

Too Many Schools?

Tracing the history of changes in our education system

The first half of the 1960's saw an unprecedented shift in the way kids attended school. It was the golden era of school consolidation, but the idea itself wasn't a new one. Basically, in the name of "progress" and "efficiency", school consolidation involved grouping kids in larger buildings and accepting that a bit of travel would be involved.

Perhaps it was simply logical that as travel got easier the schools didn't need to be so close to home.

The same process seems to have played out with other services. In the horse and wagon days, the prairie farmer wanted an elevator within a few hours drive. Today a few hours will take you a long way, and local elevators are almost gone.

The community history book "Bridging Brenda" lists seventeen schools that have existed in the municipality.

The first schools in the regions were Menota and Napinka in 1884. In the next ten years,

between 1885 and 1895, another fifteen were established.

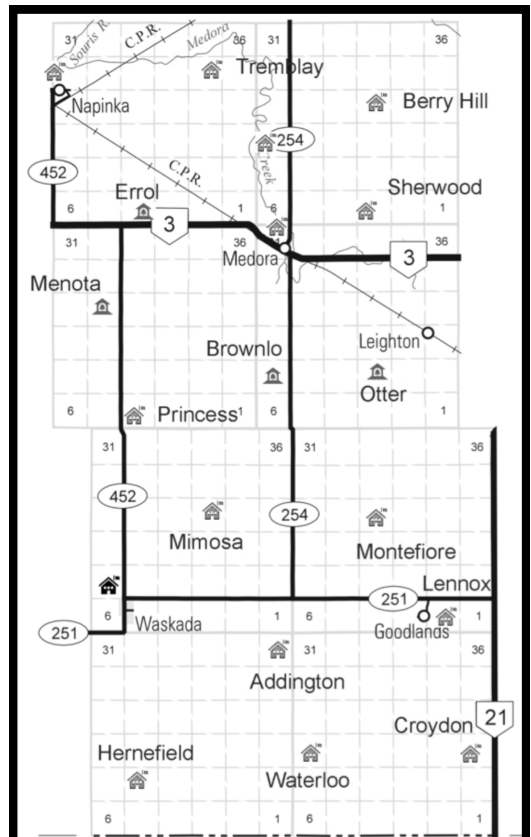
Population was never static. If a family with five children moved in or out of a neighbourhood that would make a notable difference – schools were moved as the student count changed. The goal was always to make them central and accessible.

As early as 1920 some consolidation was taking place, generally when a neighbourhood no longer had enough students. Small schools that had been established before the towns were located were closed or moved in to the town.

But by the 1960's it seemed that it was no longer necessary to keep the one-room schools open. It was just easier to bus them all into the nearest town, and some argued that a better education would be offered.

At the same time, this left the town schools short of space, so a flurry of school building occurred. In a few short years around 1960 new schools and school additions were built in Medora, Goodlands and Napinka.

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▲ There were 17 schools that operated in the RM of Brenda at one point in the mid 1900's. out of these 17 schools, only one remains.

The paint had barely dried on these new modern buildings when another change came along. The Unitary System put schools under Consolidated Boards. At the same time the second wave of rural depopulation began in earnest. The first wave had taken people off the land and into towns; the second wave took them into larger towns and cities, while at the same time families were getting smaller.

The result was that many new schools weren't open very long. Although some continued to serve the community as Libraries or Drop-In Centres, the closing of the village school was never a happy event.

As of 2019 there is only one school operating in the RM of Brenda: Waskada School registered 71 students in 2018, spread from kindergarten to grade 12.

Source:

Brenda History Committee. *Bridging Brenda* Vol. 1. Altona. Friesen Printers, 1990.

▼ Four small one-room schools were consolidated into Medora School in 1948.

