

Rural American Paradox-Part IV Cooperation, spirit and change keep Henderson going strong

By GENE KELLY
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The village of Henderson has some things going for it.

Like communist spirit, common religious background, a community betterment group and hard-working citizens.

These are resources shared by a great many of Nebraska's small towns. Right?

But Henderson, located 61 miles west of Lincoln, has a unique achievement to its credit: recognition and adoption of a new role in society.

Judging by Henderson's transition from a farm town to a light-industry small city in a span of 20 years, those looking for quick solutions to problems in rural American sociology will be disappointed.

And note this: Feeling they had merely scratched the surface of the town's potential, the Henderson Planning Commission, in 1964, asked the Community Development Department of the University of Nebraska Extension Division to create "the plan."

Federal aid regulations for low-rent housing also required a development master plan.

This plan's goal was to forecast over-all community development for a two-decade period and lay the foundation for a rural city of the year 2000.

Sounds impressive. And the full story of Henderson's comeback from the end of the road — when the Chicago & Northwestern Railroad tracks were torn up in 1941 — sounds like an Horatio Alger manuscript.

The comeback has resulted in a community hospital, consolidated school, nursing home, low-rent housing project, nearly double the population, 18 local industries and modern Menomonic churches.

Yes, Menomonic.

"While religious homogenous groups might find it easier to get together on projects, the community spirit and cohesiveness of this village are a bit beyond typical," said Dr. Otto G. Hoiberg, NU Community Development Dept. director.

Hoiberg, a recognized specialist in rural sociology, said that his work on the Henderson master plan published in 1966, demonstrated that "here's a town that knows where it's going. The people are progressive, yet conservative, in the sense that they don't go off half cocked. Henderson leaders study the possibilities and decide on definite goals."

Alan Hansen, executive director of Vision-17, southeast Nebraska development group, said that religion might be a factor in the "dramatic closeness and unusual growth" of Henderson.

"But how do you explain other one-denomination towns that aren't doing a thing?"

Hansen said he feels that this village, 15 miles southwest of York and 38 miles southeast of Grand Island, is "a good example of people getting together and making something happen."

Dr. Carl Friesen, Henderson dentist, offered new perspective, asking, "Isn't it cooperation (and school) consolidation which result in unity?"

Hoiberg summed up the community image: "It strikes you right off as you drive into Henderson, the well-kept homes and businesses. And in the summer, there are flowers all over."

"The desire to work together was evident long before our extension office had any contact with the village. This is no short-term proposition. They've been cooperating for years, under excellent leadership. They have realism to temper their dreaming."

Friesen, chairman of the planning commission, pointed to modern school and medical facilities, as the key to local progress.

Henderson was one of the first small Nebraska towns to consolidate in 1952 with other rural school districts. A half-million dollar community school was built in 1954. Expanded in 1961 and now includes elementary, junior and senior high schools.

Medical facilities consist of the Henderson Clinic, staffed by two physicians and a dentist, serving patients within a 50-mile radius, and the Henderson Community Hospital.

The 20-bed Henderson Community Nursing Home is connected with the hospital and is located near a public housing project, the 20-unit Midtown Manor.

Friesen added that the town's location two and one-half miles south of Interstate 80 has been a factor in securing industry and has increased business volume.

Figures compiled in 1966 for the development plan stated that Henderson, with only six per cent of York County's population, accounted for 15 per cent of the county's business volume and 22 per cent of the county's annual business payroll.

And industry, in turn, has helped boost the town's population from 495 in 1940 to an estimated 1,000 for the 1970 U.S. Census.

Friesen said that "at least 250" are employed in local industries which produce well-drilling and irrigation pipe, grain bins and drying equipment and a variety of agribusiness items.

"Henderson industry is a marvelous example of homegrown ideas manufactured at a competitive price," said Hansen, Vision-17 official.

If the Henderson interchange link with I-80 is "a two-way

street", as described in the master plan booklet, it carries products away to markets and makes Henderson a satellite of both York and Grand Island.

The development report faces this fact squarely: Henderson's future is linked to the growth of local industry and the city's role as a residential area (bedroom city) for those who might work in the larger city.

"It's important for a satellite city to recognize its role in relation to the big city," said sociologist Hoiberg.

"The small town has to ask: 'What can we do to compete with the city in terms of services and halting the population drain?'"

Hoiberg said that rural Nebraska bedroom cities, such as Gretna and Waverly, aren't existing as just a place to sleep. Many city workers like a small town atmosphere and take a strong hand in village community life. It's a fortunate thing.

The master plan, while dealing frankly with the satellite community topic and need for upgrading of the village's streets, also urged development of a civic center, central business park and shopping mall, and a 60-acre park system along a creek which winds through the village.

An aggressive 20-year capital improvement program was termed feasible by the report, since all city obligation bonds, other than school bonds, will be paid off by 1973.

Friesen said that a community swimming pool and dial telephone system "are a year or two away" but that 58 acres have been purchased for the park system with federal, state and local funding.

"We really have the engineers busy, working on the parks, pool, sewer system, and water main expansion," he said.

Solid achievement since the master plan was approved in 1967 include black topping of all streets, improved street lighting and remodeled store fronts.

"There isn't an empty business house in town," Friesen said. "If an old building sets empty anywhere in town, tear it down," he advised. "It's part of the city image."

Student comes from Germany to Orientation

Michael Earl, 18, established a travel record for the University of Nebraska's Summer Orientation Program when he came this week from Wiesbaden, Germany, to participate in the program.

Mike, the son of Master Sgt. Stewart Earl, formerly of Syracuse, chose the University of Nebraska because it "was about the only place I could identify with." He has relatives in Syracuse, Omaha, and near Nebraska City and lived for a time in Weeping Water when his father previously served overseas.

Part V

Great Plains cities of future could be the size of Lincoln

By GENE KELLY

The city of the future on the Great Plains may be about the size of Lincoln.

This view is held by sociologists and rural economists, including Dr. Karl A. Fox of Iowa State University. He has developed the concept of a "functional economic area," which would provide a full line of consumer goods and public services.

Such an area would have a population of not less than 100,000 and a central city containing at least 25,000 people. Fox said the area should center on at least one major community and contain a number of satellite towns.

A multi-county approach, in Nebraska's sparsely populated areas, might attract industry if these capabilities were present: Interstate-quality roads, short-haul air travel, economical (perhaps atomic) power sources and a ready labor supply.

Dr. Alan Booth, director of the Bureau of Sociological Research, University of Nebraska, sees this as a framework for Midwest industrialization.

"Lincoln is the city of the future," in size, labor supply, cultural scope and economy of governmental operation, he said. A city which offers a concentration of highly specialized facilities — such as Rochester, Minn., in the medical field — will be a leader among cities, Booth added.

What about the much-larger city and the country village? Are they naturally inefficient due to size?

When the first U.S. census was taken in 1790, only one out of 20 Americans lived the city life. Today 14 of every 20 live in cities and suburbs. The dual crisis of size is linked directly to a theory called the economics of size, said Bert Evans, agricultural economist at the University of Nebraska.

A dairy herd can be too small for efficiency, or too large. "This also applies to the right number of patrons for a grocery store, the best size for a farm operation and the ideal size of city, Evans said.

"A faltering small town is in the same boat as the metropolis. The cost of providing services at all levels is too high."

Efficiency in law enforcement, local government, education, even street costs is best in cities with a population span of 50,000 to 150,000, he said.

U.S. Department of Agriculture statistics show that when a resident of Washington, D.C., moves to the suburbs, "he not only takes his paycheck and goes off the city's tax roles, he costs the city \$23,000 in capital outlay to provide facilities so he can drive to and from work in the city every day."

This figure, from the USDA booklet, "Communities of Tomorrow" — Agriculture-2000, is contrasted with the \$487,000 street department budget for a full year in Fargo, N.D., a city of 50,000.

"Washington must spend that much to add only 21 commuter cars," the report states. A city is too big when the cost of providing services increases out of proportion to total population growth.



Near almost every Nebraska small town is a scene like this.

Evans said that studies of county governmental costs in Nebraska have demonstrated that counties with 5-10,000 population have the highest per capita expenses. Lancaster County had the lowest costs, and Douglas County (which includes Omaha) was somewhat higher.

"Lincoln would be a much stronger city if it had a half dozen satellite cities of 5-10,000 population rather than a multitude of declining small towns."

Big cities don't recognize that small town industry is good for them, as an expansion of the economic base, Evans added. "City folk feel that if a small town dies, they'll be better off. Not so. All Nebraska cities, especially Lincoln and Omaha, need the small towns as customers."

Evans said that Omaha, with a population in excess of 350,000 would feel the loss of a small town quickly. "The village is Omaha's economic base, not the manufacturing which dominates most cities its size."

"Omaha is big enough. What it and our capital city need is not more size, more streets or more population. They need to upgrade every facet of the 'good life' they claim to offer."

The NU economist said that Lincoln officials should seek to "increase the viability of small towns" as a source for dependable labor and wider wholesale market.

"If rural people, with limited skills, move to the city, they're merely trading rural poverty for city slums."

USDA statistics reveal that rural America has a third of the nation's population but more than half those considered living at poverty level (annual income \$3,000 or less).

Evans praised the 17-county promotional effort of Vision-17.

"This is the perfect example of towns seeking efficiency of planning in areas of mutual concern... and trying to hold down destructive competition."

Rivalry which becomes an incentive to improve a village is important, Evans said. "The

destruction lies in heavy competition without cooperation. Feuding towns can force more of their talented youths to the city."

Alan Hansen, Vision-17 executive director, agreed. "The young people are city-bound, and us older fellows just aren't having babies."

Evans said the secret weapons which Vision-17 is using are multi-county planning, broad study of economic and industrial problems, and a cohesive effort to take advantage of resource potentials.

"As our farms grow larger and population declines, rural Nebraska needs a wider base of non-farm employment opportunities," Evans said. This should include recreational facilities linked to tourism, new small factories and expansion of those which already exist.

Cooperation on a multi-county basis "could be the forerunner, or it ought to be, of local government reorganization to provide strength" for dealing with rural problems, he said.

"By and large county government is just not solving crises in roads, schools and hospital planning. And because local government generally is weak, state and federal bureaus are moving in to make the decision."

Evans said that county offices "don't have to merge, just cooperate." Area organizations like Vision-17 stand a much better chance of getting road aid than each county trying to wrest a few miles of paved asphalt from the State Roads Dept., he added.

The real problem," Evans said, "is that small town residents sit out there and don't get the type of information we offer the farmer. The facts they need in public decision making and business at the village level are not available. It's tough to make a decision when you lack facts. 'People will come up with just as good an answer as experts if given enough information on which to base judgments.'"

Home Ec School is separate college

At its summer commencement Friday night, the University of Nebraska graduated students from its College of Home Economics for the first time.

Formerly the School of Home Economics within the College of Agriculture and Home Economics, it was accorded college status effective July 1 by the Board of Regents.

The first alumnae of the new College included four students: Mrs. Deanna Lee Baxter Eversoll of Lincoln, who received her Bachelor of Science in Home Economics Degree with high distinction; Mrs. Elizabeth Marian Hanor Nelson of Lincoln, who received her degree with distinction; Mrs. Coyne Marie Meeklem Kraljick, Lyman and Miss Linda Jean Rohde of Hubbard.

Honorary Doctor of Humanities Degrees were awarded to two University of Nebraska alumni: Otto Kotouc, Sr., of Humboldt, a former state legislator, banker and civic

leader, and R. Lynn Galloway of Rochester, N.Y., a retired officer of the Eastman Kodak Co.

The University's highest recognition for service, the Builder Award, was presented to Miss Alma L. Benton of Fremont, a Nebraska businesswoman for more than 65 years.

President Joseph S. Shick presided at the commencement ceremony. In a charge to the class, he urged the graduates, as persons who have had the benefits of educational opportunities, to accept their leadership and trusteeship responsibilities in their chosen fields of work and in their social and civic lives.

Chancellor D. B. Varner conferred the degrees and Dean of Faculties C. Peter Magrath was master of ceremonies.

The Rev. Alfred H. Ernst, pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, gave the invocation and benediction.

Professorship to Dr. Tao; doctorate to Mrs. Tao

Just over a week ago, the University of Nebraska Board of Regents granted the Howard S. Wilson Professorship of Chemical Engineering to Dr. Tao. And then Friday night at the University's commencement ceremonies, Mrs. Tao also became Dr. Tao when she was granted her doctor of philosophy degree in the nutrition area.

Mrs. Tao says she doesn't have any definite plans, as yet, to put her new degree to work. But she is interested in working at least part-time.

Her dissertation and research were concerned with "Protein-Pantothenic Acid Interrelationships in Growing Rats and Pantothenic Acid Nutrition of Alcoholic Patients." Mrs. Tao explains this involved study of certain vitamins, both in rats and humans, and she hopes perhaps to continue work in this area.

Both her bachelor's and master's degrees are in chemistry. Mrs. Tao says she could apply much of that field in the nutrition area. "Nutrition involves many areas of discipline," she explains. "But I don't know how I got started in nutrition. One thing lead to another and so I thought I may as well finish."

Mrs. Tao started study towards her Ph.D. 3½ years ago, shortly after the youngest of the Tao children, David, was born. The other members of the family include Alvin, a recent East High School graduate who earned a four-year Regents Scholarship to the University to major in pre-medicine; Bernie, who will start his second year at East this fall; and Clara, who has just finished the seventh grade.

Mrs. Tao readily admits it wasn't always easy to take care of a household of six while completing her Ph.D. work. And she laughs, "My family is glad I'm finished."

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