2-15-1941

The Emerging Rural Communities of Kingsbury County

W. F. Kumlien

C. Scandrette

Raymond Hatch

Follow this and additional works at: http://openprairie.sdstate.edu/agexperimentsta_rural-socio

Part of the Rural Sociology Commons

Recommended Citation

Kumlien, W. F.; Scandrette, C.; and Hatch, Raymond, "The Emerging Rural Communities of Kingsbury County" (1941). Agricultural Experiment Station Rural Sociology Pamphlets. 13.
http://openprairie.sdstate.edu/agexperimentsta_rural-socio/13

This Pamphlet is brought to you for free and open access by the SDSU Agricultural Experiment Station at Open PRAIRIE: Open Public Research Access Institutional Repository and Information Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Agricultural Experiment Station Rural Sociology Pamphlets by an authorized administrator of Open PRAIRIE: Open Public Research Access Institutional Repository and Information Exchange. For more information, please contact michael.biondo@sdstate.edu.
THE EMERGING RURAL COMMUNITIES OF KINGSBURY COUNTY

W. F. Kumlien
C. Scandrette
Raymond Hatch

In pioneer days the farmer's contacts were largely limited to his immediate neighborhood. He seldom traveled more than three or four miles—a distance commonly termed the "team haul." The coming of the automobile has made it possible for the farm family to go to the village for an increasingly large share of its goods and services. As rural folks have extended their radius of interaction, larger village-centered communities have emerged.

Department of Rural Sociology
Agricultural Experiment Station of the South Dakota State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, Brookings, South Dakota
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: This study was made possible by the State and Federal Work Projects Administration cooperating with the South Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station. The project is officially designated as W.P.A. Project No. 465-74-3-235. The authors gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the following persons: farm operators who replied to the original neighborhood and community questionnaire; the two farmers in each township who checked the neighborhood map; church survey field workers who discovered where farm families attend church; high school superintendents who supplied lists of their tuition pupils; and merchants and produce buyers who volunteered information regarding the extent of their trade territories. Full responsibility for statements of interpretation, however, rests with the authors rather than with the persons who supplied the data.
The Emerging Rural Communities of Kingsbury County

What do farmers consider to be the boundaries of their particular neighborhoods and communities? Where do they go for satisfaction of economic needs, social enjoyment, church participation, and for other services? Of what importance is the village in rural community life? It is the purpose of this pamphlet to assist planning agencies and other action groups by locating present day neighborhoods and communities of Kingsbury county, showing the manner in which they have emerged, and indicating their importance in rural life.

* * * * * * * * *

It is apparent from even the most casual inspection that something is wrong with the map below. What are the important features which have been omitted? The answer is obvious – no villages or highways have been indicated. The 1,290 farmsteads cannot be thought of as so many isolated settlements, but must be considered in relation to their neighborhood and their larger village-centered community settings. The farmer and the village are inter-dependent – the village has sprung from the farmer's needs and, in turn, needs the farmer for its continued existence.

Figure 1. The Location of Farmsteads in Kingsbury County, 1940.

Source: AAA Records.
Patterns of Early Settlement in Kingsbury County

Figure 2. Kingsbury County, 1884

Legend: ○ Farmstead + Church
        ○ School P.O. Postoffice
        ------Railroad

Source: Peterson's Historical Atlas of South Dakota, 1904.

Figure 3. Kingsbury County, 1904
Even in pioneer days the farmer was not wholly self-sufficient from an economic standpoint. He looked to the villages, which very early made their appearance along the frontier, for his supply of many essential goods and services.

The first permanent settlers reached Kingsbury county in 1873 and the county was organized in 1879. Settlement proceeded rapidly, especially after the extension of the railroad across the county in 1880. Figures 2 and 3 show Kingsbury county as it appeared in 1884 and in 1904, and illustrate the pattern of early settlement.

By 1884, with only 134 farmsteads in the entire county*, 10 villages had already appeared. The prevailing plan of settlement was that of "planting" towns along the railway lines. Of the 10 villages—Nordland (later Denver—now Arlington), Lake Preston, DeSmet, Iroquois, Manchester, Esmond, Erwin, Huffman, Clyde and Pleasant Valley—only the last four were inland settlements. It is interesting to note that Erwin is the only one of these four shown to be existent in 1904 (see Figure 3), and by that time it was no longer an inland village. New villages (all on railway lines) which had made their appearance by 1904 were Hetland, Oldham, Pancroft and Osceola.

What services did the frontier village supply to the surrounding farm area? A glimpse at the county seat village, DeSmet, as of 1883, throws some light on this question. In addition to the important services performed by the post office and public school, there were those emanating from the following business establishments: 2 blacksmith shops, 1 newspaper plant, 2 banks, 2 hotels, 3 law offices, 1 doctor's office, 2 lumber companies, 1 wagon shop, 2 hardware stores, 3 general merchandise stores, 1 grocery and provision store, 2 dry goods stores, 1 livery and hand-made boots shop, 2 real estate offices, and 1 carpenter and joiner business. The frontier village was apparently equipped to perform a surprisingly wide range of services.

In 1884, 25 open country schools were operating in Kingsbury county; by 1904 the number had reached 99. There were no open country churches in 1884, but ten had come into existence by 1904. The uniform distribution of schools and settlements throughout Kingsbury county at the latter date indicates that settlement had proceeded rapidly and by 1904 had been fairly well completed.

*This figure, taken from data in Figure 2, appears to be an underestimate in view of apparent omissions. Figure 2 shows schools in areas where no farmsteads are indicated.
The early settlers of Kingsbury county, bound together by such ties as kinship, common nationality and common religion, tended to homestead in groups on adjoining farms (see Figure 2). These neighborhood groupings, frequently named for prominent families residing within their boundaries, played a vital part in early rural life. They were especially important in supplying the social satisfactions of the pioneer community. Limited facilities for transportation and communication made it necessary for the settlers to look to the relatively confined geographic limits of the neighborhood for social enjoyment. Habits of work exchange and united support of educational and religious institutions tended to draw the families comprising the neighborhood still closer together.

The scene changes with the coming of the automobile and the network of good roads. Farm folks were able to extend their contacts over a much wider area. They went to the village more frequently, and discovered that they had much in common with village residents. Social life became more and more village-centered. As a result of these forces neighborhoods have declined steadily in importance. All have lost certain functions, and some have completely disappeared. The present day neighborhoods of Kingsbury county are plotted on the map above. These neighborhoods are probably fewer in number and larger in area than those which existed prior to the advent of the automobile. It can be seen that many sections of the county in 1940 were not included within recognized neighborhood boundaries. The neighborhoods which remain have drawn their names chiefly from a township, a school, a church, or from some natural phenomenon or landmark (i.e., Lake Henry, Evergreen, Happy Hollow, etc.).

It should be noted that, in spite of the forces which have operated to limit their functions, neighborhoods of Kingsbury county have shown a rather vigorous tendency to persist. When farmers are asked to name the factors which hold their neighborhoods together, the most frequent replies are "the district school", "habits of work exchange", "clubs", "visiting", "same nationality", and an "open country church". It would appear that the neighborhood still plays a fairly significant role in the rural picture, although its importance will probably continue to decline.
Figure 5. Church Community Boundaries in Kingsbury County, 1940.

Where do the people of Kingsbury county attend church? Figure 5 furnishes an answer to this question by showing attendance areas for village and open country churches of the county.

It is readily seen that the areas served by village churches are considerably larger than those served by open country churches. Yet it seems that folks will not go so far for church attendance as for some other services. Comparison of village-centered church communities with other service areas indicates that they correspond most closely to the grocery area. The presence of sixteen open country churches naturally limits the size and increases the number of community areas as compared with service areas which are more completely village-centered.

However, more and more farm families are attending village churches. This factor has been of considerable importance in strengthening town-country relationships. In many sections, the number of participating farm families has become too small to support adequately the open country church. The village may eventually take over the religious function for its entire surrounding area.
Figure 6. Areas From Which High Schools Enrolled Their Kingsbury County Tuition Pupils, 1940.

Source: Records of High School Superintendents.

Since 1921 it has been compulsory for common school districts which do not operate their own high schools, to pay the tuition costs of students living within their borders who attend high school in nearby towns. The areas from which high schools (11 in Kingsbury county and two in adjacent counties) enroll their Kingsbury county tuition students are plotted in Figure 6, along with the locations of farmsteads from which the students numbering more than 350, are drawn.

It is interesting to note that the high school service areas correspond rather closely to the composite community areas shown in Figure 8. The high school has become one of the strongest forces in determining community boundaries and in establishing closer town-country relationships. The farmer who has children in the village high school interests himself with its organization and goes to the village to participate in, or witness, its activities. As he broadens his contacts with the village people he carries on more of his activities in the village center. His sons and daughters in high school make still further adjustment to the larger village-centered community life. Through this process, differences and misunderstandings which may have existed between town and country are gradually disappearing.
Since the coming of the automobile, many functions which were formerly neighborhood-centered have been shifted to the village. It has been noted that the farmer has always been more or less dependent upon village centers for the satisfaction of his economic needs. Improved transportation facilities have, however, greatly increased the frequency of visits by the farmer to the village, as well as the quantity of services and goods supplied by the trade centers. The cross-roads general store has all but disappeared; the village has become the economic core of the adjacent farming area. In addition to serving as a market for agricultural produce, it supplies the farmer with his groceries, clothing, goods used in the farming enterprise (oil, twine, fencing, machinery, etc.), and other necessities.

Figure 7 shows the trade areas about the village of Lake Preston for five commodities selected because of their importance to the farmer. These commodities are fuel oil, machinery, groceries, produce and grain. Since the boundaries are based upon information supplied by village tradesmen, they represent only personal estimates, and it has been found that there is considerable overlapping with trade areas secured in similar fashion for other villages of the county. Despite these limitations, Figure 7 does show the approximate areas served by dealers in the selected commodities. By combining the various trade, church and high school service areas it is possible to arrive at a composite community area for the village of Lake Preston (see Figure 8), which rather closely describes the natural community boundaries.
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.

Until about 25 years ago, the community was of relatively small importance in the total rural picture. The social life of farm people was centered largely in the neighborhood. Support of two important rural institutions, the one-room country school and the open country church, strengthened the neighborhood ties. More recently the tremendous advances in transportation and communication have brought widespread changes in the structure of rural group life. Heavy losses of population have weakened many neighborhoods. Others have lost their principal functions with the decline of the open country church and the closing of the district school. Larger number of farmers are going to the village for church services and sending their children to the village school.

The same forces which have been undermining the importance of the neighborhood have, it seems, been responsible for reorganizing rural life on a larger community basis. Figure 8 shows the composite community areas of Kingsbury county. These areas were located by first plotting on a single map the trade, high school and church service areas for each village, then selecting a boundary in each case which was most representative of all the plotted areas. Equitable division was made of those regions subject to overlapping claims by two or more villages. It is quite evident that the size of the community varies directly with the population of the village center and the number of services it supplies.
In the period of early settlement of Kingsbury county, geographic location served as the basis for most group organization. The school district, the open-country church, exchange of work, and social activity followed neighborhood lines. Interests were relatively limited and held in common; therefore, group organizations were simple and included almost everyone within the neighborhood.

With the decline of neighborhood functions and the increased ease of transportation, have come a greater specialization of interests and an expansion of the area from which persons of similar interests are drawn together. The farmer has been exposed to new and different types of interests, hobbies and associations which attract participants from outside the limited neighborhood boundaries. In 1940, 47 special interest organizations were found among the farm people of Kingsbury county. Nineteen of these groups were women's extension clubs, 14 were 4-H clubs, six were Farmers' Union organizations, six were training centers for extension clubs and two were community clubs. These categories do not include informal social gatherings or farm membership in town-centered organizations such as service clubs and lodges. It is evident that group activities, like other aspects of rural life, are being reorganized on a wider community level.
 SUMMARY

Various historical changes in social organization have been shown in this pamphlet in order to trace the gradual emergence of the present rural community. The rural neighborhood, of which the community is essentially an enlarged reproduction, functioned best during the horse and buggy days. It consisted of ten to twenty families which frequently clustered about some single economic or social service, such as a general store, a blacksmith shop, post office, a rural school or a church. In some instances the neighborhood was merely a social grouping held together by some such common bond as kinship, neighborliness or exchange of work.

With the coming of the automobile and good roads most of the economic services were readily taken over by the village or town. The only institutions left in many open-country areas were the rural schools and churches. Even the open-country churches have been giving way during the last few years. At the present time they make up less than one-fourth of all churches in the state, and of those which remain only 7 percent have resident ministers. Most country churches are now yoked with a town church, with the same minister serving two or more congregations.

During the past decade the rural district school system has declined in much the same manner. Recent studies reveal that rural school enrollments for the state have declined more than 25 percent since the peak year of 1930. Over half of the open-country schools enroll ten or fewer pupils, and in some counties as many as 25 to 30 percent enroll five or fewer. When the enrollment drops to five or below, it has been customary to close the school and send the remaining pupils to a neighboring school, paying tuition and transportation costs. In some cases the remaining pupils have been sent to nearby village or town schools.

It now appears that the villages and towns are becoming the service centers for the rural community. The village center and its surrounding service area constitute the new rural community, which makes up the prevailing type of social organization in South Dakota. Thus in a typical county there will be as many rural communities as there are villages and towns.

 IMPLICATIONS

There are definite implications growing out of this situation both for the farmer and the townsman. For the farmer it means that he is just as truly a member of the rural community as is the village resident. The fact that he can obtain the various economic and social services in the center at a reasonable cost makes it possible for him to be a specialist in agricultural production. Likewise for the townsman it means that he can specialize in his particular field of service as long as he serves his open country and town neighbors efficiently. Thus there are distinct mutual advantages in maintaining harmonious town-country relationships.

Public servants, such as extension agents, FSA and AAA workers, teachers, ministers, etc., should recognize that the new rural community is a natural community which has evolved through gradual economic and social adjustments. All planning activities should take into account the natural community areas and should utilize them as the logical units of rural organization.