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SCHOOLS AND RURAL REGENERATION

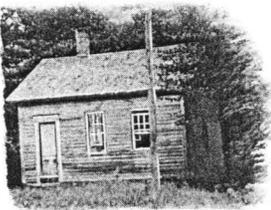


WHAT HAS BEEN DONE IN SOME OF THE RURAL SCHOOLS BY ONE MAN AND THE RELATION OF THIS WORK TO THE PROBLEMS OF THE WESTERN NEW ENGLAND HILL TOWNS

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AUG 20 1923

By John D. Willard

NOTE:—Nearly a year has elapsed since the preparation of this article. Superintendent Riley has assumed his new responsibilities at the Lowell Normal School. The teachers who were in charge of the two Peru schools are now continuing their training elsewhere. But the cardinal facts are the same, and the principles, more patent than ever, are being applied enthusiastically by Supt. Harry E. Gardner, Mr. Riley's successor.—J. D. W.



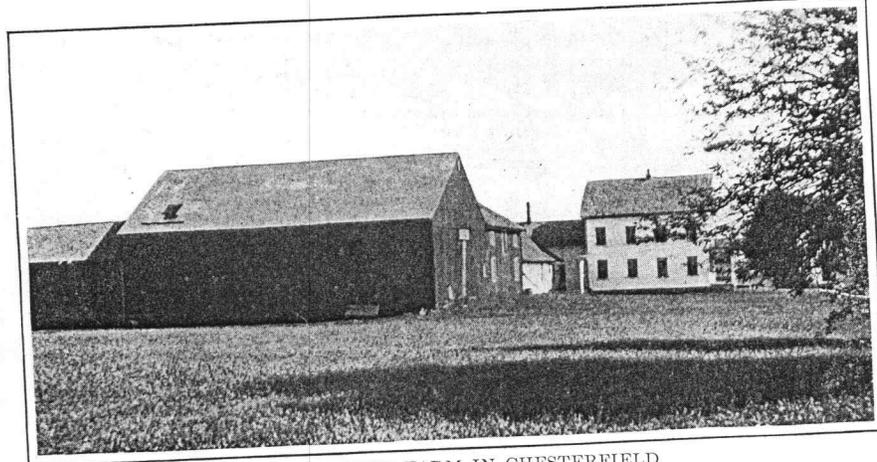
“THIS is the best of the Hill towns, and I like it, but I am afraid that in two or three years I shall have to sell out and go where the schools are better.” Thus said an officer of the town of Worthington, one of the most conservative farmers of the town. The schools are close indeed to the roots of the hill town problems.

centres of Shutesbury, Pelham, Goshen, Cummington, Middlefield, Chester, Huntington, or Russell produces a state of mind akin to that experienced in a neglected cemetery. At the old town centre on Cummington Hill nothing remains except a cemetery to remind the visitor that here were at one time church, store, post office, tavern and shop, all of which have gone. Cummington is a noteworthy illustration of the tendency, as there is no railroad to draw population to the present Cummington villages on the Westfield River; yet the inevitable gravitation toward the manufacturing centers has depleted the farms of Cummington Hill, a region known to many as the home of William Cullen Bryant.

However much of discouragement and actual decadence may have obtained in rural sections of Massachusetts during the last fifty years, the consensus of opinion at present is that the tide is turning toward better things. The actual decadence and attendant conditions of abandonment are not to be denied; yet it is now possible to see that these changes are not sheer loss, but are the necessary readjustments to new economic conditions—the result of a complete change in channels and methods of transportation and manufacture. In these changes the population has been drawn from the hills to the neighborhood of the villages in the valleys. The depleted hill-top centres have continued a precarious existence, and in many cases have shrunk almost to the vanishing point. A visit to the old town



ONE OF THE MANY FARM-HOMES WHICH HAVE SHELTERED STATE WARDS
These children especially benefit from the diversified work described.



THE HILBERT FARM IN CHESTERFIELD
A fine property of a hundred or more acres, abandoned except for the cutting of some hay each year.

The readjustment has now progressed far enough to reveal the fact that the future of the hill towns is assured, though not on the same lines of activity as heretofore. The tavern will be filled a part of the year, but not with the company of business men who in former days traveled the weary stage-roads and turnpikes. The better farms will be utilized, and the poorer will be allowed to revert to woodland, or will be annexed to neighboring property. The year-round population will in many cases be less than the maximum found in past census reports, but the summer population will constantly increase. The dwellers of the city have rediscovered the

tonic value of the hill-town air, and the towns themselves are realizing the economic significance of this asset.

The Real Problem

The real problem, however, does not directly concern the summer resident. It is rather that of making life remunerative and attractive to those who live in the hills the year round. As President Butterfield of the Massachusetts Agricultural College states the case: "The rural problem is to maintain upon our land a class of people whose status in society fairly represents American ideals— industrial, political, social, and ethical. In order to accomplish this all departments of life must be maintained at a reasonable standard of efficiency. The business of agriculture must be made to yield a reasonable return to those who follow it intelligently; and life on the farm must be made permanently satisfying to intelligent, progressive people." Thus the revival of commercial prosperity, the maintenance of efficient schools, the creation of an adequate social life, and the conservation of a strong religious idealism and inspiration are all necessary factors in the regeneration.

It is not the purpose of this article to discuss theoretically the methods by which the commercial, social and religious life of the rural districts may be quickened; nor is it for a moment claimed that the last word will be said concerning school improvement and regeneration. I wish, however, to place at the disposal of any who may read, the facts concerning what has been done along progressive lines in certain rural schools of western Massachusetts; if a certain amount of theory is included with the facts, it is only that the facts themselves may the better be interpreted. Before we turn to the facts let us find warrant in another statement of President Butterfield, both for our interest in the school question and for the experiments actually made. "The second movement in rural education is definite school instruction in agriculture as a vocational subject. The rural schools should of course train boys and girls for life in general, without regard to whether they are to be residents of the city or of the country. But there must also be facilities in the public schools for the preparation of youth for agriculture as a business. At this point there is a great gap in our educational system."

The statement above does not in the least remove emphasis from the need of general school efficiency, yet a field for improvement thus far scarcely attempted is indicated.

The Man Behind

The work which I shall describe is in the main due to the earnest persistence of former Superintendent W. E. Riley of the schools of Hinsdale, Windsor, Savoy, and Peru. During his incumbency a system was given trial in the Church Street School in Hinsdale, a school of four rooms; in the Centre and South District Schools in Peru, and in the Southeast School in Windsor. In addition to these schools, part of the work has been undertaken in other schools of Windsor and Savoy. The introduction of industrial work in a village school is nothing unusual, though not frequent in towns of the size of Hinsdale. But to undertake instruction in sewing, cooking, carpentering, typewriting and agriculture in a district school with only twelve scholars was indeed an innovation; and to make a success of the work with the first attempt was no small achievement.

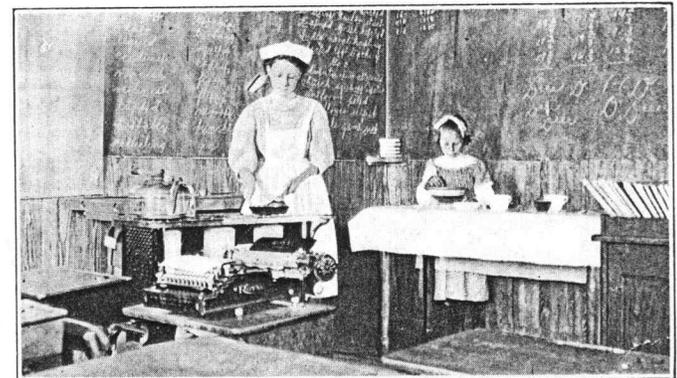
I first met Superintendent Riley in the Centre School on Peru Hill. He was making his usual visit of inspection, and had no warning that he and his work were to be "examined." The school building, as shown in an accompanying picture, is of the type so common to district



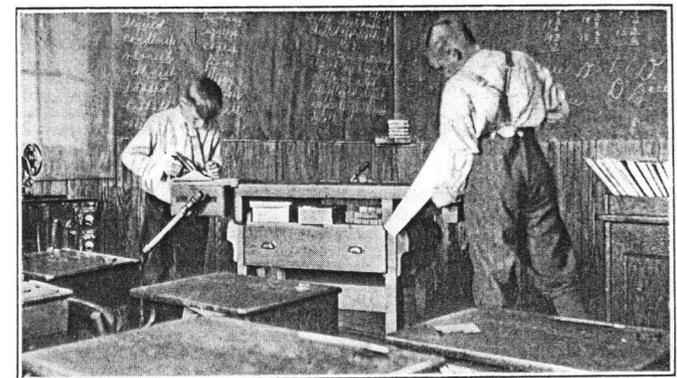
GARDENING AT THE CENTRE SCHOOL, PERU



CENTRE SCHOOL, PERU
Where some of the work described has been done.



LEARNING TO COOK IN THE SOUTH SCHOOL, PERU



CARPENTRY IN THE SOUTH SCHOOL, PERU

schools. It is a severely plain white clapboarded structure without blinds, so plain as to arouse but little zeal for learning. The outer door opens into a hallway and cloakroom. On the right is the schoolroom, and on the left a room which was formerly a woodshed. I introduced myself to Mr. Riley, stated the purpose of my visit, in the meantime noting many things unusual to a district school. A "New Home" sewing machine, and a new "Royal" typewriter were in the schoolroom. Several small hand looms, with brown and green manilla mats partially completed, hung on the walls. In the room which was formerly the woodshed were a three-burner oil-stove, with oven and cooking utensils, a carpenter's bench and complete kit of wood-working tools, and an assortment of garden tools. I began to ask questions in a manner as aimless as it was interested and wondering, and Superintendent Riley mildly suggested that we would cover the ground as satisfactorily if we began with some one department and followed it through.

The Home and the Work

So we began with cooking. The girls at about eight are expected to be helpers in the work, measuring, stirring, turning, and so forth, while the girls from ten to fourteen do the actual cooking, under the supervision of the teacher. It is insisted upon that the teacher shall not do the actual work, but shall confine her activity to supervision. In families where the work is appreciated, the child repeats the task at home in order to fix the process in memory. What is done? At the age of thirteen each girl has helped in the preparation of the following: Three kinds of soup; the common vegetables, both for immediate use on the table and for preserving; roast meat; casserole-boiled meat; fish; white, graham, rye, oatmeal, and brown bread; salads—Waldorf, cabbage and potato; sponge, layer, lily and marble cake; plain, vanilla, strawberry, and Philadelphia ice-cream; tea, coffee, and lemonade. "Horrors! Teaching the children to use tea and coffee?" A preliminary questioning of the scholars in Hinsdale revealed the fact that every girl of the age to be in the cooking class was using tea or coffee, or both, at home.

The results of this work are dependent largely on the attitude of the home from which the child comes, and on the natural ability of the pupil. A nine-year old girl in Hinsdale bought, prepared, and served alone a five-course dinner for seven people. On the other hand it is certainly true that where the work is discouraged at home, and is spoken of slightly, the child will have little opportunity or desire to repeat the processes and thus fix them in mind. In many cases where the parents speak slightly of the gains through such work, the failure is due almost wholly to the home and not to the child or the system. During the school year two dinners and one luncheon were served in the Centre School in Peru by the scholars, training being thus given in serving as well as cooking.

I fully expect that the argument at times heard in Peru will be in the minds of some: "These things should be taught at home; and besides, are not all farmers' wives good cooks?" But granting that such things should be taught at home, and that we all have eaten some of our most enjoyable meals in farm-houses, the fact remains that many children, especially state wards, are taught absolutely nothing of cooking; and also that we have suffered some of our greatest gastronomic discomforts in the country. There are too many homes in the country where the monotonous diet of fried salt-pork and potatoes is kept up, with little or no variation for weeks at a time, especially in the Springtime before the garden vegetables

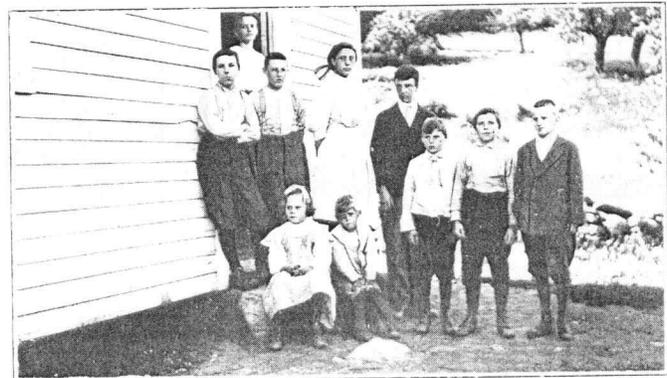
are large enough for the table. What girls from such homes can learn in cooking classes would be the most practicable education conceivable.

Sewing, Typewriting and Carpentering

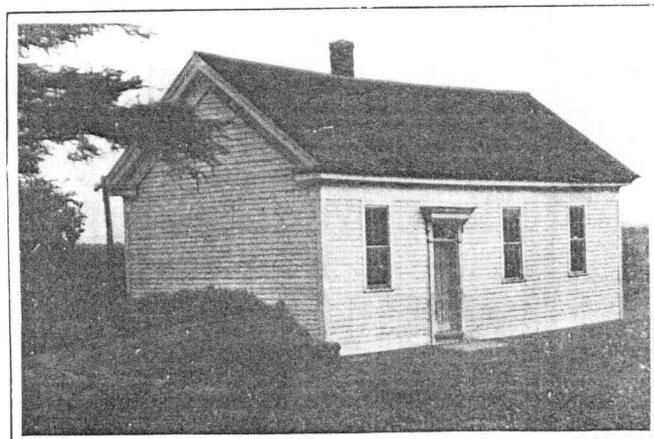
The sewing work is also done under the direction of the regular teacher. The different stitches are first worked on Penelope canvas with Saxony yarn, the aim of the



IN THE SCHOOL GARDEN
Boys at work at the South School, Peru.



THE SOUTH SCHOOL, PERU
Showing conclusively that the country has room for more families.

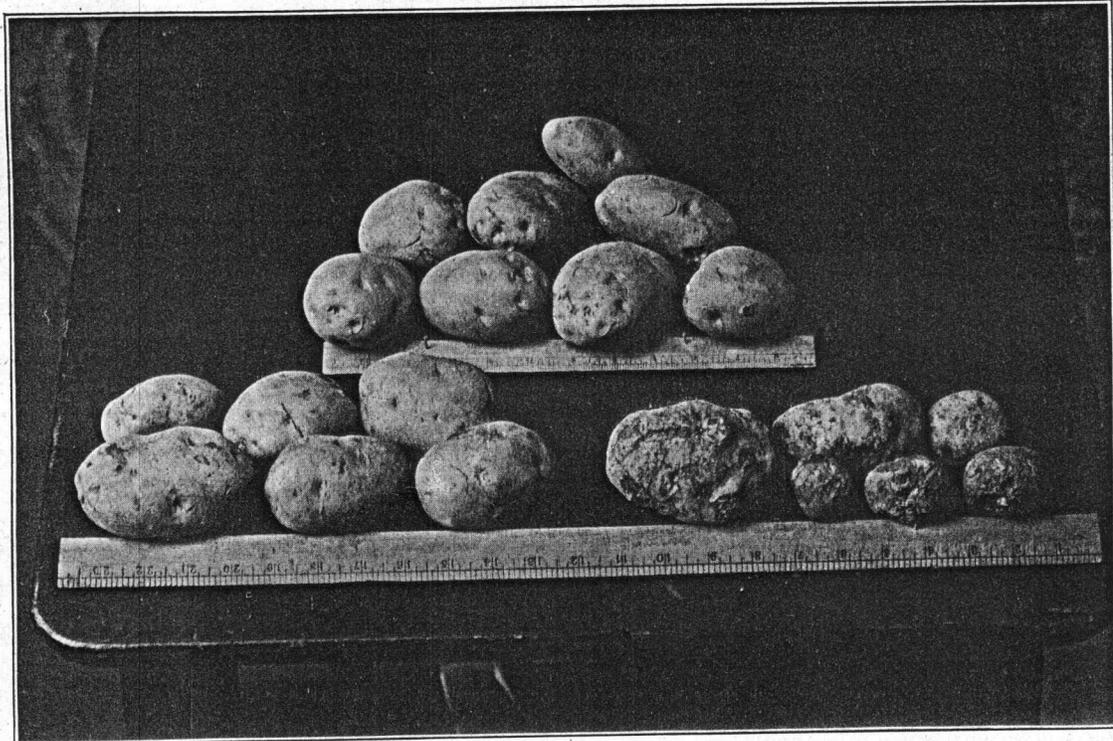


CENTRE SCHOOL BUILDING, PERU
Here is done some of the best work of the hill town schools.

first work is to teach the stitches, and give accuracy in handling needle and thread. Next the same stitches are used on Java canvas, the pupil selecting colors and working out original designs. Useful articles, at first simple, later of increasing complexity, are made. Flat-iron holders, handkerchief bags, laundry bags, aprons and napkins are among the simpler products. The science of simple garment-cutting is taught, and as a foundation for this, pattern drafting. Girls in the upper grades can draft patterns to the measure of a scholar, whether the garment is a boy's blouse, a pair of pants, a shirt-waist, a chemise, or a pair of drawers. Garments which could not be duplicated in Pittsfield for less than two dollars have been made in Hinsdale by scholars at a cost of sixty cents and the time. Shirt-waists and blouses have been made and are worn to school by the scholars on Peru Hill. In Hinsdale fifty automobile toques were made by scholars during the past winter. The objection has again been raised that these things

proficient enough to receive the necessary certificate. The principal value of the machine, however, is in the training which it gives in accuracy, patience, muscular control, spelling, and punctuation.

The carpentering work is not extensive, but is sufficient to teach the use of the ordinary tools—plane, square, saw, hammer, and so forth. Under the direction of the superintendent the scholars of the Centre School in Peru sheathed a part of one side of the woodshed, and then continued the work alone. When the plain sheathing is completed, baseboards and moulding will be added, and window and door-casings. When all the work is done the room will be used, as at present, for cooking and carpentering. The boys are taught to make sleds and toboggans, shelves, bookcases, match-safes, and numerous other small articles, and are also taught to set glass. (Judging by appearances in the country, who will say that the latter accomplishment may not be put to good and



COMPARATIVE RESULTS OF OLD AND MODERN METHODS

These potatoes were raised in Hinsdale from scabby seed; the seed of the large, fair tubers were treated with formalin, the seed of the others were not.

(Illustration used by courtesy of the State Board of Education.)

should be taught at home, and the fact is equally patent that they are not. It is also to be doubted whether correct linen darning, for instance, is understood by even a majority of the parents. One woman, much opposed to the industrial work, had the privilege or mortification of learning from her eight-year-old son how to work a flannel-stitch decoration for the hem of a baby's petticoat. She had not previously learned to do anything of the kind. Nor may we for a moment think that this is an unusual or isolated case. And altogether aside from the utilitarian consideration, the brightening of homes by decorative work, and the consciousness of being more tastefully dressed, add to the comfort and enjoyment of those who accomplish it.

In Hinsdale the use of the typewriter is allowed only to those who are proficient in penmanship. Nor does this defeat the purpose of the work, by compelling the poorer penman to remain in his poorer penmanship without the relief of the typewriter; for all were so anxious to use the machine that, by faithful work, every scholar became

frequent use?) Aside from actual proficiency in the use of tools there is a far greater gain in the stimulation of interest, and in the acquisition of originality and accuracy.

The School Gardens

The school garden is as yet a small plot, but is ample for the demonstration of certain principles. Seed potatoes treated with formalin have been free from scab, while an adjacent field, planted with seed not thus treated, yielded a crop badly affected. The Bordeaux mixture is also used successfully to prevent blight. In Hinsdale, scabby seed were taken, and a part were treated with formalin to destroy the scab spore; the remainder were planted without this precaution. The potatoes resulting from the seed treated with the preventive were large and fair, while those resulting from the seed planted without the precaution were scabbier than ever.

Mr. J—M—in Hinsdale heard of this result,

and, as he had never raised any potatoes free from scab, he determined to give the "new-fangled" method a trial. The accompanying cut, loaned by the State Board of Education, shows the result of these two experiments. Although the schools have made a specialty of the potato, the children have also raised corn, beets, Swiss chard, onions, radishes, carrots, and lettuce. The children in Peru are experimenting with alfalfa. The scholars in Hinsdale had radishes in the market three weeks after planting, and from ten to fourteen days ahead of those planted at the same time by their parents.

The use of fertilizers is taught, including interpretation of the guaranteed analysis found on the bags. The children are shown how to mix fertilizers from raw chemicals, and how to estimate the amount of available nitrogen, phosphoric acid and potash contained in the mixture. In this branch of the work, even more than in the others, the value of the work to the pupil depends on the repetition on the farm of the method learned at school. A great difference is noticeable in the attitude of the parents. Some watch the experiments with interest, and profit by them, as in the case mentioned. Others are contemptuous of the effort to improve the methods of agriculture, and continue to raise scabby potatoes with the stout affirmation that nothing better is needed.

How is it Done?

Doubtless many questions have occurred to those who read. Does not this interfere with the regular school work? Can one teacher become competent to teach all these things, and find time to do the actual work? How about the extra expense? Let us find the answers to these questions in the Peru schools. The Centre School and the South School had twelve and fourteen scholars respectively during the school year ending last June. Only two hours and a half each week are assigned from actual school hours to cooking, carpentering, and sewing. By far the greater part of the work is done as "knitting-work," or outside of the regular school hours. The teachers emphatically testify that attention to regular work is better where the scholars have the special training. The pupils have more interest in the school, and more respect for it as an institution.

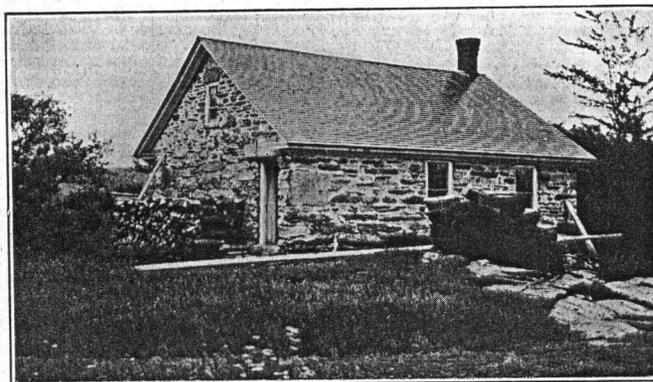
The teachers in these schools have had no normal training except correspondence and summer work. They have worked up for themselves with the superintendent's aid the industrial branches. And let it here be noted to the credit of the town of Peru, one of the most abandoned in the state and with a valuation of less than \$150,000 all told, and only sixty families, that the teachers are better paid than in any of the surrounding towns. It is but fair to say that Peru receives liberal aid from the state, yet the town's attitude toward the work is no small factor in the success. And, furthermore, the tax-rate in Peru is no higher than in neighboring towns where the teachers receive much smaller salaries, and where the schools are nowhere nearly as well equipped.

Some of the Results

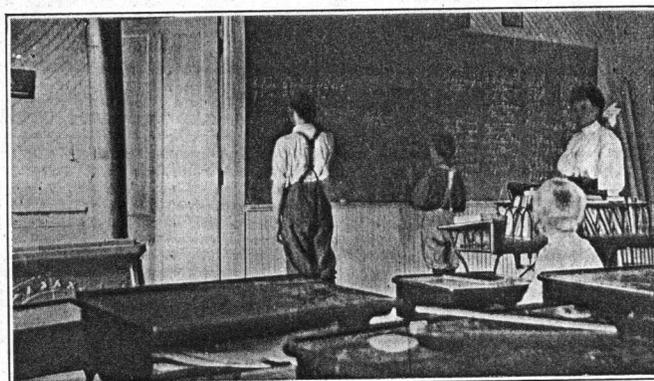
As to the gains: actual records in the Church Street School in Hinsdale show from seven to fifteen corporal punishments per month seven years ago. Today there are none. Attendance is more regular, and what is more important yet, the academic work is followed more faithfully in the schools where the industrial work has been introduced. The special work serves to keep boys in school after they have reached the age of fourteen, and has even drawn boys back to school after they have left. A boy in Hinsdale was heard to say, "In two weeks I shall be fourteen, and I am glad of it, for then I can leave

school." The boy returned because of the manual work, and followed his course so faithfully that a relative has offered him a college education if he finishes the high school course.

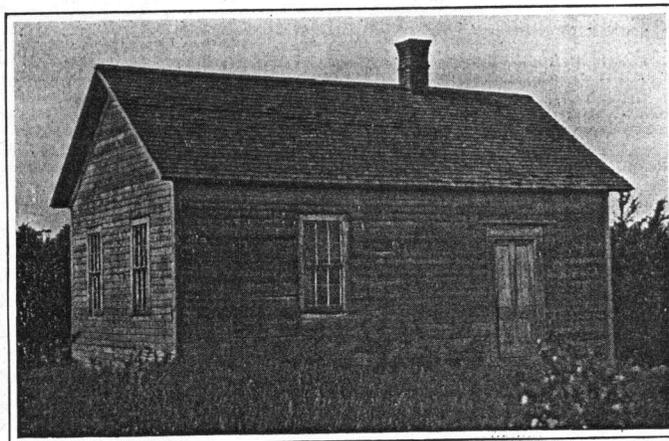
Another gain which can hardly be estimated too highly is that to the state wards already referred to. Few people realize how many of these unfortunates are placed in the rural homes of the state. The majority have good homes, and are far better off than those remaining in institutions; yet, little as we may relish the fact, it is true that these children are not trained with the same care as are native children. It is a matter of economy as well as of ethics



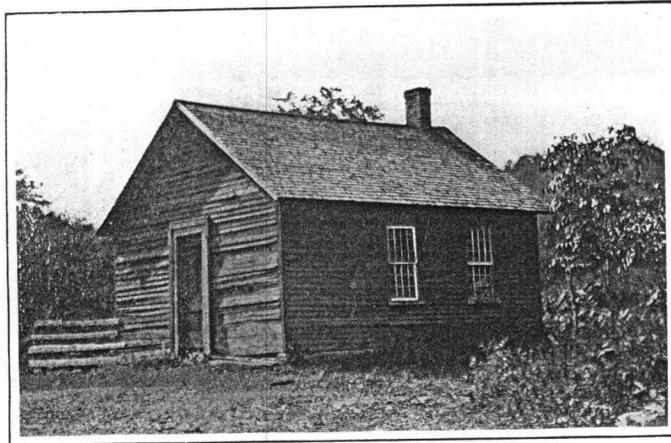
THE OLD NORTH SCHOOL HOUSE, PERU



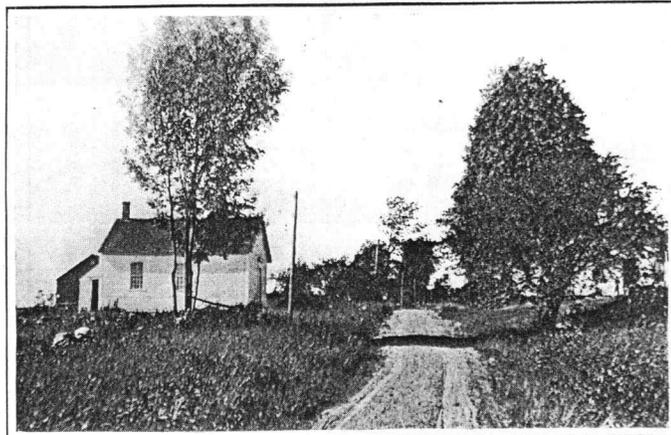
INTERIOR, THE NORTH SCHOOL, PERU
Only three pupils finished the last term here.



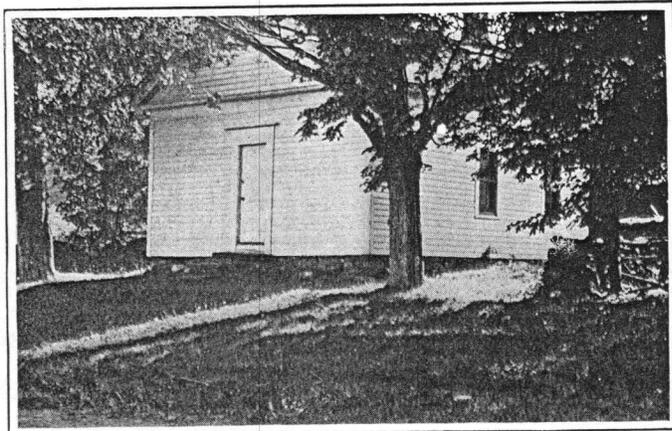
THE SOUTHEAST SCHOOL, PERU
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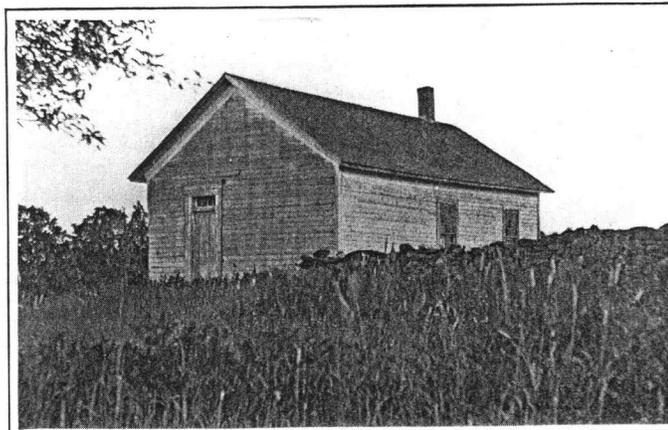
THE OSGOOD SCHOOL, WORTHINGTON
Abandoned.



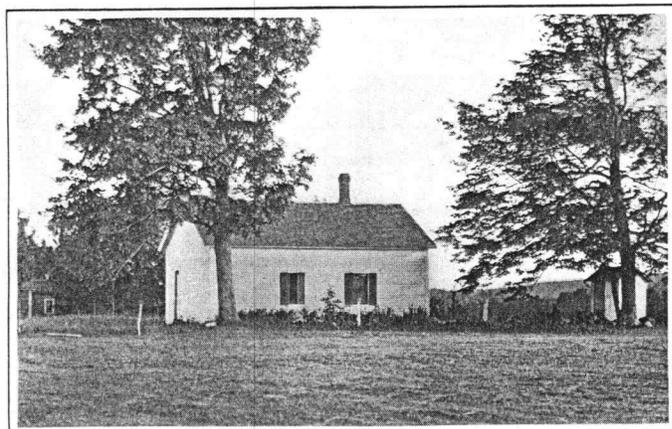
THE IRELAND STREET SCHOOL CHESTERFIELD
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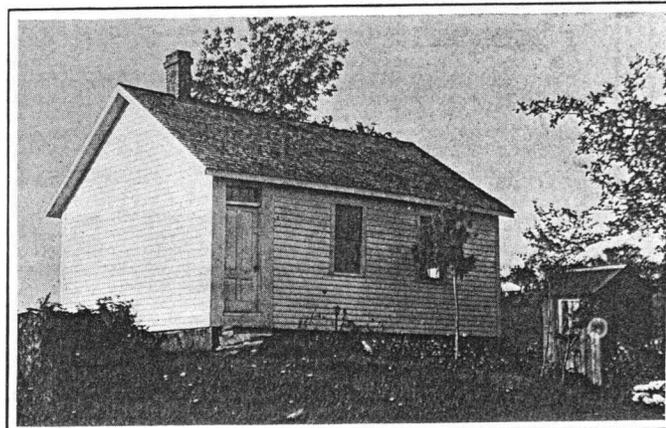
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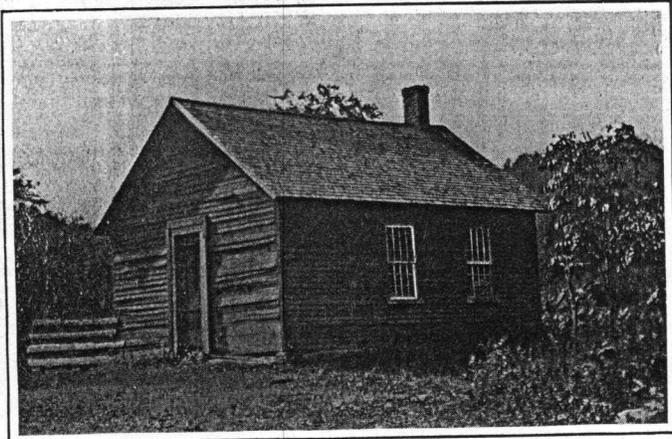
THE BURR DISTRICT SCHOOL, WORTHINGTON
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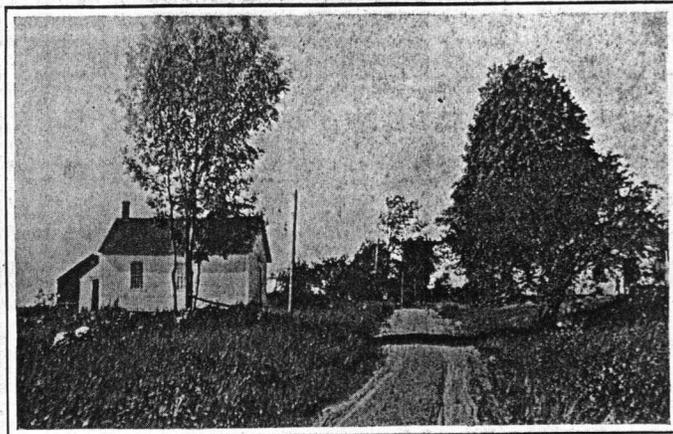
THE CENTRE SCHOOL, WORTHINGTON
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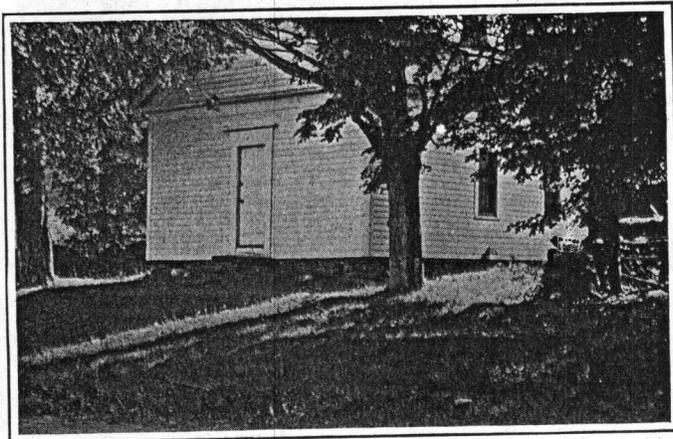
THE PEASE DISTRICT SCHOOL, WORTHINGTON
Opened in the fall of 1910 with two pupils, closed in June with four.



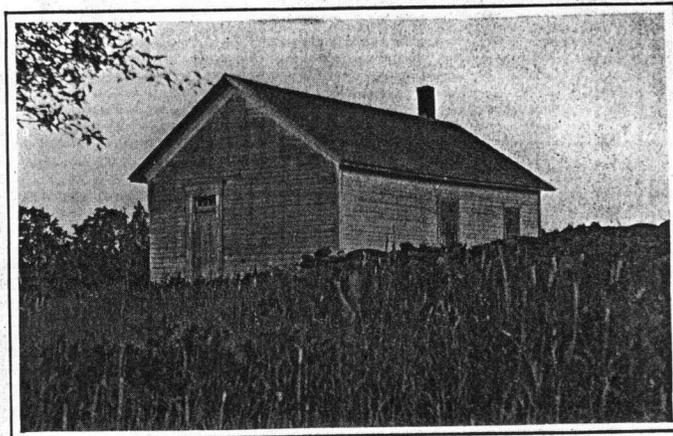
THE OSGOOD SCHOOL, WORTHINGTON
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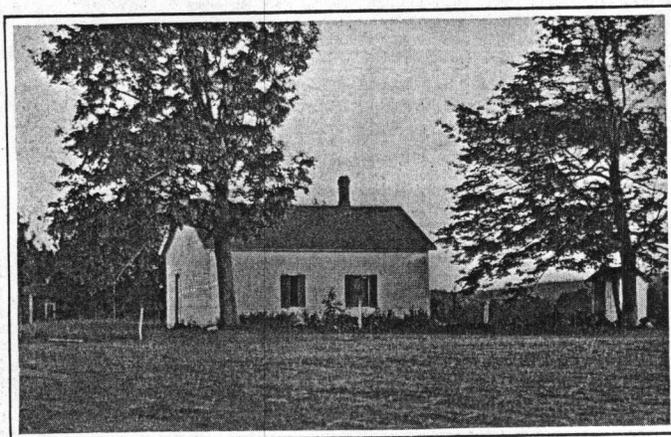
THE IRELAND STREET SCHOOL CHESTERFIELD
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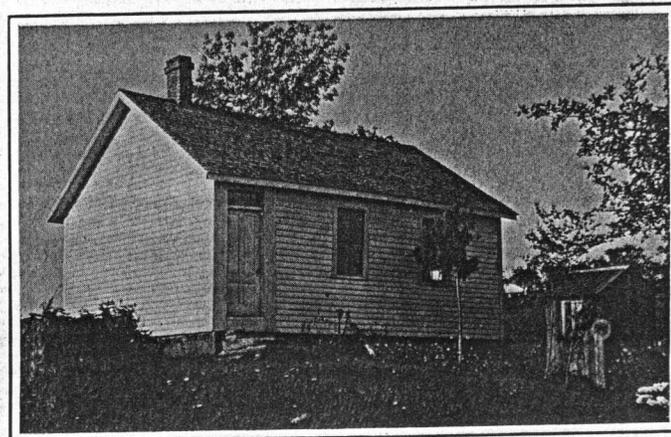
WEST STREET SCHOOL, WORTHINGTON
Discontinued.



THE BURR DISTRICT SCHOOL, WORTHINGTON
Abandoned.



THE CENTRE SCHOOL, WORTHINGTON
Unused.



THE PEASE DISTRICT SCHOOL, WORTHINGTON
Opened in the fall of 1910 with two pupils, closed in June with four.

that these children, although handicapped by circumstances of birth, should be given every opportunity to become good and efficient citizens and members of society. In the schools there is no discrimination. What the homes do not and will not furnish in the way of training in sewing, cooking, and general training in originality, the schools can do. It is impossible to compel training in these lines in the homes, but it is by no means difficult to make the schools efficient in just these lines in which the home training is too often deficient. The movement would justify itself in the gain to these children alone.

The Attitude of Opposition

Opposition has developed, as might be expected in the case of any new departure. Rural conservatism dies hard. But I have heard no objection, as yet, worthy of more consideration than the following:—namely, that the use of an oil-stove rather than a range was unpardonable because it prepared the children for life in a city flat; that the use of the typewriter would result in the spending of life in a back office; and that the children must of necessity neglect their regular work. The partial failure, if any, in making the vocational work all that its promoters hope for must be due chiefly to the disaffection created among the pupils by their own parents. If the children are sent to school having been told that the work is useless, that the teachers are incompetent, it must almost follow as a matter of course that such destructive influence at home will offset the good and constructive work supplied in the schools. If, however, parents will see to it that their children shall be punctual at school and that they are given opportunity and encouragement to repeat at home what they have learned at school, they will be giving the teachers at least a chance to work out some of their plans and be the better able to answer opposition with proofs and actual results.

If only the parents were concerned the loss would seem slight; but such opposing influence is profoundly harmful to the education of the pupil, and has its effect in the attitude of other scholars, not to mention the hardship which it creates for the teacher. The bulk of criticism appears to have its origin in a lack of ability to appreciate a need of better things, in a disregard of the principles of psychology and pedagogy on which the work is founded, or in personal spite. It must not be supposed, however, that the work is faultless, or that all criticism is unjustified. With friendly criticism and honest doubt the leaders of the movement have no complaint, and such criticism and doubt certainly exist.

Those to Whom Credit is Due

I cannot leave the subject without further reference to the personnel of the work. It would be hard indeed to say too much in praise of Superintendent Riley and his work.

*Text-books dealing with the different branches of the industrial work are available. Former Superintendent Riley recommends the following: *Scientific Sewing and Garment Cutting*, A. H. V. Wakeman. (Silver, Burdett & Co.); *The Boston Cooking School Cook Book*, Fannie Merritt Farmer, (Little, Brown & Co.); *Educational Woodwork for Home and School*, J. C. Park, (Macmillan); *Domestic Art in Woman's Education*, Anna Maria Cooley, (Scribner's); *The Touchwriter*, Fuller, (The Phonographic Inst. Co., Cincinnati, O.).

Determination, keenness of observation, versatility, and a close personal touch with his work, characterize the man. He sees clearly the practical, as well as its relation to theory. Once, in Peru, while speaking of the work, he suddenly stopped with the remark, "There you have an illustration of the waste of effort so common in the country." Following his glance I saw three teams hauling a large steam boiler. The wheel horses were doing the bulk of the hauling all the time; but the "leaders" were so hooked to the pole that, whenever they did actually pull, their effort added still more to the strain on the collars of the "wheelers."

Superintendent Riley has received his reward in the form of an appointment to the faculty of the Lowell Normal School, where he is spending his time in developing further the system which he has followed in his work among the rural schools referred to. To the teachers is due an equal share of the credit. Theirs has been the task of putting into practice the principles which Superintendent Riley has outlined. They have learned* to use the typewriter; to cook; to drive nails; to take measurements and draft patterns; to plant potatoes; and to do innumerable other things not ordinarily considered essential to a teacher's understanding. And the most encouraging feature is that teachers in the Peru schools have had even less training than many who are teaching in the country. They have regarded their position as one of opportunity. They have caught the spirit of progress, and are making their schools increasingly centres of usefulness and efficiency.

Relation of the Work to Rural Regeneration

In conclusion it may not be out of place to ask what relation this work bears to the regeneration of the country. First of all the teachers will tell you that the most marked effect of the innovation is on the academic work. Children who are taught to *do things*, and thereby learn originality, actually *learn* better. Attendance is more regular. Interest in school work is increased, and still more important, respect for the institution. But aside from the direct results in school efficiency, there is an increased respect for the school on the part of the parents, and this is exceedingly important in country welfare. Many a good farm—yes, many a district—has been abandoned for the most part, because of the praiseworthy desire of parents that their children should have *adequate* school advantages. The maintenance in rural districts of schools which command the respect of the parents will be a large factor in keeping in the hill town families from which we may expect the sturdy manhood and womanhood of the future. There will be an increasing gain through the improvement of methods of agriculture, thus strengthening the economic position. And finally, an inestimable amount may be expected in the way of home brightening and home broadening—both vital factors in "making life in the country permanently satisfying to intelligent, progressive people."