1940

The Underlying Causes of School Absence in Franklin County, Virginia

Harold Winfrey Ramsey

College of William & Mary - School of Education

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THE UNDERLYING CAUSES OF SCHOOL ABSENCE

IN

FRANKLIN COUNTY, VIRGINIA

Harold Winfrey Ramsey
THE UNDERLYING CAUSES OF SCHOOL ABSENCE

IN

FRANKLIN COUNTY, VIRGINIA

Harold Winfrey Ramsey
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF

THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY

FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF ARTS

1960
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Without the assistance and encouragement received from many sources this study would have been impossible. In the collection of data the teachers, principals, rural supervisors and office assistants of the county school system were most cooperative.

The following persons deserve special mention because of their helpful contributions: Dr. George H. Armacost, faculty advisor, for his painstaking analysis of the problem, his guidance at every stage of the study, and his sympathetic encouragement; Dr. K. J. Hoke, for his thought-provoking suggestions in regard to the logical presentation of data; Dr. James E. Pate, for his advice on the problems of marginal families; Dr. E. G. Swem, for his kindly interest and his help in securing materials needed; and Mrs. Kitty Greer Ramsey, the author's wife, for her help with the stenographic work, and for her constant encouragement.

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CHAPTER I - ATTENDANCE, A PROBLEM IN SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

Introduction

Among the many problems of school administration the question of pupil attendance is one of constant concern to the school executive. One often expressed aim of the public school is to enroll all the children and hold them for a period sufficient to develop attitudes, skills and appreciations that will enable them to meet intelligently the normal situations encountered in every day life. The administrative problems of discipline, pupil progress, curriculum modifications, housing and teaching personnel must always be considered in terms of pupil attendance. When attendance is irregular these problems become more difficult of solution and the efficiency of the entire system is thereby impaired. The fact that these phases of school administration are inextricably interwoven suggests that a study of the causes of non-attendance could be of value to those responsible for administering the schools.

Need for Study

Although school attendance has been the subject of much study in recent years, statistics show that the
desired goal in attendance has not yet been reached. In
the state of Virginia, for instance, statistics show that
for the school session 1937-38 only seventy nine per cent
of the total population of school age was enrolled in
the public schools. More than 150,000 children between
the ages of six and twenty were not attending school.
In addition to this the percentage of attendance based
upon enrollment for the session 1937-38 was only ninety
for the entire state.

In Franklin County, the field of this study, the
attendance record is somewhat below that of the state
average for the same period. In this county only seventy
three per cent of the total school population was en-
rolled in the public schools, with more than 2,000
children of school age not attending any school. The
percentage of attendance based upon enrollment was 83.1
as compared with ninety for the state. Looking at the
record for a nine year period beginning in September
1929 and ending in June 1938, it is found that the per-
centage of attendance in the county is consistently less
than that for the entire state. A comparison of the re-
cord of the county with that of the state for this period
may be seen from the following table.
TABLE I. - PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOL ATTENDANCE
FOR THE SESSIONS 1929-30 TO 1937-38
INCLUSIVE FOR FRANKLIN COUNTY AND
FOR THE STATE OF VIRGINIA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Session</th>
<th>Franklin County</th>
<th>State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1929-30</td>
<td>75.6</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930-31</td>
<td>79.2</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931-32</td>
<td>83.6</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932-33</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933-34</td>
<td>84.9</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934-35</td>
<td>82.2</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935-36</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936-37</td>
<td>80.9</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937-38</td>
<td>83.1</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average for 9-year period</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td>87.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Reports of Superintendent of Public Instruction 1930-38.

The above table shows that the state maintained an average attendance for this nine-year period of 87.9 per cent while in Franklin County the average for the same period was 81.8 per cent. It also shows that the record of the county, in this respect, for each of the nine sessions was consistently below that of the state.
Not only is the attendance record of the county below that of the state average, but examination reveals that the school system has failed to hold the children of early adolescence in school for the entire term. During the session 1937-38, twenty five per cent of the children 12 years of age were out of school and consequently dropped from the school roll for periods ranging from 10 to 40 days in length. For age 13 the percentage dropped was twenty four and for age 14 it was twenty eight. These children have been out of school to the extent that normal progress was impossible and this condition is reflected in the fact that for the same session sixteen per cent of the children of these ages were not promoted at the close of the session.

Although the children of the above ages come within the provisions of the compulsory attendance law, further investigation shows that this law has not operated to prevent school absences to any appreciable degree. From a check of cases reported by teachers during the session 1938-39 it is found that five per cent of the children 7 - 15 years of age were reported once during the session for violating the attendance law. Slightly over two per cent were reported twice.

1. For a digest of the Va. Comp. Attendance Laws see Appendix pp VI to VIII.
and one and one-tenth per cent were reported three or more times. Of these cases twenty seven parents were summoned to the Trial Justice Court for violation of the law. One of these was given a jail sentence of thirty days which was served, twenty one were given suspended sentences of thirty days each and five cases were dismissed. None of these were required to pay a fine or court costs. The attitude of the court was not to punish the parent for his previous violation of the law, but to require him to keep his children in school in the future.

The foregoing facts reveal a serious problem of school administration in Franklin County. The major portion of funds for current operation are received from the state and the amount that the county receives each year depends upon the average daily attendance maintained. Under the present state law, the county receives $500 for each group of twenty eight pupils in average daily attendance. If the attendance could have been increased by 6.9 per cent for the session 1937-38 and thus brought up to the state average this would have increased the absolute attendance by 310 and would have provided an increase of $5,500 in the state appropriation for the county during the following session. This increase in attendance would not have required additional teachers or buildings because these items must be provided on the basis of
enrollment rather than attendance. This additional appropriation, therefore, could have been used to broaden the high school offering or to purchase much needed instructional supplies for teachers.

From the standpoint of school efficiency the above record of attendance cannot be justified. Cubberly, in discussing the importance of improving school attendance, makes the following comment:

"Today one measure of the efficiency of a school system is the percentage of the school population continuously in school; another is the percentage of children who have passed the compulsory age limit who continue in school." 1

From either standpoint of efficiency as stated by Cubberly, the school system here does not measure up to standard; for as the foregoing facts reveal the school population is not continuously in school. After age fifteen, the limit of the compulsory attendance law in Virginia, the facts show that pupils drop out of school in even greater proportion than previously.

1. Ellwood P. Cubberly, Public School Administration, 1929, p 580.
Because of this record of poor attendance there is need for a study of the causes contributing to this condition, to the end that some steps may be taken to bring about an improvement in school attendance. Further evidence also, of the need for study lies in the fact that Franklin County is not alone in this respect. Conditions here, while not typical of the average county in the state, are similar in many ways to those conditions found in several of the poor counties in rural Virginia. As examples of these similarities a few facts are given here in regard to the occupation of the people, level of income, standard of living and educational status.

Occupation of the People

Franklin County, with an area of 697 square miles and situated amid the eastern foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, has a population of 24,337. 1 According to Gee and Carson, in a study made in 1927, the county ranked seventh in area and sixteenth in population among the counties of the State. 2 According to the same study only

three counties had a larger farm population, these being Pittsylvania, Halifax and Mecklenburg. 1

The people here pursue a diversified form of farming. The north and west sections of the county consist of high rolling lands and here the chief product is fruit. The east and south sections of the county are well adapted to tobacco growing. Tobacco is the chief crop of this section. Tenancy is not a pressing problem in the county, there being less than thirty per cent of the farm people classified as tenants. 2 The trend is towards more farms and smaller acreage, but in spite of this the county is below the state average in improved farm acreage per capita of farm population. The latest figures available show a per capita acreage of improved land of 7.6 for the county as compared with 8.4 for the state. 3

Level of Income

From the standpoint of farm family income, the county ranks somewhat below the state average. According to the same study, 4 it was found that for the year 1930 sixty nine per cent of the farm workers in the county had a marginal

1. Ibid, p 155.
income, while for the state as a whole the percentage was sixty five. In 1925 the per capita buying power for the county was $227, as compared with $308, for the state. There were sixty counties that had a greater per capita buying power. At the same time there were fifty seven counties that had greater per capita banking resources.  

The level of income is further reflected in the fact that in 1936 the per capita assessment of all property for purposes of local taxation was $306, there being ninety three counties with a greater per capita assessed valuation. Based upon the school census of 1935 the county's assessed valuation represents  

in wealth for each child of school age.

Standard of Living

As would be concluded from the low level of income in the county, the standard of living is low. Garnett and Borth found that the index was less than the state average and approximately the same as that of the adjoining counties, in a computation which was based upon the number of farm homes with electricity, telephone, radio, automobiles and water piped to dwelling. On this basis Franklin had an index of thirty one as compared with fifty five for Roanoke, thirty

2. Ibid, p 196.
for Bedford and twenty seven for Floyd counties. ¹ These facts pertaining to economic conditions suggest a need for a study of home conditions as a basis for improving home-school relationships, and as a basis for the inauguration of plans for family rehabilitation.

**Educational Status**

In educational matters the county has consistently ranked low. According to a rating index of the State Department of Education in 1926 Franklin was rated at the bottom of the list of counties in terms of educational efficiency and school costs. For the school session 1937-38 there were only nine counties that had a lower average of teachers' salaries and seventeen with a lower per capita cost of education. Fifteen counties had a lower percentage of attendance. The percentage of illiteracy based upon the population ten years of age and above was 14.3 in 1926 as compared with 11.8 for the State. There were sixty four counties with a lower percentage of illiteracy than Franklin. These facts indicate a need for study to determine what part an adult education program might play in reducing illiteracy and developing a school consciousness on the part of the people.

Related Studies

Many of the authorities in the field of school administration deal with the problem of school attendance in a general way. In addition to this a number of research studies have been conducted dealing with the causes of absence and their relation to certain factors in restricted areas. For the purpose of classification these authorities and studies are grouped here according to phases of the problem considered. The arrangement is as follows:

First, there are those studies which show the need for cooperation of the school, the parent and child as a means of improving school attendance. Douglas, in discussing attendance from the standpoint of administration, emphasized the need of making the school attractive as a deterrent to absence and tardiness, and thus make an appeal to the child. ¹ Engelhardt also saw the need for an intelligent study of the underlying causes of absence as a basis for securing the desired cooperation among the home, child and teacher. It was stated by him in this manner:

"Regularity of attendance required cooperation on the part of the home, the child and the teacher. Intelligent regulation of attendance required rational treatment, study and an understanding of the causes underlying the violation." ²

---

2. Fred Engelhardt, Public School Organization and Administration, 1931, p 358.
Cooper made a thorough and lengthy study of attendance in the rural schools of Delaware in which he considered the sociological aspects of the problem. In this study he showed that best results are obtained when the old "Police type" of truant officer is replaced by the trained social worker who seeks the cause of absence and works through the home in an effort to remove the cause.¹

Second, there are studies which show the causes of absence, and the effect on attendance of sex, nationality, and employment. Collins conducted a study in which he made a comparison of absence from school on account of sickness and from causes other than sickness among boys and girls. He found that girls were absent slightly more than boys because of sickness and that boys were absent more from reasons other than sickness.² Dietrich investigated the causes of absence and the effect on attendance of sex, nationality, and employment in a junior high school in California. She showed that these factors were common difficulties to attendance thus demanding that the

1. Herman Cooper, Progress and Attendance of Rural School Children, 1930.

school be vitally concerned with helping the home and the child to make the necessary adjustments.¹

Third, are those studies concerned with the relation between school cost and length of term, and attendance. The most significant study of these factors is that conducted by Myers comprising 446 counties in seven southern states.² From this investigation it was shown that school cost and length of school term have but little to do with attendance. Douglas, however, believes that school expenditures which improve the appearance of the school deserve to improve attendance. ³ Also in this connection, the Educational Policies Commission sees a need for expanding free education by providing books, other supplies and transportation, as well as maintenance grants in some cases for families of the low income group as a means of keeping children from these families in school more regularly.⁴

The fourth phase of the problem that has been investigated is that phase dealing with the type of compulsory attendance laws and their application. The most notable study here is that made by Walsh in the state of Wisconsin.

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¹ Carrie Margaret Dietrich, A Study of Non-attendance in Junior High School, Masters S. Col., 1935.
⁴ The Structure and Administration of Public Education in the U. S., Educational Policies Commission, N.E.A.
He made a survey of statistical data on the causes of absence in 157 schools in small communities and traced the application of the law to these cases. It was shown here that there is need for revising attendance laws in order that the problem may be attacked from its social and economic viewpoints rather than that simply of law enforcement by a truant officer.¹

In the fifth place, there are studies that outline long-time planning programs for school districts or counties. An example of this is a comprehensive study of the school system in Franklin County, Kentucky, by the Kentucky Department of Education in which a plan was outlined for developing a central high school and for a gradual consolidation of high school districts in order to provide an educational program for all of the children of the county.² Another example of this type of study is the Virginia State Planning Board which cooperates with the Department of Education in making surveys of Virginia counties, the purpose of which is to plan a long-time program to provide for an improved offering within reach of every child.

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1. Joseph A. Walsh, Organization for the Administration of School Attendance in Wisconsin Communities under 5,000 population, Masters, U. of Minn., 1934.
The seriousness of the problem of non-attendance at school is evident from the above digest of literature in this field. Authors who have studied school administration are concerned about establishing sound principles for a program of improved attendance; and research workers have been interested in determining the real causes of absence in restricted areas. These studies, although scattered geographically and concerned with a variety of factors form a basis for the present study. So far as the author has been able to determine, no previous study has dealt with the underlying causes of absence in a rural county. This study will therefore, be concerned with the background factors common in rural life, that stand as obstacles to improved school attendance.

The Purpose of this Study

With the foregoing background factors in mind, it is now possible to define the scope of the problem to be considered. While there are many factors involved in the problem of attendance in this particular area, the purpose of this study is to determine the underlying causes of absence from school, among children 12-14 years of age inclusive, in the schools of Franklin County. In order to accomplish this purpose an answer is sought to the following questions:
What are the causes of absence as reported by teachers?

What are the causes of absence as given by parents?

What relation exists, if any, between absence and these background factors:
   The education of the parent?
   Economic conditions in the home?
   The parents' attitude toward school?

Since the reasons for absence may be colored somewhat by the bias of the person making the report, it seems desirable to consider the causes from the viewpoint of both the teacher and the parent in order to arrive at an accurate conclusion in regard to the real causes. Somewhere between the attitude of the teacher and that of the parent, it is believed that there may be found the true reason for absence.

After these causes have been determined there is yet the question of how these absences are affected by the factors of education and school attitude of parents, and economic conditions in the homes. These conditions may prejudice the teacher in reporting causes and may influence the parent in his reasons for keeping his children out of school. Again, these factors may actually contribute to the reasons for absence and as such, constitute an important phase of such a study.

It was with these thoughts in mind that this study
was undertaken, in the hope that some conclusion may be reached which will make it possible to bring about better attendance in school. The procedure which was followed in pursuing this study will be outlined in the following chapter.
CHAPTER II. - METHODS OF PROCEDURE

General Procedure

Since the first problem presented in this study was to determine the causes of absence as reported by the teacher, a questionnaire was prepared and mailed to all white teachers in Franklin County on November 1, 1936. This questionnaire served two purposes, the first of which was to secure the reasons for absence; and secondly, the questionnaires returned provided a list of children, which was used as a basis for selecting a group of families to be studied by means of a personal interview. The families thus selected were interviewed in order to determine the reasons for absence as given by parents, and in order to determine what relation exists between absence and the background factors. To simplify procedure, the groups to be studied were decided upon before the questionnaires were sent to teachers.

Groups Studied

Because it was desirable to study all types of absence the following groups were selected: late enrollees, drop-outs, and enrolled absentees. By selecting families from each of these classes, it was possible to consider not only the irregular attendance of those pupils enrolled, but also the reasons for dropping out of school and the reasons
for retarded enrollment in school. For purposes of this study the above groups are defined in a narrow sense as a basis for selecting the families to be investigated.

Definitions

"Late enrollees" as used here refers to those children between the ages of 12-14 years inclusive who entered school after fifteen days or more of the school term had elapsed.

"Drop-outs" includes those children between the ages of 12-14 years inclusive enrolled during a part of the session 1937-38 who were not enrolled in any school during the session 1938-39. As used in this study it does not include those children who completed the term 1937-38 and failed to enter school during the following session.

"Enrolled absentees" is used to include all those children between the ages of 12-14 years inclusive who were absent five days or more during the month of November 1938.

Basis of Selection of Group

On the basis of the above definitions teachers were asked to fill in a copy of the questionnaire sent them for each "late enrollee", "drop-out" and "enrolled absentee", ages 12-14 years inclusive, for their respective class rooms. These questionnaires, when returned, were checked with the attendance record for the previous school year in
order to eliminate those children who were absent from school less than twenty days during that session. This was done in order to secure a group of children who had been in irregular attendance for a period of at least two school sessions. Where more than one child from a family was listed, the oldest was retained and the others discarded in order to have the same number of families as there were children.

The list remaining after this elimination process contained 224 children from the same number of families. Because this list was too long for interview in a limited time due to the large area over which the families were scattered, one-half of the families were chosen. This was done by arranging the names alphabetically and selecting each even number thus obtaining a list of 112 pupils from this number of families. After the cases to be studied were definitely decided upon in the above manner, it was then necessary to develop a technique for collecting the data necessary to carry out the purpose of the study.

Method of Procedure

The questionnaire which was sent to teachers provided a space whereby the teacher could indicate what, in her
judgment, was the reason for absence from school. The results obtained from these questionnaires were tabulated in percentages and will be presented in the following chapter to show the reasons for absence as reported by the teacher.

The information secured through the interview dealt with the reasons for absence as given by parents and the background factors of family life. A form was prepared for this purpose and tried out on several families to determine what changes were needed to make the form applicable to the different types of cases. From these experiences with trial cases the form was revised and mimeographed in sufficient quantity to provide a copy for use with each family interviewed. This form was arranged so that each item might be easily checked after the interview. To secure the information desired it was necessary to win the confidence of the parent by explaining that the information thus obtained would not be used against him for any purpose. It was also necessary to follow an informal procedure, taking a few notes as necessary during the conversation. At the close of the

1. A copy of this form will be found on pages 1 and 11 of the appendix.
2. A copy of the interview form will be found on pages iii, iv and v of the appendix.
interview the interview form was then checked, using the
notes taken to supplement where memory was insufficient.

The data obtained in this manner were tabulated in
terms of percentages, and will be presented at the proper
point in the following chapters to show the purpose in-
tended; namely, to determine the parents' reasons for
keeping children out of school and to determine the re-
lation of absence to certain background factors.
CHAPTER III. - REASONS FOR ABSENCE

Introduction to Data

The data pertaining to reasons for absence were obtained from questionnaires sent to teachers and from personal interviews with 112 heads of families. The families studied were selected on the basis of pupil absence from school over a two year period in order to confine the study to those children persistently absent. These families are widely scattered over the county and thus represent a cross section of the entire county with reference to irregular school attendance. The location of families, as well as the number of children in each family, is shown in Fig. 1, page 24.

School Record of Children Studied

Before considering the reasons for absence it was necessary to examine the school record of the children selected to determine the extent of absence and the effect of this absence on school progress. The facts with reference to absence and the effect of absence on pupil progress in school are shown in Table II. and Table III., page 25.
FIG. I - LOCATION OF FAMILIES INTERVIEWED IN FRANKLIN COUNTY, VIRGINIA, WITH NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN EACH FAMILY. 

(Map by courtesy of State Planning Board)

a. Each circle represents one family and the figure in the circle indicates the number of children in the family.
TABLE II. - DISTRIBUTION OF ABSENCES OF PUPILS
STUDIED OF FRANKLIN COUNTY, VIRGINIA, AS
RECORDED IN ATTENDANCE REGISTERS FOR
SESSION 1937-38

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAYS ABSENT</th>
<th>NUMBER OF PUPILS</th>
<th>PER CENT OF GROUP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-39</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 - More</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>87.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE III. - PROMOTIONAL RECORD OF PUPILS STUDIED
OF FRANKLIN COUNTY, VIRGINIA, AS RECORDED
IN ATTENDANCE REGISTERS FOR SESSION 1937-38

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLASSIFICATION</th>
<th>NUMBER OF PUPILS</th>
<th>PER CENT OF GROUP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promoted</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>54.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failed</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>40.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of School</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above tables show that absence from school was a
serious factor in connection with the education of the
children studied. All of these children were absent for twenty days or more during the session 1937-38 while more than two-thirds of them were absent for forty days or more. The effect of absence was reflected in their record of progress for the year. Slightly more than one-half of them were promoted at the close of the session, and 40.2 per cent were retained in their grades. Over five per cent of the group were out of school for the entire session. Of the entire school enrollment for the same session 1937-38, there were promoted 75.9 per cent, failed 13.9 per cent and dropped out of school during the session 10.2 per cent.¹ The high percentage of failures for the group studied has special significance when considered with relation to the ages of these children. In a study of Retentions and Drop-outs by the State Department of Education it was found that both groups were from one to two years over age as compared with the normal age for their respective grades. In this study it was also shown that retentions and drop-outs of Franklin County were approximately two months older than the average for the state.²

¹ Annual School Report for Franklin County, session 1937-38.
Reasons for Absence

In view of the extent of absence among the children investigated, and its effect upon their progress in school, it was logical to make inquiry into the causes of absence. In pursuit of the answer to this question, the reasons for absence were investigated first from the standpoint of the teacher and second from the parent's viewpoint. The reasons, as reported by teachers were compiled from the questionnaires sent them. The parent's reasons were secured from a personal interview with the head of each family. The reasons as secured from these two sources are shown in Tables IV. and V. immediately following:

**Table IV. - Distribution of Reasons for Absence of Group Studied of Franklin County, Virginia, as Reported in Teachers' Questionnaires**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for Absence</th>
<th>No. of Pupils</th>
<th>Per Cent of Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kept at home to work</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indifference of parents'</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sickness of child</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; &quot; family</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of books and clothing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance from school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truancy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reason given</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reference to Tables IV. and V. shows that while there were differences of opinion as to reasons for absence between the teachers on the one hand and parents on the other, the trend was much the same in each case. For instance, both teachers and parents gave most frequently the reasons that children were out of school in order to assist parents with work at home. The teacher gave this situation credit for
37.5 per cent of the absences while the parents said that it accounted for 32.4 per cent. From the standpoint of either the teacher or the parent it is evident that this factor was responsible for more absences than any other single reason.

In second place the teachers gave "Indifference of Parents" as the reason for absence. This attitude factor accounted for 28.6 per cent of the absences. In order to compare this percentage with that given by parents it is necessary to consider six specific statements that best expressed the attitude of parents toward the school or teacher. They are as follows:

"Does not like school."
"Has as much education as I have."
"Not making progress in school."
"Dislike for teacher."
"Has all the education he needs."
"Teacher not fair to child."

These reasons accounted for 46.5 per cent of the absences according to parents' statements. Together they indicate a state of dissatisfaction with the school system on the part of a large group of parents. If this factor is considered in connection with the first reason listed, it is possible that in some cases the teacher thought the child was kept at home to work when in reality he was out of school because of some complaint he harbored against the teacher or because of the parents'
dissatisfaction with some conditions in the school.

Sickness either on the part of the child or some member of the family, accounted for 30.5 per cent of the absences in the opinion of teachers. According to the parents, sickness was responsible in sixteen per cent of the cases.

Among reasons accounting for only a small part of the absences was "lack of books and clothing" which teachers reported in 3.6 per cent of the cases. Parents did not give this as a primary reason, although a few parents did mention as an additional reason the fact that their children did not have adequate books or clothing. The teachers thought that "distance from school" was a reason in only 1.8 per cent of the cases, but the parents said that this accounted for 7.1 per cent of the absences. These parents explained that their children had streams to cross or rough paths to travel and that in many cases the bus schedule required that children leave home by day-light and not return until almost dark during the short winter days. Truancy was listed as a reason in one case by the teacher and one parent said his child was absent because of fear of contagious disease.

It is significant that in 7.1 per cent of the cases both teachers and parents failed to give any definite
reason for absence. The teacher usually qualified her reply by saying that she did not know the reason or that there was no reason for absence. The parents in this group who hesitated to give any reason at all would, upon insistence, say that they were "too poor" to patronize the school, they saw no need of sending to school, or the school or teacher was "too sorry".

Type of School Attended

Further analysis of the reasons for absence showed that absence was not confined to any one type of school. On the other hand both the consolidated schools and the one and two-room schools had about the same proportion of the families whose children were absent much of the time. The distribution of the group studied between the large and small schools is illustrated in Fig. 2, page 32. A similar distribution of the total school enrollment 7-15 years of age is shown in Fig. 3, page 32. These indicate that approximately the same ratio existed for the families investigated, as that for the school population between the compulsory age limits. When taken together they indicate that absence is a problem within the home and is not affected materially by the size of the school available.

In Fig. 4, page 33, the percentage of attendance
FIG. 2.—PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN STUDIED OF FRANKLIN COUNTY, VIRGINIA, ACCORDING TO TYPE OF SCHOOL ATTENDED.

FIG. 3.—PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOL POPULATION 7-15 YEARS OF AGE OF FRANKLIN COUNTY, VIRGINIA, ACCORDING TO TYPE OF SCHOOL ATTENDED.
FIG. 4.—PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOL ATTENDANCE IN FRANKLIN COUNTY, VIRGINIA ACCORDING TO TYPE OF SCHOOL ATTENDED.
in consolidated schools, in one and two-room schools, and in all the schools is shown for a five year period. From this illustration it is clear that there was no consistent difference in attendance as between the small and large schools. It does indicate, however, that there was a greater variation from year to year in the larger schools than was the case in the smaller schools.

Chief Causes of Absence

The facts presented in this chapter show that the chief causes of absence were "Kept at home to work" and "Indifference of the parents". These two reasons accounted for two-thirds of the absences according to both the teachers and parents. From both sources it was found that children were kept at home in order to assist with the chores more often than for any other reason. Similarly it was shown that the attitude of parents toward the school or teacher was second in frequency as a reason for absence. The chief difference of opinion between teacher and parent lay in the fact that teachers placed more emphasis on the first reason (Kept at home to work) than parents and parents indicated a greater tendency toward "Indifference" than teachers reported.

These facts taken together indicate that economic conditions and parental attitudes constitute major problems the improvement of which are basic to a solution of the attendance problem.
CHAPTER IV. - RELATION OF BACKGROUND FACTORS TO ABSENCE

Factors Considered

Because the two factors "Kept at home to work" and "Indifference of parents" were responsible for more than one-half of the absences and because there was a wide variation between the emphasis placed upon these factors by teacher and parent, it was necessary to inquire further into the background conditions found to exist among the families interviewed in order to determine the effect of these conditions upon attendance. The information secured with reference to these conditions was grouped under three headings, namely: "The economic conditions in the home", "The parents' educational background", and "The parents' attitude". In order to present clearly the facts with reference to each phase of family background, the tables pertaining to each phase are arranged consecutively and are followed by an interpretation of the facts. These data are offered in answer to the following questions: -

Was the economic level in the home sufficient to afford for the children the basic needs of normal children?

Was the educational status of the parents high enough to encourage the social and mental development of the children?

Have "economic poverty" and ignorance combined, created a situation in which parents are either indifferent or antagonistic toward the school system?
The Economic Conditions

The tables immediately following are arranged to show the economic conditions that existed in the homes and the financial hardships under which these parents labored.

**TABLE VI. - DISTRIBUTION OF ANNUAL GROSS INCOME OF GROUP STUDIED OF FRANKLIN COUNTY, VIRGINIA, AS COMPILED FROM PERSONAL INTERVIEWS WITH 112 HEADS OF FAMILIES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ESTIMATED ANNUAL INCOME</th>
<th>NUMBER OF FAMILIES</th>
<th>PER CENT OF GROUP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$0 - $99.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100. - 199.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200. - 399.</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>33.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>400. - 599.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>600. - 799.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>800. - 999.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000. - 1199.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1200. - 1499.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1500. - Above</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE VII. - DISTRIBUTION OF AMOUNT SPENT FOR FOOD BY FAMILIES STUDIED OF FRANKLIN COUNTY, VIRGINIA, ACCORDING TO RESULTS OF INTERVIEW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANNUAL AMOUNT SPENT $</th>
<th>NUMBER OF FAMILIES</th>
<th>PER CENT OF GROUP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 - 24</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 - 49</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 - 74</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>30.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75 - 92</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 - 124</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>125 - 149</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150 - 174</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>175 - 199</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200 - 249</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250 - More</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No estimate obtained</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a. The amount listed as spent for food represents an approximation made by the parent. Where he was unable to make an estimate he was assisted by taking the amount spent during the past month and thus estimating the annual outlay.*
### TABLE VIII. - PUBLIC ASSISTANCE RECEIVED BY GROUP STUDIED OF FRANKLIN COUNTY, VIRGINIA, FROM WELFARE AGENCIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITEMS FURNISHED</th>
<th>NUMBER OF FAMILIES</th>
<th>PERCENT OF GROUP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textbooks</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing and food</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No aid</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>112</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE IX. - HOME STATUS OF GROUP STUDIED OF FRANKLIN COUNTY, VIRGINIA, AS GATHERED FROM PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOME STATUS</th>
<th>NO. OF FAMILIES</th>
<th>PERCENT OF GROUP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sole owner</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>45.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortgaged property</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenant a</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renter b</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>33.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>112</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**a.** Those families who secure living quarters and a stipulated share of crops raised in return for their cultivation of the farm acreage.

**b.** Those families who pay a stipulated sum for rent by the month or year.
The preceding tables show that financial conditions were serious with this group of families. More than one-half of the families had an annual income of less than $400, which is much below the average of $600 for "poor families" in Virginia according to a study made by Gee & Stauffer.¹ Slightly more than fifteen per cent had an income of $600 or more. In addition the families had an average of 4.4 children. Six or more persons in a family were living on an income so meagre that the basic needs of the family were only partially provided. Nearly one-half of the families spent less than $75 per year for food, in spite of the fact that they lived on poor farms and in many cases did not produce enough vegetables to supply the family. Milk, butter, and eggs were limited and the family diet was largely bread, vegetables in season, beans in winter, and "fat back".

The clothing was limited to work day apparel which consisted of overalls and hand-made shirts for the men and boys, while the women wore made-over garments of a variety of material ranging from gingham to woolen dresses. Much of this clothing for women and children was

furnished by the Welfare Department. Over one-fourth of the families received some clothing from this source while 8.9 per cent of them received both clothing and food. Even with this assistance the family was scantily clothed.

Although the income is low and food and clothing provided are poor in quality, if not in quantity, it is encouraging that 45.54 per cent of the families do own their homes. If to these are added those families with mortgaged property it is found that more than one-half of the group are living in homes that may be called their own. This group was found to be ambitious and desirous of improving their living standards. Here children were often kept out of school to assist with farm work or home chores which was made necessary by the fact that these families were over worked trying to hold their own or trying to meet payments as due on the home. The tenant class maintained the lowest standards that were found to exist. The houses were small, badly in need of repair and with many evidences of poor house-keeping. There was little concern for sanitation or health precautions and ambition was generally lacking. The renters were of two distinct classes. First were the families living in dilapidated buildings where the head of the family and his wife worked at odd jobs for nearby families and paid very little rent.
Second were the families renting a small house in the country while the head of the family worked at a regular job in town at a factory, store or office. With the first class, living standards were low comparable only to those of the tenant class, while those of the second class maintained fairly high standards of living. In the second class there were found many radios, magazines and newspapers. These families own cars, go to town frequently and the children are permitted to go to the movies occasionally.

On the whole, it was evident that the income of this group studied was too low to justify the hope that these families could provide adequately for the basic needs of family life; namely, food, clothing and shelter. Even with the best of homes visited competent management was lacking and this condition, in conjunction with low income has created a situation in which both the material and cultural development of the home is severely lacking.

**Educational Status of the Parents**

The second background factor to be considered in its relation to school attendance is that of the parents' educational status. While it was shown that absence from school was confined to families of the low income group, it is also true that aid in the form of textbooks, clothing and food did not result in any material improvement
in attendance from these families. A survey of families given assistance during the session 1938-39 shows that the percentage of attendance for this group was seventy-seven per cent as compared with that of eighty-three per cent for the entire county for the same period. Because absence is not therefore, always an economic problem it was necessary to study the home conditions in the light of educational background. The following tables present a picture of these conditions.

TABLE X. - FORMAL EDUCATION OF PARENTS STUDIED OF FRANKLIN COUNTY, VIRGINIA, AS COMPILED FROM PERSONAL INTERVIEWS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRADE COMPLETED</th>
<th>FATHER</th>
<th>MOTHER</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NO.</td>
<td>PERCENT</td>
<td>NO.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than one</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24.11</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27.68</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>29.47</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9.82</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ninth</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleventh</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended College</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent not living</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.92</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Data from questionnaire sent to teachers April 10, 1939.
TABLE XI. - NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF FAMILIES STUDIED OF FRANKLIN COUNTY, VIRGINIA, WHO HAD ACCESS IN THE HOME TO NEWSPAPERS, MAGAZINES AND MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEDIA AVAILABLE</th>
<th>NUMBER OF FAMILIES</th>
<th>PER CENT OF GROUP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily Newspaper</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piano</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victrola</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>41.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County Paper</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>39.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. The number and percentage distribution is not exclusive and there is some overlapping of items among the families.

In terms of formal education the statistics in Table X show that the parents of this group were "fifth graders". Actually 81.26 per cent of the fathers and 74.12 per cent of the mothers did not get beyond the fifth grade in school. One-half of the fathers and nearly one-third of the mothers did not get further than the second grade. The sources of information and opportunities for cultural enjoyment were severely limited as shown in Table XI. The radio, a most potent force in the home for cultural development, was found in less than one-fifth of the homes. The daily
newspaper was available in only four instances. The county paper and rural magazines were available to only the more fortunate. The victrola was found in nearly one-half of the homes but the supply of records was in nearly all cases limited to "Hill-billy" string music and religious hymns.

The limited educational background was further reflected in the oral and written expressions encountered during this study. As would be expected from the lack of formal education, the language spoken was both crude and provincial. From the conversation during the interview a few expressions often used were noted. A few of them are:

"Our teacher aint no 'count."
"Them chillun is mean an' hard to handle."
"So many books my chillun can't tote 'em."
"She's got 'nough book learnin' but no common sense."
"They got that ar' itch in school."

While the above and many other similar expressions are not typical of all the parents interviewed, they do represent a fair sample of the language spoken by the greater part of them.

Through an examination of the correspondence files of the attendance office it was possible to get a picture of the ability of these parents to express themselves in written form. The following letter from a parent in reply to a request that he send his child to school is a
conspicuous example of written form among the semi-illiterate as well as illustrative of the types of excuses given:

"In answer to the Report you have about Hemany My Boy not Being In Rolled in School I have no child that Lives Within 1½ miles of School but I Do have 3 children now In School that Has to Split the mud 2½ miles 2 of them twins only 7 years of age and Rite over the Same Road Las Winter you Paid $35. Dollar Per Month to hall From 3 to 5 Little Negroses and I no this to Be true I no What I see with my own Eyes and I no that no one negro in ten Dont Pay a Penny of taxes you Just afford my children Buss accomodation you have the negroses and Ill try too keep them in school more Regular and if you Doubt What I Say about the miles it is Just get in you car and measure it If it ant 3 miles or more Ill pay you For Your trip."

Another letter, similar in structure but different in viewpoint is the following from a parent who lives within one mile of a school bus:

"I never got your letter until today. -- is not but 6 years old and we live about 4 miles from Larel Bluff and it is al up the mountain and awful rought and it is 2 mile to -- and she got snake bit this summer and she complained with her leg so that is the reason I have not sent her when it is not so rought and she has not got a sole to go with her. -- has a child 11 years old and she never goes to school and she does not live no farther than we do. The child name is --. If I have to send her write me at once I thought you didnt have to send the until she was 7 year old."
These examples of oral and written expression show the problems involved in any attempt of the school to enlist the cooperation of this type of family, in the school program. These people are sadly lacking in formal education. Their opportunities in the home for information or cultural growth as well as wholesome recreation are strictly limited. In addition to this their social heritage is one of crude and provincial living which is reflected in their writing, speaking and thinking. From the combination of these conditions it was evident that the educational status of these parents was not sufficiently high to encourage the proper social and mental development of the children.

Attitude of Parents

Economic hardship made it extremely difficult for many of the parents of this group to keep their children in school regularly. Many of these parents were lacking in educational training to such an extent that they failed to realize the importance of regular attendance at school and were therefore unwilling to make the necessary sacrifices on this account. (See Table X., page 43 for formal education of parents and Table V., page 38 for parents reason for pupil absence). If the parents were favorably impressed with the school system
and were sympathetic toward school and teacher they would be much more inclined to make these sacrifices than would be the case where sympathetic understanding between teacher and parent does not exist. To determine what relationship existed between teachers and parents, the parents were questioned in regard to:

Their attitude toward school?  
Their attitude toward teacher?  
Parents' visits to school?  
Teachers visits in homes?  

The results thus obtained are presented in the tables that follow.

TABLE XII. - DISTRIBUTION OF PARENTS ATTITUDE TOWARD SCHOOLS FOR GROUP INTERVIEWED IN FRANKLIN COUNTY, VIRGINIA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ATTITUDE TOWARD SCHOOL</th>
<th>NUMBER OF FAMILIES</th>
<th>PER CENT OF GROUP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is all right</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly well satisfied</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A good school</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A poor school</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not know much about school</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE XIII. - DISTRIBUTION OF PARENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARD TEACHER FOR GROUP INTERVIEWED IN FRANKLIN COUNTY, VIRGINIA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ATTITUDE TOWARD TEACHER</th>
<th>NUMBER OF FAMILIES</th>
<th>PER CENT OF GROUP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>She is all right</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>55.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A good teacher in some ways</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She is unfair to my child</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She is a poor teacher</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above associating with my child</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE XIV. - FREQUENCY OF SCHOOL VISITS BY PARENTS FOR FAMILIES INTERVIEWED IN FRANKLIN COUNTY, VIRGINIA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FREQUENCY OF VISITS</th>
<th>NUMBER OF HOMES</th>
<th>PER CENT OF GROUP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>78.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE XV. - FREQUENCY OF HOME VISITS BY TEACHER FOR PARENTS INTERVIEWED IN FRANKLIN COUNTY, VIRGINIA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FREQUENCY OF VISITS</th>
<th>NUMBER OF HOMES</th>
<th>PER CENT OF GROUP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>42.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>55.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A study of the above tables shows that there was a lack of positive interest in the school system on the part of these parents. Little antagonism toward the school or teacher was expressed, though the answers given indicated an attitude of indifference. There was a tendency to blame the school system in general rather than the teacher which is indicated by the fact that over one-half of the parents said the teacher was "all right", while less than one-third said the school was "all right". It is significant that only a few parents listed specific objections to teachers but were in most cases content with the reply that the teacher was "all right", or that she

1. For attitude of parents toward schools see Table XII., page 47 and for attitude toward teachers see Table XIII., page 48.
was "a good teacher in some ways". It is equally significant that nearly one-third of the parents admitted that they did not know much about the school while less than ten per cent felt that they had a poor school. Those who said the school and teacher were "all right" left the impression quite clearly that they were simply satisfied and not that they were pleased with the school system. Lack of familiarity with or interest in the school was reflected by these parents who had no fixed opinion of the school system but simply said "It is all right". For them it was the easiest way to answer the question.

The attitude of indifference was further emphasized by the information obtained on teacher and parent visitation. The lack of systematic contact between parent and teacher was conspicuous. Only one parent said that he visited the school frequently while over three-fourths of them admitted that they had not visited the school at all. The record of the teachers in this respect was little better. In less than two per cent of the homes had the teacher been a frequent visitor while in more than one-half of the homes she had not been a visitor at any time. Many parents expressed the feeling that teachers only visited them when they had some disciplinary trouble with their children.
These facts support the argument that the inadequate family income aggravated by semi-illiterate parent-age has created a situation in which the parents are uninterested in the public school system, contented with almost any quality of educational offering and unwilling to participate in positive measures for school improvement. This attitude has resulted in much absence of children from school because the parents were not inclined to make the sacrifices necessary to provide adequate textbooks and clothing and to establish a spirit of understanding and cooperation with the school. Because the parents have been content and easily satisfied the teachers and school officials have not been stimulated to press for better school-community relationship. As a result the attitude of the teachers and school administrators has not contributed to a sound solution to the non-attendance problem.
CHAPTER V. - SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Purpose of Study

The impetus for this study was the recognition that school attendance in Franklin County had been irregular and below the average for the State of Virginia. This fact suggested the need for a first-hand study of the conditions associated with absence from school. To do this, it was necessary not only to investigate the reasons for absence but also to consider the home conditions among which the children were reared. This has been done in the preceding chapters. In order to make clear the summary that follows, the questions raised in Chapter I. are repeated here:

What are the causes of absence as reported by teachers?

What are the causes of absence as given by parents?

What relation exists, if any, between absence and these background factors:
- The education of the parent?
- Economic conditions in the home?
- The parents' attitude toward school?

Reasons for Absence

By a comparison of the results from teachers' questionnaires with those from interviews with parents, it was shown that the two sources agreed in all major respects. The differences were of minor importance. From both sources
the following conclusions were substantiated:

1. Children were kept at home to work more frequently than for any other single reason.

2. The attitude of parents toward the school, teacher or education in general was that of passive acceptance of conditions rather than positive satisfaction and was therefore second only to that of "Kept at home to work" as a cause of absence.

3. Sickness either of the child or some member of the family was responsible for approximately one-fifth of the absences.

4. Lack of books or clothing, distance from school or bus, and truancy were seldom responsible for absence accounting for less than ten per cent of the cases.

5. In 7.1 per cent of the cases studied neither the teacher nor parent was able to assign a definite reason for the child's absence from school.

A comparison showed that the results from parents differed from those given by teachers in the following respects:

1. Parents did not admit that they kept their children at home to work as frequently as teachers reported they did. Parents gave this reason credit for 22.4 per cent as compared with 37.5 per cent by teachers.

2. The parents admitted in 46.5 per cent of the cases that absence was due to indifference or dissatisfaction with school or teacher, while teachers reported that 28.6 per cent of the absence was due to indifference of parents. The teachers in many cases
believed that children were being kept at home because of need for their assistance with farm work when in reality the parents were dissatisfied with the school or teacher and had not let their dissatisfaction become known.

5. The teachers thought of all absence without a definite excuse as indifference while the parents showed in many instances that they were dissatisfied with the teacher or school program.

The home conditions among which the children were reared played an important part in the absence of these children from school. It was shown by the facts submitted that the annual family income for this group was so low that only the barest necessities of life could be provided. The amount spent for food was insufficient to provide a balanced diet and children were denied the necessary health building food from milk and eggs. The clothing was limited to cheap and thinly woven garments most of which were home-made. The houses were small, of poor construction and did not provide adequate light, ventilation or sanitary accommodations. Only scanty provision was made for the basic needs of food, clothing and shelter with the result that the children were not afforded the opportunity for normal development and growth much less for cultural growth.

From the standpoint of educational background the situation was found to be discouraging. Three-fourths
of the parents did not get beyond the fifth grade in school, and over forty-one per cent of them had finished only the first or second grade. Approximately ten per cent were illiterate. The radio and daily paper were not available except in rare cases and reading matter of any kind was limited. There was no potent force for adult education or recreation within reach of the parents thus offering no opportunities for self education and enlightenment. The oral and written modes of expression were found to be crude and provincial typifying a lack of association either business or social with other people. Amid these conditions the children were without incentive for social or mental development. Educational ambition was lacking and emphasis in the home was, almost without exception, on providing for the material needs of the family.

The general attitude of the parents was found to be that of calm acceptance of existing conditions. The attitude toward the school, or teacher was one of indifference with only a small percentage of the parents expressing some definite reason for dissatisfaction. Parents had not formed the habit of visiting the school periodically and the teachers had done but little better in visiting the homes. The parents thought of education as non-essential and a good thing for people able to
afford it, while many teachers failed to recognize this responsibility for finding a solution to this problem. Parents failed to see in education possibilities for improvement of home conditions, economic and social. The combination of low income and lack of education resulted in a feeling of indifference toward the school system. This accompanied by a laissez faire policy on the part of school officials and teachers has resulted in much absence from school that otherwise could have been avoided.

Implications of this Study

The conclusions reached from this study suggest two very definite needs in the county at present. First, there is need for a re-vitalizing of the school program to make it more universal in scope and meet more effectively the needs of all the children. Second, there is need for a program of general and specialized adult education for the dual purpose of meeting the immediate need of these people and for building a healthier relationship between parents and school. The school authorities should take the necessary steps to initiate a program designed to meet these needs and should prosecute this program as fast as funds and other conditions will permit. It is only by such means that the existing conditions may be improved and the school system made to
serve all of the children effectively.

A Broader School Program

The reasons given for absence from school indicate the need for a re-vitalized school program. These reasons show that the school had little or no appeal for many families. This lack of appeal was due to a feeling that children were not profiting from their school experience and that teachers were unconcerned about the childrens' welfare. To remedy this situation several proposals are offered.

The present system of enforcing the compulsory attendance law is slow in producing results and is not designed to improve relationships between the parent and the school. There should be employed as truant officer a person trained in social welfare whose duty it would be to investigate home conditions in cases of absence and recommend to school authorities the proper procedure. The old "Police type" of officer who proceeds mechanically to enforce the law will not solve the problem; in many cases he aggravates conditions. It is important that the person employed have the social point of view and that he pursue the policy of seeking the underlying cause of absence. Not only should he seek the cause of absence but if due to economic or social conditions he should,
with the assistance of the public welfare department, take steps to improve the situation. Perhaps with intelligent supervision the family can be shown how to make better use of the facilities available. A more healthful diet may be possible from the products grown at home. With assistance old garments may be made into more comfortable and attractive clothing. Inexpensive repairs to the home that result in more wholesome living are possible when planned by a competent advisor. An important phase of this program of rehabilitation is that of encouraging the individuals to improve conditions through their own efforts.

The school offering has been narrow in scope, traditional in method and provided little more than the academic subjects commonly taught in small schools. Many children, therefore, have lost interest in these subjects, have become retarded and finally have either dropped out of school entirely or have attended irregularly. The school should offer courses of more practical value for children in sixth and seventh grades. The retarded child should be assigned special problems compatible with his age and maturity which he may pursue under the teacher's guidance. Less interest should be placed on formal grammar and academic problems in mathematics as well as the acquisition of facts in the subjects
of history and geography. A health program should be developed that would carry over into the homes, correct language usage should replace the formal grammar and mathematics should be distinctly associated with farm problems. Supervision of farm projects for boys and home-making classes for girls, on the sixth and seventh grade levels, should replace much of the formal instruction now given.

The lack of contact between parent and teacher has resulted in much misunderstanding on the part of both. Teachers should be required to visit in the homes of the children they are teaching, for by this means they will better understand the children and will do a better part by them. Also, this should result in an improved attitude on the part of parents. This should be expanded into a public relations program for the county designed to show what the schools are attempting to do, what they are doing and the improvements needed. Parents should be encouraged to visit the school by providing for them entertainment of a recreational nature. The interest of the people, whether it is hill-billy music, literary or athletic programs, should be considered in planning this program. In addition all other effective means of publicity should be employed. The county paper, the churches and local clubs, parent teacher associations, and mimeograph
letters should be utilized wherever available as well as personal visitation by teachers and local organization leaders. If carefully planned and continuously practised this program should do much to improve the attitude of parents and bring the parents and school closer together.

Adult Education Program

The facts presented in regard to home conditions revealed the need for a program of adult education. It was shown that much of the absence from school was due to conditions within the home—conditions which cannot be removed by dealing only with the school child. If the parent is scarcely able to read and write and his living standards are low through economic necessity, he could not be expected to make the same effort to keep his children in school that he would if these conditions were more favorable. To help him improve these conditions, a program of adult education is necessary. This program should on the basis of conditions shown to exist, have the following objectives:

1. The reduction of illiteracy.

2. Provision for "leisure time" education for the ordinary citizen whose formal education was limited.

3. Stimulate the adult population to become better informed.
4. Assist parents in making better use of materials available and thus raise the standard of living.

5. Furnish reliable information on economical expenditures.

To assist in realizing these objectives the following specific types of services are suggested:

1. Literacy classes should be organized in the small schools in isolated sections, and taught by a person trained in adult methods. These should be organized as groups to learn hand-crafts, rug making, basket weaving or other things that could be made in the home and sold, depending upon materials available. Once the group is brought together by this means, reading, writing and arithmetic could be taught incidentally.

2. General education classes should be organized at high school centers, or in churches or lodge halls for those people of a limited educational background. The point of attack for this group might well be the establishment of recreation centers which would provide for leisure time, enjoyment and extend opportunities for social development. The groups thus organized could be given the instruction they desire, in fields of general education.

3. A county library system should be established both to provide reading material desired and to stimulate an interest in continued study and mental growth. This should be accompanied by an efficient book distribution system in the hands of a trained librarian.

4. There should be home-making and vocational classes offering instruction
by means of evening classes in specific skills that can be utilized in the home or on the farm. The programs of the home and farm demonstration agents and home economics and agricultural teachers should be expanded with more emphasis upon adult instruction. The various governmental agencies should be coordinated under one responsible county committee in order that duplication of effort may be avoided and in order that farm people may know where to go for the information or assistance needed.

5. The standard of living can be raised materially by the intelligent use of materials available and by practising economy in articles purchased. Vocational classes should give instruction in making articles of use. Examples of this are rugs woven out of discarded garments and floor wax made out of by-products of the farm. Home economics teachers and home demonstration agents should prepare lists of menu for balanced diet which can be provided almost entirely from the farm. Teachers of agriculture and farm agents should give instruction in the improvement and repair of farm buildings and equipment. The library should provide information service on farm and home problems for those desiring this information.

Since it has been shown that irregular school attendance is closely associated with conditions in the home, the ultimate solution demands improvement in these conditions. The results of attempts at enforcement of the attendance law will be few and short lived unless the causes responsible for absence are removed. If the above suggestions are followed there is reason to hope that school attendance will improve materially and that those children already in
attendance will experience more rapid growth in every phase of normal child development. The accomplishment of these, if only to a small degree, will justify the time and labor devoted to a study of this problem.
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A thorough and lengthy study of attendance in the rural schools of Delaware - contains an excellent bibliography on the subject.


Chapter 28 XXVIII pp 579 - 603 deals with the problem of school attendance.

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What are the causes of absence? What are the effect on attendance of sex, nationality and employment? These and other questions are analyzed and discussed in logical fashion.


A discussion of the attendance problem and means of improving school attendance p 415 ff.

In Chapter XIII, pp 348-373, the author discusses the organization for the administration of pupil personnel.


A valuable collection of facts on living standards, tenancy and marginal income. A first hand study of conditions in the rural counties of Virginia.


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Contains data indicating that school costs and length of school term have little to do with attendance.

Reavis, George H. - Factors Controlling Attendance in Rural Schools. Teachers' College Contribution to Education No. 108, 1930 pp 69.

A study of 6450 children in the one-room schools of five counties in Maryland with reference to the influence of certain factors on attendance.


A good collection of enrollment and attendance figures for the nation as a whole.


Walsh, Joseph H. - Organization for and Administration of School Attendance in Wisconsin Communities under 5,000 population. Master's, U. of Minn. '34.

A study of attendance laws in Wisconsin and their application. Also a survey of statistical data on causes of absence in 157 schools by the questionnaire method.

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RECORD OF PUPILS NOT ENROLLED IN SCHOOL WITHIN 15 DAYS AFTER OPENING DATE

Name of child: ____________________ School: ____________________
Parent or Guardian: ________________ Address: ____________________
Age of child: ____________________ Grade: ____________________
Promoted last session: ____________________
Distance from school: ____________________
Distance from bus: ____________________
School attended last session: ____________________
Number days absent last session: ____________________
Number children in family: ____________________
Has School Board ever furnished textbooks for this family? ____________________
Has any relief agency or Red Cross provided clothing or other assistance? ____________________
What, in your opinion, is the reason for this child not having enrolled in school within the 15 days period? ____________________
______________________________
Has he enrolled to date? ____________________

______________________________
TEACHER
REPORT OF CHILDREN ABSENT FROM SCHOOL
(Make report for each child absent 5 days or more during month of November 1939)

1. Name of child: ______________________ 2. School: ______________________

3. Parent or Guardian: __________ 4. Address: ______________________

5. Age of child: __________ 6. Grade: ______________________

7. Number days absent November 1st to November 30th inclusive: ______________________

8. Was he promoted last session? ______________________

9. Distance from school: ______________________

10. Distance from bus: ______________________

11. Does he ride bus? ______________________

12. School attended last session: ______________________

13. Number days absent last session: ______________________

14. Number children in family: ______________________

15. What, in your opinion, is the reason for this child's absence from school? ______________________

________________________________________

TEACHER

DATE

11
RECORD OF INTERVIEW WITH PARENT

Name of Parent_________________________ Address_________________________

I. Personal
1. Is husband (or wife) living, dead, healthy, delicate, invalid?
2. Number of children in school_________________Ages_____________________
3. Number of children not in school_________________Ages_____________________
4. Grade completed by parents
   Father: ____________
   Mother: ____________

II. Do you own your home?
1. Sole owner
2. Mortgaged
3. Tenant
4. Renter
5. Explanation

III. Do you have the following?
1. Car________________________
2. Truck______________________
3. Tractor____________________
4. Horses______________________
5. Mules_____________________
6. Milk Cows_________________
7. Hogs______________________
8. Fowls_____________________

IV. Do you produce enough of the following to supply your family?
1. Corn_______________________
2. Wheat_____________________
3. Potatoes___________________
4. Pork_______________________
5. Milk_______________________
6. Eggs______________________
7. Canned fruit and vegetables___
8. Approximate amount spent for food during year________________

V. What is your estimated annual gross income?
1. $100.00_____________________
2. 200.00_____________________ 6. $1,000.00_____________________
3. 400.00_____________________ 7. 1,200.00_____________________
4. 600.00_____________________ 8. 1,500.00_____________________
5. 800.00_____________________ 9. 1,800.00_____________________
10. 2,000.00__________________
11. Over 2,000.00_____________

VI. What sources of income have you?
1. Farming____________________
2. Position with Government__
3. Regular job, factory, mill, store, office_______
4. Part time job, factory, mill, store, office_______
5. Relief work_______________
6. Income from investments_____
7. Income from other sources_____

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VII. Do you have the following in your home?
1. Daily Newspaper  4. Victrola
2. Radio  5. Magazines
3. Piano  6. County Paper

VIII. Have you received assistance from any source?
1. From County Welfare Department
2. From Community
3. From other sources
4. Free textbooks from School Board
5. Asked for aid and did not receive it
6. Needed assistance but did not ask for it
7. Criticism

IX. Is the health of your family good (for past year)?
1. Had no medical service
2. Consulted physician occasionally
3. Had physician in home occasionally
4. Had member of family in hospital
5. Had physician in home many times
6. Health of family generally good
7. Health of family generally fair
8. Health of family generally poor
9. Explanation

X. What do you think of your school?
1. Is it all right
2. I am fairly well satisfied
3. We have a good school
4. We have a poor school
5. Don't know much about it
6. Specific criticisms or suggestions

XI. What do you think of your child's teacher?
1. She is all right
2. She is a good teacher in some ways
3. She is unfair to my child
4. She is a poor teacher
5. She is above associating with my child
6. She visits us: Occasionally, Frequently, Not at all
7. We visit her: Occasionally, Frequently, Not at all
8. Specific Remarks:
XII. What is the reason for your child being absent from school?
1. Sickness of child________ Consult physician________
2. Sickness of family________
3. Quarantined________
4. Fear of contagious diseases________
5. Distance from school or bus________
6. Dislike for teacher________
7. Needed at home to work________
8. Does not like school________
9. Not making progress________
10. Has all the education he needs________
11. Teacher not fair to him________
12. Has as much education as I have________
13. Other reasons___________________________
A DIGEST OF THE VIRGINIA LAWS ON PUPIL ATTENDANCE TAKEN
FROM THE FOLLOWING SOURCES:

1. Chapter 314, Sections 683 and 684, page 508-510,

of Virginia, 1936.

I. REQUIREMENTS FOR ATTENDANCE AT SCHOOL:

1. Parents or guardians having control of child or
children who have passed seventh birthday and
have not passed the fifteenth birthday are re-
quired to send such child or children to a pub-
lic school.

2. Period of compulsory attendance commences at the
opening of the first term of the school which
the pupil attends and continues until the close
of such school for the school year.

II. EXCEPTIONS TO THE ABOVE REQUIREMENTS FOR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE:

1. Any child may attend a private denominational or
parochial school, or may be taught in the home
by a tutor or teacher of qualifications prescrib-
ed by the State Board of Education and approved
by the Division Superintendent, provided he attend
such school or be taught in the home during the
period of each year that the public schools are in
session and for the same number of days and hours
per day as the public schools.

2. The requirements of the law do not apply to children
physically or mentally incapacitated for school work
nor to those children suffering from contagious or
infectious diseases during the existence of such
disease.

a. Physical incapacity or disease shall be es-
   tablished by the certificate of a reputable
   practicing physician in accordance with rules
   and regulations adopted by the State Board
   of Education.

b. Mental incapacity shall be determined by such
   mental test or tests as may be prescribed by
   the State Board of Education.
3. The requirements of the law do not apply to children who have completed the elementary course of study prescribed by the State Board of Education and who are actually, regularly, and lawfully employed.

4. The requirements of the law do not apply to children who live more than one and one-half miles by the nearest travelled road or other usable route from a public school unless public transportation is provided within one mile of the place where such children live.

5. a. Blind or partially blind and deaf children are required to attend some school for the blind, or deaf, or the public schools unless it can be shown that such children are elsewhere receiving regularly, thorough instruction in studies usually taught in the public schools.

   b. These provisions do not apply to a child whose physical or mental condition is such as to render the above instruction inexpedient or impracticable.

6. The local board may, in its discretion, by giving public notice of thirty days and an opportunity for hearing, fix the age for compulsory attendance in the county as applicable to children who have reached the eighth birthday and have not reached the sixteenth birthday in lieu of the above requirements as to age.

III. PROCEDURE FOR ENFORCEMENT OF THE ATTENDANCE LAW:

1. Each principal teacher is required to report to the Division Superintendent within fifteen days after the opening of school the names of the pupils enrolled in school, giving age, grade and the name and address of parent or guardian.

2. Each principal teacher is required to submit another list within fifteen days after the opening of school giving to the best of her information, the names of all children within the limits of the compulsory attendance requirements with regard to age and distance.
3. The Division Superintendent is required to check their lists with the last school census and with reports from the Bureau of Vital Statistics. From these reports and other reliable sources available the Superintendent shall within fifteen days make a list of the names of children not enrolled in school and who are not exempt from school attendance.

4. The Superintendent or the Attendance Officer, if one is employed, is required to investigate all cases of non-enrollment and when no valid reason is found thereafter, notify the parent or guardian having control of the child to require the attendance of such child at the school within five days from the date of such notice.

5. A list of the persons so notified shall be sent by the Superintendent or Attendance Officer, if there is one, to the principal teacher of the school.

6. If the person having control of the child, fails within the specified time to comply with the law, the Division Superintendent, or Attendance Officer, if there is one, shall make complaint in the name of the Commonwealth before the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court of his city or county, if there be one. If not, then prosecution shall be instituted against such person in the Circuit or Corporation Court of the county or city.

7. Every teacher shall keep an accurate daily record of attendance of all children between seven and fifteen years of age, which shall be open at all times to inspection by any officer authorized to enforce the compulsory attendance law.

8. County School Boards and School Boards of cities have the power to appoint with the approval of the Division Superintendent of Schools, one or more Attendance Officers.

IV. PUNISHMENT FOR VIOLATION OF THE COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE LAW:

1. Any person violating this law is guilty of a misdemeanor.

2. Any person making a false statement concerning the age of a child for the purpose of evading the provisions of the attendance law is guilty of a misdemeanor.
3. Any child permitted to be habitually absent from school in violation of the attendance law shall be deemed a neglected child.

4. All cases of violation of the attendance law shall be prosecuted by the Attorney for the Commonwealth of the county or city.

5. Where it appears that a person having control of a child is unable to provide the necessary clothes in order that the child may attend school, such person shall not be punished unless the local school authorities furnish the child with the necessary clothes.