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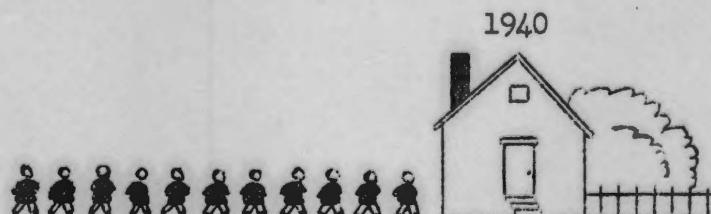
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THE PROBLEM OF DECLINING ENROLLMENT
in
the Elementary Schools
of
Miner County

W. F. Kumlien
C. Scandrette
Raymond Hatch



In 1920 there was an average of 19 pupils per rural school



but the average enrollment in 1940 had shrunk to 11 pupils

* * * * *

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* were secured. *
* * * * *

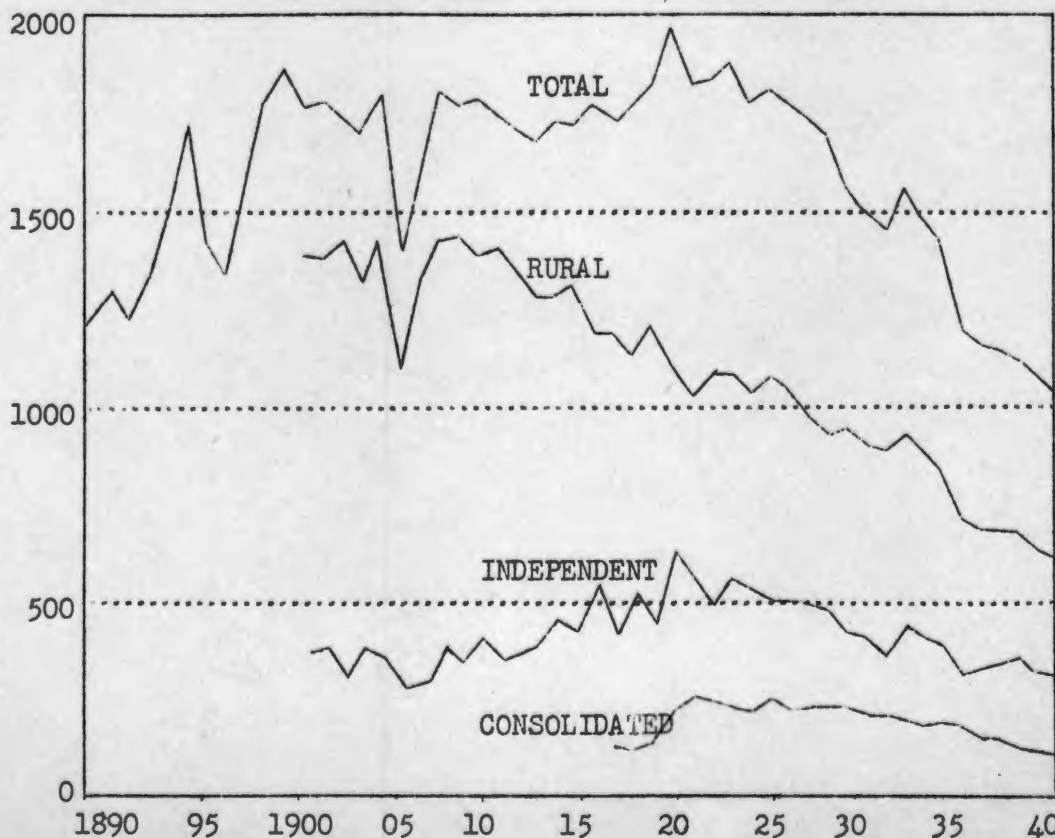
The Problem of Declining Enrollment in the Elementary Schools of Miner County

For a number of years population experts have called attention to the general decline in the birth rate and have predicted that widespread reductions in elementary enrollment will naturally follow.

Figure 1 shows the extent to which this prediction has been fulfilled in Miner county. It can be seen that elementary enrollments reached their peak in 1920. In that year 1,980 pupils were enrolled. Since 1920 the decline has been sharp, with the 1940 enrollment of 1,027 representing a drop of almost 50 percent from that of 20 years earlier. Rural enrollments were the first to experience the downward trend, but the losses suffered by independent and consolidated schools have been proportionately as great.

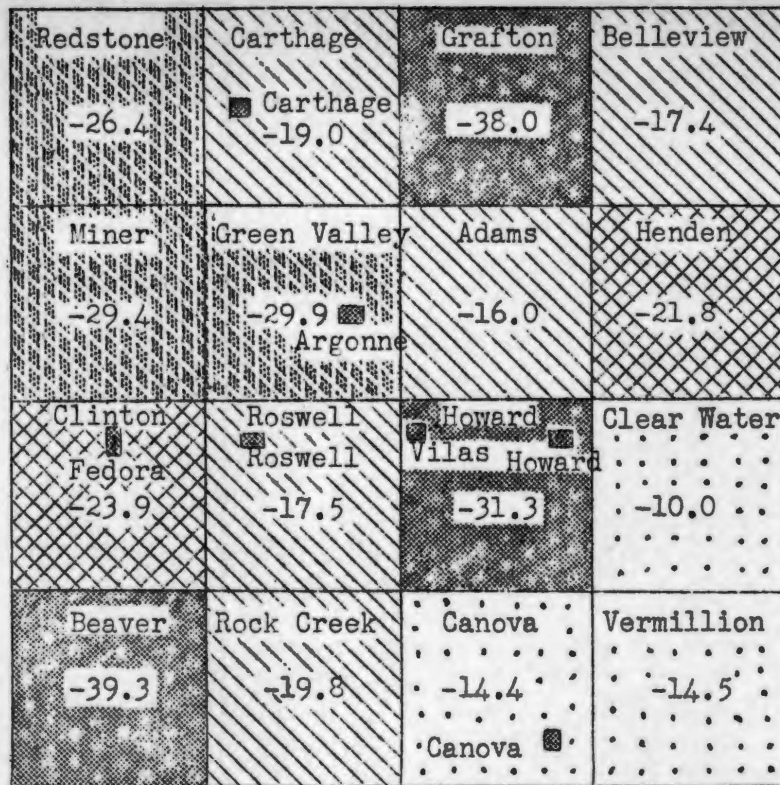
What has been the recent trend in the Miner county birth rate? In 1920 there were 27.5 births per thousand of the population--in 1940, only 17.1. The birth rate thus fell off 38 percent in 20 years with the natural result that fewer children have reached school age with each passing year. The trend has proceeded to the point where even high school enrollments are being so affected.

Figure 1. Elementary Enrollment in Miner County, 1890-1940.



Source: Biennial Reports of State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Figure 2. Population Losses in Miner County Townships, 1930-40.



Legend:
 10.0 - 14.9%
 \ / \ / 15.0 - 19.9%
 ■■■■ 30.0 and lower
 ×××× 20.0 - 24.9%
 — — — 25.0 - 29.9%

Source: Preliminary Release of 1940 U. S. Census.

It will be contended by those familiar with the South Dakota situation that another factor--population losses through migration--has also been important in reducing enrollments. The decade 1930-40 was one of heavy out-state migration, estimated for the state as a whole, at 119,000 persons.* Miner county contributed its share of the emigrants as evidenced by the fact that between 1930 and 1940, the population declined 18.4 percent--from 8,376 to 6,838. Figure 2 shows the population changes, 1930-40, by townships, and illustrates the widespread nature of population losses. All of the 16 townships showed population decreases, ranging from 10.0 percent in Clearwater township to 39.3 percent in Beaver township.

In general the townships which suffered the heaviest population losses also experienced the greatest enrollment declines between 1930 and 1940. Enrollments in the four townships with the heaviest percentage declines in numbers (averaging 34.3 percent) dropped off 45.6 percent, as compared with a decline of 23.3 percent for the four townships with the slightest losses (averaging 13.7 percent). It should be noted that elementary enrollment declines have consistently outdistanced population losses. It would appear that the falling birth rate is the underlying factor in the enrollment decline, but that the problem has been aggravated in recent years by population depletion through migration. Granted that the latter may be a temporary situation, the problem in Miner county is still one whose seriousness cannot be minimized.

* Rural Sociology Pamphlet No. 2, Population Migration to and from South Dakota, W. F. Kumlien and Howard M. Sauer, Brookings, S. Dak., Sept., 1940.

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

Redstone	Carthage	Carthage	(15)	(14)	(19)	(39)	(18)
37	Ind.	75	19	16	19	N.B.	18
47	165	47	14	13	18		12
36	112	33	7	12	10		17
	81		(16)	(17)	(20)	(21)	(22)
			20	17	19	--	9
			22	19	29	--	11
			5	7	12	11	7
Miner	Argonne		(25)	(24)	(23)	(2)	15
85	Cons.		--	--	--	14	19
69	80		16	13	10	8	9
49	66		9	14	9		(5) 20
	36		(30)	21	(31)	9	--
	Green Valley		11	16	(3)	42	(4) 14
	23		17	--	15	16	12
	16				16		12
Fedora Cons.	(40)	70	Vilas Ind.	Howard Ind.	West	Clear Water	East
110		39	71	237	42		
107		16	41	178	33	Clear Water	
			16	152	25		78
(28)	58	(26)	Woodworth	55	(34)		48
18		10		30	37		29
17		13		25	22		
--		9			5		
(36)	(35)	Burbank Cons.	(7)	(6)	14	Vermillion	
14	29		17		20		78
19	9	35	22		19		62
12	6	47	13		Canova Ind.		56
(37)	(38)	(12)	(13)	(8)	(9)	82	
22	14	19	11	27	15	65	
14	11	3	N.B.-	15	4	51	
16	10	7		7	9		

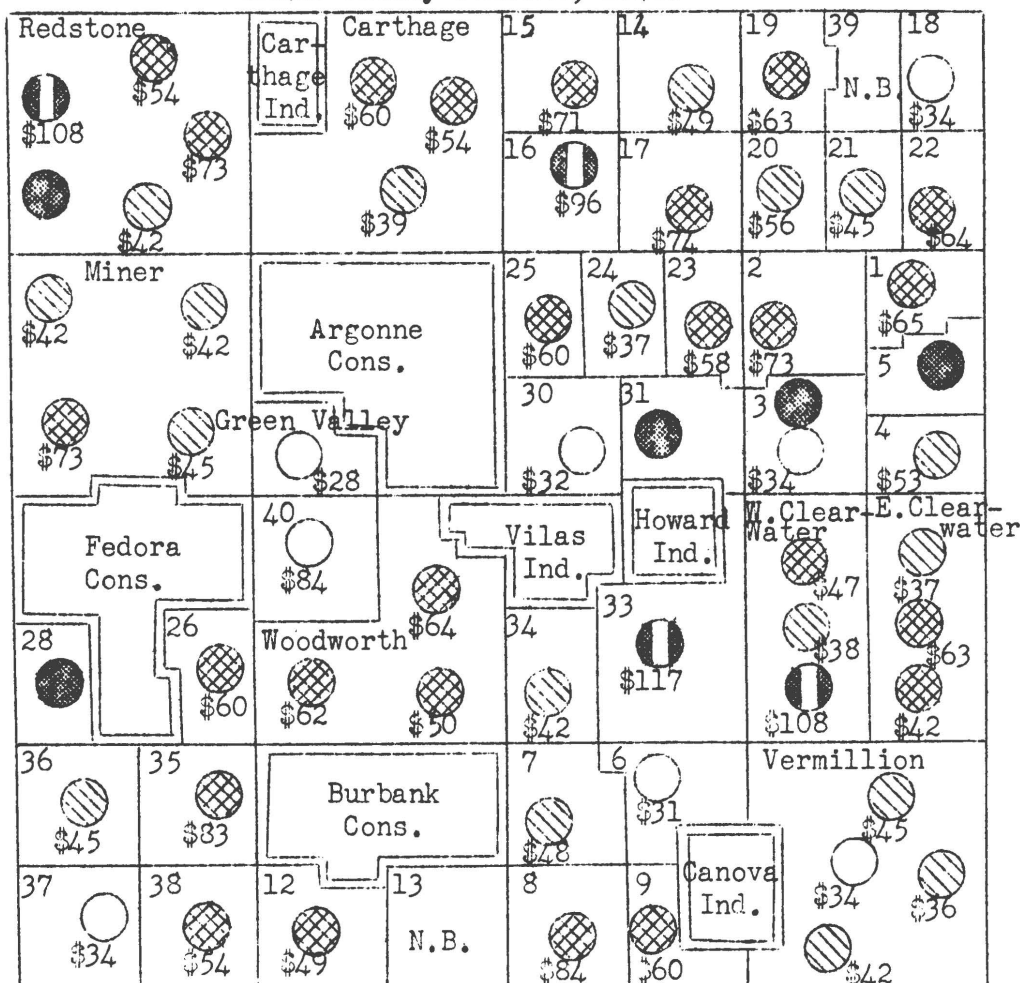
Legend: Top Figure - 1920 Enrollment
Middle Figure - 1930 Enrollment N.B. - No Building
Lower Figure - 1940 Enrollment

Source: Records of Miner County Superintendent of Schools

Fifty-five elementary schools were being operated within 38 common districts of Miner county in 1940. In addition, there were five common districts having no schools, three consolidated districts and four independent districts. Miner county combines the small, one-school district system with the township district plan, although the former is predominant.

It is possible to trace the general downward trend in elementary enrollments in Figure 3, which lists the numbers enrolled in each district for 1920, 1930 and 1940. Significant declines have occurred in all consolidated and independent districts, as well as in almost every common district. Chiefly because of dwindling enrollments five rural schools had been closed by 1940. In four additional schools enrollment had shrunk to five pupils, while well over one-half of all rural schools enrolled 10 or fewer pupils. Only one-seventh of the schools enrolled as many as 16 pupils in 1940, as compared with two-fifths in 1930. Barring unforeseen population changes, even further enrollment declines may be expected in the future.

Figure 4. Elementary Enrollment and Instructional Cost Per Pupil in Miner County Schools, 1940.*



Legend: Closed School 5 or fewer pupils 6 - 10 pupils 11 - 15 pupils 16 or more pupils

The figure below each school represents the per pupil cost.

Source: Records of Miner County Superintendent of Schools.

A wide range is discernible among the common districts in per pupil costs of elementary education. The Green Valley District School, enrolling 16 pupils in 1940, had a per pupil instructional cost of \$28. In contrast, the per pupil cost in Reeves School, District 33, with an enrollment of 5 pupils, was \$117. Figure 4 indicates that the smaller the school the greater is the per pupil cost.

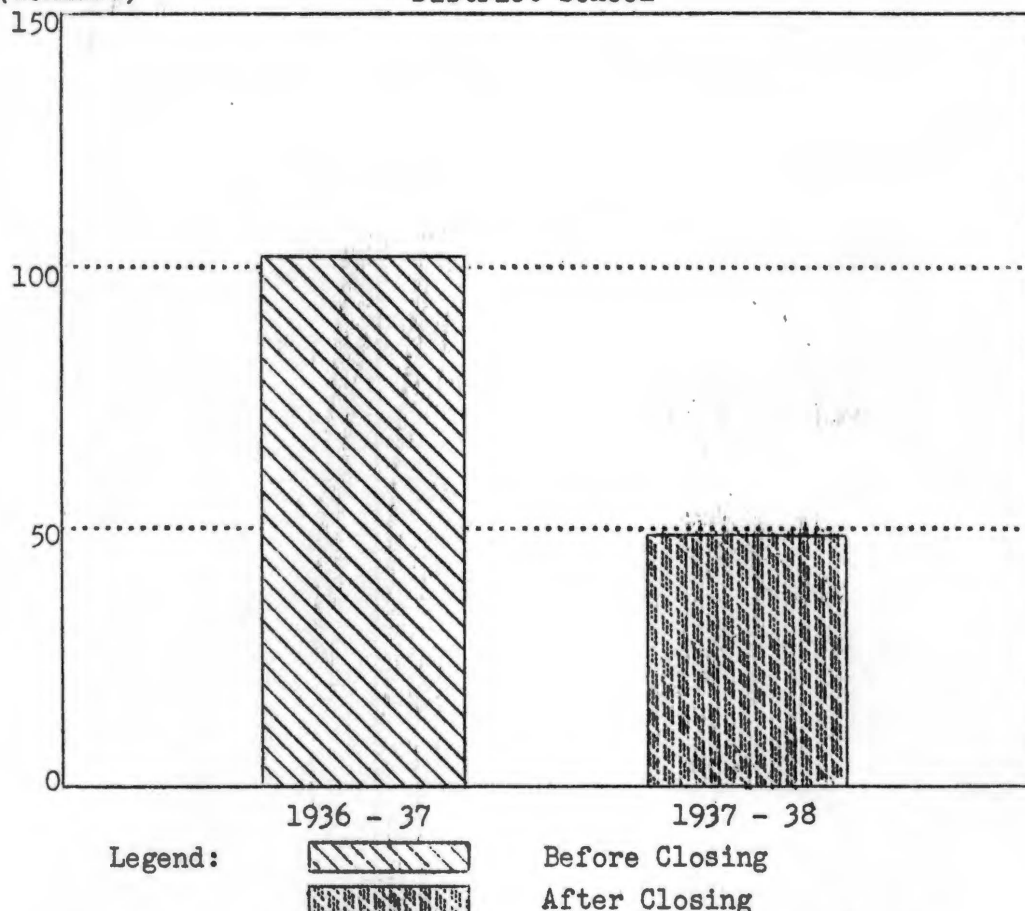
Table I (below) indicates that the operation of schools for 10 or fewer pupils is excessively expensive on a cost per pupil basis. This is particularly true for schools having 5 or fewer pupils; the per pupil cost of such schools in 1940 was \$107.25, as compared with an average of \$50.78 for all schools.

Table I. Cost of Operating Schools in Miner County by Size of Enrollment, 1940*

Size of School	Number of Schools	Number of Pupils	Total Cost	Average Cost Per Pupil
Total	55	593	\$30,110.00	\$ 50.78
5 or fewer pupils	4	20	2,145.00	107.25
6 - 10 pupils	25	210	12,985.00	61.83
11 - 15 pupils	18	230	9,850.00	42.83
16 or more pupils	8	133	5,130.00	38.57

*Based on Teachers' salaries only

Figure 5. Per Pupil Cost in District 28 before and after Closing the District School

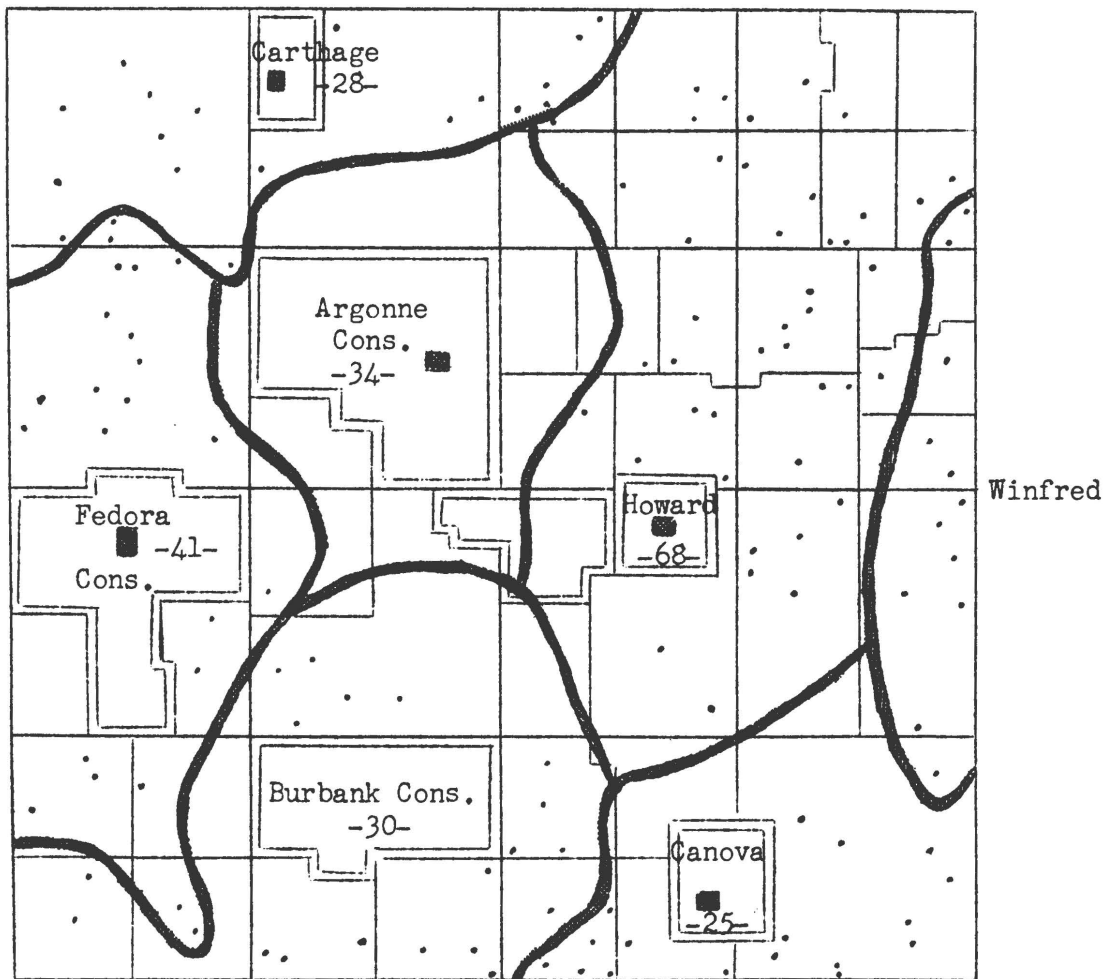


Source: Records of County Superintendent of Schools

In 1936-37, District 28 operated a single school with an enrollment of seven pupils. The total expenditures amounted to \$720.09, or \$102.87 per pupil. In view of the shrinkage in enrollment, the school was closed the following year and the two remaining pupils were sent as tuition students to a neighboring school. The total costs to the district in 1937-38 amounted to only \$96.79, or \$48.39 per pupil. The closing of its school had resulted in savings of \$623.30 to the district during the first year after closing.

From a financial standpoint it seems advisable for a school district to close a school when the enrollment drops to five or fewer pupils.

Figure 6. Areas from which High Schools Drew Their Miner County Tuition Students, 1940.

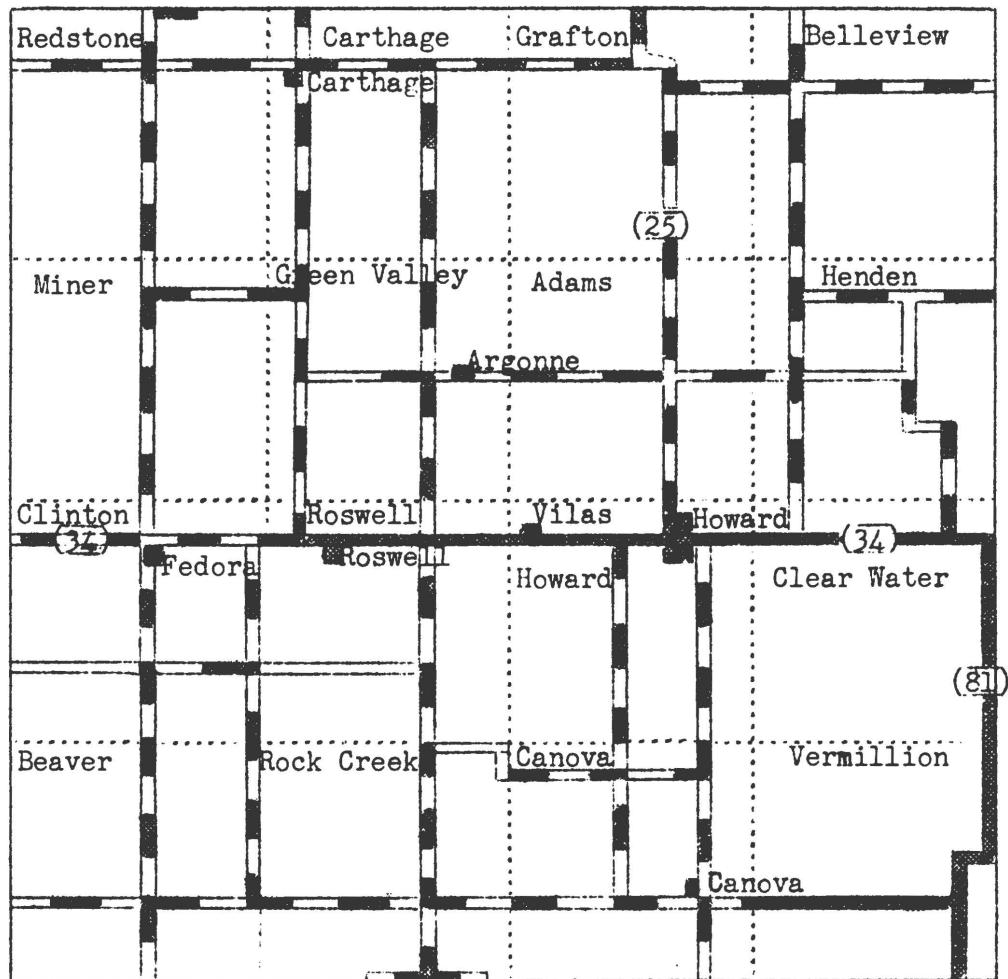





Source: Records of High School Superintendents, 1940.

A possible solution to the declining enrollment problem is suggested in Figure 6, which shows where approximately 250 farm youth of Miner county attended high school in 1940. Since high costs make it impractical for the common districts to maintain their own secondary schools for the relatively small number of students in each, the young people are sent to village high schools as tuition students. It has been seen that costs of maintaining elementary schools have become prohibitive in a number of districts. Enrollments in several of them have dwindled to the point where continued operation of the school, or schools, seems hardly justified. Why, then, should the districts not close these schools and send the remaining children to village elementary schools as tuition pupils, just as they are now doing with their high school students? Besides the financial savings which would result to the district, such a plan has the further advantage of extending to rural children improved facilities for education.

As an immediate step, especially in areas somewhat removed from village centers, the district might close its school, or schools, and pay tuition costs involved in sending the pupils to the nearest rural school still in operation. The larger districts should find it possible to maintain at least one centrally located school, closing the others as enrollment declines warrant such action.

Figure 7. Federal, State and County Highways in Miner County, 1940.



Legend:  Hard Surface  Graveled
 Graded

Source: Official Map of the State Highway Commission, 1940.

It will be noted in Figure 7 that good roads are found in all parts of Miner county. Through the media of the automobile and improved roads, farmers wherever they might live gain ready access to village centers in or near Miner county. The fact that the farmer's contacts are no longer restricted to his localized neighborhood is tending to revolutionize the pattern of rural life.

Many functions once performed by open country institutions have been shifted to the village centers. The farmer now goes to the village to buy groceries, clothing and other necessities; to attend church; to sell his produce; and to engage in social and recreational activities. As a further indication of the increased trend toward concentration of services in village centers, the farmer's sons and daughters, as previously observed, go to the village for their high school training. The next step may involve the education of the farmer's younger children in the village elementary schools.

Suggestions for Solving the Elementary
School Problem

A schoolboard confronted with the problem of declining enrollments should study its local situation carefully before taking action. The four plans listed below have been tested either in South Dakota or in other states and have been found practical. The first alternative may be applied as a temporary measure until such time as further action is advisable, but the last three suggested plans call for more or less permanent reorganization of the prevailing district system.

Cooperating with nearby rural schools

Keep the present rural district intact, but close the school, or schools, when enrollment drops to five or fewer pupils. Send the remaining pupils to the nearest rural school in which satisfactory arrangements can be made, with the district paying transportation costs when the distance exceeds four miles, and tuition when the school to which the pupils are transported is located outside the home district.

Tuition pupils to town schools

Close the rural school and send the remaining pupils as tuition students to the nearest independent school. This plan besides being less expensive than maintaining several small schools, has the further advantage of giving farm children greater educational opportunities than is possible in the small one-room school. It is essentially the same method which has been successfully used in handling the high school situation.

Consolidation

Incorporate several small districts into a consolidated district, being certain to include an area large enough to insure an adequate number of pupils and a sufficient base for support.

County-wide district plan

Reorganize the rural school system on a county-wide district basis, giving the county school board authority to discontinue small schools whenever it is advisable, and to determine the location of larger centralized schools within the county.