

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.

One of the pioneer industries of Manitowoc county was lumbering. Sawmills were built along the many streams of our county where water power could be harnessed. These sawmills cut the logs into lumber. Some of 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 schoolhouse so that new quarters were imperative. The pioneer school was replaced by frame and brick schoolhouses from 1870 to 1900, many of them still in use today.

By 1905, county records show that school enrollments of 60 to 100 pupils per school were quite common. In 1905, the state legislature passed a law requiring districts with more than 65 pupils enrolled to provide an additional room and teacher or forfeit its share of the seven mill tax then in effect. Manitowoc county, upon passage of this law, experienced a mild boom in erecting two room buildings or in adding an extra room on the school building then in use. These two-room schools became known as "graded" schools. Over twenty districts in Manitowoc county at one time or other maintained a graded school, although today only ten of such districts, including those in the three cities, remain.

Many of the schools built in the late 19th century were still in use by 1948. The average age of all the school buildings outside of Manitowoc and Two Rivers in 1948 was 49 years. Two school buildings in the county are over 90 years old, four are 80 years, eighteen are 70 years, twenty are 60 years, nineteen are 50 years, nineteen are 40 years, fifteen are 30 years, nine are 20 years, one is 10 years, and three are over 5 years old.

The first pioneer log school house was scantily furnished with crude, home-made furniture. The desks and seats were made by someone in the district and were usually eight to ten feet in length. They were all of one size, with the result that the young pupils were perched on a high bench with their legs dangling off the floor. It was not unusual to find them curled up on the bench fast asleep. The over-grown boy found the seats and desks too small, so his feet were sprawled out in the aisles. The long benches and desks were separated by an aisle down the middle of the room. The boys sat on one side of the room and the girls on the other side. A box stove, long enough to burn three and four foot cordwood, was placed in the center of the room. This had the effect of toasting those sitting nearby but having no effect on those sitting near the walls. Two or three windows along each long side of the schoolroom gave the necessary lighting. These windows were often equipped with shutters which were closed for the night. The drinking water was dispensed by a common dipper from an open water pail. A teacher's desk, with the inevitable switch nearby, was placed on a small platform across the front of the room. Boards painted black were the blackboards. A map or two of the state and nation, a variety of texts brought from the pioneer homes, and individual slates for the pupils completed the learning and teaching equipment of the nineteenth century schools in our county.

The twentieth century witnessed the setting up of school building and equipment standards by the state and educational leaders. Heating plants had to have approved ventilating systems. The open water pail was replaced by sanitary covered jars and bubbler attachments. The hand-made desks and seats were replaced in the later nineteenth century by double desks and seats. Those in turn were replaced by single, adjustable ones. The wooden blackboards were discarded and slate and composition ones installed. Uniform text books, references, library books, and modern school furniture, as well as visual aids teaching and learning equipment became common to most rural schools. By 1948, about thirty rural districts were maintaining modern school buildings with indoor toilets, running water, electric service, and conveniences found in modern urban schools. About sixty districts were maintaining semi-modern or obsolete school buildings.

The pioneer school term was often limited to three month terms of twenty-two days per month. In many schools a five or six month school term was maintained but 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. The winter session was usually in charge of a male teacher because the boys and girls from 15 to 21 years attended. The wages paid teachers for winter sessions were always higher than for the spring or summer session teachers. Summer and winter or fall and spring terms were in vogue until about 1900. It was not until 1905 that the state prescribed at least an eight months school term in order to qualify for state and county aid. A minimum term of nine months was specified by an act of the legislature in 1937.