

Comments

The Founding of RURAL SOCIOLOGY and the Rural Sociological Society

Clyde V. Collard
California State College-Stanislaus

Sociology has dated its "modern phase" from the naming of the discipline by Auguste Comte. So, too, has rural sociology fixed upon a general period as its time of emergence as a discipline. Nelson (1969:3) confirmed the concept of previous events and chronologically located the periods.

It began to emerge in the twentieth century, but we must look back to the social climate of America in the last quarter or so of the nineteenth century if we are to understand its inception and rise.

In this period of inception, we encounter names and events such as the first rural-sociology course at the University of Chicago in 1894, Sir Horace Plunkett and President Theodore Roosevelt, the Reclamation Act of 1902, and the Country Life Commission in 1908.

A curiously interesting aside in this development of rural sociology concerns Comte's concept of a "hierarchy" of sciences with sociology as its queen discipline. Yet we find this "crown" of the sciences dividing into complementary sections. If we have one sociology for rural areas and another for urban and others for education, medicine, psychology, law, and so on, then do we establish a hierarchy of the sociologies? And if we establish this new hierarchy, which sociology becomes the new crown? I fear that any answer to these questions would receive the same skeptical reactions that Comte's new, "upstart" discipline received from the older, established sciences when he made the offensive declaration of sociology's pre-eminence. Still, rural sociologists consider that there are enough problems specifically relating to rural life to warrant special studies of that area. One of the elements of establishing the distinctiveness of rural sociology was the organization of the Rural Sociological Society (RSS).

ESTABLISHING THE RURAL SOCIOLOGY SECTION

There were at least two steps leading to the founding of the RSS. First, there was the organization of the Rural Sociology Section of the

American Sociological Society; second, RURAL SOCIOLOGY was established. Brunner traced the Rural Sociology Section directly to the appointment of the Country Life Commission by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1908 under the chairmanship of Liberty Hyde Bailey. The commission later produced a report that had considerable impact in the United States. According to Brunner (1957:3):

One result of this report was the selection of "Rural Life" as the theme of the annual meeting of the American Sociological Society in 1912. During its session 12 persons interested primarily in rural sociology assembled in a hotel room. From this meeting grew informal gatherings, which eventually expanded into the rural section of the society and then into the Rural Sociological Society.

Moving forward from Brunner's date of 1912, Nelson (1969:127) mentioned the sparse program space devoted to rural sociology in the American Sociological Society and then set the time for the organization of the Rural Sociology Section.

Rural sociologists continued to participate in the general programs of the American Sociological Society for the next seven years. During this period only three papers on rural topics were read--one by John Phelan in 1918, one by Dwight Sanderson in 1919, and one by Kenyon Butterfield in 1920.

In 1921 rural sociologists held an informal gathering prior to the opening of the general sessions of the society. This meeting was apparently devoted to the problem of organization, for the following year the Rural Sociology Section was organized. Dwight Sanderson served as the first chairman, although the section as such did not appear in the program for 1922. In 1923 under the chairmanship of Carl Taylor, an official session meeting was held before the opening of the official section.

The minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee of the American Sociological Society (December 28, 1921), indicated that (Holik, 1970:4):

Professor Dwight Sanderson, as chairman of the group on Rural Sociology, made a statement outlining its history and its desire to become a section of the American Sociological Society with its meeting at a time set apart for this and other groups.... Motion made and carried that an invitation be extended to the rural sociologists to become a section of the Society, and its program, after consultation with the president, to be incorporated in the general program.

Material supplied by Holik (1970) noted that Butterfield was originally chosen to chair the section but requested that Sanderson act as such during the year of his absence from the country. Holik's notes generally follow Nelson's timetable on the organization of the rural section except that Holik considered 1922-1923 as a period of

incomplete recognition and cited 1924 as the first period of complete recognition of the rural section on the general program.

Thus, the Rural Sociology Section was formed, the parent society felt it had successfully quieted those interested in rural issues, and the rural sociologists felt they had gained their proper place. However, the honeymoon did not last long, for the rural sociologists soon realized that they had not achieved the rights they desired. According to Smith (1970):

As I recall Dr. Kolb's description of what took place, it was that younger members of the society were pressing for an organization independent of the American Sociological Society. When I look over the minutes of the meeting at which the society was organized, I find that the pressure for an independent society was most keenly put by O. D. Duncan in a minority report, and he was scarcely a younger man, but it may well be that men not represented on the organizing committee, but younger in the society did put pressure on the committee members for an independent society.

Cottrell (1970) had similar recollections of the discontent during this period.

I vaguely recall that while I was a graduate student at the University of Chicago there were reports of discontent among members of the American Sociological Society who were in the rural field because that field was not being given enough attention by the national society. I presume it was out of this discontent and the feeling that there were special interests that needed encouragement and development that the Rural Sociological Society emerged.

There were three major areas of contention between the rural section and the main society. First, section members were required to be members of the American Sociological Society and to pay dues to that body. This rule eliminated many professional people, such as extension workers, who wished to be members of the rural section but who did not desire to join the society. Secondly (Nelson, 1969:130),

Rural sociology was not a truly specialized field of interest comparable to the family, population, methodology, or the community. Rural sociology was in fact as broad in its content as sociology itself. The section was thus an enclave in the general society, rather than an organic part of it.

Taeuber (1970) summarized the general feelings of dissatisfaction engendered by these two problems.

As a graduate student at the University of Minnesota in the late 1920's I was aware that there was a good deal of dissatisfaction among some rural sociologists with their role

in what was then known as the American Sociological Society.... How much of the dissatisfaction expressed by these men related to what was regarded as undue influence on the affairs of the society by the University of Chicago is not clear to me now. I am sure that there was a good deal of this kind of rivalry involved.

The society had endeavored to give some recognition to the rural work through programs and some organizational arrangements. However, this was considered as not sufficient recognition, and it clearly did not provide a place for extension sociologists and others who were more concerned with the applied work which was being carried on in the Colleges of Agriculture. Men like Gillette and Taylor found themselves recognized by the general Society, but there was a younger group, exemplified by Lynn Smith and Charles Loomis who felt that there was a need for a separate society, and they found a good deal of support among persons who did not feel themselves welcomed in the general society with its trend toward more formal training, theoretical formulations, and a lack of regard for the empirical field surveys which were then the main contributions of rural sociologists.

Thirdly, and perhaps the most important bone of contention, the society had a general rule that members were limited to one paper during the annual meeting. Thus, any rural sociologist who presented a paper in the Rural Sociology Section could not present a paper in one of the other sections. Polson (1970) regarded this limitation as a prime reason for establishment of the Rural Sociological Society.

However, I remember the rural sociologists of that time felt they had inadequate opportunities to present and publish papers on their research. The establishment of RURAL SOCIOLOGY was undertaken to overcome this problem. The management of the journal and an opportunity for the presentation of more papers were, in my judgment, the main reasons for the organization of the (Rural Sociological) Society.

Another problem lay in the scheduling of section meetings (Polson, 1936:113).

Mr. Hummel described the problems he had encountered in preparing the program for the Rural Section. He emphasized the difficulty of obtaining an adequate number of sessions because of the regulations...on the time section meetings were to be held.

Wakely (1970) mentioned this same problem.

One of the difficulties which rural sociologists had with the American Sociological Society was the hard time they had trying to schedule a rural sociology section meeting which the rural group considered adequate. Rural sociologists were active in research at the time and felt a

keen need for an expanded section program. This the American Sociological Society refused to give.

ESTABLISHING A JOURNAL

There are several accounts of the events leading to the publication of RURAL SOCIOLOGY. All relate the same basic tale concerning the need for, debate about, and publication of the journal. As with most historical accounts, however, there are refreshingly curious shades, nuances, and discrepancies. Let us begin with Nelson's (1969:128-129) published version.

For several years during the early 1930's the society held discussions on the desirability of publishing its own journal and finally in 1935 the membership agreed to establish the AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW. The momentum of this decision carried over into the rural section. Meeting in December 1935, rural sociologists first thought of capitalizing on the publication of the forthcoming journal for their own purposes. Bruce Melvin urged the rural section to request that some issues of the new review be devoted entirely to the "presentation of rural material." In the ensuing debate on the need for better publication outlets, the discussion turned to the possibility of establishing a separate journal of rural sociology. At one point Fred C. Frey of Louisiana State University informed the group that his university would be willing to underwrite such a project for the first few years. After several hours of earnest discussion, Carl Taylor introduced, and Frey seconded, a motion calling upon the "incoming chairman of the Section...to appoint a committee to assume the responsibility of discovering and creating channels by which the maximum amount of space could be obtained for rural sociology articles in some standard publication." The committee, meeting soon after, unanimously recommended the establishment of RURAL SOCIOLOGY. The first issue appeared in March 1936.

Smith's account follows closely to that of Nelson, but Smith's apt use of connotative words gives a slightly different feeling to the story. Smith's (1957:2-3) account reads:

The matter came to a head at the annual meetings in 1935, when, as usual, the discussion of the matter occupied most of the time at the business meetings of the Section on Rural Sociology. The acute need for expanded and improved facilities for publishing the papers presented at the meetings of the Section was commented upon by various members. Finally Dr. Bruce L. Melvin moved that the Rural Section request that one or more issues of the forthcoming AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW be devoted to the rural material. Sanderson seconded. Dr. B. Youngblood "in commenting on the motion stressed the value to rural

sociology of (1) a strong professional organization through which rural sociologists could promote their own interests, and (2) a regular channel for the publication of the papers." Three hours of vigorous debate ensued. Near the termination of this, Dean Fred C. Frey, of Louisiana State University, assured the group that if all that was holding them back was the matter of the sums that had been mentioned with respect to costs, he could assure them that his University would be willing to underwrite the venture for the first few years. At this point Carl C. Taylor moved that the incoming chairman of the Section on Rural Sociology (Lowry Nelson) be instructed to appoint a committee to assume the responsibility of discovering and creating channels by which the maximum amount of space could be obtained for rural sociology articles in some standard publication. "This committee met promptly, and unanimously agreed to proceed with the publication of a quarterly."

Now consider Frey's (1970) colorful comments.

Start of the Rural Sociological Society was in New Jersey during the New Deal. There were many governmental rural programs. The American Sociological Society was split into sections. We (Rural Section) sent in programs but were stymied by the "Big Boys" (Dwight Sanderson and Carl C. Taylor). The rural sociologists got mad and talked of walking out. At the meeting members of the other sections came to the Rural Section so the "Big Boys" said they would approve of programs. Sanderson and Taylor aspired to be president of the American Sociological Society. Sanderson said we would need a journal but we had no money so rural sociology shouldn't be separate. I got mad and said LSU will underwrite the journal and we did. So the Rural Sociological Society was born.

Question: "Still seeking excitement of rural breakaway from American Sociological Society. How long was it discussed?" Frey: "Don't remember. Big argument came down to Sanderson's and Taylor's objections."

Question: "What were some of the problems of bringing the journal to LSU?"

Frey: "Too many. Biggest problem was financial. Needed secretaries, printing and other things. But we came out okay."

Zimmerman (1965:23) presented a version with an interesting twist that he stated was heretofore untold.

However about 1934 I came to the conclusion that the separate society needed its own JOURNAL OF RURAL SOCIOLOGY.

I talked this matter over with T. Lynn Smith who was then at the University of Louisiana at Baton Rouge. At that time Fred Frey, whom I had befriended very much earlier at the University of Minnesota, was Dean and Vice President of the University of Louisiana. At any rate he had access to

some free money of the university and that is always considered fair academic game in the matter of scientific publishing. Also during those summers I was teaching at the University of Louisiana summer school. Smith, my student, had invited me.

Finally I made Smith a proposition. We needed a journal. He would ask Fred Frey to allocate some university money to help support it in case dues were not sufficient. Then if the society agreed, it would be published at the University there with Smith as the managing editor.

Smith agreed to this but had one condition. Earlier Smith had been a student of Lowry Nelson and had for him a great deal of affection. He wanted Lowry Nelson to be the first editor of the Journal of Rural Sociology. I agreed to that because no one deserved an accolade for work on Rural Sociology more than Lowry Nelson. So we went ahead and thus the Journal of Rural Sociology was born. In this way I finally graduated and became a full fledged rural sociologist. This story had been told before.

Regard, finally, the formal minutes of the meeting of the Rural Sociology Section on December 29 of 1935 (Polson, 1936:113-114).

Several members of the Section suggested the need for improved publication facilities for rural sociologists and for an improved and enlarged annual program to include material of interest to teachers of rural sociology as well as the research and extension personnel.

...it was suggested that the committee investigate the possibility of establishing a quarterly journal of rural sociology, and that if the committee set up an independent journal of rural sociology it be possible to subscribe to the journal without joining the American Sociological Society.

ESTABLISHING THE RSS

The final step from section to Society began with the appointment of the committee to consider that step. At the 1935 meeting of the Section on Rural Sociology (Polson, 1936:114):

Dean Fred C. Frey moved that the incoming executive committee be instructed to study the possibilities of forming an autonomous organization of the Rural Sociology Section and to make their recommendations to the members of the Rural Section previous to the next annual meeting. Motion seconded and carried.

The following year at the annual meeting of the rural section (Anonymous, 1937:110):

A special committee, consisting of Dwight Sanderson (Chairman), John H. Kolb, Carl C. Taylor, B. O. Williams, and

O. D. Duncan, was named to consider measures and seek ways and means for perfecting a more satisfactory organization of rural sociologists.

The desire to form a separate organization was by no means unanimous among the rural sociologists, however. Nelson (1969:131) emphatically related the negative attitude that prevailed.

The rural section's response to the idea of an autonomous society did not, however, match in enthusiasm and unanimity the earlier support for the journal. In fact, there was widespread reluctance to separate from the parent society.

Edwards (1970) expressed the concern over finances as one of the "dangers" involved in separation.

There was a section in the American Sociological Society on rural sociology. I can remember discussion over several years of the possibility of forming a new society and of the dangers that some people thought of in connection with this. As I remember, Dr. Carl C. Taylor was one of the persons most instrumental in urging the membership of this section to form a new society at this time. There were some members who agreed with Dr. Taylor in urging the group to take a chance and expressing a belief that the membership would expand so as to make it financially feasible.

Other prominent members also expressed their reluctance and doubts. Zimmerman (1965:23) wrote that "I was not particularly enthusiastic about the separate society but went along with it." Brunner (1970) had similar early doubts; "I did not return to the United States in time to attend the meeting that formally initiated the society. I remember not being entirely sure that the move was a good one. In this I was mistaken." At the end of 1937, the executive committee presented its report, which reflected the general reluctance of the membership of the rural section (Nelson, 1969:131).

A majority of the committee rejected separation, favoring instead an effort to secure revision of the society's constitution in order to provide a larger measure of autonomy for the rural section. A minority report, submitted by O. D. Duncan, recommended the immediate organization of an independent society. It was only after lively and prolonged discussion that the section adopted the minority report and proceeded to organize the Rural Sociological Society.

Smith (1970) recalled the same incident as follows:

When the next business meeting of the Rural Sociology Section was held, in December 1937, consideration of the committee's report was the major item of business. A majority report recommended endeavors to secure amendments to

the constitution of the American Sociological Society that would provide the desired autonomy; the minority report, by O. D. Duncan, recommended immediate formation of an independent society. There was vigorous debate, the minority report was adopted, "The affairs of the Rural Section were brought to an end, and the group proceeded to organize the Rural Sociological Society of America."

Sewell (1970) added a personal note on Duncan's pleasure at the acceptance of his report.

All I remember about the event was that O. D. Duncan, who was head of the department (at Minnesota), and who presented the minority report that favored an independent society rather than section status for rural sociology, told all of us in the department how overjoyed he was that the decision of the membership to accept his report (he was a minority of one on a five-man committee) rather than that of the majority.

The majority report recommended two amendments to the constitution of the American Sociological Society. Duncan's report was similar to the two amendments but he added a third clause that called for the formation of a separate organization (Anonymous, 1938:124).

Dr. O. D. Duncan submits the following as a minority report. (The constitution which he appends is practically identical with that submitted by the majority report, except that it deletes Article 3.):

(1) that this group here and now declare itself to be an independent society and that as an organization its allegiance to the American Sociological Society in all matters of jurisdiction shall be regarded by this action as having come to an end,

(2) that for the year 1938 the Rural Sociological Society operate under a provisional constitution for which purpose a draft of a suggested constitution is attached hereto,

(3) that a committee be designated to draw up proposals for permanent organization, to be considered by the Society at its regular annual meeting in 1938.

The committee amended its report by deleting paragraph 2, and its report was then adopted.

The minutes provided by Holik (1970) included a paragraph not printed in RURAL SOCIOLOGY.

There was a lively discussion between members of the Section, including Sanderson, Kolb, Taylor, Duncan, and Zimmerman, concerning the desirability of forming a national organization. The principal point of disagreement was concerning the desirability of affiliating as a Section of the American Sociological Society as recommended in the majority report. It was pointed out by Dr. Sanderson that

the question could not be settled at the time because of the provision in the constitution of the American Sociological Society which provided that all amendments to the Society's constitution must be presented at least ninety days before the next annual meeting. Accordingly, it was agreed to close the affairs of the Section on Rural Sociology, organize a new national Society, operate under a provisional constitution, and defer for one year the adoption of a permanent constitution.

There was vigorous discussion, the minority report was adopted, and the tale of the founding of the Rural Sociological Society ends with a brief note in the journal (Anonymous, 1938:124): "The affairs of the Rural Section were brought to an end, and the group proceeded to organize the Rural Sociological Society of America."

However, the end of the founding is the beginning of the Society and much was to be said and done. Loomis (1970) told of an incident that illustrates some of the bitterness resulting from the separation.

As I was preparing to leave the meeting of the American Sociological Association, as I recollect held on one of the West Coast campuses, I was standing with my suitcase prepared to go to Stillwater, Oklahoma, where O. D. Duncan, then President of the Rural Sociological Society, had arranged our rural meeting. I was met by one of the top figures in the ASA who wanted to know why I was leaving early. I told him that I had to go to Stillwater to this meeting. He flew into a condemnation of "splinter groups." He and the council of ASA were very critical of those of us who had organized the Rural Sociological Society. The criticism and adverse feeling was not because of what we had done in organizing the Rural Sociological Association but rather that the Society for (the Study of) Social Problems claimed to be using us as a model in setting up its operations and criticizing the parent body. As you may know, they have continually done this. When I told this outstanding figure and supporter of ASA that I was going to Stillwater, he vented his feelings concerning both RSA and S(S)SP.

Frey had commented that all members of the Rural Sociological Society retained membership in the American Sociological Society, yet he still felt that the split had changed the parent group. Hamilton (1970) did not agree with Frey on the membership but did hold the same general view regarding change.

One unfortunate result of the setting up of a separate society is that many rural sociologists decreased their participation in the American Sociological Society (later Association). It has in my opinion tended to fragmentize the ASA and to decrease the influence of rural sociologists in the ASA.

Taeuber (1970) felt that the Rural Sociological Society had matured since those first days and considered the relationship between the two societies to have improved over the years.

Perhaps it reflects the fact that with maturity the contacts with the American Sociological Society are now received as less threatening than they seemed to be at the time the Rural Society was established. Or perhaps it is a reflection of the changed emphasis in the training and background of rural sociologists that there now seems to be a somewhat greater degree of recognition of their roles and contributions by the larger organization.

So all was not dark and what resentment there was seems to have lessened and the schism that was surely there has narrowed. Still, even in those moments of conflict, there was a feeling of accomplishment among the rural sociologists, a feeling of acquired status and privilege, and as Smith (1970) related, a feeling of elation.

More than anything specific that Dr. Kolb said, I remember the feeling of elation that came over to his students in that this was a great scholarly adventure which was to follow up on some of the achievements of members in the society in the research program that they had sponsored under the W.P.A. research opportunity. Dr. Kolb conveyed to me a feeling that now we had matched with a scholarly society and a scholarly journal the pioneering research that was being done by members of the society already.

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:

The two primary purposes of THE RURAL SOCIOLOGIST are to provide a forum for the exchange of views on matters of concern to the profession of rural sociology and to provide timely dissemination of news to members of the Rural Sociological Society. The editor of THE RURAL SOCIOLOGIST has sole responsibility for its contents, although the editor may occasionally seek the opinions of other RSS members regarding the suitability of particular submissions for publication.

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