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# Development of RURAL COMMUNITY SCHOOLS in Illinois

By D. E. Lindstrom

Bulletin 627

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS  
AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION

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# DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL COMMUNITY SCHOOLS IN ILLINOIS

By D. E. LINDSTROM, Professor of Rural Sociology

WHAT LED to the drastic reorganization that has taken place in the rural schools of Illinois since 1945? What has been the nature of that reorganization? How much still remains to be accomplished? These, in general, are the questions this bulletin attempts to answer. Special emphasis is placed on studies conducted by the Agricultural Experiment Station, showing the necessity for reorganization and indicating the kind of reorganization needed.

This report is based on two hypotheses: that the kind of reorganization described here is a social process; and that the local community (a natural area of association that provides for such needs as trade, worship, recreation, and local government) is the logical basis on which to organize school districts.

## A CENTURY OF ONE-ROOM SCHOOLS

For decades Illinois had more school districts than any other state in the nation.<sup>1</sup> Very little change took place in the number of one-room-school districts from the middle of the nineteenth century until 1945.

**Neighborhood country schools.** Up to the middle of the nineteenth century, country school districts were organized by groups of neighbors who wanted to provide schooling for their children. Existing laws permitted voluntary property taxation for the support of these neighborhood schools.

District boundaries were irregular, since they followed the irregular outer boundaries of the farms included. They were made even more irregular by the fact that some border farmers would, by petition, be granted the privilege of staying out of a district. Few of the boundaries followed township lines.

**School townships formed by law.** So that all territory would be in some school district, the state legislature in 1846 created school townships. Elected trustees of these townships had the power to divide them into school districts. The trustees were slow to act voluntarily,

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<sup>1</sup> This was brought out in a number of reports issued by the Research Division of the National Education Association.

however, and in 1855 the Illinois General Assembly ordered them to complete the job of dividing all land into school districts.<sup>2</sup>

Under this order areas not already organized were set up into districts of 4 to 5 square miles, and property taxes were required on all real estate to pay for the support of the schools. When this task was finished Illinois had about 10,000 one-room-school districts.

**Organization of town and community high schools.** Although common school districts could offer grades 9 to 12, few did so. Hence, high school districts were created in Illinois for the first time in 1872. These districts were usually town-centered and overlay districts which offered elementary work only. Boundaries usually coincided with the incorporation boundaries of the town.

Then in 1917 a community high school law was passed. Since farmers had been sending their children in increasing numbers to the town high schools, there seemed no reason why they should not be included in the high school district. Under the law, the town people, having the majority, could "vote in" the country area to form a new community or township high school. Many farm people resisted being included in town school districts against their will. The result was that bitterness and conflicts between town and country people were not uncommon all during the 1920's.

**Non-high school districts.** Not all of the territory was included in the new community or township high school districts. Therefore, in the same year that the community high school districts were authorized, so-called non-high school districts were also created by law. These districts comprised all the area in a county that was outside existing high school districts. Taxes from the non-high school districts were used to finance the attendance of children from these districts at the high school of their choice.

## THE SITUATION LEADING TO REORGANIZATION

As a result of the various laws for school-district organization, a dual-district system developed in most areas of the state. By 1944, Illinois had 11,955 school districts, of which only 99 were community unit or 12-grade districts; 646 were high school; 1,530, multiple-room elementary school districts; and 9,680, one-room elementary school

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<sup>2</sup> Ill. Legislative Council, Res. Dept. "Some Aspects of School Administration in Illinois." Res. Rpt. No. 4, p. 3. 1938. These common school districts usually provided for the first eight grades although they could maintain grades 9 through 12.

districts. (In 1,606 of these one-room districts, however, the schools had been closed for lack of sufficient enrolments or for other reasons.<sup>3</sup>)

### **Agitation for reorganization**

As early as the 1920's some educational leaders had been concerned by the problems inherent in the dual system and in the large number of small districts. In 1925, for example, the Illinois Education Commission pointed out that "Illinois is confronted with the difficult problem of discovering a satisfactory unit of school support and school control."<sup>4</sup>

In 1932 Hicks said, "In every county of Illinois more one-room schools are being maintained than are necessary to meet the needs of the rural pupils of the county. If fewer schools were maintained and the average daily attendance was raised from fifteen pupils to twenty-five or thirty pupils per teacher a tremendous saving in school costs would result and the quality of one-room schools would be greatly improved."<sup>5</sup>

Throughout the 1930's and into the 1940's came increasing recognition of the need for reorganizing the school districts of the state. These, in brief, were the main problems:

1. Since each type of district was controlled by its own board, the authority for administration of schools in most rural areas was divided. A concomitant disadvantage was that there were too many school officials — in 1933 there were 38,635 school board members in over 12,000 administrative units in the state.<sup>6</sup>

2. Enrolments were decreasing, so that by 1937 almost half the schools (49 percent) had fifteen or fewer pupils enrolled. As a result, costs per pupil were rising. Some schools, with only one or two pupils, had a cost of more than \$700 per pupil.

3. Salaries for most one-room schools were so low that they did not attract well-qualified persons. Only 7 percent of the teachers had four or more years of training beyond high school, and few could be given a "recognized rating by the Office of the State Superintendent of Instruction (only 979 out of 10,000 in 1937 were recognized)."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Bishop, Samuel. "Reorganization Raises Problems." Ill. Ed. Assoc. Study Unit 14 (5). 1952.

<sup>4</sup> "Report of the Illinois Education Commission," p. 10. Printed by the State of Illinois. March, 1925.

<sup>5</sup> Hicks, H. S. "The One Room Schools of Illinois," pp. 7-8. Compiled for the Ill. State Tax Commission. 1932. According to this report (appendix table), there were 9,691 one-room school districts in Illinois in 1930.

<sup>6</sup> Deffenbaugh, W. S., and Covert, T. "School Administrative Units." U. S. Office of Ed. Pamphlet No. 34, p. 5. 1933.

<sup>7</sup> Ill. Legislative Council, Res. Dept., *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12.

4. According to a study published by the Illinois Education Association in 1935, rural schools were "producing a product inferior to the larger urban schools."<sup>8</sup> This was indicated by a comparison between the high school records of rural pupils and the records of pupils who had attended urban elementary schools.

### **Early recommended changes**

In 1935 Governor Horner appointed the Illinois School Commission to study the situation and make recommendations for change. In its report, the Commission called sharp attention to the loose organization of school districts, the small and divided units, and the financial dependence of schools on the general property tax, which, in many areas, did not provide enough money to support modern schools. The Commission's chief recommendations were the elimination of all one-room schools and the establishment of the county as the unit for school-district organization.<sup>9</sup>

These recommendations were supported by studies made by the Illinois State Teachers Association, the College of Education,<sup>10</sup> and the Illinois Legislative Council.<sup>11</sup>

### **Arguments against change**

One of the major obstacles to reorganization was the cost of transportation. Data from other states indicated that the U. S. average for pupils transported in 1933-34 was \$19.29.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, there was widespread resistance to change among farm people. Their objections were mirrored in the annual resolutions of the Illinois Agricultural Association (the state organization of farm bureaus). The position of the Association during the last half of the 1930's was that it would oppose legislation for reorganization as long as schools had to be supported by property taxes (which meant that farm real estate would be taxed unduly heavily for any school improvement) and as long as 70 percent of the farm homes were located on unimproved or dirt roads.

Some educators also opposed reorganization, maintaining that the one-room school could be an educational institution equal or superior to the town or city school.

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<sup>8</sup> Grimm, L. R. "The Larger School District Unit: Some Problems and Issues in Illinois," p. 9. Ill. State Teachers Assoc. 1935.

<sup>9</sup> Horner, Henry. "A Report on Educational Problems in Illinois." Printed by the State of Illinois. 1938.

<sup>10</sup> E.g., Weber, O. F., and Benner, T. E., "The Problems of School Organization and Finance in Illinois." Univ. of Ill. Bul. 36 (15), pp. 167-168. 1938.

<sup>11</sup> Ill. Legislative Council, Res. Dept., *op. cit.*, pp. 15-26.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, Table 13, p. 25.

## **Efforts to get unity in thinking and planning**

Something was needed to bring together farm and school leaders of the state so that differences of opinion could be discussed and eventually reconciled. One of the first steps in this direction came in 1938, when the Illinois Community Relations Seminar sponsored an informal and unofficial meeting of leaders and policy makers of the various groups concerned with school reorganization.<sup>13</sup>

As an outgrowth of the seminar, the Illinois Rural Education Committee was organized in 1939 to meet regularly four times a year.<sup>14</sup> Committee members included representatives of the Office of the Superintendent of Schools, the Illinois Education Association, the Illinois Agricultural Association, the Illinois Home Bureau Federation, the Illinois Parent Teacher Association, the Illinois League of Women Voters, the departments of education of the various state universities and colleges, the Illinois Association of School Boards, the Illinois County Superintendents Association, and similar organizations.

Previously these groups had been working more or less independently, and, as already mentioned, often at cross purposes. The committee came to function as an unofficial coordinating agency, eventually making it possible for participants to agree on desirable legislation.

## **Studies of the situation**

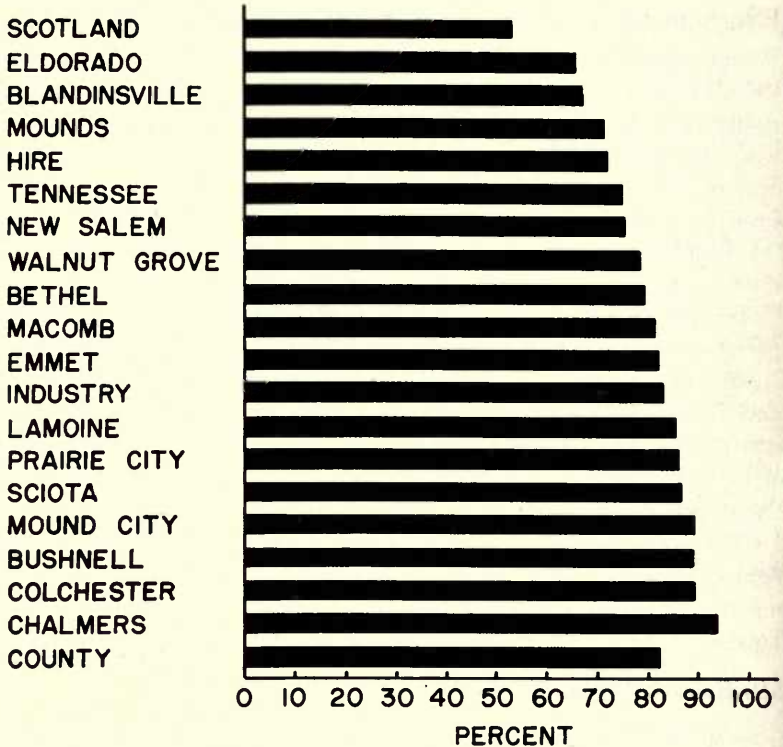
During the period that the need for reorganization was becoming recognized, studies continued to be made on the school situation. In fact, most of the organizations that were mentioned above as being represented on the Illinois Rural Education Committee conducted such studies. One of the studies made by the Illinois Agricultural Experiment Station through its Division of Rural Sociology is reviewed here to indicate the trends in school enrolments during this period.

**The decline in enrolments.** As has already been mentioned (page 5), nearly half of the one-room schools had fewer than fifteen pupils in average daily attendance in 1937. By 1945 more than three-fourths of the 9,680 country schools had an average attendance under fifteen.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> For a list of organizations represented, see "Minutes of the Community Relations Seminar on School Reorganization," Ill. Agr. Ext. Serv. (mimeo). 1938.

<sup>14</sup> This committee was originally organized by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, but it became an autonomous group a year later by electing its own chairman, meeting regularly four times a year from 1940 until 1952, when it was reorganized into the Illinois Council on Community Schools.

<sup>15</sup> "Schools Awake," published by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, Battle Creek, Mich., 1942, gave twelve as the minimum number which a one-room school should have if it is to do good work. An average of fifteen would place many schools considerably below this figure.



Percentage the 1940 school-age population was of the 1930 population in the various townships of McDonough county. (Fig. 1)

The situation was acute, also, for the rural high schools, for two-thirds of the high schools outside Cook county had fewer than 150 pupils in average daily attendance.<sup>16</sup>

The Experiment Station study of school attendance took in four counties: McDonough, Fayette, Crawford, and McHenry.<sup>17</sup> All these counties reflected the statewide decline in country school enrolment. In

<sup>16</sup> An enrolment of at least 150 pupils was recommended in "Report of the Illinois Agricultural Association School Committee," p. 64. Ill. Agr. Assoc. November, 1944.

<sup>17</sup> The McDonough county study was published as "The Need for and Possibility of Rural School District Reorganization in McDonough County, Illinois." Ill. Agr. Exp. Sta. RSM-11 (mimeo). April, 1943. A summary was included in Western Ill. Teachers' Col. Bul. 23 (2), pp. 18-24. The Fayette county study was published in "Needs and Opportunities for School District Reorganization in Fayette County, Illinois," Ill. Agr. Exp. Sta. RSM-14 (mimeo). 1944. Reports on the studies in McHenry and Crawford counties were incorporated into the tentative reports of the survey committees in these counties.

McDonough county only five of eleven open-country districts included in a detailed study had as many as twelve in average daily attendance in 1941-42.

The change in school age population that had occurred between 1930 and 1940 in the various townships of McDonough county is shown in Fig. 1. It is significant that every township showed a decrease. In Fayette county there was a decline in half the townships. In Crawford county, with better economic conditions than in Fayette, decreases took place in nine of the eleven townships. In McHenry county, on the edge of metropolitan Chicago, there was a decline in all townships; for the county as a whole the decline was about 25 percent.

By 1945 more than 90 percent of the country schools in McDonough county had fewer than fifteen children in average attendance (Table 1). The average attendance was under fifteen in nearly one-half of the one-room school districts in Crawford county, more than one-half of those in Fayette county, and 67 percent of those in McHenry county.

Table 1. — Average Daily Attendance in One-room Schools in McDonough, Fayette, and Crawford Counties and in Illinois in 1945

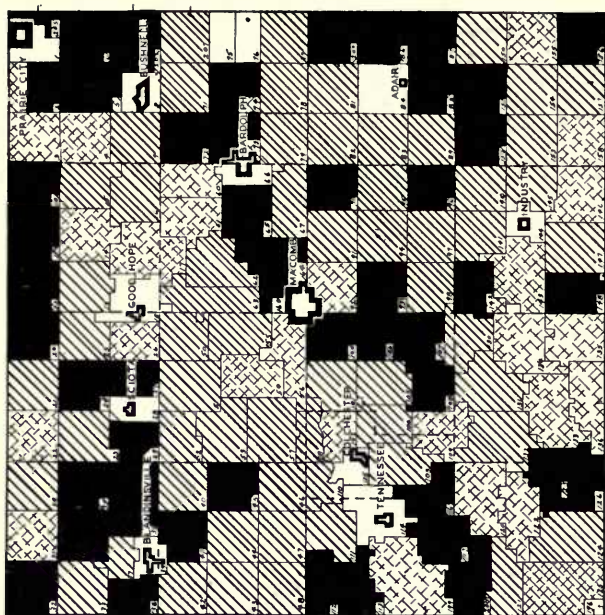
Area	Fewer than 15 children		15 or more children	
	Number of districts	Percent	Number of districts	Percent
McDonough county.....	93	91	9	9
Fayette county.....	79	56	62	44
Crawford county.....	49	48	54	52
McHenry county.....	91	67	45	33
Illinois <sup>a</sup> .....	7,270	75	2,410	25

<sup>a</sup> Data from the Office of Public Instruction, Springfield, Illinois, 1944-45.

The declining school enrolments were, of course, a reflection of the declining farm population. Not only had farm families decreased in size, but with the introduction of modern farming methods, farms had grown larger (Table 2, page 12).

As a rule, the greatest increases in size of farm took place in the good soil areas. Thus, as shown in Fig. 2 for McDonough county, low school enrolments tended to be associated with good soil areas (and consequently a high assessed valuation and low tax rate). Conversely, schools with average enrolments of thirteen or above tended to be in the poor soil areas. This same pattern was discernible in the other counties. Some entire counties, especially in southern Illinois, fell into the category of poor soil, low assessed valuation, high tax rates, and relatively high enrolments.

## AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE, 1940-41



LESS THAN 7

7—12

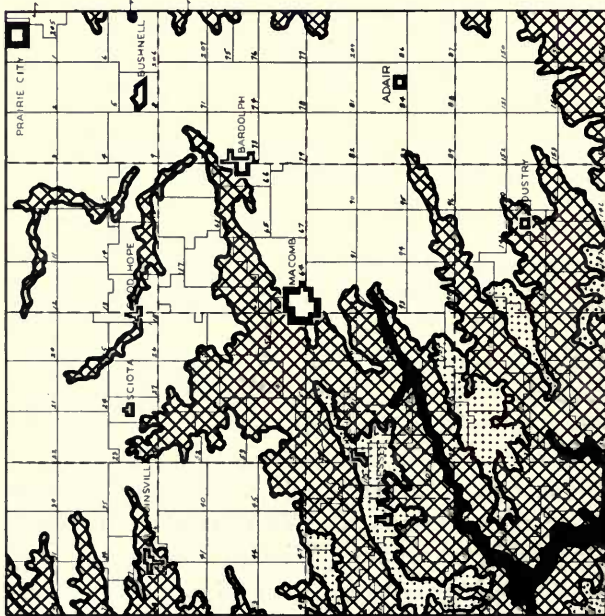
13—25

OVER 25

— SCHOOL DISTRICT LINE

- - - TOWNSHIP LINE

## SOIL GROUPS OF MC DONOUGH COUNTY



GROUP I

GROUP II

GROUP III

GROUP IV

GROUP I SOILS — Nearly level to gently rolling upland brown silt loam prairie soils (slope 0 to 7 percent near drainage lines); highly productive.

GROUP II SOILS — Nearly level grayish surface soil with claypan subsoil; moderately productive general farming soils.

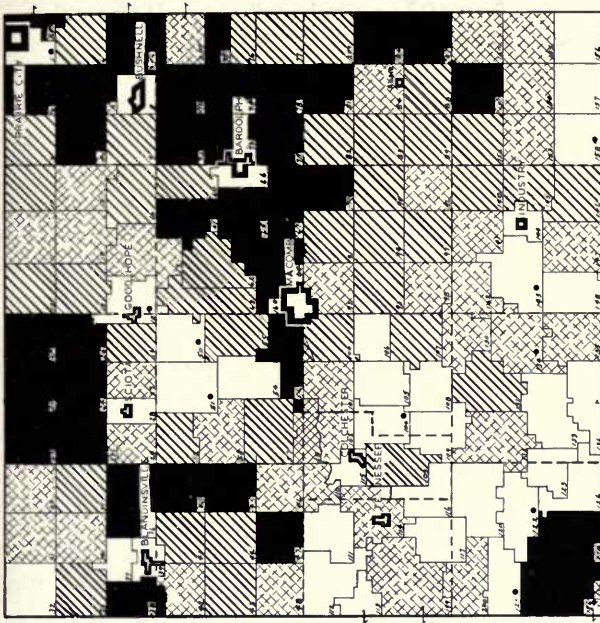
GROUP III SOILS — Strongly sloping to steep soils adapted to timber and pasture (include small irregular areas of nearly level to gently rolling areas, adapted to general farming).

GROUP IV SOILS — Bottomland, highly productive, but subject to overflow.

In McDonough county low one-room-school enrollments were often associated with good soils, and high enrollments with poor soils.

(Fig. 2 — concluded on page 11)

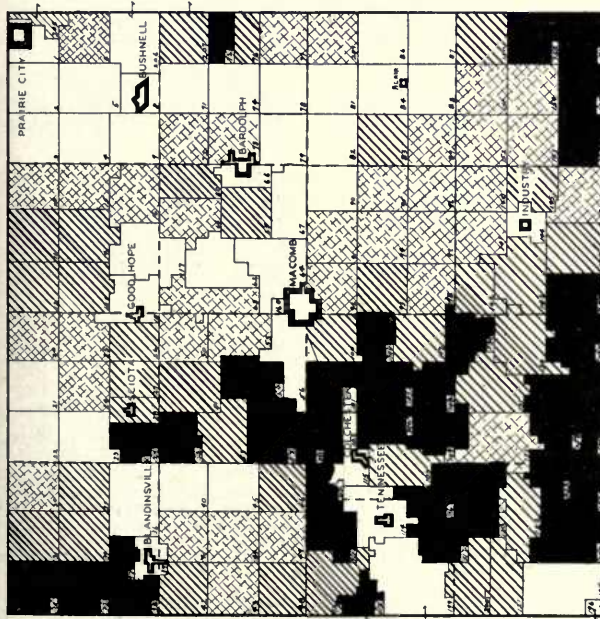
AVERAGE TOTAL TAX RATE, 1941



- 0 - \$0.47
- ▨ \$0.48 - \$0.65
- ▩ \$0.66 - \$0.93
- \$0.94 - \$2.00

• DISTRICTS WITH TAX RATE OF \$100  
OR MORE RECEIVING NO STATE AID

ASSESSED VALUATION, 1941



- \$26,060 - \$90,265
- ▨ \$90,555 - \$124,670
- ▩ \$124,885 - \$149,520
- \$149,600 - \$470,829

— SCHOOL DISTRICT LINE  
- - - TOWNSHIP LINE

High assessed valuations and low tax rates, as well as good soils, were usually associated with low school attendance. (Fig. 2, concluded)

Table 2. — Average Size of Farms in Illinois and in Selected Counties: 1910 to 1940,<sup>a</sup> 1945,<sup>b</sup> and 1950<sup>c</sup>

County	1910	1920	1930	1940	1945	1950	Increase in 1950 over 1910
	(acres)						
Illinois.....	129.1	134.8	143.1	145.4	153.2	147.7	18.6
Crawford.....	99.6	110.7	118.0	113.6	127.5	132.2	32.6
Fayette.....	103.7	110.4	121.0	128.5	144.5	147.7	44.0
McDonough.....	130.7	130.2	142.8	148.9	162.5	166.3	35.6
McHenry.....	129.0	128.3	131.6	137.6	140.1	142.4	13.4

<sup>a</sup> Data from the *Census of Agriculture* for 1930 and 1940, U.S. Bureau of Census.

<sup>b</sup> Data from the *Special Census of Agriculture*, 1945, U.S. Bureau of Census.

<sup>c</sup> Data from preliminary reports, *Census of Agriculture* for 1950, U.S. Bureau of Census.

Table 3. — Comparison by Districts of Valuation per Square Mile, Tax Rate, Percent Owner Operation, Socio-economic Status, and Predominant Soil Types in 14 One-room School Districts in McDonough County, 1940

District	Soil group <sup>a</sup>	Value per square mile	Education and building tax rate	Percent owner-operators	Socio-economic status <sup>b</sup>		
					Owners	Tenants	All
<i>Poor land with some good</i>							
Litchfield.....	III, II <sup>c</sup>	\$ 1,087	\$1.38	78	177	190	180
Mt. Zion.....	III	1,454	1.10	40	165	155	161
<i>Fair land</i>							
Cottage Corner..	III, II, I <sup>d</sup>	\$ 2,465	\$ .95	45	181	175	178
Tennessee.....	III, II <sup>e</sup>	4,200	.85	78	193	165	186
<i>Good land with some poor</i>							
Sixteen.....	I, III <sup>f</sup>	\$ 3,827	\$ .75	38	188	181	185
New Philadelphia	I, III <sup>g</sup>	6,619	.73	40	185	194	188
Prairie Hill.....	I, III <sup>h</sup>	4,094	.56	67	194	187	192
Pilot Knob.....	I, III	3,783	1.10	50	201	185	193
<i>Good land</i>							
Center.....	I	\$ 3,076	\$ .75	45	195	192	193
Fairmont.....	I	3,920	.72	70	195	192	194
Muddy Lane....	I	4,285	.49	31	209	189	195
Lombard.....	I	4,633	.42	35	190	194	192
Bushnell No. 5..	I	5,398	.41	28	218	191	202
Adair.....	I	10,725	.56	27	197	203	201

<sup>a</sup> See Fig. 2 for definition of soil groups I, II, and III.

<sup>b</sup> Based on the Sewell Socio-Economic Rating Scale, Okla. Agr. Exp. Sta. Tech. Bul. 9, 1940. The differences are not great, since a scale measuring economic and social benefits on the basis of Oklahoma conditions includes many items which all farmers in a central Illinois county like McDonough already possess.

<sup>c</sup> South  $\frac{1}{2}$  II (Fig. 2). <sup>d</sup> About  $\frac{1}{4}$  I and II. <sup>e</sup> About  $\frac{1}{2}$  II. <sup>f</sup> One corner II. <sup>g</sup> Some III. <sup>h</sup> South  $\frac{1}{3}$  III.

**Inequalities among districts.** As can be seen from the foregoing discussion, school districts with low valuation in McDonough county often had the most children to educate. In these areas tax rates were usually up to the limit set by law. Conversely, tax rates were generally low in areas with high valuation, although some communities such as Pilot Knob were willing to increase tax rates to provide better education (Table 3). It is interesting to note in Table 3 that tenancy was high in good land areas, indicating that absentee-landlordism may have kept tax rates low.

In Fayette county the tax rates for elementary school districts ranged from \$.03 to \$1.83 per \$100 valuation in 1943-44, the low rates being in areas where there were oil wells owned by outside interests. Even in McHenry county the range in rates for elementary school districts was from \$.16 to \$1.80.

**Table 4. — Years on Same Farm and in Same Community (as of 1940), and Number of Moves Made From 1930 to 1940 for 145 Families in McDonough County**

Items	All families	Owners	Tenants	Laborers
Number of families.....	145	69	57	19
Average number of years on same farm.....	.....	24.0	8.5	3.3
Average number of years in same community.....	.....	34.9	20.0	18.4
Percentage moving last ten years.....	47.6	37.9	59.6	63.2
Average number of moves made.....	3.7	2.6	4.0	5.0

Population movements added to the inequalities among school districts. A study of 145 families in McDonough county revealed that about half of them moved an average of 3.7 times between 1930 and 1940 (Table 4). As might be expected, farm laborers, who usually have the largest families, moved oftenest, and tenants moved oftener than owner-operators. Two-thirds of the tenants averaged four moves during the 10 years. Usually, in moving, families would stay in the same community, but their moves would often take them across school-district lines. This meant that in the middle of the spring term one school could lose half its enrolment and the next school have its enrolment doubled. This situation underscored the need for reorganizing schools on a community basis.

## **The way is cleared for reorganization**

The continuing decline in rural-school attendance pointed up the need for reorganization. Two other factors that gave impetus to the movement were road improvement and increasing farm incomes. In 1930, only 68,690 or 32 percent of the farms were within 0.2 mile of a surfaced road. In 1945 the number had risen to 156,834, or 78 percent. By 1950, 88 percent of the farms were on all-weather roads. Average gross incomes per farm more than doubled from 1940 to 1945; and by 1950 they were about three times as great as in 1940.

**A change in rural leaders' position.** A big boost for reorganization came in the early 1940's when the Illinois Agricultural Association changed its position to favor "reasonable" reorganization of school districts. The association appointed its own state school committee in 1943 to study the needs for reorganization and to make its own report. This report, issued in 1944, called attention to inadequacies in rural schools, and recommended the organization of administrative districts encompassing grades 1 to 12.<sup>18</sup>

Discussions of the Illinois Rural Education Committee had repeatedly pointed in the direction of the 12-grade school unit. With the farm leaders' endorsement of this proposal, support grew for it throughout the state, and by 1945 legislation was passed that paved the way for reorganization (page 15).

**Reorganization the result of a social process.** The events just sketched that led to the laws of 1945 and 1947—and ultimately to school reorganization—illustrate the way democracy operates to change a basic institution. First there was a recognition of the need for change and at the same time resistance to change. But widespread discussion of the problem led finally to a meeting of minds and the way to reorganization was cleared. The process is still going on, for there are many areas in which changes remain to be made.

## **LAWS FOR ACCOMPLISHING REORGANIZATION**

Members of the Illinois Rural Education Committee (page 7), as well as other interested leaders, had early agreed that any new law to provide for school reorganization should first call for a study of the situation in each county. The first law, passed in 1943, did just that: it provided that all the school directors and board members in a county should vote as to whether a survey be made. It did not call for action after the survey. The school officials in only 17 counties voted to take

<sup>18</sup> "Report of the Illinois Agricultural Association School Committee," *op. cit.*

advantage of this law; and none of them did much in the way of reorganization until after 1945.

The School Survey Law of 1945 not only called for a study of the situation by a county survey committee but also required that the people vote on the recommendations made by the committee. The committee was to consist of nine members, elected at a meeting of the school officials in the county. Five of the nine members had to be directors of rural school districts. As a result of this legislation, 93 of the 102 counties set up committees in 1945.<sup>19</sup>

In 1947, a bill was enacted providing that any contiguous area with \$6,000,000 valuation and 2,000 population could petition to organize a community unit (12-grade) district. The proposition had to be approved by a majority both of those living in unincorporated areas and of those living in incorporated areas.

### METHODS OF DEFINING SCHOOL DISTRICTS

With the passage of the 1945 and 1947 laws, the people were faced with the problem of defining the boundaries of new school districts. Some one-room schools were still the centers of active neighborhoods, and regular monthly meetings were held in them. However, increasing numbers of rural young people were attending high schools beyond their neighborhoods; and the farmers' trade was shifting from the small neighborhood centers to the larger, more distant community centers. The question was raised as to whether natural neighborhood groupings, high-school-attendance areas, and trade areas could be determined as the basis for reorganization of school districts.

Even before the reorganization laws were passed, the Experiment Station had been carrying on studies related to this problem. Between 1941 and 1944 several counties were mapped in order to (1) bound neighborhoods, (2) delimit high-school-attendance areas, and (3) indicate trade and service areas. These methods, which had been used in other parts of the country to give rural people a picture of their communities, were valuable tools for indicating desirable boundaries for the new 12-grade school districts. In counties where mapping was done, the results were used by county survey committees in making their recommendations. By comparing the results of the mapping with the school districts actually organized, one can see how far the natural community boundaries were recognized in the formation of the new school districts.

<sup>19</sup> About 2 years later eight of the remaining nine counties organized committees.

## **Bounding neighborhoods and communities**

The neighborhood is the first important social group beyond the family. In rural areas, its formation has been influenced by the activities of the one-room school. Natural communities usually consist of groups of neighborhoods, although some neighborhoods may be split between two communities. In setting up true community schools, therefore, a knowledge of natural neighborhood groups is essential.

With the help of farm leaders, neighborhoods and communities were mapped in Pike, Fayette, and McHenry counties.<sup>20</sup> The mapping was done so that neighborhood boundaries followed the outside legal boundaries of the farms included.

In Pike county, 155 neighborhoods were bounded.<sup>21</sup> These neighborhoods belonged to 14 communities (Fig. 3). It is significant to note in Fig. 3 that community boundaries approximately coincide with the outer boundaries of groups of neighborhoods, although community boundaries sometimes cut across neighborhood boundaries. As can be seen by comparing Fig. 3 and Fig. 4, the boundaries of the community unit districts set up under the 1947 law are in turn similar to the community boundaries.

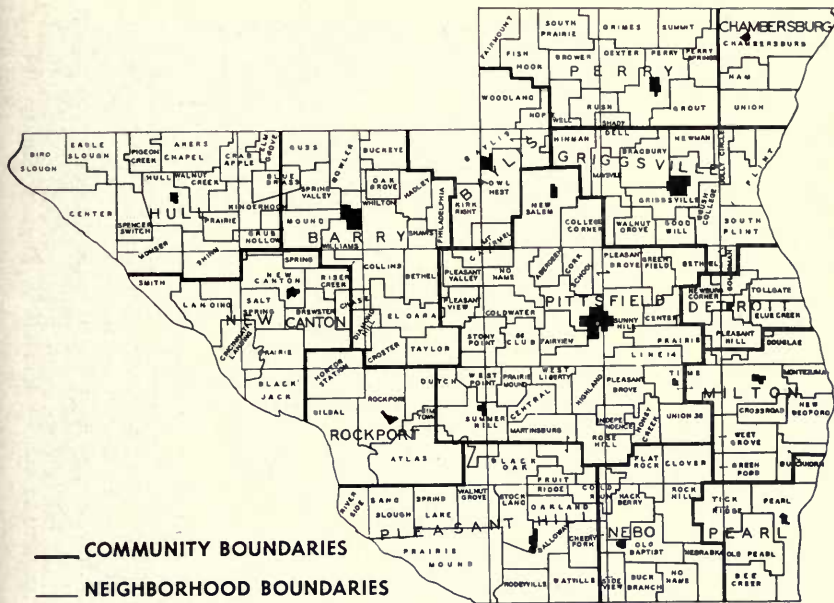
The neighborhoods and communities of Fayette county are shown in Fig. 5. A comparison of this map with Fig. 6 shows that here, as in Pike county, the new school district lines roughly follow community boundaries, although in some cases two or more natural communities were included in a community school district.

The importance of the neighborhood in establishing community school districts is illustrated by the situation in the Brownstown-St. Elmo area in Fayette county. The original community high school district boundaries were established largely along township lines, splitting at least three neighborhoods and causing controversy at the time. When the new community unit schools were set up, boundaries were determined by petitions circulated among the farmers that lived in neighborhoods through which the proposed new boundaries would run. Some

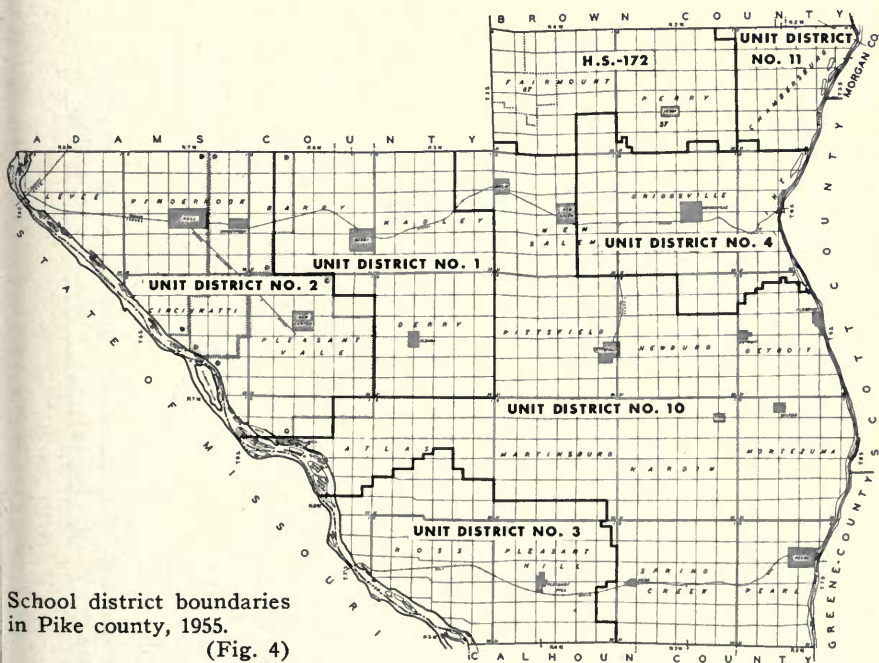
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<sup>20</sup> The method used to bound neighborhoods was (1) to find out from county extension agents, the county superintendent of schools, members of county farm organization boards, and similar leaders the names of one or more long-term residents in each school district; (2) to ask each of these residents to list and locate on a plat map those whom he considered neighbors; and (3) with the help of local and county leaders, to define the neighborhoods by drawing lines on the plat map along the outer legal boundaries of the farms included in a neighborhood grouping. A similar method was used to determine the communities to which the different neighborhoods belonged.

<sup>21</sup> See also Lindstrom, D. E., "Neighborhoods in Illinois." *Rural Sociology* 19 (2), p. 188. 1954.

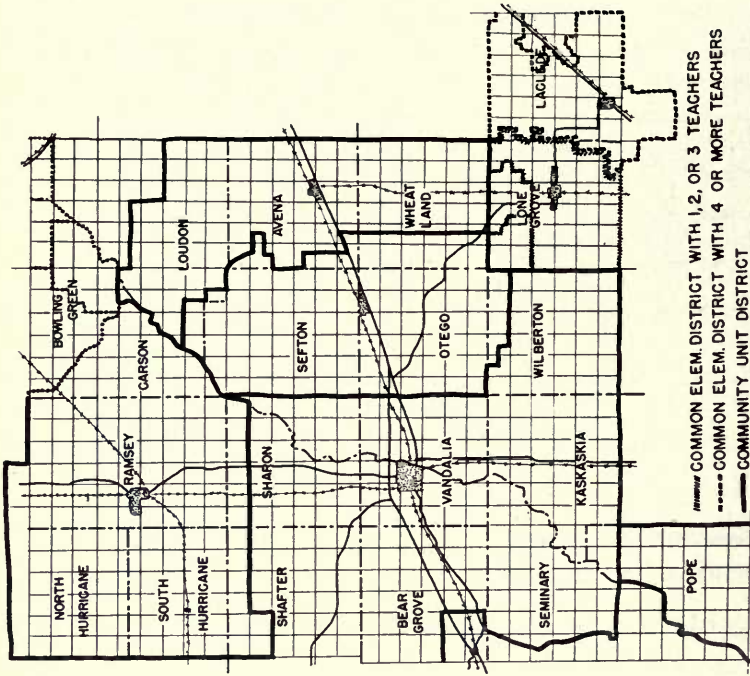


Nighborhood and community boundaries of Pike county, 1941. (Fig. 3)

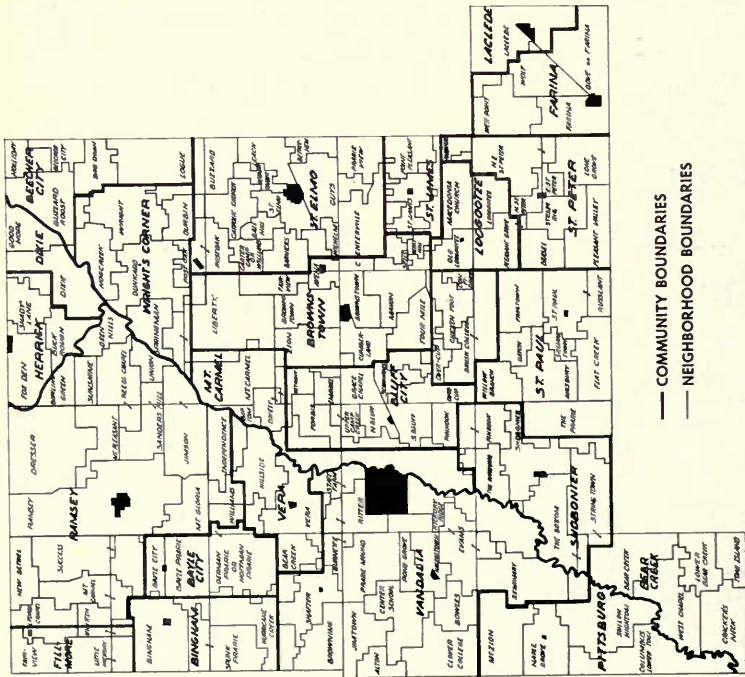


School district boundaries in Pike county, 1955.

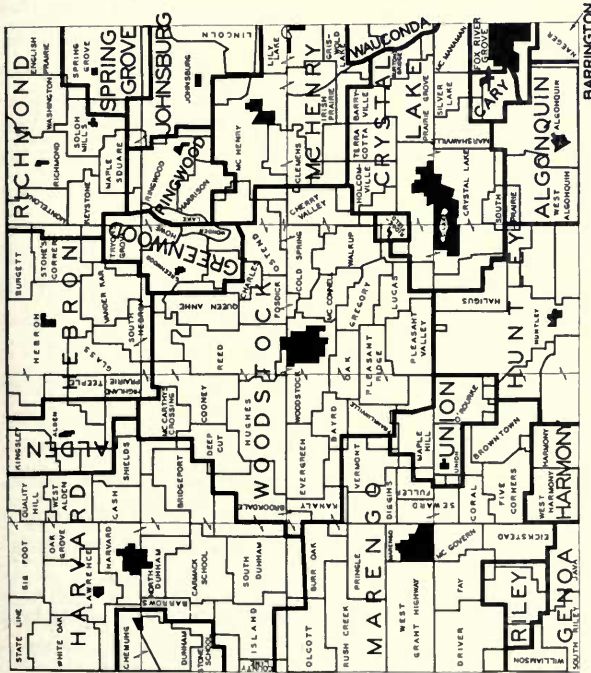
(Fig. 4)



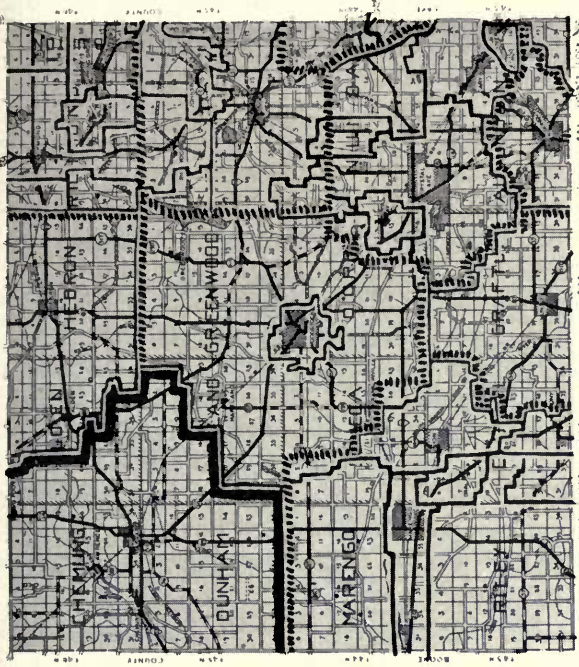
Newly organized school districts in Fayette county, 1949. (Fig. 6)



Neighborhood and community boundaries in Fayette county. (Fig. 5)



— COMMUNITY BOUNDARIES — NEIGHBORHOOD BOUNDARIES  
 Neighborhood and community boundaries in McHenry county, 1941. (Fig. 7)



— COMMUNITY UNIT  
 — ELEMENTARY  
 The school districts in McHenry county in 1950, after certain reorganizations had taken place. (Fig. 8)

neighborhoods voted to go to Brownstown, and others to St. Elmo. What is interesting is that each neighborhood voted one way or another as a unit.

The mapping of neighborhoods in McHenry county (Fig. 7) was done with the cooperation of the county school survey committee. Only one of the communities shown in Fig. 7 was sufficiently integrated to later form its own community-unit school district—this included the Chemung and Dunham areas in the northeast corner (Fig. 8). The Alden community, too small to meet the conditions of the 1947 law, joined with Hebron to form the Alden-Hebron Community Consolidated District for high school purposes; and an elementary school district was also formed with boundaries identical with those of the high school district. These boundaries followed neighborhood boundaries fairly closely, as can be seen by comparing Figs. 7 and 8. It is evident that the Woodstock community is not an integrated one (Fig. 8), for an open-country elementary school district was formed that approximately followed natural community boundaries but eliminated the town of Woodstock. The town high school, however, serves the entire community.

Although the mapping of neighborhoods and communities indicates the areas which should be included in school districts, other factors also affect the establishment of district boundaries. For one thing, property owners living in a fluid boundary area often try to choose the community in which tax rates are likely to be lower. This may cause some neighborhoods to be divided between two communities. The high school and trade attractions of two rival centers may have the same result.

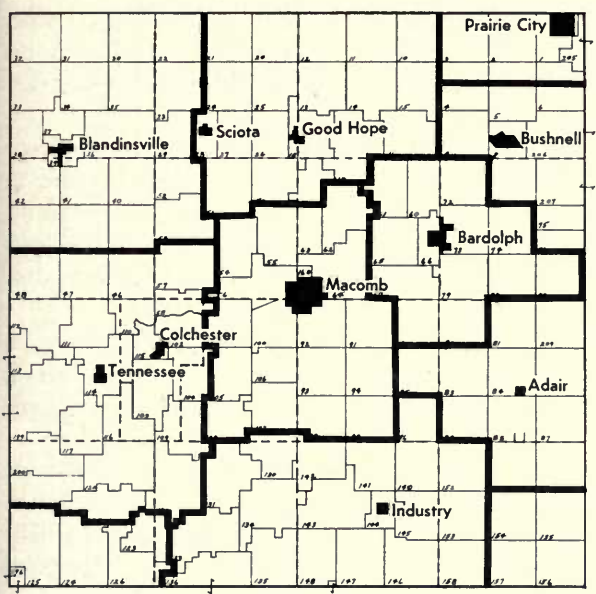
### **High-school-attendance areas**

A combination of two methods was used to map natural high-school-attendance centers in each of two counties: McDonough and Crawford. In non-high school districts, farm families' actual choice of high schools was considered an indication of their preference and hence was taken as a basis for mapping natural districts. Where high school districts had been set up more or less arbitrarily, farm families were asked what high school they would prefer if free to choose.<sup>22</sup>

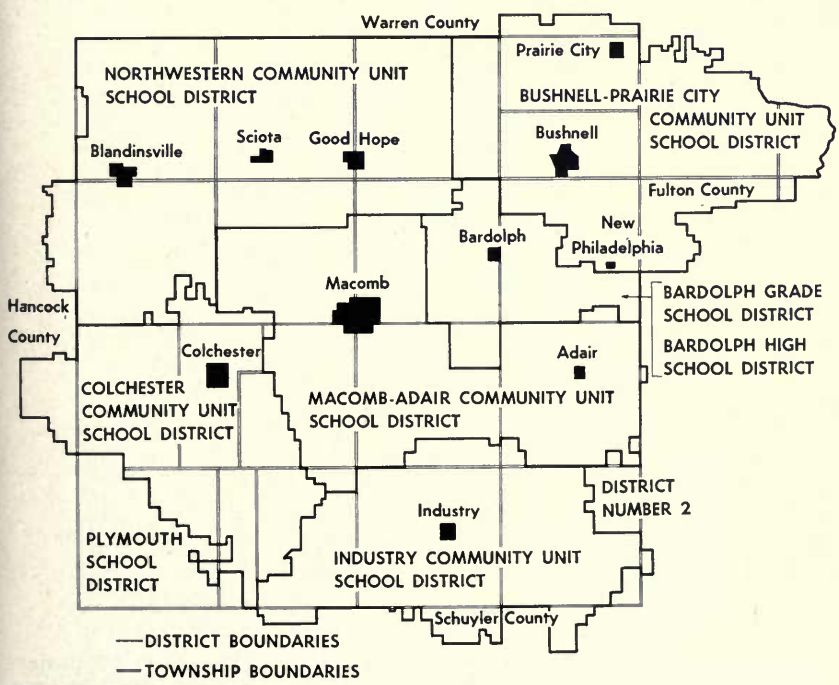
The results of the work done in McDonough county are shown in Fig. 9. Were community school district lines to be drawn along the lines shown on this map, there would be centers in them ranging in

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<sup>22</sup> This was similar to the method used by Thaden and Mumford in Michigan. See Thaden, J. F., and Mumford, Eben, "High School Communities in Michigan." Mich. Agr. Exp. Sta. Bul. 289. 1938.



Approximate high-school - attendance areas in McDonough county, based on actual attendance, 1935-1940. (Fig. 9)



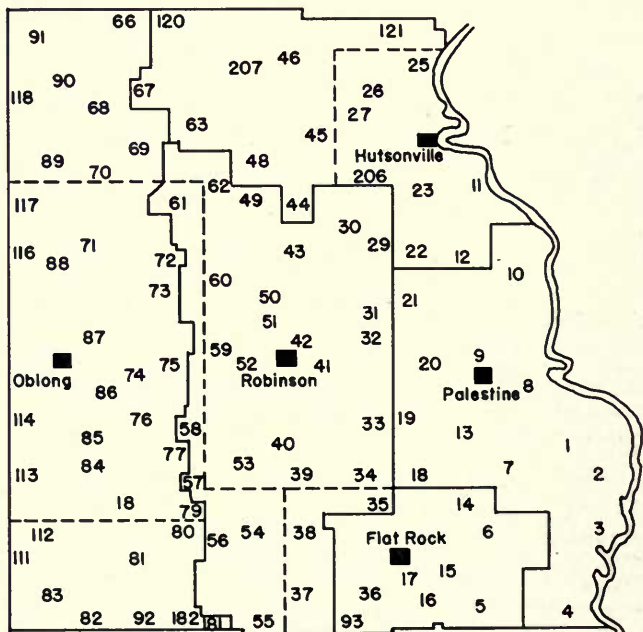
Boundaries of McDonough county school districts organized as result of petitions in 1951. (Fig. 10)

population from 246 to 10,952. When community school districts were actually formed in the county, they were the result of petitions by the people in the respective communities. The boundaries of these districts (Fig. 10) are strikingly coincidental with those shown in Fig. 9.

In several instances two or more communities had to join into one district to meet the conditions of the 1947 law. This was true of Blandinsville and Good Hope, for example, and of Industry, Eldorado, and Adair. The Bardolph community, which failed to meet the legal population requirement for a unit system, decided to have its own dual system rather than to cooperate with another community.

Natural community boundaries are not arbitrary, as are many county boundaries. Community school boundaries thus cut across county lines, as is shown both by the mapping of high school areas and the community unit school districts in McDonough county.

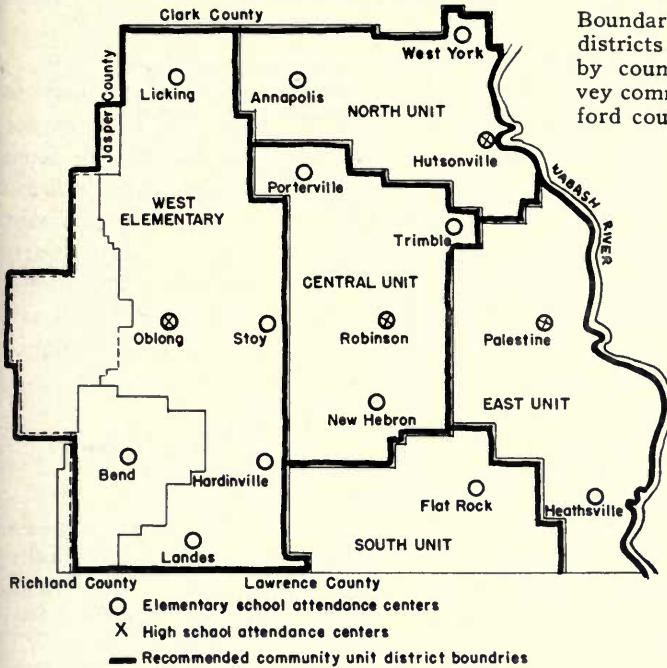
Natural high-school-attendance areas for Crawford county are shown in Fig. 11. Both the community unit districts recommended by the county survey committee (Fig. 12) and the districts as finally approved by the voters (Fig. 13) closely approximate the attendance areas.



High-school-attendance areas, Crawford county, as determined by preferences of farm people, 1941-1944 (shown by unbroken lines). Broken lines indicate high school district boundaries; numbers designate one-room-school districts. (Fig. 11)

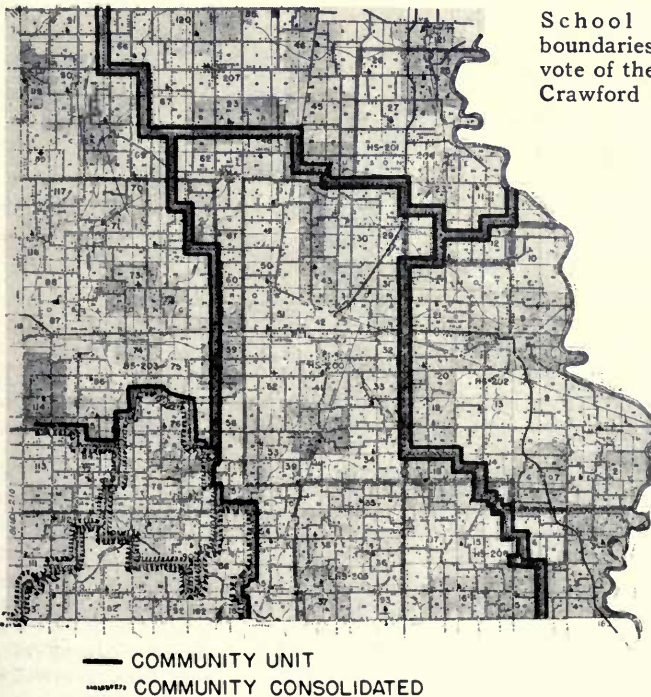
Boundaries of school districts recommended by county school survey committee in Crawford county, 1947.

(Fig. 12)



School district boundaries set by vote of the people in Crawford county.

(Fig. 13)



## Trade and social-service centers

Fifty percent of the people in 11 widely scattered school districts in McDonough county were asked where they customarily went for banking, trade, and church or social activities. As can be seen from Fig. 14, there was considerable overlapping of the various trade areas in McDonough county. Macomb, the county seat, was the dominant center for banking, farm machinery, furniture, groceries, hardware, and women's clothing. Next in trade-drawing power were Blandinsville, Bushnell, and other towns near the county boundary lines. Small villages and neighborhood centers were designated as school-attendance centers by both the county committee and school authorities.

Table 5. — Percentage of Rural People in Champaign County Preferring or Using Specified Services in Centers Classified According to Population Size<sup>a</sup> (1946)

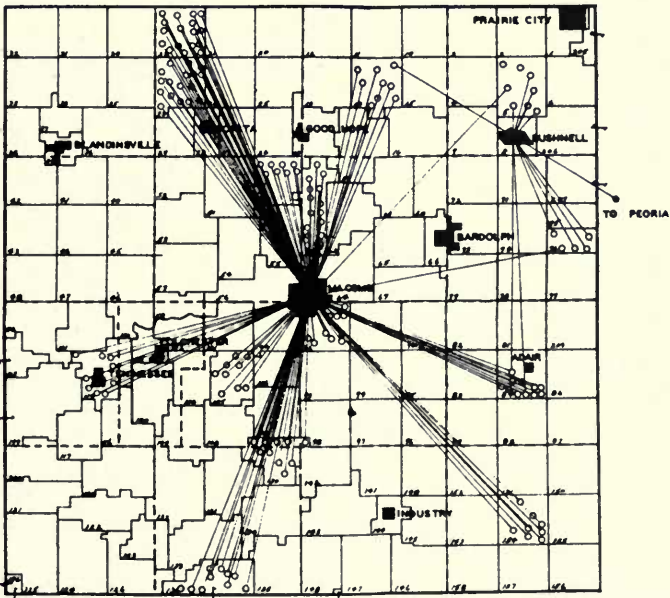
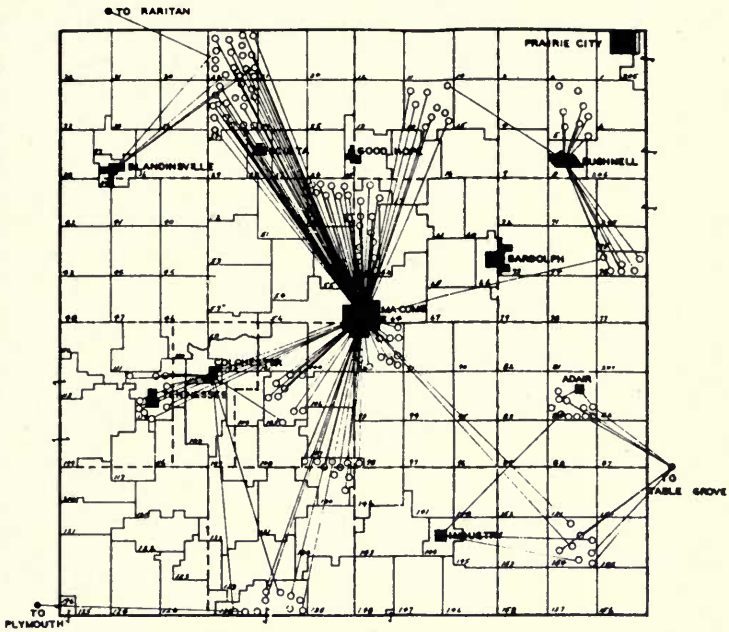
Service	Percentage of people <sup>b</sup> preferring center with population of—						
	2,500 and over	Under 2,500	Over 10,000	2,500- 10,000	1,000- 2,500	500- 1,000	Under 500
	(percent)		(percent)				
Furniture.....	88.6	12.1	82.2	6.4	4.3	3.9	3.9
Machinery and equipment	67.0	33.0	56.7	10.3	7.5	14.8	10.7
Entertainment.....	55.0	45.0	45.0	10.0	10.3	30.2	4.5
Banking.....	63.0	37.0	54.8	9.2	2.8	13.2	21.0
Medical care.....	47.4	52.6	41.0	6.4	8.2	31.4	13.0
Groceries.....	48.3	51.7	37.6	10.7	6.9	24.6	20.2
Senior high school.....	37.1	62.9	24.5	12.6	4.7	42.0	16.2
Junior high school.....	26.5	73.5	19.4	7.1	2.4	43.1	28.0
Grade school.....	13.1	86.9	8.8	4.3	.7	35.0	51.2
Church.....	17.6	82.4	11.8	5.3	1.7	30.4	50.8

<sup>a</sup> Over 10,000: Champaign, Urbana, and Danville. 2,500 to 10,000: Rantoul, Monticello, Paxton, Tuscola. 1,000 to 2,500: Gibson City, Farmer City, Villa Grove, Bement. 500 to 1,000: Fisher, St. Joseph, Tolono, Mahomet, Homer, Atwood, Potomac, Mansfield. Under 500: Foolsland, Seymour, Ivesdale, Pesotum, Sadorus, Savoy, Dewey, Ludlow, Thomasboro, Philo, Longview, Sidney, Flatville, Gifford, Penfield, Ogden, Armstrong, Allerton, Broadlands, Royal, Bondville, and open country points (1940 census).

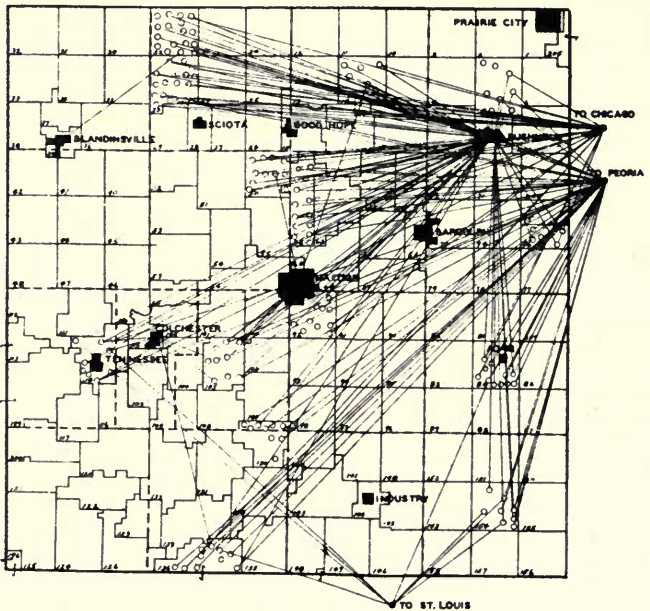
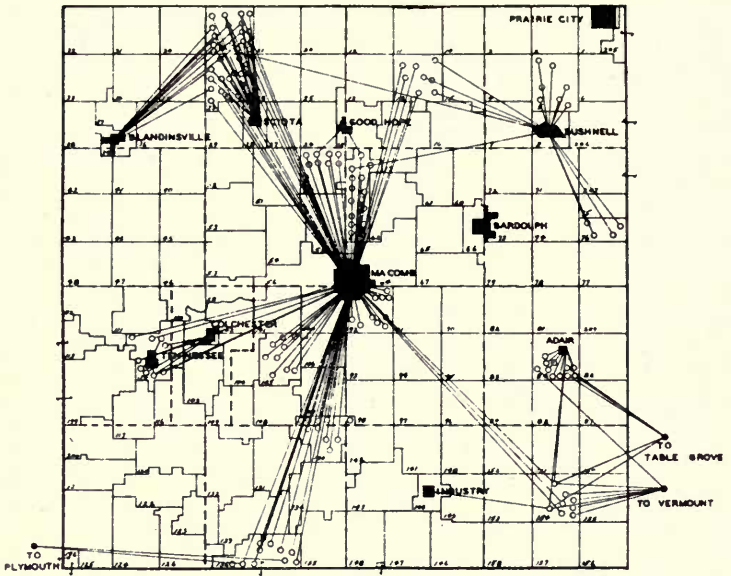
<sup>b</sup> A few specified two centers, making over 100 percent in some cases.

Data on trade and social-service centers in Champaign county were obtained from 22 percent of the 2,350 farm families.<sup>23</sup> Here the patterns of trade and of attendance at school and church stand out more clearly than in McDonough county (Fig. 15). The larger towns with populations of 10,000 and more were the major centers for furniture, machinery and equipment, and banking (Table 5). For entertainment,

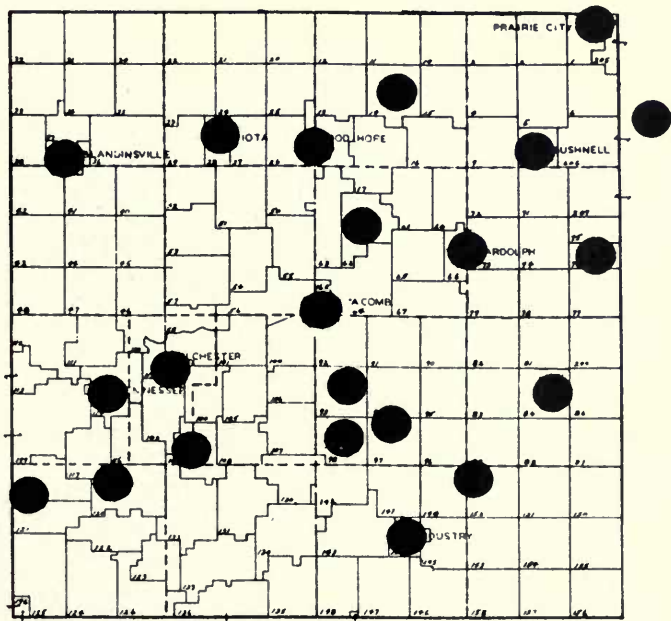
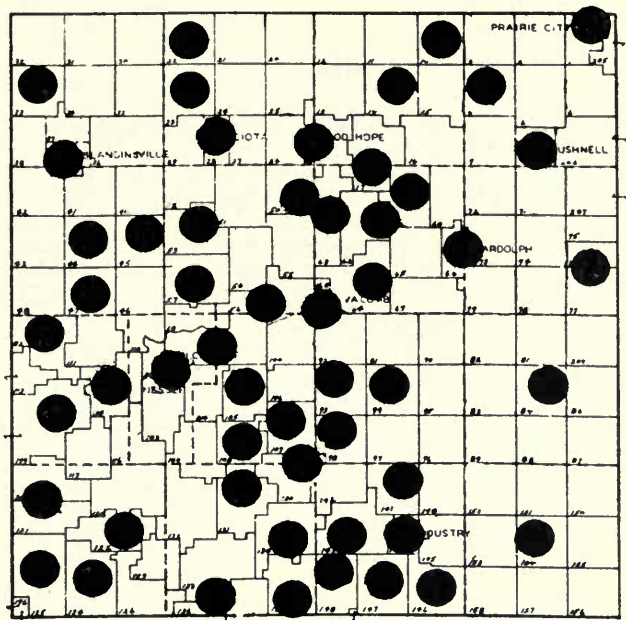
<sup>23</sup> See "Preferred and Actual Service Centers for Rural People in Champaign County," Ill. Agr. Exp. Sta. RSM-21, prepared in cooperation with the Champaign-Urbana Junior Chamber of Commerce (mimeo). 1948. A similar study made for Coles county has not been published, but was used by the county survey committee as a basis for making recommendations for reorganization.



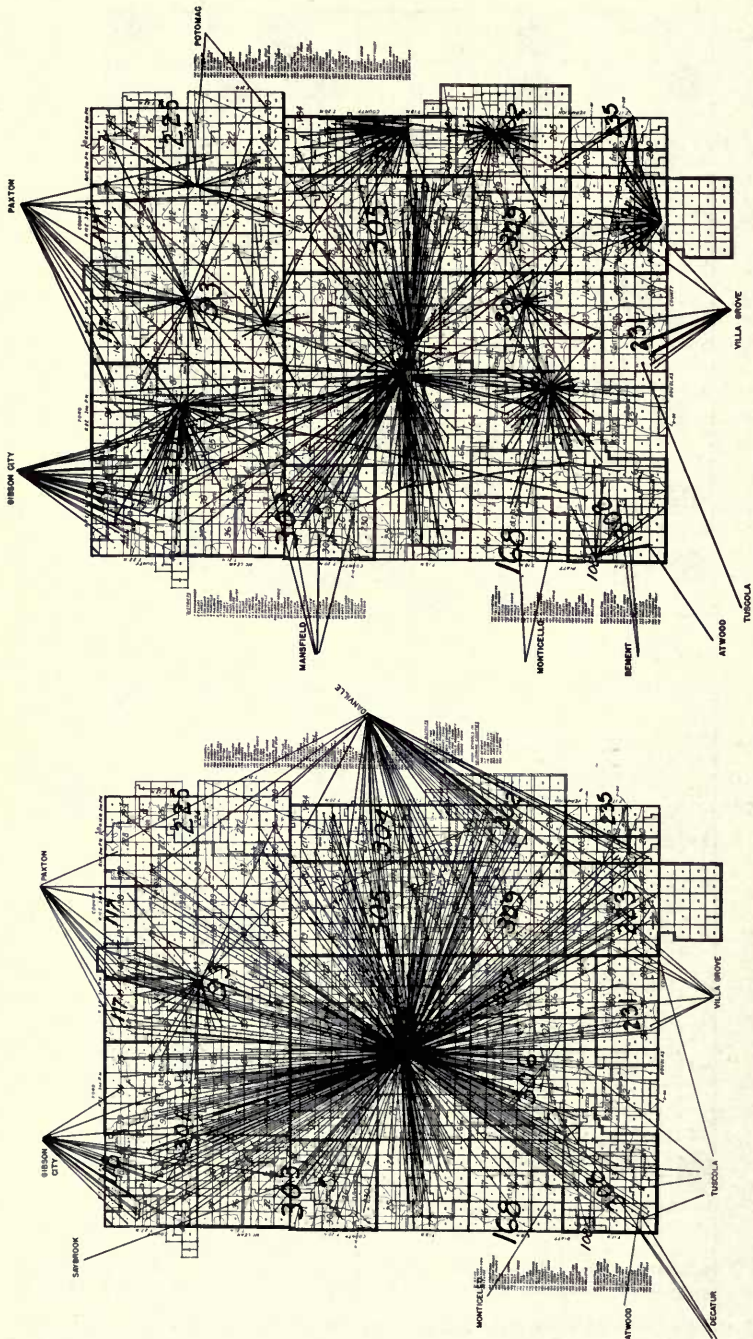
Centers where farm people in 14 school districts in McDonough county did their banking (top map) and bought their furniture (lower map), according to a survey made in 1941. (Fig. 14 — continued on next page)



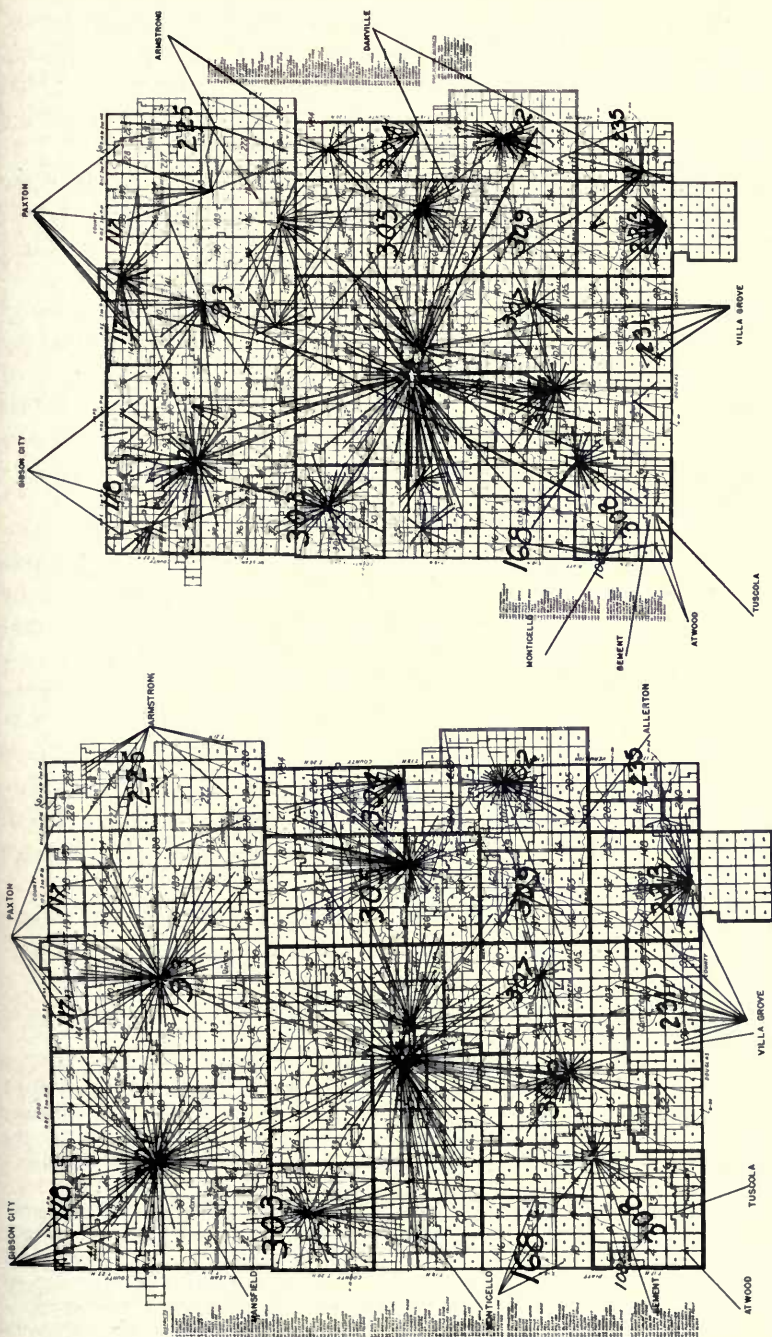
Centers designated for buying groceries (top map) and buying and selling livestock (lower map). (Fig. 14 — concluded on page 27)



Centers in McDonough county designated as school attendance centers by the county survey committee (top map) and used as school attendance centers in 1951-52 (lower map). (Fig. 14, concluded)



Centers that 514 farm families in Champaign county preferred for buying furniture (left) and for banking (right), according to a survey made in 1946. (Fig. 15 — concluded on page 29)



communities over 2,500 were preferred. For medical care, groceries, school, and church, farm families preferred communities under 2,500. Actually about half the families indicated communities smaller than 500 as their choice for grade school and church; and three-fifths of the families preferred communities under 1,000 for high school.

The mapping of trade and social-service areas serves to show the parts of a county from which farm people are drawn to the various centers, and the reasons for which they come. No hard and fast boundaries can be determined for trade areas, however. The overlapping of these areas is doubtless due to competition between various centers, and to people's tendency to trade where they feel they can get the best buys. Improved roads and the use of the automobile have, of course, made this seemingly indiscriminate trading possible. Social services are more likely to be centered in one place and the boundaries of the social service areas can be determined fairly satisfactorily.

### ***Some problems in applying these methods***

If the people of a rural community are encouraged by suitable legislation to provide modern schools for their children, they can, by using the above-described methods, determine school boundaries that will approximately coincide with natural community boundaries. As we have seen, this is what happened in Pike, Fayette, and McHenry counties.

However, a number of factors may cause "unnatural" or arbitrary lines to be set. One of these is the desire of property owners to keep taxes as low as possible.<sup>24</sup> Another is the inflexibility of the law itself. An otherwise well-integrated community may not have quite enough assessed valuation to meet the conditions of the law.

A number of solutions have been tried by communities that can't meet the requirements for a community unit district. Some communities have included in their petitions farm territory that belongs to a neighboring district.<sup>25</sup> Others, like the Alden-Hebron area, have gone

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<sup>24</sup> Efforts were made in Champaign county, for example, to form, first, a community unit embracing the twin cities of Urbana and Champaign and their immediate territory; then, when Champaign alone had organized its community unit district, to form an Urbana community unit district. The failure of the latter effort was believed due to the opposition of some land owners who did not want their taxes increased.

<sup>25</sup> A case in point is the organization of the Mahomet district in Champaign county. The people of this community preferred to have their own community school rather than to be swallowed up by the Champaign district. To do so, it included the village of Bondville and its trade territory, which is really part of the Champaign district; and also Seymour, with its farm territory, even though, as indicated by a special study, people in this area would have preferred to become

to a dual system (*see* page 20). Another alternative has been to use the law that permits a community consolidated district to offer 12 grades of work. There have also been a number of instances of two or more communities joining together to form a community unit school district. Sometimes two high schools have been maintained.

Forming two communities into one district does seem to be a practical solution to the problem of the small community. However, when this is done, it is important to provide schools in the centers that will be most available to the children. As we have seen (page 30), rural people seem to prefer community centers under 2,500 population for their schools, as well as for church and immediate trade needs. Maintaining schools in such centers will help to preserve the integrity of the small community.

Another possibility might be to provide special services, such as a junior college or instruction for handicapped children, for communities which can't quite measure up to the requirements of the law. An intermediate district—possibly an adaptation of the office of the county superintendent of schools—could be set up to furnish the services for a group of school districts.<sup>26</sup> Or a number of adjacent communities might join by contract to provide these services for themselves.

In any event, the advantages of retaining the well-integrated small community in rural areas rather than arbitrarily forming large, unwieldy districts should be carefully weighed. Reorganizations have already taken place in Illinois that have resulted in inter-community friction. Further study is needed in the light of what has been accomplished and what remains to be done.

## THE FORMATION OF COMMUNITY UNIT SCHOOLS

Changes in school district boundaries came rapidly in Illinois following the enactment of the community unit law in 1947. Whereas in 1945 Illinois still had 9,680 one-room school districts, by October, 1956, only 1,389 remained. The total number of school districts fell from 11,955 in 1945 to 2,018 in 1956—a reduction of 83 percent.

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part of either the Champaign or the Monticello district. The Seymour people have accepted the situation since they have their elementary school and their neighborhood remains relatively intact. But subsequently some of the people in the Bondville area petitioned out of the Mahomet district and into the Champaign district. The part of the Bondville area remaining in the Mahomet district is farthest from Mahomet and nearest to Champaign. The results are a divided neighborhood and overlapping bus routes.

<sup>26</sup> See McLure, William P., "The Intermediate Administrative School District in the United States." Univ. of Ill. Coll. of Ed., Bur. of Ed. Res. 1956.

As already noted, county school survey committees were organized in 93 of the 102 counties of the state by the end of 1945. There can be little doubt that these committees, with the help of state leaders such as those working in the Illinois Rural Education Committee, were the most important single influence in bringing about the changes in the number of school districts in the state.

### ***Controls resting with the farmer***

From the passage of the 1945 law, through all the steps taken toward reorganization, control was in the hands of farmer representatives. The influence of farm organizations in framing the law is indicated by the provision that five of the nine members of a survey committee be directors of one-room school districts. Since these directors are usually farmers, this insured that representatives of rural interests would have the deciding vote on the committees.

One-room-school directors were also in the majority at the meetings held to decide whether survey committees should be appointed. In fact, they had three-fourths of the votes. It was with their support, therefore, that survey committees were set up in so many counties. A study of 80 counties showed that three-fourths of the votes cast by rural school directors were in favor of the committees.

It is significant that the farmer representatives chose to support the school survey committees and then that so many of the committees recommended community unit districts. For, if the rural-school directors had chosen to do so, they could have blocked school reorganization.

Finally, according to the law, farm people had the residual control over approval of the recommendations when these were presented to the voters. Urban and rural votes had to be counted separately,<sup>27</sup> and a majority of each was necessary for approval. Farm people in open-country districts, acting alone, could form open-country community consolidated districts, and at first many such districts were formed. But farm people and town people had to act together to set up community unit districts.

### ***Type of changes made***

At first county survey committees were inclined to group several one-room school districts into one elementary district in order to increase the enrolment or raise the tax base. But as they went deeper

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<sup>27</sup> The survey law defined as "rural" the open country and towns with less than 500 population. The community unit law made the division on the basis of incorporation. See "Supplement to the School Code of Illinois," Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Cir. Ser. A., No. 45, pp. 14-18. 1947.

into the subject they saw that the problems of reorganizing elementary and high school districts were interrelated. A review of 89 committee reports showed that 60 of the committees recommended community unit districts;<sup>28</sup> only 26 recommended dual systems. Many of the committees at first recommended districts larger than the people were willing to support. Between the tentative and the final committee reports,<sup>29</sup> more committees changed their recommendations in the direction of smaller districts than of larger ones.

**Table 6. — Changes in the Numbers of Elementary, Secondary, and Unit School Districts in Illinois, 1945 to 1957<sup>a</sup>**

Year	Elementary	Secondary	Unit <sup>b</sup>	Total
1945.....	11,210	646	99	11,955
1949.....	4,194	442	315	4,951
1951.....	2,958	398	302	3,658
1953.....	1,940	344	323	2,607
1955.....	1,640	306	332	2,242
1956.....	1,389	291	338	2,018
1957.....	1,225	280	344	1,849

<sup>a</sup> From mimeographed sheets, "School District Information — State of Illinois," issued by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction on October 1, 1956, and October 1, 1957.

<sup>b</sup> Includes all 12-grade unit districts: old type, charter, community unit, and community consolidated. By October, 1957, 72 percent of the area of the state was in unit districts.

Even before final committee recommendations were made, many communities were reorganizing their school districts. Only a little more than a year after the community unit law was passed, 206 consolidations, largely of elementary school districts, had taken place in 43 counties, mostly in east-central Illinois; and 109 community unit districts had been approved by vote in 32 counties, mostly in west-central Illinois. Few changes were made in the southern third of the state. In fact, many county survey committees in this area made no recommendations, preferring to leave it to the people to make the changes by the process of petition.

Once started, the changes to community school districts came rapidly, with the biggest change coming between 1945 and 1949 (Table 6). By 1956 there were 338 unit districts, including both old-type 12-grade districts and new community unit districts. The number of elementary school districts had dropped to 1,389, of which 906 were one-room-school districts.

<sup>28</sup> Possibly the number would have been higher if it were not for the legal requirements of a \$6,000,000 valuation and 2,000 population.

<sup>29</sup> All committees were required by law to submit a tentative report so that suggested changes, if approved, could be incorporated in a final report.

**Table 7. — Changes in Numbers and Features of Community Unit School Districts From June, 1949, to February, 1951<sup>a</sup>**

Item	June, 1949	February, 1951
Number of units . . . . .	217	242
Number of counties . . . . .	71	73
Percentage of state covered . . . . .	43	51
Average size of district (sq. mi.) . . . . .	111.4	108.6
Median size of district (sq. mi.) . . . . .	101 to 125	101 to 125
Average number of elementary pupils . . . . .	558	646
Average number of high school pupils . . . . .	215	226
Median high school enrolment . . . . .	126 to 150	126 to 150
Average assessed valuation . . . . .	\$16,836,532	\$18,286,372

<sup>a</sup> From "Progress Report on School Reorganization in Illinois," State Advisory Commission Bul. 13 and 14 (mimeo). 1951.

As the number of community districts increased, their average size decreased. As shown in Table 7, there was a decline from 111.4 square miles in 1949 to 108.6 square miles in 1951. During the same period, average enrolments and valuations increased. These averages were distorted, however, by a few schools with high enrolments and valuations. The group of schools in which the median could be found had high school enrolments ranging from 126 to 150 and assessed valuations of \$10,000,000 to \$15,000,000.

Most of the reorganizations took place in the northern two-thirds of the state, where valuations are relatively high and enrolments low. Many southern communities could not organize unit districts because they are in poor land areas and their valuations are low even though their enrolments are, in general, high. The variation in amount of money available per pupil in different sections of the state is indicated in Table 8, which gives enrolments for five community unit districts with approximately the same valuation.

**Table 8. — Assessed Valuation and Enrolments in Five Near-Average Community Unit Districts, 1949<sup>a</sup>**

District	Valuation	Enrolment		
		High school	Elementary	Total
Shabbona-Rollo-Lee . . . . .	\$16,350,000	105	381	486
Fisher . . . . .	15,946,701	160	370	530
Adair-Industry . . . . .	17,105,158	132	331	463
Marshall . . . . .	18,000,000	368	978	1,346
Effingham . . . . .	16,934,110	548	1,188	1,736

<sup>a</sup> From "Progress Report on School Reorganization in Illinois," State Advisory Commission Bul. 13 (mimeo). 1951.

No doubt more reorganizations would have occurred in the southern part of the state if districts could have been assured of enough state aid to operate a good school program. Also, more communities in northern Illinois would have gone to the community unit system if the law had been more flexible as to population requirements. This law might have been modified to permit communities smaller than 2,000 to organize if they showed evidence of need and of adequate facilities.<sup>30</sup>

It is significant to note in connection with the size of the community area, that people in small towns, especially those around 500 population, showed increasing resistance to the formation of community unit districts. The desire of country people for better schools outweighed their fear of increasing taxes and losing their neighborhood school. But the people in small towns were reluctant to lose their high school.

With the surge toward the community type of school in the state, much dissatisfaction could have been avoided, it would seem, if more attention had been paid to discovering the natural areas of association by methods similar to those described in pages 15 to 31, and if more flexibility had been provided by law.

### **Reorganization still needed**

Figure 16 shows (1) the areas of the state now covered by community unit, community consolidated, and charter or old-type districts, and (2) areas in which the dual system still exists. A law of 1953 required that all non-high school territory be abolished, so that in the white areas in Fig. 16, the high school district boundaries, which are not shown, have been extended to take in all territory not already in high school districts.<sup>31</sup>

By 1957 only 25 counties were covered by unit districts; 87 had some territory still remaining in dual systems. A new survey law

<sup>30</sup> Legislation was enacted by the Seventieth General Assembly in 1957 to make this possible. House Bill No. 1106 has these provisions: "Any contiguous territory having a population of not less than 1,500 and not more than 500,000 persons and an equalized valuation of not less than \$5,000,000 and bounded by school district lines may be organized into a community consolidated district; . . . however, on approval of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the county superintendent of schools having control over the proposed district such district may be formed with a population of less than 1,500 persons and an equalized valuation of less than \$5,000,000 based upon the last full, fair cash value as equalized or assessed by the Department of Revenue as of the date of the filing of the petition."

<sup>31</sup> Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Springfield. "The School Code of Illinois." Sec. 11-18.1, p. 114. 1955.



passed by the Seventieth General Assembly, but later vetoed,<sup>32</sup> could have been applied to almost half (48) of the counties — those in which much of the territory is still in dual districts. Even without a new law, however, areas not yet organized into unit districts, as well as areas in which reorganizations have been unsatisfactory, need to review their school situation in terms of the intent of existing laws — which is to set up unified school districts with boundaries as similar as possible to community boundaries.

## SUMMARY

For years Illinois had more school districts than any other state. As farm populations declined, rural-school enrolments decreased and costs per pupil rose. This situation became increasingly critical after 1930, leading to a widespread movement for reorganization. The difficulties were compounded by the inequalities between districts. Often districts with the poorest soil and lowest valuations had the most children to educate. The movements of farm families from one school district to another also caused inequalities, especially since most of the moves were made by farm laborers, who usually have the largest families; during a school term, one district could lose half its enrolment and the next district have its enrolment doubled. The moves would usually be within the same community, however, pointing up the need for organizing schools on a community basis.

The movement for reorganization was stimulated by teacher, civic, farmer, school-administrator, and school-official organizations, as well as by such groups as the Illinois Seminar on Community Relations and the Illinois Rural Education Committee. By the 1940's, improved farm incomes and better roads made reorganization more feasible. In 1943 a law was passed authorizing counties to appoint survey committees; but little was done until after the law of 1945, which not only authorized survey committees, but also required that the people of a county vote on survey recommendations. Reorganization, based on the requirements of the community unit law of 1947, followed on a widespread basis.

The mapping of natural areas of association seemed to be a valuable, if not essential, prerequisite to the formation of rural community unit school district boundary lines. To determine natural areas, the Experiment Station mapped (1) neighborhoods and their natural

<sup>32</sup> This was House Bill 1110, which provided for the reenactment of the County Survey Law of 1945 so that all Class II counties (those which had failed to reduce the number of school districts by at least three-fourths since 1945) could form county survey committees.

communities in three counties; (2) natural high-school-attendance areas in two counties; and (3) trade and social-service areas in two counties. The first method of mapping probably gave the best results. However, its reliability would no doubt be increased if this method were combined with or checked by the other methods.

Rural people usually considered communities with trade centers of 500 to 2,500 population most desirable for a community unit school district. When, backed by a suitable state law, they worked for good schools and equitable educational opportunities, they usually set school-district boundaries that approximately coincided with the natural boundaries of the community. But sometimes the desire of landowners to be in the district with the lowest tax rates, or the inability of a natural community to comply with the requirements of the 1947 law, had unfortunate results. Neighborhoods and small communities were broken up, schisms and frictions developed within and between communities, desirable reorganization was retarded, and, in general, educational advantages were curtailed for some of the children.

In some natural communities, the limiting factor to reorganization was population; in others, it was valuation. A number of natural communities on the good land areas in northern and central Illinois could not meet the minimum population requirement of the 1947 law. In the poor land areas of southern Illinois, some communities did not have the required valuation of \$6,000,000.

The majority of farmers, it seemed, wanted better schools even though they stood to face increased taxes. Although farmer representatives were in the majority on all county survey committees and thus could have voted down school reorganization, few of them chose to do so. Of 80 committee reports studied, 70 recommended the 12-grade community school district favored by most townspeople. Moreover, farmers could have turned down any proposed reorganization, since farm and non-farm votes were counted separately. Yet more than 70 percent of the rural votes were favorable to 217 community districts organized by June, 1949.

As new units have been organized, the average area has become smaller, although enrolment and assessed valuation have tended to increase. In 1949 the average size of unit was 111.4 square miles. By 1951 the average of 242 districts was 108.6 square miles. These districts were not small, neighborhood-type communities, nor county-communities, but were communities with town centers ranging from 500 to 1,500 population.

## CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the foregoing study, the following conclusions seem justified:

1. School reorganization, to be most effective, must have the active support of the people most concerned. It may be looked upon as a social process, during which people become aware of the faults of their existing system and determine to correct them.

2. The boundaries of community school districts should be based on natural community boundaries, as indicated by neighborhood groupings or by natural high-school-attendance areas. Areas in the state which are not yet satisfactorily organized into community unit districts should be mapped to show natural neighborhoods and communities. The neighborhood, especially if it is village-centered, can then be considered the area for location of the elementary school, while the community can be considered the unit for administering both the high school and the neighborhood elementary schools.

3. The financial support of schools must be organized on a much broader basis than a purely community one if equal educational opportunities are to be provided to all people in the state. However, state laws which set population and valuation requirements for school districts should be flexible enough to maintain the integrity of the rural community, including that which just misses meeting the requirements. These provisions are suggested: (1) That intermediate districts be established to provide for small schools the specialized services that these schools cannot provide for themselves; (2) that a community with somewhat less than 2,000 population be allowed to appeal for special permission to organize, and (3) that adequate state aid be given to communities without the requisite valuation. Such provisions would probably induce many communities which are now without good school facilities to organize community unit districts. Encouragement of voluntary organization is of course preferable to the alternative procedure of compelling school officials, by law, to place all territory in some community unit district.

**APPENDIX*****Materials available from the Experiment Station***

During the Experiment Station investigations of rural schools in Illinois, the author of this bulletin prepared several mimeographed publications which give more detailed data than it was possible to include here. These publications are listed below. Unless otherwise stated, the issuing agency is the University of Illinois Agricultural Experiment Station.

- "The Need for and Possibility of Rural School District Reorganization in McDonough County, Illinois," RSM-11. 1943.
- "Needs and Opportunities for School District Reorganization in Fayette County, Illinois," RSM-14. 1944.
- "Facts Relating to School District Reorganization in Crawford County, Illinois," mimeographed by the Crawford County Superintendent of Schools. 1945.
- "Suggested Reorganization of School Districts in Champaign County, Illinois," RSM-20. 1946.
- "Preferred and Actual Service Centers for Rural People in Champaign County, Illinois," prepared in cooperation with the Champaign-Urbana Junior Chamber of Commerce. RSM-21. 1948.
- "Rural Leaders Want Modern Rural Schools," RSM-23. 1949.
- "Illinois School District Boundaries," RSM-24. 1950.
- "Tentative Report, McHenry County School Survey Committee," office of the McHenry County Superintendent of Schools.











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