

REPORT

OF THE

Kansas State Board of Agriculture

FOR THE

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CONTAINING THE ADDRESSES, PAPERS AND DISCUSSIONS AT
THE BOARD'S FORTY-FIFTH ANNUAL MEETING,
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J. C. MOHLER, Secretary,
TOPEKA, KANSAS.

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I have taken notice of what has been said by the Agricultural College experts, and have followed their advice. I have been careful in my seed-corn selection and preparation of the seed bed. I have, therefore, been more successful than the average western farmer in growing corn.

The men who came to western Kansas from Iowa and Illinois are the men who are growing corn there to-day. They know how; they know the seed selection and the proper seed-bed preparation and how to cultivate. They were raised in corn countries, but many people in the western part don't understand the first thing about corn culture. They are the class that talk the German language, and don't understand what is told them. They have to be taught the first principles of raising corn. That is the reason we are held back. We have lots of good corn land, but we do not have the people who understand how to raise corn, and it is necessary for those who know to instruct them.

The Germans are different from the English-speaking people, and they are backward. When they came to western Kansas and settled thirty years ago they were imposed upon by the people who were there, by the cowboys and others who did not have the best of reputations. That imposition created a suspicion toward the American people, and the young men have also a certain amount of that suspicion. They do not know how to raise corn. It will take years for them to learn, and when they do the west will come to the front as an important corn-producing section.

POSSIBILITIES OF THE RURAL SCHOOL.

By MRS. JESSIE WRIGHT WHITCOMB, Topeka.

This is the story of how one Kansas farmer, a Mrs. Burns, helped better the life of her community through the district school.

Mrs. Burns would have said that she knew schools and their needs. She had served three times on the school board. She always knew the teacher and the teacher's views. She believed in having the schoolhouse orderly and in good repair, in holding school full time, and in paying the teacher the average salary. She had been instrumental in bringing their school nearly, if not quite, up to standard.

But as a matter of fact, Mrs. Burns knew nothing whatever of either the methods or the equipment of a modern, progressive school. One day in the city she passed one of the new grade schools. She might not have noticed it had it not been recess time. She stopped to watch the children. She saw the see-saws, swings, chutes, sand boxes, and two basket-ball courts—one for the boys and one for the girls—in full operation. She could not help thinking that perhaps she was looking at one of the reasons why country people gravitate toward the city. She could not help but contrast the probable advantages offered the children in such a school with those she knew were offered in their own little one-room school at home.

Mrs. Burns went into the school, talked with the principal and teachers, and was secretly amazed at the wide halls, fine stairways, tiled lavatories, airy manual-training rooms, and the evidences of work done.

She asked about the playground equipment, and was told it had all been provided by a mothers' organization in connection with the school.

The first thing Mrs. Burns did on her return home was to telephone to the larger boys of the school to meet with her at her home the next night. These boys were of a type to be found in every grade school—too big and too old for the school; backward, uninterested, and apparently without ambition; not bad boys exactly, but heading that way. Mrs. Burns turned to them for lack of anything better.

They all gathered around her pleasant living-room table—a table well set forth with doughnuts and lemonade—and she told them of the playground equipment she had seen. She made little drawings of the apparatus, and they all talked. Three of the boys knew more than she did about it. They lighted the lantern and went out to her shop to look at some material, and measured it. Back in the living room they figured and planned. The result was that the boys agreed to make, from Mrs. Burns' material, two swings, two teeters, one chute and one basket-ball court. Mrs. Burns agreed that if these things were done in a reasonable time and in a workmanlike manner she would see that somebody gave them a basket ball.

The boys went at this with the greatest interest and enthusiasm—an enthusiasm communicated to the other pupils and carried by them through the whole district; in fact, everybody knew about it.

Mrs. Burns could think of no good way to secure the basket ball, and called up a clever neighbor for suggestions.

"For my part," said the neighbor, "I am simply sick to see somebody! Let's call the society together for a basket supper at the schoolhouse. When we all see the things the boys have made I do not believe there will be any trouble about getting the small sum needed for the basket ball."

This "society" she referred to could scarcely be called an organization. For years they had had a literary society that held its meetings at the schoolhouse. Some years the meetings were fairly regular; again the society seemed almost extinct. This was one of the extinct periods.

The clever neighbor's plan was a good one. The meeting was held, the apparatus was admired, and the basket ball was secured.

But Mrs. Burns had another bee in her bonnet. The day before she had received a letter from her daughter Elizabeth, in her last year at the State Agricultural College at Manhattan. This letter gave a detailed account of a trip Elizabeth had made, as assistant of one of the domestic-science teachers, for the giving of a demonstration before a certain district improvement club. She told how the people of any district, organizing for the improvement of their district, would be helped in every way by the college, and would be sent lecturers and demonstrators along any line they chose.

The letter was very lively as well as clear, and long before it was finished people were nudging each other and whispering their desire to organize in that way. Three people were up at once to propose it, and before the evening was over they were correctly organized, and their secretary had even been instructed to ask for a lecturer on good roads.

All this was in the early spring. Elizabeth was kept in touch with what was going on, and when she came home after her graduation at the end of the school year, her mother found her full of enthusiasm over what had been done, and full of new ideas. As Elizabeth had been fitting herself to be a domestic-science teacher, her mother was expecting to have to part with

her soon again. But Elizabeth said she had decided to stay home; she thought she would have a much better chance to experiment there than anywhere else, as their present teacher was a devoted friend of hers and quite willing to collaborate.

When Elizabeth's plans were divulged her mother was rather aghast. "You are simply fixing for trouble, Elizabeth," she said. "But the first little improvement you told me about seems to me possible if we go at it right. We will call that 'the flying wedge,' and you may have a chance to see how persuasive you can be at our next district club meeting, which comes this very week."

Elizabeth arranged a few little things before the meeting to help things move, and that was why at the close of the club program one member rose and asked Elizabeth to tell them something of her life at Manhattan.

Elizabeth was a good talker—as well as being good at nearly everything else she tried—and she had the keen interest of her audience by the time she began to tell them of a sort of picture machine they used at the college for one thing and another. This machine, she said, was a combination of a stereopticon and a reflector. You could use slides or the right-sized pictures—photographs or post cards. The pictures thrown on the aluminum screen were professional in quality—large, clear and fine. Then she went on to say how she herself had never been outside of Kansas, but that through this picture machine she felt as though she had seen Washington and other large cities, as well as well-known scenes which she described with vigor and picturesqueness. "And what is more," she said, "if we had one here we would see all the processes of any industry that interested us—canneries, fisheries, fruit packing, all sorts of irrigation projects"; and so she went on, naming unerringly things that different people in the room would have given a good deal to see. When she stopped they were quite in the mood for the young fellow who promptly rose, saying he had a proposition to put before them. He and two others, he said, would go among them with pencil and paper, and would ask each one to put down something they would like to contribute *in produce*, as so much corn, oats, wheat, potatoes, eggs, poultry—anything they liked. If what they subscribed did not figure up to enough to buy the machine, no more would be said about it and their produce would not be asked for. If it did, Mrs. Burns would make herself responsible for collecting everything subscribed and turning it into cash. That, of course, put the burden on Mrs. Burns. But that is always the way. In any new movement some one must always be ready, not only to lead, but to do the bulk of the work.

Elizabeth wished the money part of the transaction to be clear to all; so on the lists, opposite each one's contribution, she put the cash actually secured for it, or the market price allowed by Mrs. Burns for such of the produce as could not be handled until later. They had enough money to buy the machine itself, a small selection of slides, and all the pictures Elizabeth needed to start with. The pictures were mostly post cards and were cheap. The machine, complete, cost forty-five dollars.

All this was not done in a corner. Every move was a matter of interest to the whole community. Children were encouraged to ride up on their ponies to the Burns place and get well loaded with cookies and information.

The first meeting held after the arrival of the machine was the largest

ever held at the schoolhouse. Every one who knows what it is to attend a country schoolhouse meeting, with grown people squeezed into the children's desk seats, with extra babies perched on top of the desks themselves, and more wedged between the aisles, knows how uncomfortable it can be. But these people had all come out for a good time and meant to have it if possible. They were not complaining.

Elizabeth first showed neighborhood scenes, familiar to all, that they might realize how like the places themselves the pictures were; then she showed views that had been particularly asked for—some comic pictures; two sets of slides for the children (*Puss in Boots* and *Cinderella*)—and then she was ready for what she had in mind.

"You all look so uncomfortable, and are so uncomfortable, I must show you what you provide for other people at Manhattan and K. U. You would enjoy yourselves in rooms half as good as these."

She threw on the screen pictures of charming rest and conference rooms, as well as of the big auditoriums at the colleges. Next she showed various high-school auditoriums, and a few "board rooms."

"Look at this beautiful meeting room in one of our consolidated schools," she said. "We, on account of our isolation, can not think of a consolidated school; but look what some rural schools are supplying for themselves and their children." And she threw on the screen a succession of pictures that raised a deal of outspoken comment—pictures of smiling girls in caps and aprons engaged with their cooking lesson in their domestic-science room, and of a pleasant school auditorium with reasonable seating capacity and a usable stage.

"This school," added Elizabeth, "is in a district not nearly so rich as ours; for we are a wealthy district. I guess those people must think their children are worth more."

Naturally enough, the parents did not like that view of it.

"Suppose," said Elizabeth, throwing on the screen a fine picture of a social room connected with a country school, used as a social center, in Illinois; "suppose we had sliding doors right over there," pointing to the side, "opening into a wing that this school needs and could well enough afford. And suppose that in this wing we had a social room like this one on the screen, with its big fireplace, good windows, comfortable furniture—wouldn't it be worth while? Wouldn't it be fine right now if all these little people were comfortably taken care of in there, while we older ones enjoyed our program in here, especially if we had this room arranged more like the one I showed? Look a good while at this picture, so that when you go home you can still see it, and think what pleasure we could all take getting together in it! And in the wing, also, at the far end, should be a small domestic-science room, fitted as a complete model kitchen, to be used in school work for our girls, for extension-work in the community, and for demonstrations from the college."

The seed was sown. The discomfort of both the men and the women made the picture of that beautiful social room—that some country people thought it worth while to build, that they might take a little pleasure in life as they went along—a thing they could not forget.

To cut a somewhat long story short, the feeling was so strong through the whole community that just such a wing as Elizabeth described must be

theirs, that the wing was actually up—the pride of the district—by the time school opened in the fall.

The first meeting held by the District Improvement Club in the new wing, called variously the social wing or the domestic-science wing, was indeed a festal occasion for the district. The usual basket supper was metamorphosed, by the aid of the model kitchen, into a regular banquet. Everybody was laughing, joking, jubilant.

"Oh, I wish I could go to school again!" exclaimed one young woman, enviously, as she looked at the paraphernalia of the model kitchen. "I need it!"

"And you can have it!" laughed Elizabeth. "Get up a class, and I will give you a good short course for nothing, with the expectation that if it proves to be a distinct benefit you will all try to have our district a two-teacher school with a first-class domestic-science course."

The success of that short course stirred others, who looked longingly at the sewing-class work done in the school under Elizabeth's supervision, to arrange an extension class in cutting, fitting and children's sewing. The meetings in the pleasant social room became an event.

In all this Elizabeth freely gave her time, not only coaching the teacher, who knew nothing of teaching these new branches, but conducting the classes herself. Although she did not create a need, she had so called the attention of the community to an existing one that the demand for her services became imperative; and long before either Mrs. Burns or Elizabeth had looked for any such result, Elizabeth found herself established as the district's first manual-training teacher.

That the community might know exactly what they were doing for their children, Elizabeth planned a big exhibition for early spring. Each child was helped to do its best, and every home fairly seethed with the children's ecstatic hints of the great thing that was to take place at the school.

On the long-looked-for night there was first a school entertainment. The little stage and the improved seating arrangements in the schoolroom helped make this entertainment the success the children's efforts deserved. Then they all adjourned to the social room to see the exhibits. Although all the parents had for weeks heard of the coming wonders, no parents were really prepared for the display of attractive and neatly made garments in the sewing exhibit. All were equally surprised at the showing of shapely loaves of bread, at the light biscuits, gingerbread, nut and raisin bread, and other things that their lessons had included. No one there had ever seen such an exhibition, common though they are in every progressive city grade school; and the thought that their children were having such a chance and were so brilliantly availing themselves of it brought a look of proud satisfaction to many a father's and mother's face.

They were prepared, in a fashion, for those exhibits. One exhibit, however, was a complete surprise. Mrs. Burns and Elizabeth had further plans, and to help them along, Elizabeth all winter had been teaching joinery to a selected group of boys. That a son of each member of the school board was in this group merely shows that Elizabeth knew how to do things.

She had spent the greatest pains on these boys and their work. Each one had been allowed to choose an article of furniture he wished to make, and these completed articles formed this wholly unlooked-for exhibit.

One boy had made a little sewing table for his mother. One boy had made a small bookcase. He was a boy no one would have suspected of making a bookcase or even of reading a book. But he had read one book—one Elizabeth had given him—about intensive farming. It had appealed to him. He saw sense in it. He became so enthusiastic about it that nothing would do but make a bookcase to hold it. Two boys, who turned out to be very clever with tools, had made a big, handsome Morris chair for the social room. Other boys, not so clever, had made less pretentious things. These articles, all together, made a dazzling exhibit in the eyes of the parents. It seemed almost incredible. And they were consequently very susceptible to the little surprise program Elizabeth had arranged to follow the short program of the Improvement Club that came after the exhibition.

Elizabeth called on each boy, in turn, to tell how he had worked at his joinery, why he liked it, and what he thought the school board ought to do about it. The pride the people had felt in the boy's work was now increased by their pride in the straightforward way in which these boys said their say. The sum of it all amounted to this: The school board was scarcely treating them fairly. The girls had their perfect little model kitchen and their classes in cooking and sewing. Nearly always some class of girls was sitting around the cheerfully blazing fire in the big fireplace in the social room, laughing and chatting as they had their sewing lessons, while the boys never had a chance in that room at all, except to mend the fire, or, if they had time to sit in there for a few minutes, to read some book from their traveling library. They thought the school ought to build on another wing, on the other side of the school, like the first. The small room corresponding to the model kitchen should be fitted up as a model farm laboratory, to be used in class work, for demonstrations for the whole community, for extension classes for the young men out of school, and for demonstrations from the college.

"I want to test seeds," said the bookcase boy earnestly—a boy who had run away from home twice—"and fertilizers and soils. I know I could make money farming if I could only just find out a few things!"

That wing was as good as built in the mind of one man right then. The large room, they said, should be fitted up for bench work, and should also be used for all boys' activities through the district—for all the boys and younger men who would care to join the band Elizabeth had organized, or the Debating Club, or the Civics Club she was going to organize.

"We need it," said one boy who had formerly made himself generally disagreeable, hooting at farm and country life, and sowing the seeds of discontent in younger boys and girls. "Mrs. Burns and her daughter are making this school so plaguey interesting I don't even want to go to the village nights for fear I may accidentally miss something. And if we could have this boys' wing—that is what we call it—I for one would stick to business and boost the country. Why, it would be perfectly bully!"

A few pictures of boys at work in manual-training rooms and engaged in a laboratory, testing seeds for farmers, deepened the impression.

The people had moved forward during that year. Their point of view was already different. The new thing was not necessarily the thing to be afraid of. They were open to conviction. In addition they had learned one big thing. They had learned that a small sum of money, which spent in their own home or on their own land would bring them almost nothing of

increased comfort and joy in living, would nevertheless, if combined with similar small sums from all others in the district, bring them, in their school, comfort and benefit and real, unaccustomed pleasures that they could not hope to have in any other way. They had always known that a two-thirds vote of the district would put their school tax at whatever their needs required. But they had not known what advantages for their children, what change of attitude in the minds of the young toward their country life, what books and art and music and lectures and comfortable, enjoyable social life was at their command through so simple a means—through merely having together, with their school as a center, what they could not possibly have singly.

It was because this new sense of things permeated the district that the people, when this new chance was put before them, wanted it. They were able to see the benefit and to put out their hands to grasp it. Parents, who had begun to realize with bitterness that the homes and lands they had so painfully accumulated would after all have to pass into the hands of strangers, were not blind to the change of heart in their boys and girls since the school had begun to take its rightful place in the life of the community. So, of course, since the district wanted this boys' wing, it was no long step to possession. By the opening of the next school year it was completely built, and proved itself a factor in the life of the community that more than justified the most that had ever been hoped for from it.

This did not close the list of Elizabeth's plans. With her mother she worked out—or rather the district did after the proper buttons had been pressed—other things that to Elizabeth's mind were of more importance than all the rest.

But we will close the story here. Through a little knowledge and gumption and willingness to work, and qualities of leadership of two women, the whole community was bettered. Their school had become a real social center. They had a picture machine, a good stage and fairly comfortable seating arrangements in their schoolroom; a good phonograph, a domestic-science wing, with a model kitchen; a social room that was a joy to all who entered it; a model laboratory in their boys' wing; a room for bench work and all the boy activities of the district; their District Improvement Club; boys' band; girls' chorus; civic, debating and reading clubs; a traveling library of fifty books every six months or oftener, and an occasional exhibit, through the Traveling Art Gallery, of the best in art that the world has known.

In fact, the community still had all the advantages of country life—which, unaided, do not seem always able to compete with the attractions of the city—and in addition all the advantages for its children offered by any city school, and a social—yes, an intellectual—life hard to beat.