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## How Prairie View State College Might Aid in the Improvement of Rural Schools of Chambers County

Mable L. Toran

*Prairie View State Normal and Industrial College*

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HOW PRAIRIE VIEW STATE COLLEGE MIGHT AID IN THE  
IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS OF  
CHAMBERS COUNTY

BY

Mable L. Toran

A Thesis in Education Submitted in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Bachelor of Science

in the

Division of Arts and Sciences

of the

Prairie View State Normal and Industrial College

Prairie View, Texas

August, 1936

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I wish to express my appreciation to Mr. G. W. Harrison, head of the Department of Chemistry at Virginia Tech State Normal and Industrial College, for his criticisms and help; to Mrs. Elizabeth Harrison, Superintendent of the State Normal and Industrial College, for her assistance; and to my friends and relatives for their interest and support.

Dedicated

to

My Deceased Parents,

Mr. and Mrs. John Torrey



ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I wish to express my appreciation to Mr. G. L. Harrison, Head of the Department of Education at Prairie View State Normal and Industrial College, for his criticisms and help; to Mrs. Kathleen Benson, Superintendent of Galveston County Rural Schools; and to my friend, Professor W. H. Wilson of Galveston, Texas.

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- (1) Objectives

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HOW PRAIRIE VIEW STATE COLLEGE MIGHT AID IN THE  
IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS OF  
CHAMBERS COUNTY

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HOW PRAIRIE VIEW STATE COLLEGE MIGHT AID IN  
THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE RURAL SCHOOLS OF  
CHAMBERS COUNTY

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION

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The Prairie View State College is the largest teacher training institution for Negroes in the Southwest. Two commencements are held annually, at which times many teachers are graduated and sent to the various communities to render educational services. The institution has made actual studies of schools in rural communities and has made curricula changes designed to meet the needs of rural teachers. However, the results of these changes have not been generally felt in all rural communities.

PURPOSE

This study attempts:

1. To show how the problems of the Chambers County Schools are related to the curriculum of Prairie View College
2. To study the problems characteristic of the Negro school of Chambers County.
3. To determine how the various departments of Prairie View College may effect a solution to perplexing situations in various rural communities.



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CHAPTER I

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3. To determine how the various departments of Prairie View College may effect a solution to perplexing situations in various rural communities.



4. To offer some pertinent suggestions that may help to alleviate certain weakness in the Negro rural schools of Chambers County.

#### Historical Development of Prairie View State College

In discussing the only state supported institution for higher education of Negroes in Texas, it seemed best to give a brief historical development of Prairie View State College to show how this institution has grown from a loave plantation to the greatest Negro Land Grant College in America and one of the largest schools for Negroes in the world.

Prairie View State Normal and Industrial College depicts the rise of the American Negro from the status of a slave to that of an educated and respected citizen who is making a definite contribution to the welfare and development of his state and nation.

Prior to emancipation, the site upon which Prairie View now stands was the slave plantation of Jared Ellison Kirby. The Spanish "Alta Vista" was the name which the old estate bore when it was owned by the Kirbys.

On August 14, 1876, an act of the Fifteenth Legislature of Texas was approved, part of which reads as follows:



To establish an Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas for the benefit of the Colored youths and to make appropriations therefor.

Section I--Be it enacted by the Legislature of the State of Texas, That there shall be established in the State at such point and in the manner provided for in this Act, an Agricultural and Mechanical College for the benefit of the Colored youths of this state.

The Kirby Plantation was purchased for \$20,000.00.

The Spanish name "Alta Vista" was changed to its English equivalent "Prairie View." The School was organized as an Agricultural and Mechanical College, consequently, the Negroes failed to attend. The result was that under an act approved by the Governor of Texas on April 19, 1879, the School was re-organized into an institution whose primary purpose was to train teachers. The School has grown continuously and prospered since its re-organization.

As has been stated before, Prairie View College started out as a purely Agricultural and Mechanical College, then changed suddenly to a school primarily devoted to the training of teachers. It has constantly attempted to adapt its purposes and objectives to the needs of the people for whom it was established to serve. The college is located in Waller County about forty-six miles north of Houston, Texas on the Southern Pacific Railroad and State Highway Number Six.

In brief, the purpose of Prairie View State College under the leadership of Principal W. R. Banks may be stated in these



words: "To make available to the Colored Citizens of the Southwest the best possible training in the fields designed in the program of a Land Grant College, which are more specifically stated as:

- (a) A liberal education
- (b) Vocational Training in Agricultural, Home Arts, Industrial Arts, Nurse Training and Rural Extension Service."

Because the State of Texas emphasizes the importance of professional training for teachers in elementary and high schools, the Department of Education of Prairie View has become the largest teaching unit or department in the entire institution. The majority of students in the school of Arts and Sciences are either majoring or minoring in Education and all other divisions are dependent upon this one Department for the educational training of their students. It is found that students are encouraged to specialize in certain phases of education such as Elementary Education, or Secondary Education, instead of taking courses in any and all phases of Education.

#### History of the Rural School Problem

Until very recently, the objectives of education of Prairie View College were quite satisfactory. The school grew rapidly and hundreds of young men and women became efficient race leaders as a result of Prairie View's superior



type of training given to them."

"There is a very definite need of a change in the policy of the institution because of the serious problem that has been confronting all educational institutions in the North as well as in the South and in white institutions as well as in Negro ones." <sup>1</sup> That problem is one concerned with the education of the rural children who are in the traditional "Little Red School House."

This problem has arisen because of the deplorable conditions that are found in the rural schools. It has also come forward as one necessitating careful analysis and study because it has been found that most of the students who graduate from Prairie View go to the rural area to teach. While our city school systems are fairly well organized, a new type of educational organization is especially needed for our rural schools and small towns.

As long as we keep myriads of small isolated villages and rural school districts, we will never have satisfactory conditions for teachers. Neither can we have the dynamic, useful type of education such as communities need. The matters of organization of districts of sufficient size and wealth to support schools adequately are of fundamental importance to half of our population. We can no longer depend on the idealistic and paternal legislation which

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<sup>1</sup>

Houston Informer, April 18th issue, 1932--Education Section.



politicians plan as a relief to county areas, but must look for reforms that are helpful and lasting. These reforms must come through intelligent education. The way to prevent the depletion of rural communities and to develop vigorous citizens therein is to maintain rural schools of force and character, and on the level with the ideas of the best country people.

Prairie View State College, equipped as it is with a trained faculty, may become a very important factor in the improvement of schools in the rural communities and can do much to improve present conditions. This improvement can be accomplished by offering courses in rural education; and by continuing the educational conferences in which county superintendents are brought face to face with problems to be solved which tend to make permanent improvement in rural education.

#### Relationship of the College to Rural Schools

Prairie View has a direct relationship to the rural teachers of this state and for this reason should be of valuable service to them. Most of the rural high school students of the state attend the college for such training as it has to offer. When they have been graduated by the school, they go back to the rural community to find employment feeling that they are fully prepared to render



efficient service. They feel assured that what Prairie View has done for them will enable them to put over a good job.

#### How the School Can Help:-

Prairie View State College now finds itself in a very favorable position to render practical and needed service to the rural teacher so that the latter can better put over his job as a rural teacher. The schools in Chambers County are greatly in need of better teachers.

Prairie View has already done much to improve schools, and especially the condition of the rural schools. This has been especially true during the last eight or ten years. During this time many courses have been added so as to better prepare rural teachers. Prairie View State College is now offering the following courses that will assist the rural teachers in making their schools better:

Rural Education, Rural Sociology,  
 School Hygiene, Physical Education,  
 Home Economics Education, Agricultural Education,  
 Mechanic Arts Education.

In addition to these, the institution maintains such agencies as an Engineering Department and an Agricultural Extension Department.



## CHAPTER II

### CHAMBERS COUNTY RURAL SCHOOLS FOR NEGROES

The writer has taught in Chambers County for several years and is, therefore, well acquainted with rural school problems.

It is a lamentable fact that the rural Negro schools of Chambers County, as a whole, are less progressive than the rural Negro schools of the adjacent counties: Galveston, Harris, Liberty, and Jefferson Counties.

There are seven rural Negro schools in Chambers County with terms ranging from six to eight months each. In the past several years three new school buildings have been built. Two of them have two rooms each and the other is a four-room Rosenwald building. Most of the districts have been consolidated but it did not mean very much to the Negro schools because the Negroes protested moving their little schools. Then the boards consolidated the white schools and allowed the Negro schools to remain as they were.

We have schools located in the following communities: Mt. Belview, Cove, Texas, Wallisville, Texas, Hankamer, Texas, Anahuac, Texas, and Eagle, Texas. There are three new buildings and four in fair condition.

Chambers County is not very large. The geographical barriers cause the schools to be isolated somewhat. The



schools are situated so as to cause much difficulty in getting to them.

The health conditions have been somewhat neglected in many of the schools. There are pit toilets at only two of the schools. Only one school has screens. In most instances, water is obtained from a spring or well some distance from the school. Three of the schools have water on the campus.

In my school, emphasis is placed on health, the first Cardinal Principle of Education. Many of the schools are indifferent toward various "Health" objectives. Some of the schools have no playground equipment and provide little or no type of wholesome recreation for the pupils.

In view of the fact that Chambers County possesses some of the richest agricultural land to be found in the United States, including 550 rice farms, one should expect to find a more progressive type of rural schools located therein. One will not find progressive schools because most of the population is composed of transients.

According to a report from the County Superintendent's office, 90% of the persons that teach in the Negro Schools of Chambers County are from Prairie View State College, with 57% from Samuel Huston and 5% from other colleges. Thus, we see what a great bearing Prairie View College may have



on the rural schools of Chambers County. In brief, the rural school problems of Chambers County are:

1. The lack of sufficient finance to maintain good schools.
2. The lack of housing and physical equipment.
3. The traditional curriculum.
4. Inadequate health facilities.
5. Poor attendance.

Buildings should be something more than devices to protect the children from weather while being educated. They should offer such facilities as are conducive to beauty, providing health facilities and environments, wholesome recreational facilities as well as the necessary comforts and equipment for mental growth.

Social and economic changes are rapid and the traditional curriculum is no longer adequate. Hence, it should be changed to meet the changing conditions. Much out-of-date and useless material in our present curricula should be eliminated.

Health programs to improve and make secure the health of the children should be formed and religiously carried out. Health cannot be taught from a textbook, but must be taught by practice. The teacher should direct the children into forming good health habits.



Health Charts, "Daily Inspection," Health Clubs, Health Week, Clean-up Day and the playground are good incentives in helping children to form good health habits.

Several devices may be used to eliminate poor attendance. One way that is very effective is a personal conference with the child and a visit to the home as a follow-up measure to check the cause.

Since Chambers County is an unusually small county, we have no rural supervisor or extension agent. It may be fitting and proper in this instance to combine efforts with those of the smaller neighboring county in securing the services of a rural school supervisor.

In many instances, teachers are not selected on merit of their work. Frequently the personal element enters in the selection of teachers. Some are appointed regardless of the lack of training or qualifications.

The Department of Education is concerned with rural problems. A list of the proposed objectives for rural education are given. It is one of the facts that wide differences of opinion are possible, and of the program and



## CHAPTER III

### THE VARIOUS DEPARTMENTS

#### The Department of Education

The Department of Education will be discussed first because it is in this field that the majority of students who have chosen to follow the teaching profession do their major work and further because it is the department that offers more to the student in the way of preparing him for the teaching profession.

Much of the retardation of the rural schools is caused by the teacher's inability to cope with the situations in the rural communities. This inability on the part of the teacher can be traced, in many instances, back to the weakness of the institution to train the individual for this type of work.

In many instances, teachers are not selected on merit of their work. Frequently the personal element enters in the selection of teachers. Some are appointed regardless to the lack of training or inefficiency.

#### Objectives of the Department of Education

The Department of Education is vitally concerned with rural problems. A few of the proposed objectives for rural education are given. In spite of the fact that wide differences of opinion are revealed, most of the proposals and



tendencies imply that the elementary school is responsible "(1) for preserving a sufficiently large rural population to supply food for the world and sustain a standard rural civilization; (2) for giving country children a definite preparation for the social and vocational demands of rural life and (3) for solving the many neglected social, religious, recreational and occupational problems of the adult rural group." <sup>1</sup> These objectives demand that the rural elementary school emphasize rural opportunity, that it give preparation for specific local tasks, and that the problems, needs and interests of the adult and the local community should determine the problems and content of the rural curriculum.

In Chambers County, as in the other rural communities in Texas, we realize that the adults are not capable of determining the curriculum content because of the following reasons: (1) lack of training and (2) lack of interest in the school. Therefore, it becomes the duty of the teacher to realize the needs of the community and direct her work in the manner most beneficial to the students and community.

From all that has been said it can be plainly seen that the most significant problem in the whole field of

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<sup>1</sup> O. G. Brims, Rural Education, Chapter XIII, pp. 271-293; 1929--MacMillan Co., N. Y.



rural public education, is that of formulating the curriculum for the training of rural teachers.

W. H. Boyd, in his book Toward a New Education, defines the curriculum to include "everything that the child does, everything that contributes to his active life in school. All that he reads or writes, or points, as well as the debates between the children, their work of individual research, their group of excursions and all their activities." <sup>1</sup>

Dr. Harold Rugg makes the following statement, "We need a curriculum which will not only inform, but will constantly have as its ideal the development of an attitude of sympathetic tolerance and critical open-mindedness. A curriculum which is built around a core of pupils' activities-- studies of their home, community, special reading and original investigation, a constantly growing stream of opportunities for participation in open-forum discussion, debate and exchange of ideas, is the type of curriculum needed at present." <sup>2</sup>

"Approximately, 40% of the scholastic population of Texas lives on farms. This means that a very large percentage of our children are either attending small consolidated schools or are receiving instruction in the traditional

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<sup>1</sup> W. H. Boyd, Toward a New Education, Chapter I, pp. 21-23, Alfred A. Knopf, New York City, N. Y.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Harold Rugg, The Child Centered School, Chapter III, pp. 20-23, World Book Company, New York, N. Y., 1928.



"Little Red School House."

"It becomes necessary, therefore, that those responsible for the revision program consider carefully the matter of adapting the courses of study to the rural school. It is recommended that County Superintendents see that teachers in rural schools spend a great deal of time in the consideration of such topics as follow:

1. The value of combination and of alternation of grades.
2. The advisability of coordinating subjects.
3. The integration or fusion of subjects.
4. Fundamentally organizing by groups to study topics of social interests.
5. Advantages and disadvantages of alternation.
6. Unit teaching in rural schools."

Mrs. Kathleen Benson, Superintendent of Schools of Galveston County, in an address on "Rural Conditions which Make Curriculum Adaptations Necessary" said, "The school is a great social agency which serves all the people impartially; we must recognize, then, that social changes tend to follow a cycle and must not be too dogmatic about our contemplated curriculum revision. Not only should we seek the cooperation of the laymen in general, but the type of revision suggested by different regions should be checked

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4  
Hand book for Curriculum Study, pp. 10-11, by W. A. Stigler, State Department of Education, Austin, Texas.



to discover similarity in treatment."

"Our educators have long been emphasizing attention to individual differences. I believe they should give more attention to community differences--to provide curricula definitely worked out to meet these regional differences. I believe there should be appointed a committee of rural school workers to study conditions in rural Texas so that a suitable course of study may be prepared for the vast number of rural boys and girls who will continue to live upon the farm in rural communities."

#### The Training School

The Students of Prairie View State College do their practice teaching in their Sophomore year at the Campus Training School. When they go out into the communities most times they are unable to offer any suggestions or do any remedial work. In this way, the student does not get the proper amount of practical work nor is he given the desirable experiences he would get if the school were off the campus. The off-the-campus training school presents situations more real and similar to those he will be placed in when he goes to the rural schools.

I do not mean to say that the campus practice teaching should be abolished. It should serve as a model school,

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Mrs. Kathleen Benson, Superintendent of Galveston Rural Schools. Address delivered to Curriculum Conference at Houston, Texas, 1935.



wherein the prospective teachers observe the best methods of class procedure. This enables the student teachers to gain a background which prepares them for effective classroom participation when they go out to teach. There are many problems that will be entirely new in the off-the-campus school.

The most practical plan, for co-ordinating the Education Department and the off-campus training school, is through the organization and administration set up. It would be necessary for the administration to take the first steps.

The district that is to be taken over by Prairie View would have to agree on a satisfactory arrangement for the salary and the teachers. The college could supplement the salary the teacher receives from the district or probably give the teacher free tuition. However, a satisfactory salary schedule could be worked out. This plan of course, may add a deal to the expense of the Department of Education but the good that would be derived would greatly exceed the expense of the plan.

The college should so arrange its schedule so that the Seniors could spend one-half day out in the rurals and at the same time carry on their regular work. It seems that this plan could easily be carried out because of Prairie View's large and efficient faculty.



It would be very desirable to operate the school from Tuesday through Saturday so that many of the students could visit the school and become acquainted with some of the problems that will confront them when they become teachers. In this plan the student would only have to teach six weeks in order to complete the same number of hours that the Sophomore practice teachers have.

A member of the college faculty should supervise the student teaching at the off-the-campus training school. The students should be required to take a course in rural practical problems. The supervisor should be responsible for the professional growth of the student teacher. The supervisor should act as a co-ordinating agent between the college and training school. Since the student teacher must meet with the supervisor several times weekly in conference and class discussions, he is familiar with their training and experiences. He is able to advise the classroom teacher in the adjustment of the student load.

Again it may be said that the off-campus-training school will provide an opportunity for student contact with interests and activities which is very essential to the success of the beginning teacher.

The writer ventures to say that the reason that so many of our teachers have failed in Chambers County is due



to the lack of understanding and dealing with the rural problems. As has already been stated, 90% of the teachers of Chambers County come from Prairie View College.

#### How the Department of Biology may Aid in the Improvement of Rural Conditions

From the facts derived from the general survey of the rural schools of Texas, one can plainly see the important role that the Department of Biology can play in aiding in the development of rural schools. The country has always been pictured as being the most healthful place in which to live, and those living in the country have been prone to look upon the city as a veritable breeding place for disease but this is quite contrary to fact. All available evidence indicates that the city is more healthful and takes better care of its people than the country.

Health conditions in Chambers County create a serious problem. A survey by Dr. G. W. Farhing of Anahuac, Texas, Chambers County, shows that 75% of the drinking water is impure. What can be done? We have no board of health. These wells of impure water are said to be infected with typhoid germs. Nothing has been done to remedy this condition, although the death rate is far lower than that of some counties where health conditions are more favorable.

Since the new oil boom, housing conditions have been improved in some communities. Families that formerly lived



in two-room shanties are building three and four room houses. In some communities the pit toilets have replaced the old unsanitary type.

#### Proposed Plans for the Department of Biology

It is suggested that teachers send samples of water to Prairie View College to be analyzed and ask for remedial suggestions.

It has been found that the hookworm is a very prevalent disease of the Southern States. The Department of Biology can aid communities to get rid of this disease by examining the excreta and making remedial suggestions. It is not too much to hope that the time will come when danger from insect and microscopic pests together with the germs of such dreaded diseases as tuberculosis and typhoid fever will be extinct.

#### The Department of Agriculture

Vocational Education prepares the youth of the country. Since 90 per cent of the working population are employed in trades and industry of some type, we can readily see the need of vocational training and guidance. To meet the increasing demands for vocational training, the Federal Government cooperates with the states and communities through appropriations for Vocational Agriculture, Home Economics, and other necessary trades and industries.

The guiding principles of the Vocational Educational acts are:



1. Education to be furnished must be under public supervision and control.
2. Less than college grade.
3. Must be designed to train persons for useful employment in Agriculture, Home-making, Trades and Industries.

#### Home Making Projects:-

In view of the need for training teachers vocational Agriculture, the state Board of Vocational approved several qualified teachers to teach this type of work, the State Board of Vocational Education approved several colleges, among which was Prairie View, for teacher training.

It should be remembered that among the obligations resting upon the school, it is expected to supply children with an education which they can not obtain from their homes. Much of the content of the Vocational Agriculture should be gardening, marketing of products, canning, preserving, and other projects that would be essential to immediate and future needs. They may learn many of these things after a fashion, but they should be taught to do



them in a modern way. The miniature stores are very easily obtainable and are very useful in teaching marketing.

The school bank teaches children thrift. We have the banking system in our school. The children deposit a penny or whatever they may have on Wednesdays. Each child has his individual bank book from our local bank. The principal of the school deposits the money in the local bank for them.

#### The Department of Home Economics

The aim of the College in Home Economics is to inspire and stimulate interest in continued study, to train in accuracy, to help the student find her place in the social and economic world, and to increase the student's information. In this division young ladies are given training in dress-making, cooking and beauty culture. I think that every girl in college should be required to take some phase of Home Economics.

In the Anahuac Junior High School, of Chambers County, there is not any type of vocational training offered. Since many of the girls who finish from this school do not go off to college, it is up to the teacher to instruct them in cooking, sewing, home-making and family relationship. We find that girls in the rurals are as interested as urban girls about their personal appearance. The officials of Chambers County, having seen the need of Home



Economics in our rural schools, are making an effort to secure well trained teachers in this field. Prairie View State College should be able to supply the County with teachers who are interested in country life and willing to help the community as a whole.

#### The Department of Library Science

Chambers County does not have a local library for its Negro Citizens. The Library Department of Prairie View State College has a limited staff and a limited supply of material. If these two outstanding defects could be remedied, the Department could make a very definite contribution to the development of not only the schools of Chambers County, but to the rural schools of Texas. If more members were added to the staff and there were a larger supply of books, then the Department could afford a circulating library. Book clubs and local libraries could be established. Through these agencies the people in the rural districts could be enlightened. A great deal of the ills of the rural schools are caused by the parents objecting to new educational devices and practices. They fail to see the value of changing their ideas concerning education. This plan would help the people to see the defects and desire needed changes.

If there is any one thing that is essential to the



developing of our rural schools, it is to educate the parents into the needs of the school. The circulating library should circulate books to the parents and also to the teachers. The materials that are most beneficial should be chosen. The pupils could be given the types of books that would afford the right kind of reading for leisure time. Local libraries could be established with the Head of the Library Department of Prairie View as the supervisor. Of course, there should be part-time workers in each local library. All of the material should be checked out of the Library Department of Prairie View College.<sup>4</sup>

The white citizens at Anahuac have a library like the one I have just described. They have added several hundred books purchased and donated by different citizens.

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with the Librarian, Prairie View State College, 1935.



## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

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In an attempt to show what the Arts and Science Division of the Prairie View State Normal and Industrial College can do to aid in the development of the rural schools of Chambers County, the writer has given consideration to the departments of the division which can make a more definite contribution. It is known, however, that all of the departments can aid if the teaching is directed in the right way.

The Department of Education of Prairie View College to Aid in the Improvement of Rural Negro Schools:

1. Enlarge its curriculum so as to better prepare persons for rural service.
2. Place more emphasis on phases of subject matter that is most beneficial to prospective teachers.
3. Establish an off-campus training school with a member of the Department of Education as the supervisor or director.



The Department of Biology may Aid in the Improvement of the Rural Schools of Chambers County by:

1. Examining the drinking water for impurities that are sent to its laboratory, and making recommendations for purification.
2. Examining the human excreta to determine if the hookworm disease germ is present, and giving information how to avoid the disease.

If the rural teachers would actually contact the department of Biology for this information, many of the diseases which occur so often in rural sections would be eliminated. The hookworm is a disease that is prevalent in the South.

The Department of Library Science could plan a program that would tend to educate the parents of the rural children and enable them to appreciate and evaluate the changes in our educational system.

In conclusion, the writer wishes to state that the backward state of the rural schools is not due to the rural children being unable to learn, but it



is due to the fact that rural parents hinder the learning process through their inability to see the necessity of a change in their modes of education. Teachers who are inefficient, and who do not know anything about rural life are a hindrance to the progress of the rural school.

The institution<sup>*Prairie View College*</sup> has adopted a policy of acquainting the prospective teacher with the more vital problems common to rural life and education.



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