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# The Rural Sociologist

November 1986

Volume 6, Number 6

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## Forum

### The RSS: Coming to Formalization

John S. Holik and Edward W. Hassinger  
University of Missouri - Columbia

During the 1928 business meeting of the Section on Rural Sociology of the American Sociological Society (A.S.S.) a motion was passed to appoint a committee to study the question of a "permanent separate organization on a par with the American Sociological Society" (Burt 1929a:1). On May 25, 1929, the Section's Steering Committee considered the motion and approved the appointment of the Committee on Publications and Organization, as selected by Eben Mumford, Chairman of the 1928 Steering Committee. The committee consisted of: Dwight Sanderson, Chairman; E. L. Kirkpatrick; and C. C. Taylor (Burt, 1929a:2).

At 3:00 p.m., December 28, 1929, Section Chairman B. F. Coen convened a special meeting of the Rural Sociology Section (RSSec.) to consider the report of the Committee on Publications and Organization (Burt, 1929b). The report was based on a questionnaire circulated to persons who had participated in RSSec. activities (1). Responses based on 110 replies to 250 questionnaires favored continuing with A.S.S., but having separate officers and dues (Sanderson, 1929). The respondents also indicated that they had not experienced any difficulties in securing publication of their research work in existing journals.

The Publications and Organization Committee report contained a proposal that the RSSec. publish a Yearbook on December 1, 1930, containing papers to be discussed at the A.S.S. annual meeting. This proposal stimulated considerable discussion resulting in the revision of the original report prior to its acceptance by the "large number" of Section members present. The revised report instructed the Section officers to meet with the A.S.S. Executive Committee to determine if the proposals in the Publications Committee report would be acceptable to them.

Burt (1929b) reports that the called for meeting occurred at 5:00 p.m., December 28, 1929. The Yearbook proposal was favorably received by the Executive Committee, since earlier it had been decided to publish the Papers and Proceedings of the Society in four quarterly issues instead of a single annual one. After some discussion, the Executive Committee of A.S.S. passed

a motion to print the proposed Yearbook as the fourth issue of the quarterly (i.e., the Papers and Proceedings).

A second proposal presented to the Executive Committee by the Rural Sociology delegation was less favorably received. It was proposed that the A.S.S. Executive Committee hereafter be composed, in part, of the chairman of the several sections. The Executive Committee tabled for further consideration a motion to add an amendment to the constitution, providing that the chairman of any section may become a member of the Executive Committee upon formal application by the Section and acceptance by the Committee.

The following day, December 30th, at RSSec's annual business meeting, the report of the Committee on Publications and Organization was discussed, revised, and accepted. It contained two important resolutions (A.S.S., 1930:188): "That we remain as the Rural Sociology Section of the American Sociological Society" and "That a set of by-laws for the governing of the section be adopted." The by-laws provided for: election of section officers; dues; committees; and publications -- Annual Yearbook, Farm Population and Rural Life Activities.

The resolutions reiterated RSSec's ties to A.S.S. Moreover, the Committee on Publications and Organization was continued and instructed to present a set of by-laws for discussion at the Section's next annual business meeting.

On May 16, 1930, the Membership Committee of RSSec. announced two changes in the group's activities in a circular letter sent to A.S.S. members who has expressed an interest in the Section (Manny, 1930). The letter read:

At the last annual meeting of the Rural Sociology Section of the American Sociological Society, two important changes were made in the activities of this Section for the coming year.

In the first place, in order to allow members of the Rural Sociology Section more opportunity to attend other meetings of the Sociological Society, it was voted to reduce the number of Rural Sociology Section meetings. To make most efficient use of the limited time remaining for the section meetings, it was decided to print the major papers to be given in a Yearbook which will be distributed at least a month prior to the meetings, these meetings then becoming more predominantly discussion sessions.

In the second place, to finance the above Yearbook, it was decided to ask each member of the Rural Sociology Section to pay a membership fee of \$1.00 in addition to the dues paid to the American Sociological Society. This plan has the approval of the Executive Committee of the Society.

After discussing these matters with Dr. E. W. Burgess, Executive Secretary of the Society, the Steering Committee of our section decided to accept Dr. Burgess' offer that the proposed Yearbook be published as a supplement to the Annual of the American Sociological Society, and placed in circulation not later than November 15. It will contain the major papers for the coming Rural Sociology Section Meeting. The above fee will pay part of the cost of printing and mailing this Yearbook, the final basis to be determined by the Steering Committee and the Executive Committee of the Society.

As a member of the American Sociological Society, who has indicated an interest in rural sociology (and is therefore considered a member of the Rural Sociology Section), will you help to make these plans a success by sending your dollar to Professor H. J. Burt, Secretary of the Section, as soon as possible? A card is enclosed for convenience in remitting. Should this plan of issuing a Yearbook become permanent, it seems probable that the Section dues, in the future, will be collected at the same time that general dues are now collected, but conditions make that impractical for this year.

The solicitation secured 25 new members for the parent society and obtained \$133, as voluntary contributions, for the support of the Yearbook (Burt, 1930:1).

At the annual business meeting, December 30, 1930, the Section unanimously adopted a set of by-laws and passed a motion directing the Secretary-Treasurer to pay \$100 to the general society to help defray the expenses of the Yearbook published November, 1930 (Burt, 1930:3). During this meeting, the question of the continuation of the Yearbook plan was raised. Acting Section Chairman Manny quoted Burgess (Secretary of A.S.S.) as saying the Section could have space in the Yearbook another year if it desired. It was understood that other sections might enjoy the same publication privilege. After some

discussion, a motion carried that the RSSec. continue to use the Yearbook for the next year (Burt, 1930:2).

It was noted earlier that, in 1929, the A.S.S. Executive Committee tabled a motion to amend its constitution to give sections representation on the Executive Committee (Burt, 1929b:3). In 1930, this matter was again discussed. According to Burgess (1931:811) the Executive Committee voted to appoint a committee "to canvas Society members on the question of providing representation on the Executive Committee of the different sections of the Society."

The following year this committee (Ellsworth Faris, chairman) made its report. In an apparent effort to accommodate the rural sociologists, the committee recommended a change in the constitution to give the RSSec. a representative on the Executive Committee (Burgess, 1932:784).

In 1931, the A.S.S. increased annual membership dues from \$5 to \$6. On January 18, 1932, T. B. Manny (1932) wrote to Edmund deS. Brunner (the 1932 RSSec. Chairman) that, "there was a pretty general feeling among those present at the Washington meeting [December 1931] that it would be increasingly difficult to secure the dollar contributions from rural sociologists." Manny told Brunner that since no action was taken on this matter during the 1931 business meeting, it was up to the Executive Committee to decide whether the dollar should be sought. He also pointed out that he had gone before the A.S.S. Executive Committee with the request that the Society assume the entire financial responsibility for the Yearbook. The "Committee turned the question over to the incoming secretary, Dr. Louis Wirth, to be arranged for as he thought best" (Manny 1932). A circular letter, dated May 10, 1932, and signed by C. Horace Hamilton, Secretary-Treasurer, Section on Rural Sociology, and Louis Wirth, Secretary, American Sociological Society, was sent to "All teachers of Rural Sociology, all old members of the Section and all members of the General Society who gave as a first preference, Rural Sociology" (Hamilton and Wirth, 1932). This letter asked the recipients to join the Society and RSSec. by sending to Wirth \$7, \$6 for the Society and \$1 for Section dues.

The 1932 membership canvas was disconcerting; only 60 one-dollar memberships were received during the year (Hamilton, 1932a). At the 1932 business meeting of the Section, the Secretary-Treasurer reported (Hamilton, 1932b) that, "due to insufficient funds, it had been impossible to continue the policy of publishing an annual Yearbook of Rural Sociology." Later in the meeting, a motion was passed "that the matter of publication, in



either mimeographed or printed form, of the papers for the annual meeting be referred to the Executive Committee, with the recommendation that no printed or mimeographed papers be circulated prior to the meeting if such papers are intended to be read verbally by those on the program" (Hamilton, 1932b).

The minutes of the December 29, 1932, Executive Committee meeting show that two important motions were passed. The first reaffirmed the members' suggestion that the section not publish, in advance of the next annual meeting, papers to be read at the meeting. The second motion passed was, "that dues for membership in the Section be \$1.00 for two years membership and that members who paid their dues of \$1.00 for last year not be asked to pay again this year" (Hamilton, 1932c).

On February 4, 1933, Hamilton (1933a) wrote a letter to Herbert Blumer, Secretary-Treasurer of A.S.S., asking for 1,500 letterheads and envelopes, 750 return envelopes, and 750 membership cards to be used for membership canvas during the year. The second sentence of Blumer's (1933a) reply to Hamilton reads as follows, "I have been thinking very carefully about the contents of your letter, and I scarcely feel that we can furnish you this year, at the expense of the Society, the stationery which you request." Blumer gave two reasons for turning down Hamilton's request: first, he didn't believe it would be proper to incur the expense in view of the Society's large deficit; and, second, the 1932 joint membership canvas "proved to be quite a failure." He did offer to have the stationery printed at the estimated cost of \$24.

In his February 4, 1933, letter to Blumer, Hamilton (1933a) also inquired about the publication of the papers and discussions presented during the RSSec. sessions of the 1932 A.S.S. annual meeting. To this inquiry, Blumer (1933b) replied as follows:

The papers presented before the Section on Rural Sociology will appear in the Proceedings -- in a somewhat abbreviated form, however.

We have a policy of never publishing the discussions of papers, and accordingly there will be no place for these in the forthcoming volume.

The publication issue was compounded by the Third Annual Conference of Purnell Research Workers, held in conjunction with the 1932 RSSec. meeting (2). The

Conference was planned and promoted by the research committee of the Rural Section and papers read there became the Section's responsibility (Lively, 1932). The papers were mimeographed in the office of the Section's Secretary-Treasurer (Hamilton) and for distribution were sent to C. J. Galpin, Economist in Charge, Farm Population and Rural Life of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, USDA (Hamilton, 1933b) -- a cumbersome arrangement (3).

The minutes of the December 28, 1933, business meeting of RSSec. (Hamilton, 1933c) show that the Conference of Purnell Research Workers was again held in conjunction with the A.S.S. meeting. The question of mimeographing the Purnell Conference papers was discussed and a motion was passed to leave this matter in the hands of the Secretary-Treasurer and Professor Lively, the conference organizer. Stencils were cut in Lively's office, and sent to Hamilton for mimeographing. By turn, he sent them to the USDA in Washington (D.C.) for distribution to the Section members. The other papers read at the 1933 Section meetings were published, in abbreviated form, in the A.S.S. Papers and Proceedings.

The Fifth Purnell Conference was held as a joint meeting with the RSSec. on the afternoon of December 26, 1934. E. D. Tetreau, from the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, presiding. The rural sociologists held only one other regular session and two luncheon sessions at the 1934 A.S.S. convention.

The general theme of the Purnell Conference session was "Retrospect and Outlook for Research in Rural Sociology" (Polson, 1934a). The three papers in this session were presented by USDA administrators. The theme of the remaining, nonluncheon session related to sociological aspects of the New Deal. Three of the papers in here were also presented by rural sociologists who were in Washington as administrators.

The significance of the participation of USDA and Federal Emergency Relief Agency administrators in the 1934 sessions becomes clear when one reads the minutes of RSSec.'s business meeting (Polson, 1934b). The two items that precipitated considerable discussion were: ways to increase Purnell funds for rural sociology research; and, endorsement of a letter to the Secretary of Agriculture recommending an enlarged and strengthened rural sociology program in the USDA.

Prior to the 1934 A.S.S. annual meeting, Section Secretary-Treasurer Polson contacted Fred C. Frey, Section Chairman. In his letter, Polson (1934c) suggested that

they meet prior to the annual meeting in order to discuss publication policy; he wrote:

When do you plan to arrive in Chicago? We should probably get together, very soon after arriving, with Herbert Blumer [A.S.S. Secretary-Treasurer] and go over the matter of luncheon tickets and publication of the papers of the Rural Section. Last year the matter was left up to individual authors but some of them didn't understand it that way. I think we should announce a definite policy this year, whether the officers of the Section will assume responsibility for finding publication for the papers.

There is no record that the hoped for meeting among Frey, Polson, and Blumer happened. Instead, the Section's business meeting minutes (Polson, 1934b) show that E. L. Kirkpatrick raised the publication question and suggested a solution for getting the 1934 papers published:

E. L. Kirkpatrick ... brought forward a proposition for publishing a journal of rural sociology. It was pointed out, however, that the cost at present would be prohibitive and the problem of publishing the papers was referred to the new officers. Mr. Kirkpatrick suggested that Mr. B. Y. Landis be approached by a committee of the Section to inquire if Rural America [the publication of the American Country Life Association] could be enlarged for an issue to include the papers presented at the Rural Section. R. W. Murchie moved that Carl Taylor present this suggestion at the board meeting of the American Country Life Association Saturday morning and obtain additional information and their answer to such a proposition. Motion seconded and carried.

The 1935 Executive Committee of RSSec. met on December 29, 1934, to discuss the publication of papers presented in the Rural Section (Polson, 1934d). B. L. Hummel reported that "Landis would be willing to publish the papers in Rural America if the Section could stand the expense of the extra cost of enlarging the publication" (Polson, 1934d). Landis indicated the cost to the Section would be \$70 for the enlarged edition, plus \$10 for a few extra copies. It was decided that the Section should attempt to raise this amount. Forthwith, "four members of the Section agreed to underwrite the venture to the extent

of \$40, \$10 each" (Polson, 1934d). Still, the Executive Committee decided to solicit \$5 each from an enlarged list of underwriters to guarantee the publication of papers in Rural America.

On January 8, 1935, Polson, (1935a) wrote Benson Landis asking, "Will you kindly send me the proposition you made to the Rural Section about publishing their papers in 'Rural America'?" Landis (1935a) responded (January 11) with a letter containing the details of his proposition. By the end of January, Polson had corresponded with all of the paper presenters asking them to send him a copy of their work for publication in Rural America. The plans however for publishing them all together in Rural America fell through. On February 8, 1935, Polson wrote B. L. Hummel that 5 of the 10 papers presented at the RSSec. meeting had been committed to other journals by their authors (Polson, 1935b). Polson indicated to Hummel that the remaining papers, three of which were written by USDA administrators, might be offered to Landis to publish in a regular issue of Rural America. Polson also suggested informing the authors of the papers, which Landis might not care to publish, were free to do as they wish with their papers.

On May 9, 1935, E. D. Tetreau (1935a) wrote Polson inquiring about the publication of Dr. Ezekiel's paper, which had been read at the 1934 RSSec. meeting:

My dear Polson:

I am writing to ask about your success in getting a rural sociology paper read at the Christmas meeting in 1934 into print. I am particularly concerned about the disposal of Dr. Ezekiel's paper. His secretary just called this office and asked if I might furnish the name of the publication with the date of the issue in which the paper was published. If you have this information (I have not seen it in print yet), please let me know at your earliest convenience. If you have a promise of having it printed, please indicate the name of the publication and the date of the issue in which it is planned to have it appear.

I presume that Dr. Ezekiel is preparing records for the Agricultural Adjustment Administration or some other government agency and therefore needs this information at once.

Polson sent Tetreau's letter to Benson Landis on May 11, 1935. Subsequently (May 14, 1935), Landis wrote Tetreau that he expected to use Ezekiel's paper in the May Rural America. Landis (1935b) also penned a note to Polson that he would notify him in a few days about his decision on the remaining papers. On June 1, 1935, Landis (1935c) wrote Polson: "I don't think there is a chance of using the papers by Manny, Zeuch and Jardine. I am, therefore, returning them to you. I did use the one by Ezekiel this month."

This did not put to rest the publication issue. On July 5, 1935, Tetreau (1935b) wrote Polson, telling him that Dr. Youngblood from the Office of Experiment Stations had handed him Jardine's paper and that he (Tetreau) was resubmitting it to Rural America. He then told Polson that if he had "similar experience with other papers for which I was responsible [as session chairman] I would appreciate having them sent to me rather than to the person who prepared the paper." In a hand written note on the bottom of the letter, Tetreau said, "Dear Polson: I was a little embarrassed upon meeting Dr. Jardine the other day to have this situation arise. I had assured him that I would attend to publication."

The reason for Tetreau's concern about the publication of Jardine's paper becomes evident in the following paragraph from his letter to B. Y. Landis, Editor of Rural America (Tetreau, 1935c):

Herewith please find a copy of a paper read by Mr. James T. Jardine, Chief of the Office of Experiment Stations, at the December meeting in Chicago. In view of the fact that the Jones Bill, providing additional funds to the experiment stations for research, extension, and endowments, has been signed by the President, this paper takes on a peculiar importance to rural sociologists and to other persons interested in rural life.

In a letter dated July 9, 1935, Polson (1935c) told Tetreau that Manny's paper, which was read at the meeting Tetreau had organized, still had not been accepted for publication. Tetreau (1935d) then responded to Polson on July 12, 1935, asking if Landis might be approached to publish Manny's paper "in whatever form he thinks best." Polson (1935d) did not think Manny's paper would be of interest to the Rural America reading audience and so informed Tetreau on July 14, 1935. He then asked Tetreau "if there is a possibility of getting it into official publication or magazines that would go to the desks of deans and directors." He closed his letter with a

postscript stating that it was his understanding that an abstract of all of the papers would appear in the Proceedings of the American Sociological Association.

This did not lay to rest the issue of publication of the 1934 papers. At the December 29, 1935, business meeting of the RSSec., E. L. Kirkpatrick requested a report on the publication plans for the said papers (Polson 1935e). Polson (1935e) reported:

[T]he plans to publish papers of the Rural Section in an enlarged issue of Rural America had fallen through because some authors had made previous arrangements for publication and others requested the privilege of finding their own publishers, rather than publish in Rural America.

The Section's 1935 business meeting minutes indicate that need for a "strong professional organization of rural sociologists" was interjected into the discussion (Polson, 1935e):

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 for teachers of rural sociology as well as the research and extension personnel. [Earlier Section Chairman Hummel had described problems he had encountered in preparing the program for the Rural Section, emphasizing the difficulty in obtaining an adequate number of sessions because of A.S.S. regulations.] Dr. Bruce Melvin moved that the Rural Section request that one or more issues of the forthcoming Sociological Review be devoted to the presentation of rural material. Seconded by Dwight Sanderson. Dr. B. Youngblood of the Experiment Station Office, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 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 papers. He pointed out the advantages of these two items in promoting rural sociology work in the experiment stations. Dr. Melvin withdrew his motion. Dr. C. C. Taylor moved that the incoming president of the Section on Rural Sociology 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. Motion seconded by Dean Fred C. Frey. Motion carried. In the discussion of the motion, 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.

A letter dated January 20, 1936, from T. Lynn Smith (1936) to Robert Polson indicates that Lowry Nelson, Section Chairman for 1936, appointed a committee to study the publication question. The committee, working at the 1935 meeting, concurred sentiments to publish a separate journal. The following account is given in the first issue of Rural Sociology (Board of Editors, 1936:5).

The publication of Rural Sociology grew out of action taken at the meeting of the Rural Sociology Section of the American Sociological Society, in New York in December, 1935. After three hours of vigorous discussion of the necessity for the possibilities of a rural sociological journal, a committee was named to consider the question of publication media and was authorized to take such action as it deemed advisable. This committee met promptly, and unanimously agreed to proceed with the publication of a quarterly. The decision was partly influenced by the suggestion of Dean Fred C. Frey, of Louisiana State University, that his institution might be willing to underwrite the venture. When it was presented to them, the University officials promptly agreed to the proposition of guaranteeing the publication.

Following the disposal of the publication issue at the 1935 business meeting, a motion by Fred Frey was passed that instructed the incoming executive committee to study the possibility of forming an autonomous organization of rural sociology. C. E. Lively then suggested, and T. Lynn Smith moved, that the incoming officers be authorized to call a special meeting of rural sociologists in order to consider forming such an autonomous organization (Polson, 1935e).

From 1928 through 1935, publication difficulties kindled interests in forming a separate organization of rural sociologists, independent of the American

Sociological Society. These publication problems were influenced by two factors: the financial strains encountered by the Section on Rural Sociology and the American Sociological Society; and, an increase in the number of manuscripts rural sociologists were producing in connection with their New Deal program research activities. Thus, the stage was set for the rural sociologists to form their own independent organization.

#### NOTES

1. The number of "actors" involved in the early period of RSS's development can be interpreted from certain A.S.S. data. In 1927 A.S.S. began publishing members' expressed areas of "primary interest." The figure breakdowns are shown in the table below. It should be noted that generally only about 1/2 of the A.S.S. members provided information about their "interests." For 1930, the figure used in the table is the number of people who responded to a circular letter asking for a special \$1 contribution. From 1931 on, the figure is the number who submitted RSSec. dues along with their A.S.S. payment.

Table 1. Number of rural sociologists in A.S.S.

Year	No. of Members	Criterion for "Membership"
1927	27	Declared "primary" interest
1928	27	" " "
1929	31	" " "
1930	131	Dollar paid for Yearbook
1931	108	Section dues paid
1932	60	" " "
1933	69	" " "
1934	67	" " "
1935	77	" " "
1936	88	" " "
1937	79	" " "

2. The Purnell Conference comprised research workers supported by funds of the 1924 Act. Purnell funds were important to rural sociology's development. Leaders of the RSSec. were sensitive to getting Purnell funded research published.
3. To fully see how cumbersome this distribution procedure was, a person should read the correspondence between C. J. Galpin and C. Horace Hamilton in Folder 30 of the Rural Sociological Society of America Papers.



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 1934d The December 29, 1934 minutes of the Executive Committee of the Rural Sociology Section. RSSAP, Folder 47.\*  
 1935a Letter to Benson Y. Landis, January 8, 1935. RSSAP, Folder 37.\*  
 1935b Letter to B. L. Hummel, February 8, 1935. RSSAP, Folder 38.\*  
 1935c Letter to E. D. Tetreau, July 9, 1935. RSSAP, Folder 41.\*  
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