



5-1988

# A History of School Reorganization in Sargent Country Since 1947

Larry E. Skroch

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.und.edu/theses>

 Part of the [Psychology Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Skroch, Larry E., "A History of School Reorganization in Sargent Country Since 1947" (1988). *Theses and Dissertations*. 819.  
<https://commons.und.edu/theses/819>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, and Senior Projects at UND Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of UND Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact [zeinebyousif@library.und.edu](mailto:zeinebyousif@library.und.edu).

A HISTORY OF SCHOOL REORGANIZATION IN  
SARGENT COUNTY SINCE 1947

by  
Larry E. Skroch

Bachelor of Arts, University of North Dakota, 1984

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty  
of the  
University of North Dakota  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

Grand Forks, North Dakota

May  
1988

T1988  
Sk64

This Thesis submitted by Larry E. Skroch in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done, and is hereby approved.

Glenn Fuchs  
Chairperson

F. V. Tharson

Douglas C Munsel

This Thesis meets the standards for appearance and conforms to the style and format requirements of the Graduate School of the University of North Dakota, and is hereby approved.

A. William Johnson 5/4/88  
Dean of the Graduate School

Permission

Title A History of Sargent County's School District  
Reorganization Since 1947

Department History

Degree Master of Arts

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a graduate degree from the University of North Dakota, I agree that the Library of this University shall make it freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for extensive copying for scholarly purposes may be granted by the professor who supervised my thesis work or, in his absence, by the Chairman of the Department or the Dean of the Graduate School. It is understood that any copying or publication or other use of this thesis or part thereof for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission. It is also understood that due recognition shall be given to me and to the University of North Dakota in any scholarly use which may be made of any material in my thesis.

Signature Larry E. Shrock

Date 28 Apr. 1988

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	v
LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	vii
VITA.....	viii
ABSTRACT.....	ix
CHAPTER I. THE PLACE AND PROBLEMS: STATE AND LOCAL CONDITIONS PRIOR TO THE SCHOOL REORGANIZATION LAW OF 1947.....	1
CHAPTER II. NORTH DAKOTA'S SCHOOL PROBLEMS AND REFORMS TO 1970.....	54
CHAPTER III. SARGENT COUNTY'S SCHOOL REORGANIZA- TION: 1947 TO 1969.....	110
CHAPTER IV. CONCLUSIONS.....	168
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	174

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure	Page
1. Map of North Dakota's Agricultural Regions.....	6
2. A Map of Sargent County's Location.....	15
3. A Map of Sargent County's Townships and Towns.....	18
4. A Map of Sargent County's Railroad Towns....	21
5. Population Change, 1930-1970.....	81
6. Map of School Districts, 1947.....	112
7. Sargent County Farmers Union's Advertisement for its Annual Convention in 1948....	120
8. Sargent County's Reorganization Committee Advertisement for an Educational Meeting Concerning a Countywide Prospectus.....	146
9. A Map of School Districts After Reorganization, 1969.....	161

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Population of Sargent County's Towns.....	26
2. A Summary of Sargent County's and North Dakota's Public Schools' Facilities and Finances, 1947.....	44
3. A Comparison of North Dakota's Population Data, and Number of Farms and School Districts, 1890 to 1970.....	64
4. School Districts Reorganization in North Dakota, 1957 to 1963.....	99
5. 1958 Countywide School District Election Results.....	150

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer is indebted to Professor D. Jerome Tweton for his patient direction and encouragement in pursuing this topic. He wishes to thank Professors Playford V. Thorson and Douglas C. Munski for their constructive criticism and comments that helped to clarify the subject. He especially wishes to thank Elaine Marquette, Harriet Colburn, and Lillie Rouse for sharing their views on the school-reorganization process in Sargent County.

Thanks are also due to the staff of the Chester Fritz Library at the University of North Dakota, the North Dakota State Historical Society, and the Sargent County courthouse staff for assistance in the gathering of data. The writer wishes to thank all those who shared their opinions concerning this topic and a special thank-you goes to Bev Rosencrans for typing this thesis. Also, he wishes to thank Robert, Dale, Allen and Roland Jarombek for their friendship during the past six years.

The writer alone is responsible for any errors of fact or of judgment which may appear within this study.



## VITA

Larry Eugene Skroch was born November 24, 1955, at Oakes, North Dakota. In 1975 he graduated from Sargent Central High School in Forman, North Dakota. After graduation he served in the United States Army until 1978. Two years later he attended the Bottineau Branch of the North Dakota State University and North Dakota State School of Science at Wahpeton. He received his A.S. degree in Pre Law from North Dakota State School of Science in 1982. For the next two years he attended the University of North Dakota and received a B.A. degree in Social Science in 1984. He entered graduate school at the University of North Dakota in January 1985 to study history. Besides attending graduate school he continued to work as a construction laborer. He has served in the North Dakota National Guard since 1980.

## ABSTRACT

Sargent County's school district reorganization story began in 1947. In that year North Dakota's first comprehensive school district law was passed. Sargent County had twenty-nine school districts but needed a larger tax base to improve the quality of education. By November 1947, a County Reorganization Committee was formed and its actions became front-page news. School reorganization ignited great excitement throughout the county, and public interest ran high in 1948 because people worried about losing their schools and about possible tax increases. As people took sides, some friendships were broken; town residents became united in the defense of their school, and competition between the towns became fierce.

After the initial furor of public concern, the task of reorganization settled on the school boards and county reorganization committee. Between 1949 and 1953 Sargent County experienced an interlude of community proposals, but all attempts for reorganization failed. The first successful reorganization proposal occurred in 1954 when Harlem School District was divided up between Cogswell and Stirum. Sections of land in eight-grade school districts were annexed to nearby towns with high schools,

and by the end of 1955 Sargent County had twenty-three school districts instead of twenty-nine.

Work began on a countywide school district in 1956 and continued in 1957. The plan involved territory from eighteen school districts, and nine towns would have sent their high school students to a central high school at Forman. Much controversy surrounded this prospectus in the days before the election, and the voters rejected it. However, residents in the western part of the county approved reorganization with their natural trading center in Dickey County.

School reorganization took an intriguing turn in 1959. Cogswell and Cayuga, low on funds, signed a one-year agreement with Forman, allowing their high school students to be taught at Forman. This merger, known as Sargent Central, proved to be successful, especially in sports. Next year the reorganization procedure went through without any problem. Also, in 1960 Gwinner and Stirum became North Sargent, and Milnor and DeLamere reorganized. In 1961 land in the eastern part was annexed to Lidgerwood in Richland County. Rutland and Havana joined Sargent Central in 1963 and 1969. The school reorganization process in Sargent County was completed in 1969, reducing twenty-nine school districts to three.

## CHAPTER I

### THE PLACE AND PROBLEMS: STATE AND LOCAL CONDITIONS PRIOR TO THE SCHOOL REORGANIZATION LAW OF 1947

#### Introduction

Education has been the responsibility of North Dakota's legislative assembly since the ratification of the constitution on October 1, 1889. North Dakota's school district system was established by law on March 20, 1889. As early as 1903 North Dakota's Department of Public Instruction studied school district reorganization and its report suggested the county as a possible unit of organization.<sup>1</sup> However, North Dakota's first comprehensive school district reorganization law was not passed until 1947. Yet, North Dakota's school reorganization movement coincided with the national rural school consolidation movement. Sargent County's reorganization process was similar to other rural counties in the state. School reorganization was concerned with the financial and administrative inadequacies of numerous small schools in various districts along with curriculum equalization and improvement. A larger tax base was needed to support education as the population declined in the rural counties. Local school districts could not manage the

cost of education without increased county and state funding. Small school districts needed to be consolidated to improve the quality of education. This issue probably affected the rural counties of North Dakota more than any other issue of the time. Small towns lost schools that were part of their heritage. School reorganization was very controversial at the local level of government, and eventually affected state politics.

#### The Place: North Dakota

The Mandan Indians were the first people living in the area of what is now North Dakota (near Bismarck). By the time white fur traders and hunters reached the territory, other Indian tribes--Hidatas, Arikara, Yanktonais and Tetons (Sioux), Assiniboins, and Chippewa (or Ojibway)--divided up the northern prairie. Forced from the forest and lakes of the east, they adapted their lifestyles and institutions out of necessity to suit the barren plains. They were dependent on the horse for transportation and the bison for food, shelter, and clothing.

The particular way the rivers flow in North Dakota swayed its history. Before the Louisiana Purchase, all the land drained by the Missouri River with its tributaries belonged in turn to France, to Spain, and again to France. Water from this land drains eventually into the Gulf of Mexico. The land drained by the Souris (Mouse)

River and the Red River along with their tributaries belonged to Great Britain until 1818. In contrast water from this land drains north into the Hudson Bay. As the frontier of the United States advanced westward, North Dakota belonged, respectively, to the territories of Louisiana, Missouri, Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, and finally in 1861 to Dakota Territory.<sup>2</sup>

North Dakota is located in the center of the North American continent. The geographic center of the continent is at Rugby. Geographers have placed North Dakota in a group of states called the North Central States: North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio. It is the most northwest state in this region of the United States.

Although surrounded by larger states, North Dakota ranks seventeenth nationally in size. The total area of the state is approximately 70,655 square miles, of which about 1,208 square miles is water. The state is rectangular in shape.<sup>3</sup>

Overall, North Dakota is a plains state and lies at a relatively low elevation. However, the state has three topographic regions (excluding the Turtle Mountains and the Little Missouri Badlands in the southwest). The surface level of the state rises in three broad steps from the Red River Valley in the east through the higher Drift

Plains of the central region to the Missouri Plateau. The eastern part of the state is generally about 1,000 feet above sea level, and the southwestern part is generally about 3,000 feet.<sup>4</sup>

North Dakota has some of the best soils in the world. In the state the quality of the soil becomes less fertile as one travels from east to west. The soils have been classified roughly into three general divisions based on their origin: the lacustrine soils in the east, the glacial soils in the central section, and the residual soils of the western regions. Small areas of alluvial soils are usually found along the rivers. There are two general types of soils in the state, Mollisols and Mountain soils. Mollisols, soils of the steppe, are thick, black, and organically rich. These soils are found throughout the whole state, except the southwestern part of the state. North Dakota has the particular suborder of Mollisols called Borolls. This soil type is associated with cold winters and cool summers. Mountain soils are associated with various moisture and temperature regimes; steep slopes; and variable relief and elevation and soils vary greatly within a short distance. The suborder type of Mountain soils in the Slope Region of the state is called Aridisols. This type is associated with dry climates.<sup>5</sup>

Because of its location, North Dakota has a short-summer continental climate. Temperature fluctuations are large and common. Winter is the longest season, November into March. Spring is the shortest season, usually late March to mid May. Summer extends from May to mid September; fall lasts for about two months. The growing season in the state ranges from about 130 days to 135 days. Precipitation does not occur in equal amounts across the state, in good years fourteen inches in the west to twenty-one in the east. Blizzards and tornados are the two most severe types of weather that the state experiences.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout its history, agriculture has been North Dakota's primary source of income. The state has three general farming regions: a general farming region, a wheat region, and a cattle-wheat region due to the type of soil and the amount of precipitation. (For a map of the three regions, see Fig. 1.) Farmers have adapted practices to suit their region. Basically, the regions coincide with the topographic regions. The Red River Valley, a general farming region, is the best agricultural area in the state because it is suitable for specialized crops such as sugar beets and potatoes. Wheat, hard red spring and durum varieties, is the dominant crop of the Drift Prairie/Missouri Plateau. The Slope is a cattle-wheat region. Industries related to agriculture have



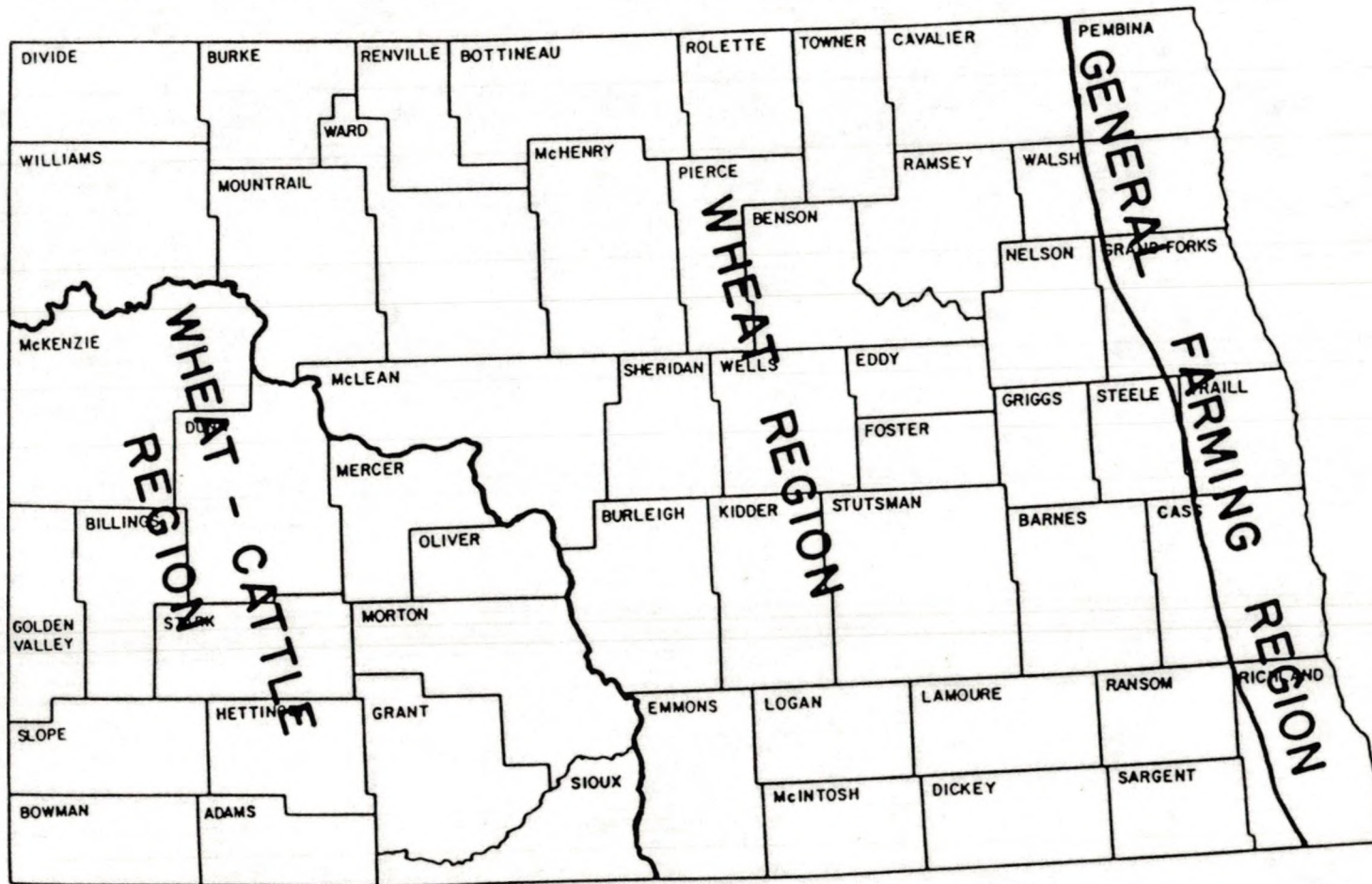


Fig. 1. Map of North Dakota's Agricultural Regions

diversified the economy. North Dakota has wheat, potato, and sugar beet processing plants as well as meat packing plants.<sup>7</sup>

The first portion of North Dakota to be settled by Europeans was the Red River Valley. By 1890, the end of the Great Dakota Boom, settlers occupied the entire valley. Pembina, Walsh, Grand Forks, Traill, Cass, and Richland counties are located in this region. Foreign immigrants from many European countries established residency, but Norwegians and Germans had the largest numbers. Older Americans, also, were attracted to the region as the American frontier to the east vanished. Although the "Bonanza" farms received a great deal of publicity, the settlement pattern was towards small family farms. Railroads hastened the growth and development throughout the valley and the state.

Besides wheat, farmers have specialized in growing potatoes, sugar beets, corn, and soybeans. Processing plants have been built throughout the valley and have provided employment for many residents. Small farming operations throughout the state have disappeared mainly to farm mechanization, the farm depression of the Twenties, the Great Depression and the drought of the Thirties. Many farmers were forced to seek employment elsewhere. However, some family farms have been consolidated and thus reduced their cost of operation. On the average

the size of farms in the Red River Valley are smaller than the ones further west.<sup>8</sup>

The highest population density per square mile in North Dakota is within the Red River Valley. In 1960 the Red River Valley totaled 20.5 compared with 8.4 for the Drift Prairie and 5.9 for the Missouri Plateau. Fargo, North Dakota's largest city, is serviced by two interstates, besides railroads and air services. Until 1980 Grand Forks was the second largest city. These two cities are the dominant trading centers of eastern North Dakota. Grafton, Mayville, and Wahpeton are the only other cities in the valley to have more than 2,500 inhabitants. Small towns are scattered throughout the valley along the railroad tracks.<sup>9</sup>

Together the Drift Prairie and the Missouri Plateau are predominantly a wheat region. The number of inhabitants increased in this area during North Dakota's two population booms, 1878 to 1890, and 1898 to 1915. Many nationalities settled in the area but the prominent group was Norwegians. Also, a large number of Germans from Russia took up land in south central North Dakota. The fierce competition among the railroads, especially the Great Northern Railway, Northern Pacific Railway, and the Minneapolis, St. Paul and Sault Ste Marie Railway, resulted in numerous branch lines. Many small towns were established along the branch lines as collection points

for agricultural goods.<sup>10</sup> The prairie landscape became dotted with numerous small towns, large barns, grain elevators and church steeples. Key cities on the main lines became influential trading centers while the small towns on the branch lines prospered and then declined.

The wheat region is the largest of the three agricultural regions of the state. Thirty-two of North Dakota's fifty-two counties are included within its borders. It includes all of the Drift Prairie, and all of the Missouri Plateau east of the Missouri River. Productive soil and adequate moisture are two keys, besides good management, to successful farming. The Drift Prairie has good soil but has marginal precipitation. This region averages only seventeen inches of annual precipitation--when the rains occur determines the farmers' fate. The 100th meridian of longitude, the dividing line between the semi-arid and the subhumid climates of the Great Plains, comes close to dividing the state into two equal parts. However, most of the wheat region is located in the subhumid region, except the northwest portion. The percentage of crop failures is greater in the western half of the state than the east.<sup>11</sup>

Hard red spring wheat is the leading crop in North Dakota. On the average North Dakota produces between 10 and 15 percent of the nation's total wheat crop and between 40 and 50 percent of the nation's spring wheat crop.

The heaviest concentration of spring wheat is grown in Divide, Williams, Burke, Mountrail, Renville, Ward, McLean, Bottineau and McHenry counties. North Dakota is the leading durum-wheat producing state in the nation. The majority of durum is grown in the "Durum Triangle" which is located in the northeastern part of the Drift Prairie--Cavalier, Towner, Ramsey, Benson, Rolette, Pierce, and Nelson counties. Farmers have rotated their crops with oats, barley, and flax.<sup>12</sup>

Within the wheat region there are several important dairy areas. One extends from Emmons County to Richland County. This region has a large population of Germans from Russia. Another region is the central eastern area of the state--Stutsman, Barnes, Griggs, Steele, Eddy, and Nelson counties. Stutsman and Barnes counties have large numbers of Danes. Dairying offered a good supplement to farm income and the residents carried on a cultural trait of their ancestors.<sup>13</sup>

The Drift Prairie and Missouri Plateau have less than half the population density of the Red River Valley.<sup>14</sup> One dominant feature in the wheat region is the large number of towns with fewer than 750 residents. Minot (north central), Devils Lake (northeast), Bismarck (south central), Jamestown, and Valley City (southeast) are the chief trading centers. However, Grand Forks and Fargo have attracted a great deal of business from the eastern

portion of the Drift Prairie. Bismarck and Minot draw business from the Missouri Plateau region. Bismarck is North Dakota's capital and in 1980, became the second largest city. Bottineau, Carrington, Harvey, Langdon, and Rugby are minor trading centers, but larger than the surrounding communities.<sup>15</sup> However, these small towns have experienced economic competition from the larger cities.

The most sparsely settled area in the state is the Slope Region of the Missouri Plateau which includes all the land west and south of the Missouri River in North Dakota. The Northern Pacific Railroad crossed the Missouri River in 1879 and the state by 1881. Between 1907 and 1911 the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad (Milwaukee) built a line in Adams, Bowman, Grant and Hettinger counties.<sup>16</sup> The Slope region is a cattle-wheat region. The farming frontier overlapped the ranching frontier when large ranching operations encountered small ranchers and homesteaders towards the end of the nineteenth century. The Slope was settled by many German-Russian immigrants along with other nationalities. The semiarid short-grass country of the Slope hampered settlement, except along the railroads.<sup>17</sup>

Topography is the most important factor in the location of wheat fields and other small grains in this region. Crops are planted on the more level fields,

leaving the rugged parts for grazing. Every slope, hill-top, and valley has its own type of soil, each with certain crop possibilities. The Slope has a semi-arid climate in which evaporation exceeds precipitation, resulting in frequent droughts. For instance, one drought lasted from 1933 to 1937.<sup>18</sup>

Cattle production in the Slope takes place on three types of farms: (1) the cattle ranches, (2) the cattle-wheat farms, (3) the wheat-cattle farms. The cattle-ranches type depends entirely on income from cattle sold. The cattle-wheat farm receives a majority of its income from cattle but will market some grain. The wheat-cattle farms have the opposite marketing. The size of farms in this area are twice as large as those in the eastern part of the state due to the difference in physical geography.<sup>19</sup>

Dickinson, Mandan-Bismarck, and Williston are the principal trading centers of the Slope. There are fewer towns in this region, but they are larger than the more numerous small towns in the other agricultural regions. Between 1950 and 1970 most of the towns in the Slope had between 1,000 and 2,000 people in comparison with less than a thousand people for the other regions.

The Place: Sargent County, North Dakota

North Dakota has forty-two rural counties, including Sargent County. School reorganization affected the

numerous small railroad towns throughout the state but particularly in the Red River Valley and the Drift Prairie/Missouri Plateau regions. Sargent County's population declined more than 20 percent between 1930 and 1970, similar to other rural counties. Forty-seven counties (including Sargent County) used the township method of school district organization. Sargent County's school districts were too small and a larger tax base would be needed to improve the quality of education. A case study of Sargent County's school reorganization process showed the typical reactions to the reorganization law, the competition between the railroad towns for a high school, and the actual method of reorganization from start to finish in one county. No other study has taken this approach concerning the school reorganization movement in North Dakota. Most likely, the other rural counties of North Dakota had similar problems with reorganization.

Sargent County is located in the Drift Prairie but borders the Red River Valley. Before the coming of white people, prairie grasses and many sloughs covered Sargent County. This county was originally treeless except for a few places along the Wild Rice River and a fringe of forest around Lake Tewauckon. For hundreds of years prior to white settlement the history of the county was Indian history--mainly Mandan and Sioux. However, by the time of white settlement the Indians were no longer the masters



of the northern prairie as reservation life had replaced their traditional way of life.

In 1883 the Dakota Territorial Legislature created Sargent County by dividing Ransom County in half. It was named in honor of Homer E. Sargent, general manager of the Northern Pacific Railroad Company, who was interested in the agricultural development of the Red River Valley. On July 16, 1883, Nehemiah G. Ordway, territorial governor, appointed the first county commissioners and designated Milnor as the county seat. County government was organized on October 8, 1883. In 1886 a county election named Forman, located at the geographical center, as the new county seat.<sup>21</sup> Sargent County is located in the southeastern part of North Dakota. (For a map of the location of Sargent County, see Fig. 2.) Except for a small proration in the southeastern corner, the county is rectangular in shape, thirty-six miles east to west and twenty-four miles north and south. Some land in the southeastern corner is part of the Sisseton and Wahpeton Indian Reservation.

Sargent County occupies parts of three topographic divisions, the prairie plains, the Sheyenne delta region, and the glacial Lake Sargent region. Of these the prairie region is the largest, forming approximately three-fourths of the county.<sup>22</sup> In general, the topography ranges from level to rolling and, in places, hilly.

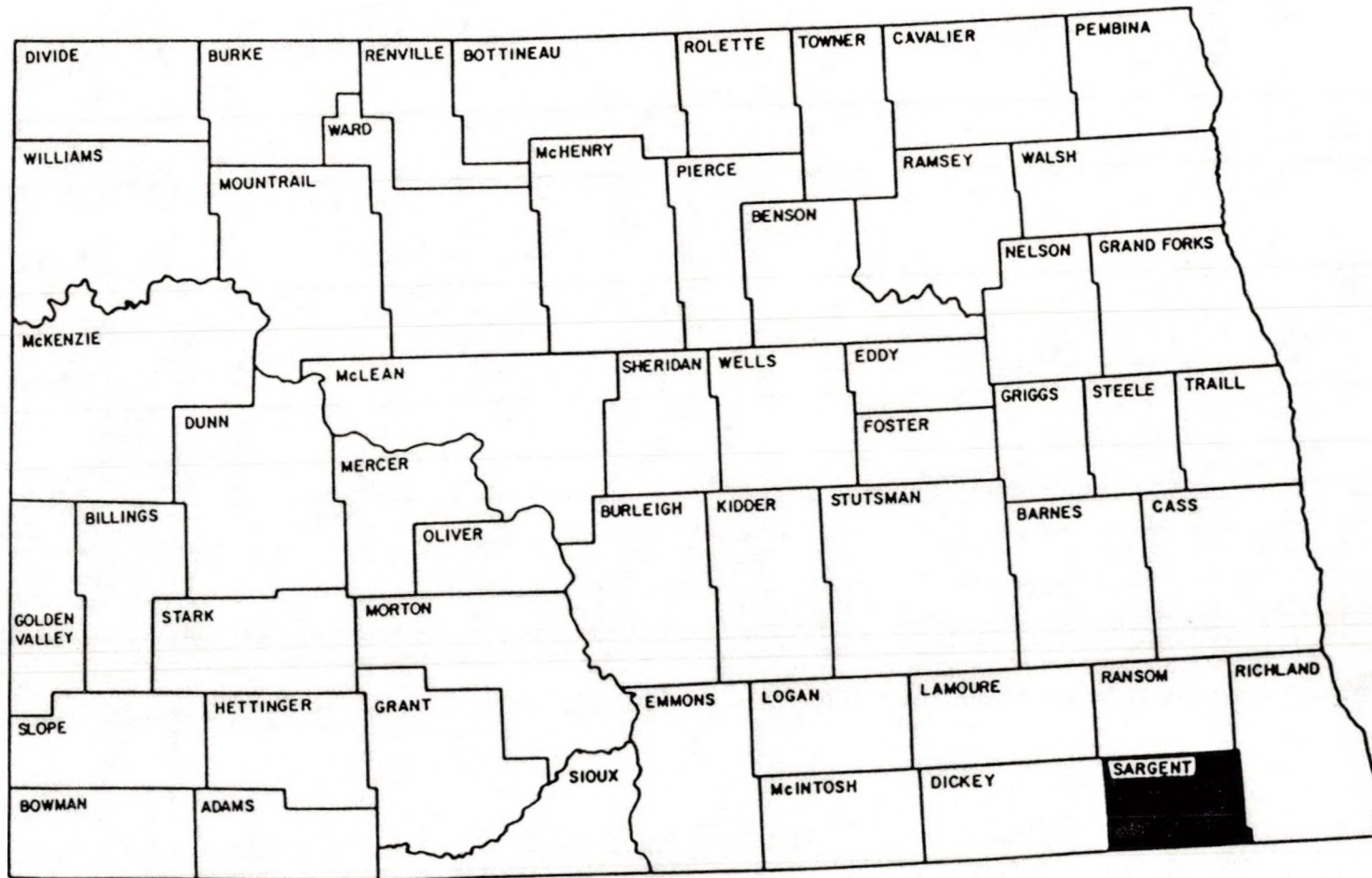


Fig. 2. A Map of Sargent County's Location

The soils of the county are derived from glacial material, either weathered in the position during the Wisconsin glaciation in which the ice left it or transported and redeposited as terraces along glacial streams, as recent alluvium deposits. Goode's World Atlas classifies this region as one having Mollisoils.<sup>23</sup> The particular suborder of Mollisoils found in the county is Borolls. Productive soils cover 80 percent of the county.<sup>24</sup> Sargent County has a mean annual temperature of 41 degrees Fahrenheit and mean annual precipitation of 20.4 inches. The growing season averages 124 days for crops.<sup>25</sup>

The white settlers began arriving in Sargent County about the same time as the Minneapolis, St. Paul and Sault Ste. Marie Railroad (known as the Soo Railroad), Great Northern Railroad, and Northern Pacific Railroad. Most of the people came in a ten year period between 1880 and 1890.<sup>26</sup> The settlers were a rugged and resourceful people who struggled with primitive conditions, drought, and crop failures. Early agriculture was very labor intensive and the farmers had to be self-sufficient. They built churches, schools, and communities and raised their children in these institutions. These were a great source of pride to the people of the county.

Americans from eastern states and immigrants from Europe settled Sargent County in its initial development. Americans settled predominantly in Bowen, Brampton,

Denver, Forman, Herman, Jackson, Kingston, Southwest, Verner, and Vivian townships. Norwegians settled in Hall, Marboe, Milnor, Ransom, Rutland, and Shuman townships. Swedish immigrants took up land in Whitestone Hill, Dunbar and part of Willey townships. Germans dominated the townships of Taylor, Weber, and a portion of Willey. A small number of Irish immigrants inhabited Sargent township. Although first settled by Americans, Herman and Kingston townships later contained a large population with Polish ancestry. The majority of the people in Tewaukon township were Sioux descendants. (For a map of the townships and towns, see Fig. 3.)

The arrival of the railroads was the key to the development of North Dakota, and the development of Sargent County illustrates this point. John C. Hudson in Plains County Towns, has explained what he calls the "processes of town development in the Great Plains, from their origins at the beginning of white settlement up to the time when retrenchments and adjustments began around 1920."<sup>27</sup> Although Hudson's case study covered fourteen counties in northcentral North Dakota, his concepts are also valid for Sargent County. Sargent County's first settlement was a trading post near Lake Tewaukon. After the arrival of white settlers in the county numerous inland towns--Ransom City, Millsburg, and Brookland--

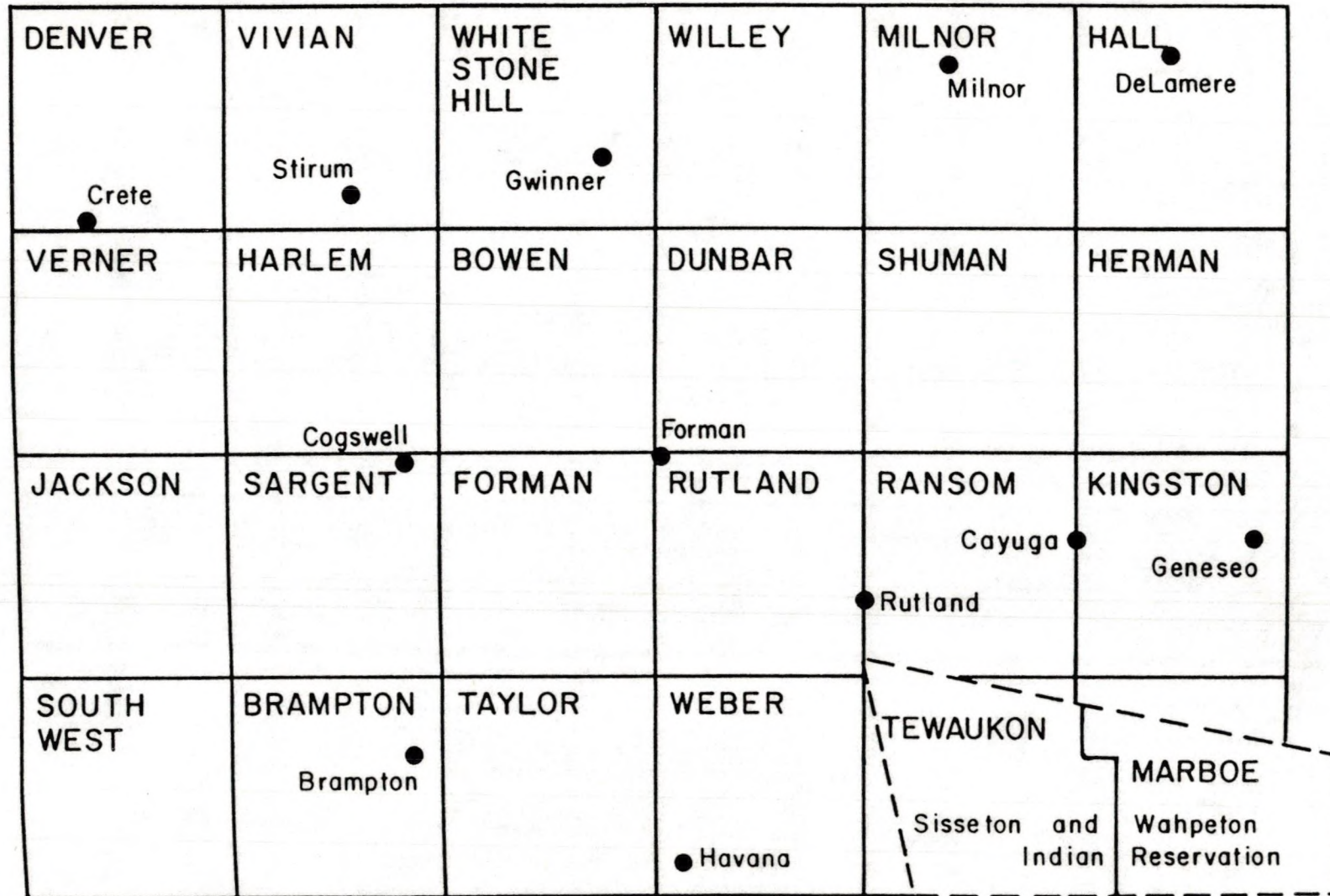


Fig. 3. A Map of Sargent County's Townships and Towns

prospered and then towns declined after the arrival and growth of the railroad towns. Hudson concluded:

The plains county town evolved in place, through three phases of regional development: the frontier era of trading posts and military forts, a subsequent phase of inland towns (a regional term referring to settlement not served by a railroad), and a third, that of railroad towns, which became the dominant form thereafter. Each phase "opened" the region for what followed. Accompanying the shifts from one system to the next were parallel changes in economic and social life.<sup>28</sup>

The building of four railroads, the Great Northern, the Soo, the Northern Pacific, and the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific (known as the Milwaukee) hastened the development of Sargent County. They promoted the availability of free or cheap land in an enticing advertisement campaign throughout the eastern United States and Europe. Each railroad established numerous small towns along their tracks. The railroads brought settlers and farm equipment to the region for commercial grain farming. Professor Hudson concluded that the single purpose of railroad towns was the collection of the region's agricultural surplus for shipment to terminal markets.<sup>29</sup> In the 1870s Minneapolis became the milling center of the United States. During the 1880s the United States experienced rapid industrialization and a remarkable growth in railroad mileage. Northwest of Minneapolis the Red River Valley, three hundred miles long and one hundred miles

wide, contained some of the richest soil in the world.<sup>30</sup> Its potential was very alluring.

In Sargent County, on the edge of the Valley, the railroad building race (1886 and 1887) was between the Great Northern and Soo lines. Only one-half mile separated the entrance of the two railroads into the county. However, the first railroad to arrive in what would become Sargent County was the Northern Pacific which reached DeLamere in 1882 and Milnor in 1883. Its construction stopped at Milnor but continued across the county in 1900 when construction resumed. While the other railroads entered the county from the east, the Milwaukee crossed the southern boundary line in 1889.<sup>31</sup> (For a map of the railroad towns, see Fig. 4.)

The usefulness of the numerous inland towns in the county decreased with the arrival of the railroad towns. The inland towns eventually died, and their business and buildings were moved to the nearby railroad towns. A great deal of speculation took place in choosing sites for businesses. Some railroad towns became ghost towns when business shifts occurred. For instance, Cogswell absorbed businesses and buildings from Towanda, Harlem, Sargent, and Nicholson. (Each was within a five mile radius.) However, Forman was platted three years before the arrival of the Soo railroad in 1886.<sup>32</sup>

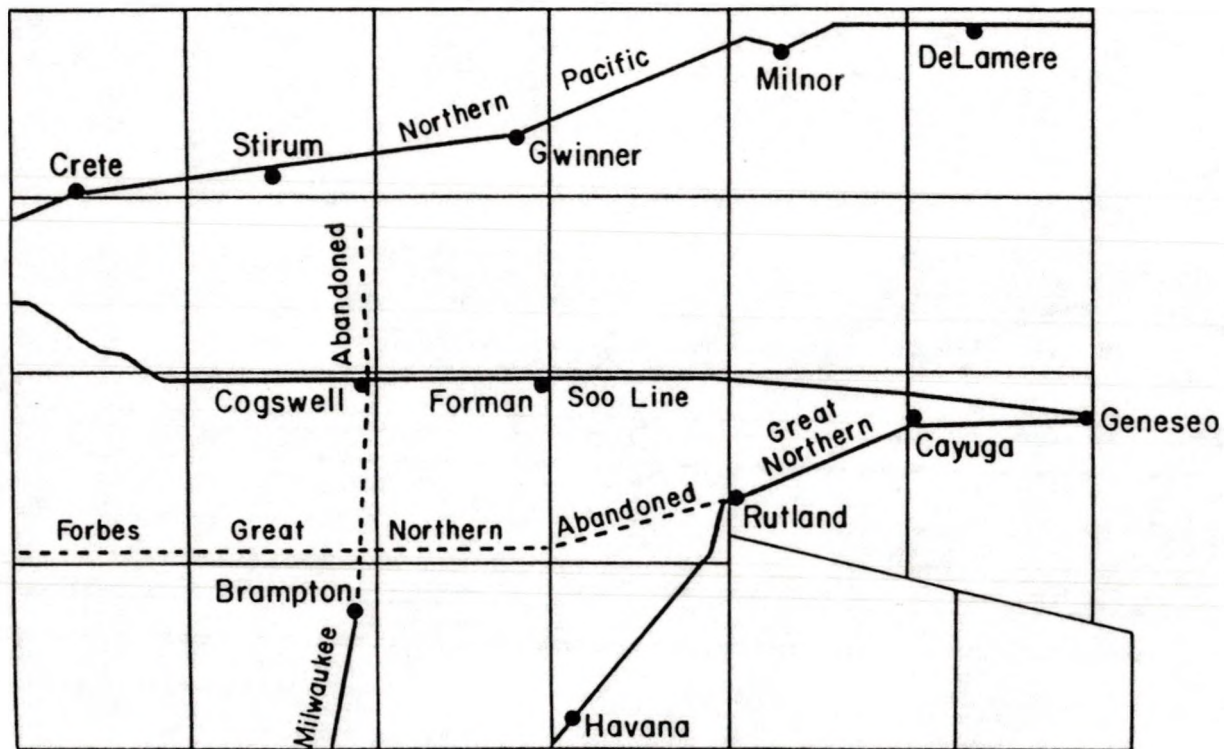


Fig. 4. A Map of Sargent County's Railroad Towns



The Northern Pacific Railroad promoted the establishment of the northern communities in Sargent County. DeLamere was founded in 1882 and named by its townsites officials for Thomas DeLamere, a pioneer train dispatcher. The post office, however, was not established until 1886. Milnor, which was platted in 1883 when the Northern Pacific reached the site, was named for William Edward Milnor, a local telegrapher, and William Milnor Roberts, Northern Pacific's civil engineer at the time. The settlements of Willey, Whitestone Hill, Vivian, and Denver townships preceded railroad building because Northern Pacific construction stopped in 1883. However, Gwinner, Stirum and Crete were established in 1900 when construction continued. Gwinner and Stirum were named for German railroad financiers who were interested in the Northern Pacific. Crete was originally named Elizabeth by railroad officials, but later renamed Crete, the nickname of John M. Steele's daughter, Lucretia. This was in accordance with their bargain for the right-of-way across his land.<sup>33</sup>

The Soo railroad arrived at the eastern border of Sargent County in 1886 and crossed the entire county by the following year. This railroad established a station just across the county border and named it Alicia. In 1886 the Soo Line reached Forman which became a key in that town's successful bid for the county seat that year. Cogswell was established when the depot from

Towanda was moved three miles to the west to compete with the Milwaukee railroad in 1889. Cogswell was located at a junction of two railroads. The Milwaukee railroad branch terminus, however, was only five miles to the north at Harlem. Cogswell was named for L. K. Cogswell who raised purebred cattle in the vicinity. The Soo railroad built a station at Nicholson, but its businesses shifted to Cogswell after the arrival of the Milwaukee railroad.<sup>34</sup>

In 1886 the Great Northern Railroad established the communities of Geneseo, Cayuga, Rutland, and Havana. Only one-half mile separated the entrance of the Great Northern and Soo railroads into Sargent County, and each built a station after crossing the border. (Great Northern platted Geneseo and the Soo platted Alicia.) A real estate dealer purchased a tract of land between the two railroad stations and platted a townsite which he named Veda. Because of the confusion resulting from the usage of three names--Alicia, Geneseo, and Veda--and the nearness of railroad stations to each other, the three towns merged into one, adopting the name of Geneseo. Cayuga was originally named Seneca, after settlers from New York who moved to Sargent County. This change occurred because another post office in Dakota Territory was already going by the name of Seneca. At first Rutland was known as Stewart; but since a Stewartville already

existed in Dakota Territory, its name was changed to Rutland in honor of the Vermont city of the same name. Havana was originally called Weber in honor of Henry Weber, Sr., who settled in Sargent County in 1883, but was changed to avoid confusion with another Great Northern railroad station named Weber.<sup>35</sup>

The Milwaukee entered Sargent County from the south. This railroad began servicing the communities of Brampton, Cogswell, and Harlem in 1889. Charles A. Finch, a settler from Brampton, Ontario, Canada, gave the town of Brampton its name when he homesteaded on the land of the townsite. Charles H. Cooper originally owned and platted the townsite in 1882. Harlem was at the end of the Milwaukee Line but declined in importance after the Northern Pacific completed its construction across the county. Also, the Soo and Great Northern charged cheaper rates for freight. But at one time Harlem was the largest and busiest town in the county. Cogswell, with the two railroads, prospered and boomed until the Great Depression.<sup>36</sup>

Sargent County's population grew between 1890 and 1920, from 5,076 to 9,655.<sup>37</sup> The most significant gain occurred between 1900 and 1910 with a growth of 3,163 inhabitants. In boom times towns grew with amazing rapidity; but when the booms subsided, the county was left with too many small towns. Since 1920 population has steadily declined. By decade from 1920 to 1970,

Sargent County lost respectively, 357, 605, 1077, 760, and 919 inhabitants. In 1970, 5,937 people lived in Sargent County. Population statistics of towns in Sargent County from 1910 to 1980 show that Forman, Gwinner, and Milnor reached their highest total in the 1980 census. These are the sites of the three high schools in the county after reorganization. Gwinner's population increased rapidly between 1950 and 1970 with a growth of 426 inhabitants. This rise can be attributed to Melroe Manufacturing Company which opened in 1946. Although this company was sold to Clark Equipment in 1969, its operation stayed in Gwinner and has attracted employees from southeastern North Dakota. Other towns in the county had population peaks in different decades: among these were Havana in 1910, Cogswell in 1920, Cayuga in 1930, and Rutland in 1950.<sup>38</sup> (For population data, see Table 1.)

Sargent County always has been a rural county. For the first time in 1970 there were more farm residents than non-farm residents, 55 to 45 percent.<sup>39</sup> However, in 1940 the ratio between rural farm residents and rural non-farm residents was 72 to 28 percent, and in 1950 was 67 to 33 percent.<sup>40</sup> This dramatic shift can be attributed to a substantial increase in farm mechanization, higher land prices, and a growth in the size of farms. Between 1950 and 1969 Sargent County lost 381

TABLE 1

## POPULATION OF SARGENT COUNTY'S TOWNS

	1980	1970	1960	1950	1940	1930	1920	1910
Cayuga	75	116	195	178	196	219	182	175
Cogswell	227	203	305	393	430	426	445	418
Forman	629	596	530	466	500	386	402	352
Gwinner	725	623	242	197	---	---	---	---
Havana	148	156	206	267	305	271	319	387
Milnor	716	645	658	674	677	564	680	641
Rutland	<u>250</u>	<u>225</u>	<u>308</u>	<u>309</u>	<u>305</u>	<u>264</u>	<u>291</u>	<u>224</u>
County	5,512	5,937	6,886	7,616	8,693	9,298	9,655	9,202

farms out of 1,168 farms, and during this period the size of farms increased from 465 acres to 680 acres.<sup>41</sup> Many families quit farming as small farms became unprofitable.

Throughout Sargent County's economic history, agriculture has been the most important source of income. However, the county's economic dependence on agricultural production became more diversified with the establishment of a manufacturing plant at Gwinner in 1946. Edward Melroe, a Sargent County farmer, recognized that grain ripened too unevenly in the local area for straight combining. This meant that grain had to be cut in windrows and cured before it was harvested. He developed a pickup attachment for combines that lifted the windrows of grain into the combine. The pickup attachment sped by the harvesting process and reduced problems associated with the weather. This attachment later became standard equipment on Oliver, Gleaner Harvester (International Harvester), and John Deere combines. A family partnership consisting of Edward Melroe, his sons Lester, Clifford, Roger, and Irving, and Eugene Dahl, his son-in-law, started Melroe Manufacturing Company. In 1947 their operation moved from an old filling station to an abandoned schoolhouse where they built windrow pickup attachments for combines. The demand for this product led to the expansion of its operation and the hiring of more local

residents. In 1951 Melroe Manufacturing Company had gross sales of \$521,992.53 and employed between 30 and 50 people. Bobcat loaders (a small tractor loader) and harroweeders were added to its manufacturing operation in later years. By 1987 the company employed around 650 local people and had annual sales in excess of \$200 million.<sup>43</sup>

In the early 1950s Sargent County had many local businesses. Most of the towns contained grain elevators, gas stations, hardware stores, barber shops, car dealerships, grocery stores, meat lockers and creameries, bars, and cafes along with other businesses. Local families operated most of the businesses. Community pride flourished because the local business people lived and worked in the same area as their customers. Businesses usually reflected either their owner's name or the name of the town. A few line chain businesses existed in the county, for instance, Fairway Foods, Red Owl, and Gambles, but local entrepreneurs owned and operated the businesses.

The residents of the county had remarkable spirit and fortitude. They survived the Great Depression, supported the war effort (1941-1945), and experienced the post war inflation. They faced new challenges as their attention turned inward to local conditions. After World War II many farms received electricity and telephones. Highways and farm-to-market roads were built.

The construction of a health clinic in Forman gave the county the services of a local doctor. Silver Lake was developed into a fine recreation area with the help of the Wild Rice Soil Conservation District.<sup>44</sup>

Schools played an important part in the competition between small towns. People from the same community supported different churches and businesses, but their children went to the same school which united the community and gave it some recognition. When a town lost its school, an important part of its heritage was gone, and the vitality went out of the community. The community lost control of its children's education. The story of school reorganization was more than the abstract issues of mill levies and property valuations, of district lines, and bus routes. It divided communities and in some cases set neighbor against neighbor. Fear was unavoidable because of the unknown.

#### The Problems: 1889 to 1947

Elwyn B. Robinson, the eminent historian of North Dakota, developed themes which are keys to understanding the history of North Dakota. These are: remoteness, dependence, economic disadvantage, agrarian radicalism, the "Too-Much Mistake" (trying to do too much too fast with too little), and adaptation to environment. They explain North Dakota's enduring problems. For instance, on the "Too-Much Mistake," he writes:



In the speculative frenzy the pioneers had done too well. Led on by expectations that were not to be realized, they had equipped their new society with more towns, stores, newspapers, churches, and banks than it could support. . . . Retrenchment and abandonment soon followed.<sup>45</sup>

The transition from territorial status to statehood affected North Dakota's education system in the beginning. Dakota's territorial legislature authorized the usage of a "district" system of nine square miles and a "township" system of thirty-six square miles. At the time of statehood in 1889, North Dakota's most populous counties--Pembina, Walsh, Grand Forks, Cass, and Barnes--already had been organized into school districts based on the district system. These counties had 521 school districts with 512 schools. The rest of the state was organized under the township system, with 406 school districts with 958 schools.<sup>46</sup> In 1890 the number of students enrolled totaled 30,821 and employed 1,894 teachers.<sup>47</sup>

North Dakota's Constitution mandated the legislative assembly to provide a uniform system of free public schools throughout the state. The Department of Public Instruction was responsible for formulating a unified school district system policy. William Mitchell, North Dakota's first State Superintendent of Public Instruction, favored the township system but allowed the existing school district to remain intact. Mitchell died unexpectedly on March 10, 1890, but the bill authorizing the

dual system of organization already had been introduced previously to the legislature. The bill was enacted into law on March 20, 1890 and Governor John Miller signed it.<sup>48</sup>

The outcome of this decision influenced the makeup of North Dakota's first legislative assembly. People became very passionate in voicing their opinions on this matter. Strenuous opposition came from the "district counties," particularly Cass and Grand Forks. F. W. Catro, Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction for the first two state administrations noted, "So intense was the feeling in some counties as to the probable prospective merits of the two systems, that some members were elected to the legislature on a platform advocating the perpetuation of one or the other of the two systems."<sup>49</sup> This pattern of "intense feelings" was repeated throughout the state after the passage of the first comprehensive school district reorganization in 1947.

North Dakota experienced two boom periods during the settlement era. In the 1870s Minneapolis became the milling center of the United States.<sup>50</sup> Railroad capitalists lured by the demand for wheat steered their tracks toward the Red River Valley. The first, the Great Dakota Boom, lasted from 1878 to 1890. During this boom, the eastern part of North Dakota, mostly in the Red River Valley and areas adjacent to the main lines was settled.

The population of North Dakota increased from an estimated 16,000 in 1878 to 190,983 in 1890.<sup>51</sup> The Great Dakota Boom ended when the United States experienced a depression in the 1890s. The second boom lasted from 1898 to 1915.<sup>52</sup> During this period some 250,000 later-day pioneers entered the state.<sup>53</sup> The Drift Prairie, and the Missouri Plateau became settled in this era. Also, North Dakota's older cities increased in size, but the most spectacular increases were in the newer cities, Devils Lake, Minot, and Williston. This was a time of growth and prosperity.

North Dakota's population booms created immediate problems in education. One problem was the insufficient knowledge of the English language. Many of the settlers came directly from Norway, Canada, Germany, England, Ireland, Sweden and Russia. By 1890 the foreign-born made up 43 percent of the population: they and the children of foreign parentage born in the United States made up 69 percent of the state's population. In 1920 about one out of six were foreign-born: 38,190 were born in Norway, 26,617 in Russia, 14,017 in Canada (mostly Scots), 11,960 in Germany, and 10,543 in Sweden.<sup>55</sup> Also, the immigrants had different attitudes toward the value of education. For instance, Norwegians placed greater value on education than the German Russians.<sup>56</sup>

School enrollment grew rapidly in North Dakota but declined after the children of the population booms finished their elementary and secondary education. School enrollment was 77,686 in 1900, 138,802 in 1910, and 168,446 in 1920.<sup>57</sup> Enrollment peaked in 1924 when 174,797 students were registered but declined steadily until 1948 with an enrollment of 112,629. The baby boom of the post World War II era reversed this trend until 1968.<sup>58</sup>

Country schools were important in the growth and development of North Dakota. While most of the early schools were constructed of wood, some were constructed of stone, sod, or logs. Standardization was established by 1915, and the white framed one-room school was duplicated in every township of the state until the end of World War II. Usually, they were white, framed, one-room schools within walking distance of the family farm. A potbellied stove occupied the center of the building and patented, store-bought desks stretched in rows in front of the teacher's desk. Beside the school, a barn and outhouses existed on the schoolgrounds. They were poorly equipped, poorly lighted, and ill-ventilated.<sup>59</sup> However, not much difference existed in the condition of the one-room schoolhouses throughout the Great Plains. By 1915 North Dakota had 5,150 one-teacher schools, 4,336 in 1929, 3,655 in 1939, 2,580 in 1949.<sup>60</sup> This declining trend indicated that the age of the country school was over. Yet they

were still in use and being built into the 1950s. Ironically, the symbol of progress on the prairie landscape of North Dakota became a symbol of backwardness.

School revenue came from two primary sources, state and county funds and the local school district taxes. From 1930 to 1945, the total receipts for education each year were less than the total in 1929.<sup>61</sup> In 1929 the total taxable assessed valuation of property in school districts reached \$945,896,702.00 but dropped to \$455,012,062.00 by 1945.<sup>62</sup> During difficult times, local property taxes declined. This pointed out the need for a more reliable source of income.

An eight-grade school district could no longer provide children with an adequate education. The importance of a twelve-grade school district became vital because of new demands and challenges. There were too many eight-grade school districts in North Dakota. Time and progress changed the usefulness of the original dual school organization system. Also, the needs of educational services changed from teaching the "three Rs" to vocational education. School reorganization was concerned with the financial and administrative inadequacies of small school districts along with curriculum equalization and improvement. However, reform for the financial inadequacy of small school districts was first attempted through a cost-equalization method. Thus, in North Dakota an

equalization movement preceded the school-reorganization revolution.<sup>63</sup> Education is a state responsibility, but the financial burden of education rested on local school districts and their property taxes. This source of revenue proved to be impractical and unpredictable because of North Dakota's dependence on agriculture.

The Passage of North Dakota's School  
Reorganization Law

In 1946 after a very thorough investigation of what had been accomplished in other states, a Legislative Research Committee of the North Dakota Education Association prepared a tentative draft of the school reorganization law for North Dakota. Its purpose was to set up the instrument for the formation of new school districts and the alteration of the boundaries of established school districts in order to provide:

(1) a more nearly equalized educational opportunity for pupils of the common schools, (2) a higher degree of uniformity of school tax rates among districts, (3) the wiser use of public funds expended for the support of the common school system.<sup>64</sup>

In early November 1946 the combined Legislative Committees of the North Dakota Education Association, the North Dakota Congress of Parents and Teachers, and the State School Officers Association, together with representatives of the State Department of Public Instruction, worked out a joint legislative program which included the school district reorganization bill. Representatives

from this delegation presented the program to the Interim Committee of the State Legislature at its late November 1946 meeting.

The Interim Committee introduced the school district reorganization bill to the Thirtieth Legislative Assembly. Similar to the reorganization law passed in the state of Washington in 1941, the bill contained parts of the Kansas school district reorganization law of 1945.

According to the Legislative Research Committee's report that it presented to the legislature;

Due to the inadequacy of the existing school structure in North Dakota as is readily recognizable by small units, inadequately financed operating schools and by still larger units and their inability to raise sufficient operating funds by taxation and through the state aid program, reorganization of school districts under this Act (House Bill 43--School District Reorganization) would provide a more equalized educational opportunity for pupils of the common schools, a higher degree of uniformity of school tax rate among districts and a wiser use of public funds expended for the support of the common school systems.

It is essential that the present excessive number of small administrative units be reduced and that a more effective district be created, not simply for greater economy of operation, but for greater service to the children and adults of North Dakota.<sup>65</sup>

On March 15, 1947 North Dakota's first school-district reorganization bill became law.<sup>66</sup>

#### North Dakota's Public Schools in 1947

When the school district reorganization law was passed in 1947, North Dakota had 2,271 school districts.

The number of school districts varied greatly from county to county. For example, Walsh County had 121 districts while Sioux County had only fourteen districts.<sup>67</sup>

There was also a variance in the size of the different school districts. It took much more effort on the part of some districts to provide educational facilities than it did for others.

The total number of public elementary and secondary schools in session in North Dakota in 1947 was 3,501, but there were also 1,689 schoolhouses not being utilized. There were 2,848 one-room, one-teacher schools in operation. The number of fully accredited schools and minor-accredited high schools totaled respectively, 173 and 74. Also, by program classification there were 111 consolidated four-year high schools: nine three-year high schools and fifty-five two-year high schools. Furthermore, there were 231 graded elementary schools (graded schools had two or more teachers). The value of school buildings and equipment totaled \$41,370,309.94 in 1947.<sup>68</sup>

The Department of Public Instruction rates North Dakota's public schools. Fully accredited schools have four high school teachers, three grade teachers, and a minimum average daily attendance of forty-five students. Minor accredited schools have three high school teachers, two grade teachers, and a minimum high school enrollment



of twenty-five. Some of the different standards between fully and minor accredited schools included, respectively, adequate gymnasium instead of a room for health and physical education, laboratory facilities and courses for three sciences in place of two science facilities with one science course each year, and annual courses for all required subjects in contrast to a schedule offering of only one-half of the required subjects. Consolidated four-year high schools needed a minimum of two high school teachers and two grade teachers. They had a minimum high school enrollment of twenty, an adequate room for work in health and physical education, two science laboratory facilities and the teaching of one science class each year, and one-half of the required subjects taught each year.<sup>69</sup>

Secondary teachers were required to have a first grade professional certificate--issued on a degree which had to include at least sixteen semester hours in education, including three or more semester hours in student teaching. Usually, elementary teachers had a second grade professional certificate--issued to a graduate of a two-year teacher training course which implied the required sixteen semester hours in professional courses in education which had to include three semester hours or more of student teaching. Also, the state issued a first grade elementary certificate--issued to a graduate

of the one-year teacher training course which included student teaching. These initial certificates were valid for three years, but teachers could obtain a life professional certificate after eighteen months of successful teaching in North Dakota after receiving the initial professional certificate.<sup>70</sup>

There were 113,284 pupils enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools in North Dakota in 1947. Enrollment of children at the elementary grade level was calculated to be 85,923, and the number of high school students reached 27,361. But further analysis of the enrollment figures illustrates the inequalities of educational opportunities. There were 78,864 students enrolled in grade schools located in town, but 31,517 students still attended one-room schools with teachers who had the least experience in teaching. Also, 2,903 students attended graded open country schools.<sup>71</sup>

The primary responsibility of educating children rests with teachers. In North Dakota in 1947 the total number of teaching positions was 6,481. North Dakota's salaries on the national level ranked high among the lowest paid. The average annual salary for all teachers was \$1,573.39. However, the salary average for town graded schoolteachers was \$1,832.97, while it was only \$1,434.08 for open country graded schoolteachers. But one-room school teachers received only \$1,175.00.<sup>72</sup>

Salaries for teachers in the fall of 1947 were contracted with local school boards in February or March of 1946. Postwar inflation drastically reduced the purchasing power of teachers' income. At this time the approximate ratio of teachers and school board officers was two to one in favor of the school boards, another problem.<sup>73</sup>

General fund receipts for North Dakota's public elementary and secondary schools in 1947 came from two major sources--local district taxes and state-county aid. State and county aid programs included state apportionment, state equalization, and county tuition funds. Local district taxes supplied sixty-two percent of the funding, and twenty-eight percent came from state-county aid. Total receipts from all revenue sources amounted to \$15,664,887.72, but total expenditures were calculated at \$16,380,901.31. However, the overall balance was \$2,220,218.37. The average cost per pupil was figured at \$137.74 in 1947.<sup>74</sup>

#### Sargent County's Public Schools in 1947

Twenty-nine school districts operated in Sargent County in 1947. Sargent County had "township," "district," and a "special" school district systems of organization. Fifteen districts had only elementary schools. Twelve of the school districts had both elementary and secondary schools, but two districts had no schools in

session. The size of the districts varied from less than two sections to forty sections of land. However, sixteen of the districts were exactly the size of a township.<sup>75</sup>

In 1947 Sargent County had seventy-eight schoolhouses, but of these only forty-five schools were in operation. The number of one-room schools in the county totaled sixty-five with thirty-two still in operation. In the postwar years Sargent County went through the process of rural electrification, but still twenty-six schools had no electricity. Eight schools had a gymnasium for their students. However, all the schools had playground equipment for their pupils. A number of schools were without an adequate water supply.<sup>76</sup>

Educational opportunities differed for the elementary and secondary students of Sargent County. Forman, Milnor, Cogswell, and Havana had a fully accredited four-year high school rating. Gwinner's high school had a minor accredited rating. Brampton, DeLamere, Geneseo, Stirum, and Rutland had consolidated programs, while Crete and Cayuga had two-year high school programs. The parents in five school districts had to pay for their children's textbooks, but twenty-one other school districts furnished free textbooks. Books in the libraries varied greatly from one district to the next.<sup>77</sup>

Enrollment for Sargent County students in 1947 was calculated at 1,731 pupils. The number of elementary

students was 1,268 and the number of secondary students was 463. Students located in town graded schools totaled 1,285 but 397 students attended one-room schools. Also, forty-nine pupils went to a graded open country school near Rutland.<sup>78</sup>

In 1947 Sargent County had eighty-five female teachers and twenty-two male teachers. Although the county had forty-four teachers with more than nine years of teaching experience, it also had forty-four teachers with less than five years of experience. Salaries for Sargent County teachers were about the same as for the rest of North Dakota's teachers. The lowest salaries were paid to the teachers of the one-room schools, and the highest paid teachers were town graded schoolteachers. Teachers of the one-room schools average monthly salary was \$122.29, but town graded schoolteachers received \$186.09. Also, town graded schoolteachers' salaries varied greatly from district to district. For instance, Crete's teachers received an average monthly salary of \$146.66, but Gwinner's teachers received \$212.66. However, the biggest difference in teachers' salaries was between male and female teachers. The average monthly salary for male teachers was \$248.06 and only \$158.03 for female teachers.<sup>79</sup>

The cost of Sargent County's public elementary and secondary schools for the 1947 school year (beginning

July 1, 1946, and ending June 30, 1947) came to \$245,706.43, but grand total receipts amounted to \$366,926.27. After expenses Sargent County school districts had a cash balance of \$116,376.21, which included Certificates of Deposit and United States War Bonds. The largest single source of revenue came from taxes levied by the school board, amounting to \$159,927.66. State apportionment and state equalization funds were calculated to be \$61,256.58. County apportionment funds amounted to \$11,695.10. The average tax rate in mills for all of the districts was 20.67. However, the tax rate for districts with high schools was thirty-three.<sup>80</sup> (For a summary of the data, see Table 2.)

#### School District Reorganization Obstacles

North Dakota's school reorganization law put the burden of reorganization at the local level, but most states avoided the use of compulsory methods of reorganization. School reorganization conflicts became highly emotional because of community pride, local prejudices, and personalities of the people. The State Reorganization Committee and the County Reorganization Committee were responsible for the legalistic details of the reorganization plans, but the local school boards were the ones who worked out the plans. Early reorganization plans usually involved too small an area and were community proposals. A public education campaign on the

TABLE 2

A SUMMARY OF SARGENT COUNTY'S AND NORTH DAKOTA'S PUBLIC  
SCHOOLS' FACILITIES AND FINANCES, 1947

	Sargent County	North Dakota
Total School Districts	29	2,271
Schools in Session	45	3,501
Abandoned Schools	33	1,689
One-room School Operations	32	2,848
Fully-accredited High Schools	4	173
Minor-accredited High Schools	1	74
Four-year Consolidated High Schools	5	111
Three-year High Schools	0	9
Two-year High Schools	2	55
Elementary Enrollment	1,731	113,284
Secondary Enrollment	463	27,361
Enrollment in Town Grade Schools	1,285	78,864
Enrollment in One-room Schools	397	31,517
Teaching Positions	107	6,481
Average Annual Salary for All Teachers	\$1,575.01	\$1,573.39
Average Annual Salary for Town Graded Schools	\$1,674.81	\$1,832.97
Average Annual Salary for Open Country Schools	\$1,710.00	\$1,434.08
Average Annual Salary for One-room Schools	\$1,100.61	\$1,175.00
Average Amount Per Pupil Enrolled	\$ 172.89	\$ 137.74

merits of school reorganization preceded reorganization. Year after year, state and local educational leaders repeated their message.

The school reorganization law had many good features, but it gave no aid for the transportation of pupils, set no minimum standards for the new districts, and left the economic burden of education at the local level. A later amendment attached to the reorganization law of 1947 almost stopped the reorganization movement in 1951.<sup>81</sup> This amendment required a favorable majority vote in each component district of a reorganization plan instead of a majority vote of the incorporated area and the rural area within the proposed new district. However, in 1957 another amendment was attached to the reorganization law which was similar to the 1947 voting procedure. The procedural process was long and complicated. At times similar and conflicting petitions were circulated in the same area. On some petitions the boundary lines were jagged when farmers disagreed over where to send their children to school.

The horse and buggy was the major mode of transportation when the majority of the school districts were organized in North Dakota. The automobile had an influential impact on the social and economic development of the state. With improved transportation systems the small school district's usefulness dwindled. But roads



and highways needed to be built prior to reorganization. School reorganization required an effective road building program, especially farm to market roads.

Fear and pride became strong obstacles to school reorganization. Some fears included: (1) a fear of deterioration of the local community, (2) a fear of closing local schools, (3) a fear of loss of local control, (4) a fear of tax increases and bond issues. Also, being an elected official was prestigious, and many school board members wanted to remain school board members.

The school reorganization movement was concerned with the financial and administrative inadequacies of the small school districts. But there were some economic advantages for some school districts. For instance, school districts with no high schools had low taxes. There were no incentives for the numerous eight-grade school districts to have high schools since they could send their high school students to a nearby twelve-grade district and avoid the cost of their education. However, the passage of the non-resident high school tuition law in 1957 stopped this practice.

School reorganization in North Dakota faced numerous obstacles. An important part in the heritage of any community is their school. Many communities rallied around their schools when they were threatened. State and local educational leaders pushed the merits of

reorganization throughout the years. The reorganization law had many good features, but lacked transportation aid for reorganized districts. Eight-grade school districts had lower taxes than twelve-grade school districts. Transportation, a key to reorganization, delayed the process as the state built new highways and farm to market roads. Fear and pride hampered reorganization.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>North Dakota, Department of Public Instruction, Ninth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (Bismarck: 1906), pp. 27-28.

<sup>2</sup>Robert P. Wilkins and Wynona Wilkins, North Dakota: A Bicentennial History (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1977), p. 7.

<sup>3</sup>Bernt Lloyd Wills, North Dakota: The Northern Prairie State (Ann Arbor: Edwards Brothers, Inc., 1963), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 31-32.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 46-56.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 15-22.

<sup>7</sup>Melvin E. Kazeck, North Dakota: A Human and Economic Geography (Fargo: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1956), p. 39.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>9</sup>Wills, Northern Prairie State, p. 116.

<sup>10</sup>John C. Hudson, Plains County Towns (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p. ix.

<sup>11</sup>Kazeck, A Human and Economic Geography, pp. 77-90.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 90-99.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>14</sup>Wills, Northern Prairie State, p. 116.

<sup>15</sup>North Dakota, Department of State, North Dakota Blue Book: 1981 (Bismarck: 1981), p. 369.

<sup>16</sup>Kazeck, A Human and Economic Geography, p. 179.

<sup>17</sup>Elwyn B. Robinson, History of North Dakota (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), pp. 186-196.

<sup>18</sup>Kazeck, A Human and Economic Geography, pp. 121-149.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 135-140.

<sup>20</sup>North Dakota, Blue Book: 1981, pp. 368-375.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>22</sup>F. Z. Hutton, Soil Survey of Sargent County, North Dakota. Bureau of Soils, U.S. Department of Agriculture (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1920), p. 5.

<sup>23</sup>Edward B. Espenshade, Jr., ed., Rand McNally Goode's World Atlas, 16th edition (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1982), pp. 18-19.

<sup>24</sup>Hutton, Soil Survey, p. 17.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>26</sup>S. [Snorri] Thorfinnson, Sargent County History (n.p. Sargent County Commissioners, 1976), p. 42.

<sup>27</sup>Hudson, Plains County Towns, p. ix.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Vera Kelsey, Red River Runs North (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1951), p. 1.

<sup>31</sup>Mary Ann Barnes Williams, Origins of North Dakota Place Names (Washburn, N.D.: By the Author, 1966), pp. 274-82.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 276.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 275-79.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., pp. 275-80.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 275-81.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 274-78.

<sup>37</sup>U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census of the United States with Supplement for North Dakota, 1910: Population, p. 584.

<sup>38</sup>North Dakota, Blue Book: 1981, pp. 368-73.

<sup>39</sup>U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. Census of Population: General Social and Economic Characteristics, 1970, pt. 36, North Dakota, p. 114.

<sup>40</sup>Alvin W. Ollenburger, "A Proposed Reorganization of School Districts in Sargent County" (M.S. thesis, University of North Dakota, 1957), p. 23.

<sup>41</sup>U.S. Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Census, 1974 Census of Agriculture: 1977 vol. 1, North Dakota State and County Data, pt. 34, North Dakota, p. II-1.

<sup>42</sup>Sargent County News (Forman, ND) 5 June 1952, pp. 1, 8.

<sup>43</sup>Sargent County Teller (Milnor, ND) 20 March 1987, p. 1.

<sup>44</sup>Thorfinnson, Sargent County History, pp. 7-8.

<sup>45</sup>Robinson, History of North Dakota, pp. vii, 155.

<sup>46</sup>North Dakota, Department of Public Instruction, Twenty-Second Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, "A Brief History of the Department of Public Instruction: 1860-1932," by Bertha R. Palmer (Bismarck, 1932: reprint, Bismarck: by Bertha R. Palmer, n.d.), pp. 19-20. (Page references are to reprint edition.)

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., pp. 19-20.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Robinson, History of North Dakota, p. 135.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 236.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>55</sup>U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920: Population, vol. 3, p. 755.

<sup>56</sup>Robinson, History of North Dakota, p. 300.

<sup>57</sup>Palmer, A Brief History, p. 43.

<sup>58</sup>North Dakota, Department of Public Instruction, Forty-Second Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (Bismarck: 1978), p. 141.

<sup>59</sup>Country School Legacy: Humanities On the Frontier (Silt, Colo.: Country School Legacy, Mountain Plains Library Association, 1981), pp. 10-14.

<sup>60</sup>North Dakota, Department of Public Instruction, Thirty-First Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (Bismarck: 1951), p. 72.

<sup>61</sup>North Dakota, Department of Public Instruction, Thirty-Sixty Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (Bismarck: 1960), p. 147.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>63</sup>Robinson, History of North Dakota, pp. 486-87.

<sup>64</sup>Paul A. Agneberg, "Proposed Reorganization Legislation," North Dakota Teacher 25 (October, 1946), 13.

<sup>65</sup>North Dakota, Legislative Research Committee, House Bill--School District Reorganization. "Report to the Thirtieth Legislative Assembly of the State of North Dakota." (Bismarck, 1946), p. 6.

<sup>66</sup>North Dakota, Department of State, 1947 Supplement to the North Dakota Revised Code of 1943 (Bismarck: 1947), p. 157.

<sup>67</sup>North Dakota, Department of Public Instruction, Thirtieth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (Bismarck: 1948), p. 102.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>69</sup>Royal Williard Goheen, "Laws and Regulations Governing the Schools of North Dakota" (M.S. thesis, University of North Dakota, 1955, pp. 7-12).

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., pp. 41-42.

<sup>71</sup>North Dakota, Thirtieth Biennial Report, p. 65.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Bismarck Tribune, 20 March 1947, p. 8.

<sup>74</sup>North Dakota, Thirtieth Biennial Report, pp. 65-66.

<sup>75</sup>Sargent County, Forman, ND. Annual Report of the County Superintendent, Beginning 1 July, 1946 and Ending 30 June, 1947, p. 2.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., pp. 2, 7.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., pp. 2-11.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., pp. 3-5.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., pp. 3-11.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., pp. 14-20.

<sup>81</sup>Robinson, History of North Dakota, p. 468.



## CHAPTER II

### NORTH DAKOTA'S SCHOOL PROBLEMS AND REFORMS TO 1970

#### Introduction

Catholics and Protestants operated the schools in the region during the period of the fur trade.<sup>1</sup> White settlers reached the Red River Valley in the 1870s. Soon after their arrival schoolhouses appeared on the prairie. With the booming influx of foreign immigrants, the primary teaching responsibility of early teachers was the English language. Furthermore, schools as well as churches became important social centers. The County Superintendents of Schools were the first leaders in education and under their directions school districts were established. In the beginning local residents financed and controlled school operations. Country schools were symbols of progress on the prairie landscape of North Dakota and aided in the growth and development of the state. While small school districts were appropriate in the days of the horse and buggy, the invention of the automobile changed the mode of transportation. Schools within walking distance of its students became less important. As the years passed the financial and

administrative inadequacies of the small school districts system became apparent and required change. The 1947 school reorganization law was the first since statehood.

Neil Macdonald and other leaders recognized the weakness in the rural schools of the state and advocated reforms. The process of educational reform spanned decades because corrective measures were often short-term solutions to impending problems. North Dakota's school problems remained the same throughout its history. In 1921 educational leaders started a campaign describing the merits of education and the needs of the local schools to the attention of the public. They published a journal, The Associated Teacher of North Dakota. Reforms in education came about as the members of the teaching profession became organized and politically stronger. Furthermore farm depression, the rural exodus of population, and the automobile revolution of the 1920s started readjustments in North Dakota. The Great Depression and the drought of the Thirties, and World War II changed rural North Dakota even more. Reform meant better teachers, higher accreditation standards for schools and teachers, and consolidation of schools and districts. Local property taxes became insufficient in the postwar era and reform also meant more state and federal aid. Although community pride suffered in many small towns, school reorganization has strengthened North Dakota's public schools.

Frontier Education: The Arrival of the  
Little Country School

On March 2, 1861, President Buchanan signed the bill creating Dakota Territory. President Lincoln appointed the first territorial officials in April of 1861. The first provision for public schools in the territory was "An act for the Legislative and Support of Common Schools" passed by the first Legislative Assembly and approved May 13, 1862. The county superintendent of public instruction was to be appointed by the board of county commissioners, and the board also was required to divide the county into districts. There were no organized school districts, no school-tax levies, and no school money collected prior to December of 1864, so James S. Foster, ex-officio territorial Superintendent of Public Instruction, in the first annual report, had "no official doings to report." In 1871 it was the duty of the territorial superintendent to select the textbooks for the common schools of the territory and publish the names in the territorial newspapers. In 1883 it required the organization of school townships, with approval of the county commissioners, and abolished school districts in all but eighteen of the older counties. School districts of Cass, Grand Forks, Walsh, Pembina, and Barnes counties remained intact. F. W. Cathro, who served as Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction for the two first

state administrations, 1889 to 1892, wrote, "The so-called Territorial school system was entirely devoid of system."<sup>2</sup>

There was little formal education on the frontier during the period of the fur trade. Pembina had the distinction of being the first community in the Red River Valley to have Catholic missionary schools, one private and one public. Here, William Edge, who helped build a log cabin that served as a schoolhouse started teaching in 1818. The first public school in the Dakota Territory was at Bon Homme in 1860. A public school was organized in Pembina in 1871, and its classes were held in any available building until a schoolhouse was built in 1876. Fargo had its first school session in the summer of 1872 and its early schools were financed by local subscription.<sup>3</sup>

Two philosophies concerning education existed on the frontier. One cherished education while the second opinion deemed it less important. For instance, a pioneer settler in a memorial address stated:

Think not that the tar-papered shack or the sod house had no expression of culture. . . . I have seen the rude school with no equipment, with no transportation except what each furnished for himself; where there were no special grades but a patient desire to learn.

"Farming was a greater purpose in the calculations of the settlers than book learning," observed another. Although people who arrived on the northern prairie had differing

attitudes regarding education, little country schools were built in great numbers.<sup>4</sup>

Some early schools were nothing more than a place of shelter. For example, Ida Hall Crofford described the first schoolhouse in Jamestown in 1874:

The school in which I taught for four months was a mere shed. . . . The roof did not leak, but the sides were not even battend, and there were wide cracks. . . . There was no chair for the teacher and the desks for the students were full length boards and so high the younger pupils used to rest their chins on them. . . . I gathered up the books and put them in a box at night, covering them to keep them dry in case of rain. . . . They were all good children and very glad to have a school. We certainly had a good time.<sup>5</sup>

Schools were usually located within one to three miles from most farm houses. If a community had no schoolhouse, it used available buildings such as abandoned farm houses, discarded railroad section houses, and claim shanties. Wood sheds were built near schools, and the local residents supplied fuel. The children or their mothers kept the schoolhouses clean on regular "scrub days," usually once a month. Each student brought water or the older boys carried water from the nearest farm.

Most frontier teachers were males. Professional teaching requirements were minimal and often required only passage of an eighth-grade examination and a teachers' examination. Professional training was less than eight weeks. In many cases the more educated farmers would take the teachers' examination and teach school. A pioneer settler observed:

The lady teacher would find herself surrounded by a huge rough crowd of all ages, some perhaps, even in their 30's and 40's, newcomers and native hermits all mixed together. Discipline could often vanish to allow a free-for-all fist fight, or mean tricks, of many hues, such as when a boy would get a ladder, climb the roof with a lid and seat himself on the chimney and smoke out the whole crowd, including the delicate, "citi-fied schoolma'm." . . . There was a time when the frontier was inclined to produce an army of naughty boys, who were always master minds at figuring out new tricks and ways to derail school routine.<sup>6</sup>

During the territorial period the accomplishments of one individual affected the growth and development of public education. William Henry Harrison Beadle, territorial Superintendent of Public Instruction from 1879 to 1885, devised a financial plan with guarantees for the support of the common schools. It was incorporated into the Enabling Act of February 22, 1889, the Omnibus Bill that authorized statehood for North and South Dakota, Montana, and Washington. The origin of the school land system had its beginnings in 1785 when Congress passed a statute devoting section 16 in each township "for the maintenance of public schools within the said township."<sup>7</sup> Aware of "school-land" corruptions in the past, Beadle doubled the amount of public lands, set selling conditions, and guaranteed the proceeds from impairment or loss by writing strict provisions.

Sections 10 and 11 read as follows:

That upon the admission of each said states into the union, sections numbered sixteen and

thirty-six in every township of said proposed states . . . are hereby granted to said states for the support of common schools. . . . That all lands granted by this act shall be disposed of only at public sale after advertising--tillable lands capable of producing agricultural crops for not less than \$10 per acre and lands principally valuable for grazing purposes for not less than \$5 per acre. . . . The proceeds from the sale and other permanent disposition of any of the said lands and from every part thereof, shall constitute permanent funds for the support and maintenance of the public schools and the various state institutions for which the lands have been granted. . . .<sup>8</sup>

#### Education: A State Responsibility

North Dakota achieved statehood on November 2, 1889. John Miller, the first governor, called the Legislative Assembly to session on November 19, 1889. In compliance with the Enabling Act, the first Legislature passed laws that established a uniform system of free public schools, the leasing and the sale of school lands, and educational institutions at various sites in North Dakota. Since education was a traditional state function, the framers of North Dakota's Constitution, adopted October 1, 1889, assigned the state legislature this responsibility.

Three provisions in North Dakota's Constitution concerned elementary and secondary education. According to Section 1, 2, and 4 of Article Eight on Education,

A high degree of intelligence, patriotism, integrity and morality on the part of every voter in a government by the people being necessary in order to insure the continuance of that government and the prosperity and the happiness of the people, the legislative assembly shall make

provisions for the establishment and maintenance of a system of public schools which shall be open to all children of the state of North Dakota and free from sectarian control. . . .

The legislative assembly shall provide for a uniform system of free public schools throughout the state, and beginning with the primary and extending through all grades up to and including higher education, except that the legislative assembly may authorize tuition, . . . in the financing of public schools of higher education.

The legislative assembly shall take such steps as may be necessary to prevent illiteracy, secure a reasonable degree of uniformity in course of study, and to promote industrial, scientific, and agricultural improvements.<sup>6</sup>

The state had the legal responsibility for the establishment and maintenance of a free public elementary and secondary school system. The people of the state delegated the legislative assembly with the task of providing equal educational opportunities and promoting "industrial, scientific, and agricultural improvements." However, much authority was delegated to the local governments. For example, local school officers hired teachers, set the length of the school term, and enforced school laws. Local governments assumed the financial burden of education.

On March 20, 1890, John Miller signed a bill giving North Dakota a uniform system of free elementary and secondary public education. Prior to its passage there was a great deal of controversy over the size of a school district. Since territorial legislation authorized the usage of the "township" and the "district" school district



systems, William Mitchell, the first state Superintendent of Public Instruction, was responsible for establishing a uniform school district system. He decided on the township method but allowed the existing school districts to remain intact. This decision pleased the people in the heavily populated counties, especially Cass and Grand Forks.<sup>10</sup>

In 1890 North Dakota had a population of 190,983 (94 percent rural) and 951 school districts, 1,479 schools in session, and employed 1,674 teachers. There were 29,904 pupils enrolled with an attendance rate of 74 percent. The number of days in the school year totaled ninety. The amount of taxes levied was \$477,561 and the total expenditures were \$780,161. Total assessed valuation was \$88,896,291.<sup>11</sup> There were high schools in the state, but teaching the "Three R's" and the English language in grades 1-8 was the norm.

School Problems and Reforms in the  
Settlement Era: 1890 to 1920

The settlement of North Dakota was completed by a second boom which began in 1898 and continued until World War I. From 1898 to 1915 some 250,000 latter-day pioneers entered the state. However, after 1915, the population movement turned outward, away from North Dakota. At this point according to Professor Elwyn B. Robinson, a new era began in North Dakota's history.<sup>12</sup>

This rapid influx of people, especially large numbers of foreign immigrants, affected education in North Dakota. The pattern of settlement tended toward small farms and towns. There was a direct relationship between farms and school district increases. In 1900 the number of farms in the state reached 45,332, and the number of school districts totaled 1,434. In 1910 the number of farms had increased to 74,360 while the number of school districts had risen to 1,904. By 1920 there were 77,690 farms in the state and 2,160 school districts. Schoolhouses increased from 2,611 in 1900 to 5,139 in 1920.<sup>13</sup> (For more information, see Table 3.)

Settlers with different cultural backgrounds took up residency in North Dakota. Food and shelter were the first concerns of the settlers. After these needs were taken care of, their attention shifted to schools and churches. Yet, there were no schools in Bowman, Dunn, Hettinger and Adams counties in 1904.<sup>14</sup>

The first priority of a school district was to educate their children. One-room schoolhouses were the most practical to build and finance. The County Superintendents of Schools and the County Commissioners established school districts after receiving a valid petition for organization by concerned citizens.

The county superintendents were the most important educational leaders at the local level. They made key

TABLE 3

A COMPARISON OF NORTH DAKOTA'S POPULATION DATA, AND  
NUMBER OF FARMS AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS, 1890 TO 1970

Year	State	Urban	Population Rural Non-Farm	Rural Farm	Farms	School Districts
1890	154,074				27,611	951
1900	319,146	23,413	295,733 <sup>a</sup>		45,332	1,434
1910	577,056	63,236	513,820 <sup>a</sup>		74,360	1,904
1920	646,872	88,239	558,683 <sup>a</sup>		77,690	2,160
1930	680,845	113,306	170,668	396,871	77,975	2,228
1940	631,935	131,440	179,065	320,959	73,962	2,272
1950	619,636	164,817	200,332	254,487	65,401	2,250
1960	632,446	222,708	205,340	110,185	54,928 <sup>b</sup>	1,351
1970	617,761	273,359	191,654	152,748	46,381 <sup>c</sup>	435

<sup>a</sup>Information not available

<sup>b</sup>Data for 1959

<sup>c</sup>Data for 1969

decisions, enforced educational laws, and gathered and reported county information to the State Department of Public Instruction.

One of the major problems during the settlement era was the limited supply of teachers. The number of teachers could not keep up with the rapid population growth. Walter L. Stockwell, State Superintendent of Public Instruction from 1903 to 1910, described this problem in 1904 when he wrote:

Our state has felt the shortage in its supply of teachers quite as severely as any state. We have not, as yet, a teaching body which we can call our own. We must depend upon those who come to us from other states; some from a desire to see the west; some attracted by the free lands; some because of higher wages, and others possibly because they found themselves no longer able to maintain the pace. The fact of a constantly shifting corps of teachers makes the work of supervision doubly hard.<sup>15</sup>

During the settlement era the teacher shortage became worse year after year as the population increased dramatically. Neil C. Macdonald, state Superintendent of Public Instruction from 1917-1918, believed that the greatest single educational need in North Dakota since statehood was having well trained teachers for the one-room rural school. He wrote:

In North Dakota we need in the one-room rural schools at least 1,500 new teachers each year. There ought to be teachers with at least four years above the eight grade including some professional training or experience. From where shall we get these? The normal schools are graduating in the neighborhood of 450 each

year, of which less than ten percent are going in the one-year rural school.<sup>16</sup>

North Dakota's Department of Public Instruction recognized that the state needed better teachers, but it could do very little to correct this problem. It basically served as a collection point of county data; it made recommendations for the improvement of education and carried on a public battle for the betterment of education. But it had no legislative powers and very little control at the local level. It could not change the laws that dealt with public school taxation. After 1901 the certification of teachers was moved from the office of the county superintendent to the state department of public instruction.<sup>17</sup> Through the reform efforts of J. M. Devine, Walter L. Stockwell, Edwin J. Taylor, and Neil C. Macdonald, state superintendents of public instruction from 1901 to 1918, changes occurred in the standards for teaching certificates and the type issued. Their reform efforts for tougher educational standards were hampered because counties could issue a permit that allowed a person to teach without a certificate. They took a comprehensive approach to the educational problems of the state. For betterment they recommended consolidation and standardization of rural schools. After consolidation, the local school boards could replace the poorly trained teachers with better trained

teachers. Also, their recommendations led to improvements in the curriculum of the teacher colleges in the state.

North Dakota's rural schools were another problem. The quality of education between town and country was extreme. The large number of rural one-room schools and their attendance rate suggested little return for the amount spent on education. North Dakota's school laws at the turn of the century implied that a school could be organized and a schoolhouse built when a petition was signed on behalf of nine persons of school age living two and one-half miles from the nearest school. Also, a new district could be organized for twelve persons of school age living two and one-half miles from an established school if it met the \$20,000 assessed valuation requirement. In 1912 North Dakota had 126 schools with an attendance average of four pupils per school, 160 had five, 211 had six, 284 had seven, 303 had eight, 210 had nine, and 367 had ten, making 40 percent of the state's schools with an average attendance of ten pupils or less.<sup>18</sup> Professor Robinson's theme of "too much" becomes evident.

By the time of the reorganization law of 1947 the idea of school consolidation was old. One of the first consolidated schools in the state was in Grand Forks County (Logan Center District) in 1904. The North Dakota Educational Association went on record favoring school

consolidation in December of 1905. A school consolidation law was passed in 1905 and revised in 1911 with other provisions for consolidating school districts and establishing partnership districts.<sup>19</sup> The laws of 1911 created the position of rural and graded school inspector and made it the inspector's duty to promote consolidation. Also, state aid was to go to standard rural and graded schools.<sup>20</sup> However, the first movement for reorganization centered around country school consolidation, and the second movement after the reorganization law of 1947 included town and district consolidation.

The weakest link in North Dakota's educational system was the rural one-room school. State educational leaders mentioned this fact often. Consolidation and standardization improved the situation somewhat. Devine wrote, in 1902, "The rural schools should, and must, receive far greater attention in the future. . . ." "There is no good reason why the rural school district under consolidation, with a school centrally located, should not have as good facilities for secondary education as most favored cities of the state."<sup>21</sup> Stockwell, in 1906, reported that,

One of the weak points in our educational system is the lack of a proper standard for education. The fact that there are 1,500 distinct school organizations in this state means that we have as many standards. This . . . is a serious condition . . . let the state fix a

standard, and then let every school come up to this standard.<sup>22</sup>

By 1911, Joseph Kennedy, Dean of the Teachers College at the University of North Dakota, believed that "consolidation of schools, so called, is a means to an end. The end, or aim, is the efficient education of children in the rural sections of the county." George A. McFarland, President of the State Normal School at Valley City in 1912, stated, "consolidation solves many problems of rural education in a state like North Dakota."<sup>23</sup>

But actions spoke louder than words. Appointed by State Superintendent Taylor, Macdonald visited rural schools as the state inspector of rural and graded schools. He noticed something seriously wrong as soon as he stepped into a rural school--very few boys were present. In a two-month period in 1911, he visited sixty one-room schools and in the upper grades found 239 girls enrolled, in comparison to only 20 boys. Macdonald continued working at this job until he became the state superintendent in 1917. Education in North Dakota needed improvements but required something unique. He organized a special event, "Better Rural School Rallies." The rally was a week's institute for rural teachers and a one-day conference for school board members. Macdonald brought in national rural-school experts, members of the state department of education and Governor Lynn J. Frazier. Ten points were presented at the rallies:



(1) Better trained teachers; (2) Improvement in attendance; (3) Conservation of health of rural school children; (4) Extension of civic-social opportunities; (5) a wider and more intelligent use of the course of study; (6) A more equitable and adequate system of state aid; (7) The removal of the administration of rural schools further from political influence; (8) The larger and more effective co-operation of all educational forces in the state; (9) The standardization of rural schools everywhere; and (10) The consolidation of rural schools wherever feasible.

He concluded, "The Rural School Rallies proved themselves to be the most effective educational campaign ever waged in this state." More than 6,000 teachers and 6,000 school board members attended.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to the problems of a shorter school term, a poor attendance rate, and the poorly educated teachers, was the attitude toward education by many parents of children in the rural schools. North Dakota was an agricultural state and prior to mechanization, farm boys stayed home to help in the fields. For instance, German Russians, the second largest group of immigrants, came to North Dakota from 1885 to 1905 and settled in the southern and central part of the state. Joseph B. Voeller, a German Russian educator, wrote in 1940: "To this day the shortest terms, the poorest schools, the lowest teachers' salaries, the most inadequate equipment, and the most irregular attendance are found in German Russian communities."<sup>25</sup> The German Russians were indifferent to education. However, the Norwegians, the largest

group of foreign immigrants to enter the state, were not. As a group they had a high rate of literacy and appreciated the value of education.<sup>26</sup> Also, a great difference towards education existed between town and county parents. For instance, in 1917 only 30 percent of farm children finished the eighth grade, while 86 percent of the city children completed this grade; only 11 percent of the farm children of high school age did high school work, while 59 percent of this class of city children were so enrolled.<sup>27</sup>

The number of schools and school districts in North Dakota increased tremendously from 1890 to 1920. By 1920 there were 589 consolidated schools and 1,089 standardized schools.<sup>28</sup> Educational standards for teachers had been increased, and schools that met higher state standards were given aid. The length of the school year was increased, and uniform curriculum for schools was established. A 1917 law updated school consolidation statutes, and in 1919 another law required compulsory education to the age of seventeen although enforcement was difficult. But the basic school problems remained the same going into the 1920s: too many rural schools, not enough trained teachers, low salaries, little standardization, and unequal education opportunities throughout North Dakota.

School Problems and Reforms of the Twenties

North Dakota experienced great changes in the 1920s. The automobile replaced the horse and buggy, and the tractor began to replace the horse. After a few decades of prosperity many railroad towns began to decline in population and importance. The state suffered from war-time inflation of land values and an agricultural depression, while the urbanized, industrial segments of America enjoyed prosperity. Robinson observed:

Inflation nearly ruined the state. Many farmers, dazzled by high prices for farm produce, borrowed money from banks and bought land for more than it was worth. When the bubble burst land values and produce prices began a disastrous decline. In the deflation, North Dakota suffered severely. Many farmers lost their land in the 1920s; many banks failed; tenancy increased rapidly. The optimistic time of rapid settlement was over, and the state now entered a period of relative stagnation.<sup>29</sup>

Many people became discontented with farming in the 1920s and left the state. This began the rural-exodus trend in North Dakota. The largest cities grew, but rural North Dakota declined in population. In 1920 North Dakota had a population of 646,872 inhabitants. The urban population (incorporated places of more than 2,500) grew 28 percent; population of smaller towns (less than 2,500) grew 9 percent; the population of the countryside declined 0.5 percent. Eighteen of the fifty-two counties and 44 percent of the 295 towns declined in population.<sup>30</sup> There were 41 counties without an urban center. The

ratio between rural and urban was approximately six to one respectively.<sup>31</sup> The number of farms increased slightly throughout the decade to 77,975, and farm size increased by thirty acres to 496.<sup>32</sup> People in the western semi-arid part of the state suffered more than the residents in the eastern subhumid part of the state.

North Dakota's educational leaders already were advocating school consolidation. With rural population declining and the loss of vitality in many small trading centers the need for school consolidation as well as school district reorganization grew. But the time was not right. Before school district reorganization, the state experienced country school consolidations.

Between 1920 and 1930 the number of school districts in North Dakota increased slightly to 2,228. However, the total number of schools in session declined by thirty-two schools.<sup>33</sup> In 1930 the state had 5,107 schools offering instruction. The number of one-room school operations in the decade ranged between 4,566 schools in 1922 and 4,270 in 1930. During this period 779 one-room schools were built. In the Thirties rural one-room school operations decreased and only 111 were built. School enrollment peaked in 1924 with a total of 174,797. During the Twenties, North Dakota's schools handled more students than any other period in the history of the state.<sup>34</sup>

Political and professional organization are keys to reform. In November 1921, the educational leaders in North Dakota began publishing a monthly journal devoted to the educational interest in North Dakota, The Associated Teacher (changed in 1924 to North Dakota Teacher). The North Dakota Education Association (prior to 1922 called the North Dakota State Teachers Association) organized the journal. The organization became a force in the drive for the educational reform:

The purpose of this Association shall be to advance the school interests of the State, to unite the educational forces of the state, to foster proper educational ideals, to give trend to progressive educational movements, to stimulate an appreciation of the responsibilities and opportunities of the profession of teaching, to maintain for the teaching vocation its true place in the world's work, to provide for the economic welfare of its members, to promote fellowship and fraternal feelings among teachers, and to forward and protect their interests by means of instruction, conference, and united action.<sup>35</sup>

The foundation of North Dakota's educational system is its teachers. In 1920, the average monthly salary for teachers in the state was \$87.89 and \$109.87 in 1930.<sup>36</sup> Salaries from 1914 to 1922 were below the purchasing-power value of salaries of 1913.<sup>37</sup> North Dakota's legislative assembly passed a minimum salary law for teachers in 1921. However, because of wartime inflation of land values, depressed agricultural prices, and the influential lobbying effort of the North Dakota Taxpayers Association, the law was repealed in 1922. According to

the law the minimum salary for a teacher who had taught school prior to August 31, 1922, with only a high school education should receive \$720.00 for a nine-month school year. Any teacher who had a four-year college degree from an approved university was entitled to \$1,300. Also, \$50.00 would be added for each year of teaching experience (up to \$250.00) but the law applied only to approved schools in the state.<sup>38</sup> In 1920-1921 some 1,400 teachers were not even high school graduates. A 1921 law, however, required teachers to be high school graduates. A twelve-week summer school was sufficient for acquiring a teaching certificate. Two-thirds of the teachers by the end of the Twenties had less than a year of normal training.<sup>39</sup>

In 1926 an article by H. O. Pippin, a county superintendent from Dickinson, in the April issue of North Dakota Teacher, explained some of the other teaching problems:

The teaching profession is suffering more from an overdose of democracy in the organization and the administration of the schools than from any one cause. . . . For some reason we have felt in this country that the control of the school must be kept as near the people as possible and consequently the teacher has had to suffer the whims of local jealousy, pride, and hate, and we are cursed with thousands of little districts with little schoolhouses run by little school boards, and as a result, taught by little teachers who are paid a little salary (p. 22).

Pippin believed there was a lack of professional spirit in the teaching profession; some people did not value

education, and teachers needed to improve their profession and their relationship with the public.

The one-room schools in rural North Dakota flourished in the 1920s. During the decade, 779 rural schools were built. However, this was the last decade that they were built in abundance, and by 1940 there were many abandoned ones. Reform and progress continued as schools were consolidated under the 1917 school laws. Rural schools expanded the length of the school term, encouraged attendance, and improved the facilities. By 1926, 1,590 schools met state standards.<sup>40</sup> State aid for graded and consolidated rural schools improved schools. High schools increased throughout the twenties as secondary education became important. However, farm children received less education than town children because of shorter school terms.

Politics interfered with a county and state reorganization plan in 1921. The State Teachers Association introduced a bill to the state Legislature that called for a county unit system of rural school management. It was centered around the organization of a county and state school boards. Politics would be taken out of education. The bill's purpose was to equalize educational opportunities, provide better supervision, and increase the educational responsibility at the state level.

However, the bill was never reported out of the legislative committee.<sup>41</sup>

North Dakota's Supreme Court handed down a decision that slowed down rural school consolidation and weakened the compulsory attendance law. It revealed how important transportation aid would be to reorganization. The decision involved the case of Jacob Fried v. Charles McDonald in 1925. The court ruled that where a school board of a common school district offered to pay 50 cents (the highest amount allowed by law) per day per family for transporting pupils who live more than two and one-quarter miles from the school, but did not offer vehicular transportation to or actual carriage of the children, the parent or guardian of such children of school age was not subject to the penalties of the compulsory law.<sup>42</sup> No school district could hire a rig or a vehicle for 50 cents a day. Educational leaders wanted the educational laws of the state made so clear that there could be no misunderstanding as to what was intended. A key to school consolidation would be the amount of transportation aid. It would be just as crucial to school district reorganization as well as to the rural school consolidations.

A new school problem began in the 1920s. Historically, local school district taxes covered most of the cost of education along with state and county funds. The state's source of funds came from the sale or leasing of



school lands. Since statehood this permanent fund gradually had decreased, and it became apparent that a new source of revenue would be needed (proceeds from sales tax). In 1920 the tax base was on a 100 percent basis and the maximum levy, 30 mills. In 1923, the tax base was changed, despite objections from educational organizations, to 75 percent and the maximum levy 14 to 18 mills. North Dakota's educational organizations lost the battle in 1923 but won a major victory in 1924 with the defeat of the Gunderson bill, sponsored by the North Dakota Taxpayers Association to reduce property valuations from 75 to 50 percent. After revenue declined, the demands for tax equalization began appearing in educational journals and newspaper articles. Revenue for public schools came from assessed valuations, and North Dakota experienced a great variation in the assessment of property from county to county.

A county superintendent's study of the financial problems of North Dakota's school districts indicated educational opportunities varied. Harold Wakefield concluded that counties of North Dakota had not attempted to produce equal opportunities and North Dakota raised more from local sources and less from county and state sources than the medium for the entire country. A county tax for the support of education and a larger tax unit were suggested as solutions.<sup>43</sup> The tax situation

in some school districts became critical during depression periods. "Equalize the tax burden" and "equalize the educational opportunities" became the primary slogans for advocating school district reorganization.

### School Problems and Reforms of the Thirties

People who never lived through the Great Depression have a difficult time understanding the years of despair. Urban areas in the United States had high unemployment, soup lines, and shanty towns. North Dakota, with a farm population of 396,871, experienced an agricultural depression in the Twenties; the Thirties brought drought, dust storms, and the Great Depression. Professor D. Jerome Tweton of the University of North Dakota, described the plight of a typical North Dakota farm family during the depression:

By 1929 the Berg family was in trouble. Yields fell off, and prices continued downward. "In 1930 we talked about leaving the farm," he remembered, "but we couldn't. It was our life. Throughout the early Thirties we survived--but that was all. Our oldest son Paul got a job in town, and our oldest girl, Hattie, well, she got married and that helped a lot. We got government seed loans to get through 1933." By 1933 Alfred Berg was broke; his only hope was a good crop in 1934.

The drought struck. Berg had no crop. "I was sure that God had forsaken us," he cried. We had nothing and almost lost the farm. How my heart cried to see the family--nothing to eat, nothing to wear, nothing! Grasshoppers all over the place. They even started eating the house." Berg received relief funds and surplus commodities. After another total crop

failure in 1936, he went to work with the Works Progress Administration. His son Erik joined the Civilian Conservation Corps, and Emma Berg worked on a canning project. Crop benefit checks and New Deal work relief programs held the Berg family on the farm during the Thirties. When the moratorium on farm foreclosures ended in 1941, Berg lost his farm and went to California to start a new life. The depression had finally broken him.<sup>44</sup>

The story of school district reorganization began with the decline of rural population and small towns. North Dakota's pre 1985 population peaked in the 1930s with a total of 680,845, the majority of which lived on farms or in small towns. Seventy-nine percent of the population was classified as rural in 1940.<sup>45</sup> However, the larger cities continued growing. The farm population declined by 17 percent and between 1935 and 1955 North Dakota lost 23,000 farm families.<sup>46</sup> Forty-three counties lost population. The same would be true for the next forty years. (For a map of the counties that declined in population, see Fig. 5.)

The number of school districts increased slightly until it peaked in 1940 with a total of 2,272. Almost one thousand schools were closed in the 1930s. However, 111 rural schools and 17 high schools were built.<sup>47</sup> There were 3,392 one-room schools still operating at the end of the decade. Enrollment in these schools declined from 64,925 in 1931 to 45,436 pupils in 1940.<sup>48</sup>

The most serious school problems of the 1930s were financial. In 1932 an initiated measure, sponsored by

# POPULATION CHANGE 1930 - 1970

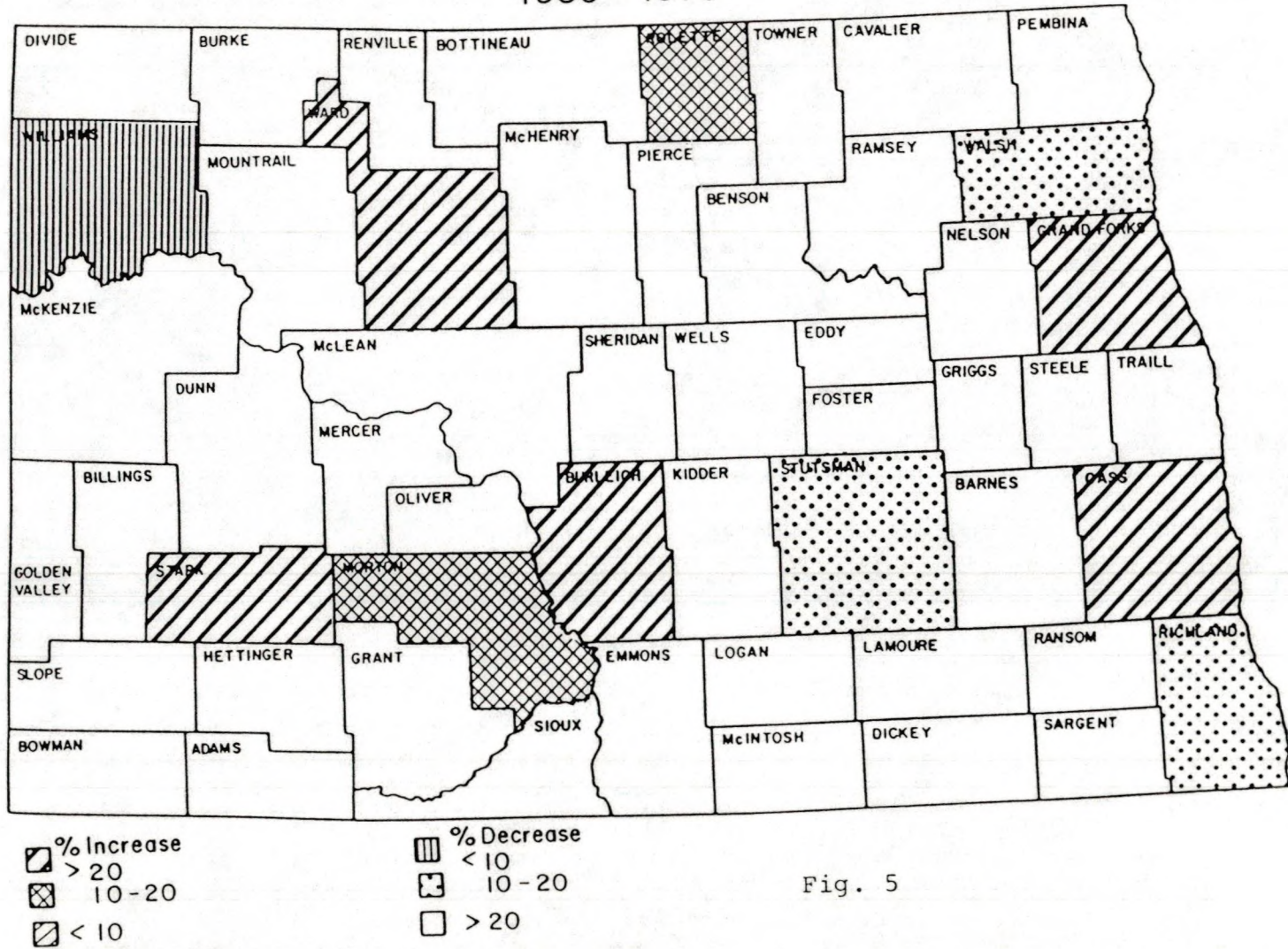


Fig. 5

the North Dakota Taxpayer Association, reduced the valuation of property for taxation from 75 to 50 percent of its value. As assessed valuation and hence returns from local school taxes fell off, some 1,800 rural schools could levy less than one thousand dollars annually, the estimated cost of a standard school.<sup>49</sup> Also, with the opening of the 1933 fall term, school districts in 40 North Dakota counties had a deficit of over \$1,000,000.<sup>50</sup> State and local governments did not have the resources to handle the economic collapse. The situation did not get better; it got worse. On October 3, 1938, Governor William Langer held a conference with county superintendents and school officers. Langer stated that 400 school districts were insolvent and other school districts were heading for insolvency.<sup>51</sup> Country schools and town schools had financial problems. For instance, Hillsboro, Cooperstown, Pembina, Jamestown, Buxton, Finley, Parshall, and Crosby could not levy half the cost of maintaining schools.<sup>52</sup>

Educational leaders repeated solutions that were suggested in the Twenties: equalize the tax burden, equalize educational opportunities, and enlarge the tax base unit. They wanted more federal and state aid, the removal of politics from education, and better trained teachers with decent salaries.

North Dakota's agricultural regions have different potentials for agricultural success and the depression certainly illustrated the point. As a result of the 1934 drought, 89 percent of all Divide County residents received direct relief, 30 percent in Hettinger County, and 26 percent in Sheridan County. Traill County had no relief, the only one.<sup>53</sup> Nine of the eleven years from 1929 through 1939 experienced less than average precipitation. In 1932 state and county aid amounted to 15 percent and local school district taxes were 75 percent of the total receipts for schools in North Dakota. Also, the local school district taxes and county-state aid ratio, respectively was 70 to 16 in 1935, 59 to 32 in 1937, 60 to 31 in 1939, and 68 to 25 in 1940.<sup>54</sup> From 1927 to 1933 over one thousand one-room schools received state aid and from 1934 to 1940 the number decreased to less than five hundred.<sup>55</sup> School districts in the semiarid part of North Dakota had more hardships than those in the subhumid part of the state. North Dakota's financial system for education was impractical and unpredictable.

With all the hardships, a great deal of attention was focused on the issue of tax equalization. School districts with just elementary schools paid less than districts with high schools. For instance, in an eight grade district the school tax (.87 mills) was \$3.48, and in a twelve grade school district it was \$72.00 (18

mills).<sup>56</sup> Some school districts benefited from utility taxes (on railroad property and public utilities) and others did not. For example, one study revealed that the wealthiest districts in ten counties expended an average of \$172.00 per child on a tax levy of less than 5 mills and that the poorest districts must tax themselves to the limit of 18 mills for \$78.00 per child.<sup>57</sup>

Local school district taxes on property accounted for the majority of income for schools. The tax base for school districts changed drastically after 1920. In that year, the tax based was on a 100 percent basis and the maximum levy 30 mills. That made it possible to raise forty-six million dollars. In 1923, the tax base was changed to 75 percent and the normal maximum levy 14 to 18 mills, making a potential income of sixteen million. In 1932, the tax base was changed from 75 to 50 percent and the potential income of about seven million dollars.<sup>58</sup> Paul Dalager, executive secretary of the NDEA, called this the "Pearl Harbor of education in North Dakota." With the shrinking tax base school districts would have to get larger to keep up with the cost of education, roots for school district reorganization.

Educational leaders suggested a county-unit organization plan to improve the situation. However, in the development of the American school system, Homer Rainey, President of Franklin College, concluded that finding

the best unit for control and support of our schools has been the "most persistent and stubborn problem." Rainey stressed the advantages of the township system over the district system, but maintained that the county unit system was far superior to either one.<sup>59</sup>

Walter Loomer, field secretary of the NDEA, reported in 1937 that the county unit plan has been discussed in North Dakota the past twenty years. The second legal attempt at adopting a county unit system was by 1937 Senate Bill 237 and was accompanied by Senate Concurrent Resolution "R" providing for a constitutional amendment to permit an appointive superintendent of schools adopting a county unit plan of school organization. This attempt was unsuccessful because it required a constitutional amendment to change the office of the county superintendent from an elected office to an appointed office. It would have eliminated about 12,000 elected officials and 2,271 school boards. At the local level, the people were very possessive of their elective offices.<sup>60</sup>

The Twenty-third Legislative Assembly passed a significant revenue law for aiding public schools in North Dakota, establishing a state equalization fund. For the 1933-1935 biennium, an appropriation of two hundred thousand was approved for the state equalization fund.<sup>61</sup> Minor changes were made to the law in 1935 and 1937. In 1935 a provision was attached stating



that no state equalization fund money can go to a school employing uncertified teachers or teachers receiving less than the minimum wage.<sup>62</sup> Schools would have to meet state standards to receive aid, an important beginning in the reform of North Dakota's public schools. The state equalization fund provided two percent of the total receipts for public schools in 1935, 18 percent in 1937, 19 percent in 1939, and 13 percent in 1940.<sup>63</sup>

Federal relief programs helped many of North Dakota's public schools through the Depression. The Emergency Education Program of the Federal Emergency Relief Act kept 1,143 North Dakota schools open during the 1933-1934 school year. FERA's employment of 1,855 teachers meant that 33,000 children could continue their education. Another work project, established by the Civil Works Administration, improved school facilities. For instance, 24 men dug cesspools for the schools in the Olga school district; 400 men repaired school buildings in Bismarck.<sup>64</sup> Workers for the Works Progress Administration repaired 646,206 books and served 3,653,392 school lunches between July 1, 1935 and June 30, 1942.<sup>65</sup> Women sewed thousands of garments which children wore to school. Throughout the state rural schools were repaired, wells and sewers dug, and school gymnasiums were built.

As the state increased its financial responsibility, children received a better education. Although 111 one-room schools were built, the country school's days were numbered. However, during the years of despair the country school was repaired and sanitation facilities were improved.

#### School Problems and Reforms During World War II

World War II ushered in a new era of prosperity. From 1940 to 1945, total personal income rose 145 percent in North Dakota (109 percent in the nation). Everything seemed to work for the benefit of the state: ample rainfall, record crops, high farm prices and declining farm debt. However, the farm population dropped from 325,000 in 1940 to an estimated 285,000 in 1945. After the Langer farm-foreclosure moratorium expired in 1942 many farmers lost their land. From 1940 through 1945 there were over 14,500 forced sales of farm land, one-fifth of the number of farms. Farms became more mechanized as men enlisted into the service or went to work in war industries. From 1939 to 1945 North Dakota lost an estimated 144,335 people, about one-fifth of the state's total population.<sup>66</sup>

Public attention focused on the war effort, and this affected the schools in North Dakota. The pledge of allegiance to the flag became a special moment for children in the morning. Schools converted their programs

to the needs of the armed forces, war industries and the government. Courses emphasizing physical fitness, math, sciences, geography, and foreign languages attracted much attention. Vocational and technical training in mechanics, aviation, vehicle operations, welding, and secretarial skills were developed and offered to students and adults. Schools sold war stamps and bonds; teachers helped in registration and rationing programs, and children had scrap rallies and made scrapbooks on the activities of the local people who served their country during the war.

The number of school districts did not change during the war, but 879 one-room schools curtailed operations.<sup>67</sup> North Dakota's schools were affected by this rapid out-migration as enrollment decreased by 24,097 along with 753 teachers. Average salaries for rural teachers rose dramatically, from \$543.00 in 1939, to \$1,409 in 1945. The average annual salary for all teachers rose from \$719.00 to \$1,303.00.<sup>68</sup> On the average, state-county funds accounted for 25 percent of total receipts, and local school district taxes amounted to 67 percent during the war years.<sup>69</sup> The amount of state-county aid to public education decreased, and local school districts assumed a greater share of the cost. Local school districts reduced their deficits and increased the cash reserves.

North Dakota's school problems remained the same but no actions were taken to equalize the tax burden, reorganize school districts, or equalize educational opportunities. With the end of the war a new stage of educational reform would begin, school district reorganization. Teacher salaries were meager, compared to the opportunities available in private, industrial, and governmental employment. A large number of male teachers (over half) enlisted in the armed forces and teachers, male and female, left the state to teach in higher paying states. However, the majority of teachers left the teaching profession. All states, including North Dakota, experienced a shortage of teachers. An estimated 633,220 teachers had quit the profession entirely between 1939 and 1947, and there were 108,000 emergency teachers who could not meet the lowest standards in their respective states.<sup>70</sup> Requirements for teaching were lowered, and some local school boards hired people with no training, despite the objections of educational associations. Initial elementary certificates, known as emergency certificates, were granted to high school graduates who completed an eight-week summer course at a state teachers college during the war.<sup>71</sup>

In 1945 the Twenty-ninth Legislative Assembly increased appropriations for the state equalization fund (from sales tax proceeds) and the non-resident high

school tuition rate. (High schools would receive \$108.00 from the state equalization fund for every non-resident pupil.) Also, House Bill 83 provided for the creation of a legislative research committee of five senators and six representatives. Its function was to study, consider, accumulate, compile and assemble information on any subject, including school problems, and prepare proposed bills and resolutions for the consideration of succeeding legislatures.<sup>72</sup>

In 1946 representatives from the North Dakota Education Association, the North Dakota Congress of Parents and Teachers, the State School Officers, and the Department of Public Instruction worked out a joint legislative program, which included a school district reorganization bill. In November this program was presented to the Interim Committee for analysis and recommendations. In 1947 the Legislative Research Committee introduced the school district reorganization bill (House Bill 43) to the Thirtieth Legislative Assembly and recommended its passage. It was passed on March 15, 1947.

#### Postwar School Problems and Reforms

Most attempts to solve the problem of rural education have been temporary solutions to impending crises. A new era in school administration began in 1947 with the passage of the first comprehensive school-district

reorganization law. The school reorganization movement had immediate results; then virtually stopped when the voting procedure was changed in 1951. Reorganization gained momentum after the voting procedure was reversed in 1957. From 1957 to 1963 the number of school districts decreased from 2,008 to 841.<sup>73</sup>

North Dakota's school reorganization was part of a national trend. Seven other states in the Midwest passed school district reorganization laws between 1945 and 1948. These states included: Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, and Wisconsin. These states, including North Dakota, had 52.4 percent of the nation's school administrative units and were ranked in the top twelve in the number of one-room schools per state.<sup>74</sup>

Although the school district reorganization law of 1947 was the most notable, other laws benefited students and teachers. The 1947 legislature passed legislation that improved the teacher's welfare: teachers' retirement system, a teacher tenure law, increased minimum salaries based upon qualifications, and increased salaries for county superintendents. It also provided laws for an eight-month minimum school term, safety provisions for school transportation, allowed a levy for recreational purposes, and school lunch program. Furthermore, it increased the state equalization fund and raised the

maximum levies for school support and school building bonds.<sup>75</sup>

School reorganization started with the formation of state and county committee. The governor, attorney general, and the commissioner of agriculture and labor made up the board that selected the state committee. The state committee consisted of seven members, one member from each of the six judicial districts and the superintendent of public instruction. Within six months county committees, composed of one representative from each county commissioner's district and the county superintendent, were organized. A series of regional meetings were held at various cities, sponsored by the state committee. At these meetings the reorganization law and the duties of county committees were explained and outlined.<sup>76</sup>

The reorganization procedure was lengthy and prone to opposition along the way. First, the local school boards put together reorganization plans (they circulated petitions to see how far they could stretch their boundaries or proposed a district around their community) and presented them to the county committee. If there were enough merit, a public hearing was required on the proposal before the county committee could work out the legalistic details--a comprehensive plan. Depending on the results, the county committee abandoned the plan or the process went ahead. Next, the plan went

before the county commissioners for approval, because taxes were involved. If approved, the county committee presented it to the state committee for approval and another hearing, and if approved, it went back to the voters of the districts concerned. Incorporated villages voted as a unit, as did rural territory; approval required a majority in both incorporated and rural territory. Any reorganization plan voted upon and approved would become operative and effective on the first day of July following final approval of the same.<sup>77</sup>

The legislature began the school reorganization movement with caution. It provided neither reward for reorganization nor penalty for failure to reorganize. The 1947 law provided no transportation aid, set no minimum standards for new districts and withheld no state equalization funds from districts which failed to reorganize.<sup>78</sup> Community pride, high after United States's victory in World War II, stood in the way of reform. North Dakota in 1950 was 73 percent rural (32 percent rural nonfarm and 41 percent rural farm).<sup>79</sup> The state, after the settlement era, had too many small towns. Towns, seven or ten miles apart, wanted to keep their schools. Although school districts suffered financially during the depression, bountiful crop yields and high prices reduced the indebtedness of school districts and equalization funds that meant that small school



districts could survive for a while.

In the beginning the school district reorganization movement had limited success. In 1947 North Dakota had 2,271 school districts and 3,501 schools in operation. There were 2,848 one-room schools in session with an enrollment of 31,517 students.<sup>80</sup> From the spring of 1949 to June 1951, there were 42 elections reorganizing more than 220 districts, but 27 reorganization plans were defeated, usually by the rural vote. One of the notable successes was the merging of 42 rural districts in Williams County into New School District No. 8, with a taxable valuation of \$4,800,000. The new districts continued the one-roomed schools, but painted the buildings, bought new equipment, and hired better teachers, paying them the best salaries in North Dakota.<sup>81</sup> Westhope, Bisbee, Fullerton, Tolna, and Carpio built new schools on the strength of greater taxable valuation they had as new districts and hence a greater bonding power. Also, Burke County experienced much early reorganization success.<sup>82</sup> As of June 30, 1951, North Dakota had 2,187 school districts, 3,268 schools (2,657 one-room schools with 27,390 students).<sup>83</sup>

By 1949, state politics were being affected by the passage of the reorganization law. Ella Schroeder, editor of North Dakota Teacher, explained:

Certain amendments to the reorganization law were enacted to facilitate reorganization. The legislature, however, became involved in a rather bitter discussion on reorganization, and the opponents of reorganization were able to cut the appropriation approximately \$50,000 from the amount appropriated two years ago.<sup>84</sup>

In 1951 school district reorganization became an integral part of North Dakota's Department of Public Instruction. In an amendment the office of the Director of Reorganization was incorporated with the other duties of the department and the appointed State Committee was replaced by an ex-officio committee of three members of which the Superintendent of Public Instruction is Chairman. A major change in the voting procedure was attached, too many people believed the reorganization law was an attack on the small school. Each district required a majority vote for approval or the whole plan was rejected.<sup>85</sup> Professor Robinson wrote:

In 1951 the legislature, responding to rural opposition, virtually stopped reorganization by an amendment to the 1947 law. Four plans were rejected, although 60 percent of the voters favored them. In Emerado, for example, reorganization lost through a tie vote in two districts, yet 75 percent of the voters favored reorganization.<sup>86</sup>

At the local level the school district reorganization law, in some cases, put neighbor against neighbor, town against town, and divided communities. The primary function of a school district is the establishment and maintenance of schools that will serve the educational needs of the people. As the needs and desires have

changed, the people have adapted new systems. People wanted a school district that was large enough to be challenging educationally and economically efficient, yet small enough to retain local control and leadership. Despite numerous public hearings and newspaper articles, the law was misunderstood--too many people saw reorganization as an attack on the small local community schools.

Dr. Clair Blikre, superintendent at Stanley, wrote a doctoral dissertation, "The Positive and Negative Factors Involved in Successful and Unsuccessful Reorganization Proposals in North Dakota" that is North Dakota's most valuable study on reorganization. He sent out a questionnaire to all members of the county school district reorganization committees, each county superintendent, selected town and city superintendents, and selected school board members. The questionnaire listed fifty selected factors concerning reorganization and asked for comments. Blikre's conclusions reveal insights into the complex problem.

There were many positive factors in school district reorganization. Blikre concluded the most positive factors were:

1. Better educational opportunities for school children;
2. Attract and keep qualified teachers;
3. State aid for pupil transportation;
4. Public participation in school district reorganization proposals;

5. Dissatisfaction with present educational program being offered;
6. Publicity in relation to school district reorganizational proposals;
7. More efficient use of money spent for educational purposes;
8. More uniformity of tax burden among all districts;
9. Amount of out-of-district tuition payments that a non-high school district must pay;
10. State Department of Public Instruction;
11. County School District Reorganization Committee;
12. State School District Reorganization Committee;
13. County Superintendent of Schools;
14. Superintendent of Schools;
15. Understanding of what is a desirable school district reorganization proposal;
16. North Dakota Education Association;
17. North Dakota Association of School Administrators;
18. Statutes under which school district reorganization takes place in North Dakota;
19. North Dakota State Parent-Teacher Association;
20. North Dakota State School Board Association;
21. Local press;
22. University of North Dakota personnel.<sup>87</sup>

Blikre's conclusions on the more negative factors in school district reorganization were:

1. Belief in adequacy of small high school and rural school;
2. Fear of closing rural school or local high school;
3. Fear of deterioration of local community as a result of consolidating attendance areas;
4. Fear of loss of local control;
5. Possibility of increase in school taxes;
6. Possibility of bond issue for new buildings and equipment;
7. Failure to fix definite responsibility at the state level for achieving school district reorganization;
8. People without children;
9. Misunderstanding by people of school district reorganization laws;

10. Weather conditions;
11. Lack of definite standards that school district reorganization must meet;
12. Antagonism between rural and town residents;
13. Fear of central control;
14. Trade or service centers ignored when proposing reorganization;
15. Distance that children must travel by bus;
16. Roads upon which children must travel;
17. Sparsity of population;
18. School board members wishing to remain on the school board;
19. Pride in own district.<sup>88</sup>

The greatest period of activity of North Dakota's school district reorganization occurred between 1957 and 1963. Annexation, rather than reorganization, became the actual method for most changes in the consolidation of districts. The number of districts declined from 2,008 to 841. Rural one-room schools' operations decreased from 2,075 to 501, and their enrollment dropped from 21,469 to 5,501.<sup>89</sup> However, ironically, five one-room schoolhouses, two and one each in Cass and Divide counties in 1958, and one each in Adams, Pembina, and Williams counties in 1960, were built while other one-room operations were closing.<sup>90</sup> (For a county by county analysis during this period, see Table 4.) The process continued throughout the 1960s. By 1970 North Dakota had 435 school districts with 619 public schools.<sup>91</sup>

North Dakota school district reorganization movement began in 1947 and has not stopped yet. North Dakota's declining rural population and the rising cost of education are factors behind the movement. North Dakota had

TABLE 4

SCHOOL DISTRICTS REORGANIZATION IN NORTH DAKOTA,  
1957 TO 1963

	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963
Adams	26	25	25	25	20	--	20
Barnes	68	63	39	37	37	--	30
Benson	42	42	27	19	17	--	13
Billings	18	18	18	18	18	--	18
Bottineau	35	34	29	28	26	--	17
Bowman	32	32	25	25	25	--	19
Burke	22	22	11	10	9	--	9
Burleigh	52	48	35	33	33	--	33
Cass	61	56	56	49	48	--	32
Cavalier	46	46	43	40	36	--	23
Dickey	27	27	27	13	13	--	13
Divide	38	38	36	36	36	--	3
Dunn	36	36	21	21	20	--	21
Eddy	19	19	16	16	12	--	5
Emmons	41	41	41	33	32	--	25
Foster	19	19	17	15	11	--	7
Golden Valley	17	17	17	17	17	--	16
Grand Forks	88	85	74	38	34	--	27
Grant	46	46	24	24	15	--	15
Griggs	23	23	22	20	6	--	3
Hettinger	32	31	24	24	17	--	16

TABLE 4--continued

	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963
Kidder	40	40	32	7	6	--	6
LaMoure	33	33	24	15	12	--	9
Logan	31	31	31	26	18	--	13
McHenry	57	54	53	33	22	--	17
McIntosh	30	30	22	15	9	--	8
McKenzie	31	31	31	31	30	--	16
McLean	63	63	54	25	14	--	12
Mercer	33	33	33	33	33	--	33
Morton	48	45	36	29	29	--	29
Mountrail	53	53	44	36	30	--	18
Nelson	27	27	24	9	9	--	9
Oliver	23	23	23	23	23	--	21
Pembina	75	74	73	43	13	--	11
Pierce	28	28	25	10	8	--	7
Ramsey	42	42	31	25	10	--	13
Ransom	25	22	11	8	8	--	7
Renville	23	22	10	8	8	--	8
Richland	42	42	42	29	27	--	24
Rolette	25	25	23	23	18	--	8
Sargent	23	22	16	16	9	--	7
Sheridan	28	27	27	19	11	--	7
Sioux	14	14	14	14	14	--	14
Slope	31	31	29	28	15	--	15

TABLE 4--continued

	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963
Stark	31	31	26	26	21	--	17
Steele	18	18	13	11	9	--	10
Stutsman	59	56	51	48	38	--	27
Towner	19	19	20	17	16	--	14
Traill	31	31	27	22	19	--	13
Walsh	118	115	97	97	73	--	54
Ward	57	57	44	33	23	--	20
Wells	39	38	29	29	22	--	13
Williams	<u>23</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>--</u>	<u>15</u>
State	2,008	1,968	1,665	1,351	1,101	--	841



too many school districts, except in the settlement era, and especially too many inefficient districts. There were two reorganization movements in North Dakota. First, North Dakota experienced a school consolidation movement, mainly rural schools, which lasted from the turn of the century to the Great Depression. It was not as controversial as the second movement, school district reorganization. The school, rich in heritage, is an important social center. The purpose behind both movements was to improve the quality of education, be more cost efficient, and adapt to the needs and desires of the times.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Hiram M. Drache, The Challenge of the Prairie: Life and Times of Red River Pioneers (Fargo: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1970), p. 295.

<sup>2</sup>Palmer, A Brief History, pp. 19-20.

<sup>3</sup>Drache, The Challenge of the Prairie, pp. 295-296.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 295.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 300-305.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 298-300.

<sup>7</sup>Clement A. Lounsberry, Early History of North Dakota: Essential Outlines of American History, vol. 1 (Washington: Liberty Press, 1919), pp. 628-630.

<sup>8</sup>North Dakota, North Dakota Blue Book, pp. 65-66.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>10</sup>Palmer, A Brief History, pp. 19-20.

<sup>11</sup>Wills, Northern Prairie State. Table XV shows a comparison of school facilities and finances by decade from 1890 to 1960.

<sup>12</sup>Robinson, History of North Dakota, p. 236.

<sup>13</sup>Wills, Northern Prairie State, p. 262, and Kazeck, A Human and Economic Geography, p. 230.

<sup>14</sup>North Dakota, Department of Public Instruction, Tenth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (Bismarck: 1908), p. 17.

<sup>15</sup>North Dakota, Department of Public Instruction, Eighth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (Bismarck: 1904), p. 8.

<sup>16</sup>North Dakota, Department of Public Instruction, Fifteenth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (Bismarck: 1918), p. 49.

<sup>17</sup>North Dakota, Department of Public Instruction, Seventh Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (Bismarck: 1902), p. 97.

<sup>18</sup>C. C. Schmidt, The Consolidation of Rural Schools in North Dakota. University of North Dakota Departmental Bulletins in Education, no. 3 (Grand Forks: University of North Dakota, 1912), p. 13.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 21-33.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>21</sup>North Dakota, Seventh Biennial Report, pp. 24-26.

<sup>22</sup>North Dakota, Eighth Biennial Report, p. 29.

<sup>23</sup>Schmidt, Consolidation of Rural Schools, pp. 66-67.

<sup>24</sup>North Dakota, Fifteenth Biennial Report, pp. 22-26.

<sup>25</sup>Robinson, History of North Dakota, pp. 286-287.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 284.

<sup>27</sup>North Dakota, Fifteenth Biennial Report, p. 15.

<sup>28</sup>North Dakota, Department of Public Instruction, Sixteenth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (Bismarck: 1920), p. 133.

<sup>29</sup>Robinson, History of North Dakota, p. 369.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 378.

<sup>31</sup>U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population: General Population Characteristics, 1960, pt. 36, vol. 1, p. 36-9.

<sup>32</sup>Kazeck, A Human and Economic Geography, p. 230.

<sup>33</sup>Wills, Northern Prairie State, p. 262.

<sup>34</sup>North Dakota, Forty-Second Biennial Report, p. 141.

<sup>35</sup>G. W. Hanna, "What is the State Teachers Association?" Associated Teacher of North Dakota 1 (November 1921): 3.

<sup>36</sup>Wills, Northern Prairie State, p. 262.

<sup>37</sup>C. E. Pickles, "Salaries and Professional Growth of Teachers in North Dakota," North Dakota Teacher 4 (February 1922): 9-11.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Robinson, History of North Dakota, pp. 476-480.

<sup>40</sup>North Dakota, Department of Public Instruction, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (Bismarck: 1922-1926), p. 82.

<sup>41</sup>R. L. Brown, ed., Associated Teacher 2 (November 1922): 22.

<sup>42</sup>North Dakota, North Dakota Reports: Reports of the Cases Decided in the Supreme Court of the State of North Dakota, vol. 53 (Rochester: Lawyers Co-operative Publishing Company, 1925): pp. 723-725.

<sup>43</sup>Harold Wakefield, "Suggestions for Curing Financial Ills of Education in City and Village Schools," North Dakota Teacher 3 (February 1924): pp. 18, 19, 25, 26, 27, 28.

<sup>44</sup>D. Jerome Tweton and Daniel F. Rylance, The Years of Despair: North Dakota in the Depression (Grand Forks: Oxcart Press, 1973), p. 1.

- <sup>45</sup> Eighteenth Census of the United States, pp. 36-9.
- <sup>46</sup> Kazeck, A Human and Economic Geography, p. 230.
- <sup>47</sup> Wills, Northern Prairie State, p. 262.
- <sup>48</sup> North Dakota, Department of Public Instruction, Twenty-second Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (Bismarck: 1932), p. 105 and North Dakota, Department of Public Instruction, Twenty-sixth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (Bismarck: 1940), p. 90.
- <sup>49</sup> Robinson, History of North Dakota, p. 480.
- <sup>50</sup> Donald Holland, "The Educational Crisis," North Dakota Teacher 13 (April-May 1934): 15.
- <sup>51</sup> M. E. McCurdy, ed., "Message of Governor William Langer: Given Before the School Officers Conference at Bismarck, N.D., Oct. 3, 1938," North Dakota Teacher 18 (November 1938): 18-20.
- <sup>52</sup> M. E. McCurdy, ed., "From the N.D.E.A.--Editorial and Secretarial," North Dakota Teacher 18 (January 1939): 6-7.
- <sup>53</sup> Tweton and Rylance, Years of Despair, p. 7.
- <sup>54</sup> North Dakota, Thirty-sixth Biennial Report, p. 147.
- <sup>55</sup> North Dakota, Twenty-second Biennial Report thru Twenty-sixth Biennial Report.
- <sup>56</sup> M. E. McCurdy, ed., "A Letter From a Rural Teacher," North Dakota Teacher 11 (February 1932): 22-23.
- <sup>57</sup> M. E. McCurdy, ed., "The New Tax Proposal," North Dakota Teacher 11 (March 1932): 14.
- <sup>58</sup> Arthur E. Thompson, "Youth of North Dakota--Our Greatest Asset," North Dakota Teacher 24 (September 1944): 13.

<sup>59</sup>Homer P. Rainey, "Development of the American School System," North Dakota Teacher 11 (March 1932): 15.

<sup>60</sup>Walter M. Loomer, "The 1937 Legislature and Schools," North Dakota Teacher 16 (April 1937): 8, 15.

<sup>61</sup>M. E. McCurdy, ed., "Editorial and Secretarial," North Dakota Teacher 12 (February-March 1933): 21.

<sup>62</sup>Loomer, "The 1937 Legislature," p. 16.

<sup>63</sup>North Dakota, Thirty-sixth Biennial Report, p. 147.

<sup>64</sup>Tweton and Rylance, Years of Despair, p. 12.

<sup>65</sup>Robinson, History of North Dakota, p. 408.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., pp. 424-428.

<sup>67</sup>North Dakota, Thirty-sixth Biennial Report, p. 148.

<sup>68</sup>North Dakota, Twenty-sixth Biennial Report, pp. 88-90, and Thirty-sixth Biennial Report, p. 148.

<sup>69</sup>North Dakota, Thirty-sixth Biennial Report, p. 149.

<sup>70</sup>Ralph McDonald, "The Teacher Crisis," North Dakota Teacher 26 (February 1947), p. 18.

<sup>71</sup>G. [Garfield] B. Nordrum, "Monthly News Bulletin," North Dakota Teacher 26 (April 1947): 12.

<sup>72</sup>Paul A. Dalager, "School Legislation," The North Dakota Teacher 24 (April 1945): 19.

<sup>73</sup>North Dakota, Department of Public Instruction, Thirty-fifth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (Bismarck: 1958), p. 164, and North Dakota, Department of Public Instruction, Thirty-eighth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (Bismarck: 1964), p. 170.

<sup>74</sup>M. L. Cushman, "An Analysis of Legislation for School District Reorganization in the Midwest" (Ames, Iowa: Microfilm, 1950).

<sup>75</sup>Nordrum, "Monthly News Bulletin," p. 12.

<sup>76</sup>North Dakota, 1947 Supplement to the North Dakota Revised Code of 1943, pp. 142-157.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

<sup>78</sup>Robinson, History of North Dakota, pp. 488-489.

<sup>79</sup>U.S., Eighteenth Census of the United States, p. 36-9.

<sup>80</sup>North Dakota, Thirtieth Biennial Report, p. 65.

<sup>81</sup>Robinson, History of North Dakota, p. 489.

<sup>82</sup>A. R. Nestoss, "Redistricting is Growing in Favor in North Dakota," North Dakota Teacher 30 (November 1950): 8, 9, 18, 22.

<sup>83</sup>North Dakota, Thirty-second Biennial Report, p. 74.

<sup>84</sup>Ella Schroeder, ed., "North Dakota Schools Advance by Constructive Legislative Program," North Dakota Teacher 27 (April 1949): 7.

<sup>85</sup>M. F. Peterson, "Department of Public Instruction," North Dakota Teacher 38 (October 1951): 55.

<sup>86</sup>Robinson, History of North Dakota, p. 489.

<sup>87</sup>Clair Blikre, "The Positive and Negative Factors Involved in Successful School District Reorganization Proposals in North Dakota" (unpublished Ed.D. dissertation, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks: 1960), pp. 325-326.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., pp. 326-327.

<sup>89</sup>North Dakota, Thirty-fifth Biennial Report, p. 223, and Thirty-eighth Biennial Report, p. 170.

<sup>90</sup>North Dakota, Thirty-fifth Biennial Report, p. 223, and Thirty-sixth Biennial Report, p. 221.

<sup>91</sup>North Dakota, Forty-second Biennial Report, p. 137.



### CHAPTER III

#### SARGENT COUNTY'S SCHOOL REORGANIZATION:

1947 TO 1969

#### Introduction

After the farm crisis of the Twenties, the Great Depression in the Thirties, and World War II, the residents of Sargent County expected a turn for the better. The people counted on progress and prosperity. This was an exciting time for North Dakotans. Electricity arrived on the farms. New highways and roads improved transportation and created jobs for the local businessmen and residents. Life became less of a struggle. The telephone and television dramatically changed the lives of rural residents, lessening a sense of remoteness. Community pride flourished as school boys or girls and their teams brought "fame" to their town. Sargent County's newspapers changed their focus of coverage from a mixture of national, state and local news to almost entirely local news.

Progress improved the standard of living, but the cost of improvement was high to the small communities. Sargent County's small town merchants could not compete economically with the larger communities such as Wahpeton

and Fargo. As the local businesses dwindled, the local school became a more important symbol to the small communities. Before any towns lost their school, loyalty and competition became fierce. Eventually many towns, however, lost their schools to reorganization. The residents approved the necessary school reorganization plans, and the enthusiasm of the children quickly dispelled any remaining fears.

#### The First Year: 1948

Work on school district reorganization in Sargent County began after the passage of the reorganization law on March 15, 1947. Within six months Miss Lillie Bowser, county superintendent, notified in writing the twenty-nine school districts to select a representative from their school boards for the purpose of electing the county committee. (For a map of the school districts, see Fig. 6.) The composition of Sargent County's School Reorganization County Committee consisted of one delegate from each of the five county commission districts. Miss Bowser acted as secretary but did not have a vote in the decision making process. In local politics membership to this committee was significant.

On November 12, 1947, the county committee met in the county superintendent's office at Forman. Lawrence Kummeth of Cogswell was named chairman. Other members

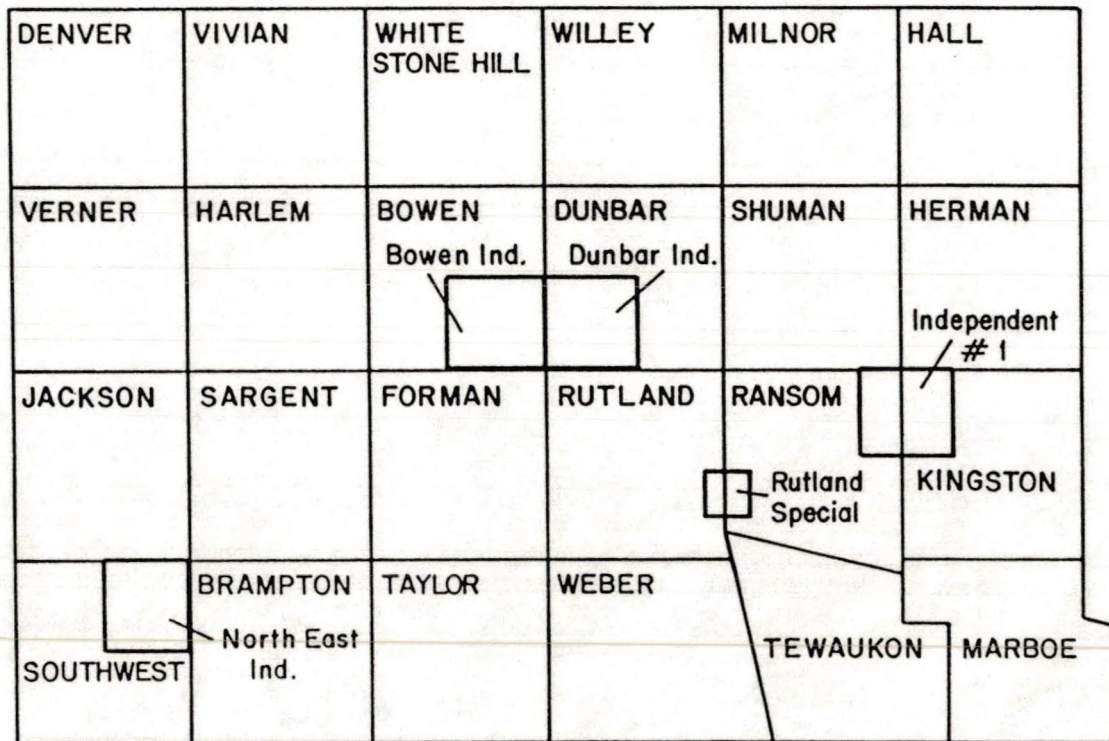


Fig. 6. A Map of School Districts, 1947

of the body included Mrs. Otto Meyer, Rutland (vice chairman); Jay Haring, Cayuga; Chase O. Dewey, Forman; and Lawrence Petterson, Gwinner.<sup>1</sup> They decided that the whole committee would attend future state committee meetings, although the law required only the chairman and secretary to do so.<sup>2</sup>

School reorganization ignited great excitement throughout the county, and public interest ran high because people worried about losing their schools for their children and possible tax increases. Uncertainty perplexed the residents of Sargent County.

In January 1948 the Parent Teachers Association of Rutland sponsored a "Mystery Lady" contest to create positive interest in school reorganization. Mrs. Otto Meyer, president of Rutland's PTA, explained, "It is positively a county-wide project to promote public interest in an important educational development." Contestants were asked to complete the following sentence in twenty-five words or less: "We should reorganize the school districts of Sargent County because--."<sup>3</sup> Three names were drawn from the entries each week and the selected individuals were asked to guess the identity of the "mystery lady." A list of clues appeared in the county newspapers. The "Lady of Mystery" contest created interest in the topic. Hundreds of people participated in the contest.<sup>4</sup> Morgan Fiados of Rutland won the fifty-dollar

contest when he identified Mrs. Flora Baker, a prominent figure in the county's educational circles, as the "mystery lady." North Dakota's Department of Public Instruction liked this approach: "May we compliment your PTA upon the splendid way in which you are creating interest in the school district reorganization bill. It is evident that through your association a great deal of interest and understanding will be developed."<sup>5</sup>

On January 23, 1948, the county reorganization committee attended a regional meeting for the county committees at Valley City. The functions and duties of the county committee were outlined and Theodore Grimsrud, State Director, explained the reorganization law and the future steps required of the county committees.

Kummeth's report in the Sargent County News, the official county newspaper, concluded that the basic issues before the committees and the people were to provide equal educational opportunities for all children and to equalize the tax burden that supported the schools. He reported that the county committee intended to survey the existing situation. Furthermore, he stated, "This committee will be glad to help any organization or group of people by giving them any information they may have available."<sup>6</sup> This plea for public support and understanding became common.

The law required that within nine months after its organization the county committee was to make a comprehensive study of the county school system in order to consider and determine the following factors:

1. The taxable assessed valuation of existing districts and the differences in such valuations under possible reorganization plans;
2. The size, geographical features, and boundaries of the districts;
3. The number of pupils attending school and the population of the districts;
4. The location and condition of school buildings and their accessibility to the pupils;
5. The location and condition of roads, highways, and natural barriers within the districts;
6. The school centers where children residing in the districts attend high school;
7. Conditions affecting the welfare of the teachers and pupils;
8. The boundaries of other governmental units and the location of private organizations; and
9. Any factors concerning adequate facilities for the pupils.<sup>7</sup>

The county committee took three days to put together this county survey in early 1948. As county superintendent, Miss Bowser gathered most of the facts and figures.

Sargent County's Farmers Union took an active interest in the school problems of the county. On April 5, at the local meeting of the Sargent-Harlem Farmers Union a round table discussion was held concerning the reorganization of Sargent County school districts. Participants included members of the Cogswell faculty and other school teachers of the community. The immediate concern was the establishment of an educational program

on agriculture for the benefit of the farm children. Ironically, in the postwar era farmers had large families, but by the time the children reached maturity there was no place for them on the farms. The following points were brought out in this discussion: high schools should be large enough to make it practical to teach such courses as home economics and agriculture in order to give the children who cannot and do not go on to college an opportunity to obtain much needed basic training; schools should provide equal educational opportunities for all children, regardless of where they live; districts should be set up in order to equalize the tax burden; the county should have only one school district and school courses should be geared to encourage boys and girls to remain on the farm.<sup>8</sup>

The faculty members were more aware of the educational inequalities in the county and used the forum to point out examples. They realized that a one county-wide school district unit would eliminate the tax inequalities and provide a substantial tax base for improving curriculum and facilities.

The state Farmers Union organization sponsored a valuable educational workshop in Jamestown, North Dakota on April 5 and 6. This workshop brought in national and state educators who were specialists in reorganization and rural education as consultants to the county

committees. These people included Dr. F. W. Cyr, Professor of Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York; Dr. Shirley Cooper, National Education Association; Dr. M. L. Cushman, Iowa State College (Ames); and Dr. F. W. Kumliem, Rural Sociologist, South Dakota State College (Brookings); G. B. Nordrum, Superintendent of Public Instruction; Paul A. Dalager, Secretary of North Dakota Education Association; Theodore Grimsrud, Director of State Reorganization Committee; and S. E. Halpern, Chairman, State Committee for Reorganization.<sup>9</sup>

The county committee along with the superintendents of Forman and Cogswell attended this educational workshop. Kummeth evaluated the session:

The meeting was a success throughout and was a lifetime opportunity for the people of North Dakota; to gether together and present their problems to the afford said faculty on education who told of their lifetime experiences in redistricting in other states, the success and failures of different methods used tying together the growing need of better education of youth and adults. I would like to ask the people of Sargent County to discuss better education and redistricting in our homes, at our neighborhood gatherings and community meetings, in our schools and may I especially ask our superintendents to take this matter up with the high school students. . . . This job of redistricting must be done by the people, the law and we board members are only the tools through which it can be done.<sup>10</sup>

In May the Sargent County Farm Bureau sponsored an open meeting on redistricting at Forman. The guest speaker was Grimsrud who talked about the various aspects



of reorganization. The Sargent County News reported that the Farm Bureau had scheduled this meeting so all its members and the public would have an opportunity to understand the pros and cons of redistricting.<sup>11</sup>

When the county committee met on May 18, a program of public hearings on reorganization was arranged for June at various towns in the county.<sup>12</sup> In announcing the schedule Miss Bowser declared, "Since this is a matter which concerns everyone in the county, the committee urges everyone who can possibly to attend the meeting nearest his home and also the county meeting at Forman."<sup>13</sup> Other sites included Geneseo, Stirum, Havana, Gwinner, Crete, Cogswell, and Brampton.

These public forums created a great deal of controversy and confusion. Kummeth hinted that a problem had developed when he urged the county citizens to attend the countywide meeting. He wrote, "With Mr. Nordrum present we should be able to clear up any questions which may arise. Many rumors have been floating around regarding this law, attend the meeting and get all the facts."<sup>14</sup>

In Sargent County the first reorganization attempt failed. At the county meeting on June 16 Rutland's school board members presented a proposed plan that consisted of all of Tewankon township, all of Ransom school district, a part of Shuman, Dunbar, and Rutland

townships. The petitions contained the signatures of approximately two-thirds of the electors residing in the proposed area.<sup>15</sup> However, in the process of several public hearings and county committee meetings, this plan and a revised plan were deferred because there was not enough assessed valuation for maintaining the Rutland Consolidated school.<sup>16</sup> Also, members of the Forman and Weber (Havana) school boards raised objections because the plan left little room for their expansion. Since Sargent County is a relatively small county, any proposed plan concerning reorganization ran the risk of angering neighboring towns or farmers in the middle.<sup>17</sup>

During the long hot summer days and into the fall of 1948 the residents of Sargent County began taking sides on reorganization. At its annual convention, the Sargent County Farmers Union held a panel discussion on October 13. The advertisement for this event in the Sargent County News on October 28, 1948, presents the story of school reorganization at a glance. (For an insight of the problem, see Fig. 7.) The panel consisted of school teachers, school board officers, county committee members, and concerned citizens. On behalf of this organization Obed A. Wyum, a panel member and later a candidate for governor of North Dakota, wrote the following comments in the Sargent County News before the scheduled event:

Fig. 7. Sargent County Farmers Union's advertisement for its Annual Convention in 1948. Source: Sargent County News, 28 October 1948. (Courtesy of the Sargent County Teller)

Annual Convention Of The  
**Sargent County Farmers Union**  
**County Auditorium** Forman

Saturday afternoon - 1:00 P.M. - October 30th

**20 Valuable Door Prizes Awarded Free - 1:00 P. M.**

---

RICHARD C. JOYCE—SECY. N.D. F. U. —JAMESTOWN  
JAMES FLAA, SARGENT COUNTY EXTENSION AGENT

**SPEAKERS**

---

ROUND TABLE PANEL DISCUSSION  
"Should Sargent County Be Re-districted? How?"

**PANEL PARTICIPANTS**

Snorri Thörfinnson — Lisbon  
Mrs. Otto Meyers — Rutland  
Ray Betting — Forman  
Gerald C. Brekke — Delamere  
T. R. Workman — Cogswell  
Harold Hobbs — Havana

Mrs. K. O. Nygaard — Delamere  
Mrs. Bernard Klinkhammer —  
Cogswell  
Bruce Johnson — Milnor  
R. A. Barker — Forman  
Obad A. Wyum — Shuman

---

Can Sargent County Schools be improved? Will changing the districts do it? Why? How should this be done? Should we have one school district? 29? Should elementary schools be changed any? Could we have a 6 year high school? Should we? Do we need more high schools? Less? Where should our schools be located? Will it cost more money? Less? Who will pay it? Should they? How much? How many high schools do we want? Need? Ten? One? Two? Three? Five? Fifteen? What kind? Where? Delamere — Cayuga — Crete — Geneseo — Stirum? Or Milnor — Havana — Gwinner — Brampton? How about Rutland — Cogswell — Forman? Why not Perry — Hoiving and Sträubville? How about the rest of the county tying up with Lisbon — Oakes — Lidgerwood — Wyndmere? Must we maintain the status quo? Can reasonable, sensible solutions be worked out in our school problems? Can we do it ourselves? This panel will try to give some of the answers. One hour. Snappy — perhaps a little biting — Audience will be given their chance too.

YES, THIS INVITATION EXTENDS TO YOU TOO.  
SINCERELY,  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF SARGENT COUNTY FARMERS  
UNION

Community Singing - Songs you know and like  
Come early - Remember Door Prizes at Opening  
All are invited - Young & old - Town & Country

We take the liberty of naming it as a highlight, because intense interest and feeling on this school subject all over the county. Believe it or not, this hot potato has already had far-reaching effects. Community lines have been and are being transformed on this background. Trading centers in some cases have already shifted. It has been used as a political football and is still being used in various manner and means--some open and above board, and some underhanded as befits the operation<sup>18</sup> of some politicians and would-be politicians.

This panel discussion filled all the seats in the county auditorium. Wyum described the event:

Many factors were thrown into the discussion both by panel members and the audience. Some of these were community pride, basketball, baseball, band instruction, adequate buildings at some locations, very poor and inadequate facilities at other sites. Lack of home economics, agriculture, and vocational training courses were cited as near tragic in Sargent County. Ninety-one percent of our high school graduates have to enter the struggle for existence void of training they should get in high school. The quality of some of our present teaching output was scored severely. A need for a co-ordinated highway system was stressed to permit improvement. A need for expanding the tax base to include all real estate for high school purposes was explored and emphasized. Today less than one half of property pays a fair share of school taxes. Rest of county escapes! Family farms should be willing to pay a fair share. One prominent citizen advanced the idea that those having excessive land holdings might oppose equitable school taxes should be denied the privilege of holding such land and that they be made for family farms. It seemed to be acceptable logic all around as far as the panel was concerned that Sargent County should perhaps have five high schools based on such comparison, both as desirable courses offered and reasonable and justifiable cost. One big problem still remained to be solved when the discussion closed. Where are the high schools to be located?<sup>19</sup>

Wyum's comments summarized the particular difficulties associated with school reorganization. This issue divided communities and was responsible for torn friendships--some lifelong. The residents did not always show compassion and understanding. A long struggle would take place before any reorganization was accomplished. People believed that after they lost their school the church might go next. Where would it end? People reacted strongly because they saw what was happening to the smallest towns in the county as they slowly declined. The people rallied around their local school.

Lillie Bowser was reelected as county superintendent in November 1948. She ran on the no party ballot and was unopposed in her effort, receiving most votes of all those who ran for offices.

In December of 1948 a public education campaign on redistricting appeared in the Sargent County News. At regional meetings the county committee learned that considerable public education was necessary before any definite action on redistricting could be taken. Kummeth and Bowser wrote a series of articles in the county newspapers, advocating reorganization and discussing the county's educational problems.

In one article Kummeth pointed out that many obstacles had to be overcome regarding distances and ways of getting to school. Also township lines and district

lines often caused families living on one side of the line to go several miles to school when a school was at their door in the other district. Furthermore, many districts had no high school facilities. He indicated that the cost of education was not equal and taxes were not equally divided. He stated that utility taxes (from railroads and power companies for the support of education) went to the area where they were located and many times caused a low levy for that district while adjoining districts had a much higher levy.<sup>20</sup> For instance, districts with railroads received money and districts without railroads received no money.

Sargent County schools in the postwar years faced serious problems. In an interview Miss Bowser explained these problems and suggested how reorganization would help correct the administrative and financial deficiencies. The problems included: the supply of competent teachers was no better than it had been during the war years; schools were having difficulty in financing their operations due to increased cost; and there was a serious building shortage in some districts due to shifting population. She reported:

Reorganziation can help solve these problems by equalizing the support of schools and making better use of the existing supply of teachers and buildings. By having a number of schools and teachers under the same administration, the special ability of a teacher can be used where

it is needed, and the schools can be combined where low enrollment makes that the reasonable thing to do. A better plan district organization would make possible wiser planning in the construction of new buildings and more stable finance program. This would act as an incentive for more young people to enter the profession as it would help prevent a repetition of the conditions that drove the teachers from the profession in the thirties.<sup>21</sup>

In another long article Kummeth used a question and answer summarization on key aspects of reorganization, duties of the county committees, and the characteristics of a good school district.<sup>22</sup> Two weeks later he wrote an article on the reorganization law and the advantages of larger school districts.<sup>23</sup> Bowser and Kummeth were strong advocates of school reorganization and believed that reorganization would equalize educational opportunity for the children and the cost of education for the adults.

In 1948 school reorganization was a popular topic for discussion at the local level. It was a learning experience for both the county committee and the residents. The first reorganization attempt failed and some other proposals were introduced but no action was taken. More than curiosity persuaded the residents to attend the various meetings.

#### An Interlude of Community Proposals, 1949-1953

After the initial furor of public concern, the task of reorganization settled on the school boards and the county committee. The school boards developed and



presented proposals to the county committee for action. The county committee was responsible for holding a public hearing on the advisability of any proposal that involved the formation of a new district or the transfer from one established district to another of any territory in which children of school age resided.<sup>24</sup>

School reorganization was a touchy situation for the residents, and even more so for the people responsible for bringing about the change. Many factors hampered the consolidation of school districts but one significant deterrent was the insufficient political influence of the school board members outside their districts. In 1949, five reorganization proposals were presented to the county committee. These plans centered around the communities of DeLamere, Milnor, Cogswell, Gwinner, and Forman. Also, the county committee put together a plan for a one unit district. However, all the community proposals and the one district plan failed because of various differences.

At the local level school reorganization generated antagonistic feelings because of local characteristics. For instance, a situation developed in the northeastern part of Sargent County where the advantages of a larger community outweighed the wishes of a smaller community. DeLamere and Milnor school boards presented conflicting reorganization plans.

The first reorganization plan in 1949 which the county committee acted on was the DeLamere plan. On April 12, it listened to testimony from the people of Hall township concerning this plan. The proposal included the territory of Rosemeade township in Random County and Hall township and the north two and one-half miles of Herman township of Sargent County. The plan recommended an elementary and secondary school in DeLamere and a rural elementary in Rosemeade and Herman townships and called for the movement of a schoolhouse and the building of an auditorium. The total valuation of the new area would be \$550,000.00 (Rosemeade, \$125,000.00; Hall, \$365,000.00; and Herman, \$10,000.00). Hugo Snellman, president of the school board of Hall, explained that this territory would supply thirty-two high school pupils and eventually sixty or sixty-five high school students.<sup>25</sup>

In 1949 Hall's school district operated two schools, a rural one-room schoolhouse and a larger school in DeLamere. Built in 1913 the DeLamere school contained two rooms for elementary pupils and four rooms for high school purposes. This school was classified as a four-year consolidated high school program. There were sixty-four students in the elementary grades and twenty-nine high school students. The school board employed five teachers including two who had more than seventeen years of experience. The average cost per pupil per month was

approximately twenty dollars. For the residents of this district the cost of education was thirty-six mills.<sup>26</sup> The residents of DeLamere were particularly proud of their music program which won recent honors in statewide competition.

The DeLamere schoolhouse was crowded and noisy on the night of April 12. The county committee set up rules in order to give everyone an opportunity to express their views. Gerald Brekke, principal of DeLamere, stated the issue, "Are you willing to pay thirty-six mills to operate a school and add a five mill bond levy or disband and go to another school?" One individual pointed out that Hall township would still bear the brunt of the cost and the people would not have a first class high school with only sixty students. The discussion brought out the point that a district could not operate a bus system on the proposed budget.<sup>27</sup> When reorganization involved the transportation of pupils, the school board of the new district was to be responsible for the costs.<sup>28</sup> The lack of state transportation aid hindered reorganization and was one of the faults with the reorganization law.

The residents were divided over where their children should attend school. Typical support for the DeLamere plan was voiced by a lady from DeLamere. She believed that a vote would not be a fair means of settling the issue since Milnor would be able to out-vote DeLamere.

Also, she thought that DeLamere should not have to lose the community center, and that size was not always an advantage. Rural areas would vote as a unit, and urban (a town of any size) areas would vote as a unit. Each region had to approve the measure by a majority vote for it to be successful (amended in 1951). Those who were in opposition believed that the proposed set-up would be too costly and that it would be better to go in with a larger district and get more for the money. Their testimony indicated an almost even split between approval of the plan and a compromise solution of keeping the elementary students in DeLamere and sending the high school students to Milnor or Wyndmere. At the end of the meeting in a show-of-hands vote, it was agreed to send the grades to a larger school when the facilities were available.<sup>29</sup>

On April 21, when the county committee met in Forman, the DeLamere proposal was automatically dispensed with after it approved a proposal from Milnor.<sup>30</sup> However, this possibility was clearly indicated prior to the start of the DeLamere hearing on April 12. The Milnor proposal covered the area of the DeLamere plan and additional territory.

County committee members voted on other proposals. A proposal for a district around Forman was presented and approved by a vote of four to one. Also, a White Stone Hill (Gwinner) plan was introduced and approved by

a three to two vote. However, the most significant vote of the night would have made all these proposals moot. The county committee rejected a one county unit reorganization plan by a three-to-two vote.<sup>31</sup> However, this plan most certainly would have failed in a countywide election.

The county committee held a public meeting in the high school auditorium at Cogswell on April 25 to discuss the Sargent proposal. This tentative proposal included all of Harlem, Sargent, Jackson, Southwest, Brampton, and parts of Verner, Bowen, and Forman townships. On this night definite boundaries were to be arranged for a larger district around the vicinity of Cogswell, and adjustments of the assets and liabilities of the various school districts were to be determined. Grimsrud explained the need for reorganization and acted as a consultant.<sup>32</sup>

The people accomplished nothing on this night. A strong preference for the status quo ended progress on the Sargent proposal. Grimsrud defended the reorganization law, but many people viewed reorganization as an attack on the small schools. Testimony indicated strong preference to the school nearest their community. There was a great deal of concern over the conditions of the roads since the western part of the county had the poorest roads.<sup>33</sup> Also, the soils in the western part

were not as rich as those in the eastern part so the farmers were concerned about higher taxes. Furthermore, some of the school districts had financial incentives not to reorganize. In 1949, the school district of Verner operated only an elementary school with thirteen pupils. Its high school students were enrolled at Crete or Oakes (Dickey County). Its total receipts for the ensuing school year doubled its total expenditures. The tax rate for the residents was twenty-four mills.<sup>34</sup> By sending their high school students to other districts, the people avoided the cost of educating these students. Under the Sargent proposal the tax rate would have jumped to fifty-seven mills. The majority of the residents naturally disapproved reorganization. Besides the tax issue, they preferred reorganizing with Crete or Oakes. Some people believed that buses would be impractical in the winter.<sup>35</sup>

The Harlem school district enjoyed the same financial advantages as Verner. Its grade enrollment was slightly larger, and the tax burden was only fourteen mills. Its high school students went to Stirum. The total receipts doubled the total expenditures of the district.<sup>36</sup> All those who testified voiced their opinion against any changes.

The school districts of Jackson and Northeast Independent #4 (located in the northeast part of Southwest township) operated only elementary schools. Their total

enrollment consisted of only thirty-three students. The Southwest school district was not operating any schools but had elected school officers who collected salaries.<sup>37</sup> One person from the Northeast school district testified against reorganization. Testimony from Jackson indicated some support for reorganizing, but the majority disagreed because it involved substantial tax increases and they wanted to send their pupils to Oakes instead of Cogswell.

A different situation existed in the case of the Brampton school district. This district operated a consolidated four-year high school in Brampton for its secondary students besides two other grade schools. Although only twelve students were enrolled in the high school program, the number of elementary pupils totaled thirty-six. The treasurer's report indicated a positive balance, but expenses were almost equal to incoming revenue. Also, the cost per pupil figure was one of the highest in Sargent County and the tax obligation was thirty-six mills.<sup>38</sup> However, those school districts that operated both elementary and secondary programs always had the highest educational cost. The residents who came to the meeting in Cogswell were interested in gathering the facts, but some expressed concern for the Brampton school while others opposed any changes.

Petterson, county committee member, identified the problem impeding reorganization. He emphasized that the

districts supporting high schools were forced to pay a much higher tax rate than those not supporting one. By sending their students to other districts they were getting the benefits of the high school without the cost. Without local support there would be no reorganization. After some more discussion on the means of transportation the meeting was adjourned.

After the patrons of the various school districts left the auditorium, Kummeth called the county committee to order and the tentative plans were shown to Grimsrud. He advised the committee that it would be useless to present them to the state committee at this time.<sup>39</sup> Without local support, no action could be taken towards reorganization. The Cogswell meeting exposed the issues, but failed to move reorganization ahead.

On May 31, 1949, the superintendents and school board members from the high school districts met with the county committee at the courthouse in Forman. The guest speaker was Grimsrud. In his speech he emphasized that educational improvement depended consequently on larger enrollment figures. The consensus was that there should be vocational training in the high schools, but districts should not be so large that students could not return at night.<sup>40</sup> Without minimum or maximum size guidelines there was some fear that reorganization would go too



far. Many reorganization plans, he stressed, covered too small of an area.

In June 1949 the voters of Denver township approved overwhelmingly a bond issue for building a high school gymnasium at Crete.<sup>41</sup> Denver's school district had two schools in operation. One was a rural one-room schoolhouse with a larger school in Crete. Built in 1917 the schoolhouse in Crete consisted of three elementary rooms and one room for high school purposes. Its high school operated a two-year program. This district had an enrollment of fifty pupils including fourteen high school students. The tax rate was thirty mills for the residents.<sup>42</sup> The primary concern was for the improvement of their facilities. However, most likely the residents of Crete wanted a place to hold basketball games and attract customers for the town's businesses. Also, the reorganization talk promoted the action; with a new gymnasium the district would be more secure and less likely to lose its school.

A public hearing was held in Milnor on June 17 to determine the possibility of reorganizing a district around Milnor. The tentative proposal included all of Milnor and Hall townships and parts of Willey, Dunbar, Shuman, and Herman townships in Sargent County. All of Rosemeade township in Ransom County was included.<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, there was some interest in adding territory from Sydna school district.

The issue of transportation was usually discussed at reorganization hearings and concerned with three aspects: (1) cost and responsibility of bus transportation, (2) road conditions, especially in winter and spring times, (3) weather factors which affected the welfare of the children. At this meeting Harley Swanson from Fairmont, a member of the state committee, indicated that bus transportation was very successful, and that very little time was lost because of blocked roads.

At this meeting the overall responses were favorable for reorganization, except those from DeLamere. Those who testified from Willey indicated that as far as they knew the attitude in their area was favorable towards school reorganization. People from Shuman and Herman supported the plan. A farmer stated that he preferred Wyndmere, but Milnor would be satisfactory. The residents of Hall township were divided. In a stand-up-vote the farmers supported the plan while the residents of DeLamere disapproved it.<sup>44</sup>

Encouraged, the Milnor school board continued working out the details. On July 1 the reorganization committees of Sargent and Ransom counties held a joint meeting with the patrons of Sydna township in Ransom county to see if they were interested with reorganizing with

Milnor. At this time most of the people at the hearing indicated they were already sending their high school students to Milnor and wished to continue the practice.<sup>45</sup> They preferred, however, not to reorganize with Milnor, largely because they were receiving the benefits of a fully accredited high school program without the cost, a familiar story. Division among the people doomed the plan. The failure of the Milnor and DeLamere proposals was not surprising. In the northeastern part of Sargent County the different petitions that circulated put the residents on one side or the other with their signatures. At times numerous petitions circulated in an area, creating much confusion. The county committee met once in July and once in December, accomplishing little.

During the next three years reorganization in Sargent County made little headway. The county committee did not meet in 1950, once in 1951, and twice in 1952. In October of 1952 morale had deteriorated substantially as the group met to discuss reorganization plans for the southeastern part of the county. People from Rutland, Cayuga, and Geneseo and surrounding townships circulated petitions, and plans were organized. The situation was frustrating because the communities were divided over how to reorganize. On October 20 a motion was made but withdrawn that the county committee resign and go on record as recommending that redistricting law

be abolished and a five mill levy for high schools be passed.<sup>46</sup> In 1951 the state legislature had responded to rural pressure and had changed the reorganization voting procedure to allow one school district to kill a reorganization plan. This was largely responsible for the fatalism that had engulfed the county for retarding the reorganization movement.

In April, 1953, action the county committee discussed a plan (the Milnor Plan) for the northeastern part of the county, Milnor township and parts of Synda, Shuman, Willey and Dunbar, and the Cayuga plan that called for the eastern half of Sargent County to be made into one district with the centralized high school at Cayuga. They decided to meet with the school boards of the eastern half of the county on April 21, 1953, in Rutland. Two options were available for the school boards. One, the Cayuga plan, called for a large administrative district in the eastern half of the county; and the second choice called for smaller districts in the northern and southern parts, the Milnor plan. A vote of the boards, their own opinions and not their constituents, indicated: Shuman, Milnor plan; Milnor, Milnor Plan; Tewaukon, uncertain; Kingston, Cayuga Plan; Herman, two areas; Hall, status quo; Cayuga, Cayuga Plan; Ransom, small area; and Sydna, Milnor Plan. It was decided that the school boards

should talk to the people in their own districts to learn their ideas in regard to reorganization.<sup>47</sup>

The county committee met on May 29, 1953, in the courtroom at Forman. Art Bakkegard, President of Independent #1, Cayuga, presented a proposed plan for the southeastern corner of the county. The plan was accepted as proposed and it was decided to get an opinion from the States Attorney as to the disposal of the old proposal.<sup>48</sup> Work continued on the plan throughout the summer and it was reviewed again in a November meeting of the county committee and sent to the state committee for approval. In a December meeting the county committee decided to meet with the County Commissioners and Deputy Superintendent A. R. Nestoss in January, 1954, for the purpose of annexation.<sup>49</sup> The year, 1953, ended on a positive note for the county committee.

Reorganization meant drawing new boundary lines for a school district without any restraints but annexation meant connecting existing districts, or parts of districts, into one larger district. According to the 1947 law, school districts consolidation could be accomplished by both methods. However, it used the annexation procedure already passed by previous legislatures. According to a 1935 law the Board of County Commissioners and the County Superintendent may organize a new school district from another or from the portions of districts already

organized upon being petitioned by at least two-thirds of the school voters residing in the proposed district.

School Reorganization, 1954-1969

On January 5, 1954, the county committee, Nestoss, and the county commissioners met in the courthouse at Forman. Nestoss explained the various phases of the reorganization law and gave an overview of other school districts which already had reorganized. Rutland's and Cayuga's proposals were discussed but the board delayed its decision until the next day. The county commissioners rejected Rutland's petitions because they were over five years old. No decision was made on Cayuga's proposal because it was tabled.<sup>50</sup> Annexation petitioners for the special school district of Rutland were circulated again after this meeting. Rutland and Cayuga, eight miles apart, had different prospectives. Cayuga offered a two year high school program; its natural trading center was Lidgerwood, and its population had been declining since 1930. Rutland offered a four year high school program, had no natural trading center nearby, and it experienced population growth. Each wanted to strengthen their school systems and retain local control.

A series of county committee meetings took place in the spring of 1954. Petitions from concerned citizens wishing to be annexed to nearby town districts

were presented and discussed. People in the northern half of Harlem township wanted to unite with Stirum and the southern half with Cogswell. The county committee accepted the petitions, worked out the legalistic details and sent reorganization plans to the state committee for approval. On May 20th the county committee reported that the state committee had approved the proposal.<sup>51</sup> On July 7, 1954, the County Commissioners approved the annexation plan and attached sections of land in the northern part of Harlem township to the Vivian School District and sections of land in the southern part to Cogswell Special School District.<sup>52</sup> An arbitration hearing took place on July 26th which divided up the assets and liabilities of the Harlem School District. Cogswell Special School district received \$962.82 and two-thirds of the liabilities. Vivian School District assumed one-third of the liabilities and \$481.41. Both school districts took possession of the schoolhouses in the annexed territory and Harlem #3 school went to Harlem Township as a polling place and township hall.<sup>53</sup> Sargent County finally had one less school district.

Sargent County experienced other annexations in 1954. Bowen Township had two school districts, Bowen School District and Bowen Independent #4. People in Bowen School District were divided over the issue of joining other school districts. However, during the

summer of 1954, Bowen School District went through the annexation procedure and parts of the school district were attached to the special school districts of Cogswell, Forman, and Gwinner.<sup>54</sup> It became the second school district which broke up. Furthermore, the county commissioners approved part of Willey School District to be attached to Gwinner Special School District but rejected the petition from residents of Jackson School District for some sections of land to be attached to Cogswell Special School District.<sup>55</sup> In April the county commissioners tabled petitions from Cayuga and Rutland and the documents were secured by the County Auditor until the petitions were released to the county superintendent in August.<sup>56</sup>

The annexation method of school reorganization continued in 1955. Numerous petitions were circulated throughout the county as residents of eight-grade school districts wanted to unite with nearby twelve-grade school districts. Farmers had to make tough decisions, sometimes going against friendships, in the matter of choosing a town district to support. Boundary lines were not straight due to disagreements. Annexations without the support of the people could go only so far. For instance, two-thirds of Shuman School District was annexed to Milnor but the districts continued operating with a one-room schoolhouse for its seventeen elementary



students.<sup>57</sup> On July 12th approximately one-fourth of Ransom School District was annexed to Cayuga while the remainder went to Rutland, assets and liabilities accordingly.<sup>58</sup> Dunbar School District and Dunbar Independent were broken up when they were annexed to Rutland, Gwinner, Milnor, and Forman.<sup>59</sup> However, Forman assumed 62 percent of the assets and liabilities and Milnor 23 percent.<sup>60</sup> Also, on July 12, all of Willey School District was annexed to Milnor and parts of Tewaukon School District to Havana. Portions of Kingston School District were annexed to Cayuga on November 2, 1955, but the county commissioners rejected petitions from Marboe School District's residents wishing to be attached to Cayuga because they lacked the two-thirds signature requirements of the electors and residents in the territory to be annexed.<sup>61</sup> Progress was made as Sargent County town districts enlarged their tax bases and more people lived in twelve-grade school districts. This was the last year for Ransom, Dunbar, Dunbar Independent, and Willey School Districts.

On August 12, 1955, Miss Bowser met with the Board of County Commissioners and tendered her resignation as County Superintendent.<sup>62</sup> Personal reasons and marriage to Merlin Rowse on October 23rd were cited. One of Bowser's last acts was the appointment of Marvin Medhaug to the county committee after Mrs. Meyers left in July.

Bowser had served as County Superintendent and secretary of the County School Reorganization Committee since 1947. Hattie (Harriet) E. Colburn was appointed on September 6th by the county commissioners to fill the vacancy effective November 1, 1955.<sup>63</sup> Colburn took the official oath as County Superintendent on the 10th of November and took over the secretarial duties of the county committee. She had been on the Havana faculty for the past ten years and was well-known throughout the county. By the end of 1955 Sargent County had twenty-three school districts. Annexation, rather than reorganization, had become the actual method of change.

School district reorganization efforts continued in 1956 when Bowen Independent #4 merged with Forman Special School District in late fall. However, the major development centered around a reorganization plan with a county high school. In April Kummeth used the pages of the Sargent County News to promote the county high school plan, reporting that the county committee believed the time was right for discussing the idea, excluding the Milnor, Hall, and Crete area. Even with the latest annexations school districts were too small.<sup>64</sup> On May 14, 1956, a committee was formed for developing a reorganization plan with a county high school. The County Educational Committee included: Robert Wyum, Harvey Peterson, Leonard Boop, Harold Mallberg, George Keifer,

Jay Haring, Emil Astrop, Robert Thayer, Peter Wertz, Dennis Lyon and Victor Ball. Colburn appointed Orville Jacobson to the county committee to fill the vacancy of Charles Dewey and Jacobson accepted the appointment on August 27th.

Good roads were a key to school reorganization and the passage of a five mill levy to hardtop roads in the general election in the fall of 1956 improved Sargent County roads. After this, road conditions became a minor issue in reorganization, but state aid for transportation cost continued to be important.

Sargent County's reorganization committee and the county educational committee planned and worked on a plan throughout 1956 and 1957 to consolidate nine high schools into one and change ten eight-grade districts into a twelve-grade district. There was an imbalance of the county's educational system: Forman and Cogswell had fully accredited high schools; Gwinner and Havana had a minor accredited program; Stirum, Rutland Special, and Cayuga had approved four-year programs; and Brampton had a two-year program. In the 1956-1957 school year Brampton had a high school enrollment of eight; Stirum had twenty-seven; Cayuga had thirty-three; Gwinner had thirty-nine; Havana had fifty; Rutland had fifty-three; Cogswell had sixty-three; and Forman had eighty-two.

The average annual cost per pupil in the high school districts ranged from a high of \$368.28 to a low of \$237.46. The value between school district property extended from \$500.00 to \$150,000.00. Kummeth led the fight for consolidation. He relentlessly pointed out the deficiencies of the present system and urged that the county adopt the motto: "Better education for all our youth all over the county and justice to all."<sup>65</sup>

The educational campaign began in Forman on March 26, 1957 (see Fig. 8). State Superintendent Peterson, Mr. Klien of Bismarck, and Cushman spoke on behalf of the one-high school concept before one of the largest crowds ever assembled in the Sargent County Auditorium. Peterson talked about the rising cost of education, new laws passed by the state legislature, and the need for a district to have enough students to enable it to hire fully qualified teachers and to offer more courses. Cushman called the plan adequate and maintained that taxes for the new school would remain about the same throughout the county. Furthermore, he explained that loss of a small high school did not mean the loss of business for the small town.<sup>66</sup>

After similar hearings took place in the county's other communities, the forum returned to Forman on December 17, 1957 for a final discussion. The courtroom in Forman was filled to capacity for the day-long meeting. The majority of people did not appear to be against

Fig. 8. Sargent County's Reorganization Committee advertisement for an Educational Meeting Concerning a County-Wide Prospectus. Source: Sargent County News, 14 March 1957. (Courtesy of Sargent County Teller)

# **EDUCATIONAL MEETING**

To Be Held On Proposed

**SARGENT COUNTY CENTRAL SCHOOL SYSTEM**

**County Auditorium - Forman, N. D.**

**March 26, 1957**

8:00 P. M.

This will be a county wide meeting and the proposed program will be explained in detail.

**HEAR THESE MEN WHOSE BUSINESS IS EDUCATION**

State Supt. M. F. Peterson and Mr. Klien of Bismarck and Dr. M. L. Cushman, Dean of Education at the State University will address the meeting.

You are cordially invited to attend this meeting and get the facts on our present schools and the new proposed system.

reorganization but were concerned about boundary lines. Those in the east favored Lidgerwood, and people in the west supported Oakes.<sup>67</sup>

After the two years of planning, the school reorganization movement had a great opportunity for improvement in 1958. The Sargent County School Reorganization Committee approved the county school plan on February 13. Districts included in the proposed plan: Gwinner, Forman, Cogswell, Havana, Cayuga, and Rutland, Rutland Consolidated, Shuman, Southwest, Northeast No. 4, Brampton, Taylor, Vivian (Stirum) and portions of Verner, Jackson, Herman, Kingston, and Marboe districts.<sup>68</sup> School news immediately became the number one issue in the residents' conversations and in the newspapers. Bold, front page headlines in the Sargent County News captioned the progress, "Committee Leaves For Bismarck Meet" and "State Board Delays Decision On School."<sup>69</sup> The state committee delayed its decision, but the only opposition came from Richland County's redistricting committee which had reorganization plans that involved eastern Sargent County. The matter was tabled until March 20, when Governor Davis could attend the hearing.<sup>70</sup> On March 21, the state approved the plan.<sup>71</sup> Sargent County received a great deal of attention because this was the first approved reorganization plan for a county high school with an expected enrollment of 400 high school students.

Before the election was held on May 6th, the people of the county became highly emotional over the issue. Twenty-two letters, pro and con, were written to the editor of the Sargent County News. Large ads, both for and against the reorganization plan, appeared in the Sargent County News. Anthony Volkmuth, editor of the Sargent County News in Forman, was a strong advocate of reorganization and he wrote bluntly in his editorials. Opponents argued that the new plan would mean loss of local control, higher taxes, high teacher-pupil ratios, and unfavorable athletic competition. Emil McLean, Rutland, asked one question that could not be answered by the state and county committee: "What would happen if the voters of Sargent County voted in favor of the big district and then when the new board put up a bond issue to build the central school, the bond issue was voted down. What would happen?"<sup>72</sup> Proponents stressed that the curriculum would improve, the district would be able to attract better teachers, new high school facilities would raise the quality of education, and more interest in sports would be created.<sup>73</sup>

In a large turnout on May 6, 1958, the people defeated the centralized high school by a wide margin. Only Forman, where the centralized high school would be located, favored the plan (see Table 5).



TABLE 5

## 1958 COUNTYWIDE SCHOOL DISTRICT ELECTION RESULTS

	Yes	No
<u>Urban Area</u>		
Cayuga	77	79
Cogswell	91	125
Forman	297	85
Gwinner	30	176
Havana	37	171
Rutland	<u>37</u>	<u>210</u>
Total Votes	569	846
<u>Rural Area</u>		
Brampton	33	66
Herman	14	21
Jackson	17	2
Kingston	4	36
Marboe	1	11
Northeast No. 4	4	13
Rutland Consolidated	10	58
Shuman	4	32
Southwest	3	5
Stirum	20	122
Taylor	15	38
Verner	<u>5</u>	<u>11</u>
Total Votes	130	413

Source: Sargent County News, 8 May 1958.

The school reorganization continued, however, after the May election.<sup>74</sup> Colburn appointed Harry Keifer, Cayuga, and Emil Astrop, Gwinner, to the county committee to fill the vacancies caused by the resignations of Lawrence Petterson, Gwinner, and Marvin Medhaug, Geneseo, on July 16.<sup>75</sup> Denver (Crete) and parts of the Jackson and Verner districts were reorganized with the Oakes Special School District on July 1st. The remaining portions of the two districts did not have enough taxable valuations to remain legally in operation (\$100,000 per teacher employed) by law; the county reorganization committee was responsible for attaching the remaining territory to another school district. Both districts were attached to Cogswell Special School District in August. Also, Southwest School District and Northeast No. 4 School District were annexed to Brampton School District. North Dakota Highway No. 11, between Cayuga and Oakes, became completely hardtopped by October 19, 1958.

School reorganization movement in Sargent County took an intriguing turn in 1959. Early in the year, Harlen Klefstad, a Forman school board member, received a phone call from Colburn, county superintendent. Colburn, excitedly, asked Klefstad to come to the courthouse at once. Klefstad arrived and met Harold Mallberg, Cogswell school board member and Emil Banderet, Brampton

school board member (their high school students were going to Cogswell). Mallberg indicated bluntly to Klefstad:

We can't operate anymore as far as the board is concerned; we're short of funds and we haven't told our people yet. We were wondering if you could take over our high school kids on a one-year trial basis and we will pay tuition to the Forman school district.<sup>76</sup>

According to Klefstad, this meeting started a multitude of school board meetings that were held more or less undercover. Finally, the Cogswell school board called a community meeting which drew a big crowd. Colburn and Klefstad attended the meeting in support of the Cogswell school board. Mallberg came right to the point and told the people that as far as the board was concerned, finances could not allow the district to operate a high school program any more and that it contacted Forman about handling the Cogswell students. The ceiling almost came down as the people protested. Finally, two students, a Mallberg boy and a Tuthill girl from Cogswell, stood up and said, "If we haven't any money we're willing to try it; we think we can get along with the Forman kids." Their attitude quieted the crowd and seemed to change the tone of the meeting. A great deal of discussion took place in the hallway afterwards but the boards went away with a feeling that the ice had been broken.<sup>77</sup>

In March the two school boards entered into a one-year agreement. Cogswell high school would be closed

for the 1959-1960 season and the students would attend the school in Forman. Transportation was provided and the Cogswell district compensated the district in Forman. Forman had 22 curriculum units, required by a 1959 law to maintain high school accreditation beginning in 1961, for the students and a staff of nine teachers. The elementary schools remained in operation in Brampton, Cogswell, and Forman.<sup>78</sup>

Within two weeks the Cayuga School Board contacted the Forman School Board for the arrangement of a similar agreement.<sup>79</sup> However, a serious problem stood in the way. School districts had to be connected. Obed Wyum, somewhat of a hero of Sargent County's school reorganization movement, however, solved the problem by placing a narrow strip of his farm land into the Forman district by annexation. The details were worked out, and the boards decided to call the new school Sargent Central High School. Forman hired Keith Thunem, Carson, North Dakota, as the new superintendent. His eleven years of experience helped in the coordination process that proceeded on schedule. Many people throughout the state watched the new high school operation and contacted the school for information.<sup>80</sup>

A total of 187 students registered at Central High School, 66 from Cogswell, 39 from Cayuga and 70 from Forman. Also, 12 other students enrolled from Brampton, Rutland Consolidated, and Taylor. Ten high school

teachers were employed during the school year.<sup>81</sup> Students selected "Royal Cadets" as their school nickname and royal blue and white for the school colors. The Sargent Central Cadets enjoyed instant success in sports by finishing undefeated in football and fourth in the state tournament in class B basketball in March, 1960. It was the first Sargent County team to win a class B basketball game in a state tournament, although Havana represented the county in the early 1940s. In June the Cadets placed second in state in baseball. Their victories brought fame and attention to the county, the three towns, and the combined high school.

The school reorganization movement continued in 1960, and with the success of the Sargent Central high school little resistance was encountered. Representatives from Sargent Central approached Rutland and Havana to see if they wished to join in a reorganization plan but the school boards refused. Beginning in the fall of 1961, school boards had to offer 22 curriculum units to maintain accreditation. This put a great deal of pressure on the very small high school operations to reorganize. Sargent County's school boards and the reorganization committee held various meetings to gather their patrons' views concerning reorganization.

Sargent County lost its foremost advocate of school reorganization when Lawrence Kummeth died on March 21,

1960. Kummeth lived long enough to see part of his dream of a county high school come true. From the beginning in 1947 Kummeth wanted one school district for the county with three high schools.<sup>82</sup> Sargent Central's new high school in Forman was dedicated to Kummeth. Ironically, after school reorganization was completed in 1969, Sargent County had three school districts with three high schools.

The reorganization plan involving Sargent Central Special School District was voted upon first. It involved all of Brampton, Cayuga, Cogswell, Forman, and parts of Shuman, Kingston, Herman, Marboe and Milnor Special. After numerous board meetings and public hearings in the first three months of 1960 the county committee called a countywide meeting and heard testimony on March 31, 1961. Although more than 250 people attended only 21 people testified before the board.<sup>83</sup> Sargent County's reorganization committee approved the plan on April 3 and presented the plan to the state committee on the 13th; about 70 people journeyed to Bismarck to attend the hearing. The state committee approved the plan the following day and the county superintendent set May 9th as the date for the election.<sup>84</sup> No large ads or letters to the editor appeared in the Sargent County News concern-  
int the reorganization plan, quite a contrast from the previous election. Voters approved the new school

district by a large margin and it became effective July 1, 1960.<sup>85</sup> A new school board was elected on June 7th and the members included Emil Banderet, Harold Mallberg, Olaf Olson, Charles Anderson, and Harlen Klefstad.<sup>86</sup> On March 28, 1961 the voters approved a \$540,000.00 bond issue for building a new high school.<sup>87</sup> Students were transferred to the new building on November 26, 1962.<sup>88</sup>

The second reorganization plan involved the combining of two school districts, Gwinner Special and Vivian Common school districts into a new district called North Sargent. The prospectus was put together by Ed Zetocha, chairman, Vernal Anderson, Eugene Dahl, Art Orn, Carl Kirmis, Jerome Tjaden, Superintendent of Gwinner Special, and Mr. Tykeson, Superintendent of Vivian School. A public hearing sponsored by the county committee took place on May 16th at the Memorial Hall in Gwinner.<sup>89</sup> The next day the county committee approved the plan and presented it at the state hearing in Bismarck on May 27th. The state committee approved the prospectus the following day.<sup>90</sup> The election occurred on June 24th and the voters approved the plan--Vivian, 102 to 70 and Gwinner, 220 to 17.<sup>91</sup> North Sargent held a new school board election on July 22 and those elected included Carl Kirmis, Willis Nelson, Chris Mathias, Roger Melroe, and Philip Bartz. Voters authorized a \$260,000 bond issue for a new school building and raised their

indebtedness from 5 to 10 percent on June 6, 1961.<sup>92</sup> In October the school board awarded construction contracts for the new school and on January 6, 1963 it was dedicated.<sup>93</sup>

The third major reorganization plan for Sargent County in 1960 involved all of Milnor Special School District, portions of Hall, Shuman and Herman School Districts in Sargent County, and portions of Sydna and Rosemeade townships in Ransom County. On April 5th, 250 people attended a public hearing in Milnor with 33 people giving testimony. The county committee approved the plan the following day and it was approved by the state committee on May 27th.<sup>94</sup> Voters, however, turned down the prospectus on June 24th although more voters favored reorganization. Electors in Milnor school district approved the plan overwhelmingly, 264 to 4. However, rural voters disapproved the plan, 138 to 160.<sup>95</sup> The school reorganization law of 1957 revised the voting procedure for reorganization plans. The law divided voters into two classes: those living within a school district with an incorporated village and those living within a school district with an unincorporated village. A majority vote must be attained in both classifications for approval.

A new but similar plan, Milnor Special, portions of Hall, and Herman school districts in Sargent County and portions of Sydna No. 24 and Salund No. 10 (Rosemeade)



in Ransom County, was put together during the next months. The county committee presented the plan on August 12th and the state approved the plan September 19th.<sup>96</sup> A special election took place on October 18th and was approved by an eight vote margin, urban vote 124 to 0, and rural vote 134 to 126.<sup>97</sup> In the fall of 1969 students at Milnor enjoyed the benefits of a new school building.

School reorganization continued in 1961 with the annexation of Marboe Common School District No. 11 and Kingston Common School District No. 14 to Lidgerwood Special School District on January 17.<sup>98</sup> A public hearing took place in the home of George Smykowski on March 13th and landowners in the remaining portion of Herman School District #8 testified that they wished to be attached to Lidgerwood Special School District. Because the school district had an assessed valuation of less than \$100,000.00 for each teacher employed the county committee was responsible for attaching it to an adjacent district. The committee officially attached the territory to Lidgerwood but believed it went against the purpose of reorganization to attach territory to a school district in another county with no guarantee of transportation or representation.<sup>99</sup> After the two districts were annexed, the county had seven school districts.

No reorganization took place in 1962, but in November, the school boards of Rutland School District #4 and

Rutland Consolidated School District #5 contacted Colburn for the purpose of reorganizing with Sargent Central School District #6. Rutland's consolidated school only taught elementary students. Fifteen meetings occurred before the county committee board held a countywide hearing on March 8, 1963.<sup>100</sup> Matters were complicated because Rutland School District was in a very different financial condition, little cash on hand, high bonded indebtedness, and almost \$26,000 in liabilities. But an arrangement was worked out where Rutland would pay off its liabilities over a five year period.<sup>101</sup> By March 19th the state and county committees approved the reorganization plan. On April 11, 1963, a special election took place but it was defeated when the residents of Rutland consolidated district voted 25 to 33 against reorganization although the urban vote went 425 to 95 in favor of the plan.<sup>102</sup> However, acting quickly the school boards petitioned the county committee for annexation to Sargent Central. After several meetings, the county committee approved the annexation petitions on May 23, 1963, and became part of Sargent Central.<sup>103</sup> The state committee approved the action.

The last consolidation action of 1963 concerned Taylor School District #7 that had not operated a school for the last two years. On May 31st, the county committee held a public hearing to determine to which

adjoining district or districts Taylor should be attached. The county committee attached the majority of Taylor to Havana but a few sections of land went to Sargent Central.<sup>104</sup> Because the county had consolidated down to four school districts by the end of 1963, little action on county reorganization took place for five years.

Early in 1969 work began on the last school district reorganization plan in Sargent County with little fanfare. Petitions for annexation to Sargent Central were circulated in the Havana Public School District #1 and more than two-thirds of the residents signed the petitions. A public hearing took place on April 16 and that same day Havana was annexed to Sargent Central. Havana paid off its liabilities in the same manner as Rutland. The school reorganization process was finished in Sargent County on April 16, 1969.<sup>105</sup> (See Fig. 9)

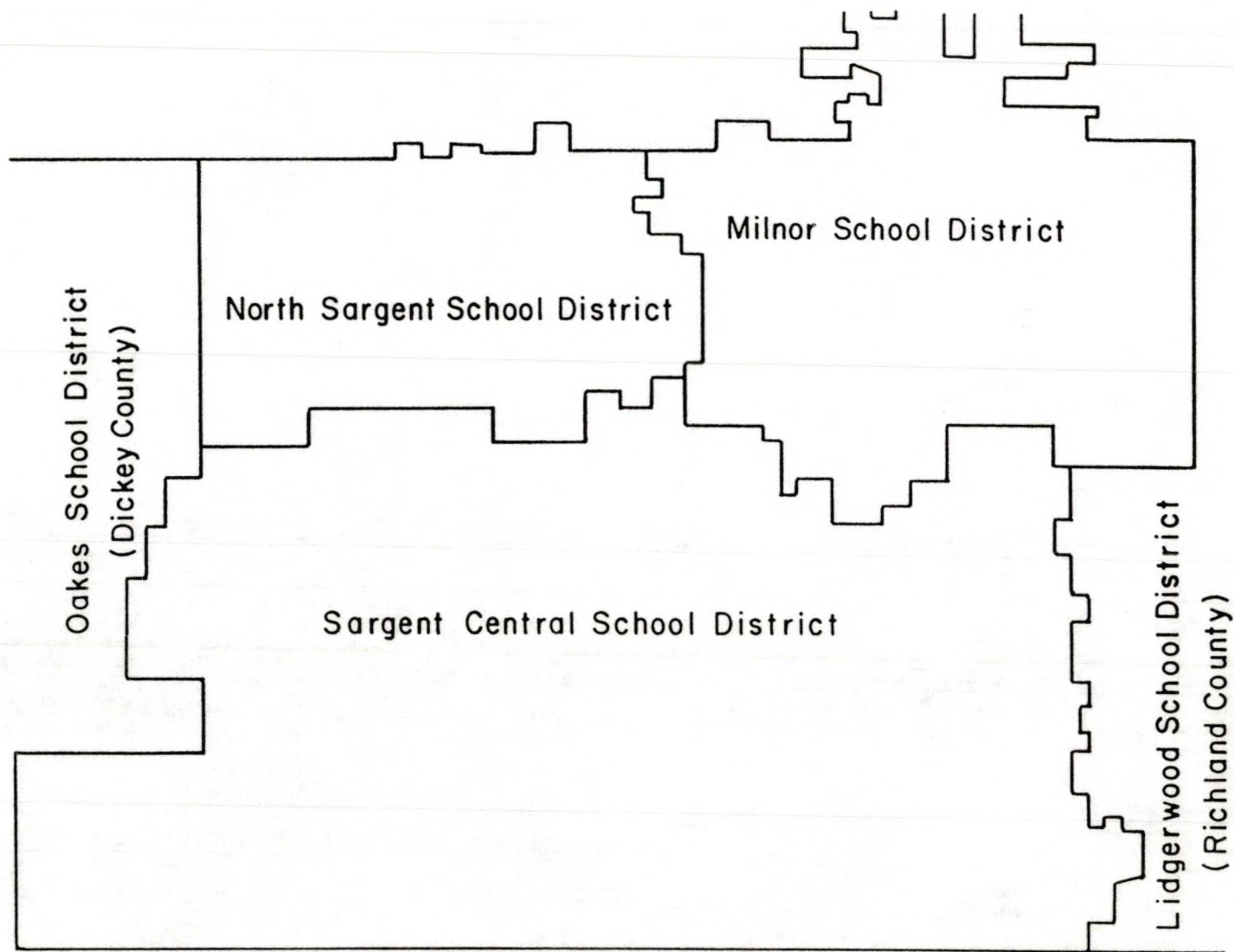


Fig. 9. A Map of School Districts After Reorganization, 1969

NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>Sargent County News, 20 November 1947, p. 1.
- <sup>2</sup>Sargent County, Forman, ND. County School Reorganization Committee Minutes, 12 November 1947, Book 1, p. 2. Hereafter cited as County Committee Minutes.
- <sup>3</sup>Sargent County News, 1 January 1948, p. 1.
- <sup>4</sup>Ibid., 8 January 1948, p. 1.
- <sup>5</sup>Ibid., 15 January 1948, p. 1.
- <sup>6</sup>Ibid., 5 February 1948, p. 1.
- <sup>7</sup>North Dakota, 1947 Supplement to the North Dakota Revised Code of 1943, p. 148.
- <sup>8</sup>Sargent County News, 8 April 1948, p. 1.
- <sup>9</sup>Ella Schroeder, "The Editor and Secretary," North Dakota Teacher 28 (May 1948): 12-13.
- <sup>10</sup>Sargent County News, 22 April 1948, p. 1.
- <sup>11</sup>Ibid., 6 May 1948, p. 1.
- <sup>12</sup>County Committee Minutes, 18 May 1948, p. 3.
- <sup>13</sup>Sargent County News, 20 May 1948, p. 1.
- <sup>14</sup>Ibid., 10 June 1948, p. 1.
- <sup>15</sup>Ibid., 1 July 1948, p. 1.
- <sup>16</sup>County Committee Minutes, 12 July 1948, pp. 5-6.

- <sup>17</sup> Ibid., 8 July 1948, p. 5.
- <sup>18</sup> Sargent County News, 28 October 1948, p. 1.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid., 4 November 1948, p. 1.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid., 2 December 1948, p. 1.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid., 16 December 1948, pp. 1, 4, 6.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid., 30 December 1948, p. 4.
- <sup>24</sup> North Dakota, 1947 Supplement to the North Dakota Revised Code of 1943, p. 149.
- <sup>25</sup> County Committee Minutes, 12 April 1949, pp. 13-16.
- <sup>26</sup> Sargent County, Forman, ND. Annual Report of the County Superintendent, Beginning July 1, 1948 and Ending June 30, 1949, pp. 2, 3, 5, 10, 11, 18, 20.
- <sup>27</sup> North Dakota, 1947 Supplement to the North Dakota Revised Code of 1943, p. 153.
- <sup>28</sup> Hall, "Reorganization of School Districts," p. 153.
- <sup>29</sup> County Committee Minutes, 12 April 1949, p. 15.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid., 21 April 1949, p. 16.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid., 25 April 1949, p. 17.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 17-19.
- <sup>34</sup> Sargent County, Forman, ND. Annual Report of the County Superintendent, Beginning July 1, 1948 and Ending June 30, 1949, pp. 2, 3, 5, 18, 20.

- <sup>35</sup>County Committee Minutes, 25 April 1949, p. 18.
- <sup>36</sup>Sargent County, Forman, ND. Annual Report of the County Superintendent, Beginning July 1, 1948 and Ending June 30, 1949, pp. 2, 3, 5, 18, 20.
- <sup>37</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>38</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>39</sup>County Committee Minutes, 25 April 1949, pp. 18,  
19.
- <sup>40</sup>Ibid., 31 May 1949, p. 20.
- <sup>41</sup>Sargent County News, 16 June 1949, p. 1.
- <sup>42</sup>Sargent County, Forman, ND. Annual Report of the County Superintendent, Beginning July 1, 1948 and Ending June 30, 1949, pp. 2, 3, 5, 18, 20.
- <sup>43</sup>County Committee Minutes, 17 June 1949, p. 20.
- <sup>44</sup>Ibid., pp. 20-21.
- <sup>45</sup>Ibid., 1 July 1949, p. 21.
- <sup>46</sup>County Committee Minutes, 20 October 1952, p. 25.
- <sup>47</sup>Ibid., 21 April 1953, p. 27.
- <sup>48</sup>Ibid., 29 May 1953, p. 28.
- <sup>49</sup>Ibid., 31 December 1953, p. 30.
- <sup>50</sup>Ibid., 6 January 1954, p. 32.
- <sup>51</sup>Ibid., 20 May 1954, p. 35.
- <sup>52</sup>Sargent County News, 22 July 1954, p. 1.
- <sup>53</sup>County Committee Minutes, 26 July 1954, p. 201.

<sup>54</sup>Sargent County News, 22 July 1954, p. 1 and 26 August 1954, p. 6.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 16 September 1954, p. 1.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 12 August 1954, p. 1.

<sup>57</sup>County Committee Minutes, 19 April 1955, p. 207.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 9 August 1955, p. 211.

<sup>59</sup>Sargent County News, 21 July 1955, p. 3.

<sup>60</sup>County Committee Minutes, 27 July 1955, p. 209.

<sup>61</sup>Sargent County News, 10 November 1955, p. 7.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 18 August 1955, p. 1.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 15 September 1955, p. 1.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 5 April 1956, pp. 1, 8.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 7 February 1957, p. 1.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 28 March 1957, p. 1.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 19 December 1957, p. 1.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 20 February 1958, p. 1.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 27 February 1958, p. 1 and 6 March 1958,  
p. 1.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 6 March 1958, p. 1.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 27 March 1958, p. 1.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 3 April 1958, p. 1.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 1 May 1958, p. 9.



- <sup>74</sup>Ibid., 8 May 1958, p. 1.
- <sup>75</sup>County Committee Minutes, 27 July 1958, p. 125.
- <sup>76</sup>Interview with Harlen Klefstad by author, 26 February 1987.
- <sup>77</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>78</sup>Sargent County News, 19 March 1959, p. 1.
- <sup>79</sup>Sargent County News, 26 March 1959, p. 1.
- <sup>80</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>81</sup>Sargent County News, 27 August 1959, p. 1.
- <sup>82</sup>Interview with Harriet Colburn by author, 4 February 1986.
- <sup>83</sup>Sargent County News, 7 April 1960, p. 1.
- <sup>84</sup>Ibid., 21 April 1960, p. 1.
- <sup>85</sup>Ibid., 12 May 1960, p. 1.
- <sup>86</sup>Ibid., 9 June 1960, p. 1.
- <sup>87</sup>Ibid., 30 March 1961, p. 1.
- <sup>88</sup>Ibid., 29 November 1962, p. 1.
- <sup>89</sup>Ibid., 12 May 1960, p. 1.
- <sup>90</sup>Ibid., 2 June 1960, p. 1.
- <sup>91</sup>Ibid., 30 June 1960, p. 1.
- <sup>92</sup>Ibid., 28 July 1960, p. 1.
- <sup>93</sup>Ibid., 8 June 1961, p. 1.

- <sup>94</sup>Ibid., 20 December 1962, p. 1.
- <sup>95</sup>Ibid., 30 June 1960, p. 1.
- <sup>96</sup>Ibid., 29 September 1960, p. 1.
- <sup>97</sup>Ibid., 20 October 1960, p. 1.
- <sup>98</sup>Sargent County Teller, 2 February 1961, p. 4.
- <sup>99</sup>County Committee Minutes, 14 March 1961.
- <sup>100</sup>County Committee Minutes, 8 March 1961.
- <sup>101</sup>Interview with Harlen Klefstad by author, 26 February 1987.
- <sup>102</sup>County Committee Minutes, "Reorganization Plan for the Sargent Central Public School District #6," n.d., p. 20.
- <sup>103</sup>County Committee Minutes, 23 May 1963.
- <sup>104</sup>Ibid., 31 May 1963.
- <sup>105</sup>Ibid., 16 April 1969.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSIONS

On April 16, 1969, the school reorganization movement in Sargent County was completed. Between 1947 and 1969 the number of school districts declined from twenty-nine to three. During the first two years the county committee was formed, and people learned about the law in newspapers and forums that farm organizations sponsored. School reorganization ignited great excitement throughout the country, and public interest ran high because people worried about possible school changes for their children and possible tax increases. No reorganization took place until 1954, but the county committee acted on community proposals. The consolidation of school districts began in 1954. Annexation, rather than reorganization, became the actual method of change. Two years of work, 1956 to 1958, was invested into a countywide prospectus which would have combined nine high school programs in the county under one administration, but the people voted against the reorganization plan. In 1959 Cogswell and Cayuga Special School Districts, under financial stress, signed a one-year trial agreement with Forman Special School District for

teaching their high school students, a successful merger. From 1954 to 1959 the number of school districts dropped from twenty-nine to sixteen. Three reorganization plans in Sargent County, Oakes Special School District's reorganization plan in Dickey County and annexations to Lidgerwood Special School District in Richland County reduced the number of districts to seven by 1961. Two districts each in 1963 and 1969 were annexed to adjoining districts leaving the county with three school districts--Milnor, North Sargent, and Sargent Central.

From its beginning as a territory to the coming of the automobile, North Dakota depended on the railroads for its settlement and transportation. Railroads helped establish too many small towns throughout the state. Similar to other counties in the state the railroad towns in Sargent County experienced a period of growth, optimism, and prosperity but some towns lost their vitality during the farm depression of the Twenties and the Great Depression in the Thirties. The legacy of the railroad towns and their slow demise affected North Dakota's history. The state has been adjusting since the rural exodus off the farms and the thriving railroad towns becoming ghost towns. People rallied around the local school, and many bitter struggles took place between nearby railroad towns during the reorganization movement. However, as the inland towns disappeared, many railroad

towns faced a similar fate in the adjustment process. Part of that process was school reorganization.

Sargent County's school reorganization experience was similar to forty other North Dakota rural counties that had no urban center. Forty-eight of North Dakota's counties were organized with the township method. The case study of Sargent Central revealed the usual pattern of school district consolidation. First, eight-grade school districts were annexed to a nearby town with a high school. A period of time, depending on local resistance, would elapse before several towns reorganized their boundaries. Also, some school districts were simply attached to an adjoining district after school operations ceased. However, annexation accounted for the most reduction of school districts using the procedures of a law that was passed in 1935. People reacted with the same loyalty when their local schools were threatened but it was only a matter of time before the inevitable happened and towns consolidated their high school programs. Multiple town schools were more numerous in the east than in the western part of North Dakota. For instance, Edinburg-Mountain-Gardar, Mayville-Portland, and Midway (Forest River-Gilby-Inkster).

Richard Bernard's study of North Dakota's small high schools in communities of less than 1,000 between 1954 and 1964 found that: Between 1954 and 1964 the

number of four year high school operations declined 23 percent from 286 to 220; sixty of the 66 high schools that closed had less than 250 people in 1960. Also, 20 three-two- and one-year programs ceased. One-third of these schools were not accredited by the state and only seven are members of the North Central Association. He concluded that the towns that have lost their high school have declined more in population than those whose schools have survived and grown.<sup>1</sup>

The rural exodus from the farms and the declining population in small towns brought about the need for school reorganization. Between 1930 and 1970 Sargent County had more than a 20 percent decrease in population. This was also true in forty-one other rural counties in the state. Enrollment numbers became very important to school administrators because of equalization payments. Farm mechanization and the automobile eliminated the need for schools within walking distance of the students.

The school reorganization process was hampered by local resistance. Lawmakers acted cautiously, judging rightly the mood of the people, in dealing with school reorganization. The voting procedure of the 1947 law for reorganization was amended in 1951 and again in 1957. The 1957 Legislature passed a non-resident high school tuition law, eliminating the economic advantage

not paying for the cost of a high school education, of eight-grade school districts. In 1958 voters defeated an initiated measure requiring any district not operating a high school to become part of such a district within three years. State aid for the transportation of pupils was provided by a 1959 law. Also passed was a law requiring school boards to offer 22 curriculum units to maintain accreditation standards by 1961. In 1963 the county reorganization committee could attach a school district, not operating a school for a period of two years, to an adjoining district.

North Dakota was settled during two population booms. Enthusiasm and optimism inflated the hopes and dreams of the white settlers. In this spirit they built too many schools. Hard times helped the people realize that the state could not support so many educational institutions. North Dakotans had to adjust to the realities of the environment. The school reorganization movement still continues, but from 1947 to 1970 the residents of North Dakota reduced the number of districts from 2,271 to 435. Today's abandoned and weathered schoolhouses testify to Professor Robinson's theme of the "too-much mistake."

NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Richard Bernard, "Changes in Small Schools of North Dakota," North Dakota Teacher, 44 (April 1965): 20, 21, 38, 39.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Newspapers

Bismarck Tribune. 20 March 1947.

Sargent County News. 20 November 1947-29 November 1962.

Sargent County Teller. 2 February 1961; 20 March 1987.

### Interviews

Colburn, Harriet, interview by author. 4 February 1986.

Klefstad, Harlen, interview by author. 26 February 1987.

### Documents

North Dakota, Department of Public Instruction. Bismarck, North Dakota. Seventh Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. 1902.

North Dakota, Department of Public Instruction. Bismarck, North Dakota. Eighth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. 1904.

North Dakota, Department of Public Instruction. Bismarck, North Dakota. Ninth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. 1906.

North Dakota, Department of Public Instruction. Bismarck, North Dakota. Tenth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. 1908.

North Dakota, Department of Public Instruction. Bismarck, North Dakota. Fifteenth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. 1918.

North Dakota, Department of Public Instruction. Bismarck, North Dakota. Sixteenth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. 1920.

North Dakota, Department of Public Instruction. Bismarck, North Dakota. Eighteenth and Nineteenth Reports

- of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. 1922-1926.
- North Dakota, Department of Public Instruction. Bismarck, North Dakota. Twenty-second Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. 1932.
- North Dakota, Department of Public Instruction. Bismarck, North Dakota. Twenty-sixth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. 1940.
- North Dakota, Department of Public Instruction. Bismarck, North Dakota. Thirtieth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. 1948.
- North Dakota, Department of Public Instruction. Bismarck, North Dakota. Thirty-second Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. 1952.
- North Dakota, Department of Public Instruction. Bismarck, North Dakota. Thirty-fifth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. 1958.
- North Dakota, Department of Public Instruction. Bismarck, North Dakota. Thirty-sixth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. 1960.
- North Dakota, Department of Public Instruction. Bismarck, North Dakota. Thirty-eighth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. 1964.
- North Dakota, Department of Public Instruction. Bismarck, North Dakota. Forty-second Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. 1972.
- North Dakota, Legislative Research Committee, House Bill-- School District Reorganization. "Report to the Thirtieth Legislative Assembly of the State of North Dakota." 1946.
- North Dakota. 1947 Supplement to North Dakota Revised Code of 1943. Bismarck: Issued by Secretary of State, North Dakota, Department of State, 1947.
- North Dakota. North Dakota Blue Book: 1981. Issued by Secretary of State, North Dakota, Department of State, 1981.
- North Dakota. North Dakota Reports: Reports of the Cases Decided in the Supreme Court of the State of North Dakota, vol. 53. Rochester: Lawyers Cooperative Publishing Company, 1925.

- Sargent County, Forman, North Dakota. Annual Report of the County Superintendent, Beginning July 1, 1946 and Ending 30 June 1947.
- Sargent County, Forman, North Dakota. Annual Report of the County Superintendent, Beginning July 1, 1948 and Ending June 30, 1949.
- Sargent County, Forman, North Dakota. County Reorganization Committee Minutes. 1947-1970.
- U.S., Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Census. 1974 Census of Agriculture, vol. 1, North Dakota: State and County Data, pt. 34, North Dakota.
- U.S., Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of Census. Thirteenth Census of the United States with Supplement for North Dakota 1910: Population.
- U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census. Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920: Population.
- U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census. Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, 1960, p. 36, vol. 1.
- U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census. Census of Population: General Social and Economic Characteristics, 1970, pt. 36 North Dakota.

#### Articles

- Agneberg, Paul A. "Proposed Reorganization Legislation." North Dakota Teacher 25 (October 1946): 13.
- Bernard, Richard. "Changes in Small Schools of North Dakota." North Dakota Teacher 44 (April 1965): 20, 21, 38, 39.
- Brown, R. L., ed. "Editorial." Associate Teacher 2 (November 1922): 22.
- Dalager, Paul A. "School Legislation." North Dakota Teacher 24 (April 1945): 19.
- Hanna, G. W. "Minimum Salary Law." North Dakota Teacher 4 (February 1922): 9-11.

- Holland, Donald. "The Educational Crisis." North Dakota Teacher 13 (April-May 1934): 15, 16, 24.
- Loomer, Walter W. "The 1937 Legislature and Schools." North Dakota Teacher 16 (April 1937): 8, 15, 16, 30.
- McCurdy, M. E., ed. "A Letter from a Rural School Teacher." North Dakota Teacher 11 (February 1932): 22-23.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The New Tax Proposal." North Dakota Teacher 11 (March 1932): 14.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Editorial and Secretarial." North Dakota Teacher 12 (February-March 1933): 20-21.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Message of Governor William Langer: Given Before the School Officers Conference at Bismarck, N.D., Oct. 3, 1938." North Dakota Teacher 18 (November 1938): 17-20.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "From the N.D.E.A.--Editorial and Secretarial." North Dakota Teacher 18 (January 1939): 5-6.
- McDonald, Ralph. "The Teacher Crisis." North Dakota Teacher 26 (February 1947): 18-20.
- Nordrum, Garfield. "Monthly News Bulletin." North Dakota Teacher 26 (April 1947): 12-13.
- Nestoss, A. R. "Redistricting is Growing in Favor in North Dakota." North Dakota Teacher 30 (November 1950): 8, 9, 18, 22.
- Peterson, M. F. "Department of Public Instruction." North Dakota Teacher 31 (October 1951): 52, 55.
- Pickles, C. E. "Salaries and Professional Growth of Teachers in North Dakota." North Dakota Teacher 4 (April 1925): 4-7.
- Rainey, Homer P. "Development of the American School System." North Dakota Teacher 11 (March 1932): 15-16.
- Schroeder, Ella, ed. "The Editor and Secretary." North Dakota Teacher 28 (May 1948): 12-13.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "North Dakota Schools Advance by Constructive Legislative Program." North Dakota Teacher 28 (April 1949): 7, 29.

Thompson, Arthur E. "Youth of North Dakota--Our Greatest Asset." North Dakota Teacher 24 (September 1944): 13.

Wakefield, Harold. "Suggestion for Curing Financial Ills of Education in City and Village Schools." North Dakota Teacher 3 (February 1924): 18, 19, 25, 26, 27, 28.

#### Atlas

Espenshade, Edward B., Jr., ed. Rand McNally Goode's World Atlas, 16th ed. Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1982.

#### Books

Drache, Hiram M. The Challenge of the Prairie: Life and Times of Red River Pioneers. Fargo: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1970.

Country School Legacy: Humanities on the Frontier. Silt: Mountain Plains Library Association, 1981.

Hall, Thomas, comp. 1947 Supplement to North Dakota: Revised Code of 1943. Issued by Secretary of State, North Dakota, Department of State.

Hudson, John C. Plains County Towns. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985.

Hutton, F. Z. Soil Survey of Sargent County, North Dakota. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1920.

Kazeck, Melvin E. North Dakota: A Human and Economic Geography. Fargo: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1956.

Kelsey, Vera. Red River Runs North. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1951.

Lounsberry, Clement A. Early History of North Dakota: Essential Outlines of American History. Vol. 1. Washington: Liberty Press, 1919.

Robinson, Elwyn B. History of North Dakota. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966.

Palmer, Bertha R. A Brief History of the Department of Public Instruction: 1860-1932. reprint ed., Bismarck: By the Author, n.d.

Thorffinson, S. M. Sargent County History. Sargent County Commissioners, 1976.

Wilkins, Robert P. and Wilkins, Wynona Huchette. North Dakota: A Bicentennial History. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1977.

Williams, Mary Ann Barnes. Origins of North Dakota Place Names. Washburn: By the Author, 1966.

Wills, Bernt Lloyd. North Dakota: The Northern Prairie State. Ann Arbor: Edwards Brothers, Inc., 1963.

#### Dissertation and Theses

Blikre, Clair. "The Positive and Negative Factors Involved in Successful School District Reorganization Proposals in North Dakota." D. dissertation, University of North Dakota, 1960.

Goheen, Royal Williard. "Laws and Regulations Governing the Schools of North Dakota." M.S. thesis, University of North Dakota, 1955.

Ollenburger, Alvin W. "A Proposed Reorganization of School Districts in Sargent County." M.S. thesis, University of North Dakota, 1957.

#### Unpublished Manuscript

Cushman, M. L. "An Analysis of Legislation for School District Reorganization in the Midwest." Ames: Iowa State Microfilm, 1950.