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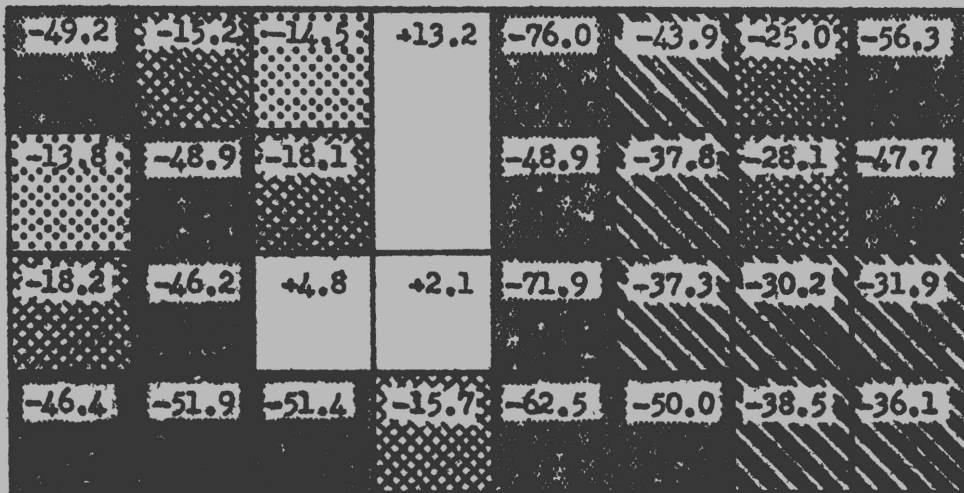
Recommended Citation

Kumlien, W. F.; Scandrette, C.; and Hatch, Raymond, "The Problem of Declining Enrollment in the Elementary Schools of Edmunds County" (1941). *Agricultural Experiment Station Rural Sociology Pamphlets*. 40.
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THE PROBLEM OF DECLINING ENROLLMENT
 in
 the Elementary Schools
 of
 Edmunds County

W. F. Kumlien
 C. Seandrette
 Raymond Hatch



Legend: Increase or no change in enrollments
 Lost 15.0 - 29.9%
 Lost 30.0 - 44.9%
 Lost 0.1 - 14.9%
 Lost 45.0% or over

The percentage decline in elementary enrollments, 1930-1940, is shown above by townships of Edmunds county. Losses were experienced in 28 of the 32 townships and ranged as high as 76 percent in Adrian township. In general, the enrollment decline was most pronounced in those portions of the county from which outward migration has been heaviest.

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EXPLANATORY NOTE

During recent years, enrollments in most South Dakota elementary schools have declined at a very rapid rate. The prevailing type of rural school district organization in most counties has proved rather ineffective in coping with dwindling enrollments and with the consequent high costs per pupil.

It is the purpose of this pamphlet to assist educators, school board members and other Edmunds county leaders by analyzing the nature of the problem and by presenting suggestions for its solution as they have grown out of the experiences of other South Dakota communities.

* * * * *

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study was made possible through the cooperation of the State and Federal Work Projects Administration and the South Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station. The project is officially designated as W.P.A. Project No. 665-74-3-143. The authors gratefully acknowledge the cooperation of Mr. Fred R. Dehnert, the Edmunds County Superintendent of Schools, from whose office most of the data used in this study was secured; and of high school superintendents who supplied lists of their tuition students.

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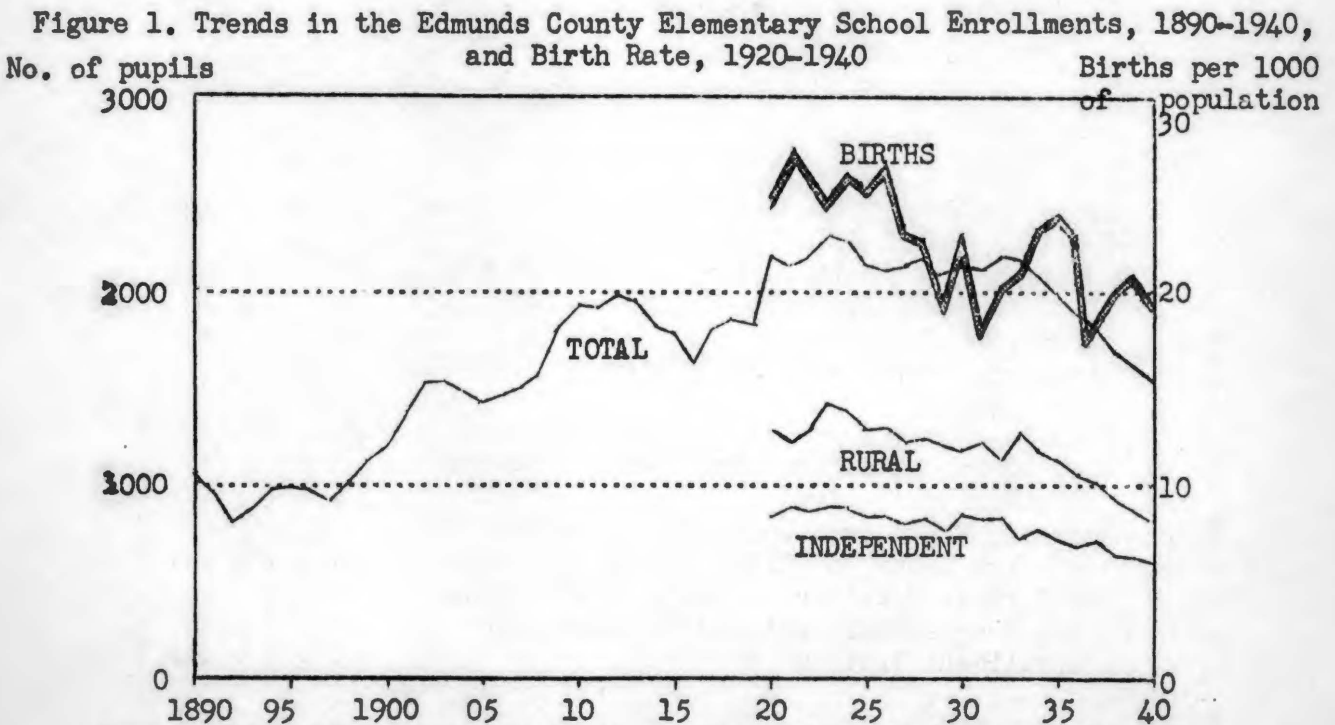
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The Problem of Declining Enrollment in the Elementary Schools of Edmunds County

For a number of years population experts have called attention to the widespread reduction in the birth rate and have predicted as one of its most serious outgrowths an appreciable decline in elementary school enrollments.

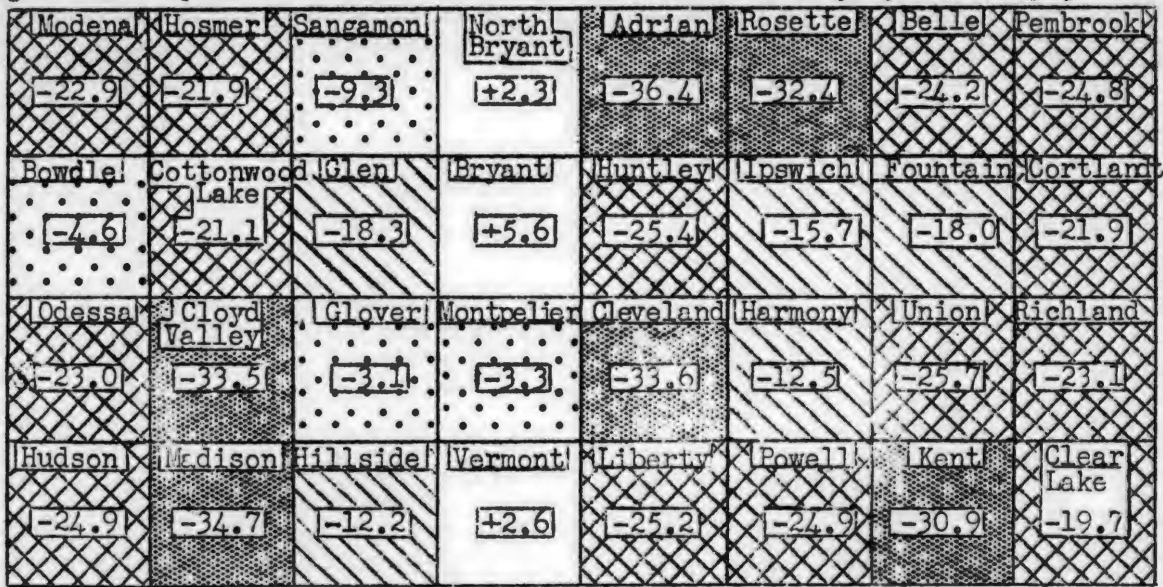
The recent trend in elementary enrollments in Edmunds county, as depicted in Figure 1, would seem to bear out this prediction. The peak enrollment of 2,294 pupils was reached in 1923, with the downward tendency particularly pronounced in the years following 1932. By 1940 only 1,527 pupils were enrolled in elementary schools of the county—a drop of 33.4 percent since 1923. It will be noted that both rural and independent enrollments have suffered decreases; although the losses have been somewhat heavier for rural schools.

The birth rate trend for Edmunds county during the period 1920 to 1940 is also shown in Figure 1. Although fluctuations have occurred from year to year it is apparent that the birth rate is distinctly dropping. In each of the years 1920 to 1926 the number of births per thousand of the population was 25 or more; but this figure has slumped below 20 during a number of recent years. As an inevitable result, each year has found fewer children arriving at school age.



Source: Biennial Reports of State Superintendent of Public Instruction and Reports of the State Board of Health.

Figure 2. Population Gains or Losses in Edmunds County by Townships, 1930-1940.



Legend: Gained in population Lost 0.0 - 9.9% Lost 10.0 - 19.9%
 Lost 20.0 - 29.9% Lost 30.0 - 39.9%

Source: Preliminary Releases of the U. S. Census 1940.

Another factor in the Edmunds county elementary enrollment decline is suggested by Figure 2, showing the percentage changes in population by townships, 1930-1940. During the ten-year period the population dropped off 10.3 percent,* largely as a result of migration from rural-farm areas. In spite of the decrease for the county as a whole, three of the five incorporated villages—Hosmer, Ipswich and Roscoe—showed population gains during the decade, with the aggregate village population jumping from 2,817 in 1930 to 3,035 in 1940. This fact is reflected in the somewhat slower rate of enrollment decline which was noted for independent schools (see Figure 1.).

As may be seen in Figure 2, 29 of the 32 townships of Edmunds county suffered population losses between 1930 and 1940. In six townships these losses exceeded 30 percent. It is interesting to note the direct relationship which apparently exists between the extent of population decrease and enrollment decline. In the five townships in which population losses were most pronounced, enrollments dropped off 55 percent, as compared with an increase of one percent in the five townships which gained in numbers, or whose losses were at a minimum.

It appears that although the dwindling nature of the birth rate is probably the underlying factor, population losses through migration have also played an important role in the elementary enrollment decline in Edmunds county.

* From 8,712 persons in 1930, the Edmunds county population had dropped to 7,814 by 1940.

Figure 3. Elementary School Enrollments in Edmunds County 1920, 1930, and 1940

(8)	Hosmer Ind. 195	(6)	(12)	(4)	(3½)	(3)	(2)	(1)
49		88		21	15	45	55	42
65		55		25	17	24	48	32
33		47	63	6	8	15	36	14
(9½)	(10)	Roscoe Ind. 190	53	(13)	ipswich Ind. 190	(15)	(16-1)*	79
269	46		60	50		61	(16-3)	(16-2)
45	47	204		47	180	57	71	11
Bowdle 148 Ind.	24	167		24	112	41	47	11
							18	7
(24)*	(23)	(22)	(21)	(20)	(19)	(18)	(17)	
33	81	69	38	27	32	56	50	
44	52	42	47	32	51	43	47	
36	28	44	48	9	32	30	32	
(25)	(26)	(27)	Loyalton Ind. 67	(29)	(30)	(31)	(32)	
57	42	48		23	48	20	34	
28	52	74	51	32	40	39	36	
15	25	36	43	12	20	24	23	

Legend: Top figure 1920 enrollment: Middle figure 1930 enrollment:
Bottom figure 1940 enrollment.

* Enrollments for districts 16-1 and 16-2 are included in the enrollment for district 16-3 in 1920.

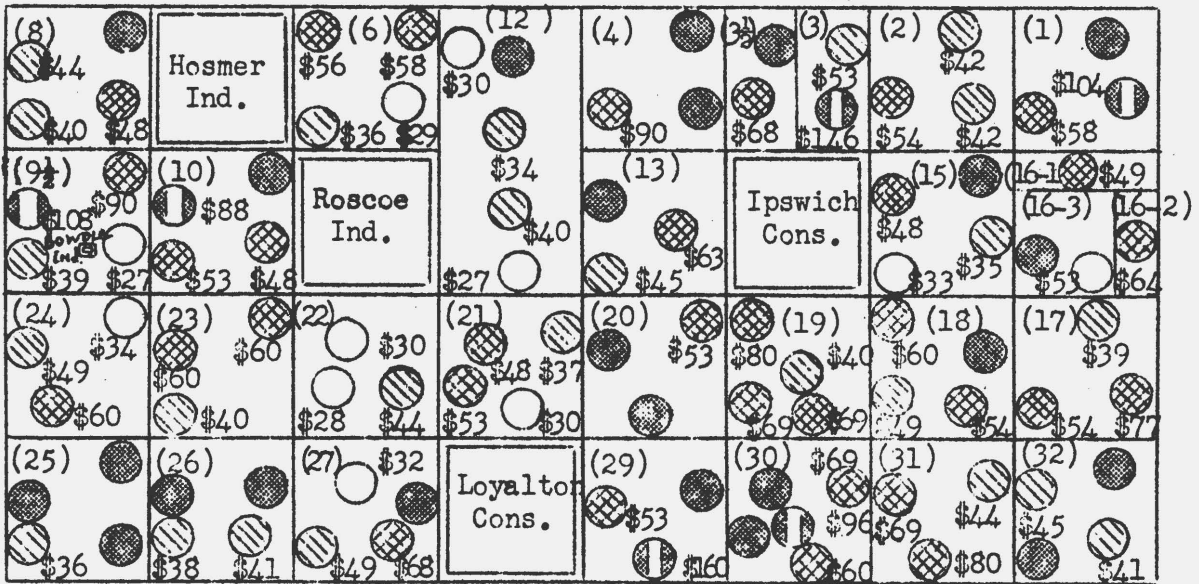
Source: Records of County Superintendent of Schools

In 1940, 30 common school districts, 3 independent districts and 2 consolidated districts were operating in Edmunds county. The school districts with only a few exceptions are organized along township lines in keeping with the pattern which prevails in most of the central and western counties of South Dakota.

Figure 3 shows the elementary enrollments in each of the Edmunds county school districts for 1920, 1930 and 1940. It will be noted that although the 1930 enrollments exceeded those for 1920 in a number of districts, a general decrease in enrollments had occurred by 1940 in rural as well as village-centered districts. By the latter year 24 rural schools had been closed as a result of enrollment deficiencies. Six additional schools enrolled only 1 to 5 pupils, while 39, or over one-half of all rural schools in operation, had enrollments of ten or fewer pupils. Twenty-five schools enrolled 11 to 15 pupils, while in 11 others enrollments exceeded 15 pupils.

Barring unforeseen developments, the enrollment trend will probably continue downward, thus necessitating some early readjustments in the rural school structure.

Figure 4. Elementary Enrollment and Instructional Cost Per Pupil in Common Schools of Edmunds County, 1940



Legend: ● Closed school ⊗ 6 - 10 pupils
 ○ 5 or fewer pupils ⊘ 11 - 15 pupils ○ 16 or more pupils

The figure below each school site is the cost per pupil.

Source: Records of Edmunds County Superintendent of Schools.

As shown in Figure 4, considerable variation is found among schools of Edmunds county in respect to the instructional costs per pupil. In general, it is those schools with the smallest enrollments which show the greatest per pupil costs. In 1940 instructional costs per pupil ranged from \$27 in the Southeast school, district 9½, and in the Schurr school, district 12, enrolling 20 and 18 pupils, respectively, to \$160 in the Pride school, district 29, where the enrollment totalled only 3 pupils.

Table I (below) indicates that the operation of schools for five or fewer pupils, and to a lesser extent for ten pupils or fewer, is excessively expensive on a cost per pupil basis. The per pupil costs in these two groups of schools were \$112.69 and \$60.24, respectively, as compared with \$31.98 for the schools having the largest enrollments (16 or more pupils). The average for all schools was \$48.01.

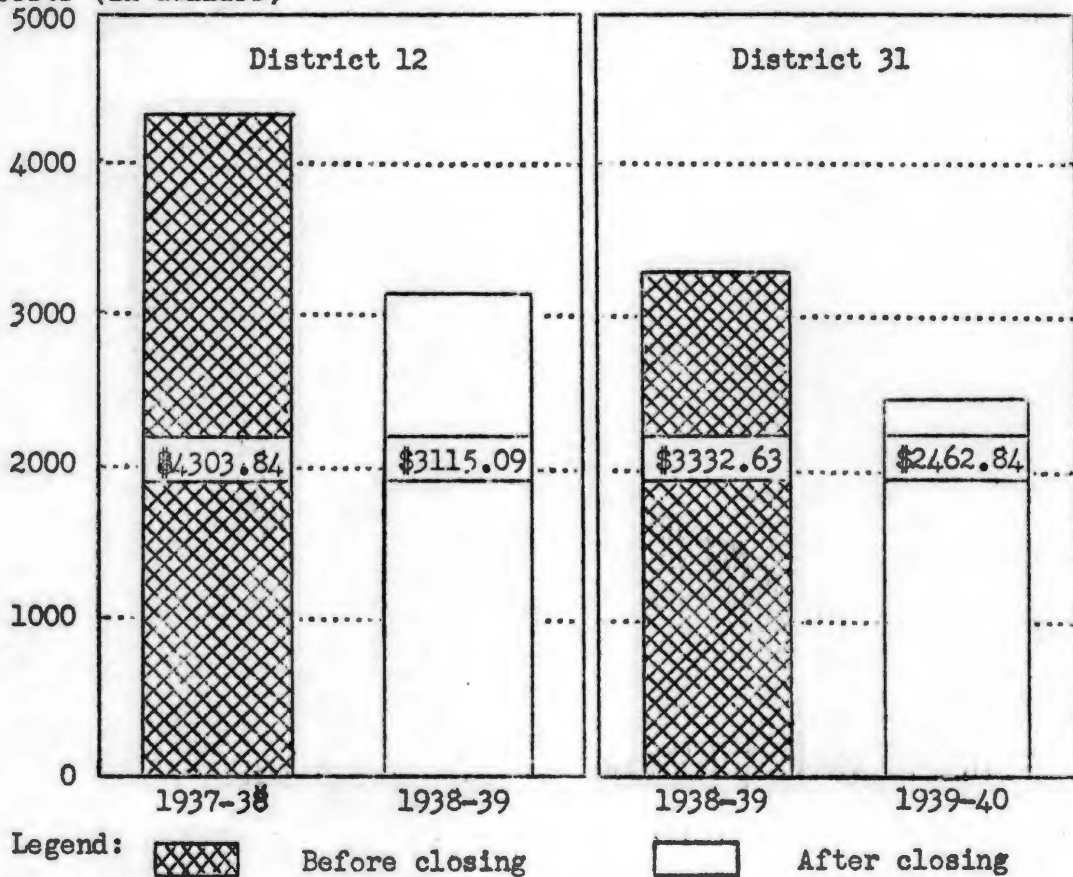
Table I. Cost of Operating Schools of Various Sizes in Edmunds County, 1940.*

Size of School	Number of Schools	Number of Pupils	Total Cost	Average Cost Per Pupil
Total	99	801	\$38,461.00	\$ 48.01
Closed	24	---	---	---
1 - 5 pupils	6	27	3,042.50	112.69
6 - 10 pupils	33	275	16,565.50	60.24
11 - 15 pupils	25	313	12,904.00	41.23
16 or more pupils	11	186	5,949.00	31.98

* Based on teachers' salaries only.

Figure 5. Cost of Operating Schools Before and After Closing One School in Two Districts of Edmunds County

Total costs (in dollars)



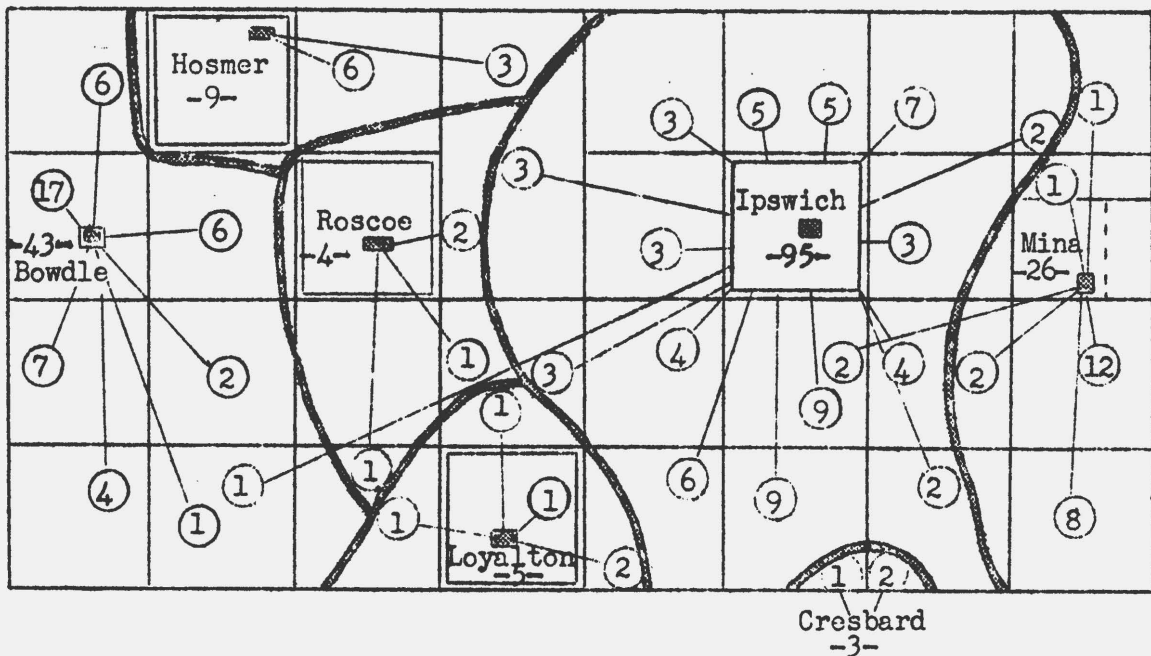
Source: Records of County Superintendent of Schools.

A large number of common school districts in Edmunds county, as well as in other counties of the state, have in recent years found it advantageous to close certain of their schools when enrollments reach a low ebb. Seventeen of the thirty common districts of Edmunds county have made use of this line of action.

To illustrate the financial advantages of closing selected rural schools, the costs of carrying on elementary education in two districts of Edmunds county are compared in Figure 5 before and after the closing of one school in each. In 1937-38, district 12 operated five schools for its 57 students at an aggregate cost of \$4,303.84. With one school closed by the following year and with 55 pupils enrolled, costs were reduced to \$3,115.09. Similarly, the abandonment of one of the four schools in district 31 resulted in the lowering of total costs from \$3,332.63 in 1938-39 to \$2,462.84 in 1939-40. The enrollment for the same years had dropped from 29 to 24.

The closing of a single school in each of the two districts, 12 and 31, thus made possible savings to the districts of \$1,188.75 and \$869.79, respectively. It would seem advisable for school districts to continue the policy of closing schools when enrollments fall below the point of economical operation.

Figure 6. Areas from Which High Schools Drew Their Edmunds County Tuition Students, 1940



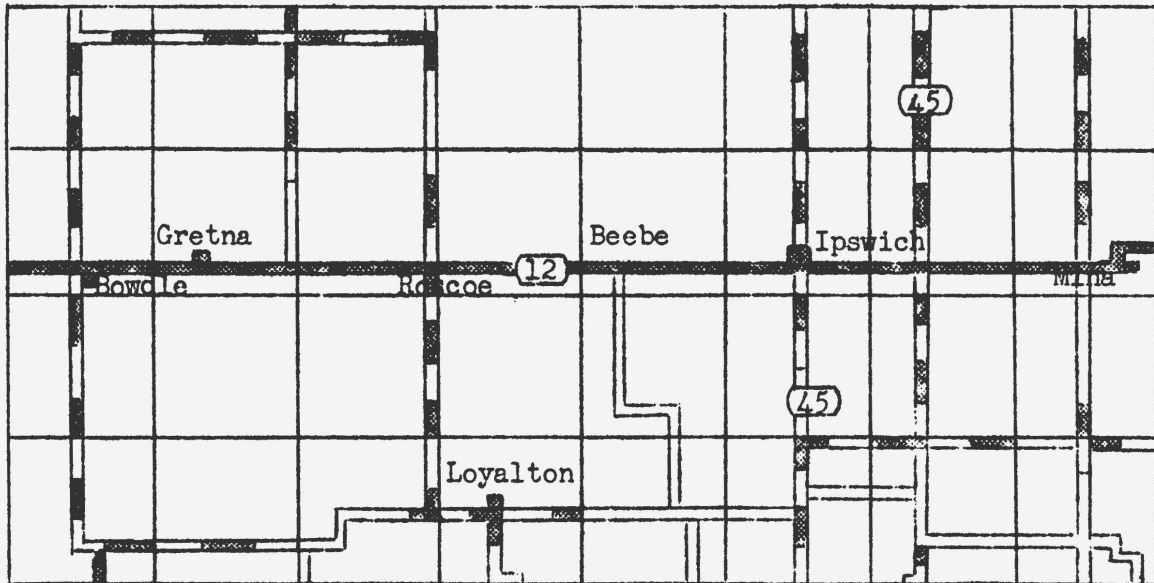
Source: Records of High School Superintendents




Figure 6, which shows the areas from which high schools drew their Edmunds county students, suggests a possible ultimate solution to the problem of dwindling elementary enrollments.

Since 1921 it has been compulsory for school districts with no high schools of their own to pay the tuition costs for their students who attend high schools in other districts. Realizing that costs of operating their own secondary schools would be prohibitive, common districts of Edmunds county have adopted the policy of sending their students to high schools already existing in town and village centers. In 1940, almost two hundred young people from rural-farm areas of Edmunds county were enrolled as tuition students in village high schools located within or adjacent to the county. Why could not a similar plan be adapted to elementary education? As enrollments continue to shrink and costs per pupil mount, it would appear to be a practical solution to close the rural schools and send the remaining pupils to village schools, the home district paying tuition and transportation costs. Such a plan has the dual advantage of economy and of extending to farm children the superior facilities and techniques of the village school.

Since the township districts of Edmunds county are sufficiently large to maintain at least one school, the immediate policy will probably call for the closing of those schools whose enrollments fall to a low level, with one or two centrally located schools administering to the elementary education needs of the entire district. In time, however, village-centered community education areas may evolve along lines similar to the high school attendance areas shown above.

Figure 7. Highways of Edmunds County, 1941.



- Legend:  Hard Surfaced Roads
  Graveled Roads
  Improved Dirt Roads

Source: Official Map of the State Highway Commission, 1941.

As indicated in Figure 7, improved roads are found in all parts of Edmunds county. This fact, when considered in conjunction with the great advances in the automobile, has had far-reaching effects upon rural life. Among the most important has been the increased accessibility of village centers to farmers and their families.

A number of services which were formerly performed on a localized basis by open country institutions have been shifted to trade centers. The farmer now goes to the village to buy groceries, clothing, machinery, and other articles for the farm and home; to sell his produce; to attend church; and to participate in group meetings and social affairs. His sons and daughters, it has been noted, attend the village high school. As a further step in the concentration of services in village centers, the village elementary school may eventually displace the one-room rural school as an institution for supplying the educational needs of children from rural-farm areas. In view of the increased ease of transportation and the apparent trend toward re-organization of institutions on a community basis, this possibility is far from remote.

How Certain South Dakota Rural Communities Are Successfully Solving the Declining Enrollment Problem

School boards confronted with the problem of declining enrollments should study their local situation carefully before taking action. The four plans listed below have all been tested by different South Dakota communities and have been found practical. One or the other of the first two alternatives has frequently been used as a temporary measure until further action was necessary. The last two plans are in the nature of a more or less permanent reorganization of the present rural district system.

Cooperating with nearby rural schools

When enrollment has dropped to five or fewer pupils certain districts have kept their district organization intact but have closed one or more schools. In cases where all schools of the district have been closed, the remaining pupils have been sent to the nearest adjoining rural school where satisfactory arrangements for tuition and transportation could be made.

Tuition pupils to town schools

Where satisfactory arrangements could not be made with nearby rural schools, the remaining pupils have been sent as tuition students to the nearest independent school in village or town. This plan is frequently no more expensive than the first, but has the further advantage of better educational experience than is usually possible in the one room school. In effect, it is essentially the same method which has been successfully used in sending farm children as tuition pupils to high school.

Consolidation

Where the second plan has been in operation for a number of years, town and nearby country districts have frequently consolidated into a single district. Such a plan has many advantages, but should first be tried out informally as a centralized school system before determining the details of consolidation.

County-wide district plan

In at least one west river county a county-wide district plan is now in operation. Under such a plan one county school board determines the location of rural schools and can regulate the number of such schools to fit in with the enrollment trend.