DIPLOMA EXAMINATIONS, GRADUATION, AND TESTING PROGRAMS

Manitowoc county boys and girls attended the first pioneer schools when convenient. The short, irregular school terms, the poorly qualified teachers in many instances, and the very irregular school attendance of school age children were factors which made completing the course of study set up almost an impossibility. The bright young man or woman who completed the "standards" set by the teachers was advised to write the teacher's examination. If successful in the examination, he or she taught school. If not successful, he or she would often return to the district school during the winter term for more "larnin".

The first diploma examination was held the last Friday and Saturday of March, 1886. The examination was conducted at Two Rivers and Cato and was in charge of County Supt. John Nagle. A total of 35 county pupils took the test, but only seven of the applicants passed. The first eighth grade graduates in 1886 were David Fitzgerald, Alice Carey, Kate A. Hayes, Otto Guidinger, Frank Vraney, Timothy McKeough, Charles G. Stangel. The diploma issued to them was a common school diploma which entitled the holder to enter high school. Entrance to high school was possible without an eighth grade diploma at that time though. Prof. C. G. Stangel reported that the diploma examinations were given at the same time and place as the spring teachers' examinations were. The subjects in which the eighth graders were tested were orthoepy, grammar, U. S. history, arithmetic, geography, spelling, writing, constitution, reading, and physiology. The test was dictated very rapidly by Supt. Nagle. The applicant was held responsible for both oral and written work. The written part of the test was of essay type.

Diploma examinations were held every year after 1886. By 1890, printed tests formulated by the county superintendent of schools were administered. Copies of these tests are on file in the vault of the county office. A system of preliminary examinations given about six weeks before the regular diploma examination was begun about 1900. These preliminary tests were made by the superintendent, printed, and distributed in sealed envelopes to the teachers. These sealed envelopes were not to be opened until the day set for the preliminary examinations. This preliminary test was given to indicate to the teacher and her pupils the scope and character of the material to be expected in the regular examination.

During the early 1890's, three grades of diplomas were issued, namely first, second, and third grades. The first grade diploma required an average of 85 and a minimum of 70 in any branch; the second grade diploma required an average of 75, with a minimum of 60; while the third grade required an average of 75 and a minimum of 50. In 1897, there were 13 first grade, 44 second grade, and 147 third grade diplomas issued. A total of 262 took the examination. No third grade diplomas were issued after the early 1900's, but first and second grade diplomas were issued until 1935 when only one grade of diploma was presented to rural eighth grade graduates. A system of recognizing outstanding graduates was begun in 1925 by setting up Honor Classes made up of the upper ten per cent of the eighth grade rural graduating classes. In the cities a system of promotion cards is employed and no diplomas are given until the pupil graduates from the high school.

The type of diploma tests have changed with the times. Essay and oral examinations were the rule until the 1920's. Educational leaders about that time were advocating short answer tests of the true-false, yes-no, multiple choice, and one word answer type. The Manitowoc county superintendents followed the newer trends by gradually changing over to the short answer type of diploma examination. About 1940, standardized tests were advocated and so a gradual abandonment of county-made tests was in order in favor of standardized tests tried out on thousands of boys and girls. By 1946, standardized tests were the rule and grade placement instead of standings based on 100% was inaugurated.

The development of the diploma examination system and the resultant policy of having all school children complete their eighth grade education placed an ever-growing load on the county superintendent. He not only had to make the questions, but he also had to mark the hundreds of papers of the applicants for a diploma. About 1900, the Manitowoc county superintendent appointed a board of examiners composed of leading teachers in the county. This examining board conducted diploma examinations in ten or more centers throughout the county on a Friday and Saturday in April or May. At first these board members took the examination papers to their homes and corrected them during the few spare hours of the following weeks. For two or more successive Saturdays this Board met in the county superintendent's office to correct papers and to confer with that official. The papers were finally all graded by the middle of May at which time the names of the graduates were determined. The
system of marking papers at home and on Saturdays was continued until the later 1920's after which the week following the administration of the diploma examination was devoted to grading of the papers by the Board in the county office. When standardized tests were instituted, the time required to grade papers had been cut down to two days.

The first diplomas issued to rural school graduates were mailed to the successful applicants. It was not until 1903 that Supt. F. C. Christiansen held the first annual district school graduating exercise in the Turner's Opera House in Manitowoc on June 11th. Forty-five rural school boys and girls graduated. A program of quartet, trio, and audience singing was given. A copy of the first graduating exercise program is on file in the county office. By that time county spelling, adding, penmanship and highest diploma standing contests were held in the forenoon and medals and prizes awarded to the winners at the afternoon program.

The development and improvement of courses of study, school texts, and standard tests, as well as the policy of an eighth grade education for every child in our county schools, necessitated a testing program, not only for the eighth graders but for the children of all grades. Standards of attainment had to be set up for all grades to lessen the chances for failure when the child reached the eighth grade. Throughout the county and the cities testing programs were set up. These tests were administered to determine each child's intelligence, his progress in certain subject matter, and his general achievement from grade to grade. Through such testing it is possible to care for the individual differences existing and to suggest possible means of overcoming obvious physical handicaps.

**EXTRA CURRICULAR COMMON SCHOOL ACTIVITIES**

Much of the pioneer social life centered around the district school. That was really their community center and was very, very often the scene of true democracy in action. The annual school meetings were always well attended and momentous questions affecting the district were voted upon and settled. Old school records reveal the facts that these annual school meetings were held the last Monday in September up to 1875, the last Monday in August up to 1882, the first Monday in July up to about 1930, and the second Monday of July after that date.

Spelling "bees" and literary society meetings were popular in many county school districts. Inter-school spelling bees were the cause of much rivalry among the young men and women of the districts involved. Literary and debating societies discussed such matters as roads, the need for high schools, and other contemporary matters. The spelling bee idea was continued in the 1900's when town and county contests were held under the leadership of the county superintendents. The literary and debating ideas resulted in the later graded school declamatory contests. Several times each year the residents of the district would assemble at the school to enjoy seasonal programs and the closing day picnic. The latter was often made a very festive affair which old-timers still recall with pleasure.

The turn of the century found a great deal of interest in "singing" schools conducted by teachers and participated in by the young men and women of the district and surrounding communities. The older district residents formed horticultural, historical, and audubon societies. Farmers' institutes became popular and large groups attended by the rural residents during the winter months. Hunting and fishing associations to save and protect wild life were beginning. A Manitowoc County Order of the Wisconsin Experiment Association composed of leading county farmers and teachers was organized about 1910. From these farm movements there developed under the direction of Supt. C. W. Meinsnest the township school fair. At these fairs the pupils proudly displayed their best school work and garden crops and competed for the prizes and honors awarded the winners. By 1930, these school and town fairs had run their course, for with the coming of the automobile the social value of the school and town hall was rapidly declining.

County contests in spelling, adding, and writing, begun in the spring of 1903 by Supt. F. C. Christiansen, spread rapidly to town and inter-school contests. Regular town contests were held in each town each spring and the winners sent to the county contests held on the morning of the county graduation day. At the height of its popularity, contests were held in oral spelling, language, adding, combinations, music memory, and in a triangular contest. Later on these contests were changed into achievement tests for the several grades enrolled in the rural schools. The popularity of these contests lasted until 1938 when they were abandoned.

The typical community by 1938 included all of the area within a natural shopping, business, church, and high school center. The fine roads with modern conveyances