

**SOCIAL AND CIVIC WORK  
IN  
COUNTRY COMMUNITIES.  
BULLETIN NO. 18**

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**E. B. MCDONALD & R. M. CHENEY  
& G. F. COMINGS & W. E. LARSON**

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*Wisconsin Dept. of public instruction*

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REPORT OF A SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE  
COMMITTEE OF FIFTEEN APPOINTED BY  
THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS  
TO INVESTIGATE CONDITIONS IN THE  
RURAL SCHOOLS OF WISCONSIN

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This bulletin on social and civic work in country communities was prepared by a sub-committee of the Committee of Fifteen, appointed by the state superintendent of public instruction over two years ago. The committee has done a careful and painstaking piece of work and the result of their efforts here embodied will doubtless be of much value to hundreds of communities in the state.

In the main, this is an effort to revive a custom that formerly existed in many parts of the country of using the school house for community purposes. Most people now in mature life can recall that there was a time when many country school houses were used by debating societies, literary societies, and farm clubs of various kinds. With the growth of cities and villages the custom here referred to has quite largely fallen into disuse. This is partly due also to certain social changes that have been taking place in many communities.

In order to succeed such work requires at least one capable leader,—someone who will take an active, persistent interest in stimulating the community to join sympathetically and cooperatively in such an enterprise. The coming together of the adult population in any community for any worthy purpose involves in itself a social gain. There grows up a wholesome and neighborly spirit; stimulus to better deeds and greater knowledge passes from one to another until the community is often transformed and its interests placed upon a higher community level.

The state superintendent earnestly hopes that hundreds,—yes, thousands, of communities will undertake in an intelligent way to develop these community gatherings.

The thanks of the department are due to the members of this committee who have labored long in order that they might send out through this department a suggestive and helpful bulletin.

C. P. CARY,  
State Superintendent.



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## PREFACE

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We have heard much of the success of the old-time school with its social gatherings, its singing schools and its contests.

This success was surely not a result of better equipment, better course of study, or better teachers. It was simply because of its greater hold upon the community. The school is not an institution for itself alone, but prepares the child for service in the home and community, and it must keep near the home and the needs of the people. The school reaches every home and does not regard racial prejudices, racial segregation or native customs. It is "the melting pot" of the nations, and for this reason the schools must make their own the problem of the social center work for the community, and assume responsibility for its existence and continuance.

It is the aim of this bulletin to show how this may be brought about; to show the part the home, the school and the people must take; to present concrete suggestions for the social program; to make suggestions for the young people who no longer attend school, and also for the older people; to show how to organize permanent clubs and how to federate those organizations. It also aims to present some cautions to be observed and to show what Wisconsin is doing for social and civic improvement in rural communities.

We trust that it will meet a need in the home and the school, and that it will be an inspiration to earnest, progressive work in this field.

THE COMMITTEE.



Figure 1. A neat farm home in Wisconsin. The greatest social and civic center should be the home.  
(Courtesy of F. Craneheld, Secretary of the Wisconsin Horticultural Society)

## SOCIAL AND CIVIC WORK IN COUNTRY COMMUNITIES

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### THE HOME AS A SOCIAL AND CIVIC CENTER

"Mid pleasures and palaces  
Tho' we may roam,  
Be it ever so humble,  
There is no place like home."

It is but fitting that the introductory article to a bulletin dealing with plans for social and civic work in country communities should be a consideration of the unit of society,—the home itself. At the present time there is a strong disposition on the part of many people to want to be somewhere else rather than at home, and instead of building up this great unit of civilization we are, in many instances, tearing it down. Some words of warning, as well as suggestion, will not be amiss in this pamphlet.

It is of the greatest importance that the family life of the nation should be made the best possible. Upon the home life all community life, national life and progress depend. Just as the strength of a brick structure depends upon the strength and quality of the individual bricks that constitute its walls, so the strength of a nation depends upon the strength and the quality of the individual homes of that nation. Only when the homes themselves are of the right kind can they be cemented into the larger community fellowship, and thus bring about that co-operation which will make possible the building up of strong ideal states.

It is in the country communities rather than in the city that ideal homes are possible. The large cities, in spite of their many conveniences and advantages, are far behind country communities