

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 $4\frac{1}{2}$ 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

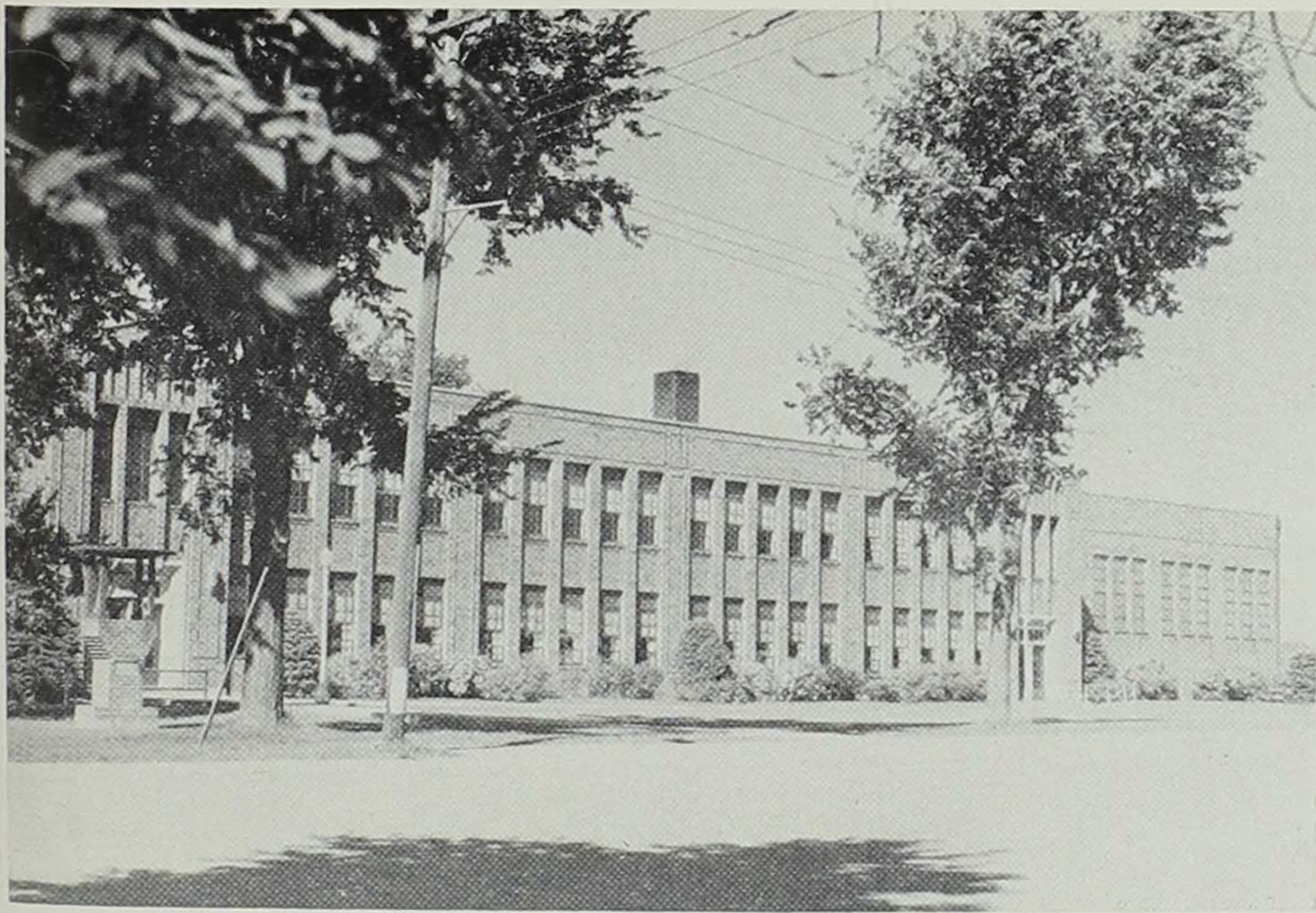
help. Besides, Grundy County Superintendent J. T. Gray wrote in 1901, "I believe that . . . the walk of a mile or more through the storm [to the rural school] may be the means of showing a child that he can do something."

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:

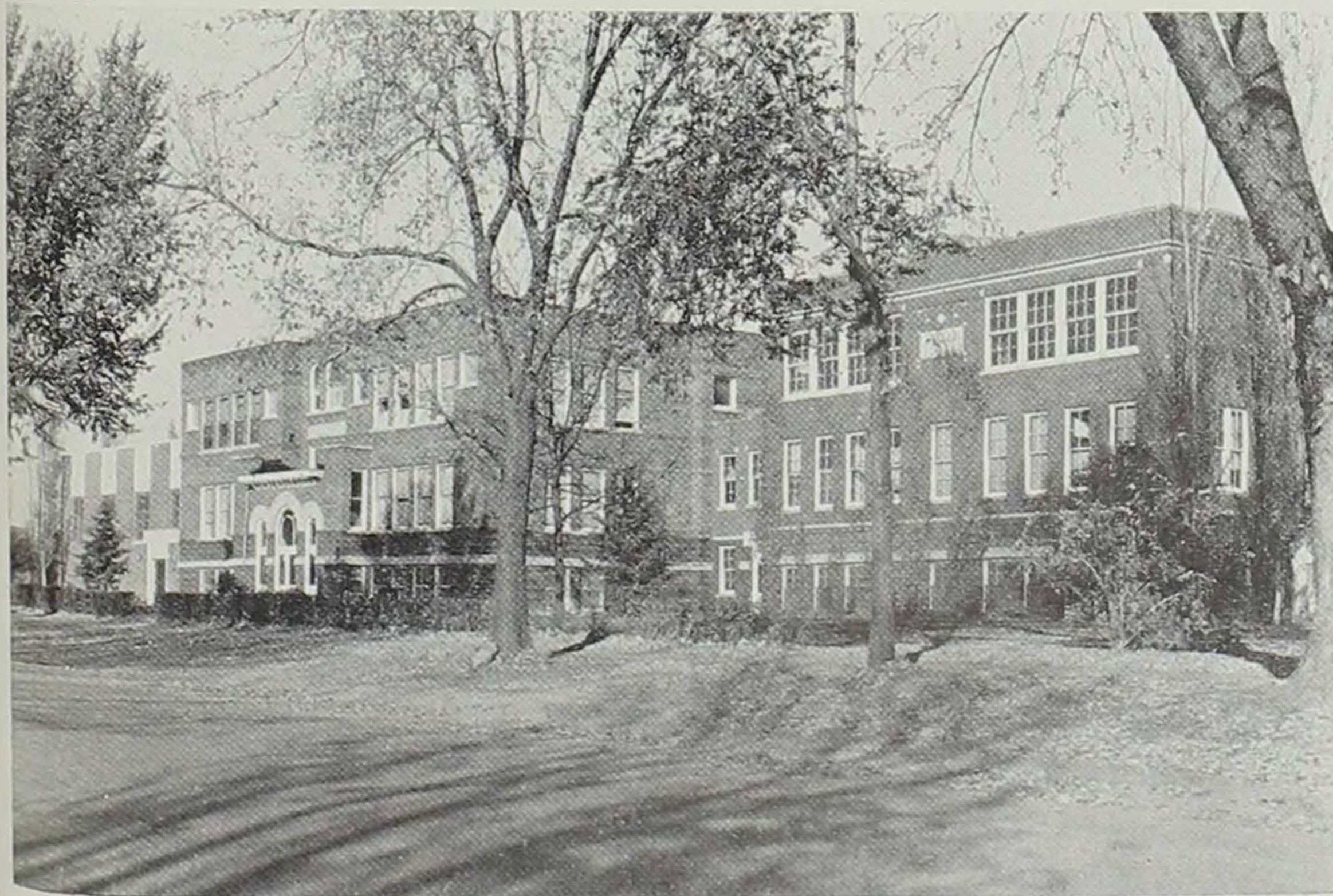
To furnish a strong, safe, properly covered vehicle, with comfortable seats, and a safe, strong, quiet team, with proper harness, all being subject to the approval of the board; to furnish warm, comfortable robes or blankets sufficient for the best protection and comfort for each and all the pupils to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

MODERN SCHOOL BUILDINGS



Courtesy Supt. A. N. Busse

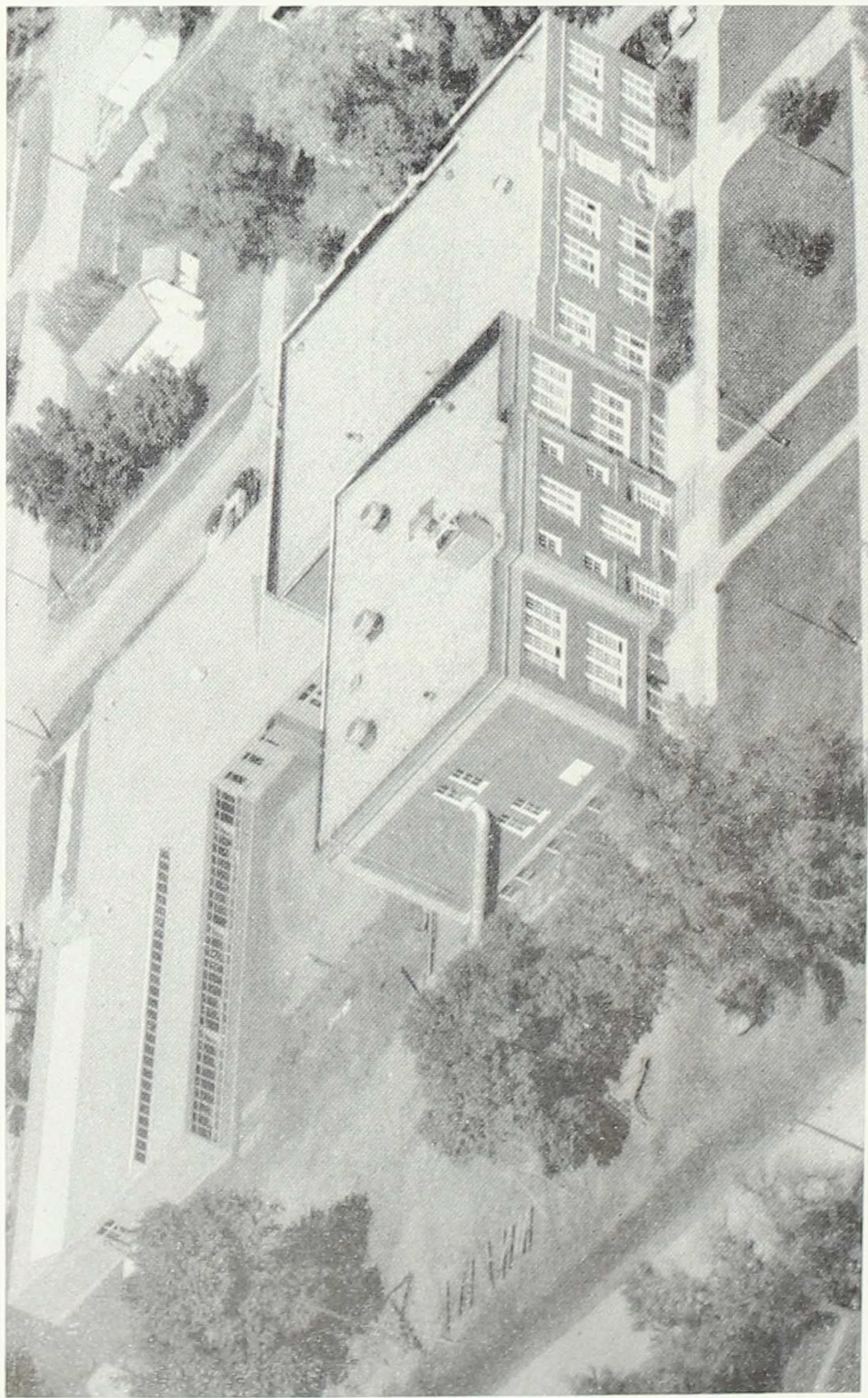
The Monona school would be a credit to any community. In 1955 the Monona-Farmersburg district maintained an elementary school at Farmersburg in addition to the one above which served as the high school for 200 students and had elementary classes for 300 more students.



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

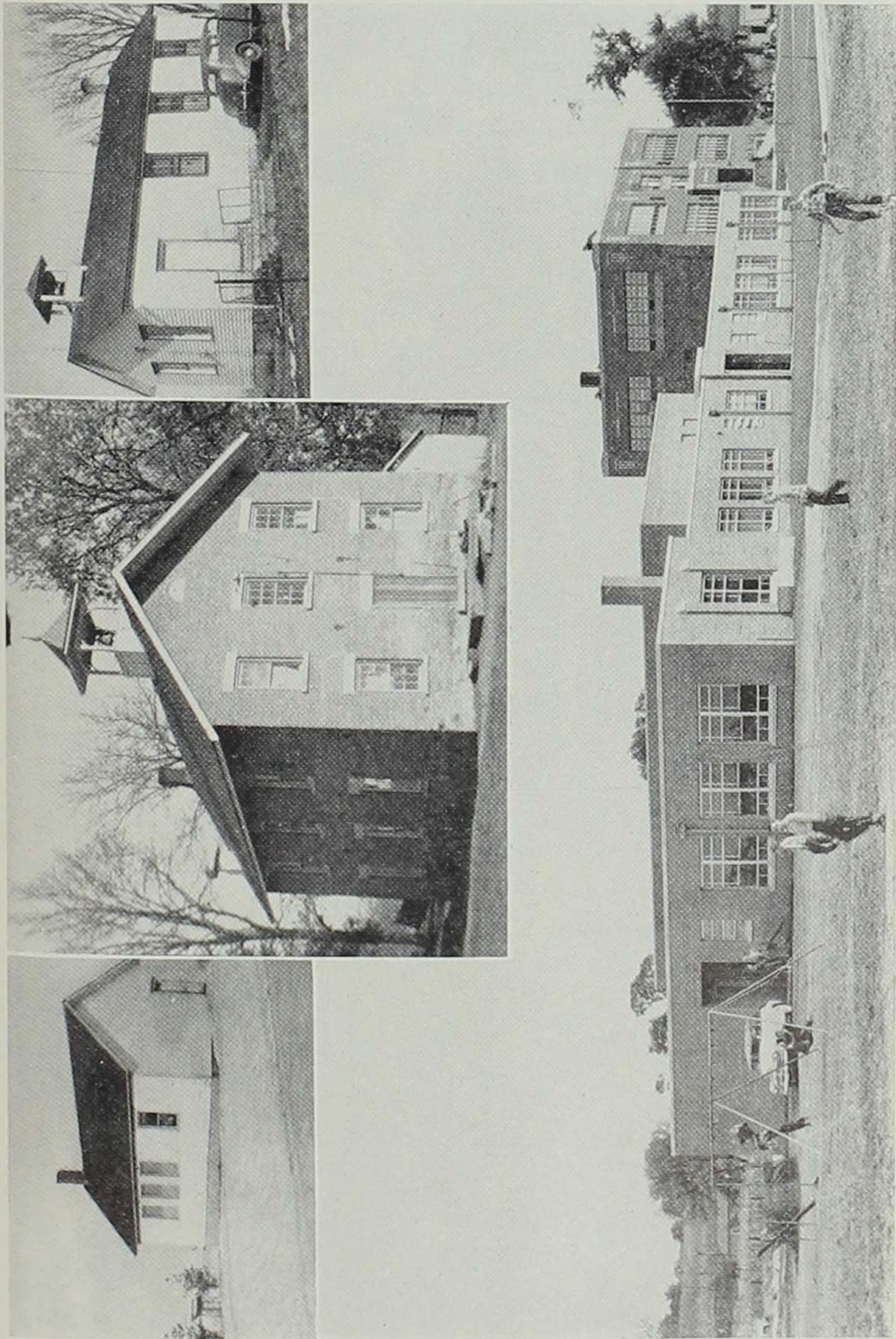


Courtesy Supt. C. L. Iverson

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,

the first building, was constructed. Finally, in 1955 the low L-shaped addition at the back was dedicated. In January, 1956, Supt. C. L. Iverson reported, the school had an enrollment of 410.

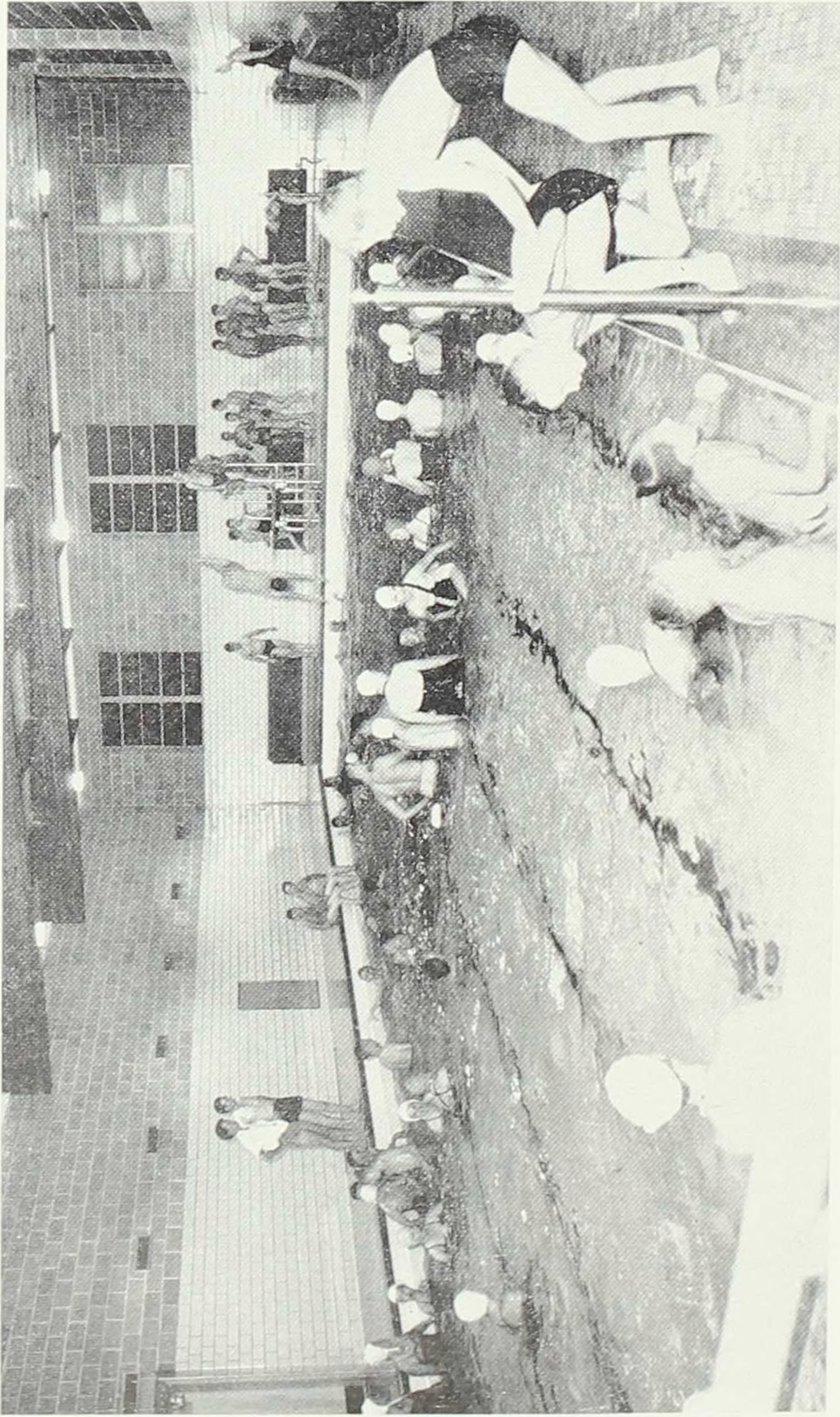
CONSOLIDATING SEVERAL SCHOOLS INTO ONE



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.

SERVING THE COMMUNITY



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.

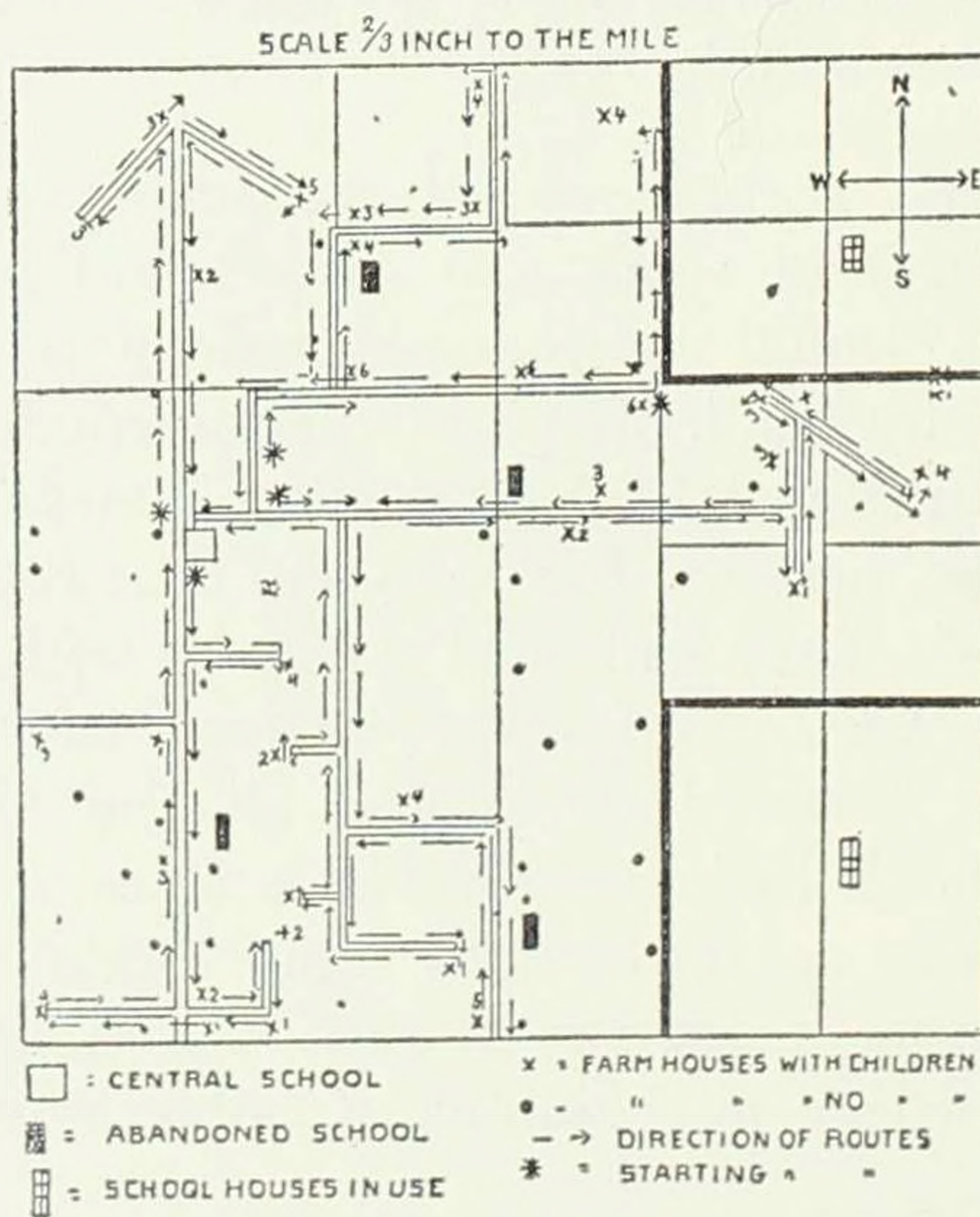
respective homes; to collect all the pupils on the route by driving to each and all the homes where the pupils reside each morning that school is in session in time to convey the pupils to school, so as to arrive at the school building not later than 8:50 a.m. and return pupils to their homes, leaving 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