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THE SCHOOL LUNCH

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The Roots of Iowa's School Lunch Program

IOWANS who attended school before 1973 probably know that not all public schools provided lunch programs. The fight to bring this about is recounted in the next article, which begins in the year 1958. But the roots of today's

Cover and pages from 1921 university extension bulletin. The bulletin notes that "a cheerful environment at meals materially aids digestion," yet the basement lunchroom (opposite) at a school in Gilbert, Iowa, 1921, is less than cheerful. No doubt the teachers were grateful for any mealtime space.

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night in the fireless cooker. Similarly the pearled barley, which needs long cooking, may be partially cooked the afternoon before it is to be served, if there be no fireless cooker in the equipment.



Serving the hot dish.

The dishes suggested, besides milk, are made of foods which are easily procured in the country, most of them being the winter vegetables or home canned and dried foods.

HOW TO OBTAIN SUPPLIES

The method of obtaining the food material for the noon-day meal must be worked out by the individual community. In general it is better for each child to pay, for the individual lunch served, enough to cover the cost of material. In certain instances the cost of material may be defrayed by the school or by a local organization; or the necessary food material may be brought from the homes by the individual pupils, each home in turn being responsible. If the latter method is adopted it will be necessary for each mother to know before hand on just what day she is to furnish the material, that she may make her plans accordingly.

Whatever method is adopted, it must be such that every child will receive his share of the food furnished. In country homes it frequently happens that food is more abundant than pennies and the child who cannot pay for his lunch in money may be made uncomfortable. For this reason the first method suggested is least desirable. It must not be forgotten that children are quite as sensitive, if not more so than adults, and under no condition should the child who has little be made uncomfortable because he is un-

able to cooperate in the same way as the other children. The main purpose of this noon-day lunch is to make the children more nearly physically fit. The arrangements must be such that all children may share equally. The increase in the school budget incident to the introduction of school lunches will decrease the cost of education. There will be fewer failures and fewer children repeating grades.

EQUIPMENT FOR THE RURAL SCHOOL LUNCH

The equipment for the noon-day lunch will vary with the type of school. The individual equipment, bowl, cup and saucer, etc., may be brought from home. Less confusion will result, however, if all is owned by the school.

EQUIPMENT FOR RURAL SCHOOL

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 Coal oil stove | 1 Can opener |
| 1 Portable oven | 2 Baking dishes 3-quart |
| 1 Aluminum or granite kettle | 1 Dipper |
| 8-quart | 1 Tea kettle |
| 1 Saucepan | 1 Water pail |
| 1 Saucepan 2-quart | 2 Trays |
| 1 Double boiler 6-quart | 6 Dish towels |
| 4 White enameled bowls | 2 Dish cloths |
| 2 2-quart | 1 "Mystic mit" |
| 1 5-quart | 1 Dish mop |
| 1 pint | 2 Dish pans |
| 1 Ladle, long handle, holding | 1 Dish drainer |
| one cup | 24 Cups and saucers |
| 4 Spoons | 24 Soup bowls |
| 2 tablespoons | 24 Serving plates |
| 2 teaspoons | 24 Soup spoons |
| 1 Meat grinder | 24 Tea spoons |
| 3 Knives | 24 Forks |
| 1 butcher | 1 Quart measure |
| 2 paring | 1 Asbestos mat |
| 2 Forks | 1 Dover egg beater |
| 1 small | 1 Measuring cup |
| 1 large | 1 Wire potato masher |
| 2 Strainers | 1 Fireless cooker |
| 1 purée | (This may be made by the class |
| 1 colander | in manual training) |
| 1 Wooden spoon | 6 pkgs. paper napkins (500 each) |
| 1 Scrubbing brush | |

A cupboard for holding the necessary materials and cooking equipment may be built into the lower part of a kitchen table, if a kitchen cabinet is not possible. The top of the table may be covered with white oil-cloth. A one-compartment fireless cooker will aid materially in decreasing the labor involved in preparing

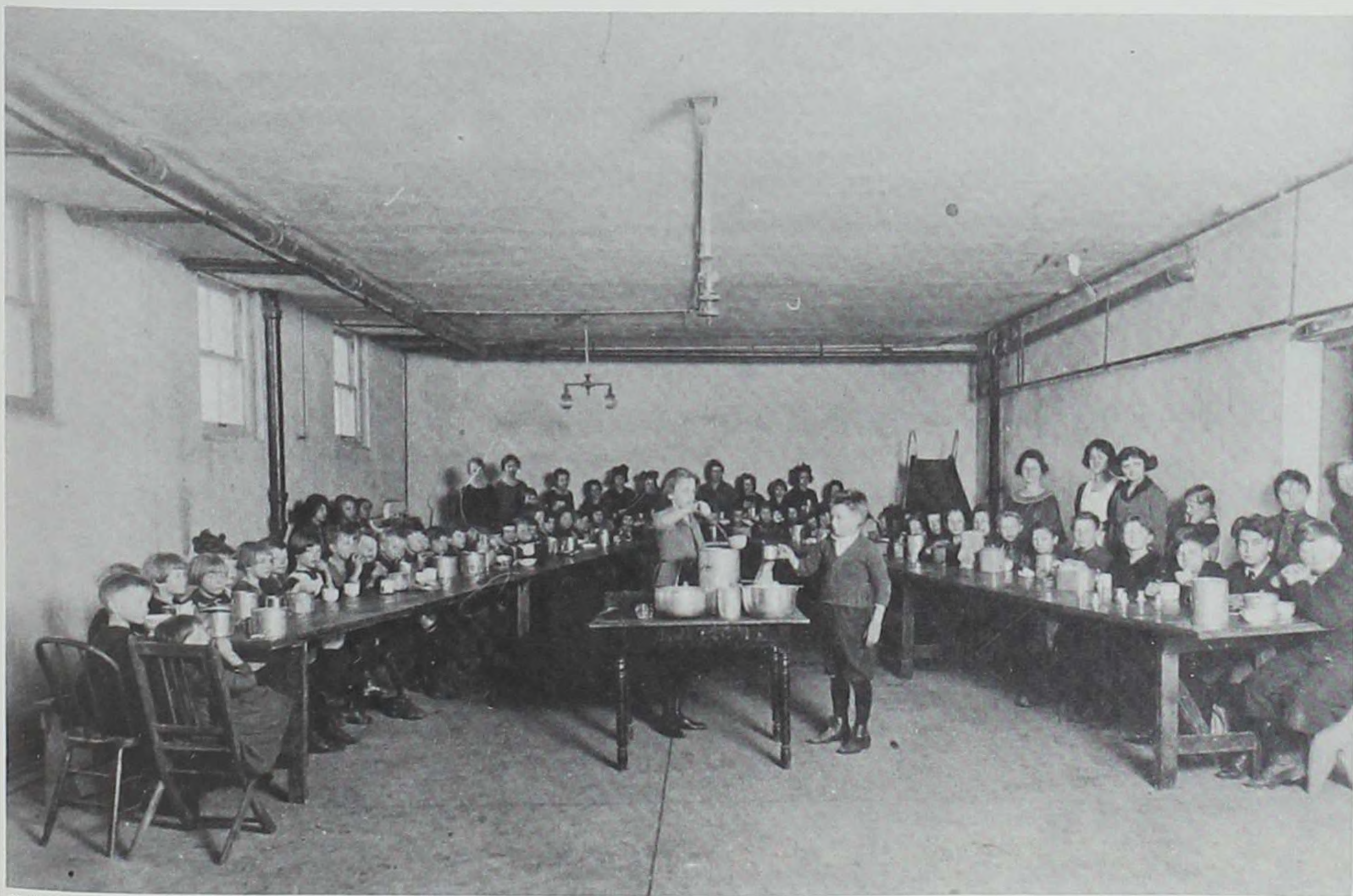
school lunch program lie in previous decades, as the photos on these four pages show.

In the 1920s, extension offices at Iowa State College and the State University of Iowa published bulletins on why and how to set up lunch programs. Addressing a largely rural state, a 1921 SUI bulletin notes that "the child who walks two miles to school needs more food than the child who rides, other things being equal." Yet the food children carried in their tin lunch pails was "cold, often unattractive and not infrequently poorly selected, consisting of a too large proportion of fried foods, meats, sweets and pickles." The solution was a hot meal, donated by parents or cooked by a teacher. The bulletin listed simple equipment to purchase, and it assured school officials that any increases in the school budget for lunches "will decrease the costs of education. There will be fewer failures and few children repeating grades."

In the Great Depression, the federal government tried to resolve the paradox of coexistent malnutrition and surplus through the Surplus Commodity Administration (SCA),

which provided surpluses for locally run, non-profit school lunch programs. In rural areas, mothers often donated their time. But in urban schools, cooks employed by the Work Projects Administration (WPA) supervised National Youth Administration helpers. Thus, the program could reduce surpluses and employ citizens while feeding children. During World War II, SCA was replaced by the War Food Administration.

Yet lunch programs were slow to take hold in Iowa and elsewhere. According to Paul Edwin Nelson, Jr., in his 1949 Iowa State dissertation on the school lunch program, "Many parents in rural areas tended to eye with suspicion the adoption of any additional functions by the school, particularly if the Federal Government was connected with the program. They objected, individually and through their Congressional representatives, to any action which might be contributory to an undesired, overpowerful, centralized state." In 1945, an Ohio congressman remarked, "I would much rather see one of these little communities use food that is contributed locally, so that these



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Above: A woman cooks beans for school lunches in Sheldahl School, Polk County (photographed by Work Projects Administration on November 17, 1941).

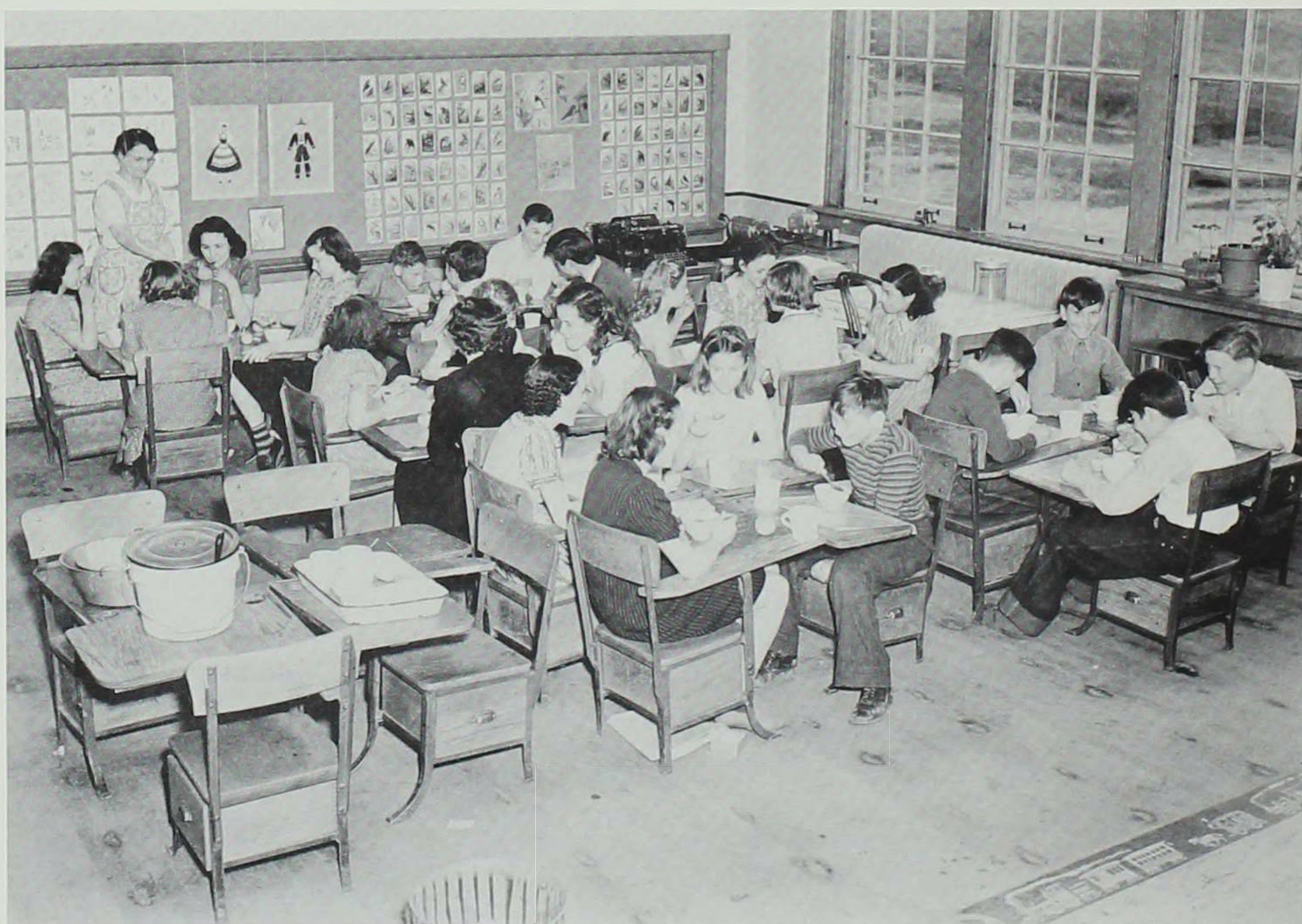
children feel that they are being fed food that they helped to raise, or that their people raised. In fact, I want to raise sovereign citizens and not citizens fed on the nursing bottle of the Federal Government."

Concern would grow, too, over whether the real goal was feeding children nutritional meals or providing agricultural price supports, making the issue even more political. "Stuffing children full of surplus potatoes," Nelson writes in his dissertation, was not the nutritional answer.

In 1946, Congress passed the National School Lunch Act. But as you'll read in the next article, this was only the beginning of the fight to feed Iowa's schoolchildren.

—*The Editor*

WPA PHOTOS (SHSI, IOWA CITY)



Students use classroom desks as lunch tables at Jefferson School in Des Moines (WPA photo, April 30, 1940).



Above: Students of various ages eat lunch at a rural school seven miles west of Centerville. Below, left: At the same school, two women wash dishes in a crowded workspace. (WPA photos, December 1941).

SHSI (DES MOINES), DES MOINES REGISTER AND TRIBUNE



Above: Grace Derr helps herself to food from an electric roaster, while Jerry Koboc waits (rural school near Cresco, February 1942). The Rural Electrification Association (REA) suggested that rural schools with electricity could set up "low-cost food centers" with a hot plate, electric roaster, and steel burr flour meal (to grind locally grown wheat into cereal).



Senior Jerry Freight runs the cash register in his high school lunch line, April 1958. Although many junior high and high schools had lunch programs by the late 1950s, elementary schools in older buildings often lacked them.