

## *Document*

### Letters to the Women's Pages as Primary Source

#### INTRODUCTORY NOTE

*Norah Lewis*

Between 1901 and 1921 more than two million settlers poured into the area between the Manitoba-Ontario border and the west coast of British Columbia.<sup>1</sup> They came as individuals, families, or ethnic or religious groups seeking free or cheap land, financial success, or political or religious freedom. Contemporary reports and subsequent research show how hard it was to establish homes, organize communities, build farms or ranches, and rear families. We also have a direct view of settler life in letters from women (and a few men) to the women's pages of agricultural publications.<sup>2</sup> These letters deserve close historical scrutiny, and constitute an under-utilized resource for research in the social history of Canada.

Letter-writers were generally young, and ethnically and socially diverse. As settlers, they shared common experiences of isolation by physical distance if not by language, religion, or culture. Far from home, they often lacked the comfort and consolation of their traditional support networks, namely their extended families and religious and cultural organizations.<sup>3</sup> Women's pages provided a new but vital support network for many lonely and isolated women, based on a trust relationship among female editors, letter writers, and fellow readers.

One of the hopes and plans of many parents was schooling for their children. When numbers warranted and parents were sufficiently interested, local school boards were formed, school houses built, and teachers hired.<sup>4</sup> Each school board functioned as an independent unit, equipping and maintaining the local school, and setting terms of employment and the teacher's salary. Until normal schools were established in the western provinces, most teachers came from other regions of Canada or from Great Britain.<sup>5</sup> There was, however, a curious diversity of motive and practice among teachers and the farming families whose children they taught. A centrally imposed curriculum and school inspectors guaranteed some pedagogical uniformity among schools. Beyond that, however, most decisions were made at the local or regional level. Letters in women's pages reveal a persistent tension between the forces of bureaucratic control and centralization on one hand, and the forces of localized behaviour and interest on the other.<sup>6</sup>

Finding a suitable teaching position was chancy at best and disastrous at worst. Provincial Departments of Education maintained lists of available positions, and weekly and daily newspapers published long lists of schools in the "Teacher Wanted" sections. The latter gave the name of the school, the name and address of the secretary treasurer, and the level of certification desired in a teacher. In some cases the salary was stated, as was the availability of a teacherage. There were great ranges in the condition of school buildings, duties expected of teachers, living accommodations provided, salaries paid, and months schools operated. In letters to the women's pages, teachers, ex-teachers, and non-teachers passed on pertinent information on teaching conditions and school regulations in their own province or region.<sup>7</sup>

Some revelled in the experience of teaching in a rural school, some did not, becoming lonely and homesick, unable to adapt to rural life or ethnic communities.<sup>8</sup> There were also landladies and trustees dissatisfied with teachers. A number of letters discussed teacher capability, curriculum content, discipline, or the advantages and disadvantages of consolidated schools. More often, farmers and farm wives resented teachers receiving regular pay for what, to them, seemed short hours and easy work. They railed that teachers earned more in one month than they did in a year. They deemed teachers a lazy, ungrateful, and snobbish lot. As most letter-writers signed with pseudonyms (editors kept records of the names and addresses of writers), they had no hesitation in berating anyone with whom they disagreed.<sup>9</sup>

Unlike farm wives, who usually found support and compassion among fellow readers, teachers were not assured of sympathy. Some teachers and ex-teachers told of experiences they deemed more difficult than those of complainers. With no central organization or society to offer support or plead their causes, teachers found little help either within or outside the teaching profession. Small wonder, then, that rural teachers moved frequently in search of better schools and better working conditions.

There are several risks in using newspaper letters as primary sources. First, as schools and education were minor although persistent topics between 1900 and 1920, we do not know how many writers actually dealt with these topics, nor what criteria editors followed in selecting some letters for publication and rejecting others. Second, other than what letter-writers revealed about themselves, we know nothing of their backgrounds or experiences. Third, researchers must be careful not to assume that the responses of a small group of letter-writers matched those of all settlers in the west for the same time period or region. Furthermore, the actions and attitudes of teachers and non-teachers in the developing west must not be interpreted in terms of present-day values and customs. Despite these limitations, letters to

the women's pages provide a glimpse into the lives of selected teachers and parents, and reveal something of the psychological and practical states of mind of the writers.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> David K. Foote, *Canada's Population Outlook: Demographic Futures and Economic Challenges* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1982), 12, Tables 1-3; J. E. Conway, *The West: A History of a Region in Confederation* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1994), 26-32. Conway reported the failure rate for Alberta homesteaders 1905 to 1936 at 46 percent and for Saskatchewan homesteaders 1911 to 1931 at 57 percent.
- <sup>2</sup> The letters, for 1905-20, were taken from the women's pages of the *Family Herald and Weekly Star* (1896-1968) [Montreal], *Free Press Prairie Farmer* (1872-1968) [Winnipeg], *The Farmers' Advocate* (1866-1936) [Winnipeg], *Grain Growers' Guide* (1908-63) [Winnipeg], and *Western Home Monthly* (1904-50) [Winnipeg].
- <sup>3</sup> John MacDougall, *Rural Life in Canada: Its Trends and Tasks, 1913* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973); Jacqueline Bliss, "Seamless Lives: Pioneer Women of Saskatoon 1883-1903," *Saskatchewan History* 43 (August 1992): 84-100; Linda Rasmussen et al., *A Harvest Yet to Reap* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1976).
- <sup>4</sup> Patrick J. Harrigan, "The Schooling of Boys and Girls in Canada," *Journal of Social History* 23 (Summer 1990): 803-15; Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer, eds., *Peoples of Alberta: Portraits of Cultural Diversity* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1985). One common thread was settlers' desire for schools; Clinton O. White, "Maintaining Anglo-Celtic Cultural Hegemony in Saskatchewan: Rev. E. H. Oliver, "Provincial Education Policy, and the German Catholics," *Historical Studies in Education* 6 (Autumn 1994): 253-79.
- <sup>5</sup> Thomas Fleming, "A Century of Concern: B.C.'s Rural Schools 1872-1988," *British Columbia Historical News* 24, no. 4 (Fall 1991): 12-15; Timothy A. Dunn, "The Rise of Mass Public Schooling in British Columbia 1900-1929," in *Schooling and Society in 20th Century British Columbia*, ed. J. Donald Wilson and David C. Jones (Calgary: Detselig, 1980), 25-51.
- <sup>6</sup> John Calan, "Teaching the Teachers: Establishment and Early Years of the British Columbia Normal Schools," in *Schools in the West: Essays in Canadian Educational History*, ed. Nancy Sheehan, J. Donald Wilson, and David C. Jones (Calgary: Detselig, 1986), 75-84; Ruby Sidney Forteath, "East Princeton—My School 1917-19," *British Columbia Historical News* 23, no. 3 (Spring 1990): 11-14. Between 1917 and 1925, when she married, Forteath taught in East Princeton, Ladysmith, Vancouver, and Trail.
- <sup>7</sup> L. J. Roy Wilson, "Children, Teachers, and Schools in Early Medicine Hat," *Alberta History* 32, no. 3 (Summer 1984): 15-21. Wilson examines some problems confronted in establishing a school—parent cooperation, suitable teachers, school discipline, and student attendance.
- <sup>8</sup> Manfred Prokop, "The Rural Elementary School in Alberta's Early History and the Anglicization of Immigrant Children," *Manitoba Heritage Review* 5 (Spring 1989): 14-21; Jean Cochrane, *The One-Room School in Canada* (Markham: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1981); John C. Charyk, *Those Bittersweet School Days* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1977).

- <sup>9</sup> Robert S. Patterson, "Voices from the Past: The Personal and Professional Struggle of Rural Teachers," in *Schools in the West*, 99–112; Jean Barman, "Birds of Passage or Early Professionals? Teachers in Late Nineteenth-Century British Columbia," *Historical Studies in Education* 2 (Spring 1990): 17–36.
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"Prim Rose at Home," *Family Herald and Weekly Star* [Montreal]

24 January 1906

A WESTERN TEACHER'S ADVICE

Dear Prim Rose,

I should like to answer Fortune Seeker through your column. She asks if the difference between the pay in the east and in the west is worth the sacrifice of home and friends. I, in answering for British Columbia, say no.

A new school system came into force on January 1, 1906. By this the government, which formerly paid the whole salary and all the expenses of the school, only pays forty dollars a month. Besides this, the government gives a dollar for every dollar raised by the people up to one hundred dollars. Many of the schools have already lowered the salary in their district. Many formerly paying fifty are now paying forty this year.

The board is from twelve to twenty dollars a month. Railway fare is four cents a mile.

No certificate other than one obtained in B.C. is valid. A teacher coming to the province may secure a temporary certificate, valid only in the school named in the certificate and until the next examination in June.

A girl should not come west unless she has friends here and knows where she can begin teaching. In many of the neighbourhoods there are only one or two white families. The rest are half-breeds.

I know of a teacher, first class in the east, who did house work in Vancouver, while waiting for a school, last term. The country is overcrowded with teachers.

I have been teaching for two years since coming to B.C. three years ago, and know something of the teacher's life here.

As I expect to be teaching in a lonely place this year, I should like to have some correspondents in Ontario and the Northwest. Prim Rose had my address.

Wishing the club a happy New Year, I will sign myself,

Western Teacher.

[Vancouver]

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“Prim Rose at Home,” *Family Herald and Weekly Star* [Montreal]

27 April 1905

A SPINSTER WHO KNOWS

Dear Prim Rose,

I am an interested reader of all parts of the *Family Herald*, but especially so of your department, and as I have been worked up to “writing heat,” by the articles sent in by bachelors in reply to “Butter and Eggs,” whose sentiments are largely mine, I think I will just give those bachelors a prod with my pen.

I have been in Alberta and Assiniboia, have visited numerous ranches, and know that the alluring picture “Nor-West Bachelor” draws of nine-roomed houses and roasting apples has not many counterparts. For the most part the shacks of the members of the bachelor clan consist of one small room about 10 x 12, which is hall, parlor, library, dining-room, and kitchen combined, built of logs, with unpainted floor, and bunks nailed to the sides for sleeping accommodation. Dreary places where love—at least any I could scrape up—would be sure to fly out the window. I have been there, you see (in the shacks, I mean).

I am one of the spinsters—a real old maid. What I want to say is, that for years I have kept my mother and two sisters—delicate girls who have both died young, one three years ago and one lately. Mother and I are alone. I have tried in every way to get a homestead, being the sole support of the family, but as mother is not a widow, am unable to do so. So we have to move around paying rent, whereas if we could only get land by homesteading we would gladly do the necessary work and build a home. Some one says, “Why not build where you are?” Simply because I teach school and teachers never know when they may receive marching orders.

I did intend writing a harrowing article to let you know there are spinsters who could not be relieved by the bachelor’s wise idea, and yet who have to shoulder heavy burdens as bread winners.

Then why, if we wish to remain old maids, may we not do so in peace and be given the same rights and privileges as a single man?

A Wrathful Spinster.

[Manitoba]

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"Prim Rose at Home," *Family Herald and Weekly Star* [Montreal]

11 April 1906

TEACHING IN MANITOBA

Dear Prim Rose:

Will you kindly allow me a little space in your column to say a few words in defence of the "teaching profession" in Manitoba.

I myself was a wielder of the birch for some time, but having found my ideal among the bachelors of Manitoba, duty called me from the routine of teaching, but I have not allowed myself to become entirely ignorant of what has been going on in the teachers' circle and my sympathy is with them too. I think Wrathful Spinster is an exception to the rule, my sympathy is not with her. Hers is a most discouraging letter to any one thinking of coming west to secure a school. I think she must have been unfortunate enough to get into some backwoods places in all her ventures. In my own experience and that of teachers (I know quite a number), I have never known or heard of any real privation. I do not say that they do not all have troubles and disappointments; it may be with the schoolboard or it may be with the pupils, but no matter what vocation in life we pursue we have troubles. I do not call such annoyances as these privations, for privation means destitution or want. I do say though, that the life of a school-marm is a thankless one in this way:— That you try to please all but please no one. The best course to pursue is to adhere strictly to the school laws and regulations, use plenty of common sense, and do what conscience says is right.

And now, Wrathful Spinster, you must not expect to come from a very much older province and drop down in a district with a house on every fifty- or hundred-acre plots, the farms being so much larger makes the houses further apart, but I think I am safe in saying that in nearly every part of Manitoba, within a radius of three miles there are at least a dozen houses and towns average ten miles apart.

The school-marm, if at all of a suitable disposition, is much sought after by both young and old. . . .

Regarding the teaching profession, I would like to say a few words which might prove beneficial to some intending candidate from the other provinces. I would advise anyone coming from Ontario to write first to the Department of Education at Winnipeg for full particulars as to what they have to do before they can teach here. They have to pass an examination. I am not sure as to the length of time but I think it lasts for two weeks.

The Educational Standard is as high as that of Ontario, and the school-laws are much better. The Government grants sixty-five cents per teaching day during the year; and the balance is made up by taxation.

Teachers' salaries are rising; forty dollars per month was at one time very high, but now it is very low, fifty dollars per month is about the average for rural schools. Board is from ten to twelve dollars per month. The number of teachers are quite limited. I know some schools who have been advertising in the papers for some time, but have as yet been unable to secure one.

Ex-teacher.

[Manitoba]

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“Correspondence,” *The Western Home Monthly* [Winnipeg]

January 1907

SCHOOL “MAM’S” NOT WANTED

Alameda, Sask., Nov. 13, 1906.

Editor,—Your magazine is the most interesting I take, especially the correspondence. I am a school trustee, and find many lady teachers turn down our young man farmers. True, there may be some teachers who make good wives, but as education appears to unfit them for work on a farm, the farmer is lucky to miss the school “mam.” The ideal marriageable girl of today asked for by bachelors in your paper is a mighty scarce article. I am still on the hunt and so far have not located the goods.

Observer.

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“Ingle Nook,” *Family Herald and Weekly Star* [Montreal]

17 April 1907

TEACHING IN THE WEST

Dear Prim Rose:

Here comes another school teacher from Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

I was seventeen when I first left home, and went bravely off, some two hundred and fifty miles to my first school, and now, six years later, I wish to say in favour of the Western people, that in every place I have been, I have met with great kindness and consideration, and always managed to have a thoroughly good time. I think it is often a teacher's own fault if the people are not nice to her.

I wonder how many of my fellow teachers have experienced the awful loneliness that came over me one spring day when I stood, a forlorn creature, beside my boxes at a wayside flag station and watched the train (my last friend) rapidly diminishing in the distance. There was one other passenger besides myself, whom I envied as I saw him meet his friends and drive off, but no one came for poor me.

Finally when the feeling of desolation was becoming very strong, I saw a great lumber wagon, with a double box and spring seat on it approaching. The big farm horses were plunging through water and half-melted April snow, urged onward by a red-whiskered little man perched aloft on the aforesaid spring seat. It was a mercy I was prepared for emergencies, or else when he drew up beside me, and invited me to ascend, I might have looked rather aghast.

"This," I thought, "is rural life with a vengeance," as we went bumpety, bumpety, bump! over the hard icy roads. Since then I have ridden many times in a lumber wagon, often minus even a spring seat. (One of the best times I ever had was a ride ten miles to a picnic, with a merry party of young people, and on that occasion all the "spring" we got was from a straight, smooth board.)

How well I remember the first dinner I had in the district, bacon, fried eggs, and mashed potatoes! How I enjoyed it! And then after the dinner, the drive to my boarding place. The people were away except the three young children who were "keeping house" till papa and mamma came home from town. I sat down, not very cheerfully, I must confess, beside the kitchen stove, on which a big pot of horse feed was boiling. Then I began to conjure up an idea of what my landlady would be like. I had just decided she would be about 45, a big coarse, red-faced untidy Irish woman, with a tongue as long as your arm, when the oldest boy cried out, "Here they come!" The sound of wheels was heard, and the next moment came the freshest, sweetest young matron of twenty-five or thereabouts, you ever saw. She was Irish, with the most beautiful complexion, and eyes and hair, but above all, she had that purely Irish friendliness, so good to a homesick girl. I can't help remarking, before I pass on, what a bright, cheery light that little woman shed through that home and she is only one of the many admirable and noble country women I have met.



The next day was Sunday, and upon my asking about church, I was told service was held in the school house. Methodist one Sunday and Baptist the next. I thought I would much rather stay at home, but of course, that wouldn't do. Some who have passed through the same experience, can imagine the ordeal of that first Sunday, far worse than the first school day. Every one seemed, by the amount of gazing (I will not say staring) directed towards me, to be intensely interested in the new "schoolmarm." It made me feel rather uncomfortable, and I thought, "What dreadful people!" but before the summer was over, I learned to know and understand them better. Some of those same people are my fast friends to this day.

Then followed the first week of teaching. I remember how I calculated each day, what fraction of the whole term I had put in. Every day also meant long walks to the post office so many times to be met with disappointment: I was consumed with homesickness, and I recollect now how longingly I used to gaze after the train as it whizzed past my little school every morning.

The second week brought the first home letter. After that everything seemed all right. Every day I grew more interested in my work, and in the people. In the autumn it was with real regret that I said good-bye to my many friends.

Since then, I have had various experiences, some pleasant, some otherwise, I have walked two miles to school in the winter over unbroken road, have waded through water so deep as to come in over the tops of my long rubber boots, have had salmon sandwiches for two weeks straight for my school luncheon, have wrestled mightily with the dreadful insects, have had to light my own fires occasionally when the thermometer registered 40 deg[rees] below and last, but not least, have had the misfortune to be almost plagued to death by some of the Western bachelors!

But if I walked two miles in the winter, I have also had the pleasure of the early walk in the summer, with the dew sparkling on the grass and wild roses shedding perfume on every side; I have known what it is to have a long, delightful gallop over the prairie; have spent merry Saturdays nutting and berrypicking; have had delicious strawberries and ice cream instead of salmon. Also I have met some bachelors who were not plagues.

Wishing all other teachers and readers of the Prime Rose column, all sorts of luck, and hoping to hear from a few of them.

Imogen

[Manitoba]

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"Prim Rose at Home," *Family Herald and Weekly Star* [Montreal]

2 July 1907

AMONG THE DOUKHOBORS

Dear Prim Rose,

I am an Ontario teacher who came out here two years ago. I have thoroughly enjoyed teaching in the West. There is always something new and interesting. I have seen a real prairie fire, dined with the Doukhobors, and lost the trail on the prairie. I have been in five different schools and all foreign, but one. There is only one section which I did not regret leaving. The people were Germans of rather a lower class; I had to board among them, and found my appetite leaving me when I saw the bread taken from the oven and turned upside down in the bed between two feather ticks. (It was not my bed.)

The mirages in some places are beautiful and in the latter part of June and in July and August the days and nights are simply grand. The sun just dips below the horizon, and it is a soft twilight until the dawn. At the present time, sun shines in the north window both morning and evening. In order to get enough sleep during these long days one has to go to bed with the sun still high.

If teachers get schools through the agencies, they have to run chances, but if they have friends out there they would be better satisfied. The minimum salary is \$600 a year, or \$50 a month. I have a village school at present at \$60 a month or \$720 a year. The school is mostly composed of Norwegians, but there are some Doukhobors and some English pupils. There will soon be more English pupils, as English settlers are moving in. The place is about a year old, but they have put up a \$2,000 school and finished and equipped it with all the conveniences that Ontario schools possess. There are even storm-windows ready for winter. Most of the schools in new places are used for church purposes, too, and many have organs, as this will soon.

Board in country places is from \$12 to \$14 a month, but in villages from \$3 to \$4 a week. If any teacher wishes for more information, my address will be with Prim Rose. I know of two good schools that are looking for a teacher at the present time. The next normal term opens about the 20th of August and closes the end of December.

Ontario Teacher in the West.

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"Ingle Nook," *The Farmer's Advocate* [Winnipeg]

21 September 1910

EDUCATION FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

Dear Dame Durden:

I thought I would write a few lines this rainy afternoon. But the rain is very welcome, as we have had no rain this summer, scarcely enough to settle the dust. There are no gardens here this summer on account of it being so dry. I saw a piece in *The Farmer's Advocate* in regard to whether a boy on a farm needed an education or not. May I tell you what I think about it? Above all things I think boys on a farm ought to have a good education, and it is their parents' duties to see they get it. How is a boy going to manage a farm of his own if he has no education? How is he going to figure his grain profits and losses if he doesn't know how? What girl wants a boy without an education? The elderly man who objected the most about us having a school in our district cannot read or write; and I don't believe would know his own name if he should see it in print. Farmers, by all means insist on your children going to school.

Also I believe it is right and necessary for a girl to learn to cook before she starts housekeeping for herself. I believe a girl can learn to cook and attend school too. On Saturdays and after school in the evenings and on holidays; a little at a time, she will soon collect a great deal of knowledge. A girl, I think, is all the better for doing a little house work as she grows up. It is good, healthy exercise. When a girl is eight or nine years old it is time to begin teaching her all kinds of light housework. What is nicer than a well-kept home; and if necessary the girls can do the work. I mean to teach my girls to work, also to sew and mend and do fancy work. They are better-natured and more useful to themselves, than idling their time away. They make better wives and mothers, and even if they don't have to do their own work, it is better for them to know when their work is done properly. Life is too short to waste, so let's all, old and young, do our duty with all our might.

Cynthia Kee.

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"Prim Rose at Home," *Family Herald and Weekly Star* [Montreal]

30 October 1912

HER HEART'S DESIRE

Dear Prim Rose,

Will you extend the courtesy of your columns to help a young spinster from England, whom circumstances in this country have shut out from the society she once enjoyed there.

Orphaned, but equipped with an excellent education, the said young spinster—myself—set out for Canada to teach for a livelihood, alone, but backed up by excellent testimonials, and references. I have succeeded, but, I am now 28, and the future looms ahead of me, with the sole prospect of teaching from morning till night, the rest of my days. I have neither leisure nor opportunity, for society, and so cannot hope to make acquaintances. It therefore appears I shall some day be shelved as an old maid, unless I take steps which certainly appear most unconventional, but are, I think, justified by the conditions. I am sure if some well-educated bachelor readers, or even widowers, who are in quest of a good wife, would exchange a few letters with me, mutual advantage would arise to one of them. I am in B.C. but should be pleased to hear from any other province. I know for certainty, so it is barely a vanity to assert it, that my education and training have placed me above the average girl, and that I possess the attributes which go to make an excellent partner in organizing and managing a happy peaceful home, and, I believe, and know, that two of the same mind, can make existence for each other an earthly Paradise.

In the hope that you will do me the favour I ask, I enclose my name and address, for your use only.

I am, dear Prim Rose, yours faithfully and in anticipation gratefully,  
B. C.

Penelope.

[British Columbia]

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“Home Loving Hearts,” *Free Press Prairie Farmer* [Winnipeg]

14 May 1919

TEACHING ON THE PRAIRIES

Dear Home Loving Hearts:

I have just finished reading Thistle Seed's letter and am going to try and defend Experienced Teacher, as I agree with her in every way. Evidently Thistle Seed has never taught school or she would not be writing like she is. How many teachers in rural Saskatchewan have a warm school to go into on a winter's morning and have a rig to take them to and from school? Not half of them have. Thistle Seed thinks we are selfish. Is it selfishness that makes a young girl leave home and friends to go out in those God-forsaken places to teach? Is it selfishness that makes a teacher live alone for ten months out of twelve in a little house in the school yard where perhaps she doesn't exchange a word week in and week out with anyone except the children? Thistle Seed says we only do it because it is the highest paid position. Why are you in this cold country, Thistle Seed? Are you not here for the same reason that some of we teachers are—that is, to better ourselves financially—or is it for the love of work that you are staying?

I taught all last summer and would not do it again for anyone. The children can learn more in one week in the winter than in two in the summer, and the reason why so many people prefer summer schools is because farmers are too lazy to get up in the morning to drive their children to school. The majority of them do not care if their children are educated or not.

There are very few teachers who have a rig to take them to school, and if they have they likely hear enough about it from their boarding mistress.

Thistle Seed states we want our board for half the city girl pays. Why shouldn't we? Does the city girl have to put up with what we have? In the majority of country places the teacher lives in a shack, has to wash in the kitchen, sit in the kitchen, live on salt pork and eggs, walk two or three miles to school, eat a cold lunch, walk back and then probably has to go half a mile when she does get home for a pail of water to get a cool drink. She spend her evenings usually listening to the farmer and his wife squabble and the children crying and quarrelling until midnight.

The city girl rises at 8. After a refreshing bath she takes a dainty breakfast in a tidy dining room. Goes to work at 9 or 9:30. Comes home to a good hot dinner at 12, goes back to work at 1:30, home to a good supper, theatre after tea, etc. Why shouldn't they pay twice as much as a country school

teacher? I hope more teachers will write and give their ideas on this subject. As for Thistle Seed, I think she had better try teaching for a summer and she will likely change her mind.

With best wishes to all.

Blue Nose.

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“Home Loving Hearts,” *Free Press Prairie Farmer* [Winnipeg]

23 June 1920

CONSOLIDATED SCHOOLS

Dear H.L.H.:

For a long time I have thought of writing a letter in answer to questions asked by some of your correspondents in regard to consolidated schools and other matters. A mother writes that her little child finds it beyond his strength to stand the long time from entering the van in the morning till leaving at evening to enter his own home. This is a point I have often wondered did not occur to the strenuous advocates of the consolidated school. It is seldom that a grown man will drive more than a mile or two to his work. For children to set in a van from 7 or 7.30 in the morning till school time, then in school for the school day, again to have an hour or two of a trip home is, to say the least of it, fatiguing. I have seen children so tired and cross on returning home in the evening that had they been mine I should have cut the whole thing out. Better no education at all than education at such a cost.

Again, when a child has his own district school to go to he walks nights and morning from one-half to perhaps two-and-a-half or three miles. Perhaps his dad takes him in the car sometimes or meets him coming home. It is astonishing the acquaintance children make with Mother Nature on these morning or evening trips. A few children, two or three, are together, and they discuss the habits of the birds they see, the varieties of flowers and often bring in stones of various forms as curiosities, asking the teacher about them. In some schools one will find stone arrowheads or stone mallets, things that would never be noticed were the poor children cooped up in a van, from which the colours only of flowers can be seen on their way to and from school.

Another thing is the broader view of things observed in the district school. All grades are taught, and the children in the lower grades see sub-

jects taught to the higher grades which furnish fuel to the fire in a child who wants to know. He tries to learn to read as quickly as possible so as to learn the things "brother Tom" is learning. This ambition is one of the loveliest things in life. It is what makes learning easy. When he gets older he wants learning for its own sake and that he may make the best of himself. In the graded consolidated school all of the children in one room are taught the same thing and there is no incentive to reach upwards to something more advanced. I remember in my own case, when the lower forms had but one grade each and each of the classes occupied its own room. When I reached the head master's room there were four grades. Why, I learned more from hearing the other classes taught, than in the class I belonged to. It was just lovely to hear explanations given them and I learned what I saw taught. I expect some one will pile on to me asking what about the scarcity of teachers. Are teachers scarcer than typewriters, housekeepers, or any other salaried people? If people would treat their teachers half as well as they do their hired man there would not be such a scarcity as there is.

Now, I hope I have given cheer to some anxious mother, especially the one whose child could not stand the long day of the consolidated school. I have been in very many parts of Saskatchewan and Manitoba and have no use for that innovation from the United States—the consolidated school. You see I have not referred to the tremendous augmentation of taxes in consolidated districts.

MAGNA.

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