COUNTY TRAINING SCHOOLS.

Miss Lura Burce, County Superintendent, Eau Claire, Wis.

(Read at the Round-Up Institute at Eau Claire, Wis.)

Not long ago someone in Wisconsin educational circles accidentally discovered that the conditions in the rural schools had not kept pace with the educational advancement in other lines. They had seemingly been neglected and almost forgotten in the planning and scheming and appropriating for higher education, and had gone on haphazard as it happened, with no other inspiration than an occasional added branch to the course of study, which the poor overburdened and often incompetent teacher struggled to master and find a corner for on her lengthy program. So, while the exterior appearance of our school system was fine to look upon, the backbone was growing weaker in comparison every year. I say the backbone, because I believe just as surely as the farmer is the backbone of our nation, the rural school is the backbone of our educational system. The majority of our best educators and best thinkers have obtained their early education in the district schools where, surrounded by the influences of nature, they early developed a power to think and an independence and strength that might never have been made evident under less favorable conditions. Statistics show that the great universities and colleges look to the farm to produce the material which, later developed, constitutes the brain power of the world.

The discovery of the rural conditions created some stir in educational circles, and men began to cast about for a remedy—something that would strengthen and stimulate, and in time prove an effective cure. Consolidation was prescribed, but the idea took but slowly and people must first be educated to its value. Perhaps years must elapse before anything could be accomplished in that line, something must be done to take effect at once. It was reasoned that country school conditions could never be ideal so long as all grades and classes must be handled by one teacher, but it was evident that a teacher, especially trained for this work, and who was familiar with the best methods of grouping and classifying her pupils and who could take advantage of every minute, would greatly improve matters. That the average rural school teacher was not adequately prepared was generally admitted, so a training school was suggested. Teachers had to be trained for kindergarten, grade and high school work, but never before for rural schools. The idea! Why hadn't it been thought of long ago. The legislature was induced to make a small appropriation for the experiment. It was tried and proved so effectual that other appropriations were made in conjunction with the counties' aid, and other schools were established, until now seven are in operation in the counties of Buffalo, Dunn, Marathon, Manitowoc, Richland, Waupaca and Wood. Two more will be opened the coming year, one in Polk and the other we are so fortunate as to have secured for Eau Claire.

Aim of the County Training School.

A few words as to what we expect to do for our teachers may prove valuable to those interested in rural school work.

I believe that a position in the country schools is the hardest to fill and fill well, that our schools have to offer. The teacher must deal with pupils of all ages and deal wisely. She must be thoroughly familiar with many branches and have the kind of interest in each that will stimulate an interest in the pupil. She must be an executive of rare ability and must be able to lead the intellectual life of the community in which she teaches. Genius such as this is rarely found. A large per cent. of our teachers every
year go into the country schools without any previous knowledge of the school system. They must gain their experience and the country seems to be the popular place in which to gain it. The district must be experimented upon and more or less time and money wasted in the experiment. Often the teacher fails utterly, or makes such a fizzle of her work that she is always ever after ashamed to look upon that first term.

Our county proposes to furnish training for such as these and others at some expense and expects, in return, services which will be a credit to the schools. We believe it will be more than a money-saving proposition in the end.

A thorough course of professional work in all the third and second grade branches with a solid year of observation methods and actual practice in the grades with a class to teach, manage and be responsible for, cannot help but put the teacher in better condition to face the difficulties she has to meet. Indeed it is a course at which no grade teachers need to be ashamed to spend a year, and even some of our old teachers might gain a few new ideas and obliterate a few ruts by taking advantage of it.

Instructors who are familiar with every condition and know how to teach students how to teach, will take a personal interest in each student, and follow them when they go out to teach, lending a helping hand whenever necessary.

**Requirements for Entrance.**

The requirements for entrance will be very liberal the first year. All who have completed the common school course or its equivalent, or who hold any county certificate and are residents of the county, may enter without examination at the discretion of the board and without tuition.

Residents from other counties will be admitted on the payment of tuition as far as the capacity of the school will allow.

**A Suggestive Course of Study.**

The following course is only a suggestive one and simply shows what branches will be pursued. The order may be and probably will be greatly changed:

- **First Term:** Reading, grammar, theory and psychology, arithmetic, penmanship.
- **Second Term:** History, composition, manual, observation, arithmetic, physiology.
- **Third Term:** History, methods and practice, geography, constitution, spelling.
- **Fourth Term:** Literature, school management and practice, geography, agriculture.

Library reading and literary work throughout the year and algebra for those who can carry it. It is expected that arrangements can be made whereby our students may take advantage of the music, drawing, cooking and manual training offered by the Eau Claire High School.

The time required to complete this course will depend upon the former education and the aptness of the pupil. High school graduates may reasonably expect to finish in a year, but those less favored will find, since the work is entirely new, that it will be necessary to take a longer time. Common school graduates should finish in two years. Students may enter at the opening of any quarter, but it is always desirable to enter at the beginning of the year and remain until the close.

The diploma from this school entitles the holder to teach for three years and if successful, the holder may, before the expiration of the three years, have a second grade certificate issued and thus secure a license to teach for six years without examination.

Credit to the amount of one year's work is allowed graduates of the Training school, upon entering any State Normal, and such graduate is thereby enabled to finish the elementary course in one year.

**Some of the Results Achieved.**

Some one recently asked me how the work of these teachers compared with that of other teachers. I admit frankly that the County Training School teachers we have had from Dunn and Buffalo, prove the strongest
teachers we have without exception. I feel that I can place them anywhere and they will be successful. Perhaps we have been so fortunate as to receive only the good ones, but we have never had a failure sent to us yet. Boards are willing to pay better salaries for teachers whom they may depend upon to successfully manage their schools and there is always a demand for such experience.

While it is our aim to keep these teachers as long as possible in our country schools, yet when we shall see them called to a graded position or a principalship after two or three years with us, we will rejoice that they are doing so well and feel thankful that we have had their services while they were preparing for something higher. Every effort is to be put forth the coming year to induce the country boys and girls to enter the school and I appeal to every farmer present to help in this mission. Our country girls make good, strong teachers, because they are familiar with conditions; are at home with country people, and are not afraid to exert themselves. They are willing workers and are anxious to gain new methods and new ideas, and are not apt to fall in ruts. We want them, and to get them we are willing the first year to admit them without examination on their common school diplomas. There is no tuition to be paid by the parents or the town, and every advantage is offered for the development of good, strong teachers.

Boys will be admitted as well as girls, and indeed it is our intention to encourage their attendance. There is always a demand for male teachers and most of our state graded schools require men at their heads. Even though the boy does not contemplate teaching as a life work, there is no reason why it should not be used as a stepping stone to something higher, provided it is made a good stepping stone.

Some of the Inducements Offered at Eau Claire.

Board is not high in our city and there are endless opportunities for both boys and girls to do light work in return for board. If we are so fortunate as to secure a course in domestic science, some might even do as Mr. Davis suggested last night—do their own cooking.

One of the best public libraries in the state is at the disposal of the students and a lecture course is offered every winter which includes the best lecture talent to be had for money. The Eau Claire people are cordial and hospitable and everything will be done by the board and faculty to make the work pleasant for the students and make them feel at home.

LAWS OF INTEREST TO WISCONSIN FARMERS.

Wisconsin Farmers' Institute Law.

Section 1. The Board of Regents of the State University is hereby authorized to hold Institutes for the instruction of the citizens of this state in the various branches of agriculture. Such Institutes shall be held at such times, and at such places as said board may direct. The said board shall make such rules and regulations as it may deem proper for organizing and conducting such Institutes, and may employ an agent or agents to perform such work in connection therewith as they deem best. The course of instruction at such Institutes shall be so arranged as to present to those in attendance, the results of the most recent investigations in theoretical and practical agriculture.

Sec. 2. For the purposes mentioned in the preceding section, the said board may use such sum as it may deem proper, not exceeding the sum of twelve thousand dollars in any one year, from the general fund, and such amount is hereby annually appropriated for that purpose.

Sec. 3. This act shall take effect and be in force from and after its passage and publication.