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The Emerging Rural Communities of Brookings County

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A community may be thought of as a group of neighborhoods in which the majority of the people have a common trade and service center. The common trade center of the above neighborhoods is the city of Brookings.
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Because land use planning is a democratic process full representation of all farmer views and attitudes is essential to its proper functioning. This is particularly true with respect to the social aspects of land use planning. Adequate representation can be assured only by organizing planning activities on a community basis. A rural community has been defined as "an area including the village center and the surrounding territory, limits of the territory being determined by the farthest distances where the agencies and institutions of the village serve the majority of the farmers in a majority of their activities." Since townships are artificially determined they are seldom true communities. Natural community lines often extend from one township into another and may cross county lines. The first problem facing extension workers and planning agencies, therefore, is to locate community boundaries. The second step is to see that each community is adequately represented on the planning committee and that community meetings are held at natural community centers. The purpose of this pamphlet is to be of assistance to planning groups by locating present day communities and neighborhoods.

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Something is wrong with the map below. Some very important items have been omitted. What are they? The answer is obvious -- no towns or highways have been shown. Have you ever considered how impossible it would be for a county having 1900 farms to be without trade and service centers and highways? Such a situation would be as impossible as a wheel without a hub. The farmer needs the village and the village, in turn, existing because of the farmers' needs, needs him.

Figure 1. Farmsteads In Brookings County, 1940.

Source: AAA Records
Even in pioneer days the farmer was not self-sufficient. Then as now there were certain necessities which he could not produce. From the very beginning the farmer was dependent upon trade centers for certain foods and articles of clothing.

Between 1869 and 1879 there were 21 postoffices and 9 blacksmith shops in Brookings county. Many of the postoffices and blacksmith shops were located at farm homes in the open-country. Aside from the postoffice and blacksmith shops most of the needs of the early settlers were supplied by four inland towns, Oakwood, Renshaw, Fountain and Medary. During this period Oakwood boasted of more services than any other town. The following services were available at Oakwood: hotel, postoffice, hardware store, grocery store, meat market, school, 2 blacksmith shops, drug store, 2 general stores, law office, harness and shoe shop, grist mill, lumber yard, 2 land locating offices, sorghum mill and lime kiln. The following services were available at Renshaw: postoffice, grist mill, general store and blacksmith shop. At Fountain the following services were available: hotel, general store, blacksmith shop, implement store, lumber yard, school, law office and the newspaper. The following services were available at Medary: 2 general stores, school, post-office, doctor, dentist, branch land office, law office, blacksmith shop, small cheese factory, broom factory, hotel and livery stable.

When the railroad lines were laid they did not run through any of these established trade centers. Consequently, new towns sprang up along the railroads. Three of the pioneer trade centers, Oakwood, Medary and Fountain were moved to new locations along the railroad. Fountain and Medary were moved to the present site of Brookings and Oakwood was moved to the present site of Bruce. Renshaw remained where it was but soon became a ghost town.
The early settlers of Brookings county homesteaded in groups on adjoining farms and were bound together by such ties as kinship, common nationality, or common religious, educational or social purposes. These groups, called neighborhoods, were the smallest working unit outside the family itself. Mutual aid, exchange of work, social affairs, school and churches became the organized pattern of these groups.

Although these small groups were from the beginning dependent upon towns for their economic needs, most of the social needs of the group were satisfied within the neighborhood. In the early days, 97 such rural neighborhoods were discovered in Brookings county. Most of these neighborhoods were named for prominent families living in the neighborhoods.

Then came the automobile. The automobile stimulated good roads and made it possible for farm families to get to the village more easily. Farm folks became aware that they had many interests in common with the people of the village, and social life became more and more village centered. The importance of the neighborhood declined. In some cases the factors which had made farm people in certain localities "hang together" utterly disappeared. The figure above shows rural neighborhoods which exist at the present time. There are now only about half as many neighborhoods as there were in the early days. The neighborhoods which remain are larger than the early neighborhoods, and in most cases are called either by township names ("Richland," "North Richland," etc.) or for natural phenomenon ("Sioux Valley," "Hells Hollow," etc.) Few of the present day neighborhoods are known by family names. When farmers were asked to name factors holding their neighborhoods together, the most frequent reply was "the district school," "Habits of exchanging work," and "clubs" were next most frequently mentioned. Other factors mentioned were "visiting habits," "same nationality," and "an open-country church."
Figure 4. Church Community Boundaries In Brookings County, 1940.

Where do Brookings county farm people attend church? The following answer is given by the 1940 Brookings County church survey:

- 74.0 percent attend church in various towns
- 12.6 percent attend an open-country church
- 13.4 percent do not attend church

The figure above shows the country areas from which town and open-country churches drew most of their attendance. Of the 1113 farm families who attend church in Brookings county towns, 21.3 percent attend church in Brookings; 18.0 percent attend church in Volga; 16.4 percent attend church in White; 12.8 percent attend church in Elkton; 10.8 percent attend church in Aurora; 10.1 percent attend church in Sinai; and 2.2 percent attend church in Volga.

Two-hundred forty-nine of the remaining farm families attend 13 open-country churches. The remaining 260 persons attend church in seven town churches outside the county.

Due to denominational overlapping and the existence of a number of open-country churches, the church community areas are somewhat smaller than both the trade and high school areas.
Since 1921 it has been compulsory for common school districts which do not maintain high schools of their own, to pay the tuition costs of pupils residing within their borders who attend high school in nearby towns. The figure above shows the areas from which each high school enrolled most of its farm pupils during the 1938-39 term.

It will be noted that, in general, the high school service areas correspond quite closely to the trade areas. The distances which farm children travel to attend high school in Brookings and Volga indicates that size and educational advantages offered apparently have greater influence upon the choice of a high school than proximity.

During the 1938-39 term the number of farm children attending each Brookings county school was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town</th>
<th>Number of Tuition Pupils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brookings</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volga</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elkton</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruce</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinai</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bushnell</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following schools outside the county drew some Brookings county tuition pupils: Arlington, Estelline, Toronto, Astoria and Hendricks.
Figure 6. Individual Trade Areas For White, 1940.

Since the coming of the automobile most of the former functions of the neighborhoods have been taken over by the towns and villages. The first function assumed by the villages was the economic. As automobiles came into general use the cross-roads general store began to disappear. The farmer now goes to the village center to buy groceries, clothing and other necessities; to sell produce; to attend church; and to visit and engage in other forms of recreation. The farmer also sends his children to the town high school.

There are two generally accepted methods of determining trade area boundaries. One method is to interview all farmers within a county, asking them to give the name of the city or village in which they sell most of their produce, buy most of their supplies and make most of their social contacts. When all farm operators have been interviewed it is possible to plot rather definite boundaries. The second method is to interview village tradesmen, asking them what farmers regularly do business with them. Both of these methods were used in securing trade area boundaries for Brookings county. Of the two methods used it was felt that the first was more satisfactory since less overlapping between trade centers occurred by the use of that method.

The following items were considered in arriving at trade area boundaries: grocery, machinery and fuel purchases; and egg, grain, cream and livestock sales. The figure above shows individual service areas for the village of White. After lines had been plotted for each type of service, a composite trade area for that village was drawn. The same procedure was followed for each trade center. When the composite trade area boundaries were drawn it was found that some overlapping occurred. In order to arrive at distinct areas the overlapping portion between trade centers was equally divided between the two contesting centers.
"A rural community is regarded as an area including the village center and the surrounding territory, the limits of the territory being determined by the farthest distances where the agencies and institutions of the village serve the majority of the families in a majority of their activities." DWIGHT SANDERSON

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Until a few years before the world war one heard little of the importance of the community in rural life. For the most part the social life of the farm folk centered in the neighborhood, clustered around the open-country church or the one room country school. With the coming of the automobile and the improvement of roads it was easier to get to the villages and contacts were more frequent. The decline of the open-country population made it more difficult to maintain the country church and farm folk went more to the village churches. Later, a shrinkage in elementary enrollments took place. Consequently, a number of the rural schools have been closed, and the remaining pupils have been sent as tuition pupils to a nearby district or town school.

The figure above shows the boundaries of the present day communities in Brookings county as determined by where the majority of people buy groceries, clothing, fuel, etc.; sell milk, cream, eggs and livestock; attend church; and send their children to high school. It will be noted that in most cases the size of the community varies in direct proportion to the population and number of services offered by the village center.
To a considerable extent locality is giving away to special interests as a basis for group organization in the rural areas of Brookings county. In the early settlement period the neighborhood, the face to face group in which everyone had common interests, was the accepted unit for organization. The proximity of life made for group consciousness. The school district, the open country church, exchange of work and social activity followed neighborhood lines. Because there were many common interests group organizations could be few, simple and include most everyone. Perhaps, the factor most responsible for the breaking down of neighborhood lines is universal use of the automobile and the improvement of roads. The automobile, which made possible a wider range of contacts, naturally encouraged the formation of special interest groups. As evidence that neighborhoods have declined, in some parts of the county people do not seem to be aware of any particular neighborhood name. In other cases, persons in the same locality claim different neighborhood names.

Hand in hand with the disintegration of neighborhood life came the establishment of numerous special interest organizations. At the present time there are 81 special interest groups among the farm people of Brookings county. Twenty-three of these groups are 4H clubs, 31 are community clubs, 20 are women's extension clubs and 7 are farmers' union locals. The above tabulation does not include such informal organizations as exchange birthday parties, card parties, etc. Neither does it take into consideration farm membership in town-centered organizations as service clubs or lodges.
Suggestions For Determining Neighborhood And Community Boundaries

How do farmers naturally organize themselves? With whom do they exchange work and visit? What is their trade center? What are their interests? These are questions which are of vital importance to extension workers, planning agencies and others who depend upon farmer participation. Extension workers have long realized that the township is an arbitrary and highly unsatisfactory unit for organization. Many times farmers in one part of the township patronize one trade center while those in another part of the township patronize a different center. Consequently, farmers of that particular township would not be in the habit of thinking and working together. As previously suggested, therefore, one of the first steps in county planning is to determine how farmers naturally group themselves. The following methods, by actual test, have been found successful in determining neighborhoods and communities in Brookings county.

A. Neighborhoods

1. The first method was to mail postal questionnaires to each of the 1903 farm operators in the county, asking them to give the name of the neighborhood in which they lived.

2. Using the data secured from the above mentioned questionnaire as a starting point the county superintendent and other persons familiar with the county were asked to map additional neighborhoods. Mimeographed copies of this map were then sent to two prominent farmers in each township. These men were asked to change any neighborhood names or boundaries which to them seemed incorrect.

B. Communities

1. Church community - In connection with a county wide church survey each family was asked to indicate what town or open-country church they attended.

2. High school service areas - High school superintendents in each of the towns within the county and in schools bordering the county, were asked to supply a list of their Brookings county high school tuition pupils. From those lists it was possible to plot the location of each high school tuition pupil in relation to the school which he attended.

3. Trade areas
   a. The second method was to send a postal questionnaire to each of the 1903 farm families in Brookings county. In this questionnaire farmers were asked to designate the town in which they bought specified goods, secured specified services and sold specified produce.
   b. Village tradesmen and produce buyers in each trade center of Brookings and adjoining counties were asked to indicate which farmers within the county regularly did business with them.

4. Composite community areas - The church, high school, and trade areas were combined to obtain composite community boundaries.

(More detailed instructions regarding the above methods of determining neighborhoods and communities may be obtained upon request)