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THE EMERGING RURAL COMMUNITIES

of

Sanborn County

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During pioneer days most of the farmers' activities were confined within a radius of three or four miles—a distance commonly known as a "team haul." In more recent years, improved transportation facilities have permitted farm families to go to village centers for an increasing proportion of their goods and services. The result has been the emergence of village-centered communities whose areas are several times as extensive as those of the old-time neighborhoods.
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The Emerging Rural Communities of Sanborn County

People can be most effectively reached and influenced through the social groups to which they belong. It is the purpose of this pamphlet to assist planning groups and other action agencies in Sanborn county by locating principle rural groupings in the form of neighborhoods and communities of the county. For a better understanding of the present day status and function of these social groupings, a brief historical sketch is given, with emphasis on the factors leading to the emergence of the rural community, which encompasses both town and country.

It is evident that something is wrong with the map below. It is apparent that such important features as villages and highways have been omitted. The 831 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 country and village are interdependent; the country looks to the village for such services as merchandising, recreation and education and the village depends upon the country for raw materials, trade and support of its institutions. This reciprocal relation is producing the town-country community of modern rural society.

Figure 1. The Location of Farmsteads in Sanborn County, 1938

The pioneer farmer was not wholly self-sufficient from an economic standpoint. He was dependent on the villages, which appeared on the frontier at an early date, for his supply of many essential goods and services.

The first settlement of Sanborn county was made in 1875. Within a year immigration began pouring in at a very rapid rate, all government land was soon taken and by 1884 the county had a population of about 6,000. Forestburg, the earliest town of the county was laid out in 1881. Woonsocket, Letcher, Diana and Florence were plotted in 1882 and soon became thriving business centers. It was to these rapidly growing towns that the pioneer farmers of Sanborn county went for various supplies and services. A surprising variety of business enterprises were established almost immediately in these towns. Sixty business places had been established within a year after the first lot was sold in Woonsocket. Among these were eight groceries, three hardware stores, one clothing house, three banks, two dry-goods stores, eight hotels and boarding houses, five lumber yards, three livery stables, two newspapers, two barber shops, two coal dealers, two millinery establishments, four machinery dealers and various other business establishments.

Forestburg, Letcher and Diana were also well equipped to supply the needs of the early settlers. Nine postoffices were located throughout the county and country stores were operated in connection with some of these, serving the more immediate needs of the farmers. Churches and schools were established at an early date. In fact, school houses were often built before the settlers themselves had comfortable homes. Sixty-two schools were in session in Sanborn county in 1890.
During the settlement period persons of the same nationality tended to homestead in groups on adjacent farms. In some instances whole blocks of townships were settled by persons of the same nationality. These areas were virtually "Little Danmarks", "Little Germanies", "Little Irelands", etc. as the case might be; the cultural pattern of their homeland being transplanted almost bodily.

Since settlement days both the cultural and geographic isolation of the original nationality groups have been partially destroyed through migration, intermarriage and Americanization. Nevertheless persons of the same ancestral background still tend to neighbor together to a much greater extent than they neighbor with persons of other nationalities.

In Sanborn county, nationality background has played a significant part in the pattern of neighborhood and community organization. Furthermore the progress of "Americanization" is revealed in the fact that the American nationality was predominant in nine of the 16 townships. (See Figure 6) In three of the northern tier of townships the majority of the farm household heads were of German descent. The Scandinavians were predominant in two townships; the British were in the majority in one township and also numbered more than 20 percent of the household heads in four other townships in the county. In Onida township the British and American nationality each numbered 31.6 percent of the farm household heads.
Figure 4 shows the various areas from which the village and open country churches of Sanborn county draw their members. It is readily seen that the attendance areas of the town churches are considerably larger than those of the open country churches. The fact that there are six open country churches in Sanborn county would indicate that people will not travel as far to attend church as they will to obtain certain other services in the village centers. Furthermore, 19 churches in the county naturally limits the size and increases the number of church community areas as compared with service areas which are more completely village-centered. Of the open country churches there are two Lutheran, one Catholic, two Methodist and one Nazarene.

More and more farm families are attending town churches, a factor which has tended to strengthen town-country relationships. In many sections the number of participating farm families has become too small to support a country church with a well-rounded and adequate program. The village church may eventually take over the religious functions for the entire surrounding area.

Legend:

- Open Country Church
- Number of Churches in Village
- Village Center

Figure 4, Church Community Areas of Sanborn County, 1940.
Figure 5. Areas from which High Schools Enrolled Their Sanborn County Tuition Pupils During the 1939-1940 Term.

Legend: Location of rural schools from which the town center drew their tuition students.

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 tuition costs for students living within their borders who attended high schools in nearby towns or villages. The areas from which the seven high schools (four in Sanborn county and three in bordering counties) enrolled Sanborn county tuition students are plotted in Figure 5 along with the locations of rural schools from which the students, numbering about 200, are drawn.

The high school service areas correspond rather closely to the composite community areas shown in Figure 5. The high school has become a very strong force in determining community boundaries and in establishing closer town-country relationships. The farmer who has sons or daughters in the village high school concerns himself with its organization and activities. He goes into the village more frequently and as he broadens his contacts with the village people he joins with them in an increasingly varied range of activities. His children in high school make still further adjustments to the larger village centered community life. Through these processes, differences and misunderstandings which may have existed between town and country are gradually disappearing.
In the period of early settlement of Sanborn county, residence in a specific locality, proximity, and common life 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 coming of better facilities for travel and communication, the country dwellers were able to seek satisfaction in groups of their own choice. The farmer has been exposed to new types of interest groups and associations which often go far beyond neighborhood bounds in recruiting their participants. In 1940, 38 special interest organizations were found among the farmers of Sanborn county. Twenty-three of these groups were 4-H clubs, seven were Women's Extension clubs, four were Community clubs, and four were Farmers' Unions and Farmers' Co-operative organizations. 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.
Until about 25 years ago, the rural community was relatively unimportant and hardly existent in recognizable form. The social life of farm people was centered largely in the neighborhood. The one-room country school and the open country church, two important rural institutions, strengthened the neighborhood ties. More recently the tremendous advances in transportation and communication have brought widespread changes in the structure of rural groups life. Depopulation through outward migration has weakened many neighborhoods. Others have lost their principle functions with the decline of the district school. A 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 led to the decline of neighborhoods have been responsible for the reorganization of rural life on a large community basis. Many of the functions dropped by the neighborhood have been assumed by village centers. Figure 8 shows the composite community areas of Sanborn county. These areas were located by first plotting on a 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. Cuthbert is a part of the Woonsocket area as it does not offer enough services to constitute a separate community area. It seems that the size of the community varies directly with the population of the village center and the number of services it supplies.
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.