

# Population Explosion--Cows Graze By Suburbia

Editor's note: The following article was written by a University of Nebraska depth reporting student. It concerns the population explosion and urban movement in Nebraska's smallest county—the effects on the farmer, the taxpayer, the teacher and the school system. The story deals with Sarpy County, but it could be your county.

By Gerald Lamberson

Nine black and white Holstein cows graze quietly on an eastern Nebraska hillside near a big red barn. Just a mile north, hundreds of beef cattle are being fattened for market.

But across the road from these two scenes is suburbia. Here hundreds of homes of many colors spread over the hillsides. Here is where the population explosion begins.

The cattle scene represents rural life. Suburbia depicts an urban movement. Near many metropolitan areas urban development has spread out and taken over much surrounding rural area. Nebraska, traditionally the "beef state" and known for its agricultural products, is one of the states experiencing such a movement.

But the Nebraska scene is perhaps a little unique at the present. Here the urban movement and population explosion have been largely concentrated in the smallest county—Sarpy County.

Sarpy County has only 236 square miles of area. However, in population it now ranks fourth in Nebraska with 34,346 people. The 1950 census listed only 15,693 population for Sarpy County. The census jumped to 31,281 in 1960, and the estimated increase between 1960 and 1962 is ten per cent.

Sarpy County was listed by census reports as an early population leader when Nebraska was first settled. But its position dipped to 59th in the 1920's when the Legislature numbered the counties according to population for auto license plates.

Just where is Sarpy's growth? Bellevue, the largest city, has jumped from 8,800 in 1960 to 10,169 in 1962. Papillion, the county seat,

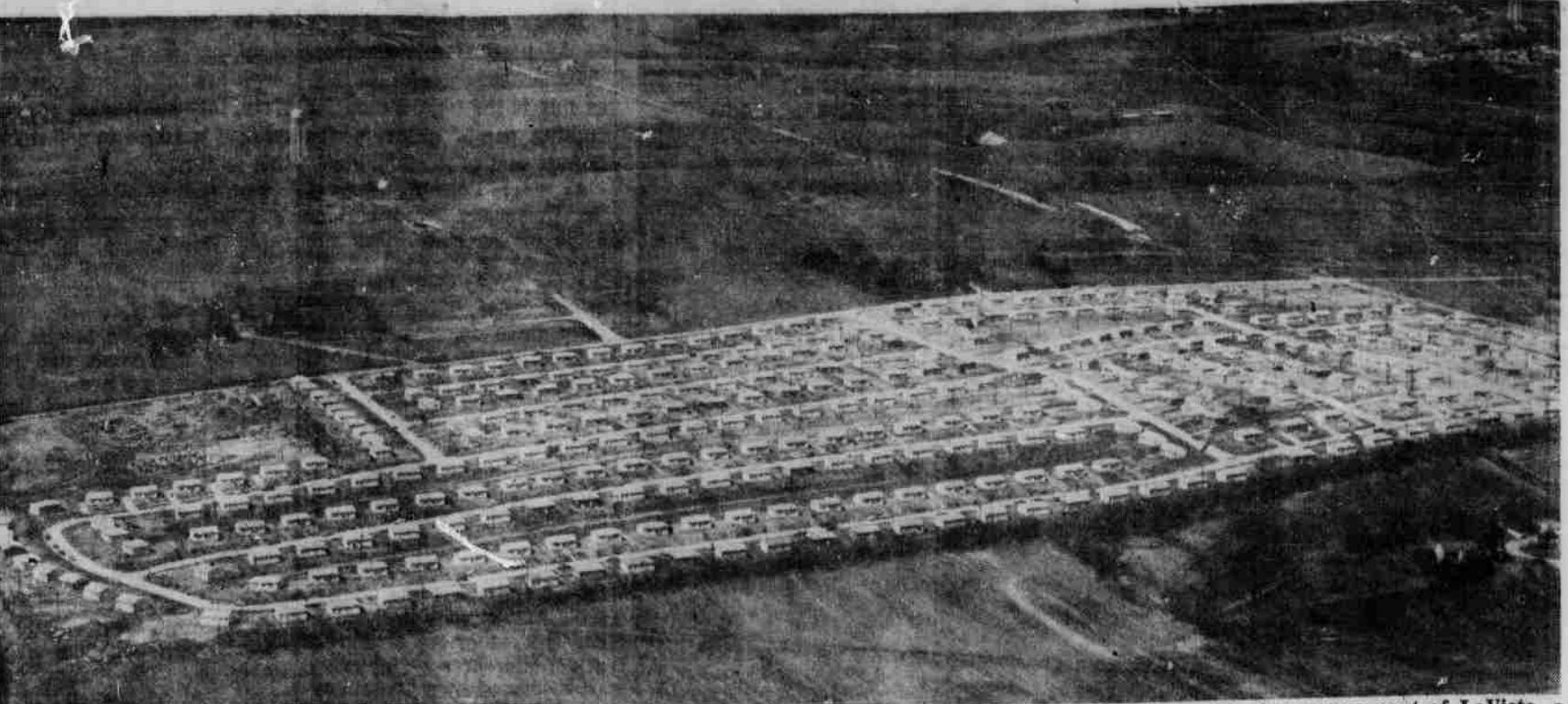
soared from 800 a few years ago to 2,800 today. LaVista is a new community, built between Omaha and Papillion since 1960, which has a population of about 2,000. Omaha proper is spreading into Sarpy County. Offutt Air Force Base is expanding its personnel.

With such tremendous growth, Sarpy County residents are being hemmed in by a movement they cannot escape, said Assistant County Attorney Frank Morse. "The residents are almost helpless with nowhere to go," he added. "Omaha and its growing pains are to the north. The Missouri River serves as the eastern border with the Platte River bordering Sarpy on the south and west."

Farmers are not resenting the urban movement. Mrs. Milton Fricke, a Papillion housewife who lives on a farm only one mile from suburbia, said that "farm folks are accepting the change. It is a part of a movement that we cannot stop. Therefore we can sit tight only until the time we are moved off our places."

Morse noted that most farmers who are being forced away are turning to urban areas to make a living. Most do not have the desire to start up again somewhere else, he said. Those farmers whose land lies near suburbia are not using additional conservation practices because of the expectation that suburbia will take their farm too, Morse continued. Along with the movement, the number of farms in Sarpy County has decreased from 801 in 1954 to 648 in 1960. The average age of farm operators has gone up from 47 to 48.5 years and only six to eight new farmers have started operation in the last five years.

Changes have also been noted in 4-H where the emphasis on beef and crops has been switched to gardens and safety, he said. But these changes to urban living are made to look attractive. A sign near the entrance of LaVista village says "House of 9's on Easy



NEW LOOK—Houses by the dozens dot what once was open countryside as the Sarpy scene changes quickly. This aerial view covers part of LaVista, a new community between Omaha and Papillion.

Street in LaVista village." As one enters he can see approximately 600 painted frame homes on the hillside. Another 75 homes, still white, are being completed in the valleys. Plans call for more than 100 homes yet to be built in the third addition.

While traveling along Easy Street in LaVista, one can notice husbands planting or working on their lawns. The oldest youngster is on his way to school while the younger ones peer out of the picture windows to see what changes have been made since yesterday.

One home owner, George Holder, 7306 Easy St., said, "My family likes it here because there is no uptown traffic. It is only a ten-minute drive to work in Omaha and we have the feeling of 'aloneness' here."

But even as city workers move to suburbia areas, they bring population to a previous rural area. They bring children. And with children come the school problems that are plaguing Sarpy County communities.

First there is reorganization of the county which has

almost been completed in Sarpy County, according to Papillion School Superintendent Leslie George. The only school districts now are at Bellevue, Papillion, Platteview and Gretna, plus two rural districts in the central and west part of the county.

The growth of LaVista in the Papillion School District has created many headaches, said Superintendent George. Despite a new high school and two new elementary schools, classes are overcrowded. Fifteen cottages in the LaVista addition are being used for classes from kindergarten through the sixth grade.

"School enrollment in the Papillion district was 442 in 1957—1,200 in 1961—and expected to reach 3,000 by 1965," George said. At the same time the mill levy including operational levy has gone up from 29.4 to 50.2. "This has put a tremendous burden on the taxpayer," he said.

The superintendent noted that Papillion too is growing, with some 750 homes to be added in the future at Tara Heights and Green Acres Additions. Also a new area west of LaVista which will be known as Parkview Heights will have more than 300 homes in the next few years.

Increase in students brings the increase in need for more teachers in Papillion. "It would have been difficult to get the teachers needed, if the salaries had not been raised," George said. "Average salary in 1955 was \$3,400 for high school instructors, but today it is \$4,700. In 1957 only 21 teachers were numbered in the Papillion schools. Today there are more than 60."

As George works to solve the present problems, he looks to the future enrollment and sees many more problems. The problems are basically financial. A still higher increase in the mill levy would be outrageous to the taxpayer, he said. The superintendent sees three solutions to the financial problem. They are:

1. State aid. Several schools in the Papillion area were seeking aid during the past Legislative session but as yet there have been no funds allocated or agreement made.

2. Loose confederation of suburban districts. Under this plan, schools of the Omaha metropolitan area would combine for monies and the unit would somewhat equalize the industrial wealth of the various districts. This would be done by pooling all the valuation and a common identity applied. However, individual districts would maintain their own identity and control.

3. One metropolitan district. All the schools combined into one district might solve the financial problem but would create an administrative problem.

Bellevue too, has school problems although they may be slightly different from Papillion's. Bellevue Superintendent Edwin Cramer said that a long range plan has been put into effect to keep away from drastic changes in the tax mill levy. Bellevue's mill levy is 40 mills

now as compared to 38 mills five years ago.

Student enrollment is a problem in Bellevue also. In 1955, Bellevue had 1,963 students — in 1958, 3,050 students — in 1960, 3,941 students — this year, 5,600 students.

Cramer said that temporary facilities have been rented repeatedly to relieve the overflow of pupils. The new Bellevue high school is being built a portion at a time as the money comes, he said. Besides a senior high and junior high, there are seven elementary schools at present. Bids have been opened for another grade school with plans for two more within a year, Cramer said.

Cramer, who has been superintendent for seven years, said that Bellevue schools have never been able to carry the load. Some of the schools had to be built a section at a time to meet finances.

Bellevue expansion has come via Offutt Air Force Base which contributes about 45 per cent of the population to the city and area northwest toward Omaha, said Chamber of Commerce Manager Harold Smock.

Many Bellevue residents work in Omaha which makes an added burden, said Cramer. This cuts out large business and industry which contribute considerable funds to schools, he said.

To further define the problem, Cramer noted that a \$20,000 house has an assessed valuation of 35 per cent or \$7,000. At the rate of 40 mills then each \$20,000 home would provide \$280 revenue for schools. This is hardly enough to educate one youngster let alone the 1.3 average pupils per household.

Smock said that Bellevue

is beginning to attract some industry. "Two small manufacturing firms have begun and are expanding and a concrete and chemical firm are close by."

But Omaha is not the only growing pair for Bellevue. Offutt Air Base which comes to the city limits has expansion plans to increase its 11,000 personnel to more than 12,000. Five years ago the number was 8,000 according to Maj. E. D. Jewett, officer in charge of information services. The boost in personnel was needed with the increased manning of Strategic Air Command (SAC), addition to the joint strategic target planning staff, air refueling squadron and Atlas missile squadron.

Future building at Offutt has a \$130,000 addition to SAC headquarters and more underground facilities. A new medical building with 125 beds and 22 dental rooms is in the planning stage, said Major Jewett.

According to Major Jewett, some 900 homes are now under construction at the base. This will bring some 2,100 homes on the 2,000 acre base site, he said. "Still about 75 per cent of the personnel live off the base with

the majority of them in Omaha and Bellevue," he added.

Maj. Jewett said Offutt is one of the largest air force bases in the nation and the largest SAC base. Of course, it is also the home of the SAC headquarters.

Sarpy County is growing. Where will it stop? Assistant agent Morse and others say the urban movement will extend southward until it hits the Platte River, leaving only a small area in the western part for rural life. Still other residents are predicting an urban complex between Omaha and Lincoln with Sarpy County becoming completely urbanized.

But as suburbia continues to develop in Sarpy County those nine black and white cows will probably leave their quiet pasture. In their place will be hundreds of new homes of varied colors.

## Sculpture Given To Art Galleries

A seven-foot sculpture, entitled "Resurrection" and executed in 1959 by Jack Zajac, was presented to the University of Nebraska Art Galleries as a gift from Mrs. A. Bromley Sheldon of Lexington.

Director Norman Geske said the piece, made of fiberglass, was shown in Lincoln during April and May as part of the "Symposium on the Arts and Religion."

"Resurrection" received first prize in the "Church Art Today, Grace Cathedral Show," held in San Francisco in 1960.

Zajac, a native of Youngstown, O., received the Rome Prize Fellowship for painting in 1954, 1956 and 1957. The 31-year-old artist received a Guggenheim Fellowship for the 1959-60 school year for study in Southeast Asia and for work in Rome.

He has exhibited in one-man shows in Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, London and Rome. His works also have been shown at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; William Rockhill Nelson Gallery, Kansas City, Mo.; Los Angeles County Museum; Santa Barbara Museum of Art; and Milwaukee Institute of Art.

## Health Institute Renews Grant

Dr. Carl E. Georgi, chairman of microbiology at the University of Nebraska, announced today the renewal of a \$24,000 U.S. Public Health Service grant to the department.

The grant is a continuation of a five-year grant first awarded to the department in 1961 by the National Institutes of Health.

The purpose of the grant is to strengthen the existing graduate program, particularly at the doctoral level, Dr. Georgi said. Funds from the grant are made available to four pre-doctoral trainees. A sum is also made available for the operation and maintenance of the graduate training program. A major part of this maintenance sum is used to purchase research equipment.

The grant is awarded to the department on the basis of its research and teaching performance.

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SUBURBIA NEAR—Construction activity in the background presses in on these peacefully-grazing livestock in northeast Sarpy County.

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## Summer Enrollment Highest It's Ever Been

Summer session enrollment at the University of Nebraska will definitely approach 4,000 students, an increase of 212 over last year, Registrar Floyd Hoover reported. He estimated that the additional 212 were primarily the result of more undergraduate students going to school the year around. Dr. Hoover said that 1,300 resident students registered early this year, compared to 1,100 a year ago.

More than 6,000 students of all ages are engaged in summer studies under the direction of the University, according to Dr. Hoover.

In addition to the 4,000 regular students — the largest number in the history of the school's Summer Sessions — there are 1,756 Nebraska high school students on the Lincoln campuses. Five hundred ninety-five students are enrolled in University High School; 411 in All-State Fine Arts Course; 375 in Boys' State; and 325 in Girls' State.

Another 175 elementary pupils are enrolled at Bancroft School and 175 at Pershing Grade School, both operated this summer by the University.

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