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The Emerging Rural Communities of Tripp County

W. F. Kumlien

C. Scandrette

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During pioneer days most of the farmer's 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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Figure 1. Predominant Ancestry in Tripp County by Townships, 1940.

Legend:

- Am. - American
- Ind. - Indian
- Boh. - Bohemian
- Ger. - German
- Bri. - British
- Scan. - Scandinavian

Note: Each nationality comprising more than 20 percent in a given township is listed.

During the settlement period persons of the same nationality background tended to homestead in groups on adjacent farms. In some instances whole blocks of townships were settled by persons of the same ancestry. These areas were virtually "Little Denmark", "Little Germanies", "Little Ireland" 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 group has 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.

Tripp county differs from most of the state in that almost half (43.6 percent) of the household heads are of American descent. It will be noted that in 40 of the 47 townships the American nationality is predominant. In Wilson and Colome townships the Bohemians are in the majority, while the Germans predominate in Valley and Weaver townships. In Gasman township, 50 percent of the household heads are of Scandinavian descent. Tripp county was originally part of the Rosebud Indian Reservation and a considerable number of Indians are found among the farm operators. In two townships, Greenwood and Bull Creek the Indians are predominant.
Figure 2. Church Community Areas of Tripp County, 1940.

Legend:

- Open Country Church
- Village Center

Figure 4 shows the various areas from which the village and open country churches of Tripp county draw their members. It is readily seen that the attendance areas of the town churches are considerably larger than those served by the open country churches. Yet it seems that people will not travel as far to attend church as they will to obtain certain other services in the village centers. The fact that there are 13 operating open country churches besides 22 town churches naturally limits the size and increases the number of church areas as compared with service areas which are more completely village-centered.

However, 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 adequately the open country church. The village churches may eventually take over the religious function for the entire surrounding area.
Figure 3. Areas From Which High Schools Enrolled Their Tripp County Tuition Pupils During The 1939-40 Term.

Note: High Schools at Butte, Nebr., and Burke, in Gregory county enrolled one and two Tripp county students, respectively.

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 border who attend high school in nearby towns or villages. The areas from which eight high schools within or near Tripp county enrolled the Tripp county tuition students are plotted in Figure 5 along with the location of rural schools from which the students numbering about 300 are drawn.

The high school service areas correspond rather closely to the composite community areas shown in Figure 8. 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.
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, 118 special interest groups were found among the farmers of Tripp county. Forty-five of these groups were Young Citizens' Leagues, 22 were 4-H clubs, 16 were Women's Extension clubs and 21 were Parent-Teacher Associations; there were two Community Clubs, 12 Farmers' Unions, one Crop Improvement Association and one Training Center Extension club. 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.
in turn supplies the farmer with his groceries, clothing, and other necessities. Increasing interdependence of town and country in their trade relationships is evident.

Figure 7 shows the high school tuition area and church attendance area of Witten together with the trade areas for three selected commodities; namely, bulk fuel, grain and groceries. Since the boundaries of the trade areas are based upon information supplied by Witten tradesmen, they represent only personal estimates, and it has been found that there has been considerable overlapping with trade areas secured in similar fashion for other towns of the county. It will be noted, however, that they follow quite closely the boundaries of the high school tuition area and the church attendance area. By combining the trade, church and high school service areas it is possible to arrive at a composite community area for Witten (see Figure 8) which rather closely describes the natural community boundaries.

The farm family, as previously noted, has always been somewhat dependent upon village centers for the satisfaction of its economic needs. Since the coming of the automobile, many functions which were formerly neighborhood-centered have been shifted to the village. Improved transportation and communication facilities in recent years have greatly increased the number of trips made to the village as well as the variety and quantity of goods and services supplied by the village centers. The crossroads general store has all but passed from the picture, the village has become the economic core of the surrounding farm area. The village serves as a market for agricultural produce and, in turn supplies the farmer with his groceries, clothing, and many other necessities. Increasing interdependence of town and country in their trade relationships is evident.
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 group 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 larger community basis. Many of the functions dropped by the neighborhood have been assumed by village centers. Figure 8 shows the composite community areas of Tripp 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. Carter, Jordan, Clearfield, Wewela, Paxton and Alamo are a part of larger community areas as they do 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.