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RURAL COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

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PREFACE

Prior to the World War, the Community Center Movement was well under way and during our participation in the conflict communities throughout the country were organized for war activities. So important had this become that at the close of the war the Council of National Defense was carrying on a nation-wide campaign for community councils. During the "reconstruction" days of the early 1920's there was a lively interest in community organization and the new Agricultural Extension Service gave it considerable attention. During this decade several books on this subject were published. The industrial depression of the 1930's put a brake upon the movement as attention was necessarily focused upon the economic situation. Yet out of this has come a new interest in the rural community as a unit for better social organization. In setting up its county Land Use Committees, the U. S. Department of Agriculture has emphasized the importance of developing local community units, and its program looks forward to considering their social as well as their economic problems. The planning movement has had a rapid growth, and state and county planning boards are coming to see that all planning is ultimately directed to human welfare and that this involves planning for and by rural communities. Thus it seems that in times of crisis people naturally come together to solve the problems of the common welfare in the area in which they habitually associate, which in rural districts tends to be the rural community.

Other forces in rural life, too, have brought out the need for better integration of the rural community. With the advent of automobiles and good roads during the past quarter century there has been a rapid increase in the number and growth of various "special interest groups" or organizations. The old neighborhood associations have waned and the smaller rural communities have had difficulty in competing with the larger village centers having

many services, such as high school, motion picture theater, bank, and specialized stores. Farm families can now go more easily to these larger villages than they could to the smaller centers in the days of mud roads. This increasing number of rural organizations, Farm and Home Bureaus, 4-H Clubs, Boy and Girl Scouts, Granges, Farmers' Unions, Parent-Teacher Associations, etc., has sometimes led to overorganization in light of the available resources of support and leadership, and there has inevitably resulted a certain amount of competition and sometimes conflict among them. These groups have done much to improve rural life, but the problems of cooperation they have raised indicate the need for coordination of effort in working toward the common welfare. The integration of the old neighborhood and smaller community groups into the life of the larger emerging rural community is a real problem in many parts of the country.

In spite of the fact that there are hundreds of examples of rural community development, most people probably still look upon the idea of rural community organization as a more or less utopian notion. "How can the desires and ambitions of individuals or strong groups be controlled by any sort of community organization?" they say. This comes back to the old question of whether man by taking thought can control his social relations as he does the world of things; to the validity of Lester F. Ward's doctrine of "telesis." If we think of rural community organization as a means of controlling or organizing the community in a mechanical sense, such as is implied in the much-abused term "social engineering," then it is apparent that it is a vain hope. But this does not mean that we subscribe to a doctrine of *laissez faire,* and that nothing can be done for community improvement. Every community in which there is any ambition strives to improve its condition. Indeed, as we have seen, communities are forced to consider their problems and to act together in times of crisis. It is possible for a community through discussion and the creation of consensus to ascertain and determine how it may adapt its life to changing conditions, and it is the rapid changes in modern rural life which are stimulating such cooperation. By a study of its situation a community can make better use of the resources at hand and can greatly improve its social control so as to advance the interests and values

which it holds to be desirable, and to retard those which it deems undesirable. A rational, realistic approach to the social problems which affect its people in common is the essential idea of community organization, whatever its methods or mechanisms may be.

Although there has been continuous advance and a lively interest in rural community organization, there has been no book which has brought together the experience and knowledge of the last twenty years or more. Many of our agricultural colleges are giving courses on rural community organization, based on the scattered material available. The authors have been giving such a course for several years, and have used most of the following pages in mimeographed form with their classes. The book has been prepared primarily for use as a textbook, but it is believed that it will be found useful to extension workers in agriculture and home economics, to planning officials, and to rural professional leaders, such as school superintendents and principals, rural pastors and church executives, social workers, and organization executives.

We have made no attempt to trace the historical development of the community movement or community organization, as this has been well done by Dr. J. F. Steiner in his *Community Organization.*

The book presupposes that the student will have had a course in general sociology or rural sociology, but, although desirable, this is not a necessary prerequisite for mature students who have had personal experience in rural life, as we have found in our teaching of the subject.

The teacher should be cautioned, in the use of the Topics for Discussion, that some of them have no specific answers, but are purposefully framed to stimulate discussion and to bring out both sides of a problem. The discussion topics and the exercises are given only as suggestions of the sort of student work which may form the basis of class sessions, which we prefer to conduct as conferences rather than as recitations. Teachers will do well to use only those discussion topics and exercises which are adapted to the experience and environment of their students, to supplement them with others of local significance, and to invite the students to add others which seem important to them. We have found it desirable to have the exercises carefully written out and handed in for cor-

rection, and to require students to have written notes on which to base their discussion in the class conferences.

We are greatly indebted to the many publishers who have permitted us to make quotations from copyrighted books and magazines, as noted in the footnotes. We are especially indebted to Julius M. Elrod, Viola Hunt, Harvey E. Jacobs, Emmajane Kleinhans, William G. Mather, Jr., and Leslie C. Nicholls, who prepared the community studies in Chapter III, to A. D. Dotter, and to Mrs. Mary Bostwick for her work with the manuscript.

Cornell University
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RURAL COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

CHAPTER I

THE SCOPE OF RURAL COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

In recent years, extension workers, sociologists, and social workers have given increasing attention to community organization, and many civic groups and planning boards have come to appreciate its importance. Furthermore, local leaders, as well as these professional people, have recognized the need to coordinate the efforts of the various existing institutions and agencies if all are to work effectively toward the common objective of a richer community life.

To understand the concept of rural community organization, it is necessary to appreciate both the nature of the rural community and the meaning of the term "community organization." The rural community as it exists in this country today is a new form of social grouping, without legal status and dependent wholly on the association of country people and villagers in their common interests. In such indexes to the popular magazines as the "Readers' Guide," almost no reference to the community as a topic will be found prior to 1910. By 1915, however, there was a good deal of discussion of community problems, and since the World War such articles have become steadily more numerous. It is apparent, therefore, that the term "rural community" represents a relatively new concept: it is an emergent form of association whose development must be watched and fostered. Some of the processes involved in the creation of a rural community are illustrated in the account of the development of Waterville in the next chapter.

There is inevitably much confusion in the current use of this term. It is frequently applied to the small rural neighborhood clustering around an open-country school or church; or, at the other extreme, it may refer to a small city, perhaps a county seat, which

dominates a rural area. Obviously, rural communities differ not only in relative size but in their structure and functions, as well. Inasmuch as the term has no legal status and has not been defined by custom, it needs clarification if we are to understand its exact meaning. This will be discussed in Chapter III.

Most of the rural communities in this country are small, centering in villages of 100 to 300 inhabitants. Before the advent of the automobile, these small places formed the centers of whatever social organization there was, for with dirt roads the distance the farmer could drive was very limited, and he went only infrequently to the local trading center. There was no problem of organization in the small village because it had only a few well-recognized institutions: the school, the church, and possibly a farmer's association, together with one or two general stores, maybe an elevator or feed mill, and a blacksmith's shop. With the quick and easy transportation of today, however, the farmer is no longer dependent on the local village center, and many villages, of which twenty years ago only one was readily accessible, now compete for his trade and attention.

Naturally enough, the larger villages have been growing at the expense of the smaller ones, and their areas of influence have steadily expanded. Furthermore, available activities have multiplied as a result of improved communication so that many interests compete for the individual's time and energies. This rivalry among organizations may be entirely friendly, but there arises an evident need for some means of obtaining consensus and united action on community matters.

The decline in population in a large proportion of the rural counties in this country and the consequent decline of neighborhoods, as well as the improvement in transportation, have influenced farm people to center their social activities increasingly in the village. The competition with the city has brought villagers and farmers together to meet their common needs. Thus change in the social environment is a major factor in creating a need for community organization in rural as well as in urban life. No longer satisfied with the institutions which served their fathers and grandfathers, farmers and villagers find they must cooperate if they are to have what they desire in the way of schools, churches, community build-

ings, etc. But farmers and villagers have not always seen eye to eye on these matters and there has often been considerable friction between them. A basic problem in the formation of a rural community, and thus of its organization, is that of the relationships between the village and the open country, which will be considered in Chapter IV.

There is much confusion as to the exact meaning of the term "community organization." Some light may be thrown on the question by considering what we mean when we speak of a community as unorganized or disorganized. The word *unorganized,* in this connection, usually implies the absence of certain facilities or agencies which seem desirable and which we might reasonably expect to find. When we speak of a *disorganized* community, however, we usually refer to one which is decadent, or in which have arisen conflicts so sharp that its normal community life has been disrupted. It is not merely the multiplicity of institutions, interest groups, or available activities, then, which marks the organized community, for it may be overburdened in this respect and still lack organization as a community. The determining factor is rather the integration and coordination of whatever agencies do exist in order that a consensus of opinion and unity of action on matters of general interest may be secured. There is evident need for an analysis of the aims and objectives of community organization, which will be made in Chapter V.

Community organization may or may not involve some type of formal setup such as a community council or committee. In many instances very satisfactory organization has been developed with no formal mechanism. To illustrate just what is involved in this process, several case histories are presented for study (Chapter VI), and various types of formal community organization are then considered (Chapter VII).

Whether or not any formal mechanism exists, the test of community organization is whether the local institutions, agencies, and individuals are able to work together collectively for the common welfare. This cooperation comes from free discussion and the development of a real consensus, and also from experience in handling community enterprises which require collective action. It is necessary, therefore, to study the techniques of community organization

and means by which such enterprises may be stimulated and carried on (Chapters VIII and IX).

In any process of organization more or less conflict inevitably arises, and often the need for community organization is the result of conflicts which have led to a state of disorganization. Insight into their nature and origin and an ability to deal with them make up, therefore, an important part of the technique of community organization (Chapter X).

Rural community organization, like every other social movement, will advance only as it enlists competent and devoted leaders, for on their vision and drive it must depend. One of the chief difficulties is to secure the interest of many people in the cause of community improvement and their loyalty to leaders of their choice. We need, therefore, to examine this aspect of the problem in some detail (Chapter XII).

The rural community exists, not by itself, but as part of our whole social and administrative structure. Its relations to neighboring areas, rural and urban, and to the county and state governments must be considered as part of our problem (Chapter XIII). Community organization in cities has grown to a considerable extent from the city-planning movement, and this idea has been extended to include county, state, and national planning boards. Their studies have shown that the effectiveness of social planning for larger units must depend on the degree of organization present in the rural areas. Thus rural community organization is an integral part of the whole social planning movement.

The inquisitive student may question the relation of rural community organization to the whole subject of rural sociology and to other bodies of knowledge which must be employed if the process of community organization is to be realistic and effective. It is evident to the student of sociology that the process of community organization must be based largely on the knowledge of groups or forms of association gained from sociological analysis. However, the process requires not only a knowledge of the social structure of the community but also an understanding of the underlying motivation and an ability to manipulate motives toward desired ends. Evidently, then, it is equally important to apply effectively the principles of social psychology. Still further knowledge will be

necessary to plan for community improvement, for the life of any community depends also on its physical situation and assets, its economic system, its political organization and relationships, and the influence of its history, traditions, and ideals. In short, rural community organization is but a part of the larger subject of rural social organization as applied to the problems of the community. Rural social organization is a technology, or art, and as such it must utilize not only rural sociology but all the other sciences and disciplines which affect its problems. Rural social organization is the art of planning social relationships in the rural environment by use of the methods of science.[1]

To understand better the relation of social organization to improving human relations, we may well consider just what is involved in the concept "organization." "An organization," says Professor E. C. Hayes, "is a set of differentiated activities serving a common purpose and so correlated that the effectiveness of each is increased by its relation to the rest."[2] His definition commences with "a set of differentiated activities." These are the different groups and institutions which may contribute to community welfare, and which form the subject matter of rural sociology. Whether or not they do contribute, whether desirable social organization exists, depends upon the third part of his definition, on their being "so correlated that the effectiveness of each is increased by its relation to the rest." This is the heart of the problem. Are the "differentiated activities," the various groups and associations, so correlated as to increase their effectiveness? This involves the matter of relationships. Is there cooperation or undue competition or conflict among the various groups? This will determine whether they can or cannot increase each other's effectiveness in "serving a common purpose." Social organization implies that the various groups and institutions are so integrated that they form part of a functioning system directed toward a common end. Thus the coordination of group activities is the heart of social organization in so far as it is related to community welfare, and the importance of

[1] Cf. Dwight Sanderson, "Scientific Research in Rural Sociology," *American Jour. Sociol.* XXXIII, pp. 190 ff., September 1927.

[2] E. C. Hayes, *Introduction to the Study of Sociology.* New York, D. Appleton Co., 1915, p. 409.

community organization in the everyday life of its people is apparent.

But the process of community organization is never completed. Were it assumed to be perfect, a static condition would result which would not provide for adaptation of community life to changes in the social environment. Social organization will be adequate only in the degree that it creates attitudes which recognize and tolerate differences of opinion. It must provide for what sociologists call "accommodation" and "assimilation" of different elements and points of view, so that they may contribute to the second essential part of Professor Hayes' definition, "serving a common purpose." There can be no integration of social forces unless there be general agreement as to what constitutes community welfare. Such a common purpose, or consensus with regard to the common values, is produced through various processes of "social control." Without attempting an analysis of the nature or processes of social control, it may be stated that it is the instrument by which individuals and groups are given a common set of values and by which their behavior is made to conform to the accepted values or purposes of the society in which they live. "Social control signifies the social definition of the wishes of the individual and their incorporation in the common culture of the group."[3] Social control is, therefore, the chief means of developing "common purposes," and the degree of social control will be an important criterion of social organization.

Community organization is a technique for obtaining a consensus concerning both the values that are most important for the common welfare and the best means of obtaining them. The most fundamental of these values have become so much a part of the culture that they are assumed as desirable; they belong to the established mores. It is the new values which arise out of the changing social environment and about which there are diverse attitudes that test the strength of community organization and give rise to the need for integration. When the young people flock to the neighboring city to attend the movies, the rural community awakes to

[3] Carl A. Dawson and Warner E. Gettys, *An Introduction to Sociology*. New York, The Ronald Press, 1935. Rev. Ed., p. 372.

the fact that it needs to build an adequate recreational program for them.

It is evident from the above discussion that community organization is but the means for creating the best type of rural community. There is, however, a larger sociological question as to the significance of the rural community as a means for building a better rural civilization, and the contribution it makes to the social organization of the whole nation. Is it worth while to attempt such an integration in the life of rural communities, or will rural social life be increasingly swayed by special interest groups whose purposes will be largely controlled from urban centers? This question of the value of the rural community as a basic unit of social organization and its function in a democratic society forms an ultimate test of the validity of the aims and objectives of rural community organization. The discussion of this question (Chapter XIV) reveals the sociological significance of rural community organization.

To illustrate the forces which have affected community organization and some of the processes by which it occurs, the next chapter presents an account of an old rural community in central New York, in whose history some of the problems of rural community organization will be revealed.

CHAPTER II

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A RURAL COMMUNITY [1]

I. The Waterville Area Before 1900:

The Period of Neighborhood Association

The term *rural community* has come to be used by sociologists to indicate the relationships existing between people and institutions in the area composed of a village and its surrounding farms. Such rural communities are typical in American agriculture, in which farm families are dispersed upon their lands about a village or town which serves as a center for their buying, marketing, church-going, recreational, and other common activities. The farmer needs the village, and the village, in turn, existing because of the farmer's needs, needs him. The two, farm and village, form parts of a whole.

But how does this relationship come about? Just what are the forces that make the community? And how perfect a job do they perform?

This study of the Waterville community is a step toward the answer to these questions. Waterville is not set forth as an ideal, nor as a bad example, but as an illustration of community-building influences at work.

[1] This chapter reproduces "A Study of Rural Community Development in Waterville, New York," *Bulletin 608* of Cornell University Agricultural Station, June 1934, by W. G. Mather, Jr., T. H. Townsend, and Dwight Sanderson, with some omissions and minor changes, and with the addition of data gathered in 1938 by Margery Townsend. This is the community described by Dr. James Mickle Williams in his doctoral dissertation *An American Town,* published privately in 1906 and now out of print. This was the first sociological study of a rural community in this country. Mr. Sanderson made the survey of Waterville in 1928; Mr. Townsend, as editor of the local newspaper, made further studies of the community and wrote its history; and Mr. Mather resurveyed the community in 1933 and wrote the bulletin.

The Waterville community lies in a great hollow in the hills between the Sauquoit and Chenango Valleys, just south of the Mohawk River. A great swamp has long cut it off from the territory to the south; on the southwest, east, and north, it is surrounded by hills. The soils of the hills are, in general, inferior to those of the valley as a whole; in 1932 an area some four miles long on the ridge to the east was withdrawn from cultivation by the State and constituted a forest preserve. The valley soils are fertile.

Waterville Village, with a population of 1,298 in 1930, lies at the approximate center and is 12 miles southwest of Utica, a city of more than 100,000. Sangerfield Center, a hamlet of 100 inhabitants, is a mile to the south, where the Cherry Valley Turnpike (U. S. 20) and the Chenango Turnpike (N. Y. 12) intersect. Stockwell, another hamlet of 30 or 40 persons, lies 3½ miles to the south on the edge of the swamp. On the edge of the area to the northeast, 6 miles away, is Paris Hill, of some 50 inhabitants; Deansboro, 233, 4 miles to the northwest; Oriskany Falls, a village of 800, 4 miles to the west; North Brookfield, of perhaps 200 inhabitants, 5 miles to the south.

The community embraces the most of two townships of Oneida County, Sangerfield and Marshall; the village lies mainly in Sangerfield.

In March of 1792 there were four feet of snow in the hills southwest of Utica. Two men and their wives, one of them with a small baby, fought their way through the storm with oxen and sleds. The snow was so deep that the oxen could not pull when yoked side by side in the usual way, so the men unspanned them, made an individual yoke for each ox, and hitched them up tandem, using the cords from their beds to lengthen the traces. At last they reached a broad, sheltered hollow by a waterfall, and here they stopped and hewed out their cabins.

The village of Waterville had begun.

Those were the years of America's breeding. From the narrow streets of New England villages, from the crowded farms of Manhattan, even from the hills of Wales and the meadows of Ireland, sturdy men and women surged up the Mohawk, up the Susquehanna, to settle in rolling, lake-jewelled central New York.

Fed by the steady immigrant stream, Waterville grew. Other