

LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN KANSAS.

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT.

1. Prelude.—The State establishes free schools for the sake of securing good citizens. No one can be a good citizen unless he has a fair understanding, at least, of the workings of his own government—the machinery of public affairs. Only as this runs smoothly, continuously, and with the least possible friction, is it of much real value to those in whose daily lives it necessarily plays such an important part. In a free government like our own, offices are filled—sometimes, it must be confessed, in a rather hap-hazard way—by persons chosen from the people and by the people. Hence, it is peculiarly necessary that every one, whether he serves or determines who shall serve, shall possess a fair degree of knowledge of the duties and responsibilities of the positions which he may be asked to fill, or in which he places his neighbors and friends. Without such knowledge, the civil service would soon become both inefficient and corrupt. In securing this necessary information, it is best to begin at home; with that in which we are naturally most interested. This will be the School District.

2. The School District.—One of the smallest civil divisions which the State recognizes is the School Dis-

trict. This is created by an officer known as the County Superintendent of Public Instruction. He has authority to divide the county into a convenient number of School Districts, and to make any changes in the boundaries of these that the interests of the inhabitants may require.¹ But there must never be less than fifteen persons of school age, *i. e.*, over five and under twenty-one years, in each District when created or changed; nor can a District be so changed as to make the amount of its bonds, if any have been issued, exceed five per cent. of the valuation of all property on the tax-rolls. The Superintendent must give due public notice of his intention to either create or change a District; and any one who is not satisfied with this action may state the facts to the Board of County Commissioners,¹ and ask them to interfere.

3. Organization.—The District is said to be organized when its first officers have been elected and have qualified; which means, have done all that the law requires them to do before entering upon the actual discharge of the duties of their offices. When duly organized, the District has a legal name: School District No. — (such a number as may be given it by the County Superintendent), — County, State of Kansas. By this name it is known in the courts, if it is ever sued or ever brings a suit; and this is the name which appears in all contracts or bonds, and in all deeds of real estate.

4. Annual Meetings.—The regular annual meeting of each District is held at the school-house, on the last Thursday in July, at two o'clock in the afternoon. At this meeting, each male to whom the State Constitution gives

¹ See paragraph 45 in chapter on County and County Officers.

the right to vote,¹ and each female over the age of twenty-one, and not disqualified,² is entitled to vote. The general business of the meeting is to elect a Director, Clerk, or Treasurer; to vote the annual tax with which to meet current expenses; to determine the length of time the school shall be taught, which shall not be less than three months; and whether a male or a female teacher shall be employed.³

5. Officers and their Duties.—The officers have been already named. One only is elected each year, and holds office for three years. Each takes the usual oath of office;⁴ and the Treasurer must give a bond, to be approved by the Director and Clerk, in double the amount of the funds which will probably come into his hands.

¹ He must be at least twenty-one years of age; a citizen of the United States, or, if foreign born, must have at least declared his intention to become a citizen; and must have resided in Kansas six months, and in the township (or district) at least thirty days, next preceding the election.

² The same limitations as are placed on males; chiefly, when under guardianship, of unsound mind, if ever convicted of felony, or guilty of taking a bribe, or of fighting a duel.

³ Of course, *all* that may be done at such a meeting is not given. That would be as impossible as to give all the powers and duties of a public officer. The compiled laws of the State will always furnish explicit details; but one of the best ways of getting information is by personal observation and inquiry. Scholars should be encouraged to attend the annual meeting, and note carefully all that is done there. A report should then be made to the school, and some time given to inquiry and discussion. Public officers might be questioned as to their duties and methods, and the results detailed to the school. Public affairs should be studied just as men study any trade or calling; not theoretically, but practically.

⁴ I do solemnly swear that I will support the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the State of Kansas, and faithfully discharge the duties of the office of ——. So help me God.

6. The three officers constitute the *District Board*; and to this is given general charge of all District affairs. It levies the annual tax; has the care and keeping of the school-house, and of all other property belonging to the District; hires the teachers; decides what text-books shall be used; can suspend any pupil guilty of immorality, or of persistent violations of any of the regulations of the school;¹ and must visit the school at least once each term.

7. Besides these general duties, each member of the Board has special work to do. The *Director* presides at all District meetings; must sign all orders drawn by the Clerk, or they are not valid; and appears for the District in all cases in court, unless the voters otherwise direct. The *Treasurer* receives all school moneys from the County Treasurer, as all taxes are collected through the latter, and pays these out on order of the Clerk and Director; keeping such accounts of these transactions as will enable him to present a detailed report at each annual meeting. The *Clerk* keeps a record of all the school matters in the District. He draws all orders for payments of salaries and current expenses; makes a detailed report at each annual meeting, covering all the statistics of the school year;² makes all the necessary reports to the County Superintendent; and acts as the Secretary of the District Board and of all District meetings.

¹ Such suspension is limited in time to the current quarter in which it is made, and an appeal may be taken to the County Superintendent.

² Such as number of children of school age; number in attendance; length of the school term; receipts and disbursements, etc.

8. *General Provisions.*—Sometimes it becomes necessary to form a District lying partly in two or more counties. This is called a *Joint District*. Sometimes two or more Districts unite for the purpose of securing a graded school for instruction in the higher branches. This is known as a *Union District*. In each of these Districts the government is substantially the same as that of an ordinary District. When a *Joint District* is formed of territory lying in two or more counties, it is formed by the concurrent action of all the county superintendents concerned, and cannot be altered without their joint consent. Such District is under the supervision of the superintendent of the county in which lies the largest amount of territory embraced in the District.

9. Every child between the ages of eight and fourteen years is required by law to be in some school, public or private, for not less than twelve weeks in each year, unless excused by the District Board for good cause shown. It is the duty of the Director to enforce this *Compulsory Law*, and to see that all violations of it are punished.

10. Any School District in the State may, at its annual meeting, vote a small tax¹ for the purpose of securing a *school library*. The Clerk is Librarian, by virtue of his office, unless the Board appoints some one else.

11. Any District may, at its annual meeting, vote on the question of uniformity of text-books in the common schools of the county. If the majority of the School Dis-

¹ Not more than \$40, if the taxable property in the district does not exceed \$20,000; \$20,000-\$30,000, not more than \$45; \$30,000-\$50,000, not more than \$50; \$50,000 and upwards, not more than one-half mill on the dollar.

tricts in any county vote for county uniformity, then the County Superintendent calls for the election of one delegate from each township, which delegates constitute the County Text-book Board. It is their duty to select and prescribe the text-books to be used in the schools of the county. When this selection has once been made, the list cannot be changed for five years.¹

12. Conclusion.—It will be readily seen that the government of the School District is very simple. If thoughtful, experienced, energetic men are placed in office, it is not at all difficult to have good schools. The services of the District Board must be rendered gratuitously; yet this is no more than men should gladly undertake as their share of the public burden. It is peculiarly necessary that the members of the Board be men who take a deep and intelligent interest in school affairs. Above all, they should be men who have no unworthy personal ambitions to gratify, no prejudices, and no pets. In their election, party lines should be entirely forgotten; the aim of all good citizens being to secure the very best man for each place.

¹ School bonds, for the purpose of erecting or purchasing the school buildings necessary for a District, may be issued by the District Board as follows: The District must have been organized at least one year; there must be at least fifteen persons between the ages of five and twenty-one years actually residing in the District; at least one-third of the qualified electors of the District must petition the Board for a special election on the question of issuing the bonds; the majority of qualified electors (including women) must at this election vote in favor of issuing the bonds; each bond must be for not less than one hundred nor more than five hundred dollars, must be signed by the director and countersigned by the clerk, must be registered with the county clerk, and must not be sold at or below par until offered to the commissioners of the State permanent school fund or to the loan commissioner of the State Agricultural College.

THE TOWNSHIP.

13. Prelude.—As soon as it was determined to open for settlement the territory which is now Kansas, the United States Government, by its survey,¹ divided the land into squares of six miles on each side, which were subdivided into thirty-six tracts, each containing one square mile. These latter were called sections, and each larger square—thirty-six square miles—was called a township. These divisions were made for the purpose of giving definite boundaries to the lands when sold.

14. The settlers found this method of division very accurate and very convenient, and have generally retained it in civil affairs. A municipal or civil township, therefore, is usually a square of land, six miles on each side.

15. In New England, the organization of each township is so complete, and its local government is so independent, that it has been said that if the National and State governments were destroyed, and all their officers removed, all local affairs would go on much as usual. In the Southern States the county system prevails; and the township, as a unit of government, is scarcely known. The Western States have very generally adopted what is known as the compromise system, in which municipal townships are granted many rights and privileges, but are, in a measure, subordinate to the county. In this State, nearly all local government is entrusted to cities, townships (under the compromise plan), and school districts.

¹ For further details, see chapter on Land Surveys.