

Talks About Our Winnetka Schools

By CARLETON W. WASHBURNE,
Superintendent, Winnetka Public Schools.

Reading, spelling and arithmetic have received more attention from those who are studying the science of education than any other school subjects. The amount of work that has been done on reading in the last few years is appalling. Moving pictures have been taken of the exact movements of a child's eye when reading simple material and when reading material that is more difficult. Most elaborate counts have been made of the words most commonly used in the English language. Professor Thorndike of Columbia university, for example, has tabulated the frequency of occurrence of the 10,000 commonest words in the English language covering all together a study of over four and one-half million running words. Tests have been devised for determining children's vocabularies, their rate of speed in silent reading, their comprehension in silent reading, and their accuracy in oral reading.

While there is still a vast amount of work to be done in the scientific study of reading and how to teach it, the amount of knowledge on hand at present is sufficient to enable us to re-construct our courses of study in reading on a scientific basis.

Scientific Investigation

The Winnetka schools have organized their reading work on the basis of the scientific investigations made up to the present time. They have done their small part in gathering data for this scientific basis.

Many hours have been spent by Winnetka teachers in painstakingly counting the frequency of occurrence of words and groups of letters in primers and first and second readers. The first scientific list of phonograms ever to be published came from the Winnetka schools. Right now alternate Wednesday evenings and you may see from twenty to thirty Winnetka teachers gathered in a class room at the Horace Mann school analyzing the frequency of occurrence of syllables in the 10,000 commonest English words so that children may be trained in the instant recognition of those syllables which have a high frequency of occurrence.

Stress Silent Reading

Much more time is given in the Winnetka schools to silent reading than to oral reading. Parents who have been brought up under older systems some-

times criticize the schools for this. The reasons of the change of emphasis from oral to silent reading are these: As adults, we read silently most of the time—orally only on rare occasions. Too much oral reading in school makes word readers of children. A word reader is one who reads each word to himself as if he were reading aloud. Such a person reads much more slowly than one who reads groups of words from one word to the next instead of skimming smoothly along the line. Instead of oral reading being good training for silent reading, it is, after a certain amount of skill has been reached, an actual detriment.

We do, however, teach oral reading also in the Winnetka Schools. It receives much less emphasis than silent reading, but no child is promoted from one grade of reading to the next until he has reached the standard ability in oral reading common to children in the same grade throughout the country. Our poorest child must equal the aver-

age child of other places before he is promoted.

There is no subject in which the Winnetka children excel those of other places by as much a margin as in reading. Every room in the Winnetka

Schools is from one to two years above the standards reached by schools in other parts of the country. Every child in the Winnetka Schools reads at least one hundred books between first grade and eighth.

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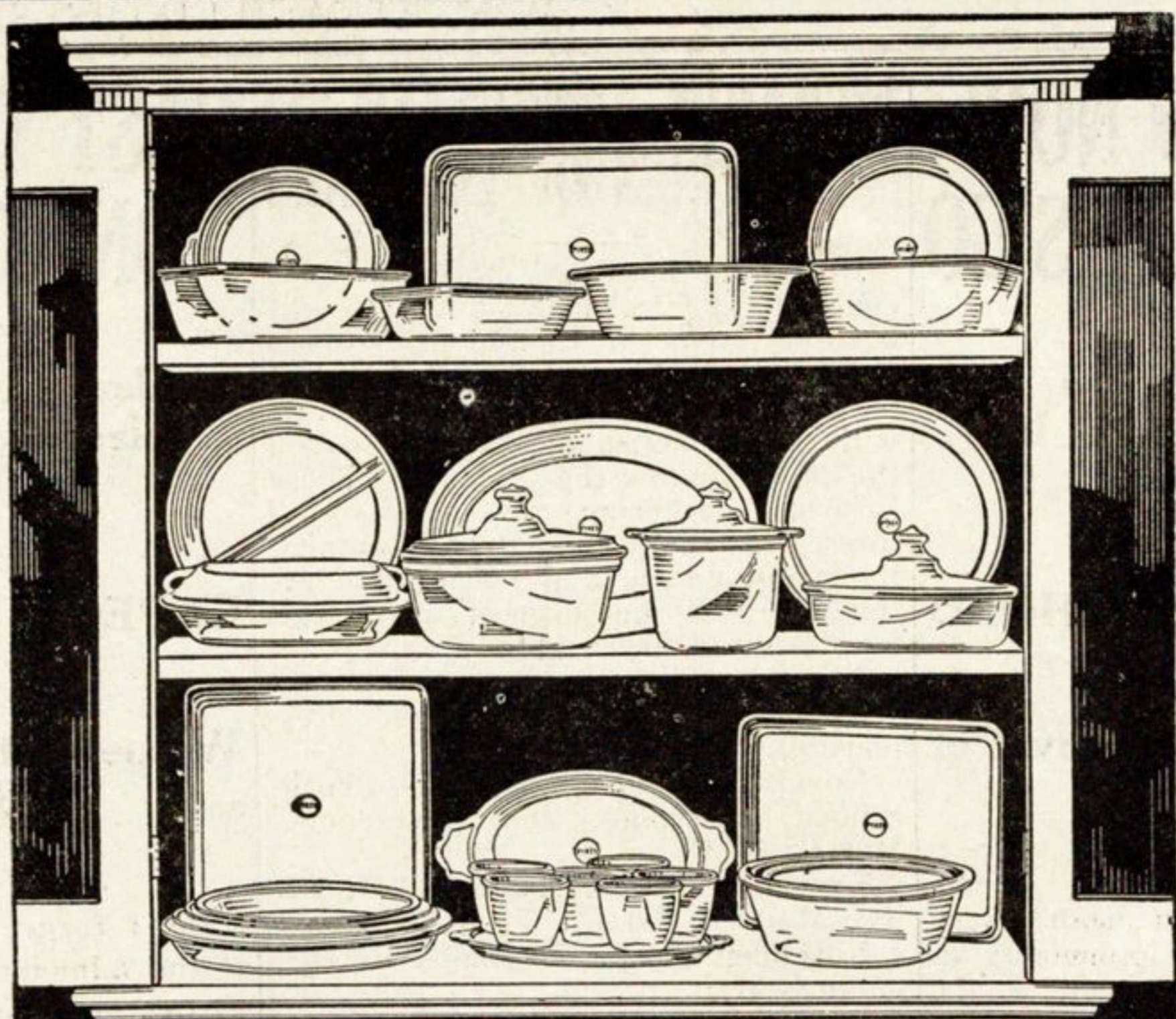
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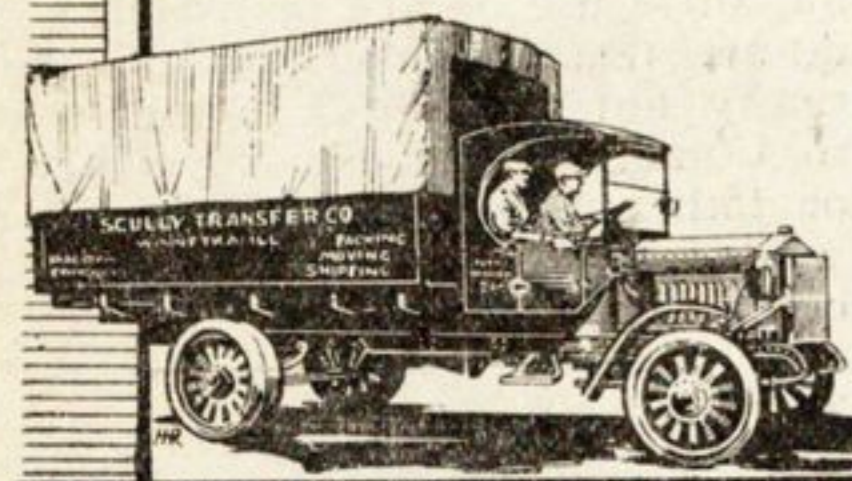
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