SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION

The Manitowoc county school system began soon after the first settlers arrived. After Manitowoc County became a part of the Wisconsin territory in 1836, territorial schools were set up. These territorial schools were administered by county school commissioners. The first law relating to the organization of common or elementary schools was passed by the Wisconsin territorial legislative assembly in 1839. The act to create county, town, or school districts was passed in 1841. One of the duties of the commissioners was to divide the county or towns into convenient school districts.

The law of 1841 creating districts delegated much power in regard to organization, maintenance, and the administration of the schools. The district became the unit for administration and control of schools. Town and county governments were authorized to make a tax levy, but they rarely did so. The money needed to maintain these so-called public schools was obtained partly from district taxes, partly from per capita tax, and partly from gifts and contributions. Only the children of the more prosperous could afford to attend in some cases, because the poor struggling settlers could not afford the per capita tax.

In 1848 when Wisconsin became a state, the first legislature passed legislation providing that counties of the state be divided into school districts by the town superintendent of schools. Manitowoc County had by that date been settled here and there by nationality groups. Records in the assessors' books of 1856 to 1860 on file in the county treasurer's vault indicate that by 1860 there were 82 school districts in operation in the county. By 1948 there were 115 school districts.

School districts were often set up to put schools within walking distance for the children of a community. Some of the later districts were organized to get out from under a district maintaining a high school system with a high tax rate. Such districting resulted in inequalities among the various districts. The tax rate ranged from no dollars per thousand in several districts to $13.36 in another district. Per pupil cost of education in the rural one room school ranged from $64.00 to $902.00. Such unequalized educational opportunities throughout the county and state led the Wisconsin Legislature of 1947 to set up County School Committees to develop and institute a plan of school district reorganization within each county.

Joint school districts with some of the area within two or more towns or counties were organized as early as the 1850's.

Up to 1917, every school district in Manitowoc County was maintaining a school. After that year, some district schools were closing due to lack of enrollment caused by parochial school attendance, smaller families, farm mechanization, and other factors. By 1948, eighteen school districts out of the 115 set up had
ceased to function and had suspended operations.

Since the settlers coming to Manitowoc County found the land forest covered, the first schools were built of logs. Lumbering was one of the pioneer industries, and sawmills were built along the many streams where water power could be harnessed. Sawmills cut the logs into lumber, and this lumber was used to construct frame houses for the progressive settlers who were becoming dissatisfied with the pioneer log houses. The growing school population by 1870 crowded the little log schoolhouses so that new quarters became necessary and the pioneer school was replaced by frame and brick schoolhouses from 1870 to 1900. Many of these are still in use today, having been converted into housing facilities.

By 1905 county records show that school enrollments of sixty to one hundred pupils per school were quite common. State legislature that year passed a law requiring districts with more than sixty-five pupils enrolled to provide an additional room and teacher. This resulted in adding an extra room on many of the school buildings then in use. These two room schools became known as "graded schools."

The first schoolhouses were scantily furnished with home-made furniture. Desks and seats were made by someone in the district. They were all one size, so that the young pupils were perched on a high bench with their feet dangling off the floor, and the overgrown boy found the benches and desks too small, so his feet were sprawled out in the aisles. An aisle down the middle of the room separated the boys from the girls. A box stove in the center of the room toasted those who sat nearby, but had no effect on those sitting near the walls. Windows gave the necessary lighting. Drinking water was dispensed by a common dipper from an open pail. A teacher's desk was placed on a platform across the front of the room. Boards painted black were the blackboards. A map or two, a variety of books brought from the homes, and individual slates completed the learning and teaching equipment of the nineteenth century schools in the county.

In the twentieth century, standards of school buildings and equipment were set by state and educational leaders. Heating plants with vents were installed, the open water pail was replaced by covered jars and bubbler attachments, hand-made desks and seats were replaced by double desks and seats and later by single adjustable ones. Wooden blackboards were replaced with slate, and uniform text books, library books, and modern teaching and learning equipment was brought into the schools. By 1948, about thirty rural districts were maintaining modern school buildings with indoor toilets, running water, and electric service.

The pioneer school often had three month terms of twenty-two days per month. In many schools, a five or six month school term was maintained. This was divided into a summer and winter term. The winter term began in November and ended in February or March. The summer term began in April or May and closed in July or August.
Usually the winter term was in charge of a male teacher because the boys and girls from fifteen to twenty-one years attended. Wages paid for winter sessions were higher than for spring or summer session teachers. In 1905 the state prescribed at least an eight month school term to qualify for state and county aid. A minimum term of nine months was specified by legislature in 1937.

The first pioneer schools were concerned with teaching children the 3 R's, reading, writing, and arithmetic. These subjects, and grammar, were the principal ones taught until the early 1850's. Geography was then added, and after the Civil War, history and civics were added.

Nineteenth century county school children were not graded as they are today. The system of grading pupils into Grade 1 to 8 was started about 1910. Separate classes for each grade were conducted daily with the first and second grades spending their time learning to read and speak the English language. By 1915 the fifth to eighth grades were studying grammar, physiology, U. S. history, arithmetic, civil government, geography, spelling, reading, and nature study. As the years passed, legislature required the teaching of more and more subjects. This necessitated the grouping of subject matter under more inclusive headings, such as nature study, physiology, and health termed as a science course.

Pioneer pupils in the log schoolhouses used whatever books were available in the community. The blackboard and slate became important tools of learning. Text book companies began sending book salesmen into the county after the 1850's to sell text books to school boards. In 1919 a County Uniform Text Book Committee was authorized by state legislature, and all text books had to be selected by this textbook committee.

Early pioneer schools had few books in addition to those used as texts. In 1887 the township library law was passed and this law specified that one-twentieth of the school fund income be devoted to purchasing library books. An equal amount had to be appropriated by the county for this purpose. This law was instrumental in beginning our present school libraries. In 1889 legislature changed the law by authorizing town clerks to withhold ten cents per person of school age for the purchase of library books. In 1921 the amount was doubled to twenty cents per school age child, and in 1940 the law was again changed to allow for the distribution of all the income from the state school fund proportioned according to the number of school children on the school census in the state.

The township library law was excellent in purpose, but it caused unequal library reading opportunities throughout the county. Small schools with few children on the school census were often limited to three or four books per year, while schools with a large census received as high as fifty to one hundred library books yearly. To equalize library reading opportunities in the county, a county circulating library was set up in 1946. Books were obtained
through an agreement with the school district boards to set aside fifty percent of their regular library fund allotment each year to purchase library books for the circulating library. These books were the property of the districts, but were "loaned" to other districts for a month at a time.

Manitowoc county boys and girls attended the first pioneer schools when convenient. The short, irregular school terms, the poorly qualified teachers in many cases, and the very irregular school attendance of school age children made it quite impossible to complete the course of study set up. The bright young person who completed the "standards" set by the teachers was advised to write the teacher's examination, and, 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 learning.

The first diploma examination was held the last Friday and Saturday of March, 1886. It was conducted at Two Rivers and Cato and was in charge of County Superintendent John Nagle. A total of thirty-five county pupils took the test, but only seven of the applicants passed. The students were tested in grammar, spelling, arithmetic, geography, writing, constitution, reading, and physiology. The test was dictated by the superintendent.

Diploma examinations were held every year after 1886. By 1890, printed tests were given. A system of preliminary examinations given about six weeks before the regular diploma testing was begun about 1900. These tests were made by the superintendent, printed, and distributed in sealed envelopes to the teachers, and not to be opened until the day set for the preliminary testing. They were given to indicate to the teacher and pupils what material could be expected in the regular examination.

Three grades of diplomas were issued during the early 1890's, namely first, second, and third grades. The first grade diploma required an average of 85 and a minimum of 70; the second grade diploma required an average of 75, with a minimum of 60; and the third grade required an average of 75 and a minimum of 50. 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 percent of the eighth grade rural graduating classes.

Diploma tests changed with the times. Essay and oral examinations were the rule until the 1920's. Manitowoc county superintendents gradually changed over to the short answer type of examination. About 1940 standardized tests were advocated, and county made tests were abandoned. 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 policy of having all children complete their eighth grade graduation placed an ever-growing load on the county superintendent. He not only had to make the questions; he also had to mark the hundreds of papers. About 1900, the county superintendent appointed a board of examiners made up of the leading teachers in the county. This board then conducted diploma examinations in ten or more centers throughout the county. At first board members took the papers home and corrected them in their spare time in the following weeks. By the middle of May the papers were finally graded and names of graduates could be determined. In the late 1920's, papers were graded by the board in the week following the examinations, in the county office. After standardized tests came into use, grading time was greatly reduced.

The first diplomas issued to rural school graduates were mailed to the successful candidates. In 1903 the first annual district school graduating exercises were held in the Turner's Opera House in Manitowoc on June 11th. Forty-five rural school boys and girls graduated. In later years, graduation exercises for all county rural school graduates were held at the County Normal School and Lincoln High School. A program by the pupils was always a part of the graduation exercise.

The teaching of the 3 R's provided pioneer children with sufficient knowledge to cope with problems of pioneer life. Progress was inevitable, however, and one room schools became graded schools, and graded schools developed into high schools. Legislature, as early as 1875, provided for the organization of high schools. Teachers progressed from "hired if they could read and write" with no qualification standards, to licensed teachers, and then to certified teachers with the standards for teachers' certificates being raised as the years went by. A need was seen for teacher training for rural school teachers, and the first such school in the county was located in the Fifth Ward (Garfield) School building. The first training school class of nine men and twenty-three women graduated in July of 1902. In 1921 the County Rural Normal School was erected in Manitowoc. Records indicate that John Lorfeld of Centerville was on the building committee. Teachers' colleges no longer exist today. Teacher certification requires four year college attendance.

Great strides have been made in education since those early years. Certainly the concerns of the first teachers, many of whom were not qualified themselves and had very little to work with, cannot be compared with the concerns of today's teachers whose years of professional training have prepared them for the job of teaching in today's modern educational facilities. One fact remains, however. As the pioneer teachers struggled to prepare their pupils with sufficient knowledge to cope with pioneer life, so too is it the responsibility of today's teachers to prepare today's pupils for the world in which they will live.

Education began in the Centerville township with the setting
up of six school districts. A history of each district follows.

CENVERVILLE NO. 1 - POINT RIVER

The history of Centerville District No. 1 dates back to 1852. Owning land in the district at that time were the Bakers, Wagners, Stoltenbergs, Hockmayers, Schuettes, Bogenschultzes, Obergockers, Janings, Kielsmeiers, Doerschs, Leiteritzes, Boettchers, Wimmlers, Orths, Groetguts, and Salmys.

Education for the district children was first provided in an old Lutheran parochial school which was located near the present building.

The first school of frame construction was built in 1871 by community members for $560.00. It was called the Point River School after 1918 because Point River flowed near the school building. It was located in section 3, Town of Centerville, 1/8 mile west, and 1/4 mile south of the present building. The school was built the same year the Lake Shore railroad was laid. The first building was abandoned in 1908 and sold to the Groetguts, who later sold it to Kielsmeier for $152.00. Kielsmeier used the old lumber in it for construction of a farm building.

The second school which still stands was constructed in 1908-1909 for $3,003.00. The acre and a half site was purchased for $275.00. The school was built as a two room building with a large attic and full basement. Kerosene lamps were used until 1939, when electric service was provided. Outdoor toilets were still in use in 1948. An artesian well supplied the water.

The structure built in 1908-1909 was used as a graded school from 1909-1912. Enrollment in the school was always large, but by 1908 it became so large that the state advocated two rooms. During the first years in the new building, the enrollment reached a total of seventy-seven. In 1912 the southern half of the district organized a new school district with the result that the enrollment was cut almost in half. Centerville District No. 1 contained sections of 1, 2, 3, part of 4, 9, 10, and 11. In 1945-1946 the enrollment had declined to twelve.

The second school used the double desks from the old school for several years. These were then replaced by single adjustable seats. When the school became a one-room school again in 1912, one of the rooms became a playroom and a room in which to prepare noon lunches. Children bought their own books up to 1940, but after that year free textbooks were provided.

Adolph Doersch served on the school board for many years. Other early school board members included Rossberg, Rettele, Jaehnig, Arends, Mill, Jacobi, Klessig, Schquette, and Lorfeld. Records since 1946 list Alvin Groetgut, Lester Gerschmel, Melvin Doersch, Harold and Clarence Bruckschen, Hugo and Leroy Janing,