

WHAT SELECTED RESEARCH AND LITERATURE TELL US ABOUT RURAL PEOPLE

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Selected findings from research studies and other literature accurately reflect today's rural scene. In this paper, the author, an associate professor of rural sociology at the Pennsylvania State University, outlines his perception of these findings in terms of a library collection: the rare book section, a documents section, and a reference section.

RARE BOOKS SECTION

Much has been said about the conditions in rural America, some accurate statements, and some inaccurate. President Nixon summarized conditions of Rural America in 1971 thusly:

. . . in rural America itself, the loss of human resources has compounded the problems of diversifying the economy and fostering vigorous and progressive community life. Those who have chosen to stay have found it harder and harder to pay for and provide services such as good schools, health facilities, transportation systems, and other infrastructure attractive enough to keep people in rural America, or to lure jobs and opportunities to rural America. Many of the small towns which dot the countryside have to struggle for existence; they often have difficulty attracting good teachers or physicians; many fight stagnation while most of the economy is expanding; they cannot give the older, the disadvantaged, and the less educated people needed assistance and care. [1,p.28]

In the same publication, Marion Clawson states his feelings in another way: "It is not an exaggeration to say that rural towns are sick." [1,p.28] Persons often get the feeling that this is the

picture of rural America and indeed it may be that the same old question, do the data support the statements? Let's turn to our documents for the answer.

DOCUMENTS

Many types of documents are useful to us in our search for the answer to this question. One framework that rural sociologists and others have found useful for organizing or cataloging our thoughts is the FOET framework. This framework permits one to analyze research and literature within the context of first examining population; second, organization; third, environment; and fourth, technology.

Population

The rural population in Pennsylvania is greater than in any other state, with over 3.4 million persons residing in rural Pennsylvania as defined at 50,000 or less. In fact, 29.5 percent of the total Pennsylvania population is classified as rural by our definition. North Carolina has the second largest rural population, with 2.3 million persons residing in rural areas. Although our definition includes cities with up to 50,000, Pennsylvania has more persons residing in places of 1,000 to 2,500 people than in the other rural population categories. Another aspect of the organization of Pennsylvania is by region. If one were to take a map of Pennsylvania and draw a line from North to South roughly through the center of Pennsylvania, one would find that since 1940 or 1950, the western half of the state, with few exceptions, all the way across the state, has lost population. The growth in Pennsylvania has been mostly in the southeast region. Although the rural farm population represents only 4 percent of our total population, that percentage includes 53,000 farmers in Pennsylvania engaged in the production of food and fiber.

While rural areas have historically declined in population, recent research by Colvin Beale of the U.S. Department of Agriculture suggests that since 1970 there has been a population turnaround; rural areas are gaining rather than losing population. Two age groups which

seem to be predominant in this turnaround are retired people moving to scenic areas or to places where they grew up, and young people disenchanted with the "succeed-or-die, lightning-pace" syndrome they may have found in the urban areas.

This mix of newcomers with those who have lived there all their lives causes some unique situations.

Different segments of the rural population view things very differently. In fact, priorities given to public issues by small town rural persons probably differ from those of rural farmers, and even farmers are diverse in their values and beliefs. For example, part-time farmers may differ significantly in their viewpoints from the highly capitalized commercial farmers.

Recent research has suggested that residents in small communities do have different attitudes from urban residents on certain topics. For example, a recent study by Osgood showed that residents in small communities had more negative attitudes toward welfare programs than did urban residents [2,p.41-48]. Differences appear to exist between those raised in small communities and those raised in large communities. In fact, size of community of a person at age 16 seems to be a better predictor, or better indicator, of what attitudes and values a person would have than size of present community.

So what do these differences mean? Glenn and Hill state that those who would understand and develop rural areas "must be concerned with and knowledgeable of attitudinal and behavioral variation in the United States. Too, they need to continue to study, but not to exaggerate the rural/urban differences if indeed we are to bring resolution of problems to fruition." [3,p.50]

Rural persons have some of the same concerns as their urban counterparts. Their concerns center around inflation, unemployment, public transportation, resource depletion, energy conservation, welfare management, pollution of environment and financing of governmental services. However, more than their urban counterparts, rural areas often have many forces outside the community that affect their resolution to these concerns.

Organization

Let's turn to the second element in our POET framework, organization. Under the heading of organization we'll look at community organization, the family, and finally, the organization of rural women.

County boundaries established two centuries ago in Pennsylvania may have less utility for today's society than at the time they were established. To illustrate, county seat towns were centrally located so that a resident could journey to the county seat, transact business, and return home the same day. The network was established to enhance the position of: (1) the county seat, and (2) the possibility of what was referred to as a "team haul" distance. This network, plus the normal migration of ethnic and other groups, led to settlement patterns in Pennsylvania (if you exclude the Philadelphia area) that can be easily traced to national origin, predominant religion of the originators, and the topography of the region simply by the names of the communities. For example, in central Pennsylvania we have Lewistown, Mifflintown, and Thompsonsboro. That's hill country, geographically, Scotch-Irish were the predominant ethnic group who settled there, and they were Presbyterian or United Methodists. Continuing on in central Pennsylvania, we have Lewisburg, Mifflinburg, and Millheim. These towns are in the broad river valleys, predominantly settled by Germans, who brought with them basically the Lutheran religion. If you go on into Schuylkill County, you have narrow river valleys that were settled by the Dutch, bringing along the Dutch Reformed religion. And so on we could continue through Pennsylvania.

Another way to look at county organization is through looking at the industrial base of various regions of Pennsylvania. Those regions that have a high extractive industry base, that is lumbering, mining, fire-clay manufacturing, tended to lose population over the last 30 years, while those with permanent industrial base and good agricultural area and those with major transportation networks tended to gain in population.

Let's move, then, to community organization. How does one interested in providing services to a rural area begin to get a handle on organization? Wilkinson provides one way when he talks about structural differentiation. In his article, Professor Wilkinson indicates that small town functions and facilities are being provided, but not on the specialized or differentiated base that may be found in a metropolitan area. For example, in the agricultural trade centers of 100 years ago, mostly under 1,000 population, all of the services and interactive opportunity outside of the family were provided. When population declines, it tends to yield functional losses that can be cataloged in the following way. The first and most significant loss can be found in the specialized professions: dentists, doctors, and lawyers, in that order. Secondly, the loss of large dry goods establishments, plus the specialized services such as beauty parlors, laundries, paint stores, and TV shops begin to leave the community. And finally, duplicate businesses are driven out such as multiple service stations, multiple garden supplies, hardwares, and so on [4, p.45-46]. Simon and Gagnon in an article in the Communities Left Behind point out:

The land and the economy of the United States will not support as many small towns as they did before. It is very difficult not to see the future as a long, drawn-out struggle for community survival, lasting for half a century, in which some battles may be won, but the war will be lost. A future in which most towns will become isolated or decayed, in which the local amenities must deteriorate, and in which there will finally be left only the aged, the inept, and the very young -- and the local power league. [5, p.51]

However, Simon and Gagnon forget to mention several significant factors in their rather pessimistic statement. Number one, Professor Wilkinson points out that the survival or the decline of small towns is selective and not universal. In a study in the early 1950's and 1960's, Brunner found that two out of five small towns were still viable. And, number two, in much of Pennsylvania, smaller places are growing more rapidly than larger places. Decentralization is occurring around non-metropolitan areas. And finally three, there

is decentralization of government. This later trend seems to be intensifying as revenue sharing promotes this notion. Wilkinson concludes with a rather optimistic note when he states "local leadership can be viable and influence stability and growth." Tupelo, Mississippi, is a prime example of overcoming shortcomings in location, natural resources, and population base by citizen/professional participation in establishing community priorities and deciding how to implement programs to achieve desired results. In Pennsylvania, we have had over the past six years a rather intensive leadership development program aimed primarily at rural leaders. All of the results from this program's continuing program efforts are not in, but those that are would indicate that indeed Professor Wilkinson's statement is sound.

We can further look at Professor Wilkinson's notion of structural differentiation of communities by looking at primary services delivered by a community. According to Doeksen, Keuhn, and Schmidt, many types of communities may be identified when they are labeled by functions. These authors provide us with the following classification scheme. First is recreation communities. We have plenty of these in Pennsylvania, normally found around water and within driving distance of a large, metropolitan area. Second is a resource extraction community: mining, lumbering, fireclay, oil. Those tend to be either in growth or decline, rather than in status quo. The third identifiable community is that of a satellite community; that is, one in which a large part of the labor force works in a nearby larger town. Land values tend to be lower than in a metropolitan area. Various open space areas are available, and these communities have grown in conjunction with the technological changes that have taken place in transportation and communication. The fourth community is the viable trade center. And finally, the remaining communities are those under 2,500 population that have experienced little growth. They're highly interdependent, one tends to find a bank that is the major business, a restaurant that serves coffee and doughnuts to the work crews, and little else in such communities. [1,p.35-40]

With the growth and decentralization of industry and government, one finds industrial location in rural and partially rural counties gaining momentum. In this regard, Claude Haren states:

Rural and partly rural counties gained in manufacturing jobs at a rate of 4.6 percent annually between 1959 and 1969, or more than double the ratio in metropolitan units. Nearly 900,000 manufacturing workers were added, together with almost another 500,000 in the remaining nonmetro areas. This brought the non-metro share of the total U.S. manufacturing employment up from 21 percent in 1959 to 23 percent 10 years later. [6]

Professor Childs did a study analyzing industrial locations in Oklahoma from 1963 through 1971 and found support for the decentralization of industry. In this time period, Professor Childs found 66.1 percent of all manufacturing jobs created by new manufacturing plants were in communities of less than 10,000 population. The Childs study did not talk about the impacts of such change, but obviously, delivery of facilities and services were major considerations in such selection. [7]

To summarize the community organization then, let me say that: (1) declining communities mean a transfer of functions and services to a regional or larger area. That is occurring in much of Pennsylvania. (2) Transfer is adaptive to economies of scale, but individual communities with knowledge of resources can intervene and remain viable. In other words, they can provide the guidance to change. And finally, human well-being needs to be foremost in mind in any program or delivery of services and indeed must be maximized rather than minimized.

Let's look at persons residing in rural areas, for a moment. We'll look at these within the context of family. A definition of family is in order before we begin. Family can be defined very simply and has been by Rickert as a unit of interacting and interdependent persons who share common goals, have a commitment to one another over time, share resources, and usually a common living space. In a generic sense, family encompasses all the social relationships that provide nurturments, protection, and renewal for individuals. Moreover, we have diverse family patterns in the United States. These include communal living, unmarried females with children, unmarried couples living

divorced, remarried, living together, and divorced, separated, or single parents with children. There have been huge adjustments in the family. Women with careers now equal 50 percent of the labor force. Husbands are helping with housework; they are more directly involved in childrearing. As one might suspect with the diverse family patterns and some of these adjustments to the family, the population projections with regard to birth rates are rather significant. Ten years ago the average United States family had 3.1 children. In 1976, it was 2.1, with the result being that in 1976 there were 12 million fewer persons than had been forecast in 1960.

Currently the proportion of the population over age 65 is somewhere slightly in excess of 10 percent. By the year 2030, this percentage is projected to be 17 to 20 percent. What all of this means is that we're moving from a child-oriented to an age-oriented society. Outside family support services are increasing. Things like senior centers, and yes, even libraries for rural residents are on the increase nationally and within Pennsylvania.

Of all those persons living in rural areas, we found that in terms of belonging, one-half of them belong to formal organizations. A minority of those belonging were extremely active. Of the remaining half, many have no organizations at all. The actives are not representative of the total community. They tend to be advantaged socially and economically while the nonactives tend to be lower in income. Often, they are in the young adult stage between high school and becoming more established in the community. Senior citizens, cultural and ethnic groups (for example, farm laborers) and newcomers to fringe area settlements also are included among the nonactives. The educationally active are the minority in everything. [8,p.200]

Finally, let us consider rural women. An article in our Centre Daily Times entitled, "Rural Women Turning to New Role," indicates that the women's movement is not a movement exclusive to urban areas. It may have first surfaced in the cities of America, but now it has spread to all levels of society in all geographic areas, including the isolated, rural village and farm. The article

goes on to state, "Rural women are banding to carve a more central place for themselves on the national scene. Despite the many obstacles of isolation, lack of communication, poor educational opportunities, employment changes and other social limitations, the rural woman is emerging as a strong-willed, strong-voiced rational citizen -- the separate, but equal, entity from her more eminent husband."

Environment

Let us now turn to the third category in our POET framework, environment. Hershey, reporting on his thesis study, indicates that in land use, the problem stems around the fact that we want food, shelter and clothing all produced on the same acre. Specifically, he was studying attitudes toward government regulation of land use. Such regulations rest on a number of powers. Government has the ability to tax, to take land for public use, to regulate or control land, to acquire land when an owner with no heirs dies without a will, and to own and manage land for specific purposes (for example, parks). In Hershey's study in Armstrong, Butler and Indiana Counties, he found that 54 percent of the respondents wanted to have the government regulate land. Those who favored government regulation tended to have a higher level of individual income and a higher level of formal education than those who preferred individual regulation. Further, those who wanted the control to rest with local officials tended to be selective in what they wanted those officials to regulate. [9]

In the rural environment, we find there is widespread poverty. A high proportion of rural housing is substandard. The rural poor are often unorganized.

The taxing structure, which helps to create our environment, has traditionally been the property tax as the major source of revenue for the smaller political subdivisions. Lately, there are arguments being championed by economists, sociologists, political scientists, and others that we need to have rather widespread reform in this area.

Services also help create an environment. We find no particular service across all communities that stands out either as not being provided or being needed, but we can isolate some specific rural problems: financial burden caused by the clean stream legislation; sewage systems that would cost more than the total property valuation of a community; poor quality of water; bridges; travel or transportation; fire protection; health; and unregulated growth. For example, let us look specifically at health. We can find that improved access to health care is urgently needed in most areas in rural America. Medical doctors and top-notch medical facilities tend to be concentrated in metropolitan centers, but in rural America we have a higher percentage of persons working in the three most dangerous occupations: mining, agriculture, and heavy construction. Rural areas have isolated roads and less adequate emergency equipment. Therefore, accidents are apt more often to be fatal in such areas. and finally, we have a higher percentage of elderly persons who need medical services.

How can rural areas attract medical personnel and establish medical facilities? Several have done it through primary health care centers. In Pennsylvania, Northern Indiana County now has a primary health care facility located at Marion Center. Upper Columbia County, the community of Benton, also has such a facility. In Centre County, Penns Valley, and Snow Shoe are two locations for primary health care units.

Technology

Let's turn to our fourth and final item in the POET framework, technology. As we mentioned earlier, technology has provided the rural resident with the opportunity to face and to begin to resolve the same problems that are confronting urban areas: land use, water control, air pollution, the disposal of sewage and solid waste, transportation congestion, and the provision of health care facilities. The process has begun. The homes are now electrified. They have telephones. The road systems have moved the rural residents from the mud to the hard-topped roads. Educational systems are becoming more equalized between

rural and urban areas. The communications systems, although not comparable to those found in urban areas, tend to be listed as adequate by most rural residents. In rural areas we find that wages are more equally distributed among all sectors of the community than they are in the urban sectors. Finally, all of this technology has permitted the decentralization of industry, which continues to put a competitive edge to the bidding for location in one community versus another.

All of these changes permit us at least three alternative approaches to what's going on in rural areas. First of all we can ignore those changes. This, I would argue, could bring disastrous results. Let me illustrate the consequences of ignoring change. The following is extracted from a talk delivered in 1908 at the annual meeting of the National Association of Carriage Builders:

Eighty-five percent of the horse-drawn vehicle industry of the country is untouched by the automobile. In 1906 and 1907, the demand for buggies reached the highest tide of its history. The man who predicts the general annihilation of the horse and his vehicle is a fool.

The second alternative to change is fight. The following letter addressed to President Andrew Jackson from Albany, New York, dated January 1, 1829, illustrates this alternative:

The canal system of this country is being threatened by the spread of a new form of transportation known as "railroads." The federal government must preserve the canals for the following reasons: One, if canal boats are supplanted by "railroads," serious unemployment will result. Captains, cooks, drivers, hostlers, repairmen, and lock tenders will be left without means of livelihood, not to mention the numerous farmers now employed in growing hay for the horses. Two, boat builders would suffer, and tow line, whip, and harness makers would be left destitute. Three, canal boats are absolutely essential to the defense of the United States. In the event of the expected trouble with England, the Erie Canal would be the only means by which we could ever move the supplies so vital to waging a modern war. For the above mentioned reasons, the government should create an interstate commerce commission to protect the American from the evils of "railroads" and to preserve the canals for posterity. As you may know, Mr. President, "railroad" carriages are pulled at an enormous speed of 15 miles per hour by "engines," which in addition to endangering life and limb of passengers, roar and snort their way through the countryside, setting fire to the ground, scaring the livestock, and frightening women and children.

The Almighty certainly never intended that people should travel at such breakneck speed. Respectfully yours,
Martin Van Buren, Governor of New York.

This brings me then to the third, and in my opinion, the most tenable of the alternatives to change. That is to guide, to modify, to direct, to be part of that whole process. In this regard, former Secretary of Agriculture Freeman commented: "We're at a moment of decision -- a moment of crisis. I believe that we can choose what kind of America our children will inherit. We are not in a blind pawn of fate, but rather the shapers of our own destiny."

How do we as educators, you as rural librarians, choose to help rural areas remain viable, remain vital, remain a place where people can choose to live while achieving a high quality of life? As educators, as rural librarians, I think we must cease being passive facilitators, i.e., waiting till people come to our neatly organized, categorized, and often hard-to-reach environment. I think we must take our expertise to them. In other words, we must become active facilitators, and we now have a vehicle that can help us do just that.

REFERENCE

The National Rural Information Clearing House of the National Rural Center was established to help persons interested in working with rural residents to help them achieve their goals, to become active facilitators rather than passive facilitators, or to become a server of the unserved. In a draft report just released, leadership initiative was shown to be necessary and crucial, and that trust in the provider, a balance of focus between rural and nonrural, and timing of suggested helps were crucial to the success of whether persons were helped or hindered. Moreover, in trying to activate this leadership initiative, the biggest problem was the serious information gap. This gap existed because appropriate information was not reaching rural people and information from rural people concerning their needs, their hopes, and frustrations, and their failures and successes was not reaching appropriate contact points.

What does the National Rural Information Clearing House of the National Rural Center offer? First, a special library that has an

extensive basic collection of materials relevant to rural affairs: references, tools, books, monographs, demonstrations, periodicals, demographic data, congressional and executive branch documents. Secondly, it has a computer information retrieval system that contains 20 data bases, among them ERIC and FAPRS. Third, it has established and operates a system for identifying and helping to secure sources and funding for technical assistance. Fourth, it has helped communities to get financial aid. Fifth, it provides reference for special research on rural matters. Sixth, it has developed and put into a computerized listing system some 14,000 names of key rural officials and community leaders and has gained cooperation for access to additional names through agreements to rent existing lists. Seventh, it has evolved, published, and distributed a directory of rural organization. Eighth, it initiated a program of issues meetings, bringing together representatives of rural organizations and federal departments to share information and discuss key issues as they develop, for example, credit, health, rural development, and communications. Ninth, they have a continuing program of meetings with federal policy making officials to exchange information. Last, they're establishing a continuous system of evaluation. Another place to look is for opportunities established by existing agencies and institutions. For example, the Middleburg Community Library just received an award for second place in the local government innovations conference, sponsored by the state rural development committee. They used raffles, gifts, car washes, bake sales, etc., in order to facilitate the resolution of a problem; i.e., lack of community access to existing library facilities. [10]

Finally, in our reference section, for your consideration, I would refer you to our own organization of Cooperative Extension Service. The national organization is located and officed in each of the 3,100 or so counties in the United States. Personnel from the Cooperative Extension Service, which has a Federal base, a State base, and as I have just mentioned, a county base, have been involved in the delivery of educational programs since 1914. These programs over the years have evolved into the current program offerings under agriculture and natural resources, family living, community resource development, and 4-R youth. Further, our organization has maintained since 1914 a primary

focus on rural audiences. Our track record is secure. We are recognized at all three governmental levels as an organization that offers about-town programs to help enhance the quality of life, especially the quality of life to those persons residing in rural areas.

I would suggest that if you are unfamiliar with the Cooperative Extension Service, you pursue it with your local county-based staff. If you are familiar with it, I would urge you to explore it further in terms of gathering suggestions as to how we might work together to help achieve the goals of the Center for the Study of Rural Bibliophilia, which are: "To identify needs and to extend current knowledge relative to the nature and role of rural librarians." Your goals are quite compatible with ours, so let's get on with the task.

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