of and would undoubtedly have been scoffed at by families whose days were filled with physical activity, and whose children walked to school whether the distance was a few yards or a few miles.

As outlying lands were settled more school districts were established. By the time all the land was claimed students did not usually live more than two and one-half miles from a school. Thus, pioneers of the area met the need to teach their children to read and write and to do so close to their homes.

The schoolhouses were typically one-room frame buildings furnished with benches at first, and with rows of double desks when the district could afford them. Early slates gave way to blackboards on the wall, and paper and pencils, or quill pens for students. Books were scarce at first. The earliest school libraries were often made up of donations of books from people in the community.

EARLY TEACHERS

Teachers were most often young women, although an occasional man appears on the roster of past teachers. About the only qualifications were the ability to read and write and the willingness to teach. By the late 1800's county superintendents administered tests for teacher certification. Even then many teachers had only an elementary education. Many of them were fine teachers who continued
to learn as they taught, by personal study, and by the county institutes provided at Black River Falls as a sort of yearly 'short course' for teachers.

With the establishment of a local high school in 1907, and later, the Normal School at La Crosse, it became much easier for teachers to acquire more education. State and county efforts to upgrade rural schools also had a very beneficial effect. In the 1920's and 30's Jackson County had a one-year teacher training program at the Black River Falls High School. Many teachers completed this course after finishing high school. Teachers at this time were encouraged to continue their academic work during the summer months and to work toward a college degree in education. Many did so.

Teaching in rural schools was no easy task. Enrollment varied from five or six students to forty or more. There were eight grades with one teacher as the only 'expert' in charge of reading, mathematics, geography, history, penmanship, spelling, agriculture, health, art, and music. Add to this subject matter the business of playground supervision, record keeping, and lesson planning, plus preparations for a Halloween party, Christmas program, Valentine party, and graduation for eighth graders at the end of the school year. Incidentals never mentioned when taking a position included building wood fires and daily sweeping and dusting chores.

Rural teachers who acquired a college degree almost always left the country schools to teach in villages or cities where they could share the society of other educators and relinquish most of the
janitorial duties. Thus, there was usually a demand for teachers in the rural schools. This was met in the early 1900's by the two-year rural course at the state operated colleges. Having completed this course, a person could acquire a license to teach for seven years. After this time one could either (1) quit teaching, (2) continue work toward a college degree, or (3) acquire a yearly permit to teach at the request of the district involved and the County Superintendent.

EFFECTS OF GEOGRAPHY AND ECONOMICS

By the 1930's depression and drought were having a definite effect on the rural schools of Wisconsin, and the Melrose schools were a part of the overall picture. The shift from a rural to an urban population was causing such low enrollments in many country schools that it was not practical to hire a teacher and continue to operate in the usual manner. Even when the district was willing and financially able to operate the school, it was often difficult, especially in remote areas, to find a teacher willing to accept the job. In some places geographical areas basically unfit for farming had been farmed and then abandoned. This land, if not resold, was taken over by county governments because of unpaid taxes, thus lowering the tax base of that district. Only one district in the Melrose area was thus effected geographically.

By World War II, however, all of the Melrose schools were finding that decreased enrollments coupled with increasing costs were causing problems for local school boards. These facts, along with
acute teacher shortages, caused some voters to see some merit in state level suggestions toward the integration of several small schools into one large district.

With the increased mobility of people by this time, it was also now completely feasible for students to travel by bus to a school several miles from home, spending less time getting there than when they walked to a school close to home. Thus the automobile and hard-surface roads helped to create a new era in education.

This same mobility, and a generally increased worldliness among rural people, also created a demand for services and areas of instruction which had not previously been a part of the curriculum of the schools in the area. Many people now wanted their children to have music lessons, art instruction, science laboratories, and organized sports. The one-room rural schools could not meet these demands.

By 1940, Wisconsin statutes required annexation of districts with very low tax valuations (see Chapter V). Rising costs of operation and low enrollments forced many districts to consider the possibility of consolidation, which was strongly advocated by state educators at this time.

In the Melrose districts, as in most areas, there was considerable opposition to change. However, many were won over to the idea of consolidation in the hope that it would be cheaper to build and operate one large school than several smaller ones. This, they hoped, would mean lower taxes. There was also the consensus of opinion that there would be a better opportunity for a more well-rounded curriculum for all students.
CHANGE ACCOMPLISHED

In the 1940's, Grace Webb, who had been Jackson County Superintendent of Schools since 1933, was convinced that the county could get more state funds for education and could also improve instruction for the children by reorganizing all county schools into several larger districts. She and an appointed education committee went to Madison to discuss the matter with state officials.

Later she drew a very large map of the county to use as a visual aid. Then she and the committee members held several meetings with representatives of various parts of the county explaining what could be done. Geographic centers were designated as well as tentative areas which could be served by these centers. Along the borders between the areas she asked individual families, or groups of families, which center they would prefer to have their children attend.

Not everyone agreed on the wisdom of the proposed change, and there were some heated arguments. Miss Webb remembers one early spring meeting at the Black River Falls Junior High when the discussion was quite lively. There was a rain storm during the meeting. The lights went out for several minutes. When they came back on, nearly everyone in the room was gone. She wondered whether they had left in anger, discovering later that most of these people were farmers with baby chicks at home under electric brooders. They had rushed home to look after their investments. Baby chicks will not survive very long
under a cold electric brooder.\textsuperscript{35}

Miss Webb and the county school committee continued meeting with citizens of the county and with local district school boards to set up new districts and to keep people informed. She states, "The people were wonderful and our county was the first in the state to be reorganized."\textsuperscript{36}

"Informal meetings of all the newly organized districts were held in April of 1948. The first formal meeting was held at Melrose in July. Ten school districts were involved and parts of two others. The Melrose Area Community School was created August 16, 1948 at the joint meeting of Jackson and Monroe County Committees held in the County Superintendent's office at Black River Falls."\textsuperscript{37}

All four schools dealt with in previous chapters were a part of the district, although Ox Bow had become a part of the village district earlier, so was not one of the ten mentioned above. Included were the Melrose Village School, Highland, West Franklin, North Bend, Mill Creek, Pleasant Valley, Lee, West Indies, and Red School in Jackson County, and the Town of Little Falls School in Monroe county.

Mr. A. E. Weiner was Superintendent of the new district in

\textsuperscript{35}Interview with Grace Webb, Jackson County Superintendent of Schools, 1933-1950, Black River Falls, Wisconsin, July 17, 1975.

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{37}Jackson County Board Proceedings for 1948, Report of Grace Webb, County Superintendent of Schools, Black River Falls, Wisconsin.
1948, and for that year all of the above listed schools continued to operate with some new services. All students were transported to school, and hot lunches prepared in the hot lunch kitchen at the high school were delivered to all schools daily. Mrs. Ella Sykes and Mrs. Lahna Spaulding prepared and packed all the lunches. The county superintendent and her staff continued to supervise the elementary schools in cooperation with the local district administration.

In many ways the consolidation, which was accomplished in 1948, was only the beginning. Many more changes were to come. But that is another story. One era ended; another began.
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3. Records

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51
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When schools were first established in the area, the school year was divided into two or three terms. When three terms were used each term consisted of from eight to ten weeks of instruction, called the fall, winter, and spring terms. At times some schools operated only two longer terms, the summer and winter terms. Hence there are often two or three teachers listed for a single year.

From 1866 until 1900 the village operated one nine month school term and a two classroom school instead of a one room school. From 1900 until 1948 there was a school operating with three or four rooms during a nine month school year.
KNOWN TEACHERS OF THE MELROSE WILLCOTE SCHOOLS
FROM 1856 TO 1948

1856-57  H. E. Sims
1857-58  H. E. Sims
1858-59  H. E. Sims
1859-60  G. R. Ward, Mary Merrill
1860-61  Mary Merrill, Martha Mellen
1861-62  Sarah Montgomery, Mary Merrill
1862-63  Mary Merrill, Mary Baker
1863-64  James P. Ward, Martha A. Fish
1864-65  Martha A. Fish, Mary Douglas
1865-66  Miss M. E. Gale, Miss M. J. Douglas
1866-67  Unknown
1867-68  S. G. Sherburn, O. S. Johnson
1868-69  S. G. Sherburn, E. A. Washburn
1869-70  E. N. Warren, O. S. Johnson
1870-1886  Unknown
1886-87  Ella Forbes, Olive Needham, Cora Nichols
1887-1892  Unknown
1892-93  Upper room unknown
          Miss Sheppard
1893-94  Upper room unknown
          Minnie James (later Mrs. A. B. Polleys)
1898-1899  W. H. Wright, Miss Bowman
1899-1900  W. H. Wright, Miss Bowman
1900-1901  R. W. Vanderhoof, Alice Robie, Nan B. Gorman
1901-1909  Unknown
1909-1910  Clara Clark, Ida Christopherson, Mary Hill
           Unknown
1910-1912  Unknown
1912-1913  Jessie Wedin, Jennie Nelson
           Mrs. Winnefred Reddy, Will Schepke
1913-1914  Harold Stephens 7 & 8
           Winnefred Reddy 4-5-6
           Helen James 1-2-3
1914-1915  Harold Stephens 7-8
           Bessie Haag 4-5-6
           Helen James 1-2-3
1915-1916  Harold Stephens 7-8
           Olive Schmidt 5-6
           Emma Peterson, Grace Webb 3-4
           Helen James 1-2
1916-1917  Harold Stephens 7-8
           Olive Schmidt 5-6
           Helen James
           Hulda Hammer
1917-1918  Herbert Wheaton, Edith Spaulding
           Ruth Jones, Minnie Sanborn
1918-1919  Herbert Wheaton, Edith Spaulding
           Ruth Jones, Minnie Sanborn
1919-1920  Dora Dahl, Esther Stetzer, May Taylor
           Margaret Kelly, Margaret O'Brien
1920-1921  Maggie Stetzer, Ruth Johnson
           Maidie Collins, Calla St. Clair,
           Margaret O'Brien
1921-1922  Maggie Stetzer, Ruth Johnson
           Maybelle Davis, Calla St. Clair
1922-1923  Edward Spaulding, Ruth Johnson
           Maybelle Davis, Sadie Tuttle
1923-1924  Edward Spaulding, Margaret Smith
           Bessie Natanson, Jeannette Vincent
1924-1925  Frank Todd, Margaret Smith
           Bessie Natanson, Jeannette Vincent
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<td>1942-1943</td>
<td>Marvin Samplawski, Stella Amborn</td>
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<td>Mrs. Margaret Christianson, Clarice Davis</td>
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<td>1943-1944</td>
<td>Stella Amborn, Birdine Horn</td>
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<td>1944-1945</td>
<td>Stella Amborn, Birdine Horn</td>
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<td>1945-1946</td>
<td>Stella Amborn, Lillian Lund</td>
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<td>Pearl Lien, Grace Erickson</td>
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<td>Stella Amborn, Lillian Lund</td>
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<td>1947-1948</td>
<td>James Walden, Stella Amborn</td>
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<td>Mrs. Leone Mattson, Grace Erickson</td>
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**Known Teachers of the West Indies School from 1856 to 1948**

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<tr>
<td>1867-1868</td>
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1921-1922  Evelyn McWald
1922-1923  Victoria Johnson
1923-1924  Edna Carisch
1924-1925  Edna Carisch
1925-1926  Rae C. Schoephoerster
1926-1929  Ruth Olson
1929-1930  Mary Stebbins
1930-1931  Lois Rice
1931-1932  Thora Bragen
1932-1933  Minnie Carlson
1933-1934  Laura Mullen
1934-1936  Marjorie Bright
1936-1937  Nilda Nelson
1937-1939  Edna Johnson
1939-1942  Mrs. Alma Melbye
1942-1943  Eleanor Olson
1943-1946  Elsie Witt
1946-1948  Eunice Pfaff

RED SCHOOL TEACHERS
FROM 1867 TO 1948

1867-1868  A. Plumley, David Randall
1868-1869  A. Plumley
1869-1870  Ella J. Champlin
1870-1871  James M. Baird, Orinda Johnson, Jeanie Lloyd
1871-1872  Marietta Hall, Ella J. Champlin
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<td>1875-1876</td>
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<td>1876-1877</td>
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<td>1881-1882</td>
<td>Trudy Ketchum</td>
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1899-1900  A. E. McClean
1900-1901  Nellie Johnson
1901-1902  Alta Hamilton, Alva Guillard, Ida Larson
1902-1903  Winnie Horwill, Vernice Button
1903-1904  Elizabeth Oliver
1904-1905  Marie Johnson, Maud Button
1905-1906  Grace Bowman, Vernice Button
1906-1907  Jeanette Tiffany
1907-1908  Gertrude Bartlett
1908-1909  Inez Wilson
1909-1910  Mabelle Nanstad
1910-1911  Carrie Pope
1911-1912  Minnie Johnson
1912-1913  Unknown
1913-1914  Esther Sims
1914-1915  Caroline Wensel, Evelyn Wensel
1915-1916  Lois Langston
1916-1917  Lois Langston
1917-1918  Berdine Stratton
1918-1919  Anna Emerson
1919-1920  Mabel Lewis
1920-1921  Lillian Hutchins
1921-1922  Alice Scott
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943-1944</td>
<td>Laura Johnson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944-1948</td>
<td>Ione Schuster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>OX BOW TEACHERS:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>FROM 1884 TO 1941</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884-1889</td>
<td>Alice Robinson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889-1890</td>
<td>Grace Haminam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890-1891</td>
<td>Edna Rova</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891-1892</td>
<td>Edna Rova</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892-1896</td>
<td>Jennie Quackenbush</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896-1898</td>
<td>Merta Behm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898-1902</td>
<td>Janette Quackenbush</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902-1903</td>
<td>Nellie Johnson</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1903-1904  Marie Davis
1904-1905  Bessie James
1905-1908  Lydia White
1908-1910  Lily Langston
1910-1912  Jessie Nanstad
1912-1913  Bessie Haage
1913-1914  Ruby Shuman
1914-1916  Dorothy Polleys
1916-1917  Jessie Ristow
1917-1918  Esther Stetzer
1918-1919  Eilla Anderson
1919-1920  Mildred Dietrick
1920-1921  Janette Tiffany
1921-1922  Addie DeWolf
1922-1924  Myrtle Tollefson
1924-1925  Leona Gutnecht
1925-1926  Mildred Stratton
1926-1928  Lloys Bekkelund
1928-1930  Gaylord Holmgreen
1930-1932  Marie Amundson
1932-1934  Cleo Wensel
1934-1936  Dorothy Ginther
1936-1937  Maida Spors
1937-1941  Irene Kersting
1941-1948  Students transported to Village of Melrose
The above picture was taken in November of 1959. This building was constructed in 1900 and used as an elementary school from October, 1900 until December, 1959. Two rooms on the second floor served as a High School from 1907 until 1915.
West Indies

This picture, taken in the late 1930's, shows the West Indies School as it was in 1856, and still stands today, two miles west of Melrose. It is presently used as a community center and as a town hall.
Red School

This picture, taken in 1938, shows the Red School when it was the pride of Red School Valley. Today the remains of the building stand forlorn on Highway 54 southwest of Melrose.
Ox Bow School

This picture was taken about 1938. In 1942 the building was sold for use as a granary in the Mill Creek community west of Melrose.