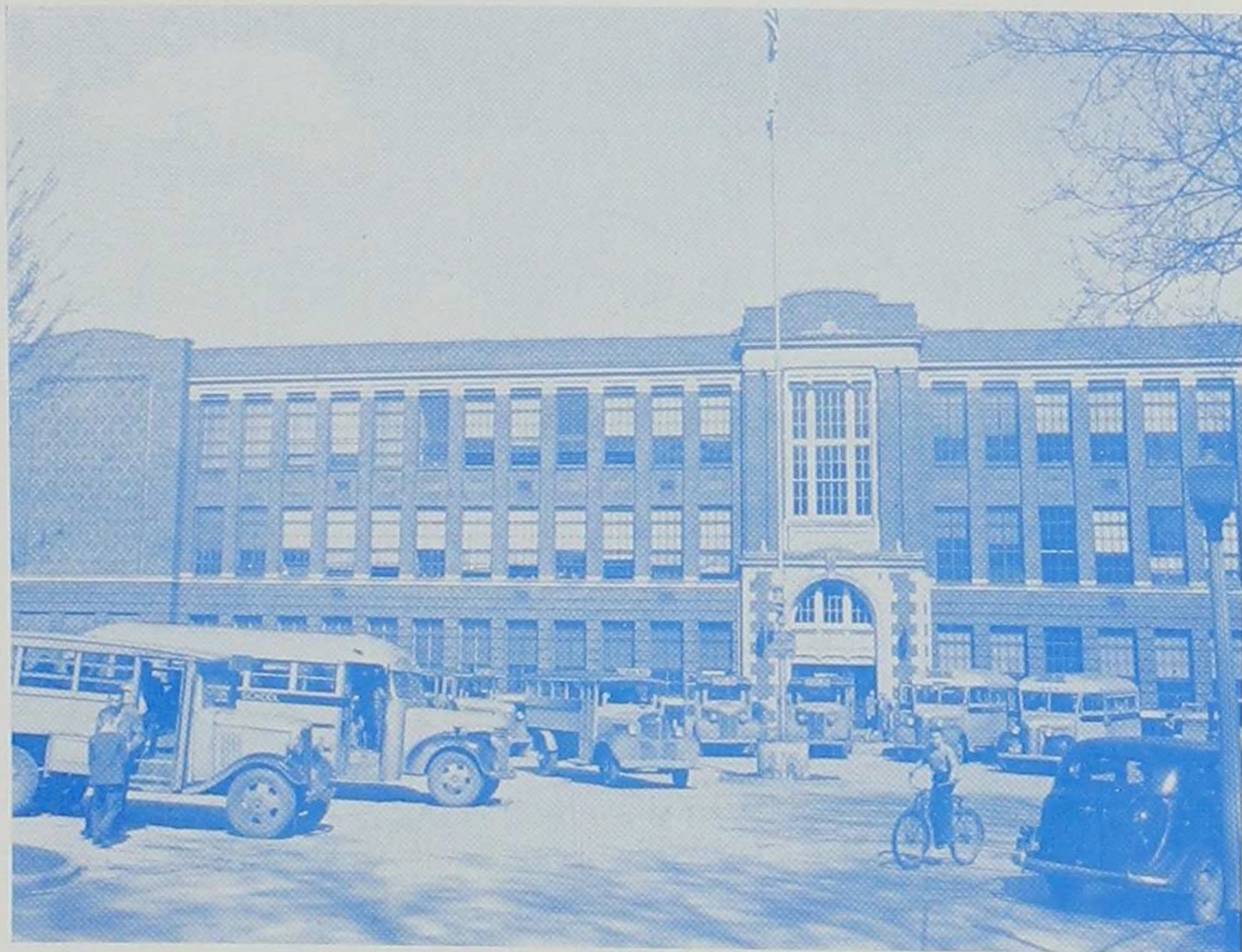
The PALIMPSEST



Consolidation and Transportation at Tipton

IOWA'S CONSOLIDATED SCHOOLS

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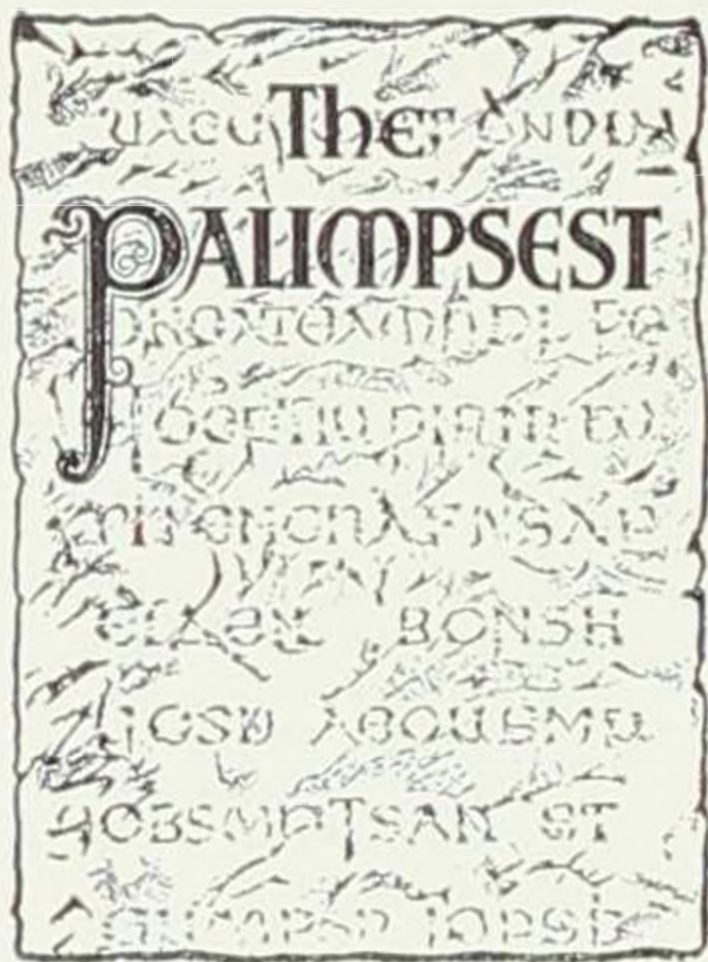

The Meaning of Palimpsest

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the record of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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Cover

Front — Tipton's fleet of school busses ready to load up at end of school day in the 1930's. (Courtesy Supt. Ralph W. Gambach)—For many years after its formation in 1920 the Tipton Consolidated District was the largest in the state. In 1955, under Supt. Ralph W. Gambach, the district included 133 sections, operated 13 busses, employed 50 teachers and had an enrollment of 1,062.

Back — Inside: Broadside courtesy Wanda Stoakes. The addition to the Geneseo Consolidated School was dedicated April 17, 1955. Under Supt. H. T. Marquardt the school had an enrollment of 256 in the fall of 1955.

Outside: Supt. Arvin C. Blome reports the Gowrie school had an enrollment of 405 on Jan. 13, 1956. Six busses transported 195 students.

Maps in this issue are used by permission of the State Department of Public Instruction. The picture of Albert M. Deyoe is courtesy *Midland Schools*, that of Macy Campbell courtesy Iowa State Teachers College.

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ENTERED AS SECOND CLASS MATTER JULY 28 1920 AT THE POST OFFICE AT IOWA CITY IOWA UNDER THE ACT OF AUGUST 24 1912

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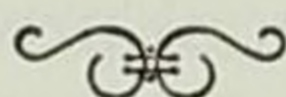


The Rural School Problem

"The school-house stood a mile away on the prairie, with not even a fence to shield it from the blast. . . . a square, box-like structure, with three windows on a side and two in front. . . . painted a glaring white on the outside and a drab within. . . . this bare building on the naked prairie seemed a poor place indeed." — HAMLIN GARLAND, *Boy Life on the Prairie*, 1899.

Amid the romance and sentiment that characterizes American concepts of the old country school, the harsh criticisms of those who knew it well are often overlooked. The rapid growth of urban centers in America during the post-Civil War years compelled educators to devote most of their thought to meeting the needs of expanding city school systems. By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, they were becoming increasingly aware of the deficiencies of the rural school. In contrast with the city school, the tiny one-room country school now seemed, in Hamlin Garland's words, "a poor place indeed."

In 1895 the National Education Association ap-

pointed a committee of twelve educators to study the rural school problem. Two years later the committee, headed by Iowa's Superintendent of Public Instruction, Henry Sabin, presented a report which for several years was the standard work on the rural school problem. Subsequently, President Theodore Roosevelt's Country Life Commission studied the question. The Iowa farm editor, Henry Wallace, a commission member, declared that he and his colleagues found that complaints about rural education were nationwide.

Meanwhile, Iowa educators for many years had been expressing concern at the failure of rural schools to keep up with the advance made in the cities. In 1890 Superintendent Sabin had directed the General Assembly's particular attention to this subject, calling it "by far the most urgent" educational matter demanding legislative action. Sabin's successors expressed similar views.

The volume of criticism grew as the years passed. In 1898, for example, Dean Amos N. Currier of the State University of Iowa told the State Teachers Association that with all their good points the rural schools were "the weakest, the most poorly equipped, and the most insufficient corps in our army of education." Fourteen years later the important Better Iowa Schools Commission, composed of many of the best known public figures of the state, devoted most of its legislative recommendations to this situation.

The rural school was not without its supporters. One Iowa paper called Simpson College's president "a fraud, imposter and unworthy of any consideration whatever" because he had criticized the country school. Iowa's low percentage of illiteracy caused many citizens to feel satisfied with existing schools. "Ability to read and write . . . *was* a high personal distinction *1,000 years ago*," Dean Currier admitted, "but greater things are needed to justify boasting at the close of the nineteenth century."

Many Iowa farmers were confused by criticism of rural schools because, as a sympathetic educator, Chauncey Colegrove of the State Teachers College pointed out, it came from the friends, not the opponents of public schools. Insofar as this criticism implied that the farmers were responsible, Colegrove said, it was unjust, since the rural school problem was caused by forces beyond the control of the rural population. Certainly the farmer was not responsible for the growth of the great urban industrial centers requiring a constant supply of labor, or for the technological revolution in farming methods that created a surplus of farm labor. Yet these complementary developments produced a migration to the city that caused Iowa's rural population to decrease 115,000 from 1900 to 1910. More important to the educator was the fact that enrollment in country schools dropped by 60,000 during the same decade.

Macy Campbell, head of rural education at Iowa State Teachers College from 1913 to 1927, was not far wrong when he remarked, "Steel farming machinery and modern farm practice killed the rural school."

But the population decline was only one of several changes upsetting the pattern of rural life. The one-room school had developed to meet the needs of an isolated, frontier population. The primitive means of transportation in 1850 made a school at every crossroad a necessity. By the early 1900's, however, rural isolation was being reduced by a vast railroad network, better roads, the telephone, and rural mail delivery. Within fifty years automobiles, movies, radio, airplanes, television, and participation in global warfare completed the process. Distances had shrunk, and institutions once prized now seemed inadequate.

Certain elements inherent in the rural school system help explain its inability to adjust to the changes going on around it. Foremost of these was the decentralized administrative system. Horace Mann had recommended in 1856 that the township be made the school unit in Iowa. Two years later his advice was heeded. Townships were divided into subdistricts, usually nine in number, with a school in each. The subdistrict elected a director who had immediate supervision over its school, and who, together with the other directors, made up the township school board.

Although the subdistrict system had its defects, it was far superior to the one that arose after 1872. Against the advice of the state's ablest educators, the 14th General Assembly permitted subdistricts, by a majority vote of the township, to become independent school districts, a unit previously reserved for cities and towns of some size. Instead of one director, a subdistrict that took this step would have a three-man board, a secretary, who might not be a board member, and a treasurer.

In a few years restrictions were imposed limiting the opportunities for forming such districts, but not before much damage was done. Between 1872 and 1874 the number of independent districts rose from 400 to 2,026, and by 1900 to 3,686. The step was defended on the grounds that it provided greater local self-control of school affairs, but lacking the means to implement its increased power the tiny rural independent district hardly benefited by the change.

The waste and inefficiency resulting from the rise of these small districts was appalling. A single township might contain from 36 to 45 school officers. "Think of this," Henry Sabin commented, "one man out of every three you meet a school officer, acting as such in some capacity, and the other two only waiting until the next election." In Marion and Keokuk counties in 1889 a total of 464 officers had to file their reports before the county superintendents could make their annual

reports. Some 13,950 school officers in the state handled school funds before they could be paid to those to whom money was due.

There were districts where there were not enough men eligible to serve, while others chose men obviously unqualified. Henry Sabin told the State Teachers Association in 1892 of "men whose official titles were presidents of boards of education who actually could not read their own name after it was written." Some districts did not bother to hold school elections.

Not only the school and its district but its enrollment was small. In January, 1910, ten country schools had an actual daily attendance of only one pupil, 35 others had only two students in attendance, while 3,018, about a fourth of Iowa's rural schools, had an attendance of ten or less.

Such small schools were wasteful. Teachers instructing ten students could, with much more benefit, handle two or three times that number. In a small school a child frequently missed the opportunity of working and learning with others of his own age and experience. Of course, as *Midland Schools* pointed out in 1906 upon hearing of a one-student school near Vincent, discipline was no problem in such a situation. "When the whole school gets down behind its lone geography, teacher knows there is something doing and she investigates."

The amount of schooling received by a farm

youth was another serious defect of rural education. Taking the school enumeration as a basis, the average annual country school attendance in 1896 was only one and three-fourths months per pupil, while the student in village and city schools had over four months of schooling each year. "Note the difference," Superintendent H. L. Coffeen of Calmar declared; "fully 60 per cent of the school population of our state turn from their books and their instructors to engage in life's pursuits, when less than three school years of nine months each cover the entire school privileges of which these pupils have availed themselves."

The size of the school and of the district affected the quality of teaching, which critics generally agreed was unsatisfactory. State Superintendent John Riggs contended in 1904 that "the rural school suffers more from inexperienced and poorly prepared teachers than any other cause."

Few men were teaching in the country school by the 1890's, in contrast with pre-Civil War days when the schoolmaster was a familiar figure in the one-room school. From the 1860's onward the proportion of female to male teachers grew steadily, until by 1900 there were 23,841 women teachers employed in the state's public schools and only 4,948 men. In rural schools the ratio seems to have been even more heavily weighted in favor of the women. Efforts were made in many districts to secure a man during the winter term, since this

was the slack season on the farm when the older boys attended school in larger numbers.

To handle a schoolroom of pupils ranging in age from five to twenty-one was difficult for an experienced teacher. But when, as Governor Leslie Shaw said in 1898, the mature schoolmaster of the earlier day was replaced by immature and inexperienced girls, the situation became desperate. The number of experienced, well-trained teachers in the state in 1900, as indicated by the first-grade and state certificates issued, was only 4,202. Most of the more than 20,000 remaining teachers had had no training beyond elementary school and a few weeks at county normal institutes.

The tiny rural districts could not hope to compete for teachers with the urban graded schools. The city schools absorbed the bulk of the specially trained teachers, and, in their constant demand for more instructors, hired the best of the rural teachers as soon as they gained experience. Chauncey Colegrove admitted that the country school was little more than a training ground for teachers who would move to the city if they proved capable. In 1903-1904 a new teacher was hired for each of the three terms in 1,808 rural schools, while in 4,836 others two different teachers came and went. Thus, pupils in over half the state's rural schools lacked the advantage of having the same teacher for one entire year.

Low salaries were the major cause of the high

rate of turnover among rural teachers. Nepotism was another cause for numerous replacements. Not uncommon in districts where three or four families supplied all the pupils was the dismissal of a teacher who had incurred the displeasure of one set of parents. State Superintendent Riggs found one subdistrict in 1907 whose two pupils were from the same family, the teacher was their sister, and their father the director. An adjoining district having several pupils but inadequate funds for a good teacher suggested that they combine their forces. The father, fearing that he might lose control of the school, rejected the idea.

In addition to all these institutional weaknesses was the deplorable physical condition of the schoolhouse. In the early years, Hamlin Garland observed, the farmhouses were no better than the school building. As time passed, the school "changed only for the worse. Barns were built first, houses improved next, and school-houses last of all." In 1896 some 5,210 school buildings in the state were listed as in no better than fair condition. Rural school outhouses were so shocking that one writer later argued that the provision of clean, supervised indoor toilets alone would justify the cost of new consolidated schools. Frequently no one in a district, not even the directors, assumed responsibility for the care of the schoolhouse. The building was generally located in an isolated spot and was easily entered by tramps and

other vagrants. Superintendent William Wilcox of Atlantic in 1897 told of a conscientious teacher who returned to his school after a three-months vacation and "found to his chagrin and sorrow that the maps he had secured had been used by tramps the summer long for bedding, the dictionary for a pillow, the stove for a spittoon, and that every conceivable liberty had been taken with his building in his absence."

Surveying all of these deficiencies of the rural schools, Dean Amos N. Currier declared in 1898 that "the lack of life and spirit and force resulting from these conditions may justly be diagnosed as intellectual anemia, affecting not only the teacher and the school, but the whole district with its blight." His remedy, and that of most educational leaders, was first to establish the township as the unit of school administration, and second to provide central graded schools for the rural children and public transportation for all who needed it. Out of the second proposal grew the consolidated school movement which, until recently, overshadowed the less colorful campaign for administrative reorganization.

George S. May

Early Consolidations

Consolidated schools first became possible in 1869 when Massachusetts authorized the use of public funds for the transportation of students to school. This enabled school districts to close rural schools and transport the pupils to a central school. The first rural consolidated school was formed in 1875 when three rural schools near Montague, Massachusetts, were closed and the students brought to a centrally located building.

The first state in the Midwest to follow the example of Massachusetts was Indiana, where, in 1889, transportation of students at public expense was approved. By 1914 Indiana had 655 consolidated schools, attended by over a third of its rural school children. Its neighbor, Ohio, began transportation in 1894, and by 1916 had established 539 consolidated schools.

After 1910 the consolidated school movement spread rapidly through the country, twice as many consolidations occurring between 1910 and 1916 as in all preceding years. By 1920 an estimated 65,000 districts had closed their schools as a result of consolidation.

The consolidated school became popular because it offered a cure for so many ailments of the

rural educational system. It strengthened the foundations of rural schools by throwing the support of an area behind one large unit instead of scattering that strength among several small ones. The large enrollments brought about by consolidation made it possible to grade students according to age and level of learning into separate classes with a teacher for each. This in turn led to a wider range of subjects, including specialized courses like music and art. The high school, which was a part of almost all consolidated schools, greatly extended the educational horizons of the rural young people whose education formerly had ceased, except in rare cases, at the end of eight grades. Finally, the consolidated schools, because of improved salaries and better working conditions, could compete on more nearly equal terms with city schools than could the one-room school.

In addition to the educational benefits of consolidation advocates of the new system stressed the over-all community advantages such a step would foster. Rural leaders like Dean Charles F. Curtiss of Iowa State College pointed out that the school question was but one phase of the challenge presented to rural communities by the modern world. The consolidated school, it was felt, would be a means of making country life more attractive and thereby would stem the migration to the city, which was depriving the farming areas of some of their most intelligent citizens. Not only could

the consolidated school provide an education comparable to that offered in the city, but it could brighten the social life of the farmer by serving as a community center for meetings and entertainment of all kinds. It would be a unifying force in the community which was witnessing a rapid decline of the rural church and which no longer had such activities as the spelling bee and lyceum debate to draw the people together.

The consolidated school movement in Iowa began officially in 1897 when the new Code granted to school directors the authority,

> when there will be a saving of expense, and the children will also thereby secure increased advantages, [to] arrange with any person outside the board for the transportation of any child to and from school in the same or another corporation, and such expenses shall be paid from the contingent fund.

This addition to the school laws, whose adoption had been urged by Superintendent Sabin in 1895, was the key which opened the door to consolidation. However, the movement in that direction had begun many years before with the introduction of the graded school during the 1850's. State Superintendent James D. Eads reported in 1854 that he had visited a "large number" of these schools and was "very highly gratified" with the results they were achieving. "Of course," he declared, significantly, "these schools can only be maintained in towns or villages where there are a

large number of scholars within a convenient distance of some central point."

As early as 1857 State Superintendent M. L. Fisher noted that some of the wealthier farmers were moving into the towns in order to give their children the advantages of a graded school education. Others began the practice of paying tuition at a graded school for the family's older children. Transportation being what it was, this frequently meant that these children had to leave home and live in the city while attending school.

Following the creation of the subdistrict school system in 1858 central township graded schools were established at several points in the state. In 1865 the voters of St. Charles Township in Floyd County approved the building of an $8,000 graded school to be open to all school children of the township. One contemporary authority declared that to his knowledge this was the first township graded school in Iowa. The school, a three-story stone affair located in Charles City, opened in 1866 with four divisions: primary, intermediate, grammar, and high school. Similar schools were founded at North Liberty, Monticello, Brooklyn, and other communities.

Although the Charles City school apparently offered the children of the township a complete education from the elementary grades through high school, others, such as the one at Monticello, served only as township high schools. However,

they were under the control of the township, and all the subdistricts shared in the benefits of an advanced school that would have been infeasible for the individual subdivisions to maintain. In this way the farmers' children who desired it could obtain a tuition-free high school education, and, if they lived close enough, might, at the same time, remain under the parental roof.

Unfortunately, this important educational development was cut short in many communities before it achieved its full promise. Charles City became an independent school district in 1871, while Monticello took the same step in 1877. This was typical of what happened in township after township as towns and villages grew in size and desired to strike out for themselves in school affairs. For the rural children the town high school was now open only on a tuition basis. "The great idea of our school system," Representative John Russell of Jones County declared in 1867, "is to guarantee to every child in the township as far as practicable an equal chance for a good education without regard to the numbers in the sub-districts respectively." When populous subdistricts organized as independent corporations, Russell argued, this high-minded purpose was defeated.

To the people of Buffalo Township in Winnebago County goes the honor of pioneering in the creation of a real consolidated school in 1897. This township, five miles south of the Minnesota

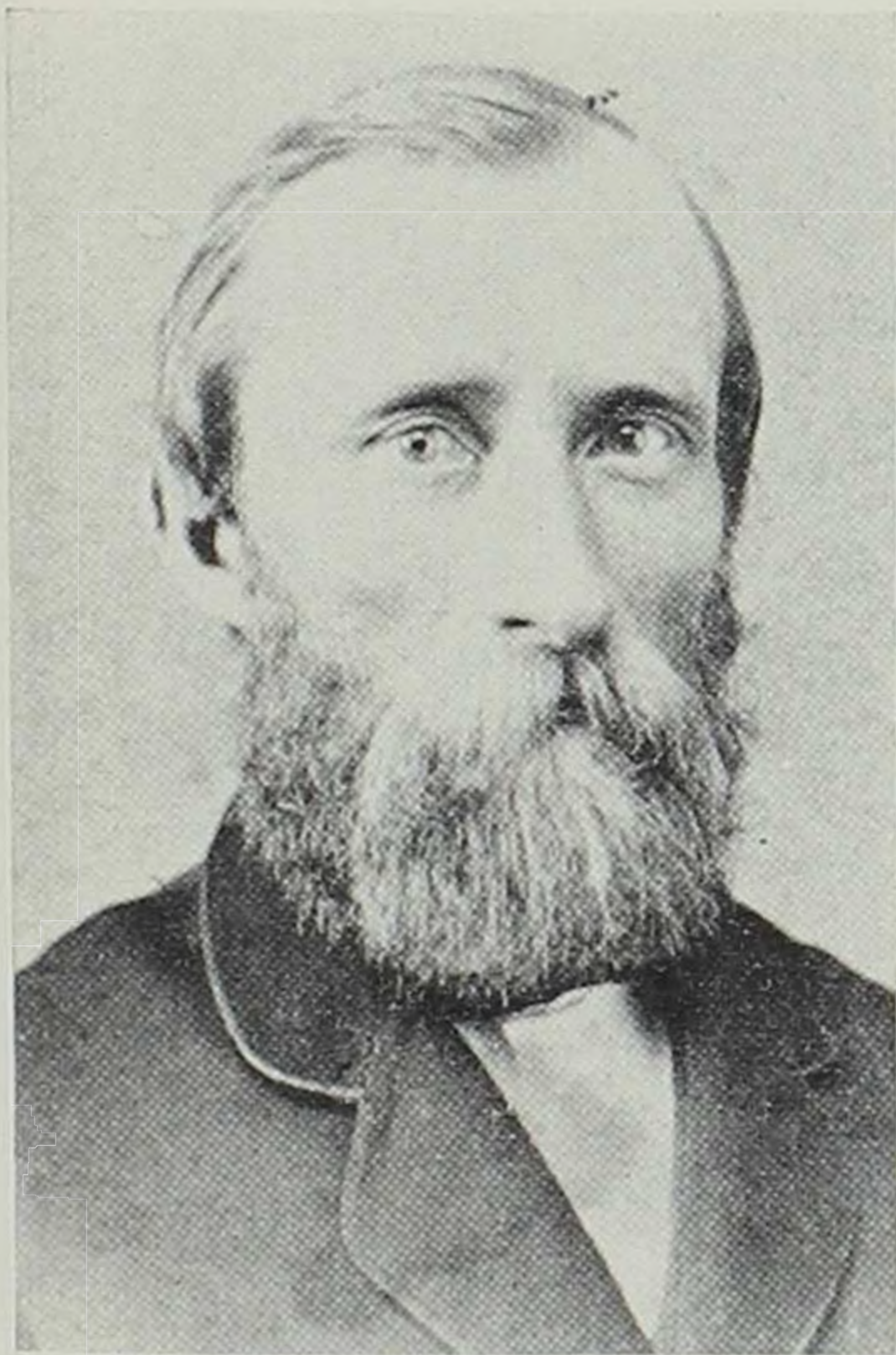
line, was one of the last parts of the county to be settled. Buffalo Center, its only town, was not platted until 1892. Founded on a branch of the Rock Island Railroad, the little settlement at first grew rapidly. It had a population of 350 when it was incorporated in January, 1894. By 1900 this figure had risen to 875, but fifty years later the town's population was only 1,087.

From the outset Buffalo Center showed a strong interest in its children's education. The first school was held in the upper floor of a private home, which also served temporarily as a Sunday School, church, and town hall. In February, 1894, a frame schoolhouse was opened, and two teachers were employed to instruct fifty pupils.

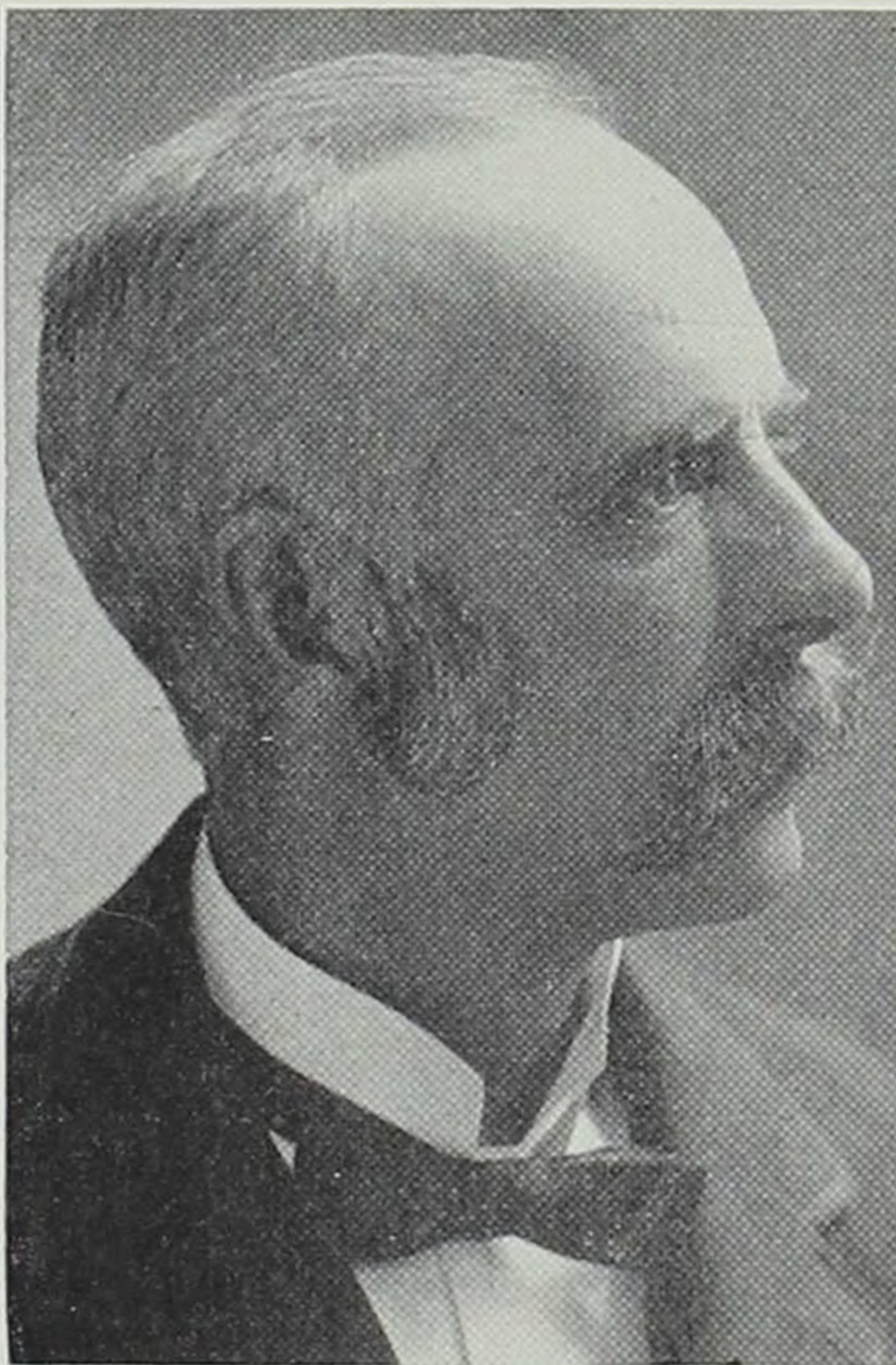
With the establishment of this school, townspeople and farmers in adjoining sections proposed the creation of an independent school district. Farmers in outlying parts of the township opposed such a step on the grounds that it would be detrimental to their interests. This led to a movement to convert the entire township into an independent school district. Brown Township in Linn County had set a precedent for such action in 1887.

Led by Henry Gardner, a Buffalo Center druggist, a petition was drawn up, signed by a majority of the township voters, asking the school board to hold a special election to decide the issue. Legally, this left the board with no choice but to do as asked. However, an independent district

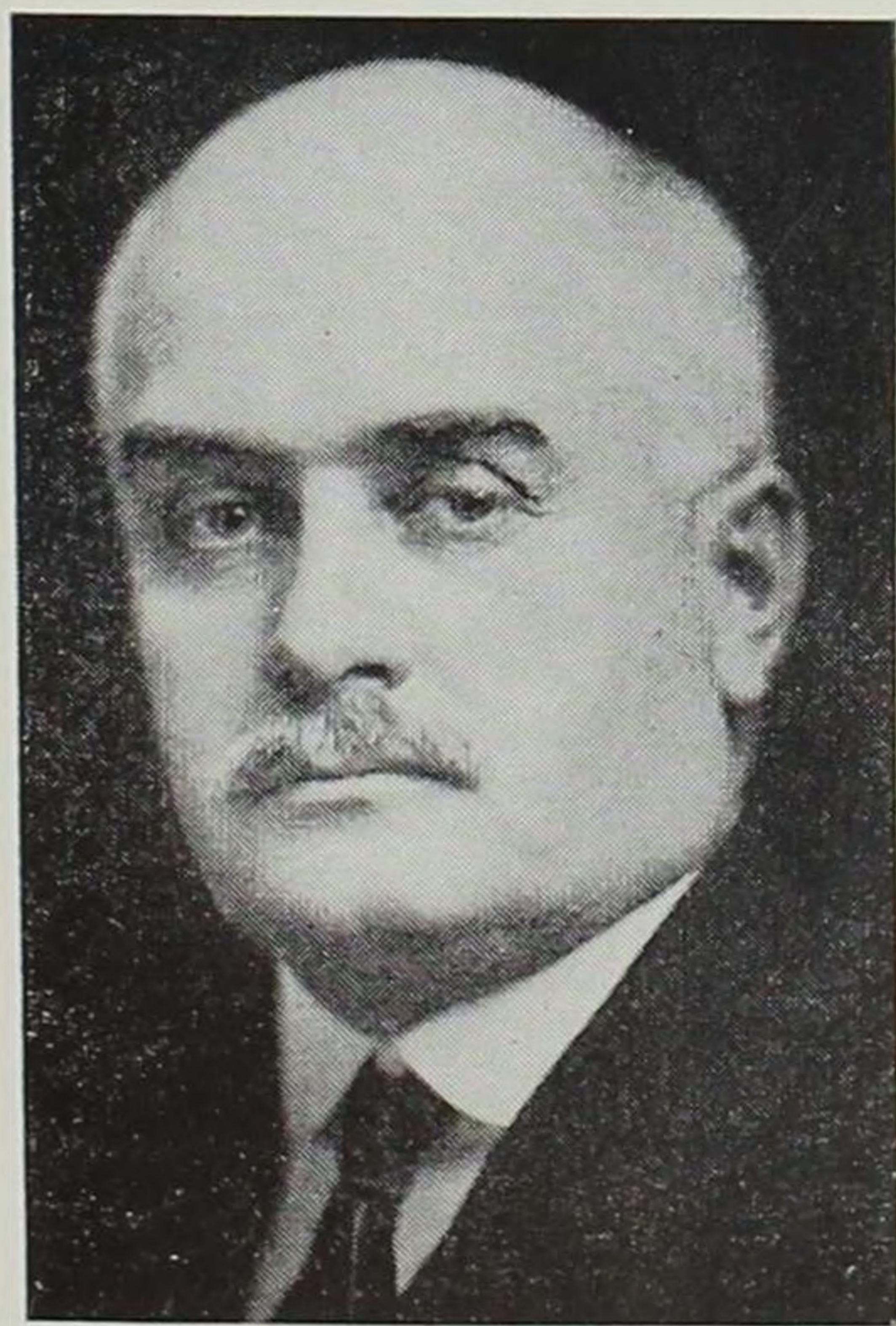
SUPPORTERS OF CONSOLIDATED SCHOOLS



Amos N. Currier



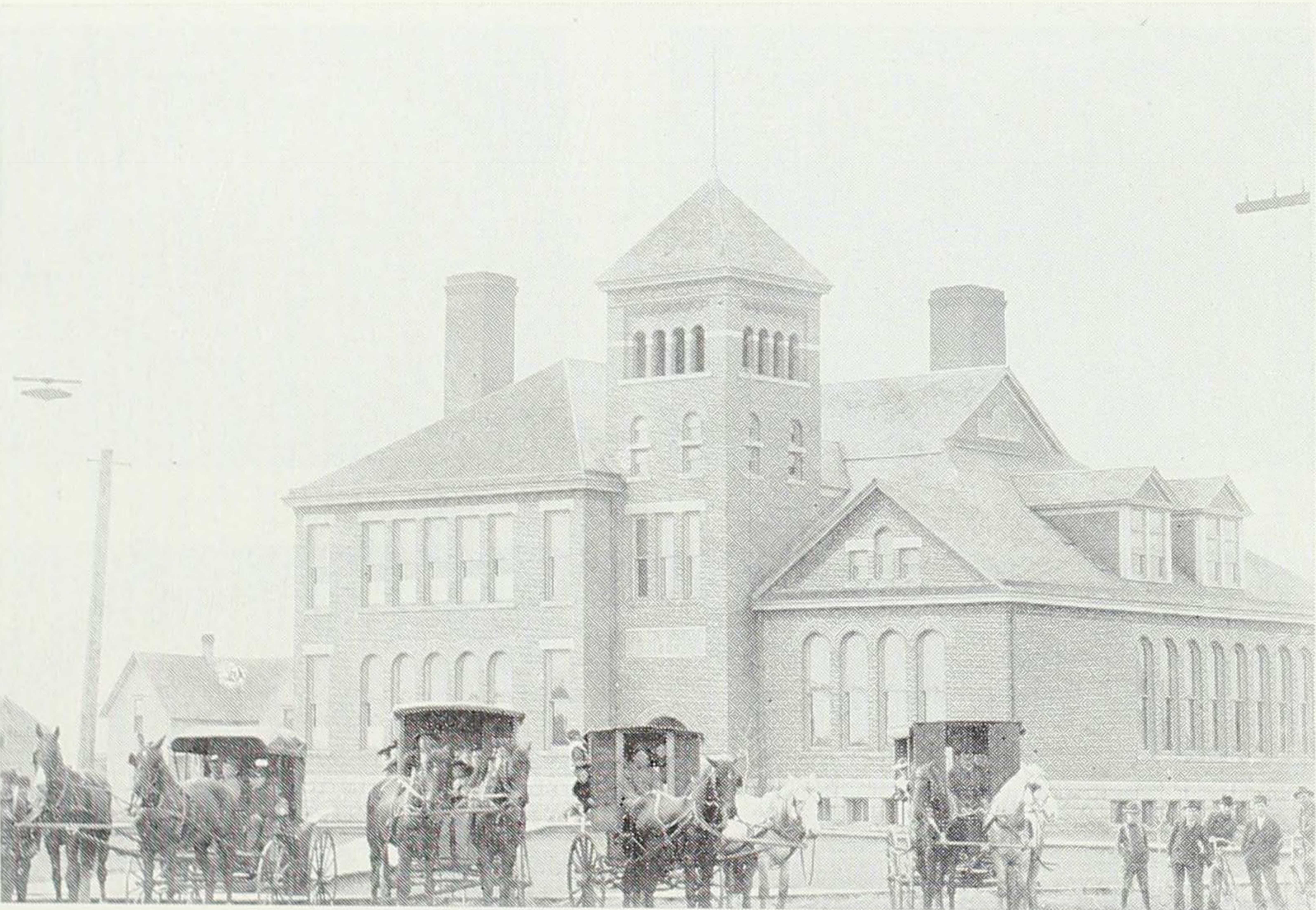
Leslie M. Shaw



Albert M. Deyoe

Macy Campbell

IOWA'S FIRST CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL

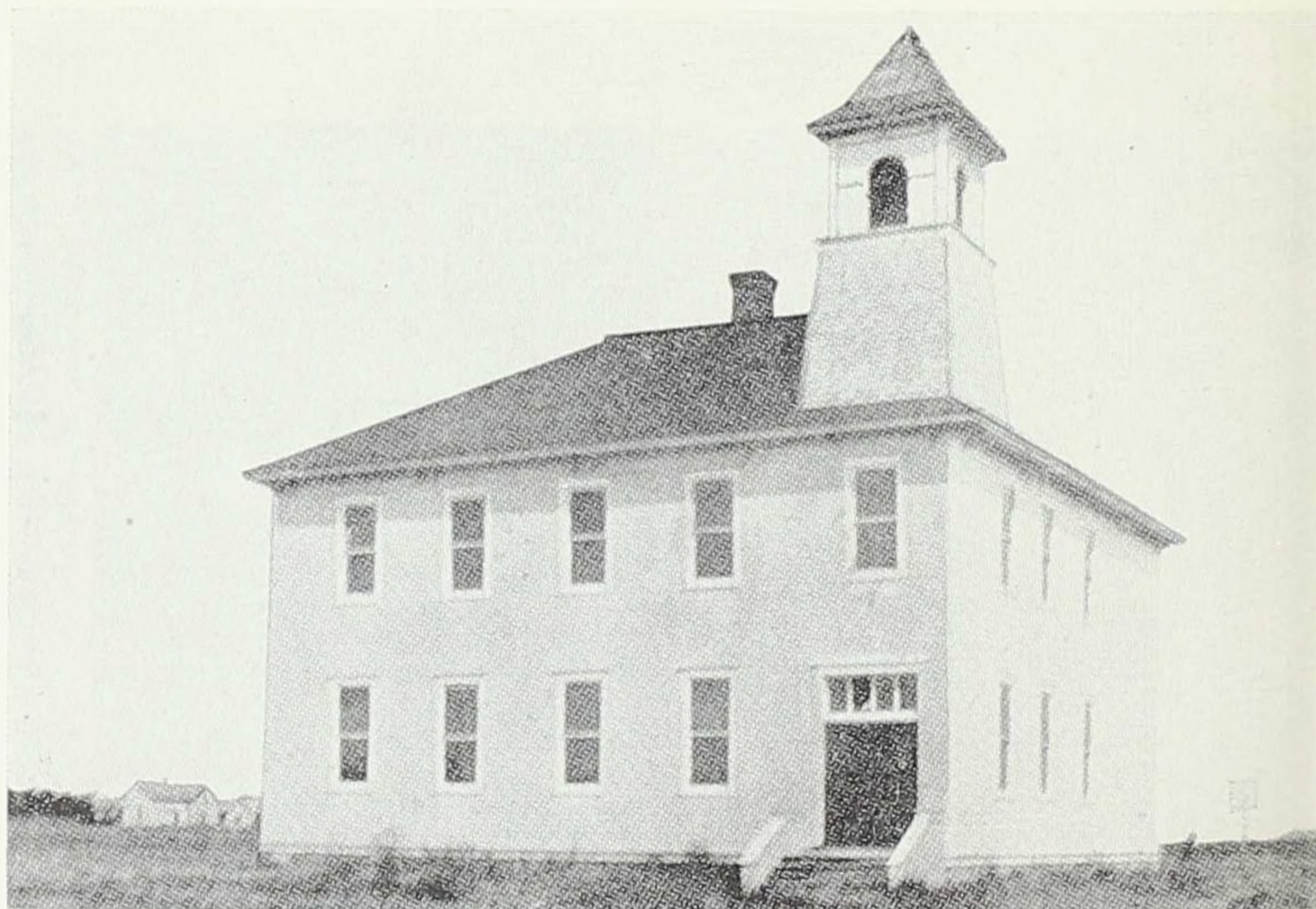


Courtesy Supt. Irving Larson

This picture of the Buffalo Center Consolidated School was taken in the late 1890's, just after transportation of students was begun to that school. In January, 1956, sixty years after this first consolidated district was formed, Supt. Irving Larson reported 660 students were enrolled at the modern schoolhouse erected in 1923.

Courtesy Supt. Fred O. Wood

Students and faculty of the Lake Township Consolidated School pose for their picture in 1903, when the school was opened. Hacks used for transportation stand ready, with some of the horses evidently impatient to be off. In 1956 Supt. Fred O. Wood reported an enrollment of 220 with the school using five 48-passenger busses.



Courtesy Supt. R. L. Kinkead

The original Terril Consolidated School building, erected in 1901 and replaced by a modern structure in 1915. Total enrollment of the school in 1955 was 326. Richard L. Kinkead was superintendent.

Courtesy Supt. W. A. Ortmeyer

Although the Armstrong Consolidated School District was not formed until 1915, students from a nearby rural school had been transported to this frame schoolhouse as early as 1905. It was replaced by a much larger brick building in 1917.

would mean a new board of directors, elected from the township at large instead of from each sub-district. As a result, four of the existing board members, who may have doubted their ability to win in a township-wide vote, opposed calling an election. Four others supported the petitioners, while the ninth member was absent.

As the board remained deadlocked, Henry Gardner obtained a writ of mandamus summoning the four recalcitrant board members to district court at Forest City to explain why they opposed the petitioners. The judge fined them each $27 and ordered the election to be held. On December 13, 1895, the voters of Buffalo Township approved the creation of an independent school district. Henry Gardner became president of the new board, while the other directors included two Buffalo Center bankers, E. E. Secor and Oscar Ulland, and two farmers, A. A. Harris and E. R. Overbaugh, who was also a rural school teacher. The first superintendent was A. A. Sifert.

In 1896 a $15,000 brick schoolhouse was erected in Buffalo Center after the necessary bond issue had been approved. At first it was the board's intention to maintain the rural schools as well as the town school, the rural children having the opportunity of securing advanced training at Buffalo Center should they desire it. But this arrangement proved unsatisfactory. Therefore, when the new Iowa Code of 1897 opened the way

for public transportation of students, Buffalo Center decided to close some of its rural schools and bring the pupils to the central school. On August 23, 1897, the patrons of old Subdistrict 3 asked the board to close their school and furnish transportation to Buffalo Center.

This date marks the beginning of consolidation in Iowa, for without the provision for public transportation the Buffalo Center school was scarcely different from those at Charles City or Monticello thirty years earlier. One week later the board agreed to close two more schools. By 1899 transportation had proved such a success that all rural schools were closed except two located in the extreme northeastern and southeastern corners of the township. Buffalo Center, its name notwithstanding, is actually two miles west of the center of Buffalo Township, and in the early years of transportation it was felt to be impracticable to bring in students from the district's more remote areas. The two remaining rural schools were under the control of the district's superintendent, who sought to make them superior to the average one-room school. Eventually the southeastern corner set itself up as the Kayser Independent District. The last rural school in the consolidated district was closed in 1921.

Persuading the parents to consent to the transportation of their children was not accomplished without much tact on the part of the board. In one

ward agreement was obtained after a promise that its country school would be reopened after four months if the residents did not like the new plan. A teacher, who had been popular in another district and whose father was an influential farmer there, was hired to teach in the central school. The farm families were then happy to have their children ride with her to school each day. In a third district nature took a hand when a cyclone blew away the schoolhouse.

In the first five years enrollment in the Buffalo Center school rose from 170 to 350, of whom 115 were transported by six horse-drawn hacks. The average daily attendance was 93 per cent of the total enrolled, as compared with only 76 per cent at the two outlying rural schools. Prior to consolidation educational costs in the township had been $5.04 per month for each pupil, but by 1901 that amount was reduced to $1.80 at the central school. The staff consisted of a principal and an assistant, five grade teachers, and a music instructor.

Superintendent C. J. Johnson listed among the advantages of the central school "the stimulating influences of large classes, giving a long time for recitations and individual work and placing of pupils in classes of equal ability." Classes were undeniably large, averaging 47 pupils to each teacher! Johnson reported that he had heard no one asking for a return to the old system, even though Buffalo Center was admittedly poorly lo-

cated from a transportation standpoint. In May and June, 1901, three farmers hired extra help in order that their boys might finish school. One of these youths was an honor student in his class.

Since its founding, Iowa's pioneer consolidated school has continued to develop. Only the traditional subjects were offered during the first year — reading, writing, arithmetic, grammar, rhetoric, literature, spelling, geography, and botany. Baseball and declamatory work were the only extracurricular activities. In 1911 an addition was constructed to take care of the increased enrollment. The same year the school was placed on the state's accredited list and courses in agriculture, domestic science, and manual training added. Normal training was introduced in the high school in 1913. Meanwhile, the extracurricular offerings had been expanded to include football, basketball, baseball, and track, glee clubs, band, dramatics, and debate.

On May 10, 1923, a new building, costing $135,000, was dedicated. Nearly twice as large as the old structure, the new school boasted such features as a modern cafeteria, and, for better community service, an auditorium, stage, and gymnasium designed to be opened into one large hall on special occasions. With such facilities Iowa's first consolidated school remained an outstanding example of consolidation's benefits.

George S. May

Growth of Consolidation

The residents of Buffalo Township were not alone in seeing the advantages of transportation and consolidation. In 1897 a farm mother told the Taylor County Farmers' Institute that much was heard of rural free delivery of mail, but, as a mother, she was "more interested in the delivery of our children at the door of a good graded school, where they may receive such an education as will fit them to read the mail when it is delivered." Two years later, in September, 1899, State Superintendent Richard C. Barrett called the attention of county superintendents "to an increasing interest in the consolidation of school districts and the transportation of children to a central graded school established by the township." The county officers had already indicated their support of the movement the previous spring.

By 1901, scarcely four years after transportation started, Superintendent Barrett was devoting seventy pages of his report to consolidated schools. His figures as to the extent of consolidation, however, were misleading. If any district shut down its school and made some arrangement to send its pupils to an adjoining district, Barrett called the action "consolidation." In 1901, only Buffalo

Center fit the subsequent definition of a consolidated school district as one containing at least sixteen sections of land, maintaining a central graded school, and furnishing free transportation.

A good claim to having established Iowa's second recognizable consolidated school may be made for Lloyd Township in Dickinson County, about fifty miles west of Buffalo Center. In March, 1901, Lloyd Township approved the construction at Terril of a two-story, $4,000 wooden building. When it was completed in October, the township's seven rural schools were closed, and, as an experiment, the students were transported to Terril. The plan worked so well that in 1903 the school board sold all the old schoolhouses, some of which were so dilapidated they were usable only as outhouses.

The elementary grades at Terril were divided between the two rooms on the first floor, while intermediate classes and the two years of high school that were offered met in a second-story room. A fourth room was finished in 1905 when the confusion of simultaneous recitations in the intermediate and high school classes proved too distracting for the pupils and the two teachers. State Superintendent John Riggs, visiting the district in 1905, found that 23 of the 27 family heads whom he interviewed were unqualifiedly in favor of the new system.

Lloyd Township was not yet, however, a con-

solidated school district. It retained its subdistrict organization until December, 1913, when a consolidated district was approved and a board of directors elected from the township at large. Two years later the little wooden school was replaced by a $50,000 brick building, and a four-year high school program was inaugurated.

None of the early consolidated schools was more important than that established in 1903 at Marathon in Buena Vista County. The previous year the board of the Marathon Independent School District had begun considering the desirability of consolidating with adjoining Poland Township. Director Charles Herrick had visited Terril, thirty miles to the north, and Buffalo Center, and had been impressed with those towns' consolidated schools.

In the spring of 1903, Superintendent Alexander C. Roberts, who later became president of San Francisco State College, was excused from his work by the Marathon school board, given a team and a driver and sent throughout the rural areas to campaign for consolidation. Roberts later recalled that "for three weeks I drove the country roads explaining the proposed consolidation to anyone and his wife who would listen to me. The favorite conference room was the kitchen with the farmer on one side and his wife on the other and the map and drawings spread out on the kitchen table."

The efforts of Roberts and the board were rewarded when, on May 18, 1903, five of the eight districts of Poland Township voted 99 to 31 to consolidate with Marathon. Because of poor road conditions the consolidation forces had not been eager to secure the support of the more outlying districts. In 1915 the area consolidated was enlarged to 33½ sections by the addition of several areas in adjoining townships.

The two-room Marathon schoolhouse, built in 1901, was replaced by a $20,000 brick structure to which, in the fall of 1903, six hacks began transporting the township pupils. By 1905, the Marathon *Republic* reported, opposition to consolidation had been succeeded by solid support for the new system. One farmer answered critics who complained that consolidation had increased taxes by arguing that the savings in the children's shoe leather alone offset the added cost.

For at least ten years, wrote James Woodruff, one of Marathon's early superintendents, Marathon had the best consolidated schoolhouse in the state. "The spirit and enterprise of the citizens was in keeping with the building." The state, Woodruff declared, owed "a debt of gratitude" to the district and its board for setting the pace with its modern school and high ideals.

Another pacesetter was the Lake Township Consolidated School in Clay County, organized, like its neighbor to the south, Marathon, in 1903.

This school is important as the first of the open-country consolidations. There was no community in Lake Township where its school could be located, as had been the case with earlier consolidations. Nevertheless, the farmers, led by Moss Mason, a member of the township school board, went ahead and built "a commodious and modern frame building," costing $3,200, at the exact geographic center of the township. There was not another building within three-quarters of a mile.

The old rural schools were abandoned, and the central school opened in the fall of 1903 with eight hacks used for transportation. When State Superintendent Riggs paid a surprise visit in January, 1905, the temperature was ten below zero, but 98 of the school's 119 pupils were present. Three of the horse-drawn busses had stoves, while the rest were provided with blankets and robes. All were covered to furnish further protection for the children against winter's bitter cold.

The roads were a serious problem. "If some evil genius had been selecting a township in the fair state of Iowa for the trial of consolidated schools," the county superintendent observed, "he could not have selected one in which the plan would have been better calculated to fail." Bad drainage had caused some roads to be abandoned. The rest were in such shape that for years the school had to be closed at certain seasons because transportation was impossible.

But Riggs reported that the people were not giving up. Difficulties with the roads only increased the desire of the farmers to improve them because their school was more than a school to them. It was the only public building in the township. Here the families met for Sunday School and church services, some of them coming in the same hacks used on weekdays to carry the school children. Thus the Lake Township school functioned as a community center, as the advocates of consolidation had hoped it would.

* * * * *

For many years progress in consolidation was slow, and defeats were about as numerous as victories. In March, 1902, for example, Okoboji Township in Dickinson County rejected consolidation by a vote of 23 to 20. In other townships the vote was sometimes as much as three to one against consolidation. In many cases where one or two schools were closed and the students transported elsewhere the experiment lasted only a short time. Thus, in 1906, thirty schools were listed as receiving students in this fashion from one or more rural schools, but by 1910 ten of these schools had abandoned the practice. In the latter year, according to incomplete reports, a total of 108 schools with an enrollment of 1,182 had been discontinued as a result of consolidation or transportation. Since there were still 12,503 rural schools with a total enrollment of 249,680,

it was plain that consolidation was not solving the rural school problem.

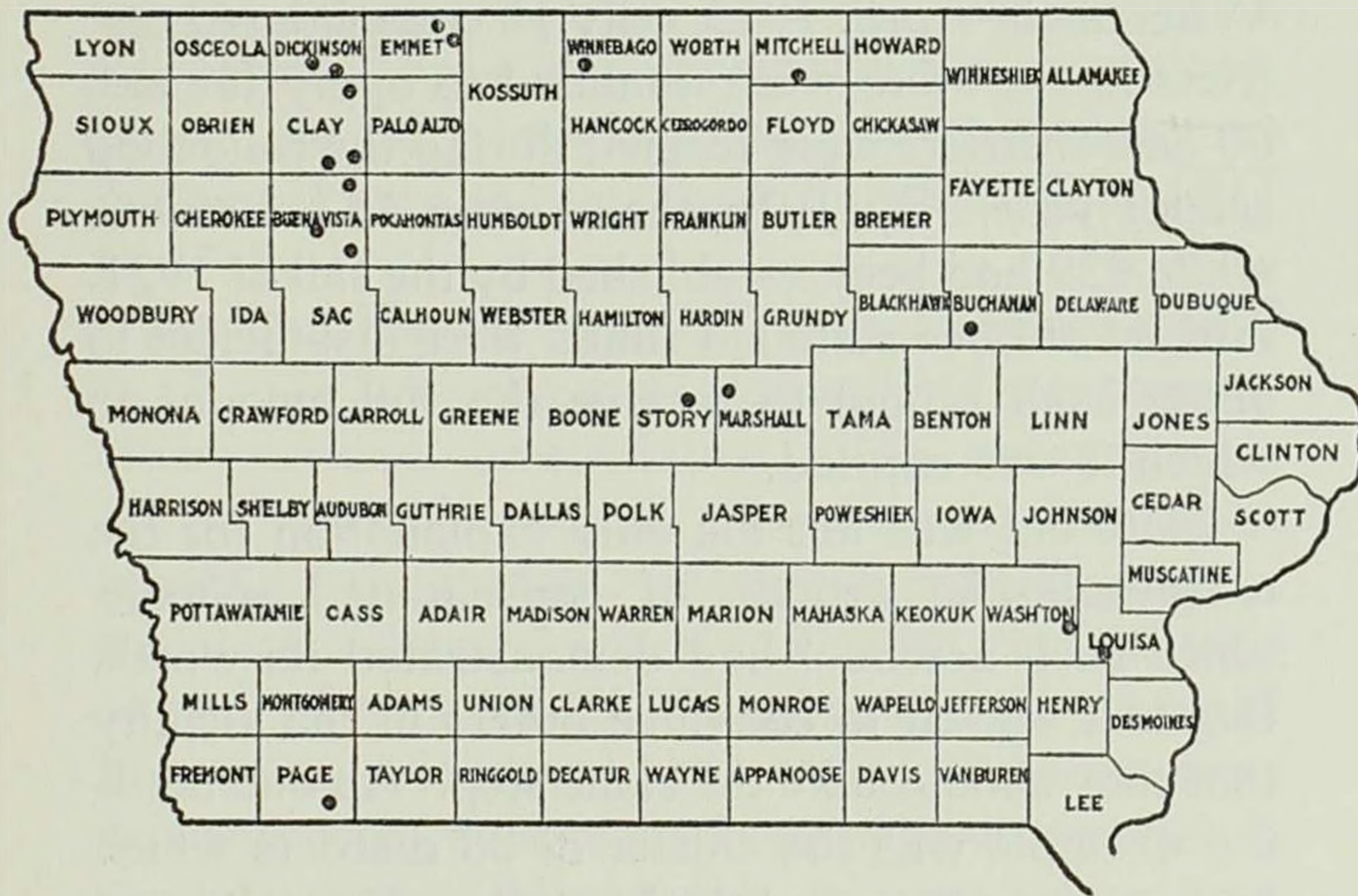
In 1898 Governor Francis M. Drake had expressed the opinion that with the provision for student transportation the school laws could "remain unchanged for years to come without detriment." Before long, however, it became apparent that more encouragement by the state was required if consolidation was to be widely adopted. Already in 1900 Governor Shaw was calling for new legislation to bring graded schools "within easy access of every farm in Iowa." He observed that in such matters "economy is not the synonym for statesmanship."

Two years later the House passed a bill which would have given voters greater opportunity to initiate the consolidation of two or more districts, but the Senate took no action. In 1906, however, the legislature provided that when a third of the voters within the boundaries of "contiguous territory containing not less than sixteen (16) government sections" indicated support for consolidation and the move was approved by the county superintendent, it was the duty of the board of the school corporation in which the largest number of voters lived to call an election within ten days. If the proposed district included portions of more than one county the approval of all county superintendents was required, or of the state superintendent if the county officials could not agree.

When a town was included in the proposed consolidation, provision was made for a separate ballot of those living outside the town. Failure to secure a majority of both the town and rural votes meant the defeat of the proposal. Additional legislation in 1911 declared it the "duty" of the board of a consolidated district to provide a central school and "suitable transportation." If residents were not satisfied, the district could be dissolved and a return made to the old system.

Except for clarifying certain procedures and establishing the minimum size of a district, these acts provided for nothing that was not already in the law. They had little effect on the number of consolidations which averaged about one a year until 1910 when two districts were organized. Two more followed in 1911 and three in 1912. These laws were permissive in character, in no way forcing any district to consolidate. Later, in 1920, President Homer H. Seerley of Iowa State Teachers College advocated a compulsory law which would "complete the opening of the right opportunities to all Iowa country boys and girls by having no other than consolidated schools permissible."

Although no such drastic step as this was ever taken, legislation passed in 1913 opened the floodgates to a torrent of consolidations. In that year, at the urging of the Better Iowa Schools Commission, the General Assembly provided that consoli-



Consolidated school districts, June 30, 1912: 18

dated schools offering courses in vocational and industrial courses and fulfilling certain other requirements could receive up to $500 in state aid toward needed equipment, and up to $750 annually thereafter, the amount being governed by the number of rooms in the school. A maximum of $30,000 was appropriated for this purpose in 1913-1914, and $50,000 for succeeding years.

This fund subsequently was raised to $125,000, but even this figure was small when compared with the $4 million Minnesota was furnishing its 300 consolidated schools by 1920. But the offer of state aid, however slight, was enough to stimulate a tremendous upsurge of interest in consolidation.

Whereas in April, 1913, only 18 consolidated districts in the state were qualified to apply for aid, 60 new districts were formed during the following school year. By 1916 there were 187 districts, while 439 had been established by the fall of 1921. Almost at once state aid funds were insufficient to allow each school to receive the full amount to which it was entitled.

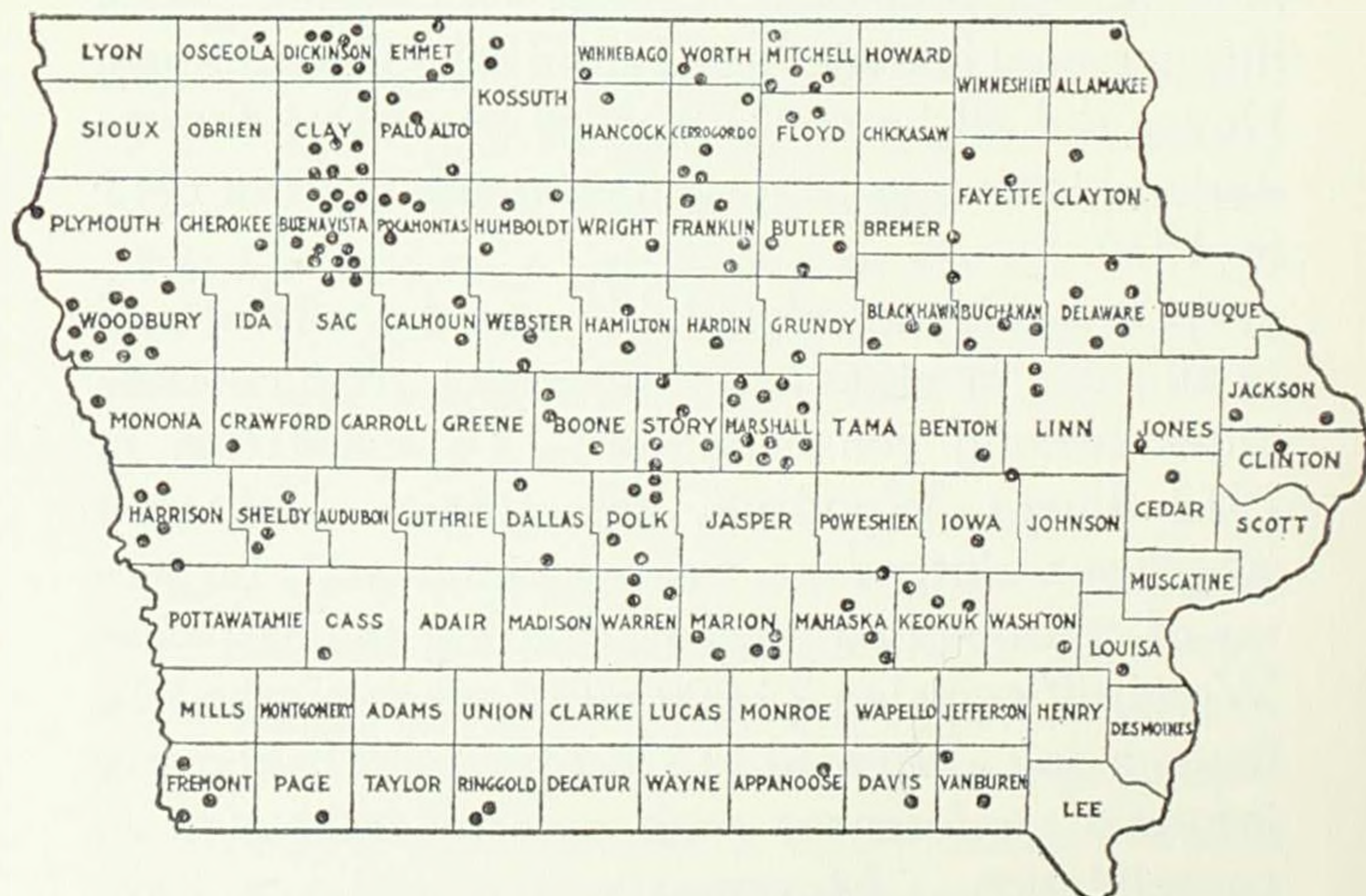
State aid was not the only explanation for the mushroom-like growth of consolidated schools. Once such a school had demonstrated its worth, this fact served to convince others in the vicinity that they should take the same step. An outstanding example was the cluster of 28 districts which had sprung up around the Marathon Consolidated School by 1918. This block of districts comprised 700 square miles of territory and extended into six counties of northwestern Iowa.

Similar groupings elsewhere in the state suggest that the consolidated school was its own best advance agent, but it received powerful help from the State Department of Public Instruction. From Henry Sabin onward most of the superintendents gave their support to consolidation, but none more so than Albert M. Deyoe, who has been called "the outstanding figure in the battle for consolidated schools." A graduate of Mason City High School and the State University of Iowa, Deyoe received his early education in rural schools and returned to them, first as a rural school teacher and

later as superintendent of Hancock County. With this personal knowledge of rural school conditions, Deyoe did all he could to spur on consolidations during his term as State Superintendent from 1911 to 1919.

At first, Deyoe related, "he could easily attend to all calls for visits and information from communities seeking consolidation." To assist him in 1913 James Woodruff, the former Marathon school superintendent, was appointed state inspector of consolidated schools. During the first year Woodruff traveled 23,000 miles, often worked 18 hours a day, delivered 118 lectures, and held many informal conferences with persons interested in consolidation. "Movements to consolidate have sprung up simultaneously at points far removed from each other," he reported in 1914, "and frequently it was necessary to deliver an address in one community and to make a hurried trip to some distant part of the state where the people were about to vote on the proposition of consolidation and were anxious to have the workings of the system explained."

In 1916 the average consolidated district, representing a closing of five rural schools, comprised 24 sections. The average size of the school grounds was five acres, the minimum amount recommended by the state to assure room for playgrounds, parking, and agricultural instruction. The school itself had a staff of seven teachers and



Consolidated school districts, June 30, 1916: 181

an enrollment of 180 pupils, of whom 57 per cent were from rural homes.

"In contrast with the one-room school, where often the county superintendent could carry off the whole equipment in his hat," Inspector Woodruff wrote, the consolidated school was fully equipped "for the business of making American citizens." The courses were designed to prepare the students particularly for agricultural work, but college entrance requirements also could be met by those desiring advanced training. High schools were required to offer at least one year of agricultural training and another of manual training or domestic science. In addition, one day each week

Courtesy Supt. R. L. Kinkead

Youngsters at the Terril school at their desks in their classroom which was gaily decorated for Christmas in the early 1900's.

Courtesy Buena Vista Co. Supt. Harrison

The third and fourth grade boys and girls of Brooke Township Consolidated School in Buena Vista County celebrate Halloween in the 1950's.

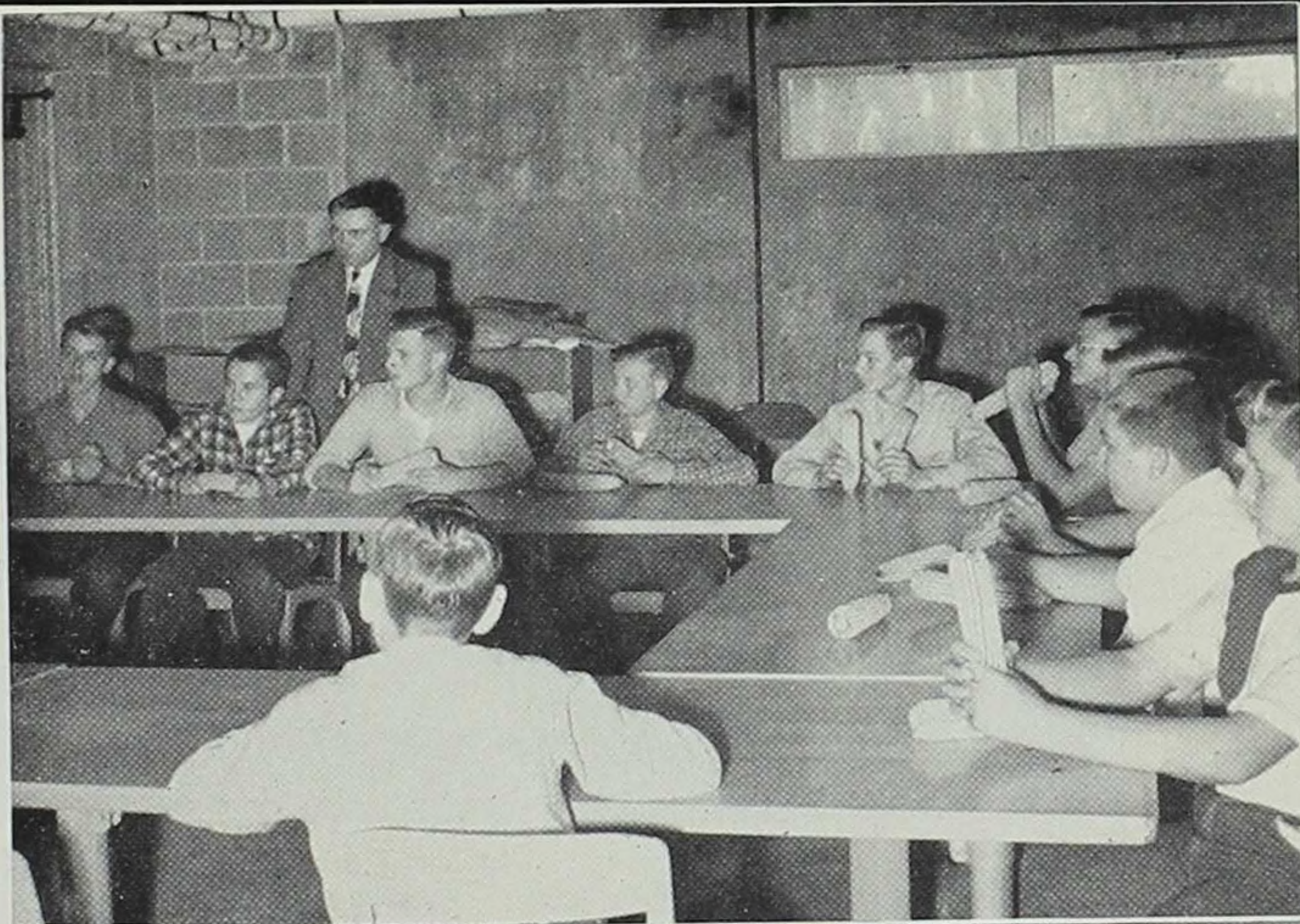
GIRLS' CLASSES

Domestic Science
Alta Consolidated
School

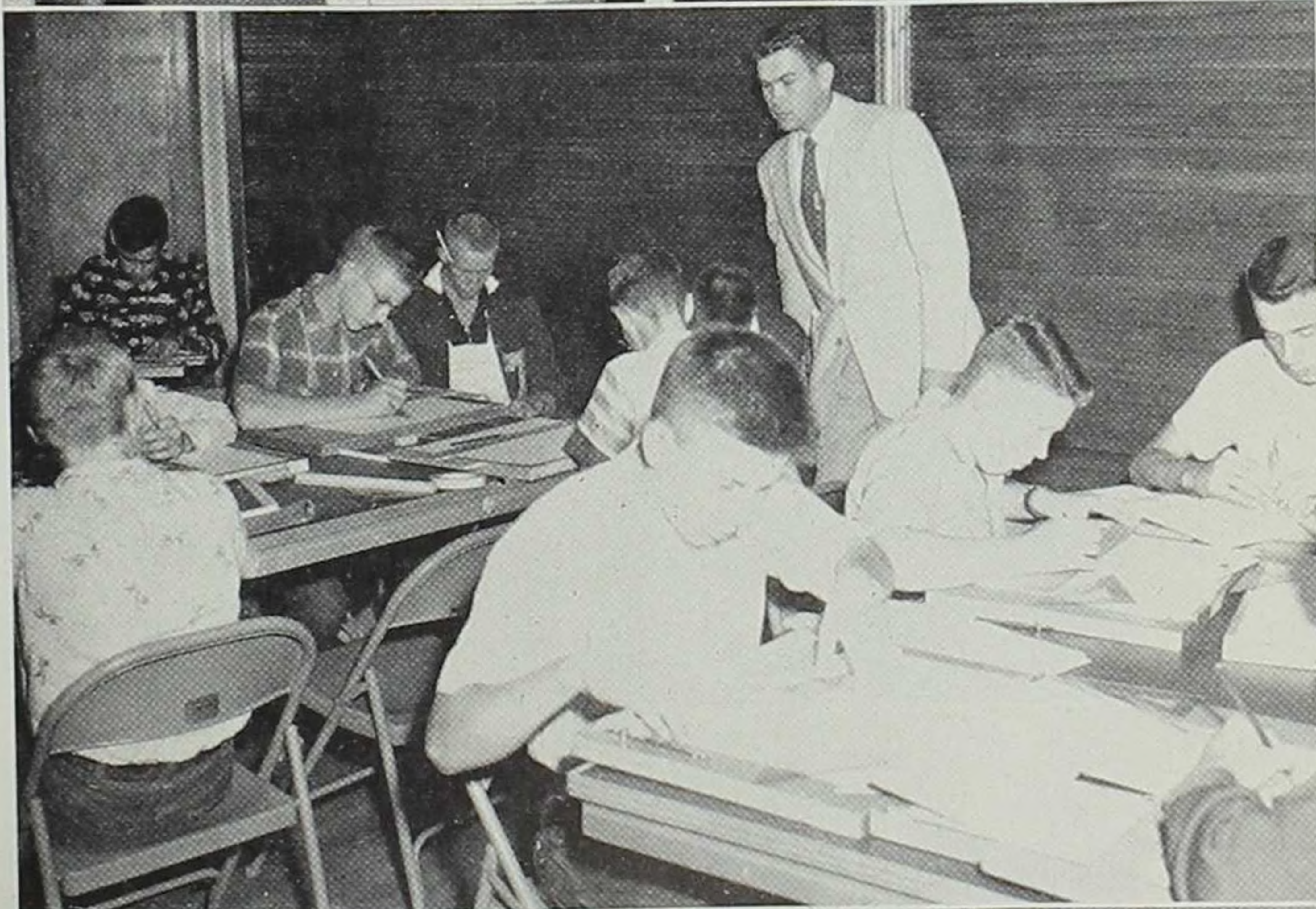
Business training
Alta Consolidated
School

Sewing class
Tabor Consoli-
dated School

BOYS' CLASSES



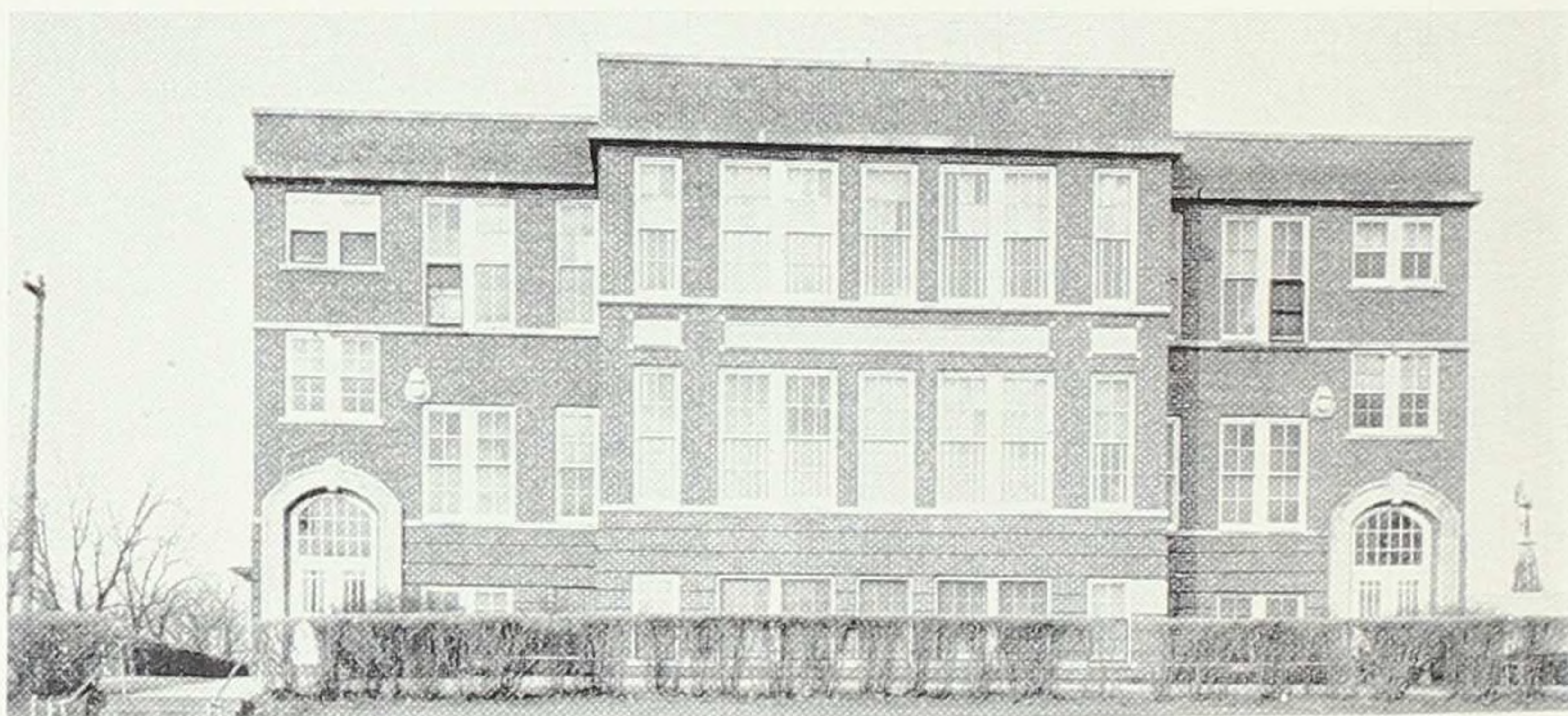
Agricultural training Tipton Consolidated School

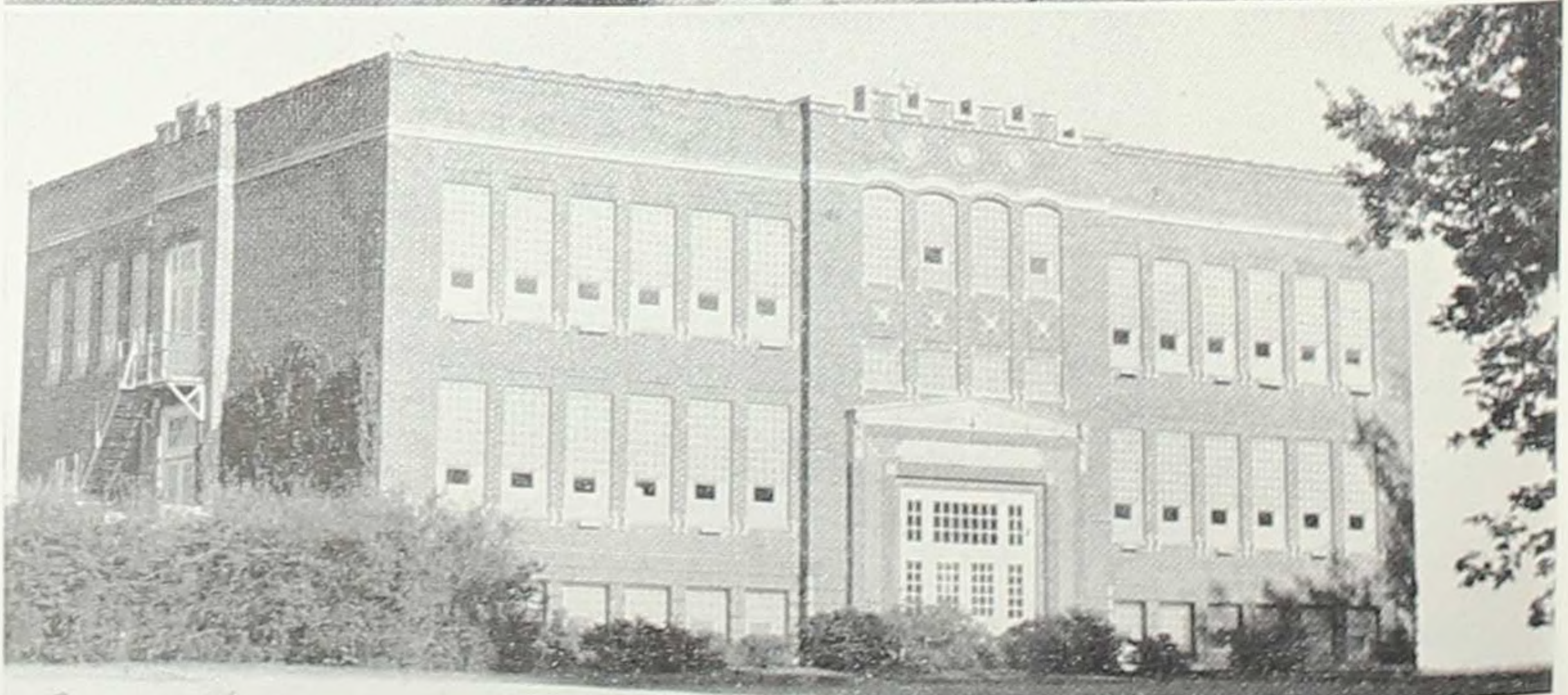


Mechanical drawing Tabor Consolidated School

Mechanical training Alta Consolidated School

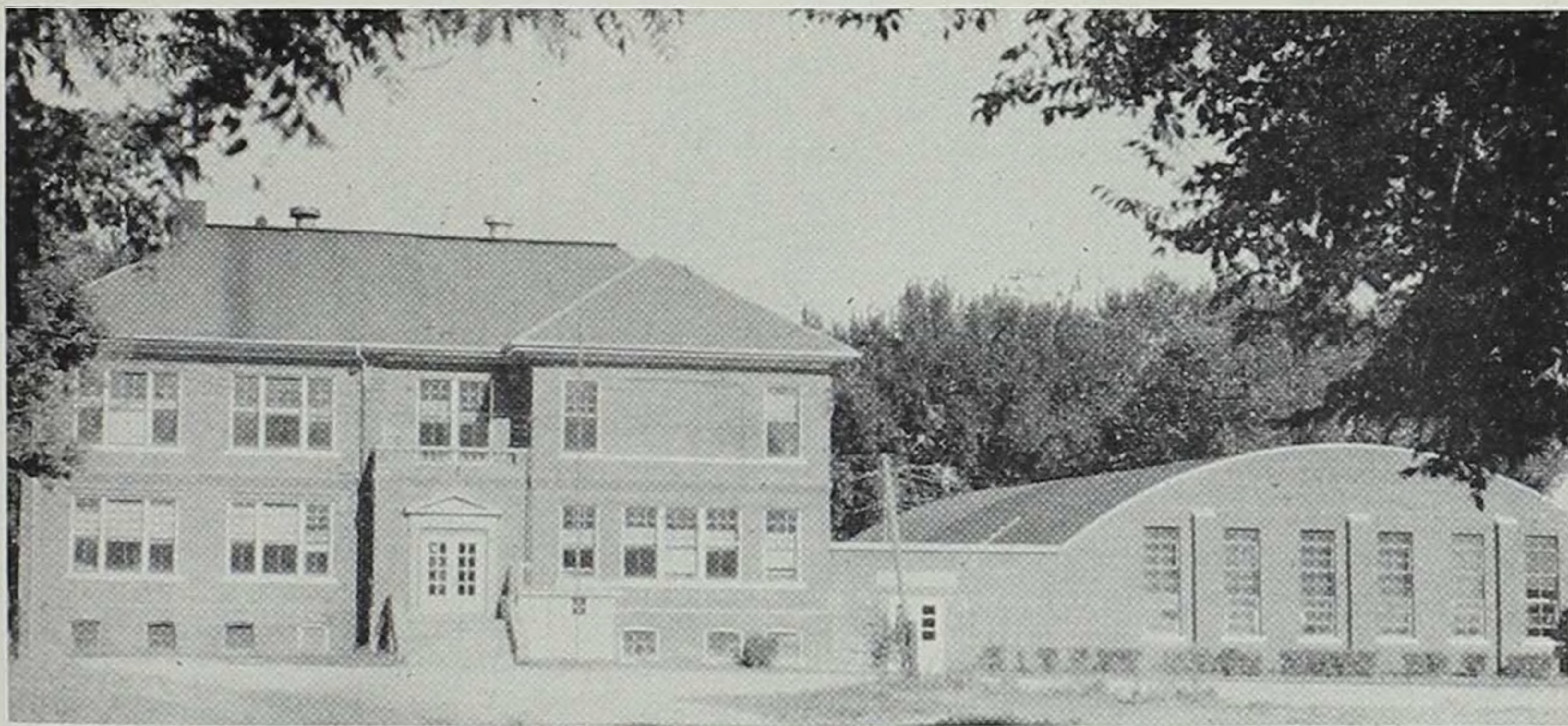
(Courtesy Supt. Melvin Samuelson, Alta; Supt. R. W. Gambach, Tipton; Miss Fern Williams, Tabor.)

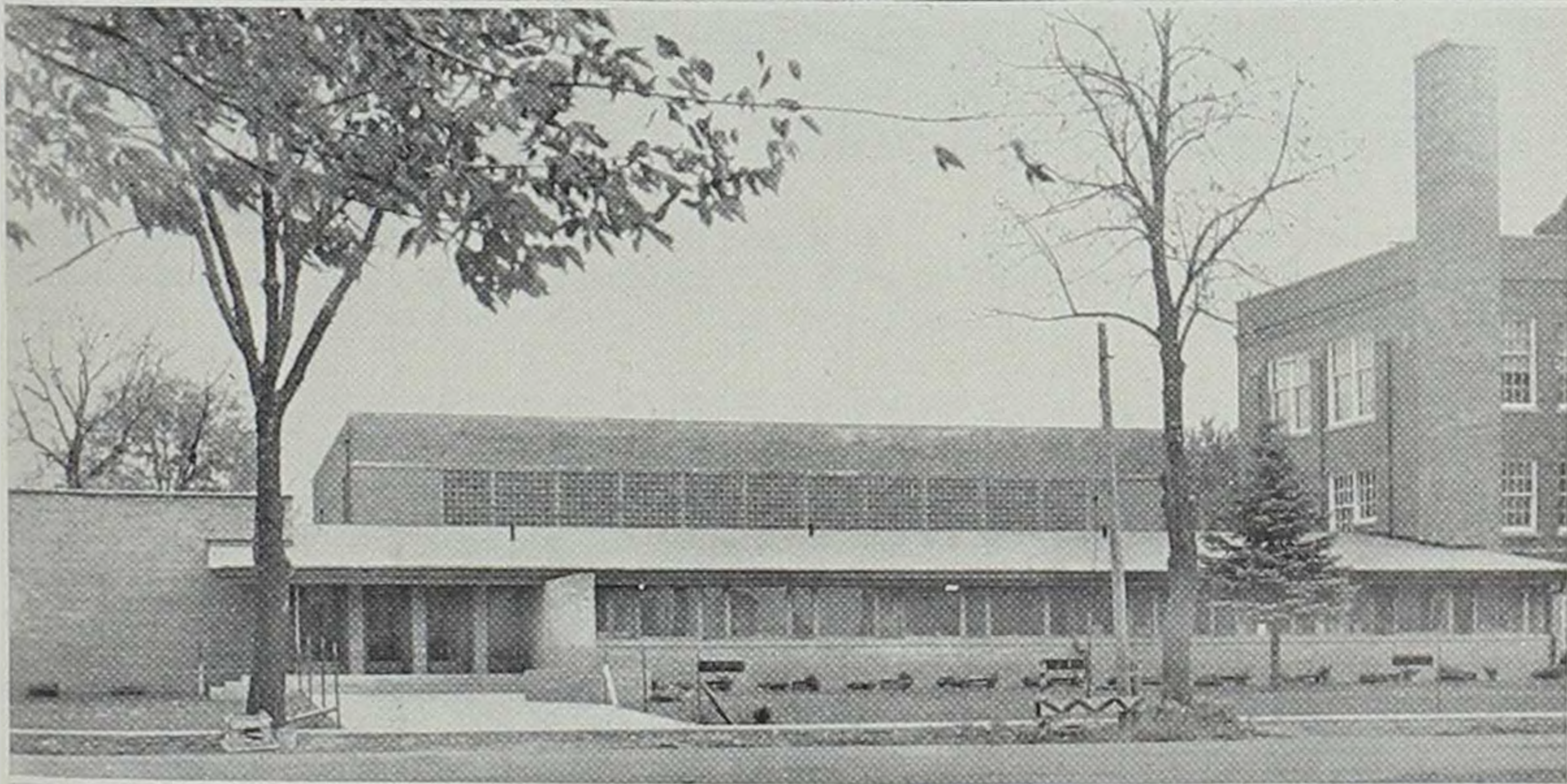


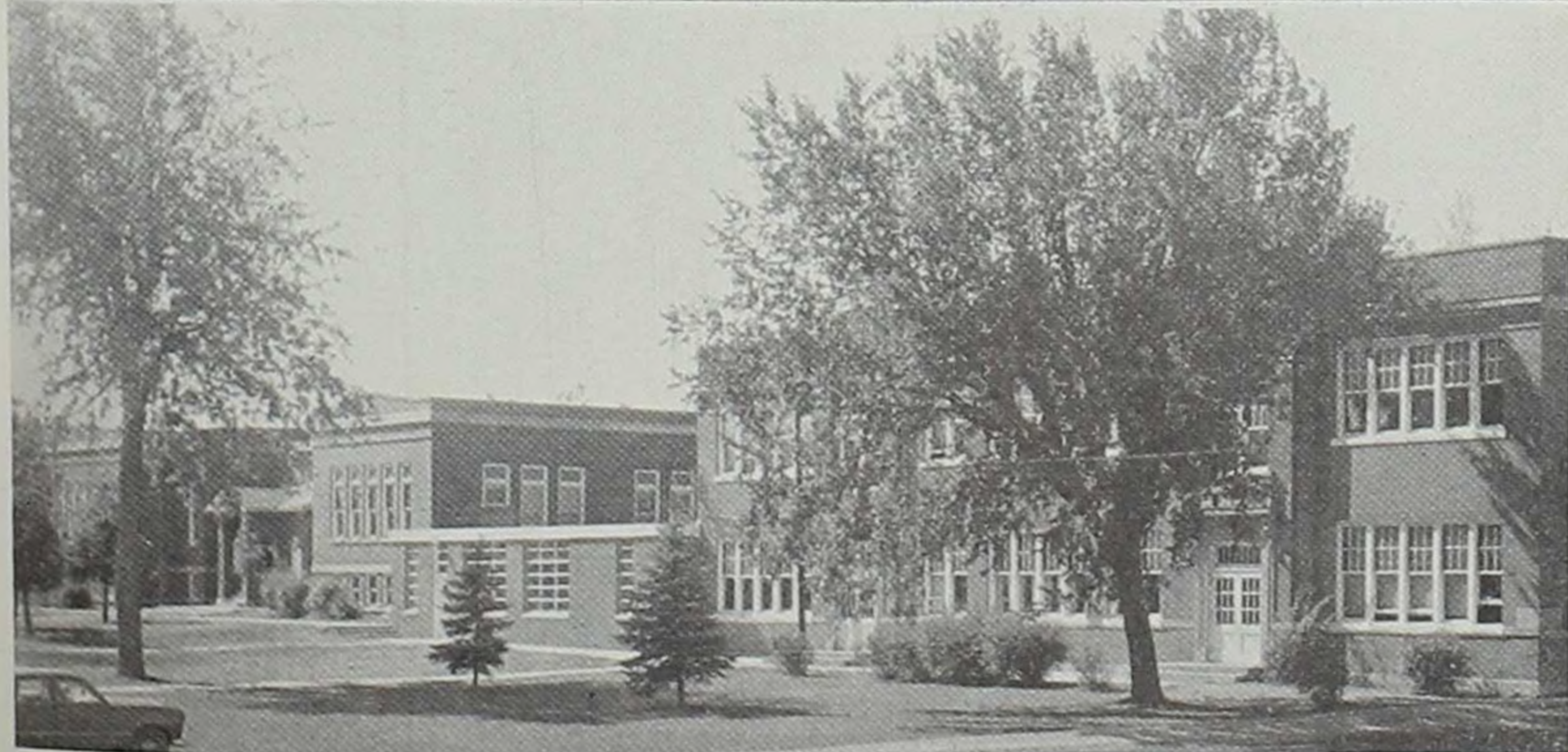


Courtesy Geneseo Con. Sch., and Malvern *Leader*

Among the 77 open-country consolidated schools in 1955 was the Geneseo Township school in Tama County (top), and the Strahan school in Mills County (bottom). Many provided living quarters for their teachers similar to the Geneseo school's dormitory (center).







Courtesy Malvern *Leader*; Supt. W. J. Edgar, Grand Junction; Prin. R. E. Bright, Paton

Typical of the ways in which increased enrollments have forced consolidated schools to add on to their original school buildings are these additions at the Henderson (top), Grand Junction (center), and Paton schools (bottom).

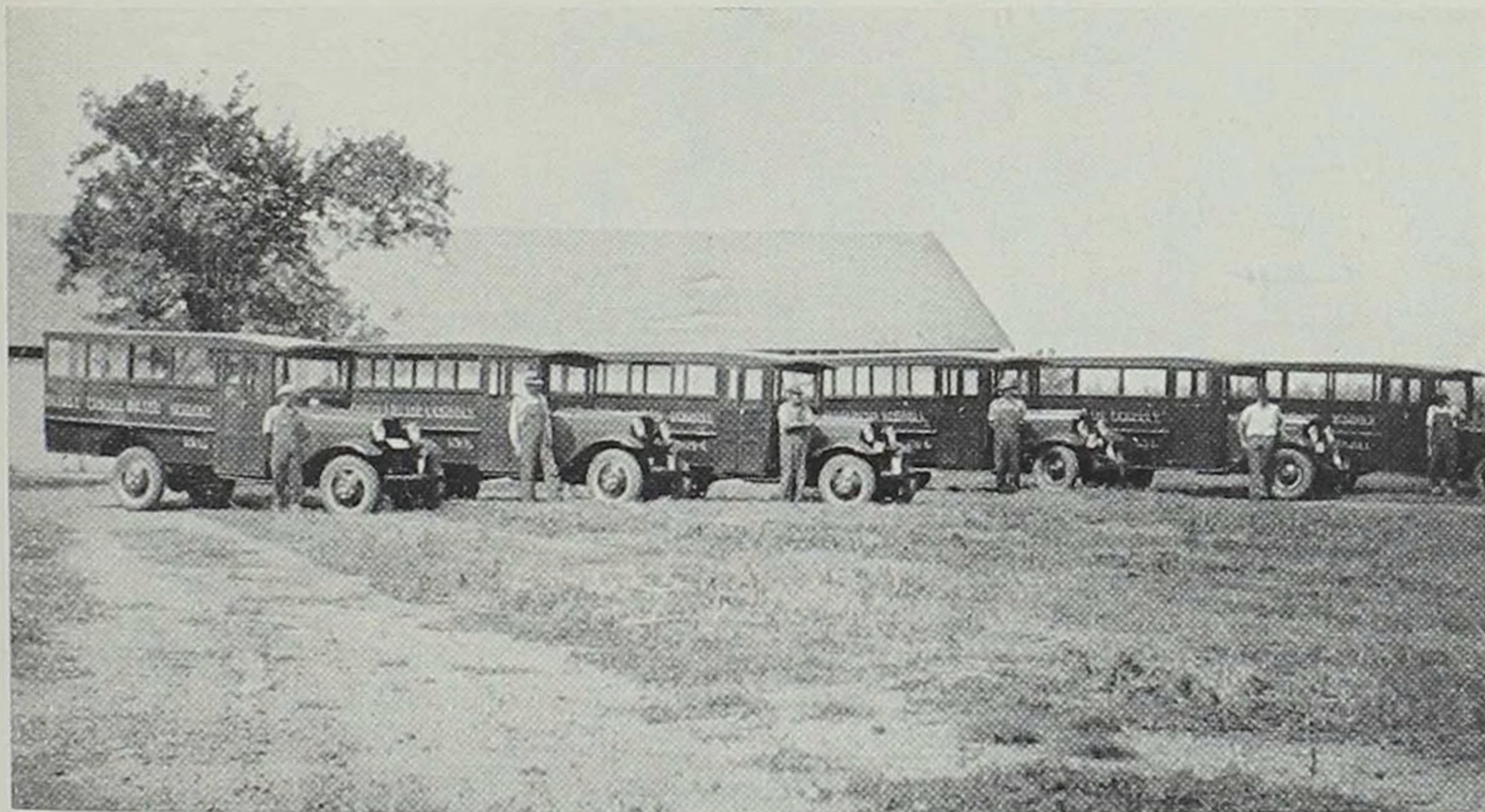
Courtesy Supt. R. B. Trafton

A. G. Johnson, Oscar Johnson, and Knute Sandeen of Marathon proudly stand beside the carriages they built in 1903 to transport students to the famous Marathon Consolidated School.

Courtesy Supt. R. L. Kinkead

"Ma's school bus" on the way to the Terril Consolidated School. Judging by the happy expressions on the faces of those standing beside the hack, the little fellow lying in the ditch was not hurt but was only camera-shy.

MOTOR TRANSPORTATION



Courtesy Dave Gibson

The Gilbert school's motor busses in about 1931. The drivers owned the trucks, the school the wooden bodies. Supt. V. L. Schwenk reported that in January, 1956, the Gilbert school was transporting approximately 300 students in six busses.

Courtesy Supt. W. A. Ortmeyer

The Armstrong Consolidated School's busses in the fall of 1955. Supt. W. A. Ortmeyer reported that 253 of the school's enrollment of 438 were transported to school at this time.

Courtesy Supt. A. C. Blome

Participation in sports, such as girls' basketball represented here by the Gowrie team in the 1920's, was one of the important benefits to the students in a consolidated school, not to mention the entertainment such sports furnished the community.

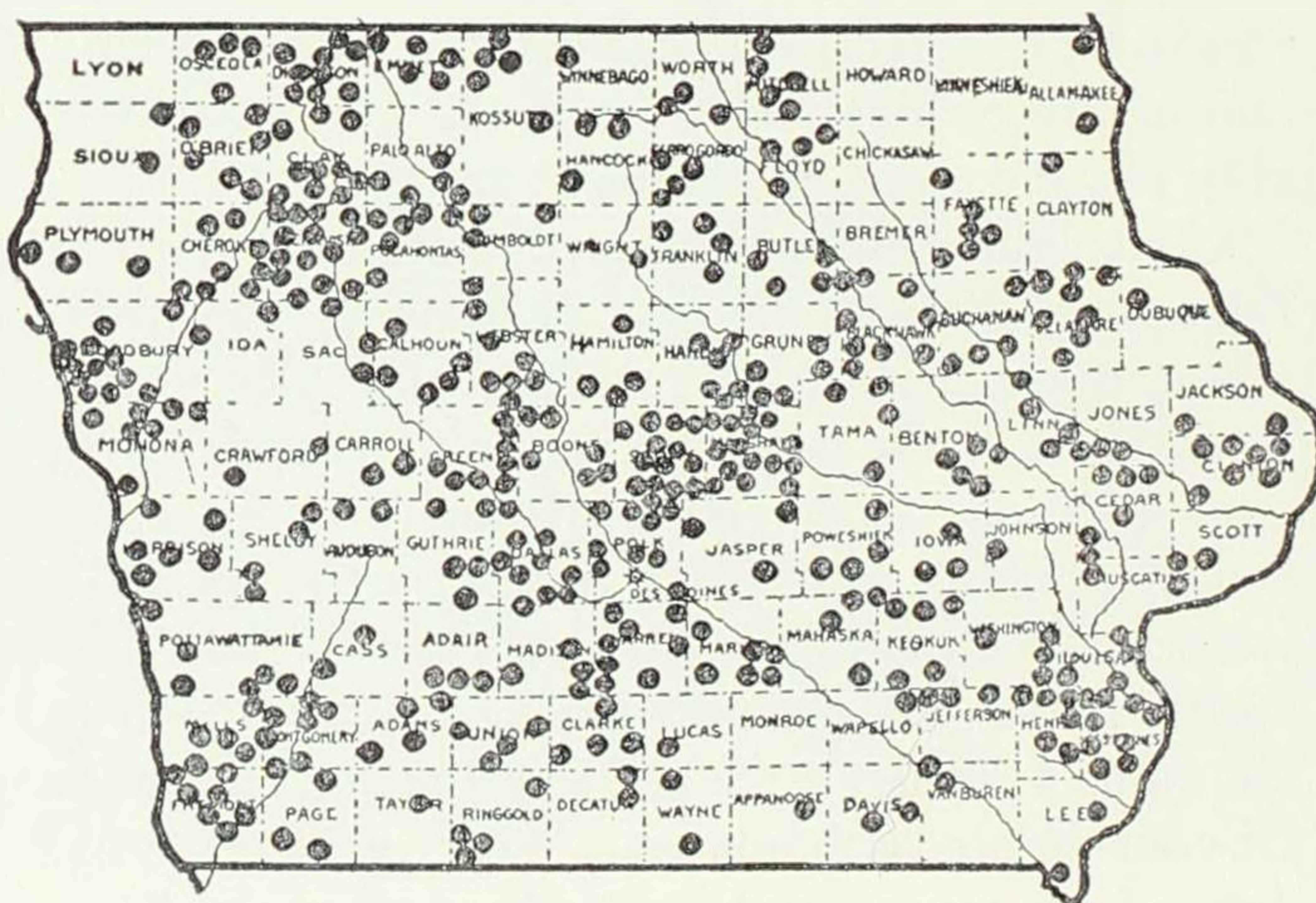
Courtesy Supt. A. C. Blome

The opportunity which they offered for the development of musical talent was among the consolidated schools' greatest contributions. Note that the auditorium in which the Gowrie band plays is also used for athletic contests and dramatic performances.

was to be devoted to similar courses in the seventh and eighth grades. Many schools went considerably beyond these minimum requirements.

Consolidated school districts were organized at the rate of fifty or more a year until 1917-1918 when, due partly to the war and partly to a new law, which made it easier for opponents to block consolidation, organization of new districts came to a virtual halt. In 1919, however, after the 1917 act was amended, and aided by the post-war economic boom, the greatest era of consolidation in the state's history began. The harried inspector of consolidated schools, even with frequent assistance from other members of the staff of the State Department of Public Instruction, was unable to keep up with the demands for his services. Between July 1, 1919, and June 30, 1920, an average of ten new consolidated districts were formed for every nine school days, while in one 29-day period in March, 1920, a total of 33 districts were established. By July, consolidation extended over a fifth of the state's area, and at least three counties had organized three-fourths of their territory. The stampede to consolidate continued unabated until late 1921.

Inevitably, many mistakes were made which might have been avoided had the advice of educators been heeded. State Superintendent Riggs in 1908 had recommended that the existing haphazard organization of districts be replaced by



Consolidated school districts, Sept. 1, 1921: 439

planned development, which would determine in advance the number and extent of consolidated districts best suited for an entire county. In 1920 President Fred D. Cram and other leaders of the Iowa State Teachers Association were urging the adoption of such a plan for the entire state.

But aside from the requirement that each district must contain a minimum of sixteen "contiguous" sections and the infrequent refusal of a county superintendent to approve a proposed district, local initiative was allowed free rein. Many districts were organized that subsequently proved too small and weak to provide an adequate education for their young people. Such matters as geographical considerations, reasonable estimates of

future enrollments, the amount of taxable wealth available, and the inclusion of a cohesive community unit should have governed the decision as to a district's size. Instead, local pride caused some areas to form districts and build costly consolidated schools simply because neighboring communities had done the same. Wild scrambles took place to gobble up the best lands before a rival district got them. Government section lines and township and county boundaries were too often the determining factors in establishing district limits. The results of such unplanned growth were a great many peculiarly shaped districts, which met the legal requirement as to size but did not comprise logical units from a geographical, economic or social standpoint.

In areas of heavy concentrations of consolidated schools those sections remaining unconsolidated often were farm lands regarded as too poor to furnish the additional taxes necessary to cover their inclusion in a district. Yet these pockets of unproductive farms were the very ones most in need of improved educational facilities and least able to supply them by themselves.

George S. May

Overcoming Opposition

"If . . . I want to make trouble for myself," Henry Wallace once confessed, "all that I have to do is to write a strong article urging centralization of rural schools. On no other point will I get such instant and urgent protest." Uncle Henry favored consolidation, as did an impressive list of Iowa's leading citizens. The Des Moines *Register and Leader* could not see "where there was any chance for argument over a reasonable consolidation of adjacent country schools." But argument there was and frequently bitter opposition, which only hard-fought campaigns could overcome.

The chief source of opposition came from the farmers. In districts that were to include town and country elements it was the rural vote that was most likely to defeat the proposition. Farm groups, such as the 1910 state agricultural convention and the Farm Bureau Federation, gave their backing to consolidation, but a strong core of opposition remained at the local level.

Some of this sprang from the farmer's natural conservatism, for, as Henry Wallace explained in 1910, the very character of his business forced the farmer to be "almost as careful to follow prece-

dent as a judge on the bench. . . . He buys livestock because he must do so to keep up with the procession and make ends meet." The need for similar improvements in rural education the farmer had not yet seen, Wallace believed in 1910. Another cause of the rural attitude was probably what a farm leader of a later generation, Mrs. Raymond Sayre, has termed the farmer's "can't-have-it complex." When, as a young bride, she found conditions not what she had hoped for, Mrs. Sayre recalls, her aunt had said to her, "Oh, Ruth, you can't have it any other way on the farm." Similarly, when a teacher left the country for a better job the farmer said, "you couldn't expect her to stay out in the country."

Resentment was back of much opposition — resentment of those who sought to change the traditional forms of rural education. Specifically, this resentment was directed at the city. There had long been a feeling that educators were more concerned with city than with rural problems. Homer H. Seerley declared that arithmetic books were "full of problems that constantly suggest city life and being a merchant. They give views of occupations that are one-sided and erroneous. They are not particularly suited to the boy on the farm, they do not make him at home in the computations he needs to use, as much as they do the boy who is to become a grocer, a banker or a clerk."

Although one group of pedagogues argued that

education was the same no matter where it was taught, Seerley was a leader of those who maintained that the interests of the country school were, and should continue to be, different from the city's. Now it was proposed to bring the graded school, which had been largely a development of the city school systems, to the country. State Superintendent Deyoe admitted in 1912 that the lack of success of the early consolidated schools was in part due to the failure to adapt them to the rural environment. The offer of state aid only to those consolidated schools that had courses in agriculture and homemaking was an effort to correct this situation. But in 1920 Chauncey Colegrove complained that at best the consolidated high school "is a poor copy of the city high school and at its worst it is a chaos of old-time subjects supplemented with some book agriculture, aimless manual training and domestic science that deals with frills and ruffles."

The traditional suspicions of the city were brought into play in another way, since most consolidated schools were located in towns. "Is not one of the great objects for living in the country that our children may not mingle in great masses where there is sure to be much impurity and depravity?" a farm mother asked in 1902. If the one-room school was replaced by a large central school, located in town, rural children would be exposed to these evils.

When the farmers of Des Moines Township in Pocahontas County heard in 1916 that the town of Rolfe planned to consolidate with parts of the township they reacted quickly. Although many of them were not particularly interested in consolidation, they were determined at all events not to become part of a district with a school located in Rolfe. By working all night the farmers prepared their own consolidation petition, which they presented to the county superintendent early the following morning, several hours before the citizens of Rolfe arrived with their own petition.

Rural parents may have exaggerated the evil influence that associations in a town school would have on their children. As C. R. Scroggie, editor of *Midland Schools*, observed, there was "just as apt to be a foul minded boy or girl in the country as in the small town." Advocates of consolidation opposed the location of any school in a town of over 5,000. The fact that in 1917 out of 235 consolidated districts only four included towns with populations in excess of 1,000 indicated that this principle had been observed. Of the remaining districts 28 included no town, 30 included towns of between 500 and 1,000 persons, while towns of less than 500 persons were found in the other 173 districts. The urban influence in towns of such size could not have been great, especially since the schools were usually located at the edge of town.

Supporters of the small town pointed out that it needed the consolidated school as much as did the strictly rural areas. Unless they could consolidate with the adjoining farmlands, most small towns would be unable to support an adequate educational program. In such a district the townspeople helped pay for the school bus service, although only the farmers' children received transportation to school. But as early as 1905 one farmer in the Buffalo Center district remarked sarcastically that consolidation "has given us the great privilege of furnishing 45 per cent of the pupils and of paying 65 per cent of the cost." Unfortunately, his complaint has been more than borne out by the careful studies of W. H. Lancelot of Iowa State College, who found in 1941 that in those districts containing town and country elements farm owners paid the entire cost of their own children's education plus 61.6 per cent of the cost of educating the townspeople's children. This disparity, the result of basing school support almost entirely on property taxes, was the major problem left unsolved by the consolidated school movement.

The anticipation that consolidation would result in higher school taxes was the principal reason why so many wealthy landowners opposed moves in that direction. An Iowa tenant farmer told Macy Campbell in 1920, "My landlord says that he will raise the rent so high as to force me off the

place if I vote for the consolidated school." Pressures of this kind were reported from many sections of the state.

Perhaps the greatest error that early advocates of consolidated schools made was to seek to silence critics by declaring that such schools would not be expensive. Eliminating several small schools and replacing them with a large one would by itself involve a saving. But with this larger school went the added expense of transportation, more equipment, higher salaries, new courses, and all the other aspects of the "educational awakening" that accompanied the demand for consolidation. "Those who are familiar with this type of school," James Woodruff asserted, "know that while the consolidated school may be made a cheap school it will always be a disappointment if made so cheap that it is cheaper than the one room school."

Eventually support was won for the consolidated school by emphasizing that it was superior to the old rural school, that it would give the taxpayers "a dollars worth of education for their children for every dollar expended." A member of the Boxholm school board told a *Saturday Evening Post* writer in 1923 that it was foolish to speak of the consolidated school as an inexpensive school. "You bet they cost," he said. "But look what we get for it! Darned good investment, we all think now, and you can say for me that this

community would get it if it cost five times as much."

Certain groups opposed consolidation for special reasons. Where there were Catholic parochial schools, opposition sometimes arose from Catholics who feared that consolidation would undermine the church schools' support. At Early in Sac County and the Varina Consolidated District in Pocahontas and Buena Vista counties Catholics were won over by a promise, which was kept, to transport parochial students in public school busses.

Directors of the existing rural school systems were another source of trouble to advocates of consolidation. The desire to be a director of his subdistrict, Henry Wallace declared, was to the farmer what the prospect of a D.D. degree was to the minister. In a large district, however, the chance of being elected would be greatly diminished. Sometimes a little horse trading helped overcome this hurdle. When the Norway Consolidated District was being discussed in 1914, one rural school official who opposed consolidation suddenly swung into support of the proposition when he was assured that he would be elected to the new consolidated school board — and he was.

The stubbornness of the opposition was such that consolidation forces could not afford to relax for an instant. The votes on organization were fre-

quently very close. If the move to consolidate was defeated on the first try, a standard maneuver was to cut away areas of strongest opposition wherever possible and try a second or even a third time. But even if consolidation was approved at the polls it might be overthrown on a technicality, as happened in the Ellston district in Ringgold County in 1920, when, after the school bond issue had been approved, the bond company discovered that the county superintendent had improperly advertised the election on consolidation. This made a new election necessary, at which the voters rejected consolidation.

Another time, after two tries, a consolidated district was approved by a slim majority in Delaware Township in Sac County. But anti-consolidation forces surged back to win control of the new school board, which refused to take any action to build a central school until a writ of mandamus was filed in district court in 1911. A school bond election was then held, which resulted in the proposed bond issue being defeated. Shortly thereafter the district was dissolved. Ten years later the township again voted to consolidate, this time also approving a bond issue that was four and a half times more than the one rejected in 1911.

Despite all the opposition to consolidation, however, State Superintendent Barrett was correct when he predicted in 1901 that once its advantages had been fully explained most people would

support consolidation. Opponents sometimes admitted that they knew consolidation would come eventually. At Jesup and in Orange Township in Black Hawk County, as well as at many other places, it was found that the best way to win support for a proposed district was to send its strongest opponents on a visit to established consolidated schools.

Once a school had been built its success rested heavily on the shoulders of the man employed as superintendent. Such a man needed, above all else, a knowledge and understanding of farmers and rural life. "Too often," Chauncey Colegrove noted, "the school board will employ . . . a man whose only experience has been in town schools, never lived on a farm, and has little or no knowledge of scientific agriculture." The ideal superintendent, Macy Campbell declared, also had to be able to develop a first-class educational program, and be "capable of handling the difficult problems of transportation, the warm noon lunch and competitive athletics under consolidated school conditions."

The rate of turnover was high, which was understandable in view of the things a superintendent, especially in a small school, had to do. Superior Township in Dickinson County in 1918 paid its superintendent $1,000. He agreed:

to do the janitor work for $350. To throw up janitor work if he does not give satisfaction. Also, he [is] to furnish

heat for downstairs and toilet rooms in residence, each teacher to pay twelve and one-half per cent of coal expenses per month. Mr. Rogers further agrees to pay for seeds used on agricultural plot, and also work done on same, said crops to be used for experimental purposes. He further agrees to room and board janitor, if found necessary to hire one.

Little wonder that the scarcity of good superintendents was a serious bottleneck in the early 1920's.

In capable hands the consolidated school overcame most of the opposition that remained. No district that erected a consolidated school ever voted to return to the one-room schools.

George S. May

Transportation of Students

When, in 1919-1920, all states had adopted transportation, about 356,000 students, less than two per cent of the national total, were brought to classes in school busses. By 1954 some 130,000 busses each day transported approximately eight million students, representing about thirty per cent of the nation's student body, at an annual cost of over a quarter of a billion dollars. The passengers carried in school busses every day totaled more than four times the daily passenger traffic on all the intercity trains and commercial busses combined. In Iowa, only 859 pupils were transported in 1903-1904 at a cost of $14,321.65. Half a century later 157,595 students were transported in approximately 4,200 motor vehicles at a cost of $8,905,000. School busses traveled an estimated 35,000,000 miles in a year.

School transportation has never been confined solely to consolidated districts. In 1897, the year Buffalo Center inaugurated its bus service, Forest City began carrying fifteen pupils into town from rural sections of its independent school district. By 1929 two-thirds of the first-class city systems, a fourth of the second-class city schools and school townships, a fifth of the towns and villages, and a

sixteenth of the rural independent districts were providing some student transportation. The General Assembly in 1933 required all elementary students living more than two and a half miles from their school to be given transportation. Later the distance was dropped to two miles. High school student transportation was also required, but under different standards.

However, in 1935-1936 consolidated schools accounted for over 80 per cent of the pupils carried by the state's school busses. Slightly more than a tenth of the public school students were transported at a cost of 4½ per cent of the net public school operating expenses. In contrast, 61 per cent of all consolidated school pupils rode in school busses at a cost of 20 per cent of their schools' operating expenses.

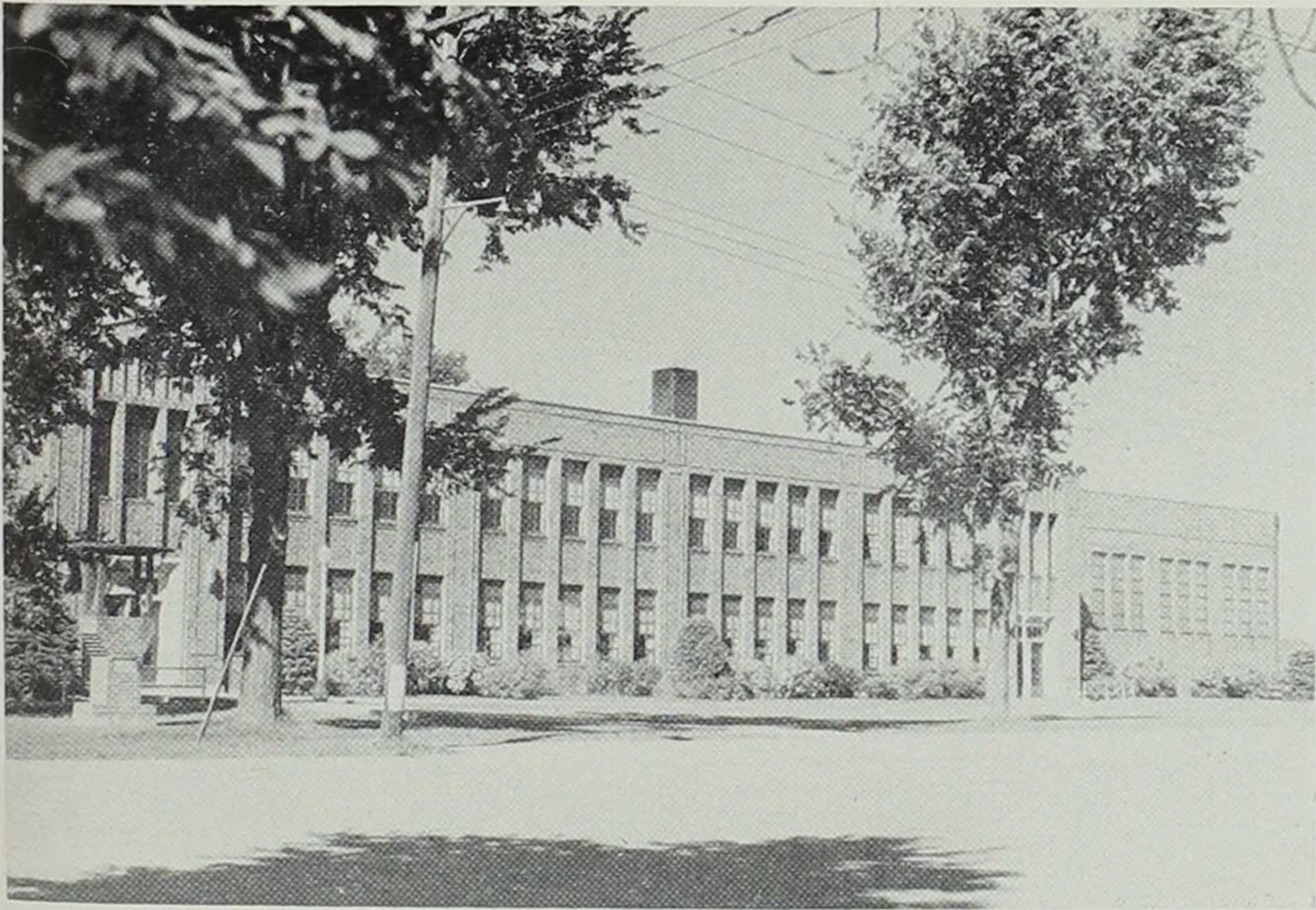
Because it was a radically new idea, transportation was one of the principle obstacles blocking the acceptance of consolidation. Many critics felt that transportation was bound to fail, declaring, "Yuh can't haul 'em." Parents were reluctant to see their youngsters ride several miles to and from school. Their health would be endangered because in winter they would have to stand in the cold waiting for the bus; their feet would get wet; and they would catch cold during the long trip to school. In addition, the bus might have an accident; the driver might be incompetent; a blizzard might come up and maroon the children far from

help. Besides, Grundy County Superintendent J. T. Gray wrote in 1901, "I believe that . . . the walk of a mile or more through the storm [to the rural school] may be the means of showing a child that he can do something."

Of course, one supporter of transportation admitted, "you can think of a lot of things that *might* happen." Wild rumors spread, such as the one reported in Nebraska in 1920 to the effect that "thousands of children . . . have frozen to death by the roadsides in Iowa." Transportation remained a source of dissatisfaction after it had been tried. A survey of the patrons of three consolidated districts in Black Hawk and Buchanan counties in 1920-1921 showed that over half of those who suggested changes in the system felt improvements were needed in transportation. However, they were no longer objecting to the principle but merely to the way in which it was being carried out.

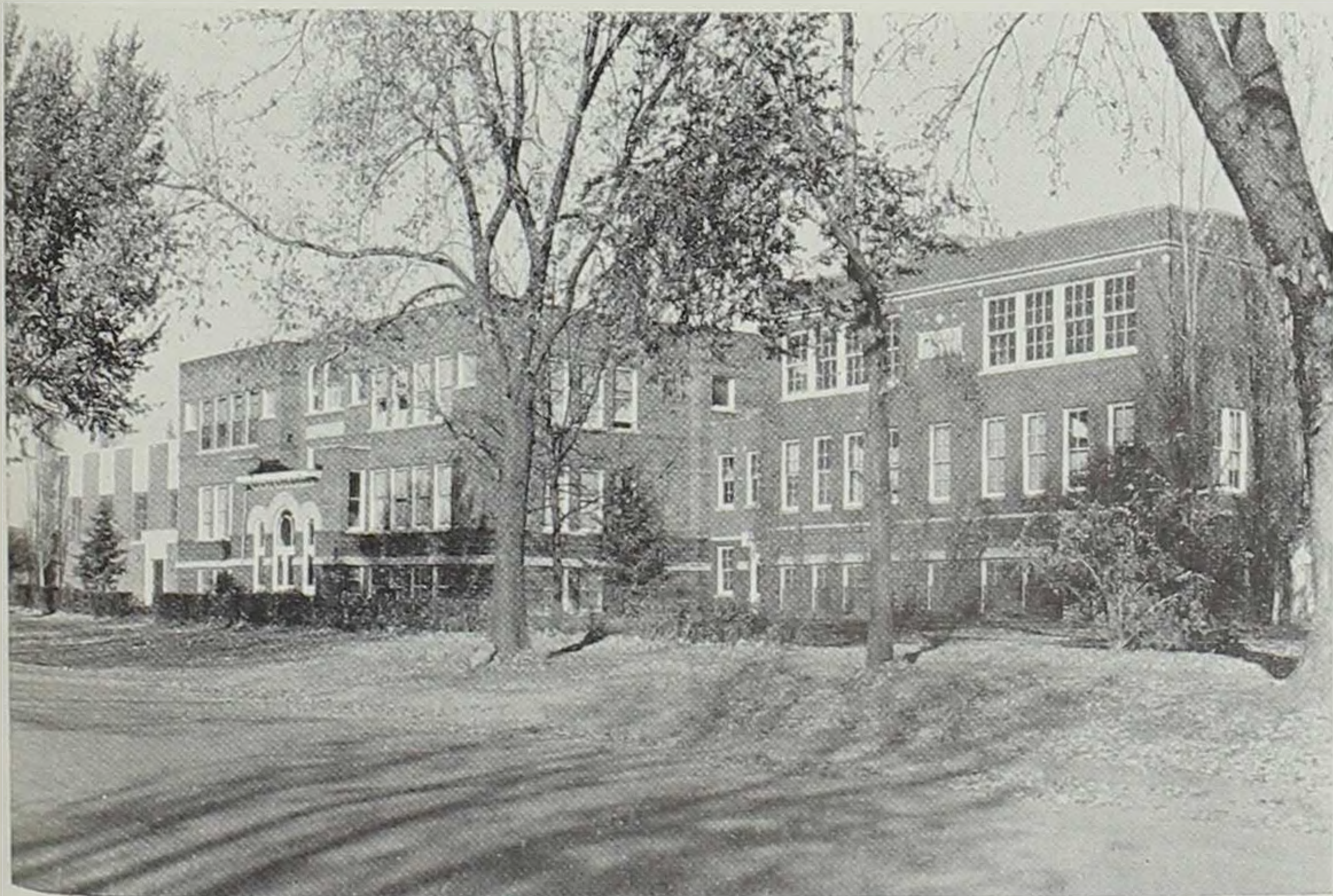
From the outset school authorities sought to allay parents' fears by drawing up elaborate contracts. Each driver at the Terril school in 1905 had signed a contract in which he agreed:

To furnish a strong, safe, properly covered vehicle, with comfortable seats, and a safe, strong, quiet team, with proper harness, all being subject to the approval of the board; to furnish warm, comfortable robes or blankets sufficient for the best protection and comfort for each and all the pupils to and from the public school building and their



Courtesy Supt. A. N. Busse

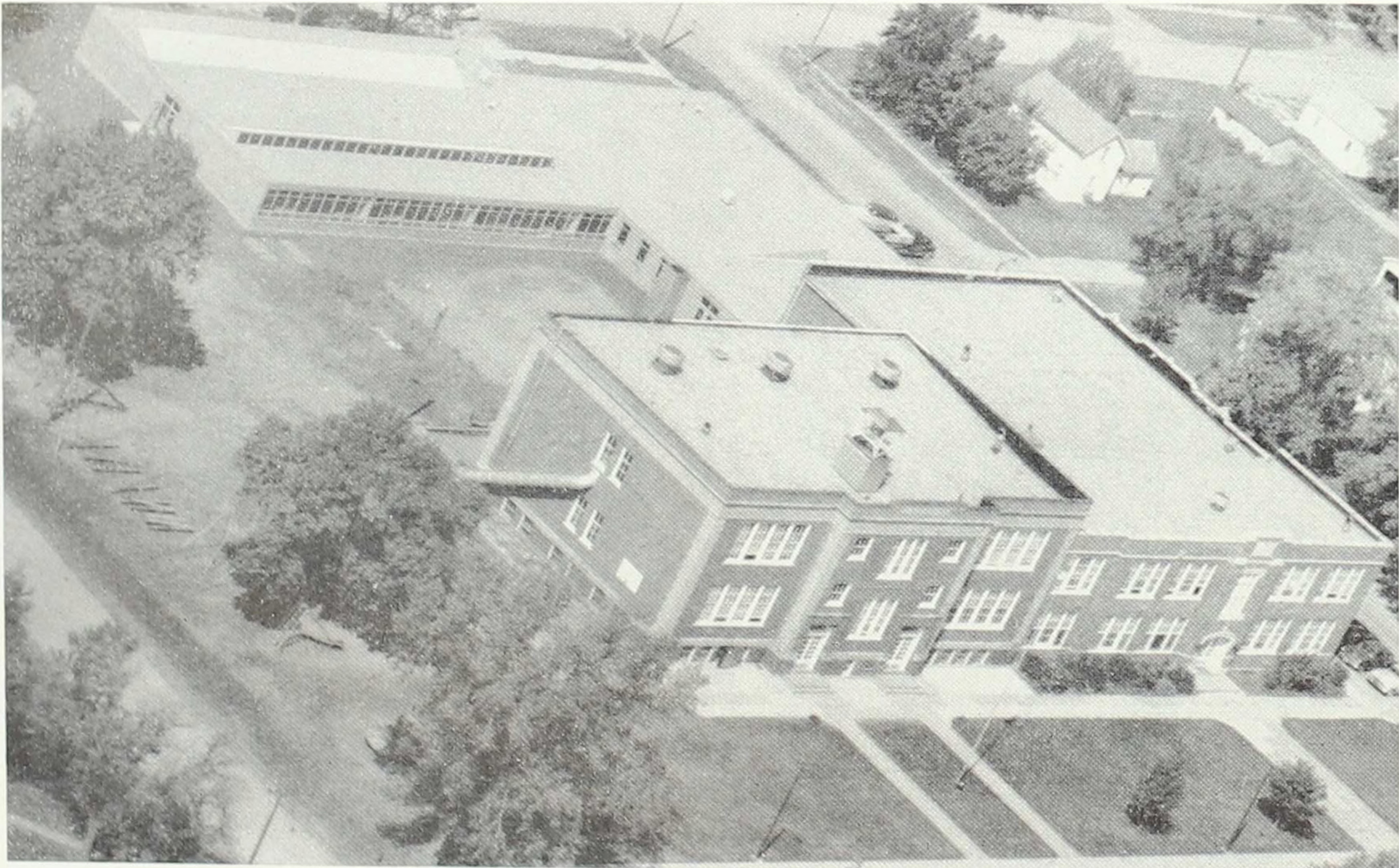
The Monona school would be a credit to any community. In 1955 the Monona-Farmersburg district maintained an elementary school at Farmersburg in addition to the one above which served as the high school for 200 students and had elementary classes for 300 more students.



Courtesy Buena Vista Co. Supt. Harrison

Buena Vista County was from the earliest years of the twentieth century a hotbed of activity in favor of consolidation. Schools such as the one above at Newell served as examples for the state. In 1955, under Supt. C. R. Kremenak, the Newell school had a total enrollment of 373.

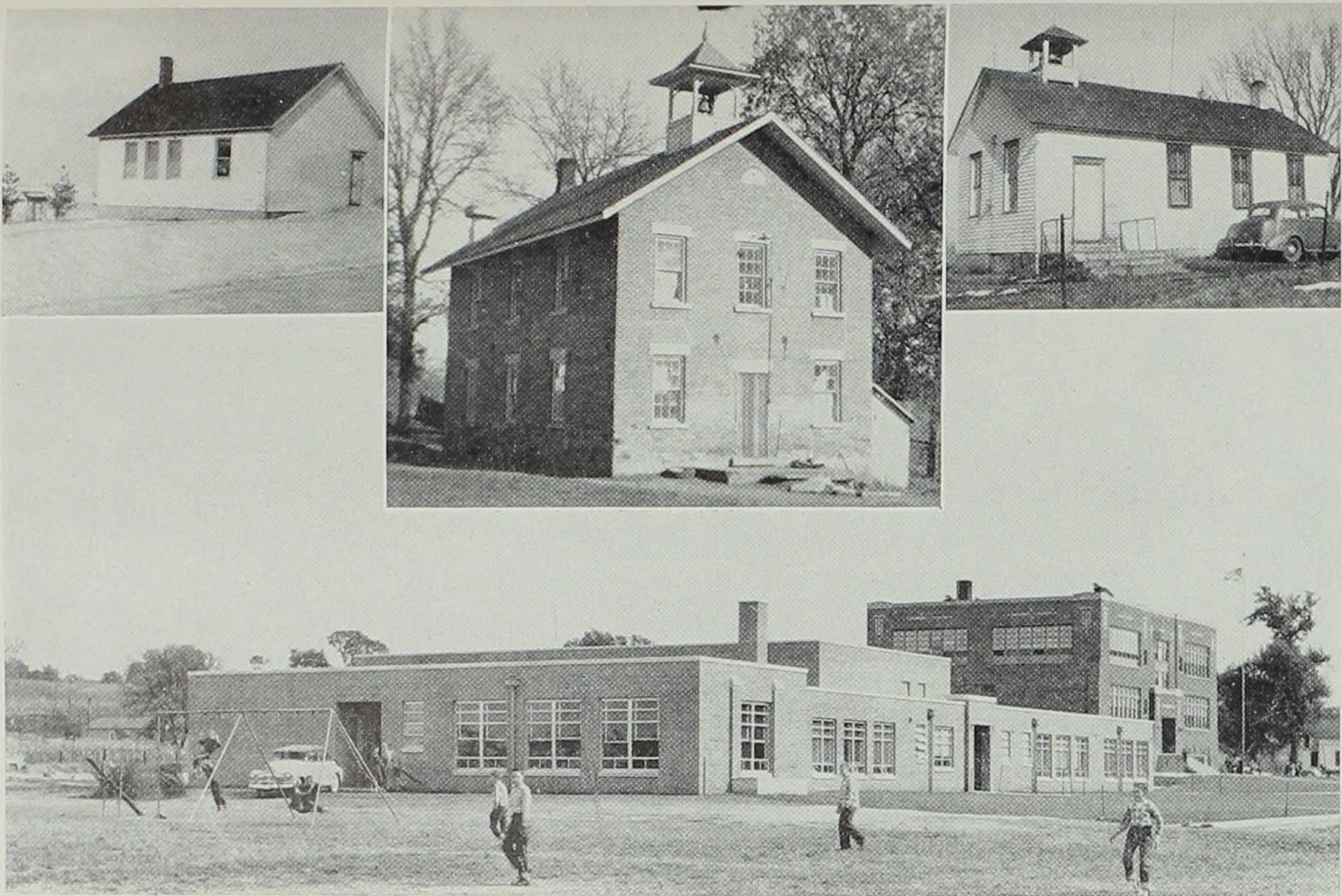
THE GROWTH OF A CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL



Courtesy Supt. C. L. Iverson

The growth of a consolidated school is graphically illustrated by this aerial view of the Milford school. The original building was completed in 1912, three years after the consolidated district was formed. In 1929 an addition, not quite as high as the first building, was constructed. Finally, in 1955 the low L-shaped addition at the back was dedicated. In January, 1956,

CONSOLIDATING SEVERAL SCHOOLS INTO ONE



Courtesy Mrs. E. L. Baxter and Cedar Rapids *Gazette*

On December 16, 1952, voters at Central City and surrounding areas approved the Central City Consolidated District. Among the small schools closed by this action were (from left to right at the top) the Melrose, Waubeek, and Paris schools. In the fall of 1954 an addition to the Central City school was completed (bottom). The name was changed to the Central City Community School in 1955 when Supt. John J. Hurwitz reported 614 enrolled.

Courtesy Supt. R. W. Gambach

With the opening in 1954 of this 30′ by 60′ swimming pool, part of the Veterans Memorial addition, the Tipton school was better prepared than ever to live up to its new name, the Tipton Community School.

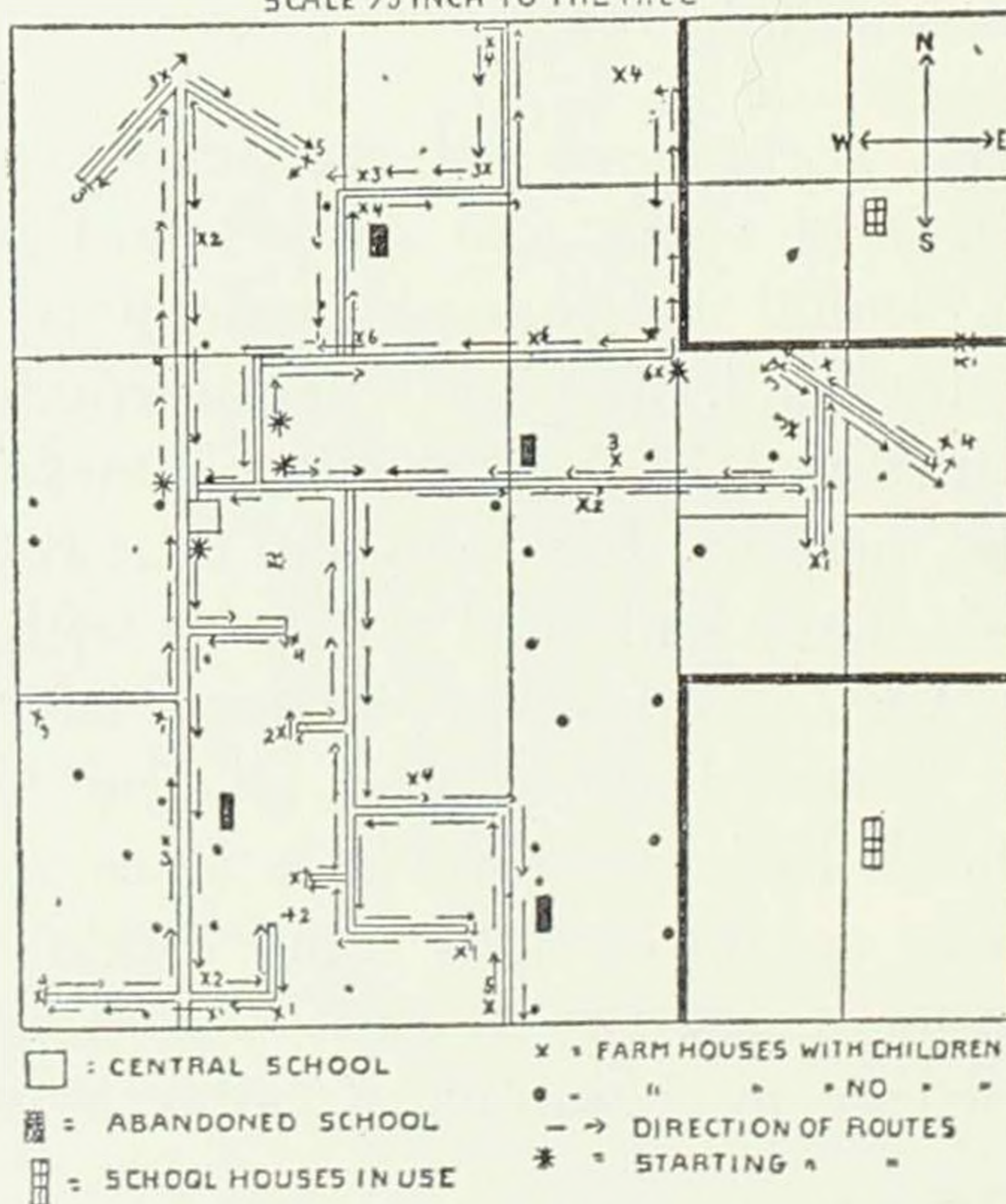
respective homes; to collect all the pupils on the route by driving to each and all the homes where the pupils reside each morning that school is in session in time to convey the pupils to school, so as to arrive at the school building not later than 8:50 a.m. and return pupils to their homes, leaving the building at 4:00 p.m.; to personally drive and manage his team, and to refrain from the use of any profane or vulgar language within the hearing or presence of the children; nor will he use tobacco in any form during the time he is conveying the children to and from school. He agrees that he will not drive faster than a trot, nor race with any team, and that he will keep order and report improper conduct on the part of any pupils to the Principal or the President of the board.

The early horse-drawn conveyances were of a wide variety of types and shapes and by later standards would be judged inadequate. They were usually small, often dark and uncomfortable. At the Kirkman school in Shelby County in 1913 four hacks, only ten feet long and four feet wide, were used. They had solid slat roofs with rubber covering. On the sides were curtains which were raised or lowered depending on the weather. Some schools had vehicles whose sides were solidly wooden except for very small windows. The lack of light inside the busses created problems for the driver in maintaining order among the children.

However, the busses were warm, and, although accidents did occur, it was widely agreed that it was safer for a child to ride several miles with a

group of youngsters than to walk a mile or so by himself to the crossroads rural school. Inspector Woodruff told of one farmer who, not wishing his little girl to have to go so far to school, had gotten up at a meeting held to consider consolidation and said, "Here is three hundred dollars to fight this thing, and there is more where this came from." Two years after the consolidated school had been established this same man was heard to say that he and his wife were less worried about

School Bus Routes at Buffalo Center, 1901



(By "starting of routes" is meant where teams start. The most remote children are as a rule gathered first.)

their daughter going to school now than they had been when she went to the old rural school.

Perhaps the greatest objection to horse-drawn busses was that they limited a district's size. Thus, in 1905 State Superintendent Riggs declared that the township, unless it had excellent roads, was too large an area to be consolidated. Five miles was the most a pupil should have to ride. If the distance was greater he would be away from home too long. Parents in the Lake Township district, for example, complained that their children left home around 7 a.m. and did not return until 5:30 p.m.

Since the 1920's, due to improved roads and the use of motor busses, consolidated districts with areas equal to several townships have been created. In 1947-1948 twelve busses in the huge Vinton district, comprising 120 sections, daily transported an average of 466 pupils, some of whom rode over 23 miles. Yet the earliest pickup was 7:30 a.m., which meant that the time spent on the road was no greater than in districts a fifth as large in the days of the horse-drawn bus.

A survey of opinion among county superintendents in 1900-1901 clearly revealed that bad roads were considered the chief obstacle to school transportation and therefore to widespread consolidation. E. J. Hook of Winneshiek County, although convinced of the advantages of consolidation, declared that lack of roads, bad roads, and roads that drifted heavily in the winter made consolidation "a physical impossibility" in three-fourths of his county's townships.

There was general agreement with Governor George W. Clarke's statement in 1913 that "the consolidated rural school will go halting and crippled until the permanent road passes the door." Actually, a great many districts did not let bad roads prevent them from going ahead with consolidation. The great road construction boom of the 1920's and early 1930's came after consolidation had ceased. A common practice as late as the Twenties was to have "bad roads vacations" during seasons when busses could not get through. When schools were in session, however, every effort was made to get the children to their classes regardless of road conditions, usually with remarkable success. Once, in the early days of the Buffalo Center district, a bus driver drove across a farmer's field in order to avoid a marshy spot in the road. The farmer brought the driver to court, but the judge refused to impose a penalty, contending that it was the driver's duty to bring the children to school by any means necessary.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the pattern of consolidation was related to road conditions. Poor roads in southern Iowa and hilly terrain in northeastern Iowa help to account for the small number of consolidated schools over much of these areas, while superior roads lent encouragement to the consolidation movement in the northern part of the state. Poor roads also served to hold down the size of the districts that were created in south-

ern Iowa. Whereas the rapid improvement in roads to the north made it feasible for many districts to expand, bad secondary roads continued to plague consolidated schools in the southern counties to some extent even as late as the 1950's.

By the first World War motor vehicles were beginning to appear in the newer districts. Whiting in Monona County in 1916-1917 used both auto-trucks and horse-drawn vehicles to convey its pupils to school, but in 1918 bought enough motor busses to take care of the whole district. Drivers in other districts sometimes used their own cars and at their own expense transported students.

By 1920 the "large majority" of districts that were beginning transportation for the first time were employing motor busses. Older districts continued to use their horse-drawn vehicles, but were replacing them with motor busses as the hacks wore out. In 192 districts in 1920, a total of 262 auto busses were being used as against 968 horse-drawn hacks. In the Pisgah district, where both types were used, the maximum time a student was on the road on the horse-drawn routes, which averaged 5.4 miles in length, was 75 minutes. On the other hand, on the motor routes averaging 6.8 miles in length the maximum time was only 49 minutes.

Mud roads slowed up the adoption of motor busses. Many districts that used them kept horse-

drawn vehicles for periods when the horseless carriages could not negotiate the roads. By 1925-1926 only 27 per cent of the districts were using motor busses exclusively. Ten years later this figure had risen to 85 per cent, while only 6.8 per cent of the districts still relied solely on horses, the remainder using both types. In a few instances the horse-drawn hack was still used as late as the Forties. After 1939 minimum standards designed to promote safety both in the construction and operation of school busses were set by state law.

With the motor bus came a gradual change in the driver's relationship with the school. In the early days it was natural for the school to contract with farmers to handle transportation. When motor busses were introduced, it seemed logical to continue this system. In many cases the driver owned the chassis while the school owned the wooden body. This system proved to be uneconomical and generally unsatisfactory, with the result that by the 1930's an increasing number of the larger districts were finding it cheaper to own their own busses and to hire mechanics and drivers to operate them.

GEORGE S. MAY

The End of the First Phase

In 1920 the consolidated school movement appeared to be unstoppable. Governor W. L. Harding told the first National Conference on Rural School Consolidation held at Cedar Falls that "in about five years if you will come back we will have one relic that we can show you, and that will be an old one room school house with the windows boarded up." A thousand consolidated schools by 1925 was the prediction of competent authorities. All at once, late in 1921, organization of new districts halted, not to be resumed for a quarter of a century.

The most frequent explanation for this sudden turn of events has been that the agricultural depression, which gripped American farmers beginning in 1921, discouraged further rural consolidation in Iowa. "It is not a question of the merits of the consolidated school," State Superintendent Agnes Samuelson wrote in 1926, "but of the price of corn." Farm prices dropped sharply, and land values plummeted from the heady heights attained during the wartime boom. District school taxes, which had risen from $22,000,000 in 1917 to nearly $48,000,000 by 1921, became a heavy burden for the hard-hit farm owners. At the same time taxes

for road improvements were also increasing. Retrenchment became the byword in the state. In January, 1922, the Farm Bureau Federation, which had supported consolidation, called for an end to all except the most essential public construction.

But even without the collapse of farm prices it is probable that the increase in the number of new consolidations would have slowed down if not stopped soon after 1921. Before the change in the farmer's economic position, the number of consolidation proposals that were rejected was sizable. Probably, as W. H. Lancelot contends, farmers had decided that in districts containing both rural and urban elements the burden of support fell too heavily upon the former. The Brookings Report of 1933 on all phases of Iowa government concluded that the real reason consolidation stopped was that no more districts could be organized under existing legislation.

Consolidated districts were hard hit by the farm depression. Already in December, 1921, the subject of how to reduce costs aroused most interest at the annual meeting of consolidated school officials at Cedar Falls. Some delegates seemed disappointed when no magic formula was produced for operating a good school without money. Economies were made by combining classes, dropping some courses, and offering others in alternate years. Whenever possible, State Super-

intendent May Francis reported in 1924, her department "recommended the elimination of surplus teachers rather than the lowering of teaching standards."

Some of the schools' financial difficulties were the result of unwise school board policies. As early as 1916, C. R. Scroggie had warned of the danger of overbonding a district. He knew of only one case of extravagant construction, but in many districts patrons were hard pressed to adjust to the sudden rise in taxation levied to meet the interest on bonds. The post-war inflation in construction costs came just at the peak of the consolidation movement. Some districts held up building projects, preferring to use temporary school facilities until prices came down. However, by 1922 the bonded indebtedness of the consolidated schools was 39 per cent of the total state public school debt, although enrollment in these districts was only about an eighth of the state's entire student body. The per pupil debt of consolidated districts in 1924 was the highest of any type of school district in Iowa.

By 1926 school construction in consolidated districts had virtually ended, to be succeeded by programs of debt payment. The number of consolidated schools was now stabilized at about 385. There were some twenty other districts which operated no central school and had no intention of doing so. By 1925 nineteen districts had been

dissolved, but in no case had they built a central school or sold bonds for that purpose.

No sooner had the schools gotten their initial financial problems under control than they were hit by the terrible depression of the Thirties. By heroic effort the schools somehow survived. Typical of the cooperation of all concerned during the crisis was a resolution presented to the Dumont Consolidated School Board in the spring of 1932 which stated:

> We, the teachers of the Dumont Consolidated School District of Dumont, have decided unanimously that we will reduce our salaries. Since the prices that farmers receive are not a fair return on their investments, we are therefore willing to cooperate with them by a reduction in all salaries.

In 1934, only four consolidated schools were unable to pay debt interest when it was due. The rigid economizing had in some cases, Inspector R. A. Griffin reported, "led to ineffective teaching, the neglect of school property, and lack of adequate supplies, especially in providing much needed maps, apparatus, and library books." Both teachers and students, however, although greatly handicapped, had "accepted the challenge with determination to make the most of the situation."

The experiences of the Twenties and Thirties demonstrated anew the need for drastic organizational and financial changes which would equalize the burden of support now distributed so un-

equally among the state's many districts and borne so disproportionately by farm property owners. Two methods were proposed for reaching these goals: greater state aid and the reorganization of districts.

Supporters of state aid argued that, by establishing certain standards with respect to courses, attendance and the like, the state had a duty to furnish schools with more financial assistance. "If the State at large is to enforce such requirements on the public schools," Ray L. Gribben of the Farm Bureau Federation had declared in 1926, "the State must be prepared to make possible the attainment of those standards by every school." Besides, Cameron M. Ross of the State Department of Public Instruction declared, surely the education of her youth "should receive as much attention and interest from the state as the roads, . . . sewers at Spirit Lake, pheasants, the criminals, the insane, corn and hogs, and a multitude of other things which have had the consideration of the state in the past."

Unlike previous state aid, such as that granted to consolidated schools in 1913, where the same amount was distributed to each school regardless of its size or wealth, the proposed aid would take into account the resources of each district. It was designed to guarantee that a certain minimum amount of money would be spent for the education of every public school child. After much prompt-

ing from several special school committees the General Assembly in 1945 finally passed the Supplemental Aid Act. Although the amount appropriated was not nearly enough to carry out its provisions, a precedent had been set for the greater equalization programs that followed. Two important companion measures were passed at the same time. One was the School Transportation Act, which appropriated $2 million to be used to reimburse school districts for transportation costs. The Agricultural Land Tax Credit Act sought to insure farm owners from being taxed excessively for school purposes.

The General Assembly also enacted at its 1945 meeting a school district reorganization law that put into effect the county-wide planning of school redistricting that State Superintendent John Riggs had proposed in 1908. A companion reform, establishing elective county boards of education which in turn appoint the county superintendents, was not passed until 1947. The county boards, working in cooperation with the State Department of Public Instruction, were ordered to prepare plans for the reorganization of school districts consistent with the state's newly voiced policy of encouraging the establishment of districts that "are necessary, economical and efficient and which will insure an equal opportunity to all children of the state."

Meanwhile, during the period between 1945

and 1947 before this reorganization program went fully into effect, a new outbreak of consolidations occurred. Encouraged by the prospect of greatly increased state aid and hoping to reorganize on their own terms before the new law restricted their actions, about a score of consolidated districts were formed while many other communities discussed the possibility.

The revived movement centered in Benton County where the number of consolidated schools jumped from the four created before 1921 to twelve in the space of eighteen months. Like a chain reaction districts sprang up all over the county, including the 120-section Vinton district organized in October, 1946. In most cases rural districts were consolidated with town schools to which they were already sending their children on a tuition basis. The consolidations were promoted partly by town businessmen, who feared that if any of the nearby rural areas were lost to another town's consolidated district the farmers in those sections might trade in that town also.

Fearing a repetition of the mistakes of the earlier era of rapid consolidation the legislature in 1947 imposed a moratorium on all school district changes until June 30, 1953, except those approved by the county boards of education and the State Department of Public Instruction under the new state reorganization law. Since 1953, no new "consolidated" districts have been formed. In-

stead, "community" districts may be organized, but only under the terms of the amended law that gives county and state school officials much greater control over reorganization movements than was the case before.

Thus ended the first phase of the attempt to equalize educational opportunities in Iowa. Whereas the emphasis during the period beginning in 1897 had been upon transporting rural students to central, consolidated schools, the approach following World War II was both different and more extensive. Through state aid it was now hoped that the quality of a child's education would no longer be determined by the accident of birth in a poor or rich district. Several districts might now combine on an administrative level, but instead of transporting all students to one school, there might be several units of instruction, especially on the elementary level, as in the immense 170-section Webster City Community District formed in 1954. Finally, with county school administrations reorganized it was possible to furnish small schools with special services, which they themselves could not afford, and thereby raise the level of education in areas not included in the large districts.

The consolidated school movement had made numerous mistakes. Many of the small districts would have to be absorbed into larger and more effective units, a procedure the patrons of the tiny

Lincoln-Lee district in Buena Vista County had voluntarily submitted to in 1946. But despite its errors, the movement had been the means of demonstrating what could be done in the way of providing better schools for rural children. Without its trail blazing efforts support for the broader activities of recent years would have been much less easily gained.

In addition, such consolidated schools as those at Tipton, Jesup, and Boxholm received national attention. In the early 1920's delegations from China, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and Texas, not to mention neighboring states, visited Iowa in search of information about consolidation. When a group of Alabamans asked the United States Commissioner of Education in 1920 where they could find the best country schools in the nation, he replied, "Go to Iowa and see the consolidated schools."

Whether the education offered by the consolidated school was better than that of the old one-room school was a point some educational theorists might dispute. But none could deny that physically the new school was far better equipped to meet the educational needs of the rural community or that it offered more years of training to its pupils. Of the 808 school districts in Iowa in 1955 operating high schools 345 were consolidated districts, and 120 more were community districts.

Undeniable also was the fact that the consoli-

dated school was doing much to fulfill the promises of its early supporters with respect to its value to the entire community. The entertainment derived from the school's sporting events, the inspiration furnished by the student choral and instrumental concerts, the instruction offered in the lecture series and adult education courses sponsored by many consolidated schools — these things touched the lives of everyone in the district, young and old.

Perhaps the most important result of the consolidated school movement was the new pride in schools that it created in small rural communities. Where once the first things visitors were shown were the latest farm improvements in the area, now increasingly they were taken to see the new school. The mingled pride and awe that the consolidated school aroused was well expressed by an old gentleman attending the dedication of the Sioux Rapids school in 1915. Gazing at the building he murmured, "She's as big as a college."

George S. May

FACTS and FIGURES

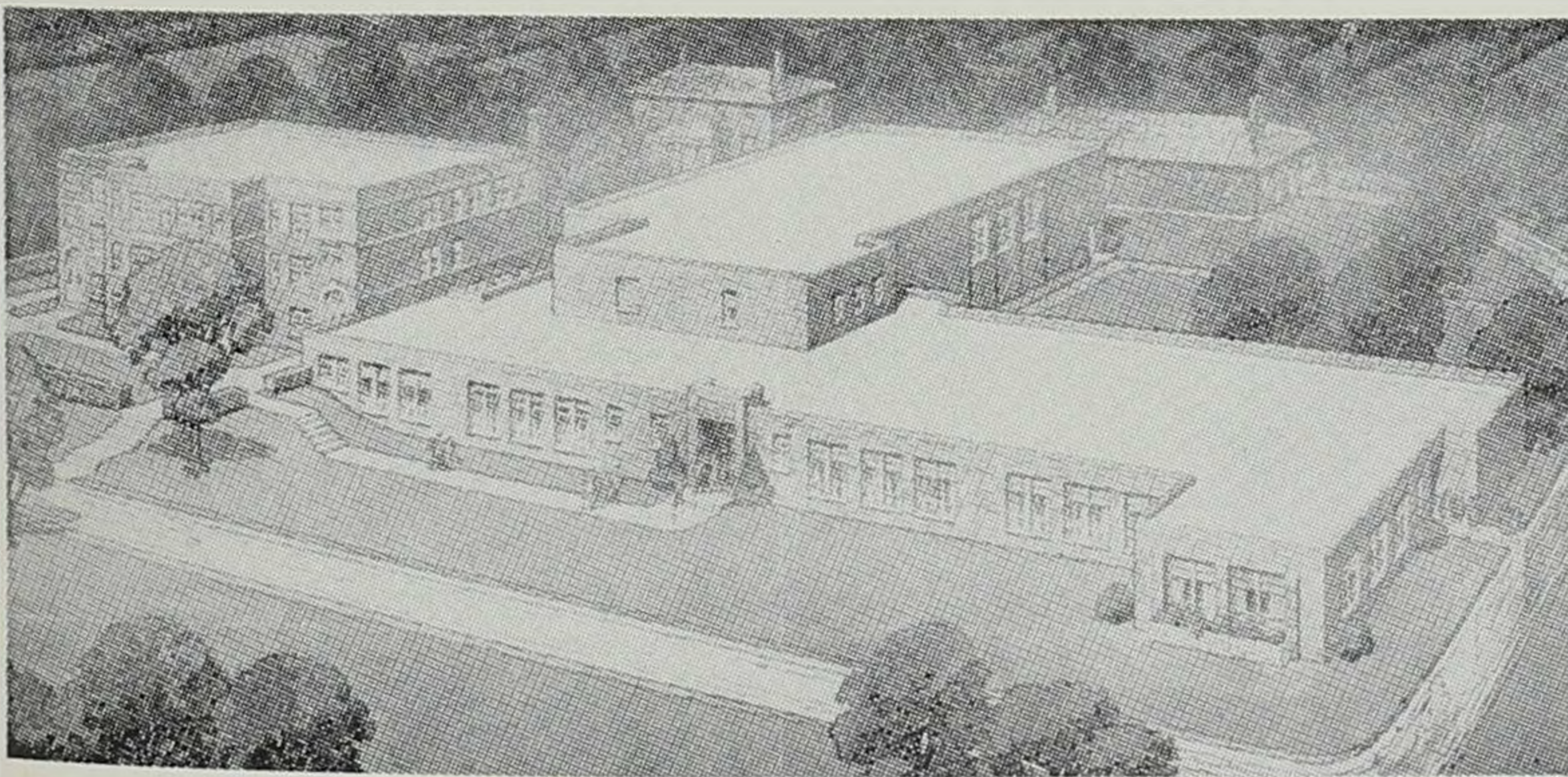
About Proposed Building Program of The

Geneseo Consolidated School

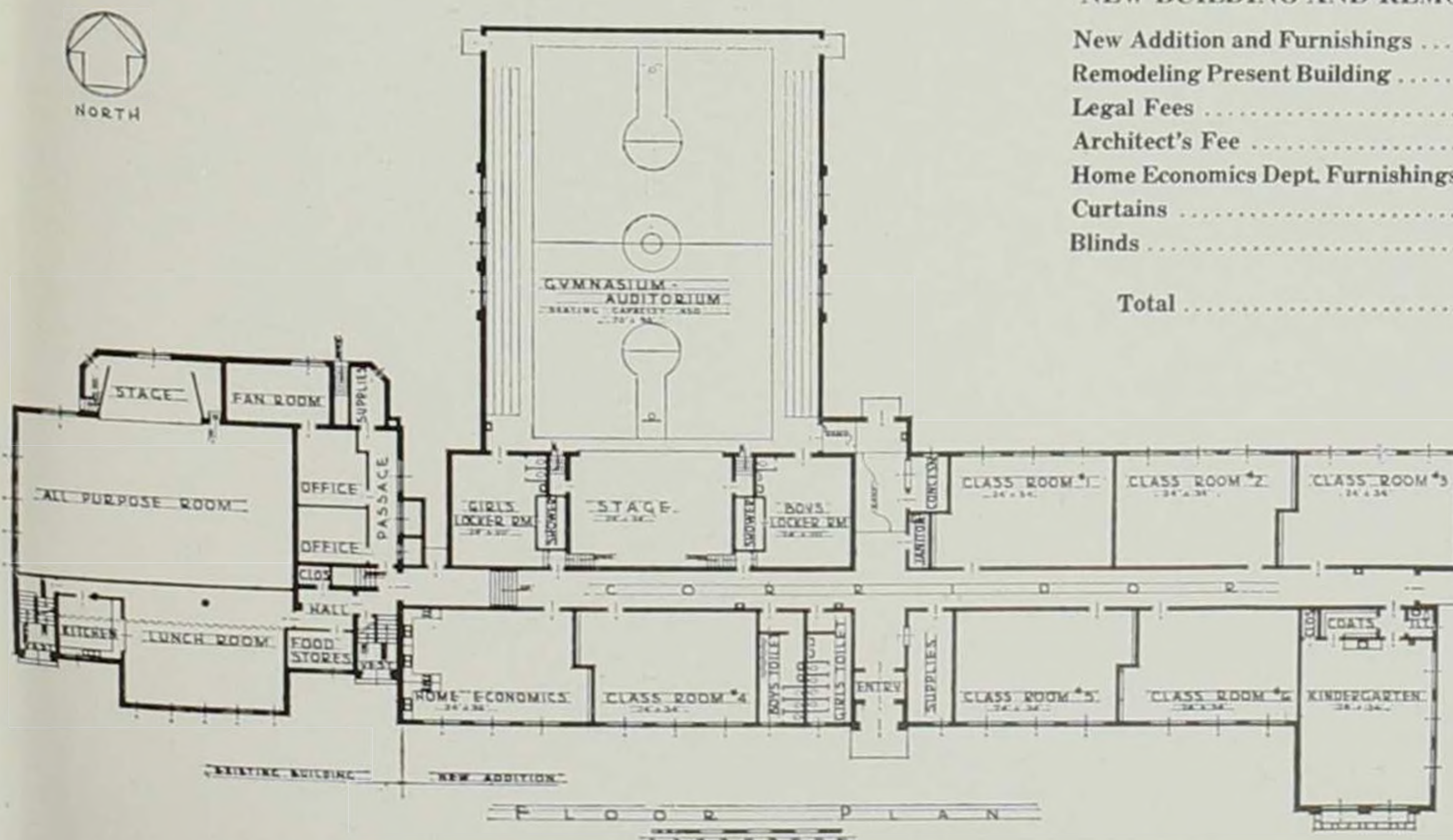
On Friday, Dec. 18, 1953, voters of the Geneseo Consolidated District will be asked to approve a bond issue of $190,000 for remodeling the present building, and erecting and furnishing a new addition, to give the district a modern school plant as shown by the architect's sketch and plan below.

The election will take place at the school building. Polls will be open from 12 o'clock noon to 7 p. m. All eligible voters living in the district may vote.

Sixty percent of the ballots cast must favor the proposition in order for the bond issue to carry.



ARCHITECT'S SKETCH OF THE PROPOSED NEW GENESEO SCHOOL PLANT (ABOVE) SHOWS PRESENT BUILDING AT THE LEFT AND NEW ADDITION AT THE RIGHT. FLOOR PLAN, ALSO SHOWING BOTH EXISTING BUILDING AND NEW ADDITION, APPEARS BELOW, WITH ROOM SIZES NOTED.



ESTIMATED COST OF NEW BUILDING AND REMODELING

Item	Cost
New Addition and Furnishings	$173,000
Remodeling Present Building	3,000
Legal Fees	1,000
Architect's Fee	8,650
Home Economics Dept. Furnishings	2,000
Curtains	2,000
Blinds	1,000
Total	$190,650

Courtesy Supt. A. C. Blome

The Gowrie Consolidated School, April 22, 1921: Some of Its Pupils, Faculty, Busses, and Drivers