

## INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Wisconsin, this year of 1948, celebrates its 100 years of statehood. Centennial activities are being carried on to give due recognition to its 100th birth date. We, in Wisconsin, have been making and living educational history during this first century of our statehood. Much of this history is unrecorded, or if it was recorded at one time those records have been discarded as useless "junk". This is all too true in the field of public education! The record books of school district clerks and of school treasurers' recorded community history which can be obtained from no other one source. The teachers' Daily Register in which the school records of children were recorded are revealing and of tremendous historical value. Too many of these district records and the teachers' Registers have been thoughtlessly destroyed, leaving little except the reminiscences of the few old-timers still with us.

The second century of Wisconsin's statehood will, no doubt, bring about a tremendous change in public school organization. The small district system, so effective and satisfactory during the first one-hundred years of Wisconsin's settlement, may be replaced by units which will be able to meet the second century's problems in rural and urban education. It is with this thought in mind, that the Manitowoc county teachers, school board members, and town and county officials deemed it of historical importance to preserve as much of the Manitowoc county school histories as possible through the publication of this book. Many of the histories are incomplete but they are as accurate and authentic as available records can make them. The histories of about twenty-five schools are abbreviated records taken from the record books kept since the district was organized. This, very likely, is the first historical record ever compiled of the schools of one county in Wisconsin. Its importance and value will increase as the centuries pass.

The publication of the Histories of Manitowoc County Schools has been made possible through the active and whole-hearted cooperation of the teachers, school board members, school administrators, interested county citizens, town and county officials, and the Manitowoc County Board. Without their enthusiastic personal and financial support, this publication would not have been possible. To all of the above named persons and groups, Manitowoc county is indebted for this historical record of Manitowoc county schools.

## ORGANIZATION OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND SYSTEMS MANITOWOC COUNTY

The Manitowoc county school system began soon after the first settlers arrived. The first settlements were concentrated at or near the mouths of the two principal rivers, with the result that the first schools were established at those places. Before the development of the public school system, the educational needs of the three communities were cared for by private schools. Dr. Louis Falge in his **History of Manitowoc County** names some of the early settlers who conducted private schools at Rapids, Manitowoc, and in the Two Rivers area.

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. The three commissioners of common schools were elected by the electors of the county. One of the duties of these commissioners was to divide the county or towns into convenient school districts.

The school law of 1841 creating districts delegated much power in regard to the organization, maintenance, and the administration of these schools. The district became the unit for the administration and control of schools. The town and county governments were authorized to make a tax levy, but they rarely did so. These district schools, as they developed under the laws of 1841 and 1843, were not free schools. 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. The children of the poor struggling settlers often could not attend because of the per capita tax.

On January 3, 1842, a petition by several inhabitants of Manitowoc Rapids, was presented to the county school commissioners praying that they allow the use of the first county court house at Manitowoc Rapids for a schoolhouse. This the commissioners granted "provided no avoidable injury shall be done to said building, and that by guaranteeing of said liberty, the inhabitants of the school districts of Manitowoc



and Two Rivers will be entitled the privilege of building schoolhouses in their respective districts, if wanted, before one is built at Manitowoc Rapids." On September 28, 1844, three school districts were officially set up in Manitowoc county. The boundaries of these districts were the same as the assessor districts for that time. District No. 1 was to be known as the Two Rivers school district; District No. 2 as the Mill school district (now Manitowoc township and city areas); and District No. 3 was to be known as the Union school district made up of the first Manitowoc Rapids area which took in the townships outside of the present Manitowoc and Two Rivers townships.

In 1848, 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 which in turn were instrumental in bringing on the tide of immigrants of the 1850's. 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 our county. During the 1860's, sixteen more districts were organized. One school district was set up in 1870, three in the 1890's, two in the 1900's, two from 1910 to 1920, and the last three in the 1930's. During these decades some school districts in our county consolidated, lowering the total number of districts, as was the case when Manitowoc city's four districts became one in 1910. By 1948, there were 115 school districts, including the three city school systems of Kiel, Manitowoc and Two Rivers.

School districts were often set up to put schools within walking distance of 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 tactics resulted in gross inequalities among the various districts. By 1948 the school district valuations in the rural areas in Manitowoc county ranged from \$167,045 to well over 1 million dollars. The tax rate ranged from no dollars per thousand in several districts to \$13.36 in another district. The per pupil cost of education in the rural one room school ranged from \$64 to \$902. 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 were organized as early as the 1850's, although they were not common at that time. A "joint district" is a district with some of its area within two or more towns or counties. The first school district set up in a township became district number 1. Sometimes certain townships have missing district numbers as is the case in Newton. A study of the development and organization of the township and school districts will reveal the fact that at some time all of the district numbers were accounted for.

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 well-known factors. By 1948, a total of eighteen school districts out of the 115 set up had ceased to function and had suspended operation. The trend towards closing small schools had by no means reversed itself at the close of the first century of public education in Manitowoc county.

## **SCHOOL BUILDINGS, EQUIPMENT, AND SCHOOL TERMS**

When the pioneer settlers came to Manitowoc county, they found the land forest-covered. It was only natural then that their first schools, like their first homes, should be a log house home of the pioneer who took on the job of teaching, along with his other responsibilities of clearing the land and constructing the necessary farm buildings. In such cases the "front" room of the two room log house was used as a semi-school and living room. The "back" room was used as living quarters by the teacher's family. The pioneer pupil, in such schools, got his three "R's" in the midst of squalling babies, barking dogs, the smell of cooking potatoes and cabbage, and swirling steam from the family wash. These pioneer pupils often had to make themselves useful in school by chopping and splitting the firewood, bringing the water from a nearby well or creek, and helping to do the family washing.

The pioneer log schoolhouses were usually built near the center of a community of settlers. Usually the land for such school site was donated, for land was then cheap and then, too, it ensured a settler of a school very close to his home. As the community became more settled, new homes were established around the original settlement. Since the log school was located without regard to future expansion of the district, we find many school districts today with the school site not at all centrally located.