The five-or-less pupil school in six counties of Montana
by Agnes B Wiggenhorn

A THESIS Submitted to the Graduate Committee in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Agricultural Economics
Montana State University

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The social value of the small school in an, isolated area is evaluated in terms of population mobility, land settlement patterns, and curriculum extension for rural living.

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Approved:

In Charge of Major Work

Chairman Examining Committee

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INTRODUCTION

The goal of American education is that all children shall have the opportunity of development according to their abilities and their needs. 1/ Theoretically, neither location nor economic condition of the parents or the children changes the major objectives. Actually, the formal and informal educational curricular offerings to urban children should not be more extensive than for rural children. In the past, the idea was to permit variations in taxation and to foster small local school districts. It was believed that after provision was made for a minimum program, the people should decide for themselves what additional education they wished to offer. A community wanting to extend its educational facilities would then support an enlarged program for extra tax.

Apparently this was logical in the early history of America when people seldom moved but lived in one community most of their lives. Today, because of higher mobility of population and changes in occupation, the principle is no longer applicable. It is recognized, however, that the means and methods of providing like educational facilities to rural-urban youth is more difficult of accomplishment in sparsely populated areas than in those of greater population density. This is especially true if the facilities are supported by the local revenue and income alone. It is only recently that the idea of state aid has been extensively applied. By this method of taxing larger units, it is possible to make money available to poor revenue areas from well-to-do areas.

1/ This ideal for education has been expressed by Dr. Bess Goodykoontz, Assistant Commissioner of Education in "Biennial Survey of Education in the United States, 1934-36", Chapter V, p. 1.

The idea of state aid has spread rapidly. Undoubtedly, it will be necessary in the future to develop legislation along the line of wider grants. 2/ Stephen Leacock in The Unsolved Social Justice says, "The chief immediate direction of social effort should be towards the attempt to give to every human being in childhood adequate food, clothing, education, and an opportunity in life. This will prove to be the beginning of many things." In order to meet these demands, the total revenue of the nation will need to be made available to all the school population.

This statement is verified by Mr. O. M. Kile who writes, "The states have not yet realized the responsibility of the cities and the general public for the maintenance of an adequate school system in the rural sections. Most city residents still look upon this as purely a local problem for the township or at most the county. They do not realize that the rural schools have educated a goodly share of the population of the cities at any given time. Calculations indicate that more than 200,000 farm boys and girls, 15 to 18 years of age are turned over to the cities each year with their education to that point fully paid for by farmers. If the village and small-town migrants to the larger cities are included, the debt of the cities becomes much greater. Figuring only the 200,000 farm boys and girls each year needed to keep up virility and size of the cities, and calculating the average taxation cost of educating these young people to the aged indicated--approximately \$100 per year or \$1,000 through the second year of high school--we find that the cities really owe the

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2/ Cook, K. M., "Biennial Survey of Education in the United States, 1934-36", United States Department of Education, Washington, D. C., Chapter V, p. 12.

farm taxpayers the sum of $200,000,000 per year. Since there are 150,000 one-room schools in the United States, 20,000 two-room schools, and 18,000 consolidated schools, this $200,000,000, if distributed back to the places where the educational work is done, would mean about $1,000 per rural school per year. If figured on the total number of school rooms educating rural children, the distribution would amount to about $6,700 per room per year." 3/

If the rural areas are to have comparable educational facilities with the urban areas, the method for extending the offerings must differ from that of the past in order to enable education to utilize the environmental resources and adjust the program to the individual and community requirements. The financing of such democratic educational methods needs to be based, not on ability to pay, but on the larger principles of public welfare. Modern transportation, communication, and population mobility bring the once isolated areas close together. Because of these factors, the inadequately educated people of one area may become the financially dependent of another area. It might pay this latter area to properly educate the former, so as to cut down its future cost.

Purpose of the Study

The educational situation in sparsely populated sections may best be understood by considering some of the outstanding problems. These are:

1. The financial cost of the five-or-less-pupil schools in comparison with the cost of schools with larger enrollments.

3/ Kile, O. M., "The New Agriculture", The Macmillan Company, 1932.

2. The need for keeping isolated school children and the children of the five-or-less-pupil school near the home and the community by bringing the educational plant to the children rather than the children to the educational plant.

3. The essentials of education in a five-or-less-pupil school from the standpoint of curriculum and facilities.

4. The development of a philosophy of rural and community life as an adjunct to education in the five-or-less-pupil school.

This study is designed to call attention to these problems in other than conventional fashion and will concern itself largely with 1, 2, and 3 above. Some inferences concerning 4 will be developed.

Background for Educational Policy

In order to understand the present educational practices in the rural school in America, it is necessary to briefly review the history of our national economy. At the beginning of our national life, agriculture was the basis of our economy. Agriculture then depended for growth and prosperity upon individual effort and initiative. Later with the introduction of manufacturing, many new phases developed in our economic system. In order to have the necessary labor in previously undeveloped agricultural and industrial areas, public and private agencies fostered population movements, while the federal government enacted legislation for the purpose of disposing of the public domain for agricultural settlement. Both the federal government and the states now shared the management of public lands, and the mutual programs for land settlement and agriculture were based on the assumption of an indefinite agriculture expansion with unlimited national and international markets. Later with a shift from an agricultural economy to an industrial economy, enlarged domestic markets opened as people engaged in industry purchased goods they did not produce. Both agriculture and industry continued to expand due largely to foreign immigration which influenced our markets at home and abroad. European nations did buy from us but we, in turn, did not buy from them. Consequently, the debtor nations were forced into a nationalistic position, the result of which was the loss of our foreign markets and a change in our land policy.

Several other modifying factors have been projected into the economy. For example, population of the country has failed to increase at its former rate, and the tendency is toward a more stable population. 4/ Furthermore, the total supply of world agriculture produce has been increased by the development of new lands in foreign countries. 5/ These then are some of the factors responsible for the depressed agricultural prices. Likewise, they are some of the factors that must be considered in planning the future policy for land use and population settlement, hence they are important in any consideration of our rural school policies.

It now appears necessary to aim at a new purpose or objective in rural life, if agriculture and our entire economy are to continue its contribution to society. The school, therefore, becomes of primary importance since it represents fundamentally the American way of building.

4/ Thompson, Warren S., "Population Problems", Mcgraw-Hill Company, Inc., 1935, Chapter XV.

5/ Bowman, I., "The World and Its People", Ginn and Company, 1933.

It is because of the belief in this democratic process of building that the Americans conceived the idea that public education is the function of the local community. Mr. Edmund deS Brunner says, "As early as the 1640's the colony of Massachusetts passed two laws requiring that each town (township) tax its citizens for the support of a school". 6/ Later with the development of manufacturing began the development of the urban centers. People moved to cities in large numbers, and our total educational plant was expanded to prepare people for urban life and not rural life. 7/ Education itself, the curriculum and its content, was created by urban individuals for urban use. It was not thought necessary to prepare an adequate program for the rural, much less the rural isolated areas. At present, however, we are confronted with the problem of continuing as an industrial nation with large centers of population, or of devoting some attention to agriculture as a way of life in more scattered areas.

If ours is to be the latter course, then the school and its program must concern itself with vision as well as facts. It must admit the importance of linking up the child's school with community life. It must conceive of the child's educational course in terms of activity and experience rather than the acquisition of knowledge alone.

Rural Education in European Countries

Many European countries including Norway, Denmark, and Finland have based their educational planning on the assumption that both formal

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6/ Kolb, J. H., and Brunner, E. deS., "Study of Rural Sociology", Houghton Mifflin Company, 1935, Chapter XVI.

7/ Chapin, F. S., "Social Heritage Rolls up on the Back of Schools", School and Society, Aug. 19, 1933.

and informal training is for every day life, rural as well as urban. 8/ It would appear that America might well consider this as a definite goal in considering its educational curriculum and its adaptation to the child's need.

The school of Norway does not separate itself from the workaday world. The laborer and the farmer are not educated away from their jobs, but are taught to bring to it a personal joy in working and a deeper appreciation of their work. 9/

In Denmark the youth, by formal and informal training, are imbued with a philosophy that symbolizes the concept of her national life. "Leaders in homesteading movements in Denmark believe that a real community life close to the soil can result in a popular culture of a high order and can produce the durable satisfaction that results when one's daily work is made intelligent and touched with imagination. Rural life on small farms is profitable and enjoyable. The subsistence homestead seeks to provide a comfortable standard of living on relatively small income", states Dr. R. H. Eckleberry. 10/

The Finnish State assumes the preservation of its national life to be dependent upon the solidity of thought and action among its people. For this reason it maintains a dual school system; one division trains for urban life, a second division trains for rural life. The enrollment

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8/ Downs, S. W., "Education Progress in Foreign Countries", School and Society, December 26, 1936.

9/ Williams, T. C., "The School for the New Social Order", School Life, June, 1933.

10/ Eckleberry, R. H., "Subsistence Homesteading and Progressive Education", School and Society, February 24, 1934.

in the rural school is limited in order that the program of self-help, self-seeking, and individual initiative may more successfully condition the pupil to life in small groups. The state, however, does not contemplate rearing a citizenry divided in purpose. Hence, throughout the entire system cooperation in all its phases is a subject of major rank. The state considers rural life and the problems of rural life, and city life and the problems of city life as being of sociological and economic importance to the extent that all should be as familiar with one of them as with the other. 11/

Rural Education in America

In the United States the idea of education such as has been attempted by European nations is taking hold. Modern leaders acknowledge that a curriculum which fits itself to the requirements of a people is more desirable than a curriculum which meets standard set for accomplishment without reference to application.

It is from this latter viewpoint that the worth of the small school as an institution has been debated by educators and economists. It is contended that the limited curriculum of traditional outline results in unequal opportunities. Small enrollments, evaluated for efficiency on the teacher-pupil ratio, thus result in high costs of maintenance. In the past the only solution proposed for the problem has been consolidation. This is in keeping with the idea of emphasis on urban curriculum expansion.

11/ Karttenun, Hanna, "Schools of Finland", a graduate student paper prepared while a graduate student in Home Economics at Montana State College, 1938-39.

It is believed that the consolidated school, with its enlarged enrollment and more extensive curriculum, tends to equalize opportunity. The five-or-less-pupil school, as a study group and equipped with the proper tools for a program adjusted to its condition, has received small attention. The need for such attention can not be questioned. After analysizing data compiled in a survey of rural schools of Iowa, Mr. O. H. Benson concluded that the boys and girls who favored country life were those who had been given opportunity at home, at school, and during leisure time to study and to follow programs of adventure with educational and recreational value and into which elements of local interest had been interwoven. 12/

Two Methods of Consolidation

There are several ways by which the advantages of modern education can be extended to a larger proportion of the rural population. One method is the consolidation of small districts into a whole for a common educational plant and taxing unit so that the revenue is sufficient to carry on the functions of modern education. Under this sytem the children of outlying areas are transported as a rule to a common school. The second method by which modern education can be made available requires the consolidation of small school districts into a common taxing base but encourages the maintenance of the small school. Such a tax base is large enough in area and wealth to create a common fund which can be reapportioned to the individual units according to needs and requirements irrespective of taxable property.

12/ Benson, O. H., "Country Boys and Girls Speaking", Rural Scouting Survey, Emmet County, Iowa, October 9, 1931.

In America we have followed the first of these principles. Thus a favorably located area and urban center has found it possible to take advantage of modern education. But by this very practice those schools which, because of isolation, location, condition of roads, low taxable value, and other resources, have been excluded from consolidation, have been deprived of these modern educational facilities.

The districts supporting consolidated schools embrace large geographic areas. In this manner the tax base is sufficiently broad to produce an income adequate to meet the school needs. On the other hand, the schools with a small tax base are deprived of sufficient resources to support a similar program. If the idea of consolidation of tax base were extended to all areas including small districts, a tax base would be established wide enough to produce ample revenue for the support of consolidated schools where practical, and of isolated schools where necessary. The common revenue would be distributed according to necessity, and the small district would continue only from the standpoint of operating and educational plant.

In short, modern educators would need to learn to think in terms of a distinction between consolidation for revenue purposes and consolidation for educational purposes. In the past the only consideration has been consolidation to accomplish a larger tax base and a central school plant. Wherever consolidation for educational purposes was being hindered by the isolated areas, these isolated areas were omitted from the tax as well as school plant consolidation. This statement is verified by Dr. Julian Butterworth who, when reporting on consolidation, said, "As was to be expected, therefore, there has been a tendency to bring together areas in which the consolidation could be effected with minimum cost, neglecting those children who live in territory contiguous, but of little wealth, where their inclusion would have produced little additional income and serious educational responsibilities." 13/

Five-or-less-pupil School as a Problem

The problem of the five-or-less-pupil school is not confined to Montana or any special section of our country. It is a by-product of a sparse population pattern in which the schools enroll few pupils. Evidence to substantiate this statement is found in the 1934 report of the Federal Department of Education which listed for the United States, some 7,500 or more one-teacher schools, not all of these schools belonged to the five-or-less-pupil school category. The report, however, estimated that 30,000 elementary school children were enrolled in five-or-less-pupil schools in 1934. 14/ For the same year, Dr. R. R. Renne accounted for 315 five-or-less-pupil schools in Montana. 15/

For the year 1935-36 there were, in 48 Montana counties, about 329 five-or-less-pupil schools with a total attendance of 1,306 pupils. In the six counties studied in this survey, there were 72 such schools with an enrollment of 195 pupils. On the other hand, in 1937-38, 54 Montana

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13/ Butterworth, Julian, "Biennial Survey of Education in the United States, 1932-34", United States Department of Education, Washington, D. C., Chapter V, p. 54.

14/ Cook, K. M., Op. cit., p. 20.

15/ Renne, R. R., "Financing Montana Schools", Montana State College, Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin No. 307, 1935, p. 9.

counties had 358 five-or-less-pupil schools. The total enrollment for this period reached 1,351. The six counties studied had 74 such schools with an enrollment of 247 pupils. While there was only a net addition of two five-or-less-pupil schools in the areas of study, comparing 1935-36 with 1937-38, the total enrollment for all the five-or-less-pupil schools in the sample had increased 26.7 per cent. This indicates that enrollment had increased in some but not all schools, and that the increase was such that the average enrollment per school remained five or less pupils.

In 1937-38 the counties which had opened for the first time or reopened five-or-less-pupil schools were with one exception located west of the Rocky Mountain divide. 16/

The small schools of Montana are gaining in number in spite of the fact that consolidation both of districts and school plants has been effected in some parts of the state.

In sparsely settled communities education is by no means wholly a problem of schools with small attendance. School financing is a problem of equal rank. This is especially the case where the expense of maintaining a small unit is relatively greater than the per capita expense of maintaining a large unit. Again reference to the Federal Department of Education and Dr. Renne's reports will verify this statement. Comparison of data from several states lead to the assumption that when a school enrolled between one and five pupils the average per pupil cost ranges from

16/ Some five-or-less-pupil schools that had been closed for two or more years were reopened.

$250 to $300, as compared with a $75 per pupil cost in elementary schools based on the national enrollment. 17/ Data compiled for Montana showed the average per pupil cost was $150 for schools that enrolled five or less pupils although the average cost per elementary pupil based on state enrollment was approximately $87. 18/

The consideration of neither enrollment nor cost of the small school will solve the educational problem if the persistent movement of people from urban centers back to the land and from one area into another area continues. It would seem rather to indicate there will be added need for a kind of service such as the five-or-less-pupil school can render.

THE SAMPLE COUNTIES

In view of the fact that all counties in Montana with five-or-less-pupil schools could not be studied, a sample of six counties was taken. These sample counties are located in different sections of the state and geographically well distributed (see map). Although, in part, these counties present differences between the various areas of the state, they nevertheless have a number of common characteristics. First, with one exception, the per capita wealth and debt does not differ greatly. Second, they all are rural from the standpoint of population density and occupation. Four of the counties have no city larger than 2,500, while two counties have one city each that exceeds this number. Third, in each case the land surface includes rough hilly country as well as plains,

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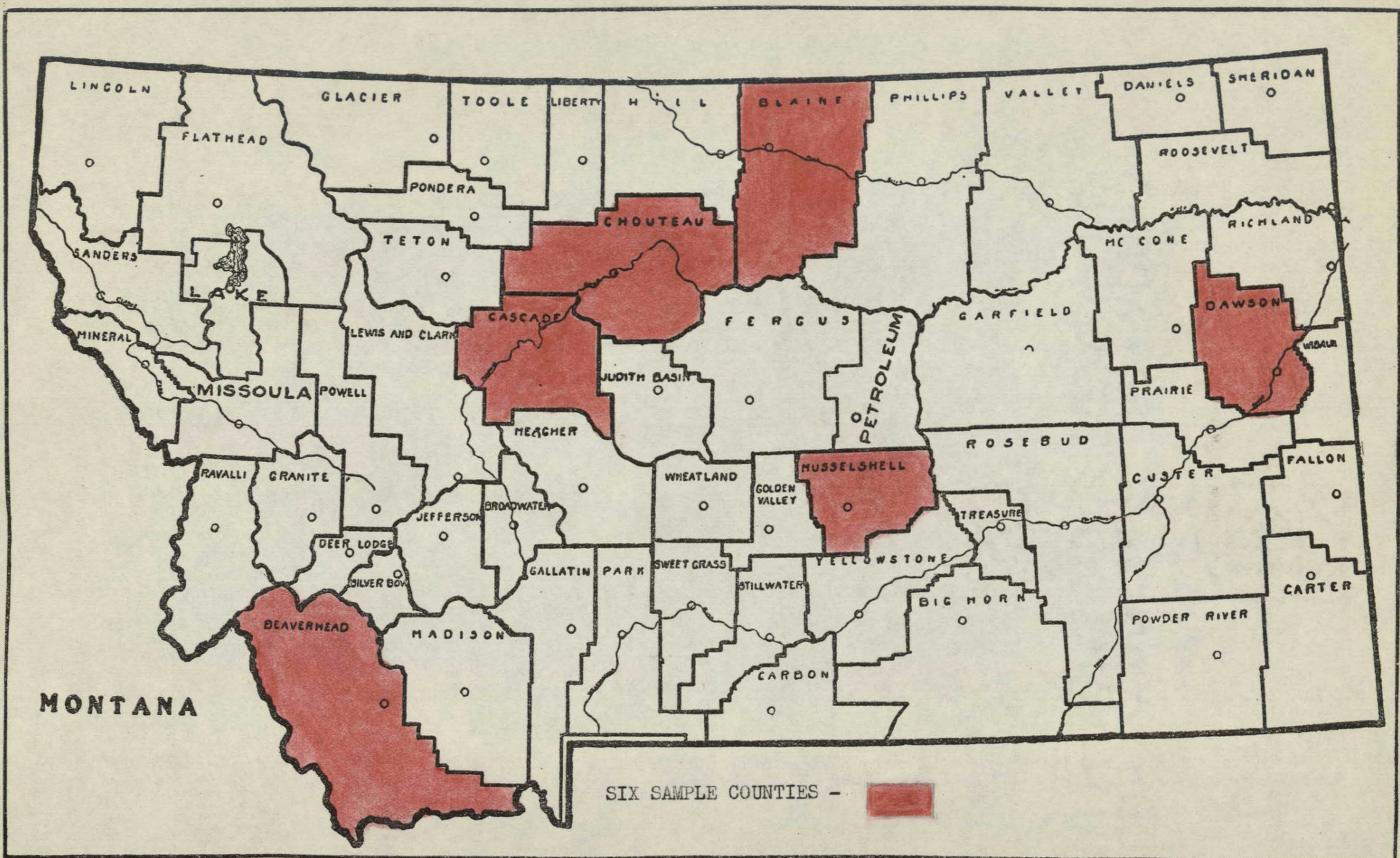
17/ Cook, K. M., Op. cit. p. 25.
18/ Renne, R. R., Op. cit., p. 10.


MONTANA
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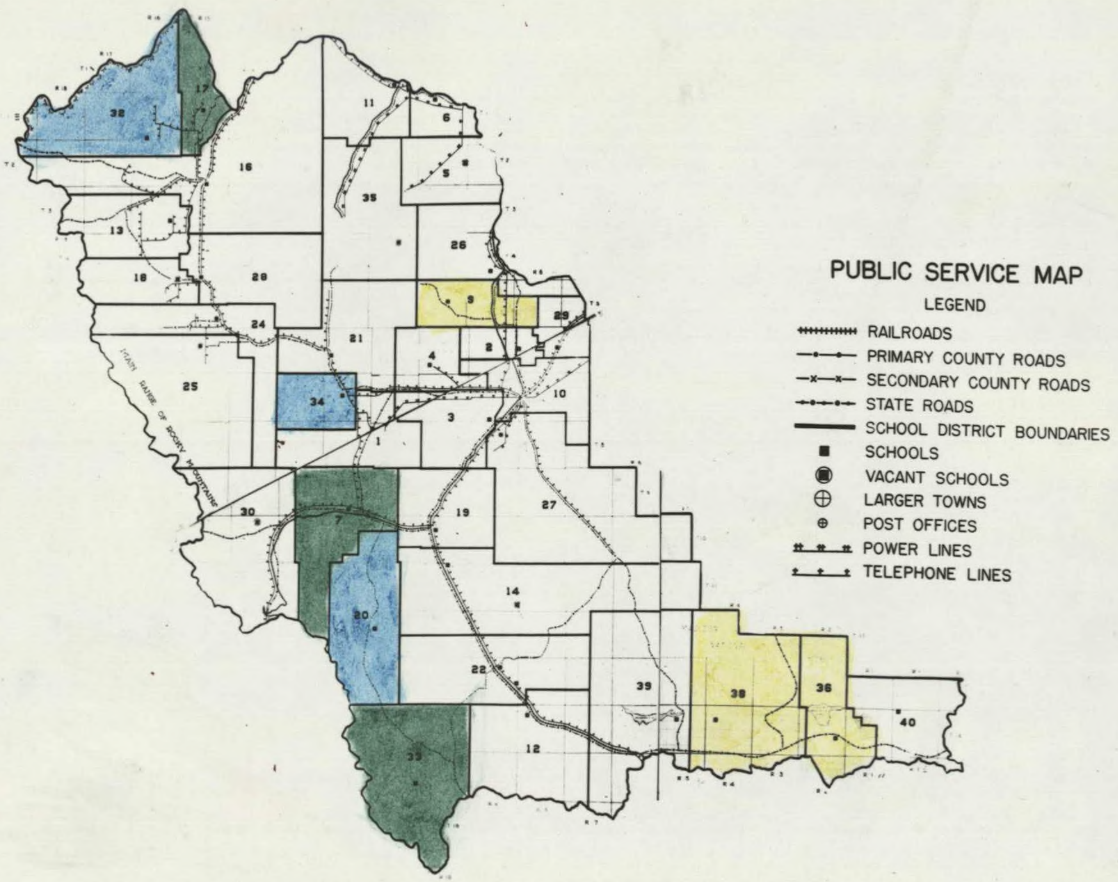
PONDERA
TETON
CHOUTEAU
RICHLAND
MC CONE
SANDERS
LAKE
DAWSON
CASCADE
FERGUS
GARFIELD
MINERAL
LEWIS AND CLARK
PETROLEUM
WIBAUX
MISSOULA
POWELL
JUDITH BASIN
PRAIRIE
MEAGHER
ROSEBUD
RAVALLI
GRANITE
WHEATLAND
MUSSELSHELL
CUSTER
FALLON
GOLDEN VALLEY
BROADWATER
JEFFERSON
TREASURE
DEER LODGE
YELLOWSTONE
GALLATIN
PARK
SWEET GRASS
SILVER BOW
STILLWATER
BIG HORN
CARTER
BEAVERHEAD
MADISON
POWDER RIVER
CARBON
SIX SAMPLE COUNTIES -

with both irrigated and non-irrigated farms. Fourth, every county is supplied with one or more public utility services. In addition, five of the counties claim an outstanding industry. These vary as to size, kind, and value by county.

The sample counties are Beaverhead, Blaine, Cascade, Chouteau, Dawson, and Musselshell.

Short History of Sample Counties

Beaverhead County.--Beaverhead County was created by the first territorial legislative assembly of Idaho in 1863, and when Montana became a territory in 1864, the county was incorporated within the latter's limits. Montana's first territorial legislative assembly held its sessions at Bannack, a thriving mining camp in Beaverhead County. In 1863 cattle were brought into the county and immediately stock raising became an important industry. It has continued up to the present time to be the ranking business. This is due in part to the topography and the natural resources as wild hay covers 152,058 acres of land while 821,453 acres are classified as good only for grazing land. On 144,509 non-irrigated acres additional hay, the leading crop, is raised. Beaverhead County has 50,358 acres of irrigated land used for the growing of small grains, alfalfa, and garden produce. Mining, which led to the exploration and settlement of the county, still claims a place in the commercial activities. Patented mining claims aggregate 8,937 acres. A considerable portion of the county is in a federal forest reserve which contributes to the public school money. In 1932 the per capita wealth was



Selected Districts - 1937

Selected Districts - 1935

Selected Districts - 1935 & 1937

BEAVERHEAD COUNTY

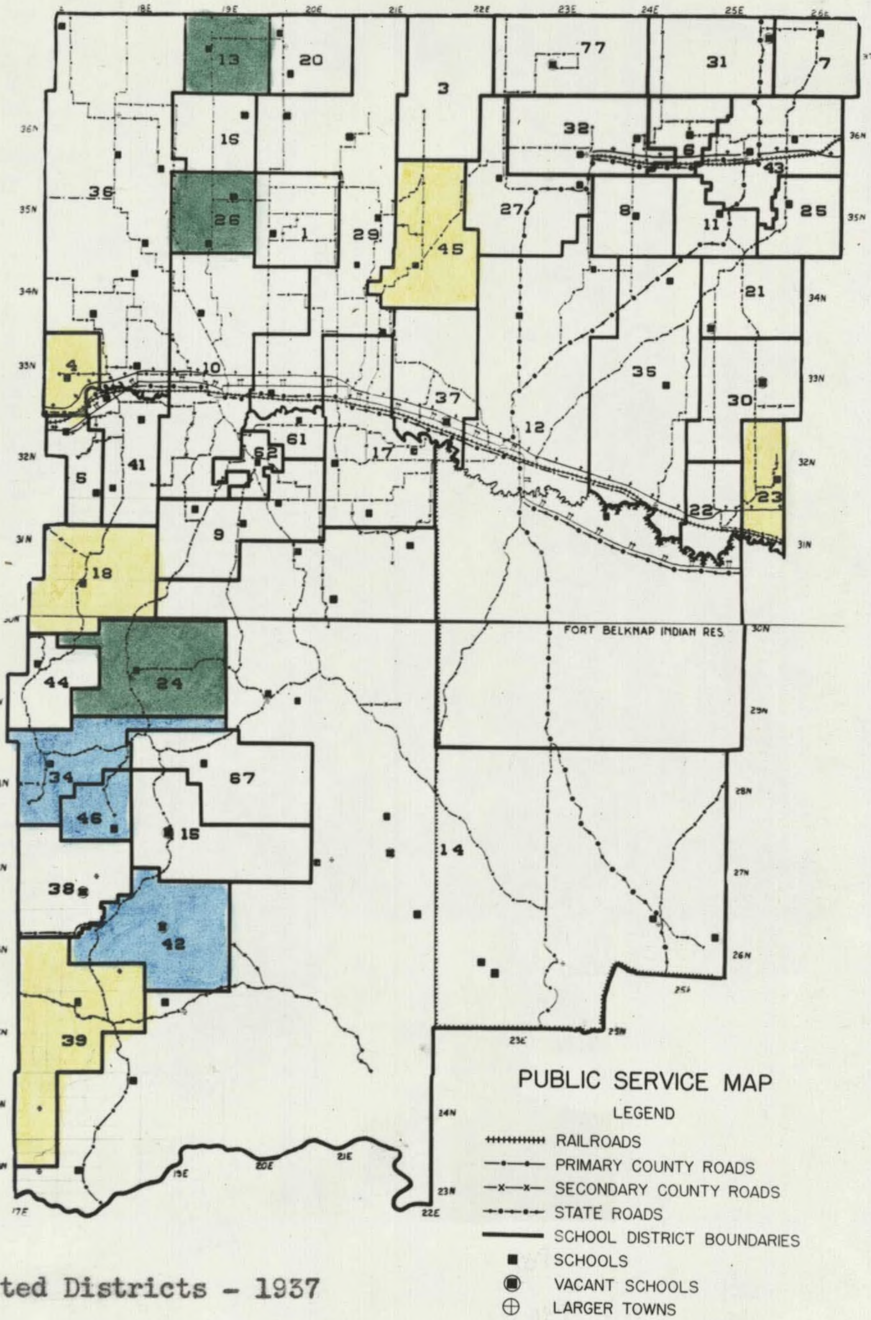
$2,000 and the per capita county and school debt was $35.65. The total population was 6,654 persons, making an average density of 1.2 persons per square mile.

It is apparent from this description that the nature of agricultural and non-agricultural enterprises makes for a sparse population. If this continues to be the best method of land use, the small school problem will be ever present.

Blaine County.--Blaine County was created in 1912 by petition and election. The original area was 6,700 square miles which was cut in 1915 to 4,271 square miles by the loss of areas to the newly created Phillips County. In early years the entire land of this section of Montana was controlled by stockgrowers. However, in 1910 the homestead act brought settlers and a part of the 235,086 acres of tillable land which lies within the boundaries of the present Blaine County, was converted to farming.

Since that period small grain agriculture has flourished and become the ranking industry. On the flat dry prairie land small grains such as wheat, oats, and flax are grown, while the irrigated section of 45,840 acres bordering the Milk River is given over to the production of sugar beets and potatoes largely. The sugar beet industry with a factory at Chinook, the county seat, is a leading business, serving not only Blaine County but all of northern Montana. Here also is located an abundance of coal, mined extensively for local use, while natural gas, commercially exploited, is piped to many of the neighboring communities. Stock raising, with about 1,349,258 acres of available grazing land,

BLAINE COUNTY



Selected Districts - 1937

Selected Districts - 1935

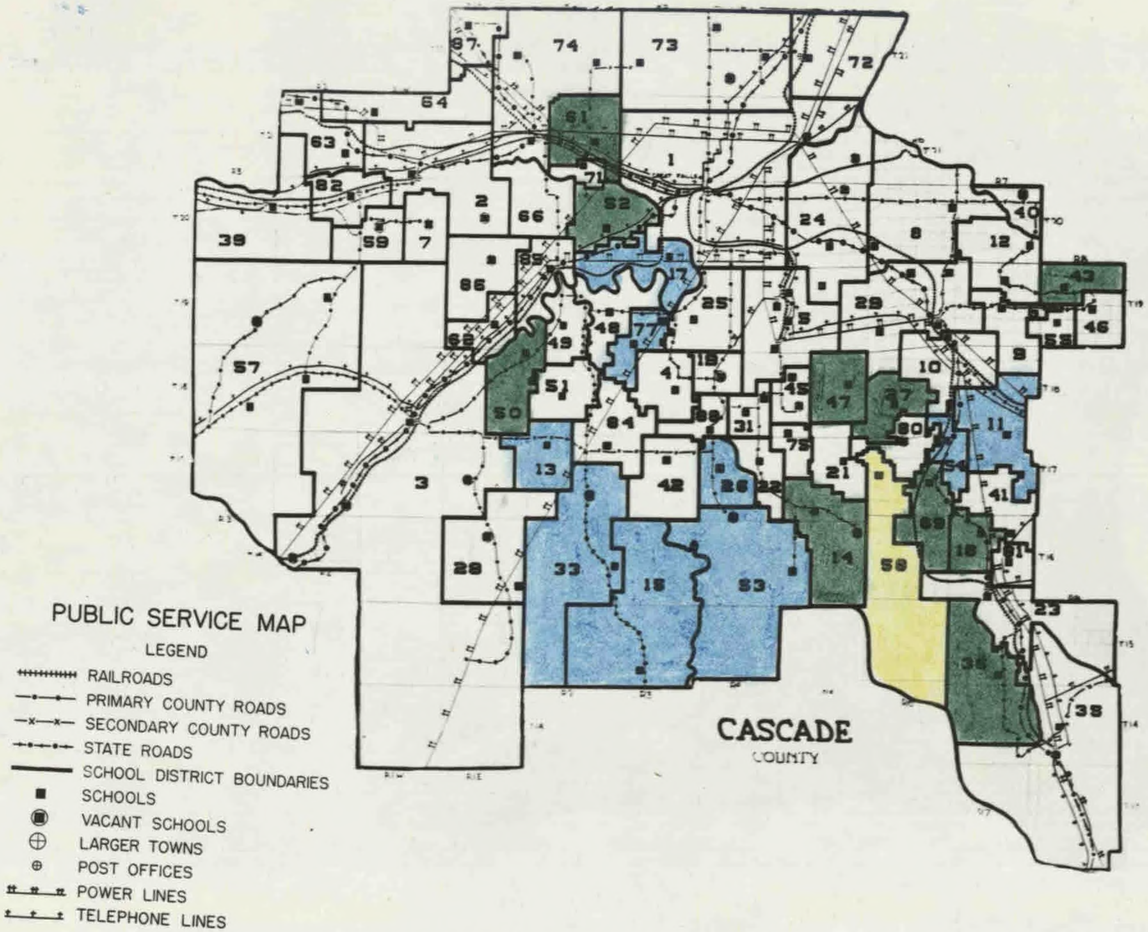
Selected Districts - 1935 & 1937

continues as a profitable business. The per capita wealth was $2,000 with a per capita county and school debt of $53.83 in 1932. The population was 9,006 persons, making an average density of 2.1 per square mile.

The above description of the existing economy again shows that portions of the county are sparsely populated, confronted with the small school problem.

Cascade County.--Part of the land now included in Cascade County was crossed by the Lewis and Clark expedition, which, in 1805, camped for several weeks on the present site of Great Falls. A member of the party, scouting for his leader, discovered Black Eagle and Rainbow Falls. His description of these falls, published later in a St. Louis paper, led to further exploration of the falls to determine their commercial value. In 1908 a syndicate secured a franchise, whereby it gained authority to construct a power site and generate electricity. This was followed by the erection of a wire and cable mill, a ferro-manganese plant and a electrolytic zinc plant. Great Falls, the center of Cascade County, became the second ranking industrial city of Montana.

Stock raising, an early occupation, continued to grow and the 791,624 acres of grazing land furnished feed. On a portion of the 457,271 acres of non-irrigated land, large quantities of grain, especially wheat, are grown. The irrigated land, some 28,829 acres, is used principally for the production of alfalfa. It is estimated that there are 1,310,504 acres of agricultural land in the county, a great part of which has not as yet been developed. Gold, silver, and quartz mining was formerly a thriving business. However, the present high cost of working the mines



Selected Districts - 1937

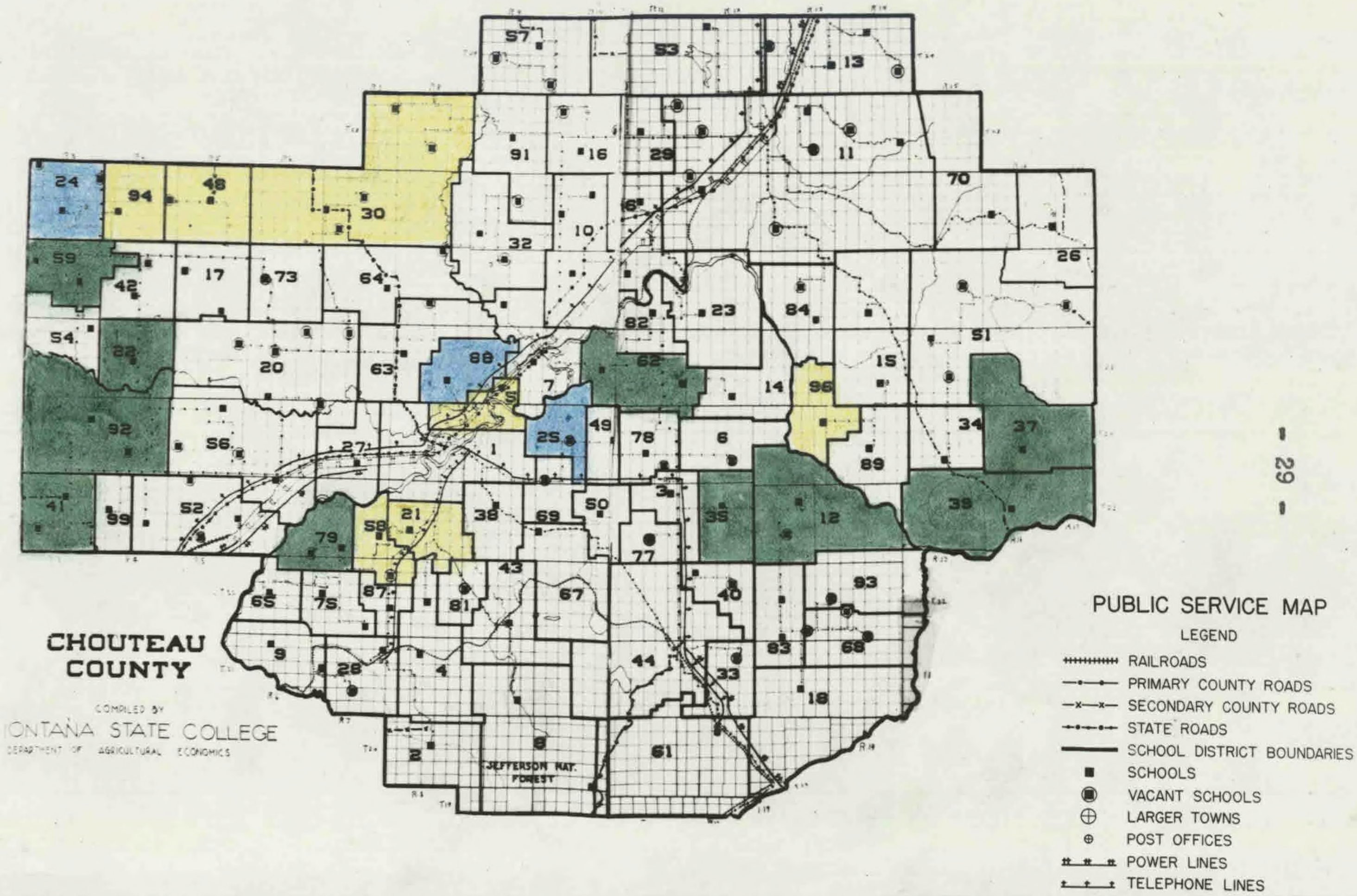
Selected Districts - 1935

Selected Districts - 1935 & 1937

has restricted the production. In 1932 the coal output of the Belt and Sand Coulee mines amounted to $1,000,000. At present the total output has been decreased, due to the loss of local markets because of the introduction of natural gas. Cascade in 1937 had the largest taxable valuation among the counties of the state. In 1932 the per capita wealth was $2,672 with a per capita county and school debt of $17.04. The total population was 41,146, making an average density of 15.2 persons per square mile.

Chouteau County.--Chouteau, one of Montana's nine original counties, was created by the first territorial assembly in 1865. The area of the original county was 30,000 square miles which has since been reduced to 3,842 square miles. Stock raising has always been the leading industry. The rolling prairie land affords good pasturage, while the Missouri River and other small streams provide water facilities. There are 644,908 acres of classified grazing land and another 1,281,896 acres of dry land, most of which is covered with natural grass. Only a small part is under cultivation and that is used for wheat and oats. Chouteau County has but 8,652 acres of irrigated land which lies mainly in the Missouri River bottom and is devoted to the growing of alfalfa. In 1932 the per capita wealth of the county was $2,000 and the county and school debt was $67.44. The total population numbered 8,635, making an average density of 2.2 persons per square mile.

Dawson County.--Dawson County, in 1882, was bounded on the north by Canada, on the east by Dakota. It was about 180 miles long, east and west, and 150 miles wide, but today its total area is only 2,303 square miles. A large portion of the county is flat prairie or low rolling hills



Selected Districts - 1937

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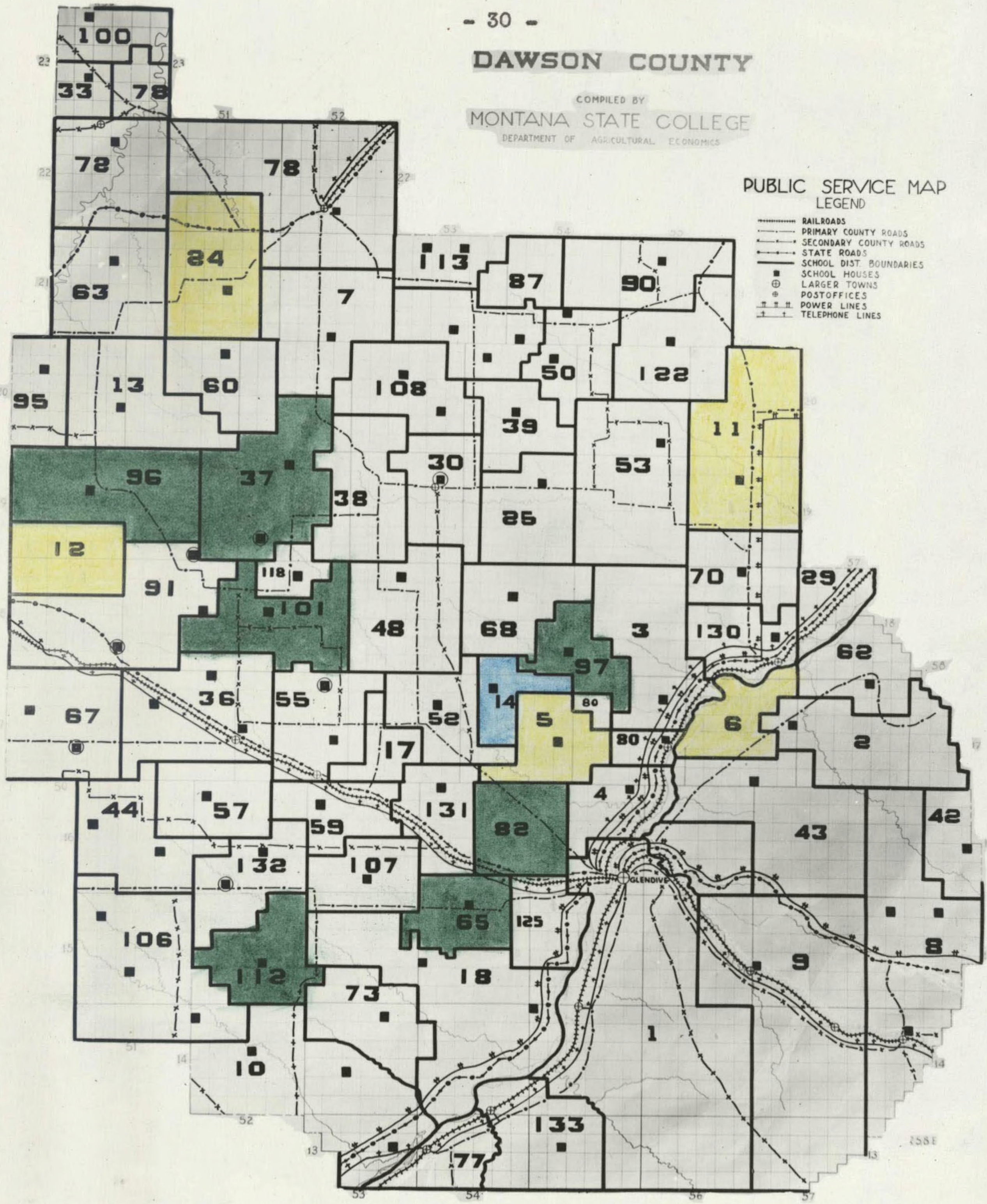
Selected Districts - 1935 & 1937



Selected Districts - 1937

Selected Districts - 1935

Selected Districts - 1935 & 1937

better adapted to stock raising than agriculture. Stock raising was the leading industry until 1900, when small grain agricultural expansion began. After 1900 a considerable portion of the 554,999 acres of dry land was homesteaded. The principal crops grown are oats, corn, flax, and hay.

In recent years much agricultural land has been abandoned with the result that a second growth of native grasses is beginning to cover the prairie. In 1937 there were 713,403 acres of grazing land and 840 acres of irrigated land. An area of about 1,285,841 acres was classified as agricultural land with limited improvements. The Northern Pacific railroad shops, located in Glendive, the county seat, are among the largest assets of the county. In 1932 the total per capita wealth was $2,000 and the county and school debt was $56.50. The total population was 9,881, making an average density of 4.2 persons per square mile.

Musselshell County.--In 1866 Musselshell County included 8,500 square miles of land within its boundaries but by 1917 it had been reduced to 1900 square miles, its present size. For many years some of the world's largest bands of sheep ranged the territory and sheep growing was the foremost industry. In 1908, because of the homestead act, there was an influx of people. Barbed wire fences cut the open range. Everywhere farms were dotted over the 138,841 acres of dry land, which was put to the production of wheat, barley, corn, hay, and potatoes. However, recently wide sections have been deserted or withdrawn from agriculture by the federal land purchasing program. Some of this land, added to the 796,716 acres of former grazing land, is again supporting a considerable number of livestock. Musselshell County has no irrigated land at the present time. Coal mining