

# Rural Schools in New Brunswick

By FLETCHER PEACOCK

**U**NDER the influence of the New Brunswick Vocational Act, 1918, and the Technical Education Act of Canada, 1919, the urban secondary courses of New Brunswick were broadened and enriched. The High Schools of most of the cities and towns became Composite Schools, each offering along with the standard college preparatory course a parallel series of vocational courses suited to the needs of the young people and their communities.

While all the towns established Composite High Schools, only one school introduced vocational agriculture. This school was established in 1919 at Woodstock to serve the County of Carleton. In 1939 a survey showed that 87% of the 800 graduates from this agricultural department were successful operators of Carleton County farms. The vast majority of the pupils living in rural and village areas remained untouched by the educational reform of the twenties. Up till 1943, the elementary and secondary schools which they attended were administered by about thirteen hundred weak school districts, most of which were too poor to establish even good elementary schools, much less adequate secondary education.

In 1943, two Acts were passed—the County Schools Finance Act, and the Rural Schools Assistance Act, the provisions of which, together with the Vocational Act, are literally making a new world educationally as far as rural New Brunswick is concerned.

Under the County Schools Finance Act all schools are financed as County Units and the Province contributes 10% of all budgets in addition to grants previously paid, and allows each County Board a fund, called an Equalization Fund, which provides another 10% earmarked for the improvement of the teaching facilities of the schools. The

object is to make working conditions in rural schools equal to those found in the best urban classrooms.

Under the Rural Schools Assistance Act, 40% of the capital costs of replacing or modernizing the outmoded elementary schools is borne by the Government. In schools that are otherwise satisfactory, substantial grants are provided by this Act for the installation of modern sanitary arrangements and electric lights. The Act also provides that where schools in a certain area having one hundred or more high school students decide to erect a Regional High School, 40% of the cost of the building and 50% of the cost of equipment would be borne by the Government. The Province also bears 50% of the cost of transporting pupils from Grade VII and up, to these centralized schools.

## A Ready Response

The rural residents who had waited so long for educational assistance responded most readily. The Finance Act was adopted by all but one of the counties within two years. There is an active competition going on amongst the various districts as to which will get its elementary school modernized first. Forty-one such projects have already been completed and seventy-three new schools are being built at present. Already eighteen areas have consolidated to build Regional High Schools and four of these schools are now open. They are proving popular and districts that a few months ago voted against joining the consolidation, are now reconsidering the matter and begging for admission to the schools in operation.

## Eighteen Regions Organized

### Twenty-six Others on the Way

In the following areas the building of Regional High Schools has been decided upon: Bay du Vin, Deer Island, Campobello, Grand Manan, Stanley, Harvey Station, Lawrence Station, St. Francois, Port Elgin, Plaster Rock, Perth-

Andover, Pokemouche, Bellisle, Salisbury, Shippegan, Minto, Southampton, Petit Rocher.

The following additional places are greatly interested in establishing consolidations and building Composite High Schools: Caraquet, Tracadie, Lameque, Neguac, Rogersville, Sunny Corner, Boiestown, Buetoche, Cape Bald-Barachois, Memramcook, Petiteodiac, Sackville and Sussex.

It will require about fifty or fifty-five consolidations to serve the whole Province. Since forty-four of these are well under way as above noted, the process of rural reorganization in New Brunswick is moving rapidly toward completion.

### **Vocational Act Amended**

In addition to the passing of the Acts above referred to, the Vocational Act has been amended so that the vocational sections of Composite High Schools get assistance to the extent of 60% of the first \$100,000—50% of the second \$100,000—40% of the third \$100,000 and 30% of all expenditures of over \$300,000. These provisions of course, apply to both the rural and the urban areas of the Province and are giving a great impetus to the development of vocational education. In actual practice, in addition bearing 40% of the capital costs for academic classrooms in rural composite high schools, the Government bears 60% of the capital cost of providing classrooms and shops used for vocational education. The grants apply proportionately to rooms used in common such as gymnasiums, assemblies, laboratories and service rooms. The Vocational Act also provides for Government grants covering 75% of the salaries of vocational teachers in the Rural High Schools.

### **Small Administrative Units Becoming Out of Date**

#### **Harvey Development an Example**

The rural people of New Brunswick, fired by a new educational consciousness and aided by the legislation referred to, are rapidly improving the educational

opportunities for our rural children. The process of reformation is illustrated by the development in a farm area like Harvey Station, York County, famous for its Jersey cattle—This is a region made up of about eighteen school districts (each with a one-room school) whose natural marketing centre is Harvey Station. In 1944, York County adopted the County Finance Act so that the maintenance of all their schools became a county charge. There was no high school within thirty miles, so the districts decided to consolidate and build a modern Regional High School that would offer three concurrent courses, namely: the agriculture high school course; the home economics high school course, and the college preparatory high school course. They have built a school costing \$100,000—of which \$50,000 is the obligation of the Province and the remainder is to be paid by the newly consolidated districts. The school is erected on a commanding site of six acres in extent. It was opened on Jan. 2, 1947, when the modern gymnasium-auditorium was thronged with five hundred eager and enthusiastic citizens. The adequate stage accommodated the Governor, the Premier, the Minister of Education, and a score of the leading citizens as well as a large chorus of trained singers. At the completion of the programme, from the spacious and well-equipped home economics department adjoining the gymnasium, the young ladies of the school and community served a delicious lunch to all present, after which all made a tour of the building and admired the modern classrooms; the adequate laboratory; the up-to-date office and library; the shops, designed to carry out farm mechanics, machinery repairs and other work appropriate to the community; the efficient heating plant, and the tiled laboratories and showers.

#### **The School a Community Centre**

The school will be equipped with up-to-date visual aids, both for the teaching of the pupils and for the enter-

tainment and education of adults in the evenings. The Principal and other speakers explained that the school was to serve the pupils from Grade VII to XII in day classes and that in addition, it was to be used as a community centre for adult education. Evening classes are planned, as well as music and lecture series and a complete programme of outdoor and indoor sports for the recreation of all the people. One man said that although the school was just opened, he felt that the money value of it was fully covered by the appreciation of the value of the farm lands of the area which had already taken place because the school was built.

### **Elementary Schools Modernized**

The small schools of the region will remain and will be modernized to serve Grades I-VI. Each primary is to have a basement; furnace heating plant and modern sanitary arrangements. Each will have a library; adequate blackboards; kitchenette and all the facilities of a most up-to-date elementary classroom, including a teacher with special preparation as a primary expert. When the pupils reach Grade VII, they are to be transported by bus to the central high school whose principal is a trained teacher and a graduate in agriculture. He will be principal, but of all the primary schools also. He will be assisted by a graduate in home economics; a man thoroughly trained in farm mechanics; as well as by an adequate staff of high school specialists. This is the NEW HARVEY converted from the old area of eighteen weak independent one-room elementary schools paying salaries of \$800 each and no high school opportunity, to one having eighteen improved primary schools within walking distance of the pupils' homes, each with a specialist in charge of Grades I-VI, and a modern regional composite high school with an up-to-date Junior-Senior organization staffed by experts and headed by a well-trained principal, working under a salary schedule running to \$3,000 per year.

### **Better Opportunities for Beginners**

The elementary schools being rid of all adolescent pupils, will, for the first time, enable the primary teacher to give the children a fair start by laying proper foundations in the most important years of their educational life. The people are proud of the progress they have made and will speedily push the reform to completion and bring to their children educational opportunity second to none, and their community an adult education service designed to keep all the people growing mentally throughout their lives.

It is hard to anticipate the values that will be realized in the rural community of Harvey by such an educational Revolution. The new system will raise up better farmers and housewives for this agricultural area that supports it; citizens who will be not only more productive through mastering the science and techniques of their vocations, but more capable of full living because of broad secondary training in English, Music, History, Economics and Civics with necessary Mathematics and Science. The changed plan will prepare those who wish to do so to go to college and enter the professions. In short, it is aimed to develop every human resource and fit each item for the place in life in which it will be happiest and most productive.

### **Movement Spreads Rapidly**

The outlook is that in the course of two or three years the thirteen hundred weak attendance units with no Rural High Schools that constituted New Brunswick, will be converted into fifty or sixty enlarged units, each with a modern Composite High School at its centre, made accessible to all Junior-Senior high school students, by bus lines with boarding hostels for the very few who cannot be conveyed. When this has been done, educational opportunity will have been equalized between urban and rural dwellers; living conditions in the country will be so improved that the exodus to the towns will be checked; the development of our primary industries of agri-

culture, fishing and forestry, will go on apace and the Province become a well-balanced, self-reliant and prosperous community whose rural people will be enabled to lead full and satisfactory lives.

### **The Theory of New Brunswick's Plan**

New Brunswick's plan provides for:

1. The financing of the maintenance of all rural schools by counties with the Province bearing 40% of the cost in Elementary Schools and 50% in Secondary Schools.

2. The financing of capital expenditures for Elementary Schools with the Province bearing 40% of the cost.

3. The consolidation of districts in areas at natural traffic and trade centres and building of Composite High Schools to serve the secondary and adult education needs of the regions, with the Government bearing one-half the cost of building and equipping such schools. The site of at least six acres to be provided by the community to be served.

The above plan assumes that every rural child has a right to the best possible elementary education during his pre-adolescent years; that this is the most important phase of education as it prepares for all future experiences; that a complete secondary education service in this post-war period should provide for both the general and vocational phases on the same level in democratically organized Composite Schools.

No Rural High School in New Brunswick will be subsidized that does not provide at least three parallel courses, viz: a college preparatory course; a home economics course for girls and a vocational course for boys in the leading occupation of the area served. Where at all possible, arrangements will be made for an enrolment of at least three hundred

students in each Junior-Senior High School unit. The object is to develop the physical resources of the country on the one hand, and to motivate and objectify the school work of each student, on the other. In the Junior High division—Grades VII, VIII and IX, the work covers a wide range for purposes of exploration and guidance. Here, all pupils take the same course, except that the shop-work differs to suit the sexes. In the senior Grades X, XI and XII, students are asked to choose among the parallel courses offered. These courses have a common core of subjects, viz: English, Health and Physical Education, and Citizenship, but each has a definite goal which gives the name to the course, such as:—College Preparatory, Agriculture, Home Economics, Commercial, Industrial, Fisheries, etc. The plan provides optional courses rather than optional subjects. This avoids the tempting of students to seek to get through on easy options. Provision is made for students to change courses in Grade XI if they find they have chosen wrongly, or if circumstances have changed since the beginning of Grade X. In the practical fields such as agriculture, a very close working arrangement is established between the school and the industry, in Grade XII. The pupil may spend up to half his time in the industry in some cases.

With improved elementary classrooms and modern Composite High Schools designed as community centres, staffed by adequate teachers of inspiration and vision, Rural New Brunswick will have provided first rate educational services that will develop her natural resources and build to the greatest degree, scholarship, happiness and character in her people.