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Agricultural Change in an Urban Age

Richard G. Bremer

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The Loup Country of Nebraska, 1910–1970

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Preface

AMERICAN LOCAL HISTORIES have traditionally focused upon the origins and early growth of communities while occasionally examining later periods of relative stability or renewed expansion. But many localities, particularly in rural areas, have undergone long periods of stagnation followed by decline and disintegration. These aspects of community existence have received much less attention and remain relatively unexplored. This is particularly true in the realm of agricultural history which in the United States has tended to steer away from the local history approach, especially when dealing with the dynamic changes of the twentieth century. The present volume represents a tentative effort to explore this void, examining the processes of socioeconomic change in an agricultural region of the Great Plains.

Perhaps the first question that arises whenever a local history appears concerns how the author happened to choose a particular geographical area as his subject and whether it accurately represents a significant sector of the broader national society. In this instance the author spent his childhood and adolescence in the region surveyed and thus developed a personal familiarity with it. Hopefully I have avoided the twin pitfalls of romanticizing "the world we have lost" on the one hand and expounding on "the horrors I have escaped" on the other, while minimizing the degree of distortion arising from personal bias. At the same time I have occasionally unearthed evidence of developments which lack printed documentation. Thus the methodologically demanding will discover to their displeasure that certain elements of intuitive interpretation have found their way into these pages. As for the typicality or representativeness of the area, this depends upon the specific phenomenon under consideration. For a further discussion of this point the reader is referred to the Conclusions.

In the process of researching and writing this work I have become indebted to numerous individuals in various positions and places. I wish particularly to thank Professor Earl Pomeroy of the University of Oregon and Professor John C. Hudson, now of the Geography Department at Northwestern University, for encourage-

ment during the initial investigation of the topic. The staffs of the Extension Division of the University of Nebraska College of Agriculture and of the Nebraska State Historical Society proved very helpful. County officials in the courthouses at Ord and Greeley deserve praise for the patience with which they put up with their peculiar intruder over the course of several years. Professors Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., and Maris Vinovskis of the University of Michigan read early drafts of the manuscript and offered helpful criticisms and encouragement. Finally, an expression of gratitude is due Professor Allan G. Bogue of the University of Wisconsin, who provided counsel and reassurance on numerous occasions when the project appeared on the verge of dissolution.

1. The Formation of an Agricultural Region

On a warm June day in 1871 four travel-weary figures reached the summit of a hill overlooking the North Loup River valley in the plains of central Nebraska. The four had been dispatched in search of new farm lands by the members of a Seventh-Day Baptist colony in Waushara County, Wisconsin. After surveying the landscape before them they decided not to proceed any farther upstream since the area appeared too isolated to justify settling there. The disheartened travelers then returned to Wisconsin and formally reported their findings to their church brethren. However, C. P. Rood, the youngest and most impetuous of the four, vigorously dissented from the majority opinion and strongly advocated moving to the Loup country. Later in the year he returned to the region accompanied by several other young Baptists and examined the land in greater detail. The following spring those enthusiasts and a number of their coreligionists moved permanently to Nebraska where they settled near the site of the future village of North Loup.[1]

Earlier that spring five Danish immigrants had arrived in the same vicinity. Niels Anderson, Christian Frey, Jeppe Smith, George Miller (Moeller), and Peter Mortensen had become acquainted in the state of Missouri where they formed a partnership to try their luck at settling farther west. Under the leadership of Miller, a veteran of the Australian gold rushes, they acquired several teams of oxen and a wagon together with breaking plow and other farm implements and moved to Nebraska. Initially they halted near St. Paul in Howard County, the center of a large Danish settlement. On finding the best lands there already taken up they decided to move northward along the North Loup River. As the five prepared to settle near the location chosen by the Baptists they learned of the latters' plans and again moved northward, ultimately settling on Dane Creek just west of the North Loup River near the present site of Ord. Shortly thereafter several families of homesteaders moved into the Springdale vicinity on the east side of the river across from the Danish group and the settlement process began in earnest.[2]

The Loup valley region to which these early pioneers came lies one hundred and fifty miles west of Omaha in the transition zone between the central prairies and the Great Plains. To the north and west stretch the seemingly endless Nebraska sand hills, today a sparsely populated area of rolling, grass-covered hills and large cattle ranches. To the south and east the hills give way to the Platte River valley, a flat prairie region that extends westward across the state. The Loup country itself includes over nine hundred square miles of hills, rolling uplands, and river valleys. Perhaps the most striking characteristic of the region, even today, consists of its complete rurality and isolation from any urban center. The largest town in the area does not exceed twenty-five hundred souls while no city of more than fifty thousand inhabitants lies within a driving distance of over a hundred miles. The chief urban center serving the area, the city of Grand Island, lies near the Platte River forty miles south of the region.[3]

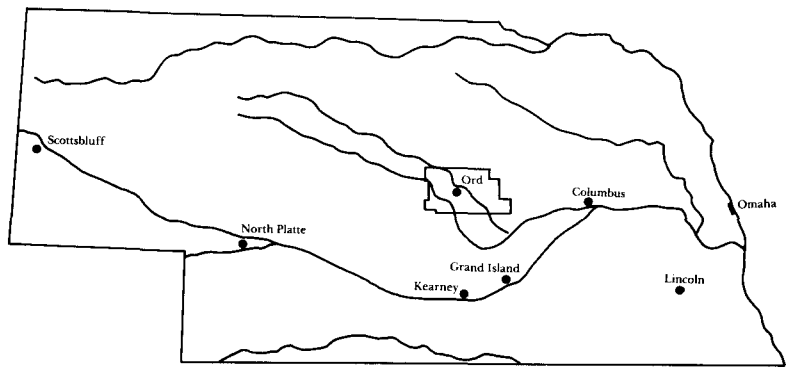

Figure 1. The Loup Valley Region, Nebraska.

Virtually all of the original land surface of the Loup country lies buried beneath a thick mantle of Peoria loess. This is a gray, limy silt whose derivative soils produce good crops but erode easily. Although at one time the terrain consisted of a nearly level plain, centuries of continued wind and stream erosion have carved an uneven landscape of hills, rolling uplands, terraces, and bottom lands. In upland areas of low relief, farmers generally cultivate the soil while in hilly areas they leave it in pasture. Sandy soils occupy about one-tenth of the surface and are generally left in grass. These sandy patches occur chiefly along the river bottoms and in Eureka

precinct in the northwestern corner of Valley County. The bottom lands, which vary in width from a half mile to three miles or more, consist largely of black soils rich in nitrogen due to the presence of organic matter accumulated from decayed grass roots. Such soils retain moisture well and are easily penetrable, thus prove ideally suited for the production of corn. These bottom lands and the terraces which lie a short distance above them cover about 15 percent of the total land area and, owing to their flatness, experience little erosion. Consequently farmers continue to crop them heavily save for the sandy areas left in grass.[4]

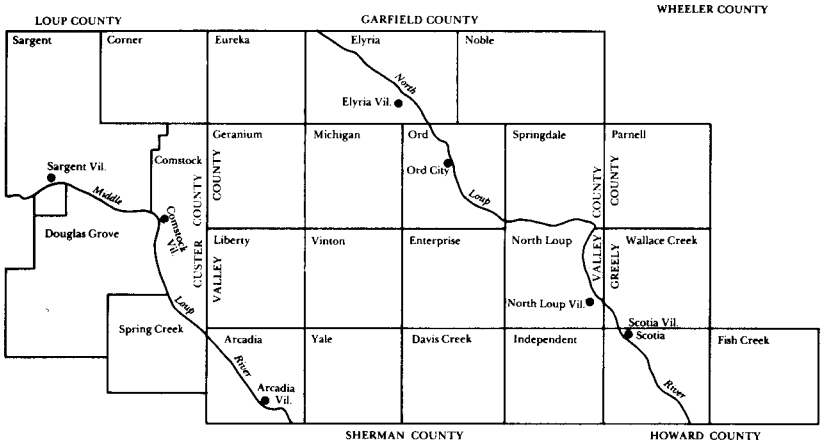

Figure 2. The Loup Country.

The North Loup and Middle Loup River systems flow through the region in a southeasterly direction and provide most areas with good drainage. These rivers flow along wide, shallow channels studded with numerous sand bars and small islands and bordered by low, grassy banks. The North Loup River has an exceptionally even flow the year round owing to the fact that both it and its major tributary, the Calamus River, rise in the sand hills where they are continuously fed by large underground springs. Broad areas of the adjacent bottom lands lie only a few feet above the river levels. These lowlands average from eighty to one hundred and fifty feet below the level of the rolling uplands.[5]

Like the rest of central Nebraska the Loup country experiences a distinctly continental climate with hot summers and cold winters. The mean annual temperature at North Loup averages 49.2 degrees, rising from a monthly low of 21.8 degrees in January to a high of

75.4 degrees in July. The record extremes reported at the same station include an all time high of 114 degrees and a record low of −39 degrees. The average growing season of 147 days suffices for the production of corn, wheat, and other cereal grain crops. Annual precipitation normally totals slightly over twenty-three inches of which about 80 percent takes the form of rain that falls during the growing season from April through September. Although the spring months usually bring considerable amounts of moisture, dry spells commonly occur in the critical months of July and August while dry autumns facilitate the harvesting of corn and sorghum. Snowfall averages from twenty-two to twenty-five inches annually but varies widely from year to year as does total precipitation.[6]

This variability in precipitation has strongly influenced agriculture in the region from the period of initial settlement. Because the mean average rainfall closely corresponds to the minimum amount needed to produce fair crops, a deviation of as much as five inches may significantly affect local yields—much more so than in the relatively humid regions to the east. Variations of this magnitude occurred during thirty of the eighty years represented in figure 3. In thirteen instances a subnormal amount of moisture fell while in seventeen others precipitation exceeded the average. Hence we find normal years frequently interspersed with years of

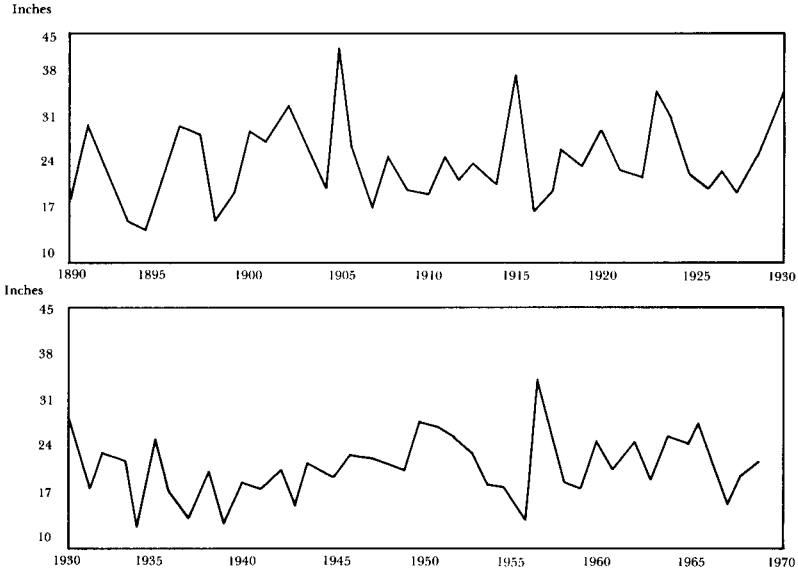

Figure 3. Precipitation by Year, North Loup, Nebraska, 1890–1969.

abnormal wetness or drouth. This variability also appears in local crop yield records which fluctuate widely from year to year. Long-term variations in rainfall also occur although the use of the term *wet and dry cycles* misleads the reader by implying a degree of regularity that does not exist. Thus, although precipitation during the 1920s averaged two inches per year above the long-term average, four of the years included in that decade saw subnormal rainfall. Even during the exceptionally dry decade from 1934 through 1943 one year experienced five inches more rainfall than normal. Furthermore, wet and dry cycles do not regularly recur in the sense of periodic cycles a certain number of years in length. One should also bear in mind that these figures do not necessarily indicate the actual moisture conditions present during a given year. First, the rainfall may occur at the wrong time of the year. A three-week dry spell in July or August may devastate a corn crop even though total rainfall that year exceeds the average. In addition, much of the rain takes the form of sudden, brief thundershowers which produce a rapid runoff with minimal soil penetration. The only visible result of such a storm may lie in the heavy erosion effected and in the accumulation of small pools of water in low-lying places. Clearly then, the problem of water supply is a crucial one for local agricultural enterprises.[7]

When the first white settlers appeared in the region they found the landscape covered by a sea of native grasses among which the big and little bluestem and the grama varieties dominated. Needle grass and sand grass flourished in the sandy upland areas, and buffalo grass also grew in some profusion. Myriad varieties of wild flowers added a touch of color to an otherwise monotonous scene. Trees rarely appeared in the grasslands but clustered in groves along the watercourses and in some of the canyons in the area. Red cedars proved of particular utility for firewood, fencing material, and building construction, but the first comers quickly denuded the cedar canyons of their timber. Common varieties of broadleaf trees included the ash, elm, willow, cottonwood, and box elder together with a sprinkling of oak and hackberry.[8]

Animal life abounded both in the grassy uplands and along the various streams. The presence of a variety of fur-bearing animals including the mink, beaver, muskrat, and otter encouraged trapping activity on the part of early settlers. Game animals appeared in large numbers, making the region a hunter's paradise. Numerous deer roamed the area including members of the red, white-tailed,

and black-tailed varieties. Pronghorn antelope were also common while large herds of elk grazed peacefully in the wilderness. Herds of the latter frequently reached three hundred or more in number. Buffalo rarely appeared even during the seventies for by then the major herds had already begun to disappear. The prairie teemed with numerous species of fowl, and wild geese, quail, and prairie chickens appeared on many a frontiersman's dining table. Although an occasional wildcat or wolf might invade the area the coyote remained the chief predator.[9]

II

Prior to the appearance of white settlers the Loup country formed part of the holdings of the Skidi branch of the Pawnee, a sedentary Indian tribe long dominant in central Nebraska. Early French explorers translated the name Skidi as *loup,* or wolf, thus giving the rivers and the region their present name. During the nineteenth century a series of epidemics, particularly smallpox, decimated the Pawnee villages, and in 1857 the tribe ceded most of its lands to the federal government. After that date relatively few Indians appeared in the region although early settlers encountered occasional individuals or hunting parties on their way to the Niobrara hunting grounds to the north. Despite an Indian scare set off by a minor skirmish in Garfield County in 1873, Indian-white conflict never materialized in the area.[10]

White settlement in central Nebraska got under way during the early seventies following the construction of a railroad bridge across the Missouri River in 1872. The Union Pacific had completed the Omaha to Cheyenne segment of its transcontinental line in 1867 while the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad reached Kearney from Lincoln in 1872. The town of Grand Island lay astride the Union Pacific track some hundred and fifty miles southwest of Omaha and served as the point of departure for most persons seeking land in the Loup and North Loup River areas. To a lesser degree Kearney served a similar function for homesteaders bound for the Middle Loup valley.[11]

As noted above homesteaders began arriving in the North Loup valley in 1872. White settlement in the Middle Loup valley began the following year as land seekers advanced along the river from Loup City in Sherman County. By 1874 half a dozen families had

settled near the river, and in that year the government established a post office to serve the farm community in what is now Arcadia township. Those traveling to the Middle Loup region left Kearney or Grand Island and moved overland until they reached the river, then turned northwestward and advanced along the stream via Sherman County. Others left Kearney and traveled directly to their claims in the area west of the river in Custer County. Homesteaders bound for the North Loup region usually reached Grand Island by train, then traveled overland to St. Paul in Howard County. There they forded the Loup River and advanced to the northwest along the west bank of the North Loup River. As the Baptist elders had foreseen, the necessity for hauling in all goods and shipping out all farm produce over a fifty-mile wagon route greatly retarded the economic development of the region. Half a dozen years after pioneers had filed the first land claims the population of Valley County stood at less than one thousand.[12]

Other factors also operated to discourage migration into the area. An Indian scare swept the region in 1873 although no attacks ever materialized. Even more discouraging, a series of drouths and grasshopper infestations plagued the area from 1873 through 1876. The most critical period followed the arrival of great clouds of Rocky Mountain locusts in the summer of 1874. During the next two years locusts and drouths again curtailed most crops, but although times were not prosperous the widespread destitution of 1874–1875 did not recur. The population of Valley County which rose by only twenty persons from 1874 to 1875 advanced more rapidly thereafter, reaching 809 in 1877.[13]

The natural disasters of the mid-seventies ended with the onset of a series of wet years in 1877. During the next five years the population of Valley County rose by nearly four hundred persons annually. With the arrival of the Union Pacific Railroad spur at North Loup in 1882 the rate of increase leaped to a thousand per year. By 1885 Valley County had nearly six thousand residents and the region as a whole included nearly nine thousand. This phase of rapid expansion ceased two years later owing to a variety of factors including unfavorable agricultural prices, a decline in rainfall, and the fact that settlers had taken up most of the available land. The census of 1890 revealed a relatively modest population growth of about 20 percent for the preceding five years. More than half of this figure came from natural increase while the remainder represented the last influx of pioneers.[14]

Most of the native-born settlers who migrated into the region during the seventies and eighties came from the north central states. About half of the total came from the tier of states extending from Ohio to Iowa, including Michigan and Wisconsin. The leading source of migrants farther east was New York which furnished one-fifth of the native-born although many of these probably moved into the region from intermediate states. With one exception immigrants from abroad did not appear until the eighties. Several Danes appeared in 1872 and others joined them soon thereafter, reflecting the presence of a large Danish colony in Howard County just south of the region. The Danes settled near Ord and in 1890 accounted for about one-ninth of the foreign-born in Valley County. The Germans, most of them protestants, included more than one-sixth of the immigrants and settled in the southern and southeastern parts of the region. The largest single ethnic group consisted of the Bohemians who settled near Ord and in the uplands of northwestern Valley County. They remained the most cohesive of the various ethnic groups—scarcely any of them settled outside of northwestern Valley County and northeastern Custer County. The Poles arrived last and scattered among the Bohemians west and north of Ord. In number they about equalled the Danes. The remaining immigrants came from a wide variety of backgrounds but did not include more than about one-fourth of the foreign-born, the Bohemians accounting for more than one-third of the total.[15]

As agricultural settlement progressed a network of villages sprang up to serve the commercial and political needs of the population. North Loup, Arcadia, and Sargent developed slowly as trade centers in the period prior to the arrival of the railroad and then experienced considerable growth. Scotia and Ord began their careers as county seats for Greeley and Valley counties respectively, although Scotia later lost this function and declined to the status of a regular agricultural marketing center. Comstock and Elyria materialized following the completion of the Union Pacific and Burlington spurs in the North Loup valley in the mid-1880s and the Burlington spur in the Middle Loup valley in 1899. Elyria never grew beyond the hamlet stage but Comstock had become a thriving small town by 1910.[16]

III

Following the period of initial settlement during the seventies

and early eighties the agricultural economy of the Loup country underwent several basic modifications which appear in the census statistics for Valley County in table 1. The most significant change

TABLE 1
AGRICULTURE TRENDS IN VALLEY COUNTY
1880–1910

Census Year	1880	1890	1900	1910
Number of farms	467	990	1085	1272
Acres per farm	182	233	287	269
Acres of corn per farm	6	42	49	77
Acres of wheat per farm	9	12	62	20
Acres of oats per farm	3	11	9	16
Milk cows per farm	1.5	4.5	3.9	4.9
Other cattle per farm	4.3	11.4	15.9	20.4
Swine per farm	2.1	36.4	26.6	43.1
Tenancy rate (%)	4.3	30.0	32.7	35.4
Value of machinery per farm ($)	78	155	177	302

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census, 1880, 1890, 1900* and *1910, Agriculture.*

involved the shift from a semisubsistence economy based upon wheat to a commercialized corn-livestock production pattern. As early as 1881 a local newspaper correspondent had pointed out the advantages offered by the latter type of farming. These included reduced transportation charges, lower seed costs, less demand for expensive machinery, avoidance of labor shortages at the peak of harvest season, and, of course, increased profitability. The argument apparently convinced many and by 1890 a transformation had taken place. The agricultural census of that year revealed that the corn acreage had risen to four times that of wheat whereas a decade earlier the wheat acreage had exceeded that of corn. The number of livestock on local farms more than tripled during the eighties, further underscoring the growing orientation of the regional economy toward corn-livestock production.[17]

This movement toward increased livestock raising faltered momentarily with the onset of a series of dry years after 1887. Particularly disastrous drouths brought widespread destitution in 1890

and 1894. Farmers sold many of their cattle for lack of pasturage and stopped raising hogs for lack of feed. In the late nineties the rains returned and by 1900 the number of cattle in the area had reached a new high. The swine population remained below the level of 1890 due chiefly to a series of outbreaks of hog cholera which devastated many herds and discouraged any further hog-raising activity. During these trying times farmers temporarily shifted back to wheat production at the expense of corn. This movement stemmed from the fact that wheat ripened in July and could usually be harvested in a dry year whereas corn matured in late August or September and thus remained susceptible to drouth for a longer period. Moreover, even at their worst, wheat prices remained substantially higher than corn prices which sank to new lows during the decade.[18]

Other changes also affected the agricultural scene during the dry years of the nineties. Farmers supported the construction of two irrigation canals, one in Douglas Grove township in Custer County and the other in North Loup township in Valley County. Other irrigation projects won voter approval, but the return of rains after 1894 induced widespread apathy and the other proposed developments never passed the planning stage. The two canals which did go into operation watered an area of about thirteen thousand acres for several years. Due to faulty construction they soon lapsed into a state of disrepair and disuse and efforts by various groups to revive them proved unavailing. Nonetheless, they did provide an inspiration for farmers in later decades when recurring drouth revived interest in irrigation.[19]

Drouth conditions also stimulated experimentation with new crops. During the nineties farmers near North Loup began growing significant amounts of popcorn. This product fetched a premium price because its dryness made it immediately usable in contrast to most popcorn which required storage and drying. By the turn of the century Valley County growers had several thousand acres of this crop under cultivation. Experimenters also tried their hand at growing potatoes and sugar beets, but the latter attempt proved a complete failure and potato production generally sufficed only to meet local demand. Farmers also grew limited amounts of flax, millet, and sorghum. More significantly, alfalfa, which had first appeared locally in 1882, came into its own as the major tame hay crop in the region just after the turn of the century.[20]

Two other indicators of agricultural change during this period

deserve consideration at this point. First, the average value of machinery per farm rose substantially. The figure doubled in the eighties due to the shift from localized production to commercial activity following the arrival of the railroad. During the nineties the value of machinery rose only slightly although this resulted primarily from the general price deflation of the period. The first decade of the twentieth century, however, brought an average increase of 71 percent. While many farmers acquired their first small-grain binders and cream separators at this time, most of their expenditures for machinery reflected the purchase of additional equipment such as wagons, cultivators, and the like rather than the adoption of new inventions.[21]

The final two decades of the nineteenth century also brought a sharp rise in farm tenancy. To some degree this development arose as a consequence of the disappearance of cheap land and the increasing capital costs of farming. Hard times during the late eighties and early nineties caused a considerable degree of mortgage foreclosure activity which also contributed to the rise in tenancy. Furthermore, a considerable proportion of the landowners in the region reached retirement age and rented their holdings to sons or other relatives. Altogether by 1910 nearly a third of the farm operators in Valley County rented their farms, a proportion which remained stable during the next decade. About half of these tenants appear to have been relatives of the actual landowners, judging from the sample examined below in chapter 7.[22]

IV

Over the course of four decades the Loup country completed the transition from a virtually unpopulated wilderness to a moderately productive agricultural region. By 1910 it boasted a population of more than fourteen thousand persons, a third of whom resided in the villages scattered along the North Loup and Middle Loup valleys. The remaining two-thirds occupied the two thousand farmsteads that dotted the countryside. The large white farmhouses, red barns and other improvements bore witness to the prosperity that marked rural society. The booming towns, too, included their quota of new structures, both residential and commercial. Following a decade of prosperity and substantial population growth the region appeared headed for a golden future.

Among the area's inhabitants the local community commanded a high degree of loyalty and concern as the region experienced a substantial degree of autonomy in terms of those functions impinging on the everyday life of the average person. County government handled the problems of welfare, tax assessment, bridge maintenance, law enforcement, and the like. The township bore the responsibility for maintaining rural roads, and the even smaller school district provided education for farm children under the eyes of their parents and neighbors. The role of the federal and state governments remained limited. In an era of relative international stability questions of foreign policy or of military affairs appeared remote and far less relevant to daily life than the operation of the post office. Likewise the activity of the state government in providing welfare institutions, prisons, and a system of higher education had only an indirect impact upon the community.

A similar degree of autonomy characterized most of the other institutions in rural society. The churches in the countryside and in the villages drew their ministers from the ranks of farm and small-town natives and geared their services to the needs of the individual congregation or parish. Links with national church organizations remained tenuous and generally concerned such remote matters as the operation of foreign missions and the like. Although lodges and other formal social organizations maintained linkages with state and national hierarchies, such connections rarely led to participation beyond the local or district level. The schools remained in the hands of community residents who continued to operate them in time-honored fashion. Thus to the outsider rural society in the Loup country might well have exemplified stability, conservatism, and autonomy—a relatively self-contained and self-regulating social order.

Such a description might also have applied at the subregional level. Even within the region ethnic enclaves existed apart from each other. The Bohemians, Irish, Poles and old stock Americans rarely intermingled and even within the ethnocultural group localism pervaded the individual consciousness. The basic unit of social identification for the farmer revolved about the farm community, usually coterminous with the elementary school district. Competition between different neighborhoods for county funds for road maintenance and bridge construction provided the major issues in county politics. Thus one might describe the early twentieth-century rural dweller's conception of society as a hierarchy

the reverse of that apparent to the outsider. That is, the home community appeared the most significant unit of society and the county the dominant political unit, whereas state and national institutions receded into the background as less directly meaningful or influential.

Such a picture distorts to some degree the actual conditions that characterized the area, however. For while certain elements of local autonomy did exist in the political and social spheres, relationships with national economic institutions directly influenced the day to day life and activity of the individual citizen, farmer, and townsman alike. Because of the partially commercialized nature of the agricultural economy no one remained entirely independent of national economic currents. This basic fact received daily confirmation in the operation of three major economic forces affecting farmers and merchants—commodity prices, the availability and cost of capital, and the cost of transportation.

In romantic legend and occasionally within his own imagination the farmer appeared as an independent yeoman who owed no man and who lived unaffected by the economic forces about him. In times of depression when the urban masses wandered the streets in search of food and shelter he had a roof over his head and could provide his own food supply. In reality such idealized conditions rarely existed. The typical farmer owed money either to banks or other financial institutions or to individuals and could not withstand adverse price conditions for more than a few years. He must have cash profits or he stood to lose his farm. He also required certain types of manufactured goods even in the hardest of times, a condition which further necessitated the availability of cash. The village merchant likewise found himself susceptible to price changes which could ruin his business. Deflation could result in large losses at the inventory level. Inflation might price his goods out of the market. Should farm prices rise less rapidly than industrial prices his sales potential would shrink correspondingly. Thus the retailer proved susceptible not only to general price trends but also to shifts in the relationship between farm and industrial commodity prices.

Since most farmers and many merchants owed money they naturally took a strong interest in the conditions affecting the national credit system. Circumstances in New York City ultimately determined western interest rates and these rates in turn could make the difference between owning or renting a farm. Farmers needed

short-term loans to see them through the harvest season but they also had an interest in long-term borrowing, a type of credit which they found difficult to obtain from most banks. Merchants also followed the financial market closely, for the inability to obtain a short-term loan at the critical juncture when one could acquire a new inventory at favorable prices could make the difference between profit and loss for the entire year's operation.

Transportation facilities and shipping rates had always played a key role in the economy of the Loup country. Early settlers had issued bonds to help finance railroad construction, recognizing its importance for economic development. But the railroads came to possess what seemed to many a stranglehold over the agricultural economy. Should rates rise sharply or even moderately they might eliminate any prospect of profit for farmer and villager alike. The recognition of this fact combined with real or imagined abuses by the railroads themselves resulted in considerable support for the political crusades that aimed at railroad regulation in the state. As in other economic conflicts antagonism against the railroads led to a coalescing of regional sentiment against the outside—i.e., the economically dominant forces centered in distant cities. It was in this sphere that the omnipotence of forces beyond community control became the most evident and resentment of the fact most acute.

Obviously the forces emanating from national economic institutions had a powerful and potentially disruptive influence within the farm community. In the social and political spheres such influences remained potential rather than real. But should conditions develop which favored the strengthening of supraregional institutions in those areas they could easily take on the same attributes and exert the same type of impact as did economic institutions. Such a change would signal a further shift in the location of decision-making power to centers outside of the region. Decisions would be reached according to principles characteristic of the rising urban centers whose interests often directly opposed those of rural areas. This meant an intensification of political conflict over the issue of local autonomy versus an increasing degree of centralization. A general institutional shift in this direction would also lead to a closer integration of the region into the national society with a subsequent decline in regional distinctiveness. Hence while the rural society of the Loup country may have exhibited the outward appearance of stability in 1910, it contained within it the seeds of

rapid change of a drastic order. The story of this society in the twentieth century is that of the realization of those potentials for change.

2. Directions in Agriculture, 1910–1930

During the second and third decades of the twentieth century the agricultural economy of the Loup country experienced only minor changes in its broad outlines. Over the twenty-year period the acreage devoted to cereal grain production rose by about 3 percent while animal numbers remained relatively stable. During the teens farmers increased small-grain production at the expense of corn although the shift was not very great, involving about a 10 percent decline in the regional corn acreage. The increase in wheat acreage partially antedated the outbreak of World War I while barley and rye production, both relatively minor, grew during the war under the stimulus of unusually favorable prices. The output of oats remained fairly stable as most of this grain went to feed horses and other livestock in the area. With the collapse in prices following the war small-grain acreage declined by three-fourths and the corn acreage rose by one-third as the movement toward specialized corn-livestock farming gained new impetus.[1]

The rise in small-grain production directly influenced the pace of mechanization and the pattern of farm labor demand during the wartime years. Since the level of mechanization in small-grain production had advanced beyond that for corn, particularly in the harvesting stage, the shift toward small grain stimulated investment in farm machinery. At the same time the farm tractor made its debut in the region, thereby providing a further incentive for mechanization. By 1918 enough tractors had come into use in the area north of Grand Island to encourage officials of the International Harvester firm to sponsor a tractor demonstration school at St. Paul, just south of the region. In 1920 Valley County farmers reported a total of forty-six tractors in operation on their farmsteads.[2]

As a result of the growing acquisition of farm equipment the average value of machinery per farm rose sharply during the teens. The increase from $302 in 1910 to $1,153 in 1920 represented a 74 percent gain when adjusted for inflation. Despite the hard times of the early twenties the value of machinery and implements per farm advanced a further 4 percent in constant dollars by 1925. The

number of farm tractors in Valley County rose by an average of ten per year from 1920 through 1927. Then, as a certain degree of farm prosperity returned, the total rose by eighty in 1928 and fifty in 1929. By 1930, 273 farms or 21 percent of the Valley County total had tractors in operation. The previous year the county agent at Ord had reported that horses were disappearing from local farms as their owners expanded the acreage under cultivation and developed tractor farming techniques. The over-all number of horses in the county declined from an average of 8.8 per farm in 1910 to 6.4 per farm in 1930. Due largely to the growing acquisition of tractors the value of machinery per farm rose 27.6 percent during the last half of the twenties even while the general wholesale price index declined by 16 percent. While this fact offered a clear indication of future trends in the region, the impact upon agricultural productivity remained limited due to the incomplete utilization of this power source. Once large-scale tractor-drawn implements began to appear, however, then a significant revolution in farm productivity could occur.[3]

Short-term increases in small-grain farming also led to changes in the pattern of demand for farm labor. Small grain requires immediate harvest when the plant matures or much of the crop may be lost. Thus each year a peak labor season of several weeks duration develops during which the labor force must expand rapidly. After the outbreak of the war farmers utilized various methods to secure this essential help. Town residents who had free time volunteered to assist in harvesting. Some merchants closed their stores early in the afternoon to help farmers in shocking and threshing operations. But the continued labor shortage also gave rise to the adoption of other methods of recruitment. The Custer County farm extension agent reported that

> the sheriff and the police force were busy watching all the trains, seeing that NONE of the itinerant wanderers were being overlooked. It was also a quite common occurance at the county agent's office to see the sheriff and the police force marching in from five to TWENTY so CALLED "Hoboes". Those who were willing to go to work were given an opportunity and those who refused were usually given free lodging in the county jail and fed on light diets.

This type of labor did not prove very useful to the farmer. The editor of the *Scotia Register* echoed their sentiments when he noted: "Farmers don't take very kindly to the idea of farm boys going to

war and town bums being sent to work on the farms . . . lots of city fellows did not know whether alfalfa grew on trees or whether they dig it out of the ground like potatoes. Experienced labor is needed on the farm as well as elsewhere." Although the military draft system provided exemptions for agricultural laborers, not enough of these were granted to satisfy local demand. However, despite the multitude of complaints no serious crop losses occurred in the area during wartime on account of a shortage of harvest hands.[4]

During the teens the farmer experienced a degree of financial well-being which exceeded anything within living memory. The early part of the decade saw one of the more prosperous periods in the history of American agriculture. Then came the exceptionally affluent war years. The new found wealth manifested itself in various ways. During the war the automobile became the usual mode of transportation in the region and by 1920 the 1,295 Valley County farm operators owned 974 of them. Some used their new crop of dollars to finance improvements in farm buildings or to buy electric light plants and other household improvements. The increase in farm mechanization has already been noted. Clearly, however, these channels did not absorb all surplus farm profits.[5]

While some farmers engaged in stock market ventures at this time, the major avenue for investment lay closer to home in the form of farm real estate. Prior to the war land values rose substantially although not excessively in view of their income potential. But with the war boom restraint evaporated and prices soared. Immediately after the war a speculative mania broke out and Valley County farm prices reached $375 per acre in some instances. Those who doubted the wisdom of this trend received a strong rebuke from one booster who wrote: "Twenty years ago men in Valley County said that land was too high and it could be bought at that time from ten to fifteen dollars per acre. Now it is a hundred to a hundred and fifty and more and the same men are saying it is too high. In ten years it will be worth two hundred and three hundred dollars per acre. . . . Why do we always have to have a bunch of kickers, holding back on the rig of progress?" Shortly thereafter a real estate agency advertised twenty-six farms for sale on easy credit with 10 percent cash down, 15 percent due the following March, and the rest on terms to suit individual needs. The precipitous drop in farm commodity prices which began midway through 1919 pricked the speculative bubble, however, and land values collapsed.

The average value of land and buildings in Valley County which had risen from $42.42 per acre in 1910 to $99.11 in 1920 (after the decline had already begun) fell to $60.70 in 1925. With this price decline many of the tracts which had gone for astronomical sums reverted to their original owners who had taken mortgages from the purchasers. A high proportion of those farmers who managed to retain possession of the land which they bought at this time did so only by acquiring burdensome debts which they could not liquidate before the end of the following decade when the entire agricultural economy collapsed.[6]

Late in 1919 farm prices began to tumble and wartime affluence disappeared even more rapidly than it had come. Between July and December of that year hog prices fell from $20.40 to $12.20 per live hundredweight, and by the end of 1920 they had sunk further to a mere $8.00. Corn prices for the corresponding dates fell from $1.72 to $1.24 and then to $0.42 per bushel. The farm purchasing power index (see Appendix) dropped from an average of 113 in 1919 to 102 in 1920 and a mere 72 in 1921. The latter was the lowest for any year of the twentieth century up to that time, and coming as it did at the end of the boom it appeared even more severe. Many farmers who had recently acquired land found themselves in an untenable situation and went under. As a consequence, the tenancy rate for Valley County which had risen by about 3 percent in the two previous decades jumped from 38.2 percent in 1920 to 45.5 percent in 1925.[7]

Conditions remained hard for the farmer until 1924 when agricultural commodity prices began rising rapidly. By 1925 the worst had passed and a five-year period of moderate prosperity ensued. During these years the farm purchasing power index averaged 96 compared with a figure of 100 during the five prewar years of 1910–1914. The new influx of profits went to finance mechanization, the purchase of new automobiles, and additional farm and home improvements. At the same time certain fundamental weaknesses in the regional agricultural economy remained evident. The tenancy rate remained at a high level while the mortgage load burden continued virtually unchanged. Farmers who paid off their mortgages during these years generally did so by acquiring new ones. So long as prices remained favorable all seemed well. But should the price situation suddenly deteriorate the basic fragility of the farm economy would become only too readily apparent.[8]

II

At the time of World War I the concept of diversified farming gained an increasing degree of support among residents of the Loup country. Shortly after the postwar collapse in farm prices a local writer warned against over-dependence on a one-crop economy. In his words, "The Cow, the Sow and the Hen offer emancipation from present grueling business conditions." The crop and livestock statistics for the region in the teens and twenties reveal that a trend toward diversification within an increasingly specialized corn-based economy did develop. That is, while the relative acreage of crops other than corn diminished, at the same time farmers expanded their output of dairy and poultry products. The development of dairying proved to be the most significant element of this movement toward diversification. Prior to this time gathering stations for creameries in distant cities had bought cream from Loup country farmers but the volume of business had remained limited for a number of reasons. Major changes must occur in the production process and in the marketing sphere before the region could develop a substantial dairying interest. Although specialized dairy farming of the type common in states to the east never developed, cream production did become a major income producing sideline on most farms in the area for some decades.[9]

Prospective dairymen faced several major obstacles in their efforts to establish profitable operations. The first involved the quality of their livestock and the necessity for improving the dairy animal itself. Most of the cows milked in the region prior to 1930 belonged to the major beef breeds. Consequently their yield of butterfat per unit of feed consumed ran substantially below that of specialized dairy animals since much of the feed was converted to meat. Farmers who milked these animals may not have realized any actual profit when feed costs were taken into account, but milking did produce a regular cash income, an item greatly in demand among the farm population. As late as 1930 the dual purpose cow accounted for 79 percent of the animals milked in Valley County. At that date numerous farmers still preferred these animals to dairy breeds. As one of them explained, the cow raised chiefly for beef purposes provided "extra" income by producing milk. The dual purpose animal also reputedly consumed much of the rough feed that went to waste when only dairy animals were kept. This conception of dairying as a basically supplementary

activity prevailed on most general and livestock farms in the vicinity. Nonetheless, a number of dairy enthusiasts did seek to remedy the situation.[10]

Obviously the solution to the problem of low-producing cows lay in the substitution of better animals. Owing to the absence of a dairying tradition in central Nebraska farmers had to import their purebred animals from the established dairying regions of Minnesota and Wisconsin. A variety of dairy breeds came into the area—Holstein-Friesian, Guernsey, Jersey, Ayrshire, and Brown Swiss among them. The county extension agents made annual trips to dairying regions to buy animals for local farmers. The rural press also carried numerous suggestions for improving herds. A leading dairy farmer in the area advised prospective dairymen to acquire one or two purebred cows or heifers and a purebred bull, keeping his red cows while he gradually produced his own purebred herd. In a few years he could sell off his red cows, replacing them with his own dairy animals. However, the fact that most farmers kept scrub bulls for breeding purposes rendered the problem of improvement more difficult. Even if the farmer acquired purebred dairy cows, by breeding them to inferior bulls he greatly reduced the production level of their offspring. The simplest solution to this problem lay in the importation of purebred dairy bulls, but this rarely happened. Not until the late thirties did major progress come in this sphere.[11]

In order to evaluate the performance of individual animals for culling and breeding purposes dairy operators established several testing associations. The rural press also carried numerous items explaining the proper procedures for testing. The common beef cow tested from 2.5 to 4 percent butterfat compared with Jersey cows which averaged from 4 to 6 percent. At this time the average milk cow in the state produced about 120 pounds of butterfat annually, a figure which was probably close to that of the Loup country animals. The dairy cows that the Custer County agent imported from other states averaged a minimum of three hundred pounds annually which he estimated produced a profit equal to that from ten average Nebraska cows.[12]

Dairy farmers and creamery managers recommended a variety of feeding programs to maximize milk production in cows of all breeds. Various individuals utilized different combinations of ground corn, bran, alfalfa, and oil meal in their operations. But the most widely discussed development in dairy livestock feeding

revolved about the construction of silos and the use of chopped ensilage. Silos first appeared in the region about 1910 in a variety of shapes and forms. Implement dealers offered wooden upright silos for sale while some farmers constructed trench silos and others adapted old cisterns for silo purposes. Several obstacles combined to prevent the general adoption of this practice, however. One difficulty stemmed from the fact that corn must be cut at the proper time of the year to avoid spoilage. Farmers eventually determined this date by the trial and error method, but other problems persisted. Although ensilage provided a relatively cheap feed its production involved considerable initial expense. The farmer must construct a silo, purchase equipment including a stalk binder, field cutter, and engine, and must hire the labor to fill the silo. In addition, the best time for filling silos coincided with the optimum time for sowing winter wheat. This made it impossible for a farmer to do both. Consequently acceptance of the silo remained limited during most of the teens and twenties and only thirty-one of the structures appeared in the agricultural statistics for Valley County in 1930.[13]

The farmer who had resolved the immediate problems of acquiring good dairy cows and providing them with a proper feeding regimen next faced the difficulty of getting his cream to a buyer before it spoiled. As much as a week might elapse between the time he milked a cow and the time when the cream arrived at the local creamery or gathering station. Cooling equipment remained virtually unknown with an occasional milkhouse the only concession to progress on this point. Milking equipment in general remained primitive with most farmers possessing only a few pails and a separator. Consequently creamery managers raised an unending stream of complaints about the quality of the cream that they received. The Sargent manager in 1912 reported that only 4 percent of local cream tested as grade one, 35 percent tested fair, and 61 percent was bad. Several years later his Comstock counterpart complained that his firm could have paid an extra four cents per pound for butterfat to producers and still realized additional profits if all cream received at his plant had arrived in good condition.[14]

Limited marketing facilities early in the twentieth century further hampered the expansion of dairying in the area. Before the war centralized creameries in Omaha and other cities had established gathering stations in most of the Loup country villages. These stations provided a limited market and farmers considered

their prices unreasonably low. Early in the teens farmers and villagers established co-operative creameries in Arcadia, Comstock, North Loup, Ord, and Sargent. All of them failed within a few years and for much the same reasons. One problem lay in the difficulty of securing competent management in an area that lacked any kind of established dairying tradition. More significantly, the available supply of cows proved too small to sustain operations. Farmers compounded this difficulty by dividing their patronage between creameries and gathering stations. Not until they came to adopt the basic co-operative principles of the Rochdale system could co-operative creameries flourish in the area.[15]

In the mid-twenties the proponents of home-town dairy processing finally achieved success, and creameries sprang up in most villages in the region while a cheese factory began operations in North Loup. The career of most of these firms paralleled that of the largest, the Ord Co-operative Creamery. Earlier failures in Ord had reduced interest in such an enterprise but by 1926 conditions appeared propitious for a new undertaking. The initial impetus for establishing a creamery came from both farmers and merchants. The farmer anticipated higher prices for his cream should a village processor appear while merchants felt that a creamery would bring more money into town. In the spring of 1926 a creamery building firm's representative arrived in Ord and met with farmers and members of the Commercial Club to discuss business prospects. The sale of shares in the creamery began in June and by early September the necessary funds had been accumulated. In the middle of that month a hundred persons, chiefly farmers, met and set up the business organization of the firm. Construction of the creamery plant began later in the month and the first shipment of finished butter left for New York in December. During its first year of operation the co-operative churned nearly three hundred thousand pounds of butter, paid out dividends of more than ten thousand dollars, and retained a fifteen thousand dollar profit. Business continued to prosper for the remainder of the decade in this as in most other creameries in the region.[16]

Poultry and egg production offered another alternative to the farmer seeking to diversify his sources of income. Receipts from these operations in Valley County nearly tripled in terms of constant dollars between 1909 and 1929. For the most part poultry growing remained in the domain of the farm housewife, and the agricultural census of 1930 reported only three poultry farms in

the entirety of Valley County that year. Several factors accounted for this lack of interest in specialized poultry production. A poor system of grading eggs resulted in low prices. Various poultry diseases infected local flocks with cholera proving particularly severe. Also, many housewives delayed culling well past the proper season, thereby increasing feed costs and creating the impression that poultry raising lacked much profit potential. Most farmers did not consider it worthwhile to put additional time and effort into increasing productivity, and the possibility of profitable large-scale poultry operations did not gain general recognition.[17]

Because of deficiencies in the agricultural census data for these years one cannot determine precisely the changes in the relative significance of different sources of farm income during this period. It appears, however, that the over-all share derived from the sale of livestock products rose from about 7 percent in 1909 to about 14 percent in 1929. In the latter year Valley County farmers received about 70 percent of their cash income from the sale of livestock and the remaining 16 percent from crop sales. The figures for production and sales further reveal an important shift toward commercial production on the part of dairy and poultry operations during this period. In 1909 farmers churned more than half their butterfat production at home and sold about one-third of this butter to stores or to individuals. By 1919 the proportion of butterfat churned at home had fallen to one-third of which only about one-tenth was sold. With the rise of local creameries during the twenties home churning fell to less than one-eighth of the butterfat produced in 1929 and the sale of home-churned butter virtually ceased. Among poultry growers the proportion of chickens and eggs produced which actually went to market rose more slowly. The proportion of eggs sold inched upward from 56 percent in 1909 to 59 percent in 1919 and to 64 percent in 1929. The proportion of chickens marketed remained unchanged during the teens but rose from 22 to 34 percent during the twenties.[18]

Despite the growing interest in dairy and poultry production the raising and finishing of livestock for slaughter remained the primary source of income among Loup country farmers throughout the teens and twenties. Hog production which rose by nearly half during the first decade of the twentieth century experienced a severe decline during the teens and early twenties owing to outbreaks of hog cholera. The first major epidemic since the nineties erupted in the summer of 1913. The outbreak coincided with a

heat wave which caused unusually heavy losses. The situation worsened when many farmers found it impossible to obtain the serum necessary for inoculating uninfected animals. The vaccine shortage and the high cost of inoculation—ninety cents per animal plus a fee for each farm visit—aroused considerable hostility toward the veterinarians. The fact that vaccine easily deteriorated and sometimes proved ineffective added further to the farmer's resentment. Following an outbreak in 1919 the local incidence of hog cholera subsided and throughout the twenties the number of swine remained close to the 1909 level.[19]

Hog production remained a sideline operation on most farms in much the same way as dairying. Some farmers did specialize in swine growing, however. One such individual near Ord received fifteen hundred dollars for a purebred Poland China boar in 1918, and another sold Poland China breeding stock to buyers in other states. Generally speaking, however, local hogs were heavy, lard-type animals weighing over three hundred pounds. The Lutz brothers who lived near Arcadia operated a specialized hog farm typical of those in the area. In a normal year they farrowed a hundred sows in the spring and rebred half of these for fall litters. They scheduled breeding so as to allow the handling of pigs in lots of a hundred to hundred fifty animals. Following this procedure they usually produced twelve to fifteen hundred pigs annually. Brood sows ranged through the fields with access to alfalfa stacks in the spring while receiving corn for grain. The farm operators weaned their pigs at eight or nine weeks of age and vaccinated them shortly thereafter. These pigs reached marketable size after an average of six to eight months. The owners estimated that with this type of operation an individual farmer could raise from five to seven hundred pigs annually with his own labor. Specialized farms of this type proved relatively uncommon, however.[20]

Although the sale of finished cattle remained by far the largest single source of farm income in the region the number of animals rose by less than 3 percent during these decades. A few individuals worked hard to improve the quality of their livestock but progress came very slowly. The major advances that did occur came in the area of disease prevention and control. Blackleg posed the major disease threat to cattle in the teens. At first prevention proved difficult because the vaccine lacked long-term effectiveness. Consequently an animal had to be reinoculated four or five times until it reached the age where it acquired lifelong immunity. In 1919

a new vaccine which conferred permanent immunity came onto the market and within four years had come into general use in the region.[21]

Other diseases also posed threats to the cattle grower's operations. An outbreak of contagious abortion occurred in 1922. Shipping fever remained endemic in the area but in the mid-twenties scientists developed a vaccine for the disease which came into general use later in the decade. The most difficult problem by that time concerned bovine tuberculosis which reached the Loup region late in the teens. Following the initial appearance of the disease in the state in 1914 the legislature adopted measures which provided for testing animals and compensating owners of those found to be infected and subsequently destroyed. In 1927 a group of farmers launched a drive to establish Valley County as a tuberculosis test area. Part of the official testing procedure required that 60 percent of the farmers in the county must petition in favor of the program before it could be instituted. The signatures proved difficult to obtain, however, particularly when the state lacked the funds with which to compensate owners of infected animals. In Custer County farmers voted down an attempt to initiate such a program and actual tuberculosis testing in the region did not get under way until the middle of the depression.[22]

Changes in crop production during these decades revolved about the adoption of new seed varieties. Corn growers devoted much time and energy to the search for better methods of selecting and testing their seed corn. "Seed Corn Special" trains sponsored by the railroads passed through the towns bringing agricultural experts to demonstrate the newest techniques. Certainly at the beginning of the teens local seed corn was of such poor quality as to make some improvement necessary. After ten years of educational campaigns on the part of numerous individuals and governmental agencies local seed samples still had an average germination rate of less than 70 percent. Progress came very slowly and Valley County corn yields remained stagnant, averaging 24.4 bushels per acre in 1914–1917 and 24.3 bushels per acre in 1926–1929.[23]

Somewhat more impressive advances came in the area of small-grain production. Many farmers adopted new varieties of seed which raised yields enough to offset the effects of declining soil fertility in the area. By 1920 wheat yields had declined substantially from earlier levels due to this factor and to the spread of rust. In that year the Valley County agent imported a carload of the new

rust-resistant Kanred strain of wheat. Within two years nearly 80 percent of all wheat sown in the county belonged to this variety. Similar if less rapid changes occurred in barley and rye production. In the three years after 1919 most farmers adopted the Rosen variety of rye while later in the twenties a number of farmers adopted the Comfort strain of barley. Oats production remained virtually unchanged throughout the entire period with no major advances in productivity.[24]

Some farmers also experimented with new crops but achieved no major success. Various enthusiasts sought to promote vegetable production in the hopes of stimulating the growth of a local canning industry, but to no avail. Sugar-beet growers found themselves hamstrung by their inability to obtain crop quota and processing agreements. Thus by default popcorn remained the major specialty crop of the region. Popcorn production remained relatively limited for several decades after its introduction but the acreage devoted to the crop rose from less than a thousand in 1917 to nearly seven thousand in 1919. Initially one firm in Chicago handled virtually the entire output of the area. Early in the teens, however, disgruntled farmers formed a Popcorn Growers Association at North Loup, the center of popcorn production. This group worked actively to develop alternative market outlets for the crop. By the early twenties the popcorn acreage had declined by nearly half. At that time the growers produced about half of their crop on contract with local dealers who set prices before spring planting. These prices ranged from one to three and a half cents per pound depending on the quality. Late in the decade the crop again grew in significance and the popcorn acreage expanded to more than eight thousand. The entire business collapsed with the prolonged drouth of the thirties, however, and never regained its former significance.[25]

Despite a general lack of interest in soil conservation during these years some farmers did practice crop rotation as a means of combatting declining soil fertility. Usually they alternated alfalfa or sweet clover with grain crops. Advocates of this system claimed that it boosted wheat yields by as much as eight to twelve bushels per acre. They also credited crop rotation with increasing the amount of organic matter in the soil, thus improving moisture retention and increasing resistance to baking, blowing, and cracking. Sweet clover enjoyed a momentary vogue late in the teens but alfalfa remained by far the most important legume crop used in rotation schemes.[26]

TABLE 2
FARMS BY TYPE, VALLEY COUNTY, 1930

Type of Farm	Number	Average Size (Acres)	Average Value Land and Buildings	Average Value per Acre
General	248	226	$13,305	$59
Cash Grain	174	239	16,821	70
Crop Specialty	32	179	17,581	98
Dairy	27	216	13,480	62
Animal Specialty	730	292	17,568	60
Miscellaneous & Unclassified	89	***	****	****

Type of Farm	Average Value of Machinery & Implements	Sources of Cash Receipts (%)*		
		C	L	LP
General	$ 835	32	38	30
Cash Grain	983	68	18	14
Crop Specialty	1,091	75	14	11
Dairy	787	10	32	58
Animal Specialty	1,156	7	80	13

Type of Farm	Average Proportion of Products Consumed at Home, by Value	Average Value of Products Sold per Farm
General	21.5%	$1,789
Cash Grain	10.0	2,085
Crop Specialty	9.7	3,861
Dairy	16.1	1,843
Animal Specialty	8.5	3,661

SOURCE: *1930 Census, Agriculture,* Vol. III, pp. 931, 939, 951.
* C: sale of crops; L: sale of livestock; LP: Sale of livestock products.

The nature and scope of individual farming operations varied widely as the figures in table 2 indicate. The agricultural census takers in 1930 classified a total of 1,247 of the 1,300 Valley County farms by type of operation, specialized farms being defined as those receiving 40 percent or more of their cash receipts from a single

source—i.e., crop sales, livestock sales, etc. Thirty-six of the specialized farms belonged to the minor categories of stock ranches, poultry farms, and self-sufficient enterprises. Of the classified farm operations about one-fifth consisted of general farms whose occupants derived their income from the sale of crops as well as from livestock and livestock product sales. About one-seventh engaged in cash grain farming while nearly three-fifths specialized in the production of livestock, primarily beef cattle. Only about 5 percent of the farms specialized in dairying or specialty crop production.

General and dairy farmers had much in common with each other in contrast to the grain and livestock specialists. They farmed poorer land, particularly in the hilly areas and in the sandy regions along the rivers. They invested less heavily in machinery and implements than did other types of farmers and the products which they sold had a much lower value. Families residing on these farms consumed a high proportion of the agricultural commodities which they produced—more than a fifth in the case of the general farmers and one-sixth on the part of the dairy farmers. The major difference between the two lay in the limited volume of crop farming and sales carried on by the dairy producers who fed most of their limited grain output to their own animals.

Crop specialty and cash grain producers tended to occupy the best farm land. Most of these farms lay along the fertile river terraces and bottom lands or in the less rolling upland in the south central part of the region. The cash crop specialists invested more heavily in machinery than did general or dairy farmers and the scale of their operations was considerably larger. Among the crop specialty farmers cash receipts per farm averaged more than double the figure for general and dairy farm operators.

Animal specialty producers completely dominated the regional farm economy. They included three-fifths of all farmers and received three-fourths of all farm income in Valley County in 1929. Livestock producers grew most of the feed for their animals and invested more heavily in machinery and farm implements than did even the crop specialists. Their farms were the largest in size of any major category and occupied all types of land, particularly in areas which combined terrain suitable for cropping with ample pasturage. Cattle sales provided the major source of income with the number of cattle per farm more than double the average for general farms. Although livestock products accounted for only one-

eighth of the total receipts on these farms they provided more than one-half of the total income from the sale of these products in the county. So great were the feed demands of these operators that even before 1920 the region had become a grain importing area.[27]

Despite the specialized census classifications most farm enterprises in the region derived their income from diverse sources—the sale of crops, of livestock, and of livestock products. The general farming practices of these individual units obscured somewhat the continuing movement toward corn-livestock specialization. Much of the income from the sale of crops came from the sale of corn while the rise of the dairying stemmed chiefly from the dual utilization of beef cows. Thus the seeming contradiction between growing specialization and increased diversification proved unreal. Another significant change during the period lay in the declining proportion of agricultural products consumed at home by the farm family. That is, farm enterprises became more highly commercialized as a higher proportion of products grown went to market. This movement proceeded at a slow pace but perceptible progress had occurred before the onset of the depression brought a complete collapse in the market for farm commodities.[28]

III

If farming practices changed slowly during these decades it was not for lack of effort on the part of agricultural educators. The country press continually supplied readers with reports from innovative farmers who described the practices which they had tried with varying degrees of success. National farm magazines attained a considerable circulation in the region. During the twenties radio provided a new medium for spreading farm information, and by 1930 most radio stations scheduled regular programs of farm market news, weather forecasts, and talks by various agricultural experts.[29]

Farmers' institutes and local short courses offered by the University of Nebraska College of Agriculture provided another channel for the flow of farming information. These institutes operated prior to the advent of the county extension agent during the war. At such meetings trained specialists discussed such topics as controlling hog cholera, selecting and breeding beef cattle, and the problems of winter wheat production. The College of Agriculture

also furnished speakers for short courses held during the winter months. In addition, the extension division offered rural youth the opportunity for correspondence study under the guidance of neighborhood farmers who provided on the spot instruction. Railroads ran special trains to the agricultural villages to serve their lines in order to stimulate productivity and to improve their public relations. Such trains carried exhibits dealing with seed corn testing, methods of hog raising, and similar subjects.[30]

Unfortunately the effectiveness of these media in supplying the farmer with current research findings was limited by the sporadic and unco-ordinated fashion in which they operated. The arrival of the county extension agent, however, allowed the development of a permanent organization for providing information and technical assistance to farm operators. Agitation for the establishment of a farm bureau in Valley County began in 1914 when the *Ord Journal* ran a front page editorial calling for the hiring of a county agent in order to raise the level of efficiency and profitability of local agriculture. County residents took no action on the matter for the next three years since most farmers had lukewarm feelings on the subject. As one of them noted, the more progressive farmers didn't feel that they needed the help of an agent while the less progressive type wouldn't learn from one. The adoption of federal legislation providing funds for the support of agents in each county in 1918 provided the necessary catalyst for action. The Valley County board met in March, 1918, and allotted fifteen hundred dollars for the support of an agent. Later in the month a temporary farm bureau organization began taking shape. By the end of April an agent had arrived and opened an office. During the same year another agent began operations in Custer County under similar circumstances. Apathy prevailed in Greeley County which did not establish a farm bureau until after the adoption of major federal agricultural programs during the thirties.[31]

After establishing himself in the county seat the agent performed a variety of different services. The first major operation involved setting up labor exchanges to assist farmers in getting their small grain harvested. Another major project concerned disease prevention in animals with strong emphasis on vaccination against hog cholera and blackleg in cattle. Vigorous activity by the county agents in this area led to the development of considerable animosity on the part of local veterinarians who felt that their

rights had been encroached upon. The agents also carried on an extensive seed corn testing program and introduced new varieties of small grain. Despite these and other useful activities, however, many farmers continued to dispute the agents' usefulness and accused them of hobnobbing with a few rich aristocrats.

Localistic and ethnocentric attitudes and rural animosity toward the towns in which the county agents maintained their offices contributed further to the antipathy which they encountered. Although the Valley County Farm Bureau reported more than five hundred members in 1924, the membership did not accurately reflect the composition of the farm population. The northwestern townships which contained most of the Bohemian and Polish residents and included more than a third of the county's farmers accounted for only one-eighth of the bureau's membership. Thirty percent of the members lived in North Loup and Ord townships while fewer than 5 percent lived in Arcadia precinct. Thus the services of the agent gravitated toward the old stock American and German-American farmers living along the Ord-North Loup axis and in the south central part of the county. His practice of maintaining all his office hours in Ord also aroused opposition among residents of the other villages in the county.[32]

With the collapse of farm prices after the war farmers sought new ways of reducing their property taxes and soon a number of them launched an effort to abolish the county agent's position. Each election year opponents of the agent circulated petitions to abolish this office, while the farm bureau regularly circulated petitions supporting its continuation. The major campaign on this issue came in 1924. In a move to gain support in the villages the agent announced plans to maintain offices in North Loup and Arcadia as well as in Ord. This gesture undercut much of the opposition in those two towns. In the fall election the city of Ord turned in a three to two majority for retaining the position. North Loup township favored retention by nearly three to one and Arcadia township supported continuation by about four to three. The thirteen farm precincts favored abolition of the post by a margin of 778 to 716. Only five of those precincts favored retention whereas the Bohemian and Polish areas of small farmers returned heavy margins in favor of abolition. The decisive votes came from the villages whose businessmen felt that the continued presence of the agent might raise farm income and would in any case bring farmers to town more often.[33]

IV

While they disagreed as to the desirability of retaining county agents, Loup country farmers unanimously recognized the necessity for improving the public roads. From the earliest times transportation problems had posed a major obstacle for the farmer seeking to market his products. The arrival of the railroads only partially resolved this difficulty for it remained almost impossible to haul farm produce to town during much of the year. Tales of the difficulties encountered in trying to get to town reached gargantuan proportions. For their part the village merchants acting through their commercial clubs advocated road improvement in order to lure more customers to town.

As farmers acquired automobiles in the teens they soon discovered that these vehicles fared no better than horses on bad roads. The actual nature of road problems varied from one type of terrain to another. The Mira Valley road from Vinton township to Ord lay beneath a foot or more of dust for much of the year. Roads to the east of the Ord river bridge rested on a bed of sand and the bottom fell out each spring when the water level rose. Roads to the southeast of North Loup remained impassible beneath a layer of mud or deep ruts during most of the summer. Where roads received more regular maintenance farmers complained of excessively narrow and steep grades which caused their cars to slide off the road into the ditch after rains. As a consequence of dissatisfaction with these conditions several good-roads clubs organized in the region during the teens.[34]

The decentralized nature of the county road system precluded any rapid solution to the problem of impossible roads. Although county bridges came under the jurisdiction of the county board, township overseers bore the responsibility for maintaining most roads. The farmers who served as overseers had other things to do and paid little attention to their official duties. Advocates of improvement sought to overcome this obstacle in 1916 by substituting a Valley County engineer for township overseers. Proponents of the reform argued that farmers failed to maintain their roads and that they would not move their own or their neighbors' fences back to widen roads. An engineer would operate free from local prejudices and could supervise a unified maintenance system in the county. The proposal soon foundered on the rock of localism, however, and voters rejected the proposed change by a two to one

margin. Although both the state and federal road assistance programs required county level supervision of roads as a condition for aid, this requirement was circumvented and the formal adoption of a single county-wide road system did not come for another forty years.[35]

Despite these disagreements and the vicissitudes of county politics actual road improvement began in the late teens. In the summer of 1917 the Valley County board established a "Black Hills Route" west of the North Loup River running through North Loup, Ord, and Elyria. This route later became a part of Nebraska 11. Also in 1917 the board laid out an east-west route which later became part of Nebraska 70 between North Platte and South Sioux City. By 1920 the main river road from Scotia to Ord was reported to be in perfect shape for a dirt road and the stretch north of Ord was declared the equal of federal roads. The collapse in farm prices in 1919–1920 delayed further improvement activity until late in the following decade although the state did gravel part of the route from Ord to Arcadia in the mid-twenties.[36]

Opposition to higher taxes provided only one obstacle to road improvement efforts. As early as 1914 speakers at a good-roads meeting in Sargent hinted that Comstock merchants opposed road improvement out of fear that a good road would divert trade to Sargent. Over a decade later roads to Sargent received a gravel topping and Comstock merchants watched their business melt away. After the Christmas buying season of 1928 the village editor warned that Comstock must get a highway within the next year in order to avoid a recurrence of the poor sales of recent months. Intervillage rivalry also influenced new road construction. When Greeley County established a new road parallel to the county line west of the new Scotia bridge across the North Loup River, North Loupers suspected a plot to steal trade away from their stores.[37]

Such squabbling paled into insignificance compared with the blasts fired at proposals for state highway building programs during the twenties. In 1925 the Nebraska legislature considered a measure that would impose a gasoline tax and redistribute auto license funds to support the construction of two paved roads across the state. A Sargent writer summed up the prevailing local view of the matter when he argued:

> Your interests lie in Custer county. . . . We shall be more interested in having year 'round roads in Custer county so that the farmers of the country

can market their products . . . then we are in having two main highways across the state hard surfaced at state expense for the benefit of the big towns and the tourists. This may be jealousy and if it is lets have more of it, and you will find that it's going to keep us from being eliminated by the backwash of the great highway systems which build up the big centers to the detriment of the smaller towns. We are for good roads, but to our way of thinking, the way to have good roads is to have them at home.

Similar responses greeted later legislation proposals on the same subject. This sentiment reflected one element of the larger distrust between the rural and urban worlds—between town and country. And, in the teens and twenties, this antagonism exploded into open hostility and political conflict.[38]

3. Farmers and Villagers

EVEN BEFORE THE DAWN of the twentieth century a number of social and economic cleavages had divided the ranks of society in the Loup country. Conflicts between various groups persisted in one form or another throughout the region's history. Wide divisions developed between Roman Catholics, chiefly of Bohemian, Polish, and Irish stock, and Evangelical Protestants of British, German, and Scandinavian origin. Neighborhood identification remained strong and played a dominant role in county politics. The most fundamental division in local society, however, lay in the distinction between town and country. This remained the case from the rise of the villages in the eighteen-eighties down into the mid-twentieth century. The antagonism between these two sectors reached an early peak during the Populist era of the eighteen-nineties and again flared into promience during the second and third decades of the twentieth century.

This hostility stemmed from the different and often conflicting roles performed by the farmer and the townsman. The farmer raised a crop or livestock which he sold to the villager for shipment to distant processing centers or for local resale. Price changes originating in distant terminal markets first manifested themselves locally in the prices paid the farmer by village buyers. Consequently, whenever farm commodity prices happened to fall the small-town elevator operator or livestock buyer bore the brunt of farmer dissatisfaction. Villagers also engaged in the urban function of retail distribution. In so doing they exposed themselves to further hostility from the countryman because of the generally rising costs of manufactured goods which the farmer must buy. In essence, the position of the villager immediately adjacent to the farmer made him the contact point for the current of rural antipathy toward the urban dominated marketing system.[1]

Despite the basically urban nature of the villager's economic role his own interests often conflicted with those of the larger city as well as with those of the farmer. Like the farmer he suffered from the price fluctuations in urban markets. The urban centers also offered direct competition with the village retailers. As early as the 1880s the small-town businessman battled the big city mail-

order house together with traveling salesmen who sought to lure away his customers. Later, with the widespread acquisition of the automobile city retailers directly threatened their small-town counterparts. Farmers and townsmen alike could now drive to Grand Island, Kearney, Lincoln, or Omaha to shop at city stores. The latter firms carried larger stocks of merchandise, often at lower prices than home-town merchants could afford to charge.

Loup country businessmen faced competition from the mail-order house at an early date. During the teens the problem threatened to become even more serious as Congress began considering proposals to establish a parcel-post system. Prior to this time the individual who patronized a mail-order house had to travel to town in order to obtain his package at the railroad depot. Once direct delivery to his door began he might cease going to town entirely, ordering whatever he needed from a big city firm and receiving it in his own mail box. Merchants feared that such a development foreshadowed the doom of the small-town businessman and ultimately of the small town itself. Village editors warned that the innovation would result in the elimination of small-town jobs, forcing local girls to move to the cities where a fate worse than death awaited them. On the other hand most farmers favored the proposed service. As one of them remarked, the parcel-post system would boost the level of prosperity in the country by enabling the producer and consumer to reach each other more directly, thus eliminating the middleman's profit and reducing the cost of living. This view received a predictably unenthusiastic reception from the village business community.[2]

Once the parcel-post system began operating business competition tightened and the doomsayers found ample evidence to support their forebodings. The *North Loup Loyalist* revealed that during the month of October, 1913, nearly three hundred parcel-post packages passed through the village railroad depot. Four years later the Ord postmaster published statistics which further illustrated the extent of the mail-order business. The four R.F.D. routes operating out of Ord provided service to a total of 499 families. During the month of August, 1917, mail carriers delivered an average of 1.8 packages per family on these routes. Village spokesmen blamed the increase in mail-order house patronage for the relatively limited expansion of business opportunities in the small towns during the teens and twenties.[3]

Despite their agreement that competition from mail-order houses was on the rise and must be dealt with village retailers disagreed

over how to handle the problem. Many merchants made the galling discovery that village residents including their fellow businessmen patronized the mail-order houses almost as readily as did the farmers. It soon became clear that regardless of the origin of those patronizing out-of-town firms they must be educated into buying at home. This necessarily involved a major public relations campaign on the part of the business community.[4]

Village retailers developed and endlessly expounded several basic arguments designed to lure customers away from the orbit of the mail-order house. First they criticized the latter institution for its conservative business practices, particularly the requirement of prepayment in contrast to the long-term credit available from local merchants. In addition, they charged that purchasers had difficulty in obtaining refunds or making exchanges for items acquired from mail-order firms. The deceptively low prices listed in the mail-order catalog did not include the cost of postage, while any remaining cost differential between the locally available article and the mail-order item stemmed from the inferior quality of the latter. Again and again merchants told their neighbors that they would find superior bargains at home if they would but open their eyes and look about them. Such arguments fell upon skeptical ears and the mail-order business showed no signs of falling off. As one Custer County farmer wrote:

> I see in one item where you say the mail order houses fool part of the people all the time. I wish to differ with you, because I am one of those fools you have reference to. For example, I sent to Omaha for a pair of trousers. They cost me $3, postage and all. I got them back in two days. If I had waited until I had gone to Sargent, I might have frozen to death. I went to Sargent and priced them. A poorer quality than I bought were $4.50. . . . Oh, yes, this merchant said his were far better quality. What was the use of lying? Don't we farmers know anything? . . . The merchants say they compete with the mail order house, but do they, or could they? We don't expect it of them. All we ask is a square deal.

Faced with such recalcitrance the merchant developed other arguments emphasizing community loyalty and the mutual dependence of farmer and townsman.[5]

The mail-order house, so the merchant reasoned, operated in a distant city, did not require large amounts of capital and did not pay taxes where it carried on business. The reverse characterized the small-town retailer. In order to set up business he accumulated capital, thus increasing the wealth of the community. Once he had established his firm he became a regular taxpaying member of the

community with a direct interest in its continuing development. Money received by the merchant remained in the area and helped it prosper. Thus the merchant community provided the foundation for the country town. Should out-of-town buying force them out of business the village would fade into oblivion. This in turn would adversely affect the farmer by removing his market, educational facilities, and part of his tax base. Such appeals to local loyalty remained in vogue well into the twentieth century.[6]

Loup country businessmen employed somewhat similar tactics to meet the problem of competition from other towns. Commercial clubs took a keen interest in the routing and improvement of country roads as a means of attracting customers from the trade areas of other towns. However, with the development of state highways it became feasible for the more adventurous driver to travel to Grand Island or Kearney in a few hours. There he could shop at the larger stores and take in the sights. Although the cost of transportation might more than offset the amount saved by buying there, as home-town boosters invariably pointed out, the appeal of taking such a drive outweighed the expense in the minds of many potential shoppers. Thus appeals to local patriotism proved no more efficacious in the campaign against out-of-town buying than in the one against mail-order houses.[7]

Faced with rising competition and a stable number of potential customers village retailers developed new business techniques designed to increase their sales and reduce expenses. The most significant change came with the elimination of long-term credit. The old credit system, described by one merchant as "that Godforsaken method of allowing people to carry off my goods and never pay for them," gradually gave way to a regular system of thirty-day accounts. The owner of one Comstock firm which shifted to a cash and short-term credit basis in 1911 reported that under the old system his credit accounts had averaged double the figure that he could safely afford. The following year most stores in Sargent changed over to the new arrangement by common agreement. By 1921 when Scotia merchants made the transition most stores in the region operated on a cash (including thirty-day credit) basis. Many retailers further reduced expenses by eliminating the home delivery of goods for customers residing in town. The growing acquisition of automobiles facilitated this trend since in most cases town customers could now carry their own purchases home. In some instances village merchants also reduced the size of their labor force, particularly during the twenties. Given the small size

of most stores, however, this did not have a very great impact upon the overall retailing business.[8]

Increased competition for customers also led to the development of new sales techniques. Hard-headed merchants sought to attract farmers to town and to persuade them to buy when they came. In Ord and Comstock they began arranging to hold their seasonal sales on identical dates. By simultaneously offering sale prices in a number of stores they hoped to drawn more people to town to shop than if only one store held a sale at a time. Retailers found these widely advertised "dollar-day" sales sufficiently successful to repeat them at fairly regular intervals during the twenties. Such sales expanded to include price specials on more expensive items and the "dollar days" gradually became "bargain days." The success of individual sale days remained largely dependent upon weather and road conditions but on the whole they proved helpful to village retailers.[9]

Even if the small-town entrepreneur overcame these problems he still had to contend with competition from farmer-owned business enterprises. Farmers' Union organizations sprang up in the Loup country during the first decade of the twentieth century and in the teens and twenties a number of co-operative firms began operations. These businesses sought to eliminate the middleman's profit that most farmers held responsible for high consumer prices. Certain co-operative firms such as the creameries bought raw commodities from the farmer and processed them, shipping the finished product to eastern distributors. These enterprises received substantial support from village businessmen as noted in the previous chapter. But when farmers sought to enter the retailing sphere by opening up nonprofit elevators and general merchandise stores such a harmony of interests quickly dissipated.[10]

The Farmers' Grain and Supply Company of Ord provides the best example of this type of firm's operations. Members of several farmers' clubs in the Ord vicinity organized the company in January, 1915, and two months later acquired a vacant grain elevator in Ord. The company's officers sold one hundred shares of stock to farmers interested in the business. Actual operations began that spring and at the first annual meeting the directors declared a 20 percent dividend. At the same time stockholders voted to limit future dividend payments and to issue patronage dividends to future customers. The company later expanded its initial grain and coal operations to include general merchandise when the directors bought a vacant building in Ord and converted it into a

store. By 1920 the Farmers' Grain and Supply Company boasted more than 650 stockholders and claimed to be the largest co-operative business in the state. Branch operations began with the acquisition of a store in Arcadia and a store and elevator in North Loup. The over-all company sales figure continued to climb during the decade, reaching nearly $895,000 in 1929.[11]

Numerous other co-operative ventures appeared during the teens and twenties although none enjoyed such spectacular success as the Farmers' Grain and Supply Company. A co-operative shipping association formed in Comstock to handle shipments to terminal markets while Farmers' Union stores in Comstock and Sargent sold farm implements. During the twenties co-operative oil stations appeared in most of the villages. Not all of the new firms enjoyed financial success, however. A co-operative insurance company formed at Ord in 1917 proved short lived. Efforts by Sargent area farmers to establish a grain elevator failed because of their inability to raise the necessary funds. These and other failures occurred for a variety of reasons including deficient management, a lack of farmer patronage, and the shortage of available capital during the early twenties.[12]

Small-town businessmen viewed the appearance of these rival concerns with acute distaste. The co-operative firm generally offered its customers price reductions in the form of patronage dividends. The storekeeper could respond to this tactic only by lowering his prices, a practice which he believed would eliminate any hope of profit. Few businessmen dared to openly attack the co-operatives for fear of driving away their own farm patrons but privately they expressed bitter feelings. For their part the farmers suspected the village retailers of plotting against them and saw the commercial clubs as conspiracies designed to break up farmer-owned businesses.[13]

Out-of-town buying and competition between private and co-operative business firms did not constitute the only economic sources of antagonism between farmer and villager in the early twentieth century. The existing tax structure provided another major source of conflict. Until 1967 the state of Nebraska possessed neither a general sales nor income tax. Virtually all state and local revenue came from the property tax. By the very nature of his occupation the farmer owned most of the real estate in the state and county. He considered himself at an even greater disadvantage when it came to personal property. Such property included the farmer's livestock, machinery, and feed inventories—capital investments re-

quired for the production of income. In the villages capital accumulation often took the invisible form of investment in stocks and bonds or in bank deposits. Thus while the tax assessor could count the farmer's cows he had only the word of the village resident as to the value of his intangible property holdings.

It came as no surprise to farmers that most villagers failed to report any intangible property holdings whatever to the county assessors. The farm bureau sought to remedy the situation by requiring the publication of individual tax returns, but this rarely occurred. The state legislature did seek to curb underreporting by enacting a measure which taxed intangible property at one-fourth of its actual value. But as a local editor wrote, "It worked about as successfully as a bribe to a scarlet woman to induce her to refrain from practicing her profession." Faced with this situation the major farm organizations in the state advocated the passage of an income tax in order to relieve the property tax burden. The farm bureau also lobbied for the passage of a constitutional amendment that would allow the legislature to classify tangible property for tax purposes. Under this arrangement certain types of property such as livestock or feed inventories might become tax exempt. These efforts proved unavailing and scarcely any changes in the tax system occurred until the mid-sixties. Thus town-country friction persisted as the old abuses continued to rankle in the mind of the farmer. He easily persuaded himself that the merchant passed on his tax burden by raising his prices, something that farmers could not do. Even with the eventual adoption of state sales and income taxes, county and local government remained dependent upon the property tax for revenue so that tension in this area still remains evident.[14]

II

The long-standing antipathy between town and country involved a social as well as economic dimension. To some degree both farmer and villager identified the small town with the city. Village entrepreneurs aspired to raise their town to urban status. They considered the city the major locus of progress and looked to it for the newest trends and fashions. At the same time the townsman often regarded the farmer as someone living outside the mainstream of progress. Farmers thoroughly resented this notion. As one irate countryman remarked:

> One foolishness common to townspeople the world over is the idea that the farmer is a hick. That somehow he isn't as bright, or as clever as a business man, as well-read as the townsman.
>
> The farming class in this country have always averaged higher in native wit and ability than the town folks. Of late years the American farmer has been better read, better educated, and a far better businessman than many of his town brethren and sisters.

In fact many farmers viewed themselves in the mold of the up-to-date businessman, often implying that the small town represented a backwater of ignorance and conservatism rather than the vanguard of rural progress. They felt, as one Arcadia writer put it, that "the Hayseed has passed on. In his stead we now have a rural businessman." Yet even while the farmer sought to emulate the businessman he remained distrustful of the latter's natural habitat—the city.[15]

A similar element of ambiguity appeared among small-town residents. In many ways they absorbed the farmer's image of the city. The villager's own experience with urban competition and his sense of economic dependence upon the city undermined his sense of urban identification. So did the galling tendency of city dwellers to regard the villager as a rustic, much as the townsman looked down on the farmer. This attitude of condescension considerably irked the townsman. As editor Rood of the *North Loup Loyalist* complained after reading *Main Street*, "I am sure we in small villages are about as broad minded as are our city cousins and that we are almost as wise." To some degree the widening division between city and small town involved an admission by the villager that his town had failed in its drive to become a metropolis and was doomed to the perpetual status of a country town. And, as his older dream of becoming an important merchant in a rising city faded the villager became more sensitive to the virtues of his town and the vices of the metropolis. Or at least his publicists did.[16]

Village editors endlessly expounded the superiority of small-town life, particularly in the twenties when it became evident that the prospects for real urban growth in the Loup country had vanished. The rural press repeated the familiar clichés of small-town friendliness, the absence of vice and poverty, and the virtues of living in the open country. The city by contrast featured vice, overcrowding, poverty, air pollution, and sundry other undesirable features. For all of this negative imagery, however, the major crime of the city lay not in its ugliness but in its attractiveness which continued to lure rural youth away. The outflow of young people continued despite warnings that they would disappear into a whirlpool of oblivion should they migrate to the city. For however

much virtue might exist in rural life the lack of employment opportunities and the rising cost of getting started in farming eliminated the possibility of remaining at home for a large segment of the younger population.[17]

Although town and country joined together in denouncing the city the social gulf between the two persisted. This did not mean that all relationships between farm and village were acrimonious, however. For example, both co-operative and conflicting relationships developed in the sphere of public education. The village school served two major functions for residents of the surrounding countryside. First it provided a high school education for the handful of farm children aspiring to attend college. Secondly, it furnished teachers to staff the rural elementary schools in the vicinity. Under the state system of teacher certification high school graduates who had taken a semester course in normal training could take the standardized teacher's examination and, if successful, received an elementary school teaching credential. Thus local girls with an interest in teaching obtained their high school diplomas in town and then taught at nearby schools before getting married. Some, of course, remained lifelong teachers.

If the village schools successfully supplied a constant flow of new schoolmarms they failed abysmally when it came to educating farm boys. Out of the thirty-six students in the ninth grade at North Loup in 1909 only eight—six girls and two boys—graduated from high school. Observers agreed that the high attrition rate for boys resulted from the emphasis upon college preparatory courses rather than upon "practical" or vocational subjects. After reviewing the situation the village school board voted to seek state aid for vocational training. Such assistance would enable the district to provide courses in agricultural and industrial arts without having to raise the school district tax levy.[18]

This episode typified the movement toward vocational training programs taking place throughout the state and country at large at this time. At the national level the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act in 1917 provided federal aid for vocational education. By 1924 thirty-five Nebraska high schools offered federally funded vocational training in agriculture. The three-year program available at the Scotia high school included animal husbandry and shop the first year; crops, soils, and farm mechanics the second year; and farm management together with further mechanical training the third year. Upon graduation the student could begin farming or, if he wished, he could enter the University of Nebraska College

of Agriculture. Several years later the Ord high school began offering a similar curriculum and other schools in the region followed suit. Training in home economics for farm and village girls also became available at this time under the auspices of the Smith-Hughes measure.[19]

The willingness of the village schools to adopt normal and vocational training courses did not stem entirely from disinterested motives. Not only did the school provide the facilities necessary for education in American society, but it also brought money to town. This applied particularly in the case of students from outlying farms who boarded in town for the school term on account of the poor roads and transportation facilities. These students brought in money in the form of personal spending while in town. They also brought tax relief in the form of nonresident high school tuition which helped to meet the expenses of operating the village school system.[20]

Several school consolidation movements emerged in the region during the teens and their history further illustrates the complexity of town-country relations at this time. First came the campaign to combine rural elementary school districts. The major impetus behind this movement came from professional educators who wished to reduce the number of ungraded one teacher schools. From their point of view larger elementary schools would permit more specialized instruction by several teachers. This would mark a major improvement over the usual practice of having one teacher handle from five to fifteen students in an ungraded school. The professional educators gained support from some farmers who hoped to reduce property taxes by lowering the cost of school buildings and instruction.[21]

In contrast with this campaign, the second redistricting movement aimed at the consolidation of rural districts into the village districts. Support for this drive came primarily from the townsmen who saw it as a means of broadening the tax base that supported their expensive high schools. Since it would appear unseemly to urge consolidation on these grounds they emphasized the benefits that farm children would obtain from attending school in town. Besides noting the obvious superiority of village schools in terms of physical plant and equipment, proponents of this type of reorganization argued that farm children would perform better in town schools because of the greater competition there. At the same time they disclaimed any tax advantages to the village from consolidation and tried to show that it would not significantly raise the farmer's tax bill.

Several consolidations of rural elementary school districts took place in the teens and twenties but only one case of consolidation with a town district occurred in the region. In 1919 four rural districts merged with the Scotia village district. The enlarged district covered nearly fifty square miles. Contrary to the prognostications of village propagandists the mill levy of the consolidated district averaged about half again as high as in the former rural districts. Farmers found reason to doubt the wisdom of the consolidation when they received their higher tax bills just as the bottom fell out of the agricultural economy. Some malcontents charged that villagers had engineered the merger to force farmers to pay for the new school building which the town would have had to build anyway. Following this experience interest in town-country consolidation did not revive in the area for another twenty-five years.[22]

This redistricting campaign gave added stimulus to the rise of a third consolidation movement which directly opposed the efforts of towns to annex adjacent farm districts. Proponents of this movement sought to establish high schools in the countryside. This movement arose as a consequence of several factors. On the one hand it reflected the increased value placed on education by the farmer. To a considerable degree, however, it grew out of hostility toward the village and a desire to end its domination of secondary education. Many farmers blamed the student's exposure to town life during high school for luring him away from the farm. As one of them wrote, "If they were kept in the farm school for a few years longer nine times out of ten they would remain on the farm." Here again the image of the small town blended into that of the city, at least in the mind of the farmer. Such sentiments led to the establishment of six rural high schools in the region by 1919. The number rose to fourteen by 1925 including one four-year high school and thirteen two-year high schools.[23]

III

Elements of agrarian discontent arising from these and other sources found their fullest expression during the political controversy which developed around the appearance and activities of the Nonpartisan League between 1917 and 1922. At that time the resentment which had smoldered for years burst into the open and the basic lines of social and economic cleavage between town

and country clearly emerged, just as they had during the stormy politics of the Populist era two and a half decades earlier. The bitterness engendered by this conflict lingered through the remainder of the twenties and into the early thirties when the disasters of that decade diverted concern to the basic problem of economic survival.

The Nonpartisan League became the spearhead of farmer protest in North Dakota soon after its inception. A coalition of old progressives, socialists, and co-operationists joined together to support a program calling for curbs on the urban dominated agricultural marketing system. The league advocated the establishment of state-owned terminal elevators, flour mills, and packing houses together with state grain inspection to avoid abuses in grading. Other planks in the organization's platform called for the exemption of farm improvements from taxation, state hail insurance, and credit from state banks at actual cost. The league's leadership sought to avoid the fate of earlier Populist reformers by eschewing the formation of a third political party. Instead, the league worked through the primary elections of the two major parties to nominate candidates sympathetic to their aims. In 1916 they captured the North Dakota governorship and elected a majority of the state House of Representatives, then began a drive to enact their program into law.[24]

Encouraged by their success in North Dakota, league members scurried out into nearby states bearing their gospel of reform. Although the organization never gained power at the state level outside of North Dakota, it did find substantial support at the local level in several other plains states. Organizers and speakers first appeared in the Loup country in the summer of 1917 and a major membership drive soon got under way among the farmers of the region. Among the first converts was the farm columnist of the *Ord Quiz*. In the ensuing controversy the *Quiz*, under the editorship of H. D. Leggett, became one of the handful of newspapers in the state to support the league. The *Ord Journal*, the other major Valley County newspaper, became the spokesman for business opposition to the movement.[25]

Paid professionals from North Dakota carried out the initial work of setting up regional Nonpartisan League organizations. The professional organizer traveled through the countryside, stopping to solicit memberships from farmers along the way. Occasionally he remained in a particular locality to help with the farm work and thereby made direct contact with additional farmers. Those

who joined (and only farmers or retired farmers could become members) paid an initial membership fee of sixteen dollars. The funds accumulated from this source flowed into the league's national treasury where they financed a newspaper, various political activities, and further organizational work. When enough farmers in a particular area had joined they set up a county organization and elected their own officials. County conventions later met to deliberate policy, endorse political candidates, and carry on other business.[26]

As the nature of the league's objectives became increasingly evident urban and small-town businessmen directed a heavy barrage of criticism against its organizational techniques. Village editors warned farmers against allowing themselves to be fleeced out of sixteen hard-earned dollars by a few schemers from North Dakota. The presence of professional organizers from outside the state lent credence to the charge that outside agitators were stirring up discontent among the farmers. Because the first year of intensive league activity in the region coincided with the last year of war, the organization soon ran afoul of single-minded individuals opposed to any activity which did not contribute directly to the war effort. Many villagers took the position that the farmer didn't know what he was doing when he joined the league—a condescending attitude which further fueled the farmer's resentment.[27]

Wartime criticism of the league generally took the form of attacks upon the national organization. The urban and small-town businessmen who provided most of the hostile commentary sought to discredit leading league officials, particularly founder Arthur Townley. The fact that Townley had once gone into bankruptcy received considerable publicity. Frequent allegations of financial irregularity cropped up and the press carried numerous accounts of splits in the North Dakota organization which usually led to bitter charges against members of rival factions. But the most important line of attack by league critics involved the issue of disloyalty.

From its initial appearance in the Loup country the Nonpartisan League found itself marked with the stigma of disloyalty. League speakers emphasized the loyalty theme and assailed their critics as "politically inspired." Soon, however, Horace Davis, the Democratic editor of the *Ord Journal* criticized the league on several grounds, the most significant of which involved its need to prove "100% loyalty." Davis soon found himself caught up by the war hysteria and in April, 1918, he launched a full-scale assault

on the movement. In his words, "I am convinced that the leaders of the movement are the most clever, most dangerous Prussian allies in the United States and I want to help the council of defense of Nebraska to rid the state of its influences and to prevent other loyal, patriotic farmers from giving unconscious aid and comfort to the common enemy." When the Valley County Council of Defense met the following month its chairman called upon Davis for evidence to support his charges. The editor conceded that he was not prepared to offer proof and stressed that his attack was aimed not against local members but rather at the leadership of a movement which practiced sedition by encouraging class feeling.[28]

Soon after its inception in the spring of 1917 the Nebraska Council of Defense launched a state-wide attack against the league for allegedly undermining the war effort. Many farmers concluded that the urban businessmen who dominated the council manipulated it to serve their own purposes. The membership on the council of a Lincoln businessman whose milling firm had been convicted of using false weights added to such suspicions. In the spring of 1918 the council secured the passage of a state law redefining sedition. Under the new act sedition included habitual loafing and the refusal to engage in useful work if available. A later ruling by the state attorney general defined "useful work" in such a way as to exclude organizational activity for any body not directly involved in promoting the war effort. In effect this interpretation outlawed the league's organizing campaign. Ultimately the collision between the council and the league led to a compromise agreement whereby the league halted its use of out-of-state professional recruiters and the council agreed to refrain from further attacks upon the organization.

To some degree a similar pattern characterized the relations between the county councils of defense and the league in the Loup country. The region itself became one of the major league strongholds in the state. In Greeley County its members completely dominated the county council of defense and prevented it from taking any position in the controversy. In Custer County the county council and the league agreed to a suspension of activity in the Democratic, Republican, and league organizations for the duration of the war. League support also surfaced in the Valley County Council of Defense. However, an accommodation between it and the League did not materialize until tensions had been inflamed by the Thull incident.[29]

Jake Thull began working as a league organizer and farm

laborer in the Custer and Valley County area in the spring of 1917. Nearly a year later in June, 1918, the Valley County sheriff arrested him on charges of violating the state sedition act. The initial complaint came from the Valley County attorney, a Wilsonian Democrat. Thull spent several days incarcerated in the Valley County jail. When the court convened the following week county attorney Norman was joined on the prosecution's side by a member of the county council of defense. After a day and a half long trial the judge dismissed the case for lack of evidence. League supporters saw the outcome as a vindication of their own position while Horace Davis and his associates charged the presiding judge with bias in favor of the league. Several days after this episode county law officers again arrested Thull but this time charges were dropped and the prisoner quickly released.[30]

Five weeks after the Thull trial the Valley County Council of Defense issued a carefully worded statement defining its position on the league. The council specifically denied any doubts as to the loyalty of Valley County members but criticized the league's recruiting activity for hindering the prosecution of the war and urged a postponement of any discussion of grievances until after the conclusion of hostilities. With the conclusion of the truce between the state council of defense and the league this policy went into effect. At the same time at least a few members of the Valley County council remained unimpressed by the attacks upon the league. Indeed, in the general election of 1918 the league quickly endorsed council chairman B. M. Hardenbrook for the Valley County attorney's position held by their bitter foe, Democrat Norman.[31]

Initially the league disavowed any interest in local elections although in practice it endorsed candidates for county office. Most of the organization's attention focused upon the election of men to state and national office since these were the officials who decided the major issues. This approach involved working through the existing parties and not through third-party movements. As Ernest Coats, farm columnist and Valley County league secretary explained:

> The western farmers have long been dissatisfied with the two old parties. Years ago the Farmers Alliance tried to get the farmer what was due him but they finally got ate up by the democrat party. When Mr. Roosevelt started his big Bull Moose party we flocked to his party by the thousands and a lot of democrats swallowed Roosevelt for the sake of the new progressive party, only to be sold out to the republican party. The way has at last been shown how to get what we want and to use the old parties for our benefit. They do not like it and it is going to be a bitter dose but they will have to take it and be good.

In July, 1918, the Valley County Nonpartisan League convention endorsed a platform that stressed the need for curbing corporate power and eliminating middleman profits. In this respect it followed the model of earlier agrarian protest movements and the conflict between town and country which followed repeated much of what had gone before in the Populist period of the eighteen-nineties.[32]

Already faced with competition from farmer owned co-operative stores, mail-order houses, and city retailers, the merchants had no use for any new schemes designed to eliminate the middleman. After all, they themselves were precisely that. Again and again members and sympathizers of the league explained that they did not consider the village merchant their enemy. But the same individuals actively participated in setting up farmers' stores which sought to undersell the local retailers. Their own personal antagonism toward the small-town merchant blended into their hostility against the big city interests and reinforced their antiurban, neo-Populist views.[33]

Village businessmen grasped this fact quite clearly and not only assailed the league for its advocacy of "class legislation" but also explicitly defended the role of the middleman. An exchange of letters which appeared in the North Loup village newspaper in the spring of 1918 graphically illustrated the division between town and country on this point. First, a local farmer expressed his views of the subject:

> Now I am wondering from whence come these railings against farmers organizations, certainly not from the farmers. . . . Do they come from the man who is doing absolutely nothing to feed the world? . . .
>
> Come on, now fellows, get that white shirt off and a checkered one on, buy a nice pair of overalls, lock up your diamond pin with your notes and bonds, get out and slop the hogs, haul them to market, step into the bank and cash your big check, hold up your chin and you will not have time to rave at the man who has always fed you.

This colorful exposition of farmer attitudes drew a heated reply from a local elevator operator the following week:

> What good is a large part of the farmer's crop if nothing is done but raise it? Most of it must have something more done to it. Must there not be millers and packers. . . . To my mind it is not a question of what part of work one does whether it be farmer, mailer, blacksmith, merchant or elevator man. The question is whether each of these is doing his part for a fair part of the profits, or in other words for fair wages.

This argument represented one more variation on the theme of the interdependence between farm and town developed in the campaign against the mail-order houses. Such a philosophy left no room for the rhetoric of class interest that the league employed. Consequently businessmen stepped up their attack on the organization's "Bolshevist" tendencies after the disloyalty charge lost its force with the end of the war.[34]

Since the league organized with the object of attaining political power the clearest gauge of its success lies in its performance at the polls. In Valley County the organization's members concentrated their attention upon three major contests in the 1918 general election—those for state representative, state senator and county attorney. The league endorsed Dave Strong, a Springdale farmer and Republican for state representative; W. J. Taylor, a Custer County Democrat won the endorsement for state senator; and Republican B. M. Hardenbrook received the nod for the county attorney's office. In the November election all league candidates carried Valley County, most of them by substantial margins. Since all but one of these were Republicans, however, one cannot determine with any precision the relative significance of league and partisan influences. Perhaps the best indication of the organization's voting strength lay in the fact that Hardenbrook carried every farm precinct, receiving 74 percent of the vote in those precincts. He also carried his home village of Arcadia by a landslide but received only 54 percent of the vote in Ord City and North Loup Precinct. At the same time the league endorsed Democratic state senatorial candidate carried eleven of the thirteen farm precincts, receiving 62 percent of the farm vote compared with only 42 percent of the village vote. The most marked indication of league strength came in heavily Bohemian Geranium Precinct which voted 57 to 15 for the Democrat Taylor and 56 to 16 for the Republican Hardenbrook.[35]

A better gauge of league strength and of the depth of the split between town and country appears in the voting pattern that marked the special election of a delegate to the state constitutional convention in 1919. Since the convention would determine the course of future state activity in the economic sphere the election provided a major test of voting strength and alignments on economic issues. Because both candidates belonged to the Republican party, partisan considerations did not enter into the race. The Valley County league endorsed Representative Strong who opposed John Wall, Arcadia's leading merchant. When the votes had been counted Strong emerged with a farm precinct margin of 566 to 134,

receiving 77 percent of the farm vote. He carried every farm precinct while his opponent received as much as one-third of the vote in only two of them—both of those lying adjacent to his home precinct of Arcadia. Wall carried the village and township of Arcadia 196 to 28 and won the other village precincts by a margin of 260 to 129 or almost exactly two to one. Most of the votes for Strong in the latter precincts evidently came from farmers in North Loup Precinct and from retired farm operators residing in the villages.[36]

League officials remained confident of their strength after this success but in the following year they abandoned their most sacred tenet with disastrous results. In the summer of 1920 both parties nominated state tickets which the league found unacceptable. Many members then joined in the formation of a state Progressive party which nominated Judge Arthur G. Wray for the governorship. In the November election Wray received about 89,000 votes compared with 153,000 for incumbent Republican Samuel R. McKelvie and 130,00 for Democrat John Morehead. None of the league endorsed candidates won state-wide office but once again they swept Valley County. The fledgling Progressive party struggled on for another year and a half before expiring early in 1922. In September of that year league founder Arthur Townley made his only appearance in the region when he delivered an address at Bohemian Hall in Ord. There he struck out at the Nebraska organization for abandoning the movement's position on third-party campaigns, advising members that they might just as well take their ballots out in the woods and burn them as vote for third-party candidates. The state organization soon followed Townley's advice and endorsed Democratic gubernatorial nominee Charles W. Bryan, Republican senatorial candidate H. R. Howell, and Democratic hopeful Charles Beals for Congress. In the ensuing election Howell carried Valley County by a three to one margin. Bryan carried the farm precincts two to one while losing the village vote three to two. Beals lost the county when his five to three margin among the farmers failed to overcome his Republican opponent's two to one lead in the towns. The county league endorsed independent Marion Cushing for the state senate and he received 65.7 percent of the farm vote along with 22.4 percent of the village vote. Results in other contests proved mixed owing to the appearance of other issues such as prohibition enforcement.[37]

Only a month after this election columnist Coats announced the impending disbandonment of the Nonpartisan League. He ex-

plained that it would be superseded by another grassroots organization designed to elect representatives and senators to Congress who would support the farmers' demands. This organization never got off the ground, nor did a Nonpartisan League type of operation develop to elect a profarmer political figure president. However, the "farm bloc" in Congress did function throughout the twenties and the discontented farmer found his spokesman among its ranks.[38]

Several factors contributed to the demise of the league in the Loup country as well as in the nation as a whole after 1922. The economic distress of the two previous years greatly reduced the ability of individual farmers to raise eighteen dollars in dues every two years. It also proved impossible to sustain the initial level of enthusiasm over a prolonged period of time. New issues such as prohibition threatened the solidarity that had momentarily developed among farmers in the area. Finally, in the presence of several other farm organizations the league had become increasingly superfluous. The farmers' union organizations offered a means of circumventing village middlemen through the operation of cooperatives. The farm bureau became increasingly politically oriented and adopted some league positions such as the advocacy of tax reform and improved agricultural credit. In addition, the more sophisticated lobbying techniques and quasi-governmental status of the farm bureau proved more effective in securing desired farm legislation, particularly at the national level, than did the league's directly political methods. Thus the league came to appear increasingly impractical and ineffective and its appeal diminished, leading to its quiet extinction.[39]

IV

Following the political contests of the late teens and early twenties the overt conflict between town and country subsided although a considerable residue of hositility persisted. This development coincided with the re-emergence of another major line of social cleavage—that between the various ethnocultural groups centering upon the symbolic issue of prohibition. Both villagers and countrymen divided over this issue which flared up at various times in the eighteen-nineties and early 1900s. The Roman Catholics of Bohemian, Polish, and Irish origins opposed prohibition while most of the old-stock Yankees together with some evangelical Germans and Scandinavians favored it. The predominantly Yankee villages of Arcadia and North Loup remained dry strongholds from

the late 1880s down to the mid-twentieth century whereas Ord veered from one side to the other at different times. The ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment appeared to have settled the question but the issue of enforcement remained a sensitive one. The Republican Valley County attorney lost his party's nomination in 1922 after he adopted a hard-line policy toward liquor law violators. That November he ran as an independent and won re-election in a close three-man race. The issue remained an explosive one and figured prominently in the 1928 presidential campaign.[40]

Perhaps the most significant manifestation of ethnocultural conflict in the Loup country during the twenties came with the meteoric rise of the Ku Klux Klan. The KKK first appeared in the area in April, 1924, when a state senator from Georgia addressed a large meeting at Ord. The organization drew widespread support from among the evangelical Protestants who dominated the southeastern two-thirds of the region. Klan speakers attracted such large crowds as the estimated two thousand persons who attended a meeting at Midvale in the southern part of rural Valley County. Klan picnics also brought out large numbers of local residents. Late in 1926 the organization disappeared from sight in the wake of national scandals and after 1927 no further reports of the movement's activities appeared in the pages of the regional press.[41]

Klan events consisted largely of lectures and occasional costumed parades, particularly on the Fourth of July. On several occasions Klansmen attired in hoods and sheets appeared in Protestant churches to perform rituals and donate offerings. A few night meetings culminated in the burning of crosses on hilltop sites. Most of the movement's local appeal stemmed from its anti-Catholic and prohibitionist stance. The old tales of Roman Catholic conspiracy familiar to students of nativism cropped up again and although some exponents distinguished between home-town Catholics and the church hierarchy the appeal to ethnic prejudice remained powerful. In taking its position the KKK drew heavily upon antiurban sentiment and employed the city as a symbol of alien threats to the American way of life. In this regard a North Loup correspondent proved at least partially correct when he remarked that the Klan was in large part an outgrowth of the earlier sentiments against the financial interests of New York. For despite the shift in emphasis from economic to religious issues, the city remained the center of evil while virtue found its haven in the countryside and small towns. Thus ex-Nonpartisan League members of Protestant background continued to rail against the city, this time as

the haven of the wet. Now, however, their former Roman Catholic allies remained silent. Consequently the antiurban aspect of the movement grew more obscure as it revived the old neighborhood feuds over the outlawing of demon rum.[42]

As the election of 1928 approached, the religious question and prohibition dominated the political arena and Yankee Democrats began abandoning the Al Smith candidacy in wholesale numbers. Rumors about Smith that even an ultra-Republican editor called "disgusting propaganda" circulated widely and Democratic editors openly blamed his defeat upon religious prejudice. The clearest indication of the division that developed in this election appears in the voting pattern of precincts in the region. Smith carried heavily Bohemian Roman Catholic Geranium Precinct in Valley County 119 to 15 and won the Irish precinct of O'Connor in Greeley County 184 to 8. On the other hand he lost the heavily Yankee precincts of North Loup and Arcadia by votes of 535 to 86 and 400 to 91 respectively. Herbert Hoover carried the largely German Protestant township of Wallace Creek in Greeley County by a margin of 123 to 32, most of the Smith vote coming from the scattering of Irish in the precinct. The intense feelings generated during the campaign persisted for several years until the general economic collapse of the thirties turned public attention to other issues. These basic ethnocultural voting divisions re-emerged in the late thirties, however, and survived in their general outlines for the next forty years.[43]

Although elements of hostility between town and country persist to the present day, open conflict between the two sectors has rarely reached the degree of intensity that marked the late teens and early twenties. Several factors have operated over time to reduce the social distance between farm and village. With the revolution in communications and transportation following World War I, farm isolation diminished substantially. As rural electrification spread after World War II the gap in living standards between town and country lessened. Increasing numbers of farmers retired to the villages where their presence diluted the political strength of the merchant community. Continued intermarriage between village and farm families provided further linkages between town dwellers and countrymen which helped to offset economic conflicts of interest. Finally, with the rise of the large metropolis to dominance in American society the villager's sense of common identity with urban interests declined, accompanied by a corresponding rise in the intensity of his sense of rural identification.[44]

4. Drouth, Depression, and Disaster

LATE IN 1929 farm commodity prices began to tumble, ushering in what would become the worst agricultural depression of the post-Civil War era. The 1930 Nebraska farm price index averaged one-sixth lower than the previous year's and it dropped another third in 1931. In 1932 it averaged only two-fifths of the 1929 figure. At the same time the cost of goods and services which the farmer must buy fell much less abruptly. Consequently the real purchasing power of farm products diminished by more than two-fifths within the space of three years. This collapse in purchasing power spelled austerity if not ruin for most farmers even in a time of abundant harvests. However, almost every year during the decade brought a subnormal amount of rainfall. When the farm price index soared in the mid-thirties farmers in the Loup country had nothing to sell; indeed, they had to purchase feed for their livestock at the higher prices, thereby further undermining their own economic position.[1]

While the fall in farm income adversely affected all agriculturalists, some found themselves in a more vulnerable position than others. The more conservative farmer who had avoided investing heavily in capital improvements found himself with a sharply reduced income but could try to adjust his expenditures accordingly. However, his more progressive counterpart who had borrowed money to finance improvements in his farming operation had to face the critical problem of mortgage payments. For him survival entailed not only a reduction in his cash outlay but also the acquisition of enough money to meet his mortgage payments and retain possession of his farm. At the time of the 1930 census 64.7 percent of the farm owner operators in Valley County held their land subject to a mortgage with an average debt figure equal to 43.1 percent of the value of their land and buildings. The tendency of mortgagors to improve their land and to hold better land resulted in a higher valuation for their farms compared with nonmortgagors. For example, in Valley County mortgaged farms operated by their owners had an average 1930 value of $67.56 per acre compared with

a figure of $60.80 per acre for owner operated farms not subject to mortgage.[2]

As real estate values plunged during the decade this mortgage debt mushroomed in terms of its ratio to the actual value of land and buildings. Average per acre farm values for Valley County declined from $60.01 in 1930 to $32.99 in 1935 and $23.41 in 1940. The ratio of mortgage debt to actual value rose from 43 percent to 64 percent during the same period. The combination of falling income and high fixed mortgage expenses posed an insurmountable difficulty for many farmers during the decade. Each year the mortgaged farm operator had to raise enough cash to pay 6 or 7 percent interest on an amount which might equal the total value of his farm. Once the drouth set in the prospects of meeting his interest payments, much less the principal of his obligation, became increasingly remote.[3]

When the usual sources of long-term agricultural credit began to dry up the position of these farmers worsened. Traditionally the farm owner had obtained five- or ten-year mortgages which he either renewed or replaced with new mortgages when they came due. But in the face of the national financial constriction the volume of funds available for borrowing contracted sharply. The value of new farm mortgages filed in Greeley County fell from $660,999.12 in 1929 to $194,785.00 in 1933. The corresponding figures for Valley County were $753,929.12 and $347,213.85. If the debtor could not obtain a new mortgage he must pay the old one off, a difficult feat in prosperous times and a near impossibility in the depression. These conditions fostered a rash of foreclosures spanning the entire decade of the thirties and extending into the early forties. The figures for farm foreclosures in Greeley and Valley counties appear in table 3. Foreclosure sales became a regular event in the county seat towns. In many other instances farmers gave up trying to raise impossible sums and sold their farms to creditors at nominal prices. As a result large tracts of land passed into the hands of the major corporate firms which had invested heavily in farm mortgages, notably the Lincoln Joint Stock Bank and the Prudential, Travelers, Penn Mutual, and Union Central life insurance companies.[4]

Not all farmers stood placidly by while their land passed into the hands of their creditors. In January, 1933, twelve hundred persons attended an organizational meeting of the Farmers Holiday Association at Ord. There the chairman and secretary of the neigh-

TABLE 3
FARM MORTGAGE FORECLOSURES
GREELEY AND VALLEY COUNTIES, 1929–1941

Year	Greeley County	Valley County
1929	26	6
1930	23	7
1931	25	8
1932	27	24
1933	15	23
1934	16	26
1935	49	36
1936	27	44
1937	39	32
1938	85	55
1939	24	21
1940	....	15
1941	....	16
Total	356	313

SOURCE: *Index of Instruments Filed,* Office of the County Clerk, Greeley County courthouse, Greeley, Nebraska; and ibid., Valley County courthouse, Ord, Nebraska.

boring Sherman County association addressed the crowd. In the course of the evening they advocated extensions on farm mortgage and interest payments until prices rose enough to enable farmers to pay their debts. In the meantime they proposed to halt any foreclosure actions which mortgage holders might undertake. Following this meeting Valley County farmers organized thirteen township associations and elected county officers. Township meetings the following week attracted large crowds as farm owners sought to escape the economic morass in which they found themselves.[5]

In the same month that the Valley County farmers organized some three hundred farmers and other interested persons attended a precinct organizational meeting at Scotia. In the ensuing two weeks township associations sprang up throughout Greeley County and a loose county-wide organization emerged. The proposals raised at the Scotia meeting covered a considerably broader scope than did those of the Valley County gatherings. Calling a halt to farm foreclosures represented only the first step in a general economic program. Various speakers raised the possibility of organizing farm withholding actions to force farm prices up to profitable levels.

They also sought new ways to reduce property taxes in order to provide relief for the farm owner.[6]

While the Farmers Holiday groups in the Loup country proved much less militant than their counterparts elsewhere members found it necessary to stress the peaceful nature of their aims. The Valley County association chairman explained that his organization consisted of the substantial farmers of the county who were merely asking for a chance to save their homes from the mortgage holders until prices rose enough for them to pay their bills. Main street merchants remained dubious, however, and when the Iowa association's members forced the closing of a court in Le Mars in the spring of 1933 the organization came in for heavy criticism. In the midst of these controversies the Valley County association worked to discourage further foreclosures and in March, 1933, it claimed credit for settling seventeen cases out of court. The following summer the group turned its attention to politics, seeking to influence political figures and to elect sympathetic candidates. It also campaigned with some success for higher Federal Land Bank appraisals of farm land for mortgage purposes.[7]

These actions did not significantly affect mortgage trends, however, and farmers began contemplating more direct action. By October, 1933, creditors had initiated foreclosure proceedings against nearly 110 Valley County farms. Early the following month eighty members attending a Valley County Association meeting at Ord voted unanimously to join the proposed national farm strike. They pledged to oppose violence and picketing and in a bid for local support agreed not to withhold such items as eggs, meat, or butter intended for local consumption. The strike movement collapsed the following month in the wake of sharp criticism from Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace. The following year the Valley County group endorsed the Frazier bill for refinancing farm indebtedness and urged a halt to all meat imports from abroad. At this point the organization's membership included about half the farmers in the county.[8]

Not only did the Farmers Holiday Association fail in its efforts to prevent farm foreclosures but it also experienced defeat in its campaign to halt federal crop reduction programs. The association came into direct conflict with the farm bureau on this issue. The bureau stood squarely behind the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) and the general Roosevelt-Wallace policy of controlled production of agricultural commodities. State and national association officials constantly reiterated their hostility toward this and other

New Deal programs, assailing the National Recovery Administration (NRA) as a blue buzzard gnawing at the vitals of the American farmer and the Reforestation corps for planning to shoot down farmers trying to save their homes from foreclosure. Spokesmen for the association expressed jubilation when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the first AAA unconstitutional in January, 1936, but even that triumph proved short-lived with the subsequent enaction of the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotments Act followed by the second AAA.[9]

The confrontation between the Farmers Holiday Association and the farm bureau represented not only a disagreement over specific farm policy but also a divergence in basic world views. The association spoke for farmers who viewed agriculture as a fundamental way of life and who sought essentially to restore earlier, more favorable conditions. To such individuals the idea of deliberately reducing the output of foodstuffs appeared contrary to nature, especially in view of the existence of hunger in the cities. They sought to restore security of tenure to the family farm and to return to their customary mode of living. Farmers closely associated with the farm bureau subscribed to a different approach. They tended to view farming as a business rather than as a more general way of life. They concerned themselves primarily with perfecting their marketing organization and enhancing their productivity, for their general outlook stemmed from a basic concern with increasing their profits. Hence they did not feel the ingrained opposition to production controls which the traditional farmer experienced, viewing them in the light of a business proposition rather than a fundamentally moral question. This does not mean that all individuals in either organization subscribed completely to either viewpoint, for many persons belonged to both organizations. Nonetheless this basic divergence in outlooks did shape the political stances of the two organizations.

This disagreement found direct expression in the contest to abolish the Valley County extension agent's post in 1934. The Farmers Holiday Association and its ally, the Valley County Taxpayers League, sought to abolish the position on the grounds of economy. In practice, however, the campaign represented an attack upon the farm bureau and the AAA, both of which retained close relationships with the agent. In the November election of that year the basic voting divisions of the 1924 contest reappeared. This time the electorate favored retention of the office by a margin of 1,942 to 1,903. Again the winning margin came from the city of Ord. On

this occasion the townships of Arcadia and North Loup voted for abolition since village residents saw no benefit for their towns in the presence of the agent at Ord. The distribution of votes among the farm precincts paralleled that of the previous contest although this time the total farm precinct vote deadlocked 965 to 965.[10]

Even before the Farmers Holiday Association appeared on the scene state officials acted to alleviate the farm mortgage crisis. In November, 1932, several district judges declared a moratorium on the foreclosure cases pending in court. Then on February 13, 1933, Governor Charles W. Bryan issued a proclamation calling upon all mortgage holders to suspend foreclosures and forced sales until a commission which he had established to mediate such disputes could complete its organization, and until the state legislature and Congress could act. The legislature quickly enacted a moratorium statute which gave at least the appearance of stemming the tide of foreclosures. Ultimately the state Supreme Court declared the measure unconstitutional, but this action did not come until 1938.[11]

Most new mortgages acquired after 1933 took the form of Federal Land Bank and Federal Land Bank Commissioner Loans. These loans bore interest rates of 4 or 4.5 percent compared with the existing commercial rates of 6 or 7 percent. More significantly, they covered much longer terms—twenty years or more in the case of land bank loans—thereby providing borrowers with relatively long-term security. With the disappearance of most types of private credit these loans offered about the only means of refinancing mortgages available to farm owners. The land bank loans entailed first mortgages on real estate while commissioner loans involved first or second liens and covered chattels as well as lands. Under existing regulations the federal loans could not exceed half the appraised value of farm land or 20 percent of the value of improvements. Appraisers based their estimates upon the productivity of the land multiplied by the farm commodity prices for the base period of 1910–1914. This system of appraisal and especially its choice of a base period provoked numerous complaints from borrowers who thought the new valuations too conservative.

Thus influx of federal loans led to a sharp increase in the value of farm mortgages filed in 1934 and 1935 after which the volume of new land bank loans receded to its previous level. New federal loans in Greeley and Valley counties from 1933 through 1936 totaled more than $1,700,000. Judging from the incomplete agricultural census data for this period it appears that by 1940 Federal Land Bank loans accounted for perhaps two-thirds or more of the

total farm indebtedness in the region. For some farmers the reduction in interest and the extended period of repayment provided the margin necessary to retain ownership of farms which they would otherwise have lost. For many others, however, federal loans merely staved off the inevitable a little while longer. The intense drouth which began in earnest in 1934 prevented even men of superior managerial ability from meeting their financial obligations. The combination of exhausted financial resources due to repeated crop failures together with the nullification of the state moratorium on mortgage foreclosures in 1938 led to a sharp rise in foreclosure activity in that year as table 3 (p. 61) indicates.[12]

A more detailed analysis of the mortgage picture in Valley County reveals several patterns of interest. About sixty-eight thousand acres or 19 percent of all farmland in the county underwent foreclosure proceedings while a further thirty-seven thousand acres or 11 percent went to creditors through forced sale. The latter group included approximately 150 farms which combined with the 313 foreclosed units gives a total of 463 farms lost to creditors. According to local statistics, this meant that 29.2 percent of Valley County farms including about 30 percent of the total land area went to creditors. In other words, the farms lost averaged close to the mean average size of farms in the county. Scarcely any of the smallest farm units—i.e., those of less than forty acres—underwent forced transfer although numerous eighty acre tracts did so. On the other hand the largest units did not enjoy immunity from foreclosure on account of their size. Most forced transfer units fell in the hundred sixty- to three hundred twenty-acre size grouping—the normal family farm category. For a more detailed examination of this process at work among a cross section of Loup country farms see chapter 7.[13]

Who lost his farm and who did not? Those free from the burden of mortgages experienced relative security of tenure. Mortgage free farms generally fell into one of three categories. In a large number of cases the owner who had finished paying for his land had retired and rented his farm. Thus in 1940 full owners of mortgage-free farms averaged 58.2 years of age compared with a figure of 51.9 years for debtor farmers. In many other instances debt-free land remained tied up in family estates. Finally, in a few cases young operators who had recently inherited land had not yet acquired mortgages. Conversely those operators engaged in expanding their holdings or who had not yet held their land long enough to pay off their debts found themselves in a vulnerable position. Hence

farm operators between the ages of thirty and the late fifties found themselves most susceptible to foreclosure or forced sale.[14]

Which of the mortgaged farmers lost their land? Altogether 45 percent of mortgaged land passed to creditors whereas 55 percent of the debtors retained possession of their farms. In part survival depended on how much of the mortgage principal remained due. A number of farmers had only one or two years of payments to make at the beginning of the decade and managed to obtain the necessary funds before the drouth set in. In other instances those who began farming late in the thirties had only to struggle with two or three fairly small payments before the war boom began. Those substantially in debt at the beginning of the thirties, however, faced a better than even likelihood of losing their farms. Individual success or failure in this regard depended upon a variety of factors. The most significant of these involved the quality of the farm land. Farmers in soil-depleted, hilly regions had much less chance of survival than those in river valleys where subirrigated land might produce at least a partial crop together with some pasturage for livestock. Freak weather variations proved significant as hailstorms demolished some crops which the drouth had spared. A farmer's managerial capacity, the ability of the family to obtain funds from relatives and other nonfarm sources, and participation in federal farm programs for cash payment all played a part in determining individual farm survival or failure.

Figure 4 illustrates the variability in the mortgage picture from one precinct to another. Higher rates of forced transfer generally prevailed in the marginal farming areas such as Noble, Springdale, Davis Creek, and Independent. The better land lying in the river valleys and in south central Valley County did not go to creditors nearly as often. Cultural factors also exerted some influence since the Germans and Bohemians tended to borrow from neighbors and relatives rather than from banks or mortgage brokers to a far greater extent than did the population of old-American stock. Thus the proportion of mortgaged land lost proved notably low in (German) Enterprise and (Bohemian) Geranium townships. In addition, the general farming pattern characteristic of the Bohemians proved better suited for survival during drouth periods than the livestock-feeding economy prevalent in the hilly areas which depended on imported feed for animals and required large-scale capital investment. Obviously a number of variables influenced the prospects for farm survival during this period so that any sweeping generalizations on the subject require qualification.

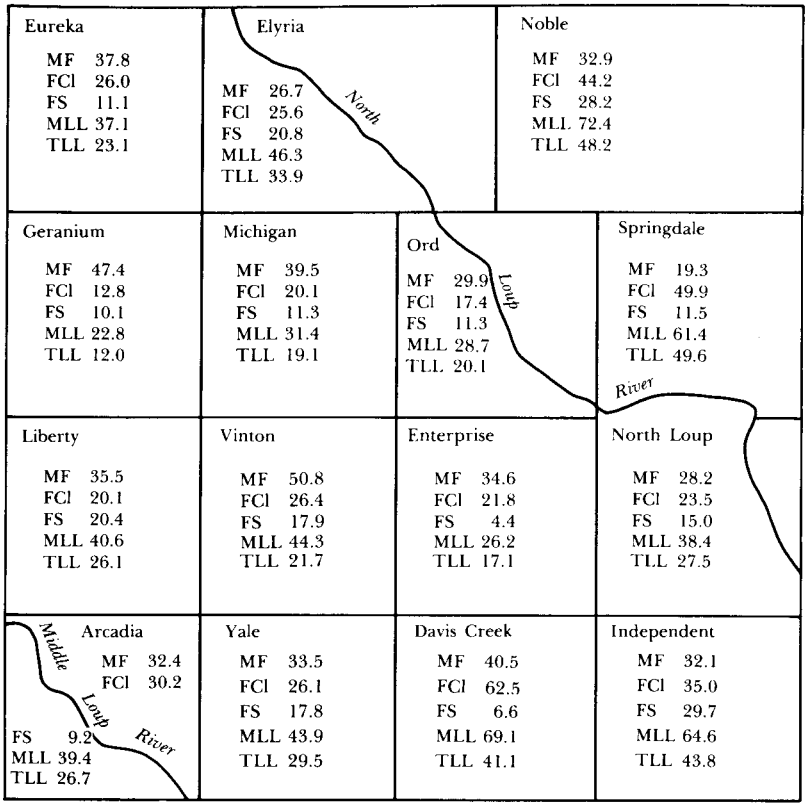

Figure 4. Mortgage Situation, Valley County, 1929–1941.

II

Meeting his mortgage payments comprised only one of the many difficulties facing the farmer during the thirties. Once the price collapse had begun the simple task of raising the cash necessary to pay such basic expenses as taxes, grocery bills, and seed costs grew increasingly formidable. Consequently the farm operator began looking about for financial assistance. The major channel for direct federal help initially consisted of the emergency seed loans authorized by the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC). This measure provided for loans to midwestern farmers affected by drouth and insects. Both natural hazards afflicted the Loup country in 1931 and 1932 and in the latter year the Valley County agent obtained federal authority to implement the program in his area.

Under this program the farmer who could not obtain a seed loan from regular commercial sources could borrow up to four hundred dollars from the federal government. In exchange he paid 5.5 percent interest, deducted in advance, and gave a lien on his crop. Only those who had operated their farms the previous year qualified for such loans. This program remained in effect for most of the decade although the Roosevelt administration later incorporated acreage reduction requirements into its provisions.[15]

Herbert Hoover's establishment of the Federal Farm Board in 1929 had signalled the end of an era in the realm of federal agricultural policy. Prior to that time governmental involvement in agriculture had consisted almost entirely of limited financial support for education and research together with occasional disaster relief. The major exception to this policy of limited activity came during World War I when, under Hoover's administrative leadership, the government established minimum farm commodity prices in order to encourage production. This policy terminated abruptly following the successful conclusion of the conflict. Even in wartime the typical farmer had not come into direct contact with federal officials other than the county agent who himself represented a hybrid combination of federal, state, and county authority. The price-fixing procedure had appeared as remote to the agriculturist as the normal process of price determination in the urban terminal markets. Hence even during the war the individual farmer had not felt any personal sense of governmental intervention in his domain. The same remained true when the Federal Farm Board launched its abortive effort to raise farm commodity prices through manipulations of the marketing system.

With the advent of the Roosevelt administration in 1933 the traditional policy of governmental abstention from participation in the producing sector of American agriculture received a final blow. Roosevelt and his farm policy makers concluded that the failure of the farm board stemmed from its inability to control farm production. Proceeding on the assumption that the root cause of the farm crisis lay in the overproduction of basic farm commodities the new regime moved to resolve the problem by lowering production to a level consonant with demand. Now, for the first time, the individual farmer found himself asked to surrender a degree of his managerial autonomy in exchange for guaranteed economic support. Thus, rather than operating in a remote way the new agricultural programs led to direct farmer-government contracts restricting production and specifying practices to be car-

ried out by the farmer in exchange for cash payments. Under this system the farm operator found himself increasingly integrated into a large bureaucratic structure of the type already familiar to most urban manufacturing and commercial enterprises.

New Deal farm policy took shape with the passage of the first Agricultural Adjustment Act in 1933. Under the provisions of this measure farmers who reduced their crop acreages from existing levels could qualify for benefit payments. In the summer of 1933 AAA organizations sprang up in all three counties in the Loup country as the first step toward the implementation of the new program. Greeley County acquired a farm extension agent at this time—fifteen years after Custer and Valley counties had done so. The county agent supervised local AAA activities, thereby underlining the intertwining relationship between the farm bureau, the federal government, and the county. The administrative structure of the AAA followed the usual precinct and county lines with a pyramidal hierarchy of elected officials topped by the county board of directors.[16]

Since farmers sowed winter wheat in the autumn it received first priority in the activation of the acreage reduction program. Owing to the limited nature of wheat production in the Loup country, however, it did not significantly affect the regional economy. But when federal officials began setting up the corn-hog reduction program to take effect in 1934 they reported encountering exceptional local interest. During the first year approximately three-fourths of the farmers in the region signed up to participate in the program. These operators agreed to reduce their corn acreage by 20 percent and hog production by 25 percent in exchange for direct cash payments. These contracts proved unexpectedly easy to enforce—at least with respect to the corn crop—since the drouth that year killed nearly all of it. A shortage of feed led Custer County farmers to slaughter many of their hogs and eliminated any problem of enforcing compliance with hog reduction there. In Greeley County, however, some farmers produced too many swine which the county agent advised them to kill or donate to the county for relief purposes.

Despite their initial enthusiasm Loup country participants in the corn-hog program voted against continuing it in 1935 by a four to three margin. Nonparticipants opposed continuation by a margin of four to one. The low voter turnout contributed to the negative vote since many of those satisfied with the system became compla-

cent and remained home while those with grievances turned out in large numbers. Partisan politics also played a major role as normally Republican precincts opposed continuation whereas Democratic areas favored it. Finally, many of those who favored continued federal payments opposed the concomitant production controls because they failed either to understand or accept the concept of artificially induced scarcity to foster high prices.[17]

Probably the most significant source of opposition to the corn-hog program, however, lay in the nature of the regional agricultural economy. The corn-hog program sought to raise the price of both corn and hogs by restricting their production. Neither this nor any other federal program provided for raising beef cattle prices and most farmers in the region obtained the bulk of their income from the sale of cattle rather than from the sale of corn or hogs. As early as 1931 the Valley County Farm Bureau had gone on record opposing the plan of the governor of Iowa to raise corn prices to sixty cents per bushel. Bureau spokesmen pointed out that Valley County farmers had imported two hundred carloads of corn that year and had no interest in raising their own feeding costs. Six years later a Scotia farmer echoed the same sentiment when he stressed that Greeley County farm operators had to buy their corn from outside the area and had no interest in raising corn prices. For the beef producer, then, the program's disadvantages considerably outweighed its advantages and he sought to abolish it accordingly.

Despite the negative vote, participation in the corn-hog program in 1935 exceeded the level of the previous year. In the referendum on continuing the program in 1936 the region's farmers favored renewal by a margin of more than two to one. The reversal from the previous year's vote resulted from the continuing drouth which left nearly all farmers faced with heavy operating losses. Indeed, the Greeley County agent reported that had it not been for their participation in the corn-hog program farmers would have had to sell most of their hogs for lack of feed. The sharp reduction in the number of cattle due to the drouth also contributed to the election's outcome as beef producers reduced the size of their herds and with them the scope of their grain requirements. The signing up of farmers for the 1936 season proceeded at a brisk pace but halted abruptly when in January, 1936, the United States Supreme Court ruled the AAA unconstitutional.[18]

At this juncture Congress enacted the Soil Conservation and

Domestic Allotment Act to provide continued assistance to farmers who reduced their crop acreages. The act defined corn, sorghum, small grain, and other row crops as "soil-depleting" while classifying alfalfa, sweet clover, and permanent grasses as "soil-improving." Farmers could convert up to 15 percent of their soil-depleting crop acreage to soil-improving crops the first year in exchange for payments similar to those made under the AAA programs. The number of farmers signing up for the new scheme exceeded those for its predecessor although payments averaged less, as burned-out farmers sought desperately to obtain funds from any available source. Two years later in 1938 Congress enacted the second AAA which incorporated the basic provisions of the 1936 act. This program, with some minor alterations, provided the basic framework for agricultural policy down to the 1970s.[19]

Another major New Deal farm program that initially attracted considerable attention among Loup country farmers centered upon the operations of the Commodity Credit Corporation. The secretary of agriculture established this corporation in October, 1933, and the new enterprise began operating in the region shortly after the fall harvest that year. Participating farmers agreed to undertake acreage reductions and brought their corn to the corporation in exchange for loans at the rate of forty-five cents per bushel at 4 percent interest. In the early months of 1934 more than three hundred Valley County farmers or slightly less than one out of four signed up for loans averaging about eight hundred bushels each. Total corporation payments in the county that year came to over $125,000. Following this initial burst of enthusiasm interest in the Commodity Credit Corporation waned as drouth conditions drove corn prices well above the loan rates. During the last two years of the decade some farmers again sought corn loans but with the coming of World War II price increases once more led to a cessation of the corporation's activity. It, too, continued to function under the provisions of the second AAA and became a mainstay in the operation of postwar agricultural programs.[20]

Although the AAA, the Soil Conservation Act, and the Commodity Credit Corporation all sought to raise farm prices by restricting production other federal programs aimed at achieving different and not entirely compatible objectives. These included several emergency programs designed to alleviate the effects of the intense drouth which plagued the region for most of the decade. The extended drouth began on a small scale following the near

record harvest of 1930. In each of the next three years subnormal rainfall caused declining crop yields. Corn and oat yields fell by about one-third below the level of the twenties and wheat yields declined by nearly one-fourth. This period of moderate drouth reduced the level of subsoil moisture and caused the drying out of the surface soil. This paved the way for serious wind erosion and in September, 1933, the most severe dust storm in many years struck the Ord vicinity. Winds of forty to fifty miles per hour drove clouds of dust which forced motorists to use their auto headlights at midday. Then real disaster struck. Between December 2, 1933, and July 19, 1934, the village of Scotia recorded less than two inches of precipitation. Finally, in September, 1934, some rains came, followed by the appearance of a few blades of grass which sprouted up in the pastures.

Even with the fall rains the year proved a major disaster for Loup country farmers. They harvested less than one-eighth of the seeded wheat acreage and even that produced only one-fourth of the normal yield. Three-fourths of the corn acreage produced nothing at all while the remainder averaged about one-third of a normal crop. Likewise the production of hay crops shrank as the acreage of alfalfa cut fell by three-fourths and that of wild hay harvested by more than nine-tenths. The acute moisture deficiency that year further dried out the subsoil and in the spring of 1935 dust storms began to wreak genuine havoc. In April storms swept into the region bearing red soil from Texas and Oklahoma. Townsmen swept and shoveled dust from their sidewalks as they might remove snow after a blizzard. The following summer dry spells alternated with sudden rains and the worst hail storms in thirty-five years pelted the northern part of Valley County. Again crop losses proved severe but small grain suffered less than corn and farmers enjoyed a successful oats harvest.[21]

Similar conditions prevailed through the remainder of the decade. In the fall and spring rains usually fell, facilitating the seeding of wheat and other small-grain crops. In July and August rainfall ceased and hot southern winds burned up the corn crop. Farmers began cutting their corn for ensilage in July in order to save something of the crop while small grains usually produced half their normal yields. Another major disaster occurred in 1937 when the over-all damage approached that of 1934. The influence of the drouth shows up most clearly in the statistics for crop yields in the thirties compared with the averages for 1921-1930. These figures

which appear in table 4 tend to understate the impact of the drouth somewhat in that they do not take into account acres seeded but not harvested, a classification which included most of the crop acreage in 1934.[22]

TABLE 4
VALLEY COUNTY CROP YIELDS, 1931–1941

Year	Wheat	Corn	Oats	Alfalfa
1921–1930 Average	17.6 bu.	24.2 bu.	29.4 bu.	2.2 tons
1931	18.2	12.8	16.9	1.15
1932	11.9	10.8	31.4	1.44
1933	9.9	20.0	7.4	1.35
1934	3.6	1.6	11.9	0.90
1935	9.7	7.9	26.8	1.50
1936	15.4	2.1	10.0	0.78
1937	5.8	3.2	8.4	0.81
1938	13.4	8.7	22.8	1.19
1939	9.5	6.8	12.2	0.75
1940	9.2	3.8	10.0	0.60
1941	9.9	11.8	22.8	1.02

SOURCE: Compiled from the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, *Nebraska Agricultural Statistics,* (annual) passim.

As the severity of the drouth became evident in 1934 the federal government initiated two emergency programs of major significance to farmers in the region. As the pastures dried up and the supply of fodder dwindled the government designated the region a drouth disaster area, thus making the resident eligible to participate in federal emergency cattle-buying operations. The intensity of the drouth led Custer County farmers to offer for sale eight times the number of animals that the federal quota allowed. Two-thirds of the farmers in Greeley and Valley counties made sales ranging from one to over one hundred head of cattle each. In the case of Valley County the number of cattle sold—nearly sixteen thousand head—amounted to more than half the total in the county. As the auctions progressed considerable irritation developed owing to the inability of buyers to purchase all cattle offered for sale.[23]

While forage supplies dwindled another emergency program went into effect. The emergency feed loan program attracted widespread interest among livestock owners throughout the region. More than five-sixths of the farmers in Greeley County applied for feed loans and the county commissioners imported ninety-four carloads of feed. Four hundred farmers received direct loans averaging more than $300 each. Across the county line to the west nearly half the Valley County farm operators received a total of $150,000 in feed loans. An additional 150 farmers there obtained emergency loans from the Federal Emergency Relief Act program, paying for their feed by working on the county roads. This emergency program did not extend beyond 1935 but for some it proved crucial. For many operators these emergency loans together with AAA payments provided the only means of remaining in business for another year.[24]

Last among the major agricultural programs to affect the area's farmers during the depression decade came the Resettlement Administration (RA) whose functions eventually passed into the hands of the Farm Security Administration. This agency provided small subsistence grants to farmers along with occasional larger loans to assist them in consolidating their debts or acquiring ownership of their farms. During the particularly severe drouth year of 1937 nearly half the farm families in the region received grants from this source. Certain program administrators came under heavy fire, however, because of the criteria used in selecting recipients. A mass meeting of farmers and townsmen in Greeley late in 1937 voted 540 to 14 to condemn the attitude of the local RA office. Shortly after this meeting RA officials reported that grants were being made on the basis of need. This quieted the agitation although some degree of rancor persisted.[25]

III

Loup country residents had never entirely dismissed the possibility of developing irrigation as a means of combatting the drouths which periodically afflicted the region. Irrigation boosters looked back to the diversion projects of the 1890s which had functioned briefly with some degree of success. However, the ultimate failure of those projects gave rise to skepticism concerning the economic feasibility of large-scale diversion. Consequently interest shifted

from diversion to well irrigation during the twenties. This change paralleled the rise of well irrigation in the Platte valley to the south of the region. Experts from the State College of Agriculture recommended the use of pump irrigation from either rivers or wells since the presence of the sandhills to the north ensured not only a regular flow of surface water throughout the year but also an abundant subsoil moisture supply for well irrigation.[26]

As the drouth began to appear in the thirties public interest veered back in the direction of large-scale diversion. In 1930 rumors spread that the federal government would designate the Ord vicinity an irrigation, drainage, and flood control district. Area leaders queried the state engineer on the matter and that official advised them to form an irrigation district and submit a loan application to the federal government. To hard-pressed farmers seeking to cut their expenses the projected water rates of from $3.50 to $4.00 per acre appeared excessive and support for the project lapsed. However, interest in the subject revived when the drouth began in earnest.[27]

Late in the summer of 1932 farmers in the North Loup vicinity began seriously considering plans for a project that would irrigate ten thousand acres along the North Loup River south of Ord. The RCF tentatively offered a loan to finance the construction of a dam and diversion ditch. The proposal touched off a major debate over the costs and advantages involved in carrying out such a project. A number of critics expected building costs to greatly exceed the official estimates whereas others contended that the projected benefits from irrigation were unrealistic. The major opposition to the scheme came from those who did not expect to benefit from irrigation and who feared being assessed to help pay for the project. Despite these objections a farmers' meeting at North Loup elected temporary officers for the proposed district and drew up petitions for permanent formal organization.[28]

Further meetings in the North Loup River valley towns led to a public consideration of additional irrigation and hydroelectric power generating schemes. In March, 1933, irrigation enthusiasts raised the funds to finance an initial survey for the project. Early in June the preliminary report appeared, carrying with it a cost estimate of $2,905,000. This greatly deflated proponents of the project whose highest previous estimate had only approached a million dollars. After some hesitation they decided to proceed and applied to the state for the necessary approval. Late in June Gov-

ernor Bryan approved the loan requests submitted to the federal government. The North Loup Public Power and Irrigation District then formally organized and the directors reported that the anticipated cost of the project had been reduced to about two million dollars.[29]

There followed a protracted series of negotiations as district officials sought to obtain the necessary funds from the federal government. Finally, in August, 1936, the congressional appropriation for the project received the president's signature. Altogether nearly forty-eight thousand acres in the North Loup Valley would come under irrigation. Government experts estimated that annual water rates would average about $2.50 per acre. The public response to this approval, coming as it did in the middle of the third consecutive severe drouth year, followed a predictable pattern: "Whistles shrieked, bells clanged and men and women went wild with joy in the towns of the North and Middle Loup valleys. . . . At Ord the fire siren began blowing about 10:30 but it was two hours before all people had been acquainted with the reasons for so much noise. Then bells, car horns and other noise-making devices joined the fire siren which blew intermittently for several hours." Several months later Senator George Norris who had carefully steered the project through the myriad paths of the federal bureaucracy appeared at Ord. There he plowed the first furrow to begin construction on the North Loup project. An estimated eight thousand persons attended the celebration held at Ord in conjunction with the ceremony.[30]

Events in the Middle Loup valley followed a similar course. Mass meetings in 1932 led to the completion of a preliminary study early in 1933. In January of that year promoters began signing up landowners who would use irrigation water. They formally organized the Middle Loup district in May and drew up plans for the project. These initially called for the construction of two main gravity irrigation canals together with a hydroelectric dam; however, they underwent considerable modification in the process of application for federal loans. Finally in 1936 Congress appropriated the funds for project construction. As in the case of the North Loup district the Middle Loup project dropped its proposed electric power generating scheme. In the spring of 1937 the district awarded bids for construction and work began almost immediately. Water first flowed through the system's canals late in 1938, almost at the same time as it began reaching the fields in the North Loup district.

Shortly thereafter the Comstock editor reported that about forty farmers who had received water were doing well while adjacent dryland corn had already burned up.[31]

IV

Low prices and acute drouth forced the farmers in the Loup country to revamp their operations if they hoped to survive. Some turned to irrigation as part of the movement outlined above but they did not attain their goal until 1938. Even then only about one out of six farmers in the region benefited directly from the diversion projects since the remainder lived outside of the irrigable zone. For these farmers the process of adaptation continued until the onset of war prosperity and the return of adequate rainfall after 1941. This adaptation process involved two basic dimensions. First, the farmer sought to reduce his cash expenses as far as possible. Second, he altered his pattern of commodity production so as to obtain the highest possible income within the context of curtailed operations.

One of the most obvious and traditionally the most obnoxious source of cash expense to farmers lay in the real and personal property tax. In 1930 property taxes in Valley County averaged sixty-two cents per acre of farmland. For an average-sized farm of 240 acres this amounted to nearly $150, a substantial cash sum even before the deflation of the thirties. Consequently the farmers soon launched a campaign to reduce property valuations and government spending. They began holding meetings at the township level to discuss the problem and soon the county boards received a flood of petitions requesting a downward revision of farm property valuations. Assessment boards across the state responded to such pressures by reducing land valuations 15 percent in 1932 with further downward adjustments in later years. They also lowered the personal property assessments for livestock and grain inventories to reflect their diminished value. In Valley County the assessed valuation of personal property on farms decreased between one-third and one-half in 1932. Thus the farmers achieved their initial objective of reduced tax valuations without encountering any serious resistance.[32]

But lower assessed valuations meant little if government spending did not decline since mill levies could rise as rapidly as valua-

tions fell. This consideration led both farmers and their village allies to launch a vigorous attack on government spending. The Valley County Taxpayers League formed in 1932 for the express purpose of reducing county and local taxes. Similar organizations appeared elsewhere in the region and throughout the state as well. These groups demanded a number of changes including reduced school budgets, the consolidation of county governments where such action could reduce county expenses, and the closing of tax loopholes—particularly with regard to intangible property. They also urged a general reorganization of the tax structure based upon the substitution of a state income tax and luxury goods sales tax for a large part of the property tax burden. The crusade to cut taxes achieved some degree of success as the average property tax per acre of farmland dropped by about one-fourth during the decade, from sixty-two cents in 1930 to forty-eight cents in 1940.[33]

Reducing property taxes provided one means of lowering farm expenses but obviously the farmer had to make adjustments elsewhere as well. Most of the farmers in the region adopted a conservative strategy, reducing the scope of their operations which involved cash outlays. Livestock farmers decreased their holdings in an effort to eliminate the cash expense of buying feed and young animals. This led to a sharp drop in the number of cattle and hogs in the region in mid-decade. Government programs played a limited role in this progress—chiefly affecting the steep reduction in the number of cattle through the emergency buying program in 1934 and to some degree the reduction in hog numbers in 1934–1935. Statistics for the animal population in Valley County appear in table 5.[34]

Other cuts in farm expenditures came less from the curtailing of operations than from the avoidance of new expenses. Construction activity on farms halted entirely and existing buildings received a minimal amount of maintenance and repair. Altogether the value of farm buildings in Valley County fell by nearly three-eighths in terms of constant dollars during the decade. Part of the decline resulted from the abandonment of farms whose buildings then disintegrated. Nonetheless the fall reflected a real deterioration in the general condition of farm buildings in the region. Similarly the amount of money invested in new machinery diminished significantly. The total value of farm implements and machinery in Valley County declined by about one-third in terms of constant dollars during the thirties. Purchases of new automobiles also

TABLE 5
CATTLE AND HOGS
VALLEY COUNTY, 1931–1940

Year	Cattle	Hogs
1931	23,500	65,340
1932	20,760	68,240
1933	20,260	45,660
1934	24,450*	54,400
1935	10,520	21,480**
1936	19,000	24,890
1937	16,680	16,470
1938	15,610	15,280
1939	17,730	19,030
1940	18,980	23,190

*In 1934 federal buyers purchased 15,963 Valley County cattle.
**In 1935 Valley County AAA participants reduced hog production by 13,079 from the preceding year.
SOURCE: *Nebraska Agricultural Statistics*, passim.

slowed drastically from the level of previous years. More than half the autos on farms in 1940 exceeded ten years of age while fewer than one-sixth were less than five years old.

If the over-all investment in farm machinery fell alarmingly during the thirties mechanization did advance in at least one area. The proportion of Valley County farms using tractors rose from about one-fifth in 1930 to more than two-fifths in 1940. While part of this increase came as a consequence of the declining number of farms, the actual number of farming operations using tractors nearly doubled during the decade. About two-fifths of the tractors in use in 1940 exceeded ten years of age—relics of an earlier prosperity. Only about one-sixth consisted of 1931–1935 models. Most of the tractor buying that decade came after 1937. Many of the new purchasers evidently lived in the river valleys and resumed profitable operations after the arrival of irrigation water in 1938. Other cash grain farmers, especially the small-grain producers in the southern part of Valley County, also acquired tractors which they found useful in field crop production.[35]

Other advances also occurred within the framework of a reduced scale of farm operations. Prior to the drouth the silo had won only limited acceptance in the region, chiefly from dairymen. But

when it became evident that cutting corn for ensilage offered the only means of saving part of the crop, general and livestock farmers adopted the practice with alacrity. The number of silos in Custer County alone rose from three hundred in 1934 to twelve hundred two years later. Corn growers also investigated improved strains of seed but the persistent drouth frustrated progress in that direction. Dryland corn invariably failed whatever the variety of seed planted. Only after large-scale irrigation got under way in 1938 did hybrid corn come into local use. Farmers who watered their fields reported that the new varieties increased yields by 30 to 40 percent. This pointed the way toward a general adoption of hybrid corn once rain returned to the area.[36]

Another aspect of the search for survival concerned the production of crops more resistant to drouth than corn and small grain. For a while Jerusalem artichokes received a good deal of publicity but the ballyhoo over this crop eventually subsided. The widespread adoption of grain sorghum proved far more significant as the Valley County acreage of this crop rose from less than a hundred in 1930 to more than nineteen thousand in 1939. The latter figure equaled more than two-fifths of the corn acreage seeded that year. The adaptation of corn planters and other machinery to sorghum production posed some technical problems but farmers soon ironed them out. Sorghum producers cut about half their acreage for ensilage or hogged it while harvesting the rest for grain. During the same period barley production expanded rapidly, particularly after the introduction of the hardier Spartan variety. In 1940 Valley County producers planted sixteen thousand acres of barley, a figure nearly equal to that of all other small grains combined.[37]

Somewhat paradoxically the reduction in livestock numbers provided an opportunity for advancing the regional cattle industry. The necessity for getting rid of large numbers of animals forced farmers to examine, many of them for the first time, the individual performance records of their cattle. Thus while much indiscriminate unloading of livestock did take place, a generally culling process went into operation. This applied to dairy animals as well as beef cattle. Late in the decade dairy farmers in Valley and Custer counties began importing purebred dairy bulls with the assistance of village creamery managers and the county agents. This led to a noteworthy improvement in the grade of dairy animals. At the same time the counties in the Loup country finally initiated tuberculosis testing programs. Farmers had earlier opposed testing because of

the inadequate compensation for animals found infected and destroyed. With the drouth and the resulting necessity for reducing the number of animals the compensation prices appeared more attractive. Testing got under way in 1935 and Valley County earned a modified tuberculosis-free rating the following year. Custer and Greeley counties achieved a similar status shortly thereafter.[38]

One other positive aspect of drouth adjustment appeared with the growing interest in soil conservation. Few farmers had seriously thought about the subject in earlier decades and the main conservation practice in the region consisted of a system of crop rotation based upon alfalfa or sweet clover and grain. When their land started to blow away, however, farmers began to grasp the necessity for adopting soil conservation measures. Unfortunately, the means for implementing a long-term conservation program did not exist. The enactment of the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act in 1936 helped to fill this gap by providing technical assistance and financial benefits for participating farmers. Since the program aimed primarily at crop reduction its major initial effect involved the movement of cropland into legumes and permanent grassland. But after the adoption of the second AAA the emphasis shifted toward the encouragement of other soil-conserving practices. Contour plowing quickly attracted attention because of its moisture conserving characteristics. Toward the end of the decade terracing and the construction of farm ponds also got under way although significant participation in these practices did not come until after the return of the rains in the early forties.[39]

V

As the farmer's economic plight worsened the banking institutions dependent upon his well-being began to go under. In June, 1929, the Farmers State Bank of Scotia went into involuntary receivership. The major sequence of failures in the region began two years later when the State Bank of Ord suspended business on October 15, 1931. The following day the North Loup State Bank failed to open its doors. Officials of the latter institution blamed the suspension on heavy demands by depositors coupled with low farm prices which made it impossible for farmers to meet their obligations. During the next few days the village experienced a fever of unrest and discouragement and business came to a complete

halt. The debacle aroused considerable ill feeling among those most affected and complaints soon appeared that merchants were taking unfair advantage of the absence of any bank by charging five cents for cashing checks.[40]

North Loupers confronted the problem of carrying on business without regular banking facilities for a decade and a half as they did not obtain another bank until 1946. After limping along for nearly three years dependent upon the credit facilities of nearby towns, a group of village merchants established a credit association in the summer of 1934. This organization, the North Loup Co-operative Credit Association initially limited its transactions to cashing checks and to accepting deposits from those who had paid the ten-dollar membership fee. By 1938, however, it had acquired most of the functions normally associated with banks—accepting money for deposit, allowing members to write checks, loaning money on security, and discounting notes with city banks. The organization did not join the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) because some of its directors lacked faith in that agency's ability to meet the strain should another real financial emergency arise. Consequently the association could not guarantee the security of its deposits. Despite this fact the institution fulfilled its functions with considerable success and villagers did not feel the absence of a bank so deeply during the latter half of the decade.[41]

Four months after the suspension of the Ord and North Loup banks both Sargent banks closed their doors within the space of a week. The Sargent State Bank never reopened and the Farmers State Bank remained closed for seven months. Officials of the latter bank explained the suspension in the same terms as had the North Loup bankers. Large certificates of deposit coming due could not be met without forcing farmers to sell everything they possessed to pay off their notes. In September, 1932, the bank reopened under special arrangements for handling the problem of withdrawals. Those who left their large deposits in the bank were repaid over the course of the next ten years while those who wanted immediate withdrawal were offered a 24 percent final settlement.[42]

A month after the Sargent banks had closed the Citizens State Bank of Comstock suspended business and did not reopen. The other Comstock bank, the Farmers and Merchants State Bank, remained in operation and ultimately joined the FDIC. In the same month the only bank in the hamlet of Horace north of Scotia failed. A year later on January 30, 1933, the State Bank of Scotia closed its

doors. Efforts to revive the institution failed and it was succeeded by a new institution, the State Bank of Scotia, financed by local farmers and businessmen together with several wealthy Ord attorneys. This bank operated successfully through the remainder of the depression. One other bank in the region, the Elyria State Bank, went into voluntary liquidation and wound up its affairs in January, 1936. Only the village of Arcadia with its lone bank weathered the depression without a bank suspension. Altogether a total of nine of the thirteen banks in the region closed of which only one successfully reopened. Thus in the space of seven years the number of banking institutions in the Loup country fell by more than half.[43]

Both Governor Bryan's bank holiday which began March 4, 1933, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt's national bank holiday which began two days later came too late to affect most of the region's banks. During the "holiday" period Ord merchants issued scrip as a substitute for checks and currency. Various proposals for circulating such scrip had appeared during the earlier banking crises and one such scheme had attracted the favorable attention of the Ord editor. But like the Townsend clubs which sprang up in several Loup country towns the scrip projects proved more useful in creating a sense of activity on the part of a badly shaken populace than in accomplishing any genuine change.[44]

Banking failures represented only one facet of the depressed economic conditions in the towns. As farmer buying power shrank after 1929 retail sales slumped, leading to a general reduction in the village sales force. Construction activity soon came to a halt, adding further to the unemployment problem. Hence the appearance of the NRA drew an enthusiastic response from local businessmen struggling to ward off bankruptcy. They rushed in to sign up under the blanket code and for a brief time optimism reigned supreme. As adverse conditions persisted, however, disillusionment set in. A year after the implementation of the NRA Ord merchants warned that strict compliance with the code would force many men out of work since they could not afford to pay the specified wage rates given the current business climate.[45]

Faced with this unpalatable situation villagers as well as farmers began seeking work on the various federal relief projects in the area. In the summer of 1933 nearly a thousand Valley County men including a number of farmers signed up for work. The county itself carried on relatively few relief operations, leaving the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) and Civil Works Ad-

ministration (CWA) to finance most of the work projects in the area. By January, 1934, more than two hundred men were engaged on CWA projects involving road work and water and sewer line construction, but they worked only on a fifteen-hour per week basis. That month Arcadia received a federal grant and loan for the construction of a new schoolhouse, a project which provided employment in that area. Works Progress Administration (WPA) projects began operating in 1935 and centered upon road work, much as the CWA projects had. Relief operations of this type continued for most of the decade with the largest projects involving the construction of the North Loup and Middle Loup irrigation systems in 1937 and 1938.[46]

Despite the operation of these programs times remained hard in the villages of the Loup country and many merchants went out of business. The survivors strove to reduce costs by laying off employees, reducing inventories, and seeking to reduce taxes. With the worsening conditions later in the decade a substantial net outmigration from the villages developed as the inflow of population from the farms dwindled. For the first time in thirty years the smaller towns began losing population as local residents left in search of work. Ord did not suffer as greatly as it served as district headquarters for most of the relief projects. Even there, however, the number of retail firms diminished under the pressure of unfavorable economic conditions. Thus began a long-term period of decline for the agricultural villages of the region.[47]

During the second and third decades of the twentieth century a substantial outflow of migration developed in the Loup country owing to the lack of employment opportunities for local youth. This stream of outmigration slowed in the early thirties due to the decline in employment opportunity elsewhere. With the worsening of the drouth, conditions deteriorated further and another major outflow developed. Among those who left the more successful sent letters home advertising the advantages of their situations and urging others to join them. One family that moved from Greeley County to the Yakima Valley sent a letter characteristic of this genre to the Scotia editor. In somewhat patronizing terms the author wrote: "To the friends we left behind us we give our sympathy. We sincerely hope the hard times let up back there and that you all prosper as we have since we have been out here. . . . We have all been working steady since we got here and good wages, too. All of us are making from $2.50 to $4.00 per day. The climate here

just suits us. It is warm during the day and cool during the nights and a person sure can get a good night's rest." Encouraged by such tidings many residents seriously considered moving west, especially after the severe drouth season of 1937. Farm Security Administration personnel warned that the rumored labor shortages there were temporary and that the work and income were only seasonal. Compared with the certainty of receiving no income at all, however, the prospects remained alluring and the late thirties saw a marked movement of population out of the region toward the West Coast.[48]

The harshness of the conditions facing those who remained would have tried the patience of Job. Perhaps the most poignant description of the situation came from a Greeley County housewife in a letter to her Congressman:

> I want you to know the real conditions of farmers in general here. 1934, dried out—1935 raised feed, nothing to sell, 1936 dried out—1937—grain dried out, corn holding on, but can't much longer without rain. We have been living on hopes and half rations for 4 years. No gardens, except a little early garden and not much to buy fruit and vegetables shipped in. It sure is getting monotonous living on half rations. Our cows and horses had nothing to eat all summer but weeds. We worked the horses on that diet. Nothing to buy feed with.
>
> Most of the grass in pastures died out last summer, and now the weeds are drying up. Lots of people have gone to the west coast, and many more are talking of going. They think they can get to pick fruit out there and something to eat. Nebraska has raised lots of wheat this year, but not in Greeley County as it dried out here. People here are a thrifty, energetic class of people. In the summer they have some eggs and cream to sell. But unless we raise some corn there won't be anything to feed the chickens and stock with, as the hay meadows have turned to weeds, too. If we had some money we could buy feed, but our pocketbooks are empty. People are talking of moving to the eastern states now as it is about filled up on the west coast. If we don't get rain soon, what are we to do?
>
> Farmer's Wife
> Scotia, Nebraska
>
> P.S. We also have too many grasshoppers.

With increasing frequency those faced with such intolerable conditions simply gave up and left. Large numbers of abandoned farms cropped up on the landscape, causing the remaining residents to conclude that a major exodus of population had begun. Later generations of Loup country dwellers continued to point to the thirties as the time when migration out of the region began, a notion which will receive more detailed consideration in chapters 7 and 8. In the fall of 1939 columnist George Gowen of the *Ord Quiz* offered several illustrations of the desertion of the countryside. Twenty-five idle farms lay along a twelve mile stretch of road to

the south and west of North Loup, while a mail carrier reported that his rural route had fifty fewer mail boxes than a few years previously. That a heavy movement of population out of the region had materialized seemed undeniable although a few scattered boosters still preferred to deny the inevitable. The census of 1940 revealed the extent of the decline in human numbers, the beginning of a trend destined to continue through succeeding decades. In many ways the new trend toward rural depopulation would prove the most significant development in the social and economic history of the region.[49]

5. New Directions in Agriculture, 1940–1970

RESIDENTS OF THE LOUP COUNTRY who had survived the economic disasters of the thirties saw few auspicious omens in the arrival of the forties. Although the outbreak of war in Europe raised hopes for higher farm prices the drouth continued unbroken. The average corn yield in Valley County fell from a meager 6.8 bushels per acre in 1939 to a miserable 3.8 bushels per acre the following year. Faced with a seemingly endless drouth farm residents grew increasingly discouraged and outmigration from the region continued. As editor Leggett of the *Ord Quiz* wrote in the summer of 1940: "The discouragement over this section of the country this summer, is the worst of any yet. Many proclaim this the worst year, but it don't seem much different to me than many others and especially 1934. But everyone has become a little poorer as we come along and many of those that are left here haven't money to get away or to live on either. . . ." Fortunately 1940 proved to be the last year of the severe drouth period. Although dry spells curtailed corn yields on several occasions during the forties substantial crop failure due to drouth did not recur until the middle fifties.[1]

As wartime demand mounted farm prices rose sharply in 1941 and continued their climb until the adoption of a price stabilization policy by the federal government in 1943. The combination of normal precipitation and high prices which then materialized spelled a new era of prosperity for the farmer. Indeed the period from 1942 through 1952 emerged as the second "golden age" for twentieth-century agriculture. Even as the war ended in 1945 the upsurge of consumer demand sustained high farm commodity prices, and the demand generated by heavy European imports of foodstuffs drove the Nebraska farm price index to its highest point in the decade in 1947. Prices continued favorable throughout the Korean War. With the end of this conflict, however, prices again fell and for much of the ensuing two decades the old specter of overproduction returned to haunt the farmer. Although the actual price situation varied from year to year the parity index generally

hovered in the middle or upper eighties—or about the average for 1930. The annual index figures for 1940 through 1970 appear in the Appendix.

In much the same way as its predecessor two decades earlier World War II encouraged changes in the crop production patterns of the Loup country. The combined acreage of corn and sorghum remained unchanged but the ratio of the former to the latter rose from less than four to one in 1940 to more than twenty to one in 1945. The change-over followed the return of rains in 1941 as farmers returned to their favorite crop. Small grain acreage rose by nearly two-fifths in 1939–1943 compared with a one-third expansion in 1914–1918. Nearly 40 percent of the increase resulted from expanded barley production which continued the rapid growth begun in the late thirties. Although wheat and rye acreages tripled their combined total did not equal that of barley. Oats production remained stable throughout the war.[2]

During both world wars favorable meat prices encouraged a substantial increase in livestock production. Between 1914 and 1918 the number of beef cattle in Valley County rose by half and the number of swine by one-fourth. Between 1941 and 1945 cattle numbers in the region nearly doubled. About half of this increase went to make up for the losses due to drouth the previous decade. Thus in Valley County the number of nondairy cattle fell from 24,450 in 1930 to 18,000 in 1941. By 1943 the number had risen to 27,450 and it reached 37,000 in 1945. Early in the war high corn prices hindered the expansion of cattle-feeding operations while pastures in the area did not fully recover from the drouth until 1942. Real expansion in the number of cattle beyond the level of earlier decades came after that date.[3]

Other farm animals also increased in number during the war. The swine population doubled between 1940 and 1944 although this expansion represented recovery from the curtailment of the thirties rather than renewed growth. Even at the latter date Valley County counted 11 percent fewer hogs than in 1934. Poultry holdings doubled during the first half of the war in the wake of the federal government's decision to guarantee the price of eggs. In the latter two years of the conflict poultry and egg production fell somewhat as other animal populations rose. Despite the increase in dairy prices the number of dairy cattle in the region remained stable due to the emphasis on beef finishing. Owing to an increase in feed production and to improvement in the quality of local

animals the volume of dairy products marketed rose by about one-fourth even while the number of cows milked remained unchanged.[4]

Again like its predecessor World War II generated fears of a labor shortage which ultimately proved unfounded. The industrial expansion touched off by full scale military mobilization created a strong demand for labor at relatively high wages. Urban wartime jobs lured farm people to the cities in large numbers so that out-migration from the region continued at a rate nearly equal to that during the drouth years of the previous decade. The sight of these masses of people departing created a degree of panic among those who remained and who normally hired farm labor during harvest season. To a considerable extent the draft laws alleviated the shortage by providing deferments for agricultural laborers. In practice the expected labor shortage confined itself to the small-grain harvest and scarcely any grain was lost for lack of field hands. As the Greeley County agent noted, if nothing else the ability to harvest crops with a sharply diminished labor force showed the degree of waste in the pattern of labor utilization in earlier years.[5]

If the changes in crop and livestock production and in labor demand followed similar directions in both wars major differences characterized other aspects of regional agriculture. The United States entered World War I relatively late and never mobilized its resources to the degree characteristic of World War II. The course of mechanization clearly demonstrates the difference in this respect. During World War I the farmer did not compete directly with the military for priority in obtaining machinery and equipment. Hence during the war many farmers bought automobiles and farm implements and began electrifying their farms. This pattern did not recur during World War II because of the necessity of diverting steel to military use from an early date. The ultimate ordering of priorities by the federal government led to a major reduction in the manufacture of farm machinery with emphasis upon the production of spare parts. The scarcity of new machinery made the blacksmith the busiest man in the rural areas as farmers called upon him to repair their aging equipment. Thus while the war brought large farm profits it also resulted in stagnation in the mechanization process because of the lack of machinery to buy.[6]

The more advanced technological level of agriculture also created new problems which had not affected farmers during World War I. By 1940 nearly all farm operators owned automobiles and the rationing of gasoline and tires directly affected them. Rural

social life suffered as a consequence and the county extension agents had to curtail their programs. Furthermore, by 1941 about half of the farms depended upon tractors as the major power source for field work. These tractors operated on either fuel oil or gasoline, both of which were rationed. Ultimately federal officials resolved this difficulty by assigning farmers priority in the distribution of gasoline and oil. Farmers received similar concessions with respect to new tires for both automobiles and tractors.[7]

Because of the system of priorities in the allocation of resources farmers found it necessary to utilize their profits differently during World War II than they had during World War I. Since they could not buy manufactured goods, they applied their profits primarily toward reducing their debts and acquiring land. This contrasted sharply with the World War I boom in consumer durable goods and machinery. The large-scale flow of funds into real estate did not lead to a speculative boom comparable to that of the late teens, however. First, the psychology of the depression loomed large in the minds of most farmers who sought to reduce existing debts rather than to contract new ones. They subscribed to the general view that a major depression would follow the war so that those with heavy debts at the cessation of hostilities would probably lose their farms. Everyone from the president down to the local village editor joined in the chorus urging farmers to liquidate their indebtedness. Such a step would reduce future problems of postwar adjustments, prevent inflation, and enable creditors to buy war bonds with their repayments. But this process together with the widespread acquisition of additional farm land did not lead to a new real estate boom as one might have anticipated.

While land values in the Loup country rose, they did so at a slower rate than did the general price index. Even in 1945 the average per acre value of land and buildings remained less than half of the 1930 figure. The continued industrial demand for labor encouraged further migration away from rural areas so that farm sales remained brisk even late in the war. In addition, the large volume of land held by mortgagees of the thirties lay waiting for purchasers at unusually favorable prices. These lands included perhaps one-fourth of the total acreage in the Loup country in 1940. Consequently the available supply of land could easily meet the new demand without generating price inflation. Furthermore, the tightening of general credit limited speculative activity of the type common in the late teens and helped to keep real estate prices stable.[8]

II

If the war years brought partial recovery from the effects of the preceding decade the latter half of the forties saw the beginning of a sustained drive toward enhanced agricultural productivity which has continued to the present day. Wartime profits went largely toward the liquidation of old debts, the acquisition of land, and the rebuilding of depleted livestock herds. But with the end of wartime restrictions farm operators became free to invest on a large scale in new labor-saving equipment. At the same time the availability of copper and aluminum facilitated the spread of rural electrification over the countryside. (For an extended discussion of the mechanization and electrification processes see chapter 6.) But postwar changes came in other areas as well. Specialization became the dominant feature of Loup country agriculture as the older emphasis upon diversification faded. The federal government did not repeat its earlier policy of abrupt withdrawal from the agricultural scene after the war but remained actively engaged in trying to promote farm prosperity. Farmers increasingly sought to organize themselves in such a way as to improve their long-term economic and social position in American society. Finally, even as all these trends developed, the individual farm enterprise expanded greatly in size as part of the long-term process which will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

Before the war farm tenancy trends in the Loup country had largely paralleled those of northern agriculture generally. The tenancy rate in Valley County rose from 32 percent in 1900 to about 45 percent in 1925 and slightly less in 1930. The rash of foreclosures in the thirties forced the rate up to a high point of 58.5 percent in 1940. Table 6 provides a picture of the changing tenancy pattern after that date. During World War II 118 farms disappeared from the tenant column. Of these 52 or about four-ninths acquired owner operators or part-owner operators. The rest were consolidated into other farm units. In other words, about one out of thirteen 1940 tenant farms had acquired an owner operator by 1945. Most of this movement occurred late in the war as farmers obtained increasing amounts of cash.

Over the next five years 203 farms or more than one-third of the total dropped out of the tenant column. One hundred forty-four of these reappeared in the owner and part-owner columns, meaning that more than one out of four tenant farms in 1945 had acquired owner operators by 1950. This impressive showing resulted

TABLE 6
FARM OWNERSHIP STATUS
VALLEY COUNTY, 1940–1969

Year	Full Owners	Part Owners	Tenants	Tenancy Rate (%)
1940	323	160	686	58.5
1945	333	202	568	51.3
1950	434	245	365	34.9
1954	420	257	361	34.8
1959	353	238	261	30.7
1964	354	224	174	23.1
1969	323	207	113	17.5

SOURCE: *Census of Agriculture, 1940, 1945, 1950, 1954, 1959, 1964, 1969.*

from a fortuitous combination of favorable farm prices and relatively low real estate values—the average value of land and buildings in Valley County rose only 7.9 percent in constant dollars during the five-year period. During the first half of the fifties real estate prices climbed rapidly while farm prices sagged, producing virtual stagnation in the tenancy pattern. After 1954 real estate values continued to mount under the pressure for farm expansion. The sharp reduction in tenancy after 1954 proved somewhat illusory in that it resulted from the purchase of abandoned tenant farms by other farm owners rather than from the movement of tenants up to owner or part-owner status.[9]

Even as the tenancy structure in the region underwent modification the nature of the farming operation itself changed. The most significant aspect of this change related to the growing dominance of a specialized pattern of commodity production based on the finishing of beef cattle for slaughter. As this specialty grew in importance certain sectors of production which had played a key role in earlier diversification efforts declined, both in significance and in absolute numbers. The dairying, poultry, and swine-raising sidelines disappeared from a majority of farms. This development grew out of changes both in the sideline operations themselves and in the beef-producing business.

The decline in dairying resulted from changes in marketing and in individual farm management. As noted above dairying as a specialized type of operation never really developed in the region. The dairy animal which before the war was usually a dual purpose

cow remained a subsidiary source of income for most farmers. During the thirties the number of cows milked in Valley County fell by about one-fifth. Although dairy cow numbers remained stable during the war the removal of price supports for dairy products in 1946 led to a sharp fall in numbers that year. The continued high prices for beef cattle and grain further encouraged farmers to move out of dairying. In addition, as herds improved the animal became more expensive and no longer offered the advantages of the earlier dual-purpose cow. The necessity for maintaining dairy animals separately from beef cattle made the task of keeping them more burdensome. As a result of these and other factors the number of dairy cows continued to diminish gradually throughout the late fifties.[10]

Dairy management practices in the region remained backward, making dairying less profitable than should have been the case. Similar conditions had obtained in earlier decades but the desire for a regular cash income together with a lack of cost accounting techniques obscured the fact. Now, however, farmers became increasingly aware of the unprofitable nature of their milking operations both in terms of hard cash and in the return on the labor involved. A testing program carried out by the Valley County extension agent in 1962 clearly revealed the casual nature of local dairy management. The value of products sold per cow ranged from $241 in one herd to $384 in another while average feed costs varied from $84 to $175 per animal. If these conditions marked the larger herds one may well imagine the chaotic situation among smaller operators.[11]

Other factors also contributed to the downgrading of dairying enterprises in the area at this time. In the middle and late fifties several dairy processors in the region closed down their operations. Simultaneously processors began to shift away from purchasing home-separated cream in favor of buying whole fluid milk. This forced the dairyman to buy expensive bulk-cooling equipment in order to meet required health standards. At the same time the enforcement of these standards became increasingly stringent as state inspectors began checking more closely upon local processors. For many farmers to whom the milking business was secondary this provided sufficient justification for discontinuing operations. As a result, the number of milk cows in Valley County fell to less than one-third of the 1934 figure by 1970 at which time only about one-fourth of the region's farmers kept cows for milking purposes compared with more than three-fourths at the earlier date.[12]

Poultry growing in the region declined even more precipitously than dairying. Poultry and egg production reached a peak in 1943 when Valley County farms counted more than 200,000 chickens. By the end of the war poultry numbers had fallen by about 15 percent. Sharp breaks came late in the forties but by the mid-fifties the chicken population had stabilized at about half of the 1943 level. Over the next fifteen years the number of fowl dropped by nearly three-fourths in the wake of the development of factory-type chicken operations which virtually wiped out the market for fryers. By the early sixties farmers could no longer justify raising poultry for market and the proportion of farms producing chickens or eggs fell from over nine-tenths in 1944 to less than half in 1959 and one-third in 1969.[13]

Swine production in the region remained relatively stable during the postwar era although numbers fluctuated on a year to year basis, usually between twenty and twenty-five thousand for Valley County farms. The proportion of farmers raising pigs fell from four-fifths in 1945 to half in 1964 and two-fifths in 1969. Several reasons lay behind this diminishing interest in hog production. Diseases remained troublesome, particularly in the case of erysipelas outbreaks from the mid-forties on. Swine raising also required too much labor, especially during farrowing time, if carried on as a sideline operation. Hog raising then, proved profitable only when the farmer had the labor available to care for the animals. Thus swine production passed increasingly into the hands of a dwindling number of specialists while the majority of farmers turned their attention to expanding beef production.[14]

While these diversified farming operations declined substantially after World War II, the fattening of beef cattle for slaughter underwent a major expansion. Beef cattle finishing had traditionally played a major role in the farm economy of the Loup country, but it had not completely dominated the scene to the degree that it would later. Between 1919 and 1945 the ratio of swine to cattle on Valley County farms virtually reversed itself from 34.1 to 19.5 at the earlier date to 21.8 to 38.5 at the latter. The number of beef cattle in the region declined in the three years following the war due to a combination of high feed-grain costs and unfavorable meat prices. The cattle population regained its 1945 level by 1951 and stabilized for the remainder of the decade. During the sixties the number steadily increased, showing an over-all gain of 40 percent. By 1969 the number of cattle per farm had reached 98.2.[15]

Obviously the farmers themselves concluded that fattening

cattle offered the best hope of making a profit or they would not have expanded in this direction. But several regional factors contributed to this trend and may properly be considered here. First, the presence of the Nebraska sand-hills ranching area immediately adjacent to the region provided an easily accessible source of livestock for finishing. Loup country farmers raised nowhere near the number of animals which they fattened annually and had to import large numbers of feeder cattle each year. Due to the introduction of improved grasses the carrying capacity of the sand-hills ranches rose substantially after the thirties so that the necessary supply of young animals became available at minimal transportation cost.

Local geography and land utilization patterns also favored beef production over, for example, swine raising. Continued cropping of marginal land in the thirties had taken a heavy toll of topsoil even before the dust storms appeared. Consequently a large acreage of farm land previously devoted to crop production remained suitable only for pasture and in the postwar period went into permanent grassland. The presence of this large expanse of pasture provided a major incentive for carrying cattle. Such land enabled farmers to graze their animals over the summer before finishing them for slaughter in their feed lots. Hence by expanding their beef cattle operations farmers could obtain maximum use of their land holdings.

A further advantage of the cattle-feeding operation lay in its relatively limited labor requirement. Cattle feeding required a much smaller labor input than, for example, dairying. Particularly after the adoption of mechanical self-unloading wagons and grain augers in the fifties, the farmer could handle several hundred cattle in an hour or two of feeding time daily. This gave him more time to devote to his other operations, particularly to cultivating the field crops on his expanding farm. Most farmers preferred feeding their own crops to their cattle to purchasing feed grain for cash although the feed deficit in the region forced them to adopt the latter practice to an increasing degree.[16]

If the rise in cattle numbers represented one aspect of the growing regional specialization in corn / livestock production, the changes in crop growing reflected another. Two major developments marked the postwar picture of crop production in the region as table 7 illustrates. First, the acreage of cropland harvested decreased substantially during the postwar years. The over-all figure for Valley County declined 46 percent between 1945 and 1969. This decline almost exactly equaled the rate of decrease in the

number of farms so that the average acreage of cropland harvested per farm scarcely changed at all. Nearly one-fourth of the cropland taken out of production went into some type of federal crop diversion program while the remainder shifted over into permanent pasture.

TABLE 7
CROPLAND HARVESTED AND CROP ACREAGES
VALLEY COUNTY, 1945–1969

Year	Cropland Harvested	Cropland Harvested per farm	Corn	Sorghum	Wheat	Other Small Grain	Hay
1944	171,548	164.3	89,467	7,164	8,898	35,905	24,854
1949	161,775	163.6	79,153	2,139	16,899	24,044	36,754
1954	166,262	173.0	75,605	1,816	8,355	25,557	54,266
1959	139,332	177.3	66,822	9,807	10,693	13,216	37,983
1964	106,725	161.4	35,342	15,662	10,002	2,984	40,053
1969	92,901	165.8	40,907	5,881	7,887	1,558	34,984

SOURCE: *1940, 1945, 1950, 1954, 1959, 1964, 1969, Census of Agriculture.*

As the over-all crop acreage in the region declined small grain other than wheat virtually disappeared. Rye had largely vanished by 1954 while barley experienced a long steady decline from 1945 until it had practically disappeared by 1964. The acreage devoted to oats actually rose in the decade after the war, reaching a high figure in 1954. Production fell by two thirds in the next five years and by 1969 less than a thousand acres remained seeded to oats. Wheat production, on the other hand, fluctuated somewhat but generally amounted to eight or ten thousand acres. By 1970 it remained the only crop in the region that could challenge the monopoly of corn and its ally sorghum.

III

Early in World War II farm spokesmen in Congress secured the passage of the Steagall amendment which ensured the continua-

tion of federal agricultural programs following the conclusion of the war. In so doing they sought to avoid a repetition of the abrupt deflation and agricultural depression which had followed the sudden termination of federal price supports at the end of World War I. The crop loan program continued to operate as the basic price-support mechanism. Under this system farmers who agreed to accept acreage restrictions could obtain federal crop loans from the Community Credit Corporation at a specified rate. The continued high prices for farm commodities immediately after the war discouraged participation in the program and in 1947 only two farmers out of more than a thousand in Valley County obtained corn loans.[17]

This period of minimal participation in federal agricultural programs ended abruptly with the record harvest of 1948 which coincided with a collapse in European grain demands. As early as August of that year local editors warned that existing storage structures in the area were inadequate to hold the impending harvest. Farmers besieged lumber dealers as they sought materials for constructing cribs to hold the new crop. When the government established a corn loan rate of $1.37 per bushel in October more than one-fourth of the local farmers sealed an average of about a thousand bushels of corn each. The following year another bumper corn crop led to increased participation as nearly half the active farmers sealed corn in exchange for loans totaling more than $700,000 in the case of Valley County alone.[18]

Faced with these rapidly accumulating stockpiles the Department of Agriculture began constructing additional bins on the federal sites in the region. Storage space in federal binsites in Valley County rose by three-quarters of a million bushels in 1949–1951. Fortunately the outbreak of the Korean conflict set off another round of high prices and the number of corn loans fell to only eight in 1951. As prices fell in the next two years participation again rose and in 1953 more than one-quarter of the area's farmers again sealed corn in federal bins. Over the next three years recurrent drouth curtailed corn production and reduced participation, but the return of rains in 1957 brought with it a new bumper crop and drove the proportion of borrowers up to more than two-fifths. The figure rose even higher in 1958 when crop loans in Valley County exceeded $850,000.[19]

By the middle fifties the problems engendered by growing federal stockpiles of surplus farm commodities had come under close scrutiny and harsh public criticism began to emerge. Faced with

rising surpluses and falling prices the Eisenhower administration developed a new farm plan which it unveiled in the spring of 1956. In effect it revived the first AAA policy of controlling commodity production by subsidizing acreage reductions. Under the new plan farmers could earn cash payments by reducing their planted acreages below the existing level. In effect they put their land into the "soil bank" in exchange for federal subsidies and continued price supports. Although the soil bank program did not go into full operation until 1957 some farmers did enroll under its provisions in 1956. These included farm operators who had underplanted their base acreage, those who had plowed under part of their crop, and those who would not harvest part of their seeded acreage due to crop failure. In the face of the drouth of that year farmers rushed into the temporary program in large numbers. Many of them signed up for maximum participation, agreeing to retire 50 percent of their base acreage. In exchange they received payments based on normal production multiplied by a base-price figure per bushel for corn and wheat. By August, 1956, more than half the farmers in the area had applied for participation in the program. At the same time the Community Credit Corporation continued to extend crop loans based upon acreage allotments. Interest in these programs ran high among local farmers, and in Greeley County agricultural officials received enough applications for enrollment in the soil bank in 1957 to retire more than half the corn acreage in the county.[20]

Despite considerable fanfare the soil bank program failed to achieve its objective of reducing farm production, based as it was on the obsolete concept of acreage controls. The process of intensification in the production process discussed in the following chapter rendered acreage figures largely meaningless. Following the advent of the Kennedy administration the federal government launched another campaign to eliminate farm surpluses. The new "feed grains" program followed the same basic lines as its predecessor in providing diversion payments and price supports in exchange for crop acreage reductions. Participation required a minimum reduction of 20 percent compared with a 10 percent minimum under the soil bank program but the maximum retirement rate remained at 50 percent. In 1964 most farmers in the region participated in the program and diversion payments in Valley County that year totaled over $1 million with price support payments exceeding $270,000. About 32,000 acres of cropland in the county went out of production that year. Altogether about one-fifth of all

cropland in the county was diverted from production under this program. The high level of direct diversion and price support payments continued through the remainder of the decade.[21]

Despite their lack of success in stimulating farm prosperity these programs played a key role in the region during the fifties and sixties. From 1953 through 1969 total federal payments under the various agricultural programs amounted to slightly over $25 million for Valley County. This included more than $1 million dollars in conservation grants under the Agricultural Conservation Program along with more than $10 million each in crop loans and diversion payments and $3 million in price support payments. Over-all federal payments averaged about $1.5 million annually at a time when total county farm income ranged from about $10 to $14 million per year. Thus in most years federal subsidies accounted for from 10 to 15 percent or more of the region's total farm income. It remains problematical whether these programs influenced the process of farm consolidation one way or another. However they did undoubtedly provide added impetus to the process of technological intensification by subsidizing the removal of marginal land from production.[22]

Postwar federal farm programs tended to reflect the influence of the American Farm Bureau Federation, the major farm organization which drew the bulk of its membership from livestock producers and large farm operators. Although the farm bureau severed its direct connection with the federal government in the early forties it remained by far the most influential farm lobbying organization. The Loup country lacked any grange organizations while the Farmer's Union groups concerned themselves primarily with the operation of local co-operative enterprises. Thus by default the farm bureau enjoyed a virtual monopoly of membership among the region's farmers until the late fifties. The only exception to this rule came during the thirties when the Farmers Holiday Association sought unsuccessfully to challenge the bureau's position.

But as farm discontent increased during the fifties competing agricultural spokesmen began to appear. The most significant among these was the National Farmers' Organization. The NFO made its debut in the region at a farmers' meeting held in Greeley County in the spring of 1956. During the next two weeks further meetings led to the election of officers and the establishment of a formal county organization. Several months later farmers met at Ord to form a Valley County NFO branch while farm operators in Custer County organized the following year. The NFO initially

set dues for farm members at $1.00 per year, later increasing the figure to $3.50 annually. After this initial burst of activity the local organizations lapsed into a relatively dormant state until another major membership drive got under way in 1962.[23]

At the beginning of this period the major interest of NFO officials lay in the influencing of federal farm policy. They proposed a new farm program with price supports set at 100 percent of parity for farmers undertaking a minimal acreage reduction. In addition they favored the establishment of price supports for livestock as well as for grain. At a local appearance in February, 1958, President Oren Lee Staley unveiled a new program proposal involving a national checkoff system for commodities which would allow farmers to dispose of their own surpluses and administer their own prices with allotments based on production rather than acreage. In advocating this policy the NFO demonstrated an appreciation of the diminishing relevance of acreage control to production control. It also parted company with previous proponents of agricultural programs in de-emphasizing federal supervision in favor of a program operated by the farmers themselves.[24]

This emphasis on a reduced federal role in agriculture soon developed further. Basically the NFO altered its self-conception from that of a lobbyist to that of a collective bargaining agent for its members. Farm operators would band together and negotiate collectively with buyers in order to secure higher prices for their products. The ultimate weapon for enforcing their demands lay in the farm strike or withholding action designed to prevent farm produce from reaching commodity buyers until terms had been settled and contracts signed. In exchange for these services NFO members agreed to pay one percent of the gross value of sales under NFO contracts to the organization to cover the cost of weighing and grading. Members of the increasingly militant group pledged to sell all their commodities through the NFO, penalizing themselves for noncontract sales made after contracts had been signed. In addition the organization raised membership dues to twenty-five dollars annually, partly to help finance the new system, partly to discourage the faint-hearted from seeking membership.[25]

While the national NFO undertook a short-lived withholding action on hogs in the fall of 1959, the first serious effort in this direction came in September, 1962, following a major membership drive and publicity campaign. Soon NFO spokesmen reported reductions of one-half or more in livestock sales receipts in the region. Other members charged that the farm bureau had advised its

members to ship in livestock in order to confound its rival. At this time the NFO reported a membership of about one hundred in Valley County, many of whom manned checkpoints during the strike. Unfortunately the NFO lacked the strength necessary to achieve success and found itself forced to call a recess in the withholding action a month after it had begun. Following the initial slump in receipts livestock prices had climbed perceptibly but after several weeks they fell back to normal levels and the effort collapsed.[26]

Two years later the Valley County NFO reached an agreement with the Ord creamery whereby the NFO would serve as its procurement agent. However, the agreement never went into effect since its operation was conditional upon the success of the general organizing drive that the NFO was sponsoring throughout the Midwest at that time. Another livestock withholding action in 1966 proved unsuccessful and only generated additional bitterness between NFO and farm bureau members. A similar pattern characterized later withholding attempts as the NFO failed to attract enough large producers into its ranks to successfully influence marketing receipts at the major terminals. As this failure became increasingly evident the NFO organizations took a growing interest in the operation of the day-to-day marketing progress. Thus, for example, they established a hog collection point near Sargent which shipped members' hogs to packers in Nebraska and Iowa.[27]

The gulf between the NFO and the farm bureau mirrored a real division of sentiment among farmers both locally and nationally. Within the Loup country NFO members tended to lean toward the Democratic party while the farm bureau had a substantially Republican membership. The NFO drew largely upon the general and dairy farmers—smaller operators who feared for the future of their family farms. The farm bureau attracted larger farmers, particularly the livestock specialists. These farmers operated expanding units and sought chiefly to maximize their productivity and profits, looking to the federal agricultural programs to resolve the problems of overproduction. This does not mean that NFO members lacked interest in raising productivity or that farm bureau members did not worry about the future of the family farm enterprise. But in terms of their major emphases the two organizations did represent, in essence, the two major types of farm operator in the region.

Smaller farmers as typified by the NFO membership especially feared two major developments which they believed could spell

the end of the family farm. First they opposed federal farm policy which they felt subsidized the larger producers while forcing smaller operators out of business. These fears reached a climax with the publication of the report of the President's Committee on Economic Redevelopment in 1962. This report recommended the elimination of two million marginal farm units and the relocation of their operators elsewhere. The appearance of this document touched off a violent outburst among small farmers who received support from village merchants fearful of losing still more of their farm customers. An intense distrust of federal policymakers has continued to linger among small farmers down to the present.[28]

Increasing corporate farming activity also generated considerable apprehension about the future of family farming. NFO members reminded themselves and others of the collapse of the poultry-growing business following the entry of large firms into the field in the fifties and early sixties. When some chain stores and feed manufacturers began entering the livestock-finishing business during the sixties, they excited fears that a similar fate might await small hog and cattle producers. The fact that some corporations entered agriculture for the purpose of gaining tax write-offs rather than for the sake of making profits created further tension since firms of this type would be willing to see prices fall to the point where small operators faced ruin.

In essence, then, the NFO came to speak for the more traditional farmer—the individual who looked to farming not only as a means of earning a livelihood but even more as a way of life. For these persons farming meant primarily a family enterprise handed down from one generation to the next. Ironically enough, in joining the NFO these traditionalists adopted a modern concept in the form of collective bargaining. This fact damned them as radicals in the minds of farm bureau members. The latter individuals continued to follow the traditional lobbying practices in an effort to obtain favorable federal farm policies. But while the farm bureau used more conservative methods and took more conservative political stance, it represented the real forces of change in farming. By looking primarily toward cash profits and increased productivity its members clearly embodied the modern business ideal rather than rural traditionalism although the latter might linger in rhetorical form. Thus the long-standing division between the business-oriented farmer and the tradition-oriented farm operator persisted on into the latter part of the twentieth century.[29]

6. A Revolution in Farm Technology

PRIOR TO WORLD WAR II the level of agricultural productivity in the Loup country rose relatively little. Once a stable general and livestock farming economy had developed following the initial frontier period further changes rarely involved more than minor shifts in emphasis. Depending upon current prices, climatic prospects, and animal disease conditions a farmer might decide in a particular year to raise more small grain and less corn or more cattle and fewer hogs. The next year he might well revert to his previous pattern of production. Although new strains of seed grain appeared the declining level of soil fertility largely offset the potential increase in yields. Improvement in the quality of livestock likewise came very slowly as the glacial rate of progress in the dairying business amply illustrated.

A significant increase in agricultural productivity could not occur until two major preconditions had been fulfilled. First the level of agricultural technology must advance to the point where a significant enhancement of efficiency became possible. Prior to 1930 the major hindrance to the adoption of agricultural innovations lay in their apparently marginal value. For the most part the gain achieved from their use did not appear sufficient to justify the expense of adoption. The major exception to this principle came in the development of improved strains of small grain which produced notably higher yields. But progress in the area of mechanization remained limited. Before the advent of the farm tractor the ultimate dependence upon animal muscle strength as the basic power source fixed a low ceiling on potential field crop productivity. Even after the appearance of the gasoline-powered tractor the slow rate of progress in adapting field implements to its use restricted its practical utility. As the implement manufacturers began to resolve this problem the onset of the drouth and depression of the thirties submerged any question of mechanization in the more basic struggle for survival. When farm profits began to accumulate once more during wartime, industrial restrictions precluded any significant acquisition of machinery. Only after World War II did a conjunction of farm profits, rapid technological breakthroughs, and the

mass availability of machinery pave the way for a major increase in agricultural efficiency.

But the mere existence of more highly developed machinery and farming techniques did not of itself ensure their adoption by the individual farm operator. The farmer himself must feel a need or desire to utilize the available innovation in his own operation. Here lay a major problem, for the purchase of new equipment involved capital expenditures on a much larger scale than had previously been the case. This particularly applied in later years when the acquisition of new machinery became linked with the purchase of additional land. The primary source of difficulty rested in the fact that a basic dualism had always marked the outlook of the farmer. On the one hand he obviously wished to make larger profits. At the same time, however, he also desired a certain degree of security which usually took the form of holding a clear title to his farm and remaining out of debt. This inclination invariably militated against undertaking any new capital ventures.

The balance between the profit-risk or expansionist orientation and the security orientation altered from time to time during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries although both always remained present to some degree. During the frontier period of the 1880s the rapid appreciation in real estate values gave added impetus to the profit motive and led to a rapid turnover of farm ownership. But the emergence of a stable agricultural economy with a stagnant level of productivity reduced the prospects for individual expansion. This factor together with the drouth and depression of the 1890's gave the security orientation added force. In the following two decades a high degree of prosperity again offered some encouragement to those who sought greater profits even if it necessitated taking additional risks. These individuals sought to emulate the up-to-date urban businessman, abreast of all the latest techniques for maximizing earnings. They adopted new varieties of seed along with improved breeds of livestock and bought new machinery in their quest for greater efficiency and profit. This approach influenced only a minority of farmers, however, and the economic disasters of the thirties threatened to obliterate it entirely.

Following the revival of farm prosperity at the time of World War II and particularly when the expected postwar depression failed to materialize, the profit-risk orientation once more gained ascendency. The availability of vacant farmland due to the heavy outmigration of the previous decade and a half and the new break-

throughs in machine technology made farm expansion with significantly higher productivity levels a genuine possibility. Over the next three decades the expansionist orientation achieved dominance although a large minority of farmers remained firm in their primary commitment to security of title. The latter group continued to carry on general farming operations and in some instances expanded their holdings slightly, but they soon came to be overshadowed in the aggregate farm statistics for the region by the expansionists. As noted in the previous chapter, the two groups ultimately came to find organized spokesmen for their general points of view in the NFO and farm bureau, respectively.

Because of these factors the level of farm technology in the Loup country remained low even as late as 1940. At that date slightly more than one out of five farms in the region had electricity, but this power generally came from domestic electric plants and served only limited household functions. Somewhat greater progress had occurred in the realm of field crop production. By 1940 more than two-fifths of Valley County farmers owned tractors although many of these were of ancient vintage. While the adoption of the tractor represented a step toward increased efficiency in crop production most tractor farmers lacked the field implements needed to realize its full potential. Thus in 1940 farmers carried out most of the field work in the region using equipment designed to be drawn by horses. Although the proportion of tractor farmers had passed three-fifths by the end of 1941 the shortage of new machinery during the war precluded further progress in mechanization until after mid-decade.[1]

Consequently the first major advance toward a new, more productive agriculture came with the development of irrigation during the late thirties. Farmers in the North Loup and Middle Loup irrigation districts began receiving water in their fields in the summer of 1938. The following year almost two hundred Valley County farm operators irrigated at least part of their cropland compared with only two a decade earlier. Nine-tenths of these farm operators received water from the diversion projects while the remainder pumped directly from rivers or creeks or from their own wells. Following this initial phase of expansion the irrigated acreage remained fairly stable for nearly a decade. A dry season in 1943 spurred an increase in the watered acreage the next year, but the return of rainfall in 1944 caused a decline of interest that persisted through the remainder of the forties and early fifties as the figures in table 8 demonstrate.

TABLE 8
IRRIGATED ACREAGE IN VALLEY COUNTY
1941–1970

Year	Acres Irrigated	Year	Acres Irrigated
1941	14,780	1956	27,615
1942	15,150	1957	31,000
1943	15,890	1958	32,200
1944	20,250	1959	32,800
1945	18,065	1960	32,500
1946	18,347	1961	33,000
1947	18,175	1962	33,400
1948	16,884	1963	34,000
1949	17,205	1964	34,700
1950	17,351	1965	36,700
1951	17,656	1966	38,500
1952	18,900	1967	39,500
1953	20,000	1968	41,200
1954	21,300	1969	43,500
1955	24,980	1970	47,600

SOURCE: *Nebraska Agricultural Statistics.*

Recurring drouth in the mid-fifties produced another outbreak of irrigation fever. During the two worst years—1955 and 1956—dryland corn yields in Valley County averaged four and six bushels per acre, respectively. In the same two years irrigated corn averaged fifty-two and sixty-eight bushels per acre. Evidence of this sort persuaded most farmers of the desirability of irrigation and the watered acreage rose by more than half in the space of four years. After a half-dozen years of stability another surge of expansion occurred in the latter part of the sixties. At the same time that the irrigated acreage expanded the total cropland acreage in the region declined as farmers shifted marginal land into permanent pasture. Consequently the proportion of total cropland artifically watered rose from about one-tenth in 1942 to one-eighth in 1950, one-fifth in 1960, and about three-eighths in 1969. The latter figure included most of the readily irrigable terrain in the area and as of that date more than two-fifths of all Valley County farmers irrigated at least part of their land.[2]

Although these figures clearly illustrate the over-all rise in irrigation activity they conceal a basic change in the source of irrigation water and in the means used to deliver it to the fields. In 1940

90 percent of the farmers received their water from the two major diversion projects. After the war, however, some farm operators began sinking their own irrigation wells. The number of registered wells in Valley County reached 85 in 1956, rising to 137 four years later. By 1965 irrigators had drilled 150 wells, a figure which rose to 264 by 1971. Most of the farms with wells lay in the uplands where their owners could water their fields with sprinklers or gated pipe but not with diversion ditches. But wells also appeared in some parts of the river valleys which did not yet have their own diversion canals. Other farmers along the rivers pumped water directly from those streams or from creeks flowing into them, but these constituted a distinct minority in the region.[3]

Both of the diversion districts in the Loup country encountered numerous financial and operational difficulties from the start but the Middle Loup district proved more successful in resolving them. The district operated for the first ten years under the auspices of the RFC which held its bonds. In February, 1949, the latter agency accepted an offer of $100,000 from the district directors as full settlement of the remaining indebtedness which at that time totaled $728,000. The directors then established a surcharge of $1.00 per acre on current water rates in order to pay off the debt. They made the eleventh and final payment in February, 1960, at which time the district became free of all long-term obligations. At that time water rates averaged $4.50 per acre including the surcharge which the directors voted to keep for the purpose of accumulating reserve funds. These rates proved relatively inexpensive, averaging only $2.00 per acre above the original 1938 figure. By 1960 the district included a total of ninety-four miles of canals and over a hundred miles of laterals along both sides of the Middle Loup River south of Sargent.[4]

Another burst of activity on the Middle Loup came in the mid-fifties as construction began on a second diversion network just north and west of the Middle Loup district. Congress appropriated a million dollars to finance the project in 1954 and construction began shortly thereafter. The new development did not enjoy unanimous local support, however. Early in 1952 farmers south of the river filed a petition opposing the project. This was the area in which irrigation boosters had built a canal in the eighteen-nineties, resulting in astronomical property tax levies. Farmers feared a repetition of this episode should diversion canals invade their area. Largely in response to this opposition the government postponed indefinitely the construction of a canal south of the

river. Work on the remainder of the system went ahead as scheduled and construction reached completion in 1957. The new Sargent district included about 17,500 acres of irrigable land between Milburn to the northwest and Comstock to the southeast. Most of the project centered north of the river where the Sargent canal watered about 14,000 acres.[5]

The North Loup Irrigation District encountered far greater difficulty in resolving its financial problems than did its counterpart to the west. The district ceased making payments on its RFC loan of more than $1 million early in 1942. In the spring of 1950 the RFC filed suit asking that the court order the district to charge rates high enough to ensure the eventual liquidation of its indebtedness. The district board of directors responded with an offer of $125,000 to settle all obligations. These totaled more than $1.2 million at the time. The RFC refused the offer and the district passed into the hands of a receiver in January, 1953. By the spring of that year the number of farmers using water supplied by the district had fallen considerably, forcing the rates paid by the remaining users up to $9.65 per acre, more than double the figure for the Middle Loup district. Fortunately for the North Loup district the severe drouth of 1955–1956 brought farmers back in large numbers, thus easing the financial pinch and allowing a reduction in water rates. Fifteen years later the RFC accepted an offer of $270,000 to settle the district's obligations which by that time had grown to about $2,150,000. Farmers in the district paid an assessment of $15 per irrigated acre and the debt was liquidated in the summer of 1972.[6]

Midway through the fifties a new crisis loomed which greatly overshadowed the immediate financial problems of the two irrigation districts then in operation. In May, 1955, the Loup River Public Power District, a power generating firm situated at Columbus, requested all upstream irrigators to confine themselves to their legally authorized water quotas. The power company had obtained its water rights in 1932, prior to virtually all irrigators. Under prevailing state law irrigators took precedence over power companies in the diversion of water provided they paid the latter for water used in excess of their authorized quotas. The North Loup district could legally divert twenty-two thousand acre feet annually from the North Loup River. However, district officials interpreted this to mean that they could take the amount needed to deliver twenty-two thousand acre feet to the fields. Owing to the loss incurred in tran-

sit the actual amount diverted came to nearly sixty thousand acre feet.

As compensation for this excess diversion the power company demanded that all upriver irrigators including pump irrigators who obtained their water from creeks and rivers pay $1.25 per acre foot diverted beyond their quotas. Both the irrigation districts and individual pump operators termed this figure exorbitant. When the State Bureau of Irrigation ordered all farmers to stop pumping from the North Loup River beginning in June local irrigators vowed to fight to the bitter end, warning that they would carry shotguns to their fields in order to prevent anyone from shutting them down. Then in the middle of June certain pump irrigators offered to settle with the power company at $0.25 per acre foot for excess diversions.[7]

At this juncture the Loup River Public Power District agreed to delay enforcement of its June sixth cutoff deadline pending a ruling by the State Bureau of Irrigation. Organized opposition to the power company weakened when farmers in the Cedar and South Loup River valleys agreed to pay one dollar per excess acre foot diverted into an escrow account which would go to the power company should the courts rule in its favor. In the meantime farmers in those regions would continue watering their crops as usual. By the end of July about one-fifth of the North Loup River valley pump operators had agreed to participate in the escrow scheme and resistance began to crumble. Farmers who met in Scotia late in July agreed to sign similar contracts but stipulated that they would consider them binding only for the current year.

Both irrigation districts became involved in protracted litigation before they finally reached an accommodation with the power company. After losing a court case over diversion allotments the North Loup district agreed to pay the power company five thousand dollars in compensation for diversion beyond the authorized quota through September of that year, plus one dollar per acre foot diverted after that date. The district again drew off an excessive amount of water and on September seventh the state courts ordered it to close down its canals immediately. Litigation over the matter continued for several years amidst numerous charges of bad faith, but after 1955 the crisis subsided and the issue became a source of irritation rather than of critical concern on the part of local irrigators.[8]

Some time prior to the water rights dispute irrigation enthusiasts developed plans for further expansion in the form of the Twin

Valleys irrigation project. In 1943 organizers of the scheme requested the Bureau of Reclamation to carry out the necessary survey. Most of the land involved lay to the south of the Loup country but large areas of Valley County were also included. By 1953 the plans called for the construction of a large dam north of Burwell in Garfield County with major reservoirs at Turtle Creek and Davis Creek in Valley County. Following this initial flurry of interest during the dry year of 1943 apathy returned and for the next decade the proposal remained dormant. Then, in 1954 the Twin Loups Reclamation District took shape. In August of that year farmers residing within the proposed district voted by a margin of 835 to 307 in favor of establishing a mill levy to finance preliminary work on the project. Opposition quickly developed among the farmers of Geranium and Michigan township who objected to the proposed Turtle Creek reservoir. Given the hilly topography of the area the reservoir would inundate most of the land suited to crop production. In 1955 these opponents formed the Turtle Creek Protective Association to carry on the fight. In their subsequent campaign they stressed the impending loss of good farm land, the necessity for rerouting county roads should a reservoir be constructed, and the existing abundance of irrigation wells in the area. In the face of this opposition project designers scrapped the proposed Turtle Creek reservoir in favor of one situated in the sand hills north of Burwell which would inundate less farm land and allow for the irrigation of a larger acreage.[9]

At this point boosters of the project began a protracted series of negotiations with the federal government for approval and funding of the proposed scheme. In October, 1960, the Bureau of Reclamation filed a favorable report and proposed to water fifty-two thousand acres along the North Loup and Loup rivers south of Burwell. The bureau estimated the cost of the project at slightly over $44 million. Ten years later as negotiations continued the price tag reached more than $68 million. However, with the continued expansion of well and pump irrigation in the fifties and sixties farmers themselves divided more sharply than ever over the desirability of a new project. Those who had invested heavily in sinking a well, acquiring a pump and engine, and purchasing expensive pipelines viewed the project as a political boondoggle. Thus opposition surfaced during the congressional subcommittee hearings on the proposed project held in July, 1970. Certainly it appeared questionable by that date whether the proposed scheme

would improve the economic position of many of the region's farmers.[10]

The relative desirability of well and diversion irrigation became the subject of extended debate as both types became firmly entrenched in the Loup country. For the individual farm operator well irrigation offered several advantages over ditch irrigation from diversion canals. First, it proved much more flexible. The well irrigator could increase, decrease, or shut off the flow of water as conditions warranted. He could get his water when he wanted. In contrast the diversion irrigator had to wait his turn, even if a heat wave threatened to burn up his crop. He also suffered from the disputes over water rights and sometimes experienced losses due to breaks in canals or laterals between the water source and his fields. On the other hand well irrigation required a substantial direct capital investment on the part of the owner who paid not only the costs of installing his system but also personal property taxes on his expensive equipment.

Well irrigation costs varied widely from one farm to another depending on such factors as the scope of operations and topographical conditions. Farmers with a limited acreage of level cropland might put down a well, install a pump, and then use ditches and siphons to carry the water to their fields. Such a system cost from three to five thousand dollars in the fifties, depending on the depth of the well, size of the pump, and the like. Costs rose sharply in the case of uneven terrain which required either land leveling or the use of pipe. Most well irrigators cropped land of this nature and had to buy a large stock of irrigation pipe in order to deliver water to their fields. On sloping land with no surface irregularities farmers could use gated pipe which poured water down corn rows. On more uneven surfaces or in hay fields they used various types of sprinkler pipe. During the sixties large sprinkler devices which could water an area several hundred feet in radius came into use along with mobile sprinkler lines. For the farmer who had to buy pipe this meant an additional expense of from one to three dollars per foot in the fifties and considerably more in the sixties. On an average-sized farm this could raise the total cost of an irrigation system to ten or fifteen thousand dollars or more—one hundred dollars or more per irrigated acre.

A major bone of contention betwen well and diversion irrigators concerned the relative expense of the two types of operations. Engineers from the Bureau of Reclamation argued that diversion cost less and produced more economic benefits than did well irrigation.

They based their argument upon the fact that land with water rights in the irrigation districts had a higher value than did land watered from wells. They also estimated per acre irrigation costs for well irrigators at two and a half times the figure for ditch irrigation. In this particular instance both arguments appeared rather dubious. The actual per acre water rate for diversion irrigators at the time was double that of the rate calculated by the bureau spokesmen. In addition, much if not most of the difference in valuation between diversion watered land and well irrigated land clearly rested in the fact that the latter included hilly areas with greater erosion damage and a lower proportion of tillable soil. The diversion watered land lay in the flat, highly arable river valleys and thus had an intrinsically higher value.

Another issue in the irrigation controversy concerned water conservation. In regions to the south of the Loup country intensive well irrigation had led to a substantial drop in the water table. Local farmers worried about the possibility of a similar development which might render their shallower wells useless. To some degree the proximity of the region to the sand hills alleviated this problem since that area absorbs nearly all of the moisture that falls there, thus providing an exceptionally large supply of ground water. But late in the sixties the water table began to fall in southern Valley County where farmers practiced well irrigation most intensively. Proponents of diversion argued that such a process was inevitable and that farmers would do better to trap rain and use it where it fell. Well irrigators responded with predictions that diversion reservoirs would rapidly silt in due to the high sediment content of the area streams. The controversy remains unresolved although the proposed Twin Loups project continues to inch closer to federal approval.[11]

While these disputes raged the amount of irrigated cropland continued to rise. The growing significance of irrigation appeared both in the proportion of farms artifically watered and in the share of total crop production grown on irrigated land as shown in table 9. During most of the period after 1939 about 80 percent of the watered acreage consisted of corn, sorghum, or alfalfa. Acreage yields alone do not tell the whole story since irrigated crop yields averaged far higher than dryland yields. Ordinarily irrigated corn yielded two or three times as much as did the dryland variety. In particularly dry years the ratio was much higher reaching fifteen to one in 1955–1956. By 1970 the irrigated areas accounted for about 90 percent of corn production for grain. The expansion in

TABLE 9
IRRIGATED FARMS AND CROPLAND
IRRIGATED CROP PRODUCTION
VALLEY COUNTY, 1939–1970

Year	Number of Irrigated Farms	Percentage of All Farms	Percentage of Cropland Harvested Under Irrigation
1939	198	16.9	8.1
1944	230	20.9	9.0
1949	236	22.4	11.6
1954	260	25.0	12.8
1959	300	35.2	21.6
1964	289	38.3	28.3
1969	280	43.5	38.1

Production, Corn for Grain

Year	Percentage of Acres Irrigated	Irrigated Yield/Acre (bu.)	Dryland Yield (bu.)	Percentage of Total Production, Irrigated
1950	18.2	62	25	34.7
1955	23.8	52	4	85.6
1960	38.0	81	25	62.4
1965	57.4	95	38	77.1
1970	70.2	100	27	89.6

Production, Alfalfa

Year	Percentage of Acres Irrigated	Irrigated Yield (tons)	Dryland Yield (tons)	Percentage of Total Production, Irrigated
1950	9.5	2.6	1.7	14.0
1955	11.6	2.9	0.8	32.2
1960	8.1	2.7	1.5	19.3
1965	11.0	4.3	1.6	22.2
1970	24.7	3.5	1.7	40.3

SOURCE: *1940, 1945, 1950, 1954, 1959, 1964, 1969 Census of Agriculture; Nebraska Agricultural Statistics.*

watered alfalfa acreage came more slowly and the irrigated acreage produced only two-fifths of Valley County's crop in 1970.[12]

II

The development of irrigation broke a major bottleneck which had hindered the adoption of a number of agricultural innovations. With a stable water supply now assured farmers could utilize practices which they could not economically justify during the drouth of the thirties. The adoption of hybrid corn in the region offers the best illustration of this principle. Late in the thirties county agents in the area experimented with hybrid seed but the drouth devastated hybrid and local seed corn alike, discouraging the adoption of the former. However, experiments on irrigated land showed that hybrid strains outyielded the best home-grown varieties by 30 or 40 percent. As the war boom lifted prices irrigating farmers quickly adopted the new strains and raised their yields accordingly. In Valley County the proportion of corn acreage seeded to hybrid varieties rose from 4 percent in 1939 to 17 percent in 1941, most of the latter acreage involving irrigated land. When the rains returned dryland farmers quickly adopted the new seed whose superiority had been so clearly demonstrated. By 1945 four-fifths of the regional corn crop came from hybrid seed and by the end of the decade the proportion topped nine-tenths.[13]

But the acceptance of hybrid corn provided only the first of several illustrations of how irrigation encouraged the adoption of new practices. As the irrigating farmers grew more hybrid corn, for example, they discovered that their increased yields depleted the soil more rapidly than formerly. Consequently they began employing commercial fertilizer to bolster their sagging yields. In the earlier years irrigation constituted a virtual prerequisite for the use of fertilizer because the nitrogen in commercial fertilizer usually caused burning in dryland corn unless rainfall proved abundant. Again the irrigator led the rest of the farmers in adopting the new practice.

Purchases of commercial fertilizer increased rapidly as the acreage under irrigation rose. In 1939 only two Valley County farmers utilized commercial fertilizer but by 1954 more than one-third of the farmers in the county were spending an average of four hundred dollars for that purpose. In that year they applied fertilizer, chiefly nitrates, to about twenty thousand acres of crop-

land. Four-fifths of this acreage consisted of cornland while about one-eighth involved wheat. Altogether about one-fifth of the cereal crop acreage planted that year received some type of commercial fertilizer application. By 1959 the fertilized acreage exceeded thirty-two thousand and the figure doubled during the following decade. By 1970 regular irrigators added nitrates to their corn fields every two years while the average farmer in the region spent nearly nine hundred dollars annually on commercial fertilizer.[14]

In taking up the use of commercial fertilizer farmers in the Loup country demonstrated a growing awareness of the problem of soil exhaustion. Local agriculturalists had noted the effects of erosion and declining fertility even before World War I, but most of them lacked the resources, experience, and inclination necessary to undertake conservation practices on their own. This was true of most farmers in the country at large as well, and the federal government recognized the fact by the enactment of the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act of 1936. Although intended primarily to control farm production the measure did provide cash incentives for the adoption of certain conservation practices. By the late thirties about seven-eighths of all farmers in the region participated in this program. During the war much of the land diverted out of soil-depleting crops into soil-conserving grasses and legumes went back into cereal grain production. At this time the federal government shifted its emphasis to other aspects of soil management.[15]

Among the soil-conserving practices now emphasized, the construction of small earth dams on hillsides held high priority. These dams trapped runoff during rainstorms, thus curbing erosion while providing stock ponds for watering cattle. Given the hilly nature of much of the local terrain and the rising number of cattle in the region's pastures, this practice proved highly popular, and in the fall of 1940 alone Valley County farmers constructed more than four hundred small dams. Contour plowing which had passed through the experimental stage during the late thirties gained in popularity since it improved moisture retention and increased crop yields. In 1940 a Mira Valley farmer became the first in the area to terrace his fields as a further means of controlling soil erosion. Under the federal conservation programs operating at this time farmers received payments of from fifteen to one hundred dollars for putting these practices into effect. Because of the self-evident benefits of these measures and the possibility of obtaining cash

payments for carrying them out, a high proportion of farmers continued to participate in the program throughout the war.

Soil-conserving practices became even more popular following the organization of conservation districts in the region in 1942. A farmer in one of the new districts could qualify for assistance in developing a conservation plan for his farm, and in the three years following the formation of these districts a third of local farmers applied for such help. Conservation activity after the war followed along the same lines laid out during the war. Payments to Valley County farmers under the ACP and other programs during the two and a half decades following the war generally ranged from fifty to one hundred thousand dollars annually. The major contribution of the federal conservation programs probably lay in their encouraging farmers to take measures which they would not otherwise have done. Many, if not most, farmers probably would not have thought it worthwhile to adopt such practices had not the federal government resorted to this species of judicious bribery. Even so, the program came too late to undo the damage caused by generations of poor farming practices. More than half the topsoil in the region washed away before anyone sought to stem the destruction. And even after the more progressive operators had put soil conserving practices into effect many others continued year after year to overstock their pastures, to crop their hillsides, and to ignore the erosion processes taking place before their eyes.[16]

III

As the size of the individual farm enterprise grew and as the farmer increased his inputs of seed, fertilizer, and chemicals as well as irrigating his fields in many cases, he found it essential to increase labor productivity if he hoped to make any profit. The Loup country remained a bastion of family farming operations, and after World War II the proportion of farms using regular hired labor never exceeded about 12 percent. On the great majority of farms the members of the operator's family provided the entire labor force. Thus as the farm size expanded the ratio of available labor to the land diminished. Nonetheless, during the same period commodity production on Loup country farms actually increased. The major factor responsible for this rise in labor productivity lay in the adoption of farm machinery which gained new impetus in the late forties.

The first step on the road to mechanization came with the change in power sources used by the farmer. Until he acquired a tractor he remained dependent upon the muscle power of his draft animals, a fact which severely restricted his prospects for increasing efficiency. But once he had acquired a farm tractor with its high speed and great power the potential for a variety of changes appeared. Consequently the distribution of tractors offers the most convenient index of the advance of agricultural mechanization. Over-all, the proportion of Loup country farmers with tractors rose from slightly over two-fifths in 1940 to three-fifths in 1945 and more than four-fifths in 1950. The latter figure included virtually all commercial operations in the region. But the initial acquisition of a tractor marked only the first step toward tractor farming. This was soon followed by the purchase of additional tractors for more specialized use. This trend really developed only after the war. Then the average number of tractors per farm quickly rose to 1.4 in 1950, 2.2 in 1959, and 2.8 in 1969. Now the farmer used light tractors for haying, hauling wagons, or light field work such as rotary hoeing. He bought larger tractors for use in plowing, discing, or harvesting. The multiplicity of tractors also attested to the increased value placed on time as the farmer found it too wasteful to change attachments on a tractor several times a day in order to use it for different purposes.[17]

Tractor adoption represented only the first step in farm mechanization. Mechanical improvements generally involved one of two types of change. The first concerned an increase in scale. The two-bottom plow gave way to the four-bottom model or the four-row cultivator succeeded the two-row type. But new equipment might also combine previously distinct field process as in the case of grain combines or field hay choppers. After the war some farmers bought grain combines, although because of the limited amount of small grain grown in the region their number was not great. However, most farm operators did buy mechanical corn pickers which represented a major advance in both time and labor savings. The proportion of farms with corn pickers rose to two-fifths in 1950 and five-sevenths in 1964. After the latter year the figure began declining for several reasons. Many farmers had reduced their acreage in corn to the point where owning a corn picker could not be financially justified. In addition, machinery prices climbed so rapidly in the sixties that many farmers who did raise corn could no longer afford such a purchase. Consequently they came to rely more heavily upon custom harvesting. The same trends marked

other machinery acquistion as well, and between 1964 and 1969 the average annual expenditure per farm for custom work rose from a little over two hundred dollars to nearly five hundred dollars. To an increasing degree the farmer who did invest in expensive new machinery found himself hiring it out to his neighbors in order to help pay for it.[18]

As a consequence of the adoption of irrigation, chemical fertilizer, improved soil conservation practices, and new farm machinery, the volume of farm commodities grown in the region rose even as the acreage devoted to cropland fell by nearly half. Increased yields more than offset the decline in acres planted. Wheat yields rose from an average of 18.8 bushels per acre in 1945–1948 to 27.0 bushels per acre in 1965–1968. More spectacularly, corn yields improved from 27.0 bushels per acre to 71.4 bushels per acre during the same period. Despite this sharp rise in productivity the Loup country grew increasingly dependent upon grain imported from outside the region owing to the large increase in cattle-finishing activity. But the greater efficiency of local agriculture did serve to substantially reduce the size of this grain deficit.[19]

The mechanization process did not confine itself to the sphere of crop production by any means. Shortly after the war farmers began purchasing trucks in large numbers in order to eliminate the need for hiring vehicles to move crops, animals, or other items to or from the villages. The proportion of farms with trucks rose from one-sixth in 1940 to half in 1954 and four-fifths in 1969. As in the case of tractors, the number of trucks per farm rose significantly as many farm operators acquired a light pickup truck as well as a larger model for hauling loads of feed or livestock. Among the farms with trucks the average number per owner rose from 1.04 in 1945 to 1.11 in 1954 and 1.47 in 1969. Self-unloading feed wagons replaced the old fashioned wagon and shovel for livestock in the fifties and late in the sixties a few farmers installed automated feeding plants. Mechanization thus affected a variety of farm operations besides field crop production. But not all new farm equipment depended upon the internal combustion engine as a power source, for the postwar years also witnessed the diffusion of electrification across the countryside.[20]

Although the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) began its career in 1934 electricity did not become generally available to farmers in the Loup country until fifteen years later. Some of the more prosperous farm operators had installed electric generators as early as World War I. These generators produced a limited

amount of current used primarily for lighting the house, but in a few cases farmers also used them to power milking machines or motors used for farm work. By 1930 about one out of fourteen farmers in the area used such motors in one capacity or another. During the next decade electrification ranked well down the list of priorities among those struggling for economic survival. In 1940 less than one out of four farms had electric lighting and less than a third of these received their power from electrical lines; the rest depended upon home generators for their current.[21]

Wartime shortages of electrical wire and equipment further delayed the extension of rural electrification in the Loup country. But as agriculture revived, the demand for electrical service grew, and farmers organized the Loup Valleys Rural Public Power District. They received support for their endeavor from village merchants who foresaw the development of a large market for electrical appliances as well as a short-term boom during the construction and installation of the power transmission lines. The new public power district formally incorporated in November, 1945, elected its officers, and began filing applications for loans from the national REA.

Despite the initial optimism four years elapsed before electric power from the district reached the farm. The immediate postwar period saw a continued shortage of the materials needed for the construction of power lines. It also required time to process the applications for federal loans. The district ultimately constructed 902 miles of lines to serve 1,610 customers—three times the number originally proposed. The first pole went into place in October, 1948, and service to farms began in January of the following year. More than half the farms initially received their power from the Ord municipal power plant while the remainder obtained their current from the Consumers Public Power District of Columbus. Ultimately in 1957 the district contracted with the Nebraska Public Power System to obtain its entire supply of electrical current through high-power transmission lines.[22]

As a result of these developments the proportion of Valley County farms receiving electric power rose from about one-fourth in 1945 to three-fourths in 1949 and nineteen-twentieths in 1954. The advent of electricity brought a revolution to the farmhouse as farmers' wives bought larger electrical appliances such as washers, refrigerators, and stoves. This process contributed greatly toward diminishing the difference between farm and village living standards. Now the farmer could enjoy the same comforts at home as

the townsman had possessed since the twenties. More importantly from the point of view of the agricultural economy, electrification placed a cheap, reliable power source at the disposal of the farmer who could now mechanize many of his farmyard operations.

One of the first outdoor uses for electricity involved the operation of pumps to provide water for use in houses and for livestock. Here it replaced the less reliable windmill with a constant supply of energy. Electrical current powered some of the irrigation pumps in the region and also displaced a considerable amount of hand labor, allowing the substitution of augers and elevators for the shovel. In the late fifties and sixties many farmers installed electric arc welders to perform tasks formerly relegated to the village blacksmith. Thus, while by no means as significant as the tractor, electrification did play an important role in mechanizing farm operations and in improving rural living standards.[23]

IV

What did all these trends mean for the individual farm enterprise? We have already examined the changes in the production pattern of crops and livestock in the region, noting the increasing specialization in beef cattle finishing and the concomitant decline in other lines of activity. We have also followed the adoption of

TABLE 10
VALLEY COUNTY FARM VALUES
1940–1969

Year	Number of Farms	Average Size (acre)	Value per Acre*	Average Value*	Average Value of Sales per Farm*
1940	1,173	298.4	$ 45.81	$13,671	$ 2,581
1945	1,101	330.9	42.24	13,983	5,605
1950	1,045	351.4	45.59	17,270	6,781
1954	1,038	353.3	54.50	20,138	6,093
1959	853	431.7	60.07	25,574	8,104
1964	754	485.2	85.44	40,628	10,721
1969	643	519.0	107.38	55,742	17,444

SOURCE: *1940, 1945, 1950, 1954, 1959, 1964, 1969 Census of Agriculture.*
* Value expressed in constant 1947–1949 dollars.

various new agricultural techniques by farmers in the Loup country. But what of farming as a business? Perhaps the most important development concerned the increasingly capital intensive nature of the farm operation. Several factors contributed to this change. Individual farm units expanded greatly in size, absorbing their erstwhile neighbors. Between 1940 and 1969 the average farm grew more than 73 percent in size. At the same time the average per acre value of land and buildings more than doubled in terms of constant dollars. As a result the average value of land and buildings per farm rose by 308 percent in constant dollars during those three decades. Table 10 reveals the pattern of increase in both farm size and farm values.

But the value of land and buildings represented only one part of the increased costs of farming. In 1940 the average investment in machinery on Valley County farms amounted to $620. Three decades later the figure had swelled to $11,806 owing to the rise in agricultural mechanization described above. The acquisition of additional tractors and other equipment for operating the larger farm units made an increase of this type inevitable. Although inflation affected these figures they still represented an increase of 682 percent in constant dollars—an impressive rise by any standard. In addition, livestock holdings, particularly those of beef cattle, rose substantially during this period. The average value of livestock per farm rose from $1,150 in 1940 to $20,709 in 1969, a gain of 589 percent in constant dollars. The total average farm investment in land, buildings, livestock, and machinery soared from a figure of $8,756 in 1940 to $106,986 three decades later. In constant dollars the increase came to a hefty 367 percent. These totals do not include the investment represented by feed and grain inventories which probably involved an additional $3,000 to $5,000 or more per farm in 1969.[24]

As the farming enterprise grew more capital intensive it also became more fully commercialized in its operations. The last lingering elements of subsistence activity faded away with the decline of home consumption of poultry and dairy products and the disappearance of home livestock butchering. The rise in cash investments in the farming business proved even more significant. For example, the growing emphasis upon beef finishing led to higher expenditures for animals and feed than in previous years. But other types of expenses also loomed large. Farmers had to pay for machinery, gas, and oil on a much larger scale than before while expenditures for irrigation, fertilizer, and other chemicals repre-

sented new types of outgo. Altogether, in 1969 the average farm in the region had expenses of slightly over nineteen thousand dollars annually. Of this figure 52 percent involved the purchase of livestock and feed while 10 percent went toward the purchase of gas and oil and of agricultural chemicals. The remainder included 5 percent for labor and about 33 percent for miscellaneous other expenses.[25]

In a sense the use of figures for an "average" farm misleads the reader by implying an unreal degree of homogeneity among individual farm units. In actuality, although the trends of the postwar era favored larger, more highly capitalized units, the smaller farms did not disappear. In practice the gap between the larger commercial farm and the smaller traditionally oriented farm actually widened. This does not mean that the larger farms were not family operated. As of 1969 only five of the 643 Valley County farms represented incorporated enterprises and none of these had more than ten shareholders. All of them represented family businesses which had incorporated in order to ease the transfer of property ownership. But while families operated virtually all of the farms in the region their operations varied widely in terms of their output. This diversity appears in the distribution of farms according to the value of agricultural products sold which appears in table 11.

TABLE 11
FARM UNITS BY VALUE OF PRODUCTS SOLD
1944 AND 1969

Value of Farm Products Sold	Percentage of Farms 1944	Value of Farm Products Sold	Percentage of Farms 1969
Less than $1,000	14.3	Less than $2,500	13.6
$ 1,000–$ 2,499	33.2	$ 2,500–$ 4,999	11.9
$ 2,500–$ 3,999	24.6	$ 5,000–$ 9,999	20.0
$ 4,000–$ 5,999	13.8	$10,000–$19,999	22.8
$ 6,000–$ 9,999	9.0	$20,000–$39,999	17.8
$10,000–$19,999	4.2	$40,000–$79,999	8.2
$20,000 and over	1.9	$80,000 and over	5.6
	100.0		99.9

SOURCE: *1945 Census of Agriculture*, Vol. I, 12, p. 159. This set of figures represents the value of farm products raised minus the value of those products fed to livestock. *1969 Census of Agriculture*, Vol. I, part 20, sec. 2, pp. 705–706.

Many of the farms which produced less than $2,500 worth of farm products in 1945 represented partial-subsistence operations. This particularly applied to those units included in the $1,000 to $2,500 category. By 1969, however, virtually all farms in this class involved anomalous situations—the presence of semiretired farm operators, part-time farmers or census farmers. The growing number of farms in the largest sales classifications stemmed from the rise of cattle-feeding operations which led to larger investments, higher operating expenses, and larger sales receipts. The intermediate groupings included most of the smaller livestock specialists and the smaller categories included cash grain farms together with the surviving general farms. In the case of the latter two groups the lower sales figure did not necessarily imply lower net family income, for those operators did not have to contend with the heavy expenses of buying livestock and feed. In some instances the general farmer might realize a net income equal to that of the larger livestock specialist. But he did not expand the scope of his enterprise nor did he accumulate capital gains as rapidly as the larger operator did. On the other hand he more frequently held his land free from mortgage than did his larger neighbors. Before further examining this phenomenon of stable family farms operating side by side with expanding commercial units, however, we must turn our attention to the patterns of farmer turnover and persistence which ultimately shaped the course of farm consolidation in the region.

7. Farmer Mobility and Farm Consolidation

When Harold Foght wrote his history of the Loup country midway through the first decade of the twentieth century, he looked back upon the previous period with some degree of complacency. The seventies had brought the trappers, scouts, and first settlers who blazed the way for future comers. Then followed the great rush of the eighties which had transformed the region from a wilderness into a productive Eden. But this happy phase had ended with the drouth of the nineties which seared the crops and struck fear in the hearts of many residents. The less strong-willed left, causing a population decline which led to stagnation in the villages. To Foght these years represented the "critical period" in the region's history. Fortunately the valiant in spirit remained, and with the return of the rains they and a new wave of immigrants enjoyed a golden era of prosperity amidst a growing number of farms, bumper crops, and good farm prices.[1]

With the passage of time the first three decades of the twentieth century came to figure in local minds as the "good old days." Farmers remained on their farms and reaped abundant crops. The villages flourished and the advent of new inventions such as electric lights, the automobile, and radio made life easier for farmer and townsman alike. These halcyon days lasted until 1930 save for a brief interruption in the early twenties. Then a new series of disasters struck. Drouth and depression drove large numbers of farmers out of the region and the villages shrank as trade dwindled. Only after irreparable damage had occurred did the war come, bringing with it rains and high prices. Another decade of prosperity set in only to lapse with the onset of another drouth in the mid-fifties and with the decline in farm prices characteristic of the Ezra Taft Benson years. Thenceforth farmers migrated out of the region in large numbers, and the regional economy continued to stagnate as population again fell.[2]

So, at any rate, goes the local tradition. In this chapter the author will attempt to evaluate the accuracy of this tradition and of the Foght legend in terms of the pattern of turnover and per-

sistence among farm operators dwelling in the region. At first glance the most obvious measures of population change appear to support these interpretations. The figures for both the total nonvillage population of the region presented in table 12 and the number of farms in Valley County given in table 13 changed only slightly during the teens and twenties in comparison with the abrupt decreases that occurred later. The moderate rise in the number of farms before 1925 coincided with a slight decline in farm population at that time due to the diminishing size of the average family. For Valley County as a whole the average size of family fell from 4.68 persons in 1900 to 3.46 persons in 1930. However, simple statistics of the above type can mislead the reader for they represent

TABLE 12
NONVILLAGE POPULATION OF THE LOUP COUNTRY
1900–1970

Year	Population	Decadal Change (%)	Year	Population	Decadal Change (%)
1900	8,337	.....	1940	7,156	-23.1
1910	9,748	16.9	1950	5,755	-19.6
1920	9,407	-3.7	1960	4,599	-20.1
1930	9,298	-1.2	1970	3,543	-23.0

SOURCE: *Census of Population*, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930, 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970.

TABLE 13
NUMBER OF FARMS, VALLEY COUNTY
1900–1970

Year	Number of Farms	Percentage of Change	Year	Number of Farms	Percentage of Change
1900	1,085	.....	1945	1,101	-6.1
1910	1,272	17.2	1950	1,045	-5.1
1920	1,295	1.8	1954	1,038	-0.7
1925	1,351	4.3	1959	853	-17.8
1930	1,300	-3.8	1964	754	-11.6
1935	1,371	5.5	1969	643	-14.7
1940	1,173	-14.5			

SOURCE: *Agriculture* Volumes, U.S. Census of 1900, 1910 ,1920, 1925, 1930, 1935, 1940, 1945, 1950, 1954, 1959, 1964, 1969.

net changes, the result of the interaction of a complex variety of elements such as migration stream flows, changing mortality patterns, and shifting birth rates. Hence they may actually conceal the nature of population changes rather than elucidating them.

The basic question under consideration here concerns whether human migration represents the collective response of a population to changes in the physical and/or socioeconomic environment or whether it represents an independent variable in human behavior. To answer this question we may examine the pattern of persistence and turnover among Loup country farmers over the course of the last eighty years. Such an examination may reveal whether the migratory behavior of farmers underwent the drastic shifts indicated by the traditional explanation of regional population decline. In undertaking this analysis the author has adopted in large part the basic procedure followed by James C. Malin in his pioneer studies of turnover among the farm population of Kansas. Since, however, the period under discussion is one for which agricultural census schedules are not available certain adaptations have been made in terms of source materials.[3]

First, in place of census schedules the author used the personal property assessment schedules preserved in the county courthouses and in the Nebraska State Historical Society in Lincoln. On these schedules appear the names of heads of households and other individuals reporting property holdings in each precinct together with descriptions of the property. From this data one may determine whether a specific individual operated a farm or whether he merely resided in the precinct. On the basis of this information the author compiled lists of farm operators a five- and ten-year intervals for each of six precincts in the region—Arcadia, Enterprise, Geranium, Independent, and Springdale in Valley County and Fish Creek in Greeley County.

In the six decades following 1910 these six precincts experienced an aggregate population decline of 64.3 percent compared with a figure of 62.4 percent for the over-all nonvillage population in the region. Similarly the rate of change during each of the six decades proved nearly identical for the six precincts and for the region as a whole. Of these precincts Arcadia and Springdale include much farm land lying in the river valleys. Independent and Fish Creek consist largely of hilly terrain. Enterprise includes a large area of gently rolling countryside whereas Geranium covers both broken upland and small rolling areas. Thus the townships offer a reasonable cross section of the topographical and soil conditions which

characterize the region as a whole. The same applies to the ethnic composition of the population in those townships. Enterprise has a largely old stock American and German population and Arcadia contains old stock Americans, Germans, and Scandinavians. Geranium is heavily Bohemian whereas Fish Creek includes German and Irish elements. Springdale's population features an admixture of Bohemians, Scandinavians, and Germans whereas Independent's consists chiefly of persons of British descent.

Various problems arose in the process of organizing and carrying out this tabulation. First came the question of the completeness of the tax records as a source of names of farm operators. A thorough compilation of all households in Valley County was made in order to determine whether such concern was warranted. The author then compared the number of households counted on the tax schedules with the number reported in the federal censuses for the corresponding years. The discrepancies which emerged proved insignificant. For the five census years in which both the number of census families and the number of tax households could be determined the greatest variation amounted to only 1.6 percent. Clearly, then, the tax records offer a relatively complete guide to precinct residents.[4]

Certain procedural problems proved more serious. First, some farm operators moved from one farmstead to another within the same precinct. Studies based on census records may miss this type of movement and understate somewhat the degree of turnover. County records proved inadequate to remedy this difficulty. In some cases personal property tax records bore the wrong section location numbers while in others no such location number appeared at all. Since many farmers rented their land, real estate records offered no solution to the problem. Consequently if the farmer remained in the township he was counted as persistent no matter where his residence. Another problem involved the tendency of some farmers to move out of the area for a year or two and then to return. Fortunately their number proved relatively small. Generally they were counted as present and persistent if present, absent if their names did not appear on the tax records.

A further difficulty involved ascertaining the point at which an elderly farmer ceased operating the farm and his grown-up son who lived under the same roof took over. The decision depended on individual circumstances in each case. Some fairly reliable guides on this point included the son's marital status, the relative distribution of property between father and son, and actual age. After

TABLE 14
GROSS PERSISTENCE RATES FOR FARM OPERATORS
1890–1970

Base Year	N	5 Years		10 Years		20 Years		30 Years		40 Years	
		%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
1890	379	51.3	195	39.2	149	18.6	71	6.0	23	1.6	6
1895	387	61.8	239	44.2	171	22.2	86	7.5	29	3.9	15
1900	451	53.9	243	34.4	155	15.8	71	8.0	36	3.5	16
1905	488	52.9	258	33.8	165	17.2	84	10.0	49	4.7	22
1910	491	61.7	308	35.3	176	21.8	109	9.8	49	4.8	23
1915	496	45.2	227	36.0	189	24.4	121	12.7	63	5.0	25
1920	487	62.2	303	45.6	223	24.6	120	10.5	51	4.3	21
1925	492	61.4	302	46.7	230	23.6	116	12.0	59	7.1	35
1930	483	65.6	243	42.9	207	23.9	115	14.1	68	6.6	32
1935	482	54.1	261	35.9	173	20.7	100	12.5	60	.....	.....
1940	408	59.6	243	42.3	172	24.5	104	14.4	59	.....	.....
1945	377	60.7	229	47.7	180	28.4	107	.....	.....	.....	.....
1950	379	67.6	256	51.4	195	34.0	129	.....	.....	.....	.....
1955	350	62.9	220	47.1	165	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
1960	322	69.4	224	53.6	173	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....

SOURCE: Personal Property Tax Assessment Schedules, Greeley County courthouse, Greeley, Nebraska; Valley County courthouse, Ord, Nebraska; Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska.

these difficulties had been ironed out the author compiled the lists of farm operators and processed them to yield the figures which appear in table 14. These statistics represent gross persistence rates—that is, the number and percentage of farm operators present in the base year who resided in the same precinct five years later, ten years later, and thereafter at ten-year intervals. Since these figures do not allow for mortality, they do not properly reflect actual persistence behavior over longer periods. After 1910, however, the ages of all farm operators appear on the schedules. If we adjust the figures for those years to reflect mortality the persistence rates at later intervals rise substantially as table 15 indicates. The author obtained the adjusted figures by applying the age-specific mortality rates for Nebraska males to the age distribution of farm operators for each base year.[5]

These statistics reveal several important patterns. First, a substantial degree of turnover has always existed among farm operators in the region. In no instance prior to 1950 did more than half

TABLE 15
GROSS PERSISTANCE RATES FOR FARM OPERATORS
ADJUSTED FOR MORTALITY, 1915–1970

Base Year	5 Years	10 Years	20 Years	30 Years	40 Years
1915	47.8%	40.5%	33.6%	23.5%	16.1%
1920	69.8	55.9	38.2	23.3	16.8
1925	64.3	52.2	33.2	22.9	24.5
1930	68.8	49.1	33.6	28.5	25.0
1935	56.7	41.6	31.3	27.6	.....
1940	62.6	49.4	38.2	33.0	.....
1945	64.1	55.7	43.1	.....	.....
1950	71.3	57.6	50.6	.....	.....
1955	65.5	54.7	.....	.....	.....
1960	74.7	65.0	.....	.....	.....

SOURCE: Greeley and Valley County Personal Property Assessment schedules; Forrest E. Linder and Robert D. Grove, *Vital Statistics Rates in the United States, 1900–1940 (Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940)* (Washington, 1943), p. 165; Robert D. Grove and Alice M. Hetzel, *Vital Statistics Rates in the United States, 1940–1960* (Washington: Public Health Service, 1968) p. 358.

the farmers present at a given date remain within their precinct ten years later, nor did more than one-third of them remain in the same place for as long as twenty years. Even when adjusted for mortality, persistence did not far exceed half at the ten-year level or two-fifths at the twenty-year level until after 1940. Second, persistence rates have not fluctuated nearly as greatly as one would expect on the basis of the traditional interpretation of population trends in the region. Indeed, in several instances the limited changes that did take place followed a direction contrary to that assumed by most writers. The lowest persistence rate at the five-year level did not come with the 1935 population stricken by the drouth or the 1940 population affected by the war boom but with the 1915 population in the midst of the supposedly stable "good old days." At the ten-year level the 1915 and 1935 populations had virtually identical turnover rates while at the twenty year level the 1935 group proved slightly less persistent.[6]

Third, on the whole persistence levels have shown a tendency to increase over the years. If we aggregate the data for gross persistence for twenty-year periods this pattern clearly emerges as the figures in table 16 illustrate. This appears to directly contradict the over-all population pattern of sharp decline during the

TABLE 16
GROSS PERSISTENCE OF FARM OPERATORS BY TWENTY-YEAR PERIODS
1890–1970

Base Years	5 Years	10 Years	20 Years	30 Years	40 Years
1890–1905	55.0%	37.9%	18.5%	7.6%	3.4%
1910–1925	57.6	40.9	23.6	11.2	5.3
1930–1945	60.0	42.2	24.4	10.2	....
1950–1960*	66.6	50.7	.....	.....	....

* Fifteen-year period.
SOURCE: Greeley and Valley County Personal Property Assessment schedules.

same period. Why should this have happened? One might logically assume that the increase reflects a change in the age structure among farm operators. Migration studies long ago established the axiom that older persons migrate less frequently than younger ones. Hence an increase in the average age of farm operators might explain the recent rise in persistence. Table 17 indicates the age distribution of farm operators in the six precincts following 1910. Over-all the average age of farm operators increased substantially. The proportion under thirty-five years of age fell from about two-fifths in

TABLE 17
AGE DISTRIBUTION OF FARM OPERATORS IN PERCENTAGE
1915–1960

Age	1915	1920	1925	1930	1935
Under 35	40.7	36.6	33.1	28.2	29.7
35–44	36.3	25.9	28.6	29.0	24.9
45–54	16.5	19.5	21.5	22.6	22.2
55–64	10.7	13.7	12.2	15.1	16.8
65 & Over	5.8	4.3	4.5	5.2	6.2
Age	**1940**	**1945**	**1950**	**1955**	**1960**
Under 35	21.1	21.8	25.6	23.7	21.8
35–44	28.7	24.7	23.7	23.7	18.3
45–54	25.2	23.1	23.2	24.0	20.8
55–64	16.4	20.2	16.4	20.6	23.3
65 & Over	8.4	10.3	11.1	11.7	15.8

NOTE: Due to rounding columns may not total 100.0%.
SOURCE: Greeley and Valley County Personal Property Assessment schedules.

TABLE 18
FARM OPERATOR PERSISTENCE BY AGE
ADJUSTED FOR MORTALITY — 1915–1970

		Present 5 Years Later		Present 10 Years Later		Present 20 Years Later		Present 30 Years Later		Present 40 Years Later	
Age/Year	N	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Under 35											
1915	202	87	43.9	80	41.2	60	32.4	35	21.3	10	8.6
1920	178	111	63.4	87	51.2	50	31.2	25	17.6	17	15.6
1925	163	92	57.5	71	45.2	43	28.7	31	23.5	21	22.8
1930	134	95	70.9	66	50.0	53	41.4	43	37.4	27	32.1
1935	143	67	47.8	46	33.6	39	29.8	29	25.2	....	.....
1940	86	47	55.3	46	55.4	31	38.8	27	37.5	....	.....
1945	82	50	61.7	39	48.8	29	37.7	....	.....	....	.....
1950	97	58	60.4	42	44.2	36	39.7	....	.....	....	.....
1955	83	51	62.2	44	54.3	....	.....	....	.....	....	.....
1960	70	45	64.3	36	52.2	....	.....	....	.....	....	.....
Average			58.7		47.6		34.9		27.1		19.8
35–44											
1915	130	62	48.8	57	47.1	39	36.5	22	28.6	6	16.2
1920	126	93	75.5	68	58.1	34	33.7	13	17.6	1	20.0
1925	141	87	63.0	65	48.2	36	31.0	18	19.2	10	22.2
1930	140	86	62.8	63	48.5	30	26.1	15	17.8	5	12.5
1935	120	70	59.3	47	42.0	38	39.2	19	26.8	....	.....
1940	117	74	64.3	55	49.5	45	45.9	24	33.8	....	.....
1945	93	63	68.5	57	64.0	41	52.6	....	.....	....	.....
1950	90	65	73.0	54	62.8	45	59.2	....	.....	....	.....
1955	76	39	52.0	33	45.8	....	.....	....	.....	....	.....
1960	59	44	76.8	40	71.4	....	.....	....	.....	....	.....
Average			64.4		53.7		40.5		23.8		17.7
45–54											
1915	82	49	62.0	29	40.3	19	37.3	6	25.0	1	50.0
1920	95	57	62.6	46	55.4	32	54.2	13	50.0	1	20.0
1925	106	75	74.3	62	66.7	30	47.6	8	27.6	4	66.7
1930	109	74	71.2	45	47.4	21	29.7	7	20.0	0	00.0
1935	107	68	66.0	46	48.9	19	28.8	10	33.3	....	.....
1940	103	58	58.6	33	36.7	19	28.4	7	21.2	....	.....
1945	87	54	64.3	46	59.7	26	46.4	....	.....	....	.....
1950	88	73	86.9	59	76.6	35	61.4	....	.....	....	.....
1955	84	61	75.3	51	69.9	....	.....	....	.....	....	.....
1960	67	55	87.1	51	86.4	....	.....	....	.....	....	.....
Average			70.8		58.8		41.7		29.5		34.2

TABLE 18 *(continued)*

Age/Year	N	Present 5 Years Later		Present 10 Years Later		Later 20 Years Later		Present 30 Years Later		Present 40 Years Later	
		No.	%	No.	%	%	No.	No.	%	No.	%
55–64											
1915	53	21	43.8	8	26.3	3	18.8	0	00.0	....	.....
1920	67	40	65.6	22	44.0	4	17.4	0	00.0	....	.....
1925	60	37	68.5	43	64.3	7	36.8	2	66.7	....	.....
1930	73	49	74.3	30	54.5	11	40.8	3	75.0	....	.....
1935	81	45	60.8	56	51.8	6	25.0	0	00.0	....	.....
1940	67	50	82.0	25	52.0	8	33.3	1	25.0	....	.....
1945	76	39	56.5	54	50.0	9	25.7	....	.....	....	.....
1950	62	43	76.8	31	66.0	12	52.5	....	.....	....	.....
1955	72	48	73.8	52	55.8	....	.....	....	.....	....	.....
1960	75	55	80.9	36	64.3	....	.....	....	.....	....	.....
Average			68.3		52.9		31.3		27.8		.....
65 & Over											
1915	29	8	34.8	3	17.6	0	00.0	....	.....	....	.....
1920	21	2	13.3	0	00.0	0	00.0	....	.....	....	.....
1925	22	11	64.7	5	38.5	0	00.0	....	.....	....	.....
1930	25	13	65.0	3	30.0	0	00.0	....	.....	....	.....
1935	31	11	45.8	5	29.4	0	00.0	....	.....	....	.....
1940	35	21	75.0	12	75.0	0	00.0	....	.....	....	.....
1945	39	23	74.2	11	47.8	0	00.0	....	.....	....	.....
1950	42	17	50.0	9	40.9	0	00.0	....	.....	....	.....
1955	41	21	63.6	8	33.3	0	00.0	....	.....	....	.....
1960	51	25	62.5	10	38.5	0	00.0	....	.....	....	.....
Average			54.9		35.1		00.0		.....		.....

SOURCE: Greeley and Valley County Personal Property Assessment schedules; Forrest E. Linder and Robert D. Grove, *Vital Statistics Rates in the United States, 1900–1940*, p. 165; Robert D. Grove and Alice M. Hetzel, *Vital Statistics Rates in the United States, 1940–1960*, p. 358.

1915 to about one-fifth in 1960. At the same time the proportion aged fifty-five and over rose from about one-sixth to two-fifths of the total. The relative size of the thirty-five- to fifty-four-year-old group shrank from about one-half the total in 1915 to two-fifths in 1960. To some degree the higher proportion of older farmers stemmed from increased longevity, but this obviously accounts for only a small part of the over-all aging of the farm operator group.

TABLE 19
AGE-SPECIFIC PERSISTENCE OF FARM OPERATORS BY PERIODS
1915–1970

Age/Period	5 Years (%)	10 Years (%)	20 Years (%)	30 Years (%)	40 Years (%)
Under 35					
1915–25	54.9	45.9	30.8	26.8	15.7
1930–40	58.0	46.3	36.7	33.4	.....
1945–60	61.2	49.9	38.7	.....	.....
35–44					
1915–25	62.4	51.1	33.7	21.8	19.5
1930–40	62.1	46.7	37.1	22.8	.....
1945–60	67.6	61.0	55.9[a]	.....	.....
45–54					
1915–25	66.3	54.1	46.4	34.2	41.9
1930–40	65.3	44.3	29.0	24.8	.....
1945–60	78.4	73.2	53.9[a]	.....	.....
55–64					
1915–25	59.3	44.8	24.3	.....	.....
1930–40	72.4	52.7	33.0	.....	.....
1945–60	72.0	59.0	39.1[a]	.....	.....
65 & Over					
1915–25	37.6	18.7	.....	.....	.....
1930–40	61.6	44.8	.....	.....	.....
1945–60	61.3	40.2	.....	.....	.....

SOURCE: Greeley and Valley County Personal Property Assessment schedules; Linder and Grove, *Vital Statistics Rates in the United States, 1900–1940*, p. 165; Grove and Hetzel, *Vital Statistics Rates in the United States, 1940–1960*, p. 358.
[a] Data based upon two base periods.

Although the increase in the average age of farm operators appears to account for the rising persistence rates in later decades, a closer analysis of turnover patterns among the different age groups reveals the hopeless inadequacy of that explanation. The statistics for age-specific persistence adjusted for mortality appear in table 18. As in the case of gross persistence, long-term trends become more evident with the aggregation of data from several base years into averages for longer periods. Table 19 provides the mean average age-specific persistence rates for three such periods including the base years of 1915–1925, 1930–1940, and 1945–1960.

Among farm operators under thirty-five years of age a general trend toward slightly higher persistence developed although changes at the five- and ten-year intervals proved minimal after 1920. The major rise in persistence at longer intervals began in 1930. This age group exhibited most clearly the effect of the drouth and depression of the late thirties and of the war during the early forties. For the 1935 base year members of this class showed notably lower persistence than either their 1930 predecessor or their later successors. However, persistence among these farm operators at later intervals did parallel the rates for the same age category in base years prior to 1930. The thirty-five through forty-four year olds also showed a general upward trend in persistence, chiefly at the longer intervals. Here again, the major rise in persistence came after 1930. The depression and war conditions had scarcely any impact upon this group's rate of turnover, in sharp contrast with the situation of the younger farm operators.

Forty-five to fifty-four year olds showed a substantial rise in persistence, particularly at the longer intervals, following World War II. On the other hand members of this category exhibited notably higher turnover rates at longer intervals for the 1930–1940 base years than either before or since. One might conjecture that these farmers were engaged in expanding their operations at the time the depression struck and consequently proved especially likely to lose possession of their farms, resulting in a high degree of turnover. The two older age groups showed higher persistence levels after 1925 and, in the case of the fifty-five to sixty-four year olds, again after World War II. The earlier rise probably reflected improved health conditions and greater longevity but the latter did not. Most age groups, then, experienced greater persistence after 1945. Thus even had the age distribution of farm operators in the region remained unchanged after 1915, persistence still would have increased, particularly during the fifties and sixties. Yet this decline in turnover came at the same time as the precipitous drop in both the number of farms and farm population. Why should the population have fallen so sharply if fewer farmers left their farms?

The answer to this question lies in the dwindling flow of replacement farm operators into the region. The statistics in table 20 illustrate the changes that occurred in this area. While the rate of turnover diminished, the flow of replacements onto the vacant farms fell even more rapidly, producing a net outmigration of farm operators and an over-all population decline. The lack of replacements also meant a decline in the number of continuing

TABLE 20
FARM OPERATOR REPLACEMENTS

Period	Number of Operators Present at Beginning	Number of Operators Present at Conclusion	Five-Year Persisters	Number of Operators Departing	Number of New Operators	Percentage of Replacements
1890–95	379	387	195	184	192	104.4
1895–00	387	451	239	148	212	143.2
1900–05	451	488	243	208	245	117.8
1905–10	488	491	258	230	233	101.3
1910–15	491	496	308	183	188	102.7
1915–20	496	487	227	269	260	96.7
1920–25	487	492	303	184	189	102.7
1925–30	492	483	302	190	181	95.3
1930–35	483	482	317	166	165	99.4
1935–40	482	408	261	221	147	66.5
1940–45	408	377	243	165	134	81.2
1945–50	377	379	229	148	150	101.3
1950–55	379	350	256	123	94	76.4
1955–60	350	322	220	130	102	78.5
1960–65	322	279	224	98	54	55.1

SOURCE: Greeley and Valley County Personal Property Assessment schedules.

farm operations. Prior to 1935 the number of farms had either grown or had fallen only slightly because in each instance at least 95 percent of departing farmers left new residents on their vacated farms. During the drouth years of the thirties and the war boom of the forties the number of replacements dropped as the region lost its attractiveness for potential migrants. By the sixties only three-fifths of the farm operators who retired or moved out of the region left replacements behind them. The remaining two-fifths of the vacated farms passed out of existence as independent operations.

Most of the replacement farm operators came from two basic sources. On the one hand sons of local farmers looked forward to taking over their fathers' operations or struck out on their own. These individuals figured prominently in the ranks of farm operators under thirty-five years of age. Farm migrants from outside the area, many of them in the middle or older age brackets provided the remainder of the replacements. Generally speaking the under thirty-

five age group contributed between two-fifths and half of the replacement operators while the older in-migrants furnished the balance. The lowest proportion of younger replacements came in the thirties when older farmers could least afford to retire. In-migrants outnumbered the native sons in every decade and in each ten-year period the rate of change proved virtually identical for both groups.

While the decline in farm operator replacements explains the downward trend in the number of farms and farm population in the face of increased farm operator persistence, it does not explain the latter phenomenon. A significant relationship may exist, however, between the decline in new farmers and the greater degree of persistence among those in the older age groups. In earlier decades perhaps the chief factor that determined when a farmer retired was the presence or absence of an adult son at home who wished to take over the farm. Usually this came when the son had married and begun to raise a family, generally in his late twenties or early thirties. When he could no longer begin farming with a minimal capital investment the son could rarely afford to go out and begin farming on his own. Instead, he must wait for a chance to take over the home place. Hence the presence of an aspiring replacement at home led many farmers to retire once they had reached their middle or late fifties.

But the attraction of farm life for local youth clearly diminished over the years. This led to a decline in the number of farmers under the age of thirty-five. Their number fell from 202 in 1915 to 70 in 1960 and even fewer in 1970. As a growing number of young men decided not to enter farming they eliminated the major impetus to early retirement on the part of their fathers. This explains the rather low turnover rate among farmers beyond the age of fifty-five during the early forties followed by a high rate of turnover at the ten-year level. During the war farm boys went into the army or obtained urban war jobs while their fathers continued to farm. With the return of peace a large number of the younger men returned home and sought to take over the family farming operation. As the number of these aspiring farmers fell after the early fifties, the older age groups experienced another rise in persistence.

This movement of farm youth away from the region not only reduced the pressure to retire but also eliminated in large part the possibility of a retired farmer living with his grown children as had been customary in previous decades. This in turn further encour-

aged the older farmer to remain on the land while curtailing the scope of his operations. Generally speaking he could live more cheaply on the farm than in town since he avoided the cost of rent and could raise part of his own food supply. This proved particularly true prior to the extension of social security coverage to farmers and other self-employed persons. After this extension came in the early fifties the rate of persistence among farmers over sixty-five years of age fell noticeably.

Furthermore, given increased longevity and improved health conditions together with the changing nature of the farm enterprise one might have expected some increase in persistence even had these other factors not existed. Most farmers could expect to remain in fairly good health until their late sixties or early seventies while, as a result of mechanization, they could carry on the heavier farm work to a greater age than previously. In addition, as farmers became more specialized, so did their farms. A farmer who specialized in hog production, for example, might construct an expensive collection of facilities designed expressly for that purpose. Having undertaken such a heavy investment he would be less likely to move to another farm which must undergo reorganization and remodeling in order to suit his production program. The same applied to other specialists such as cattle feeders and dairymen as they acquired the expensive equipment required by their chosen lines of endeavor. Thus the interchangeability of farm units diminished and with this the barriers to easy movement between farms grew.

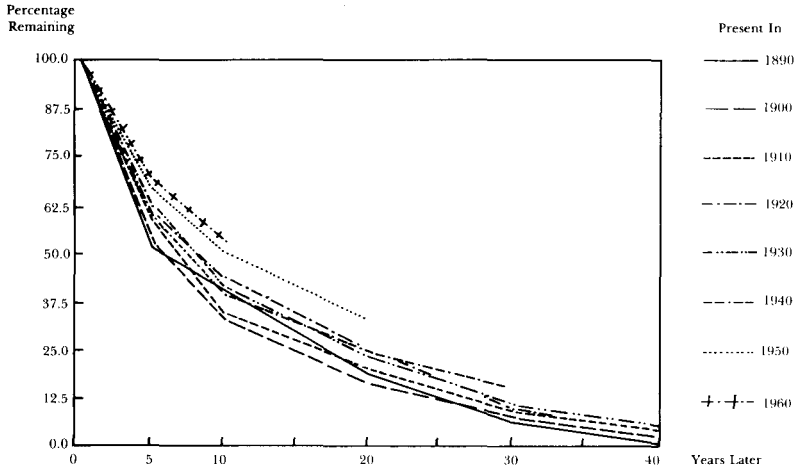

Figure 5. Gross Persistence, Loup Country Farmers, 1890–1970.

In conclusion, farmer persistence rates in the region followed the basic curve described in figure 5 for each of the base years examined. Over-all persistence rose somewhat after 1920, declined slightly in the late thirties and then climbed to new highs in subsequent decades. The changes that occurred proved limited in scope contrary to expectations based upon the traditional interpretation of population changes in the region. At this point let us return to the basic question underlying this inquiry into farmer persistence and turnover: Did the propensity for migration among the farmers change in response to alterations in the socioeconomic conditions in the region or did it represent a relatively stable independent variable of behavior? From the evidence analyzed above one cannot help feeling more impressed with the limited scope of the changes that occurred than by the changes themselves. The fact that these changes did not necessarily take the direction one would have predicted on the basis of economic conditions supports the conclusion that they played a secondary role in shaping persistence rates. Clearly such influences cannot be dismissed entirely for in exceptional circumstances such as the drouth period of the late thirties they obviously exerted some impact upon persistence levels for certain age groups. But the data analyzed here suggest that migration tendencies may not be explained solely in environmental terms and that intensive further exploration into this problem area is greatly needed.[7]

II

During the three and a half decades after 1935 the number of farms in the Loup country declined by half. However, this simple statistic, like those for net population change, obscures a highly complex process of individual farm consolidation and subdivision. Table 21 provides a more useful picture of the change in the number of farms by size. Before proceeding further we should note the different types of operations represented by the various sized groupings. Farms of less than 50 acres included several distinct subtypes. Townsmen living outside the corporate limits of the villages often appeared in agricultural censuses as farmers. The 1969 agricultural census, for example, listed forty-five Valley County farms of less than 10 acres in size with an average of slightly under 2 acres each. These represented little more than oversized building lots and could not properly be considered farms. On the other

TABLE 21
VALLEY COUNTY FARMS BY SIZE
1910–1969

Size/Acres	1910	1920	1925	1930	1935	1940
Less than 50	55	73	87	56	102	59
50–99	69	56	60	49	71	51
100–174*	427	404	463	445	426	350
175–259*	210	232	231	235	218	167
260–499	392	424	407	401	438	407
500–999	108	94	94	104	108	116
1000 & Over	11	12	9	10	8	23
Total	1,272	1,295	1,351	1,300	1,371	1,173
Size/Acres	1945	1950	1954	1959	1964	1969
Less than 50	105	99	121	66	69	67
50–99	47	49	36	33	28	21
100–174*	236	198	175	130	97	76
175–259*	154	145	150	93	61	39
260–499	386	355	342	295	246	196
500–999	141	162	170	177	184	166
1000 & Over	32	37	44	59	69	78
Total	1,101	1,045	1,038	853	754	643

SOURCE: U.S. Census, *Agriculture* volumes 1910, 1920, 1930. *U.S. Census of Agriculture*, 1925, 1935, 1940, 1945, 1950, 1954, 1959, 1964, 1969.
* Size categories of 100–179 acres and 180–260 acres for period from 1940 through 1969.

hand a few semiretired and part-time farmers resided on tracts of from 10 to 50 acres each. Although they engaged in a marginal type of operation they did produce some subsistence items such as dairy products, eggs, poultry, and vegetables while marketing a few animals or small crops each year. The next larger sized category of from 50 to 100 acres also included several different types of operations including semiretirement, part-time, and in a few cases regular commercial farms, the latter usually consisting of irrigated land. The 100- to 174- (later 179) acre units included traditional family farms of a nonexpanding nature. The next two larger categories involved commercialized units which generally included large acreages of pasture together with cropland. Farms in excess

of a thousand acres originally comprised cattle ranches but in later periods came to include substantial areas of cropland as well.

Between 1910 and 1935 the number of farms in the region remained relatively stable with the greatest rate of change amounting to about 5 percent over a five-year period. During the teens intermediate sized farms—i.e., those from 175 to 499 acres in extent—grew slightly at the expense of the next larger and smaller categories. The early twenties brought a slight movement toward subdivision which reversed itself later in the decade. The depression of the early thirties halted the outflow of farm youth from the region and the number of small subsistence units rose substantially—of the seventy-one new farms that appeared between 1930 and 1935 sixty-eight included less than 100 acres. The drouth of the middle and late thirties eliminated most of these new units together with many farms in the other categories of less than 500 acres. The number of farms exceeding 1,000 acres rose considerably as these units absorbed farms vacated by their previous owners. For the time being much of this land acquisition in the late thirties involved speculation rather than expansion geared to maximizing the efficiency of individual farming operations.

War prosperity fostered a dual tendency toward both enlargement and subdivision on Loup country farms during the early forties. The number of farms containing less than one hundred acres rose by more than two-fifths as did the number of farms exceeding a thousand acres in size. The growth of the larger units marked a continuation of the process of absorbing abandoned farms. The smaller farmsteads included a few irrigated tracts as well as some semiretirement operations. In addition, with the revival of rural prosperity empty farmhouses near the villages acquired occupants from among the town workers whom the census takers classified as farmers. The increase in the number of farms in these categories came at the expense of the quarter-section farms which fell in number by nearly one-third during the war. Farms of this size proved too small for profitable commercial operations unless situated on unusually favorable terrain.

The immediate postwar decade saw a continuation of these trends but at a much slower pace than earlier. Then, in the latter half of the fifties the number of farms containing less than 50 acres fell by about half. Most of this drop resulted from a change in the census definition of farm, however. The number of units of this size remained stable for the next decade. For the most part these

"farms" represented desirable residential locations near the villages, well suited for either town workers or retired farmers. In the period after 1954 the other size categories involving less than 500 acres experienced heavy losses. Farms in the 100–174-acre class fell by four-sevenths in number while those in the larger 175–259-acre class declined by nearly three-fourths. The larger decline on the part of the latter units grew out of their location in more marginal farming areas while the persisting quarter-section farms usually lay in the more fertile, irrigated areas. In addition, many quarter-section farms had tradition-oriented owners who preferred to continue their operations on a limited scale rather than incur additional indebtedness. The larger 260- to 499-acre farms began to disappear after 1950 as technological advances made themselves felt in the intense pressure toward farm expansion aimed at attaining the maximum possible operating efficiency. Now the largest farms came into their own. The number of Valley County farms exceeding 1,000 acres in size doubled during the two decades after 1950 and by the end of that period they accounted for one-eighth of all farms in the county. In one-fourth of the cases these units had grown to more than 2,000 acres in size.

While cataloging changes in the number of farms by size gives us a general picture of farm reorganization in the region it does not provide a really detailed view of the process. A more intensive analysis of a smaller cross section of farms offers greater insight into this complex pattern of change. For this purpose we may turn to six representative precincts in the region. The author drew a 20 percent random sample of farms from each of the six precincts as of 1910 and then compiled the ownership and residence histories of each for a total of 101 individual units. In addition, a residence map was constructed for each precinct at twenty-year intervals showing the location of all resident farm operators present in 1910, 1930, 1950, and 1970. This furnished a tool for analyzing further the pattern of farm consolidation and for tracing residential relocation on the part of expanding farm operators.[8]

Sixty-one of the 101 farm operators present in 1910 owned their farms and 2 others shared ownership with brothers. Altogether 38 of the farmers or 37.6 percent of the total were tenants compared with a Valley County average of 35.4 percent that year. Of those tenants 16 operated farms owned by their fathers. In many cases, then, the fact of tenant status per se proved misleading as the farm actually belonged to the operator's family. The sample farms

covered a mean average of 196.5 acres compared with an over-all Valley County average of 268.9 acres. Two factors explain this divergence. First, the land included in these farms represented only the area which the operator or, in the case of tenants, the landlord owned. In some cases individual farmers rented and farmed other land, but surviving records do not enable the researcher to measure either the frequency of this practice or the extent of land involved. Also, the sample precincts do not include any of the northern tier of townships in the county. Those townships included much of the ranching land in the area and thus accounted for a disproportionate number of the larger units which raised the over-all county average. Because of the pastoral rather than agricultural nature of most of their operations their exclusion is not significant. Among the sample farms the largest covered 960 acres, another included 800 acres, and a third totaled one section. Of the remaining units most—i.e., sixty-two of ninety-eight—occupied a quarter section. Eleven included only 80 acres each and one totaled but 60. The mean size of farm by township ranged from 170.5 acres in Geranium to 250.6 in Enterprise.

Among the sixty-three owner-operators present in 1910 fifteen had originally obtained most of their land either from the Burlington Railroad or directly from the federal government. Most of these men had acquired their farms late in the 1880s. So also had thirteen of the thirty-eight landlords, ten of whom rented the land to their sons in 1910. The proportion of original owners varied widely from precinct to precinct. Thus in Springdale and Independent, both settled in the early seventies, only two out of thirty-two sample farm owners held original patents or railroad deeds. In contrast, six out of nineteen owners in Arcadia, eight of nineteen in Geranium, six of sixteen in Enterprise, and six of fifteen in Fish Creek belonged to this category. Altogether a total of 27.8 percent of the farm owners still held land obtained either directly from the public domain or from the railroad. Seven of the remaining owners were sons of the original patentees. Altogether, then, thirty-five farmers or 34.7 percent occupied family farms created during the pioneer period more than twenty years earlier.

During the next twenty years the sample farms experienced little change. Twenty-two of the 1910 operators remained present on their farms in 1930, a proportion identical with the over-all farm operator persistence for that period—21.8 percent. In addition the offspring of eighteen previous owners held land farmed by their

parents in 1910. Hence a total of 40 or two-fifths of the farms remained in the possession of the same family in 1930 as in 1910. Of the 101 units 3 passed out of existence as separate entities. One 80-acre tract in Geranium lost its tenant occupant in the teens and no replacement ever materialized. One quarter-section farm was purchased by a neighboring farmer who remained in residence on his original farmstead. A third owner-operator bought up an additional quarter section and moved there from his original homesite which then fell vacant. On the other hand five heirs divided up the largest farm in the sample in 1917 and the home farmstead shrank from 960 acres to 240 acres. The farm which had originally included 640 acres went to several different owners and the main farmstead dwindled in size to a quarter section. The two sons of the owner of a third farm divided the operation between them. Five other farms stood vacant in 1930 but all of them acquired resident operators by 1935. One other quarter-section farm momentarily disappeared when a neighboring farmer bought it. The consolidated farm went to a corporate creditor in the thirties, however, and each of its original components acquired tenant operators in the middle of the decade.

Although all of the vacant farms acquired resident operators early in the thirties the latter part of the decade saw a major constriction in the number of farms. By 1940 another eleven farms had disappeared, reducing the total number of farm units with resident operators to eighty-seven. The eleven farms that disappeared included five which went to creditors. Five of the remaining six became tied up in long-term family estates. These units could no longer support a resident farm family and either remained idle or were rented out to farmers residing elsewhere. The last farm to disappear consisted of a 40-acre tract which an adjacent landowner purchased. Of the farms that disappeared five included quarter sections, three contained 80 acres or less, two covered 240 acres each, and one occupied 480 acres. No particular relationship appeared between size per se and the likelihood of a farm disappearing as those that vanished represented a fair cross section of the total sample.

As the drouth persisted into the early forties the decline in farm numbers continued. During the decade a total of fourteen more farms went out of existence. Eight of these had fallen into the hands of corporate creditors during the preceding two decades. Eight of the fourteen covered quarter sections, one a half section,

one three-quarters of a section, and one ninety acres while the others involved intermediate sizes. Again, size alone did not significantly influence the prospects for farm survival. Two of the farms which lost resident operators remained in the hands of creditors in 1950, two others belonged to family estates, and nonresident operators bought the remaining ten. By that date, then, the number of surviving farms with resident operators present had fallen to seventy-two. Of the twenty-nine units that disappeared expanding farmers had purchased eighteen, four remained in the hands of corporate creditors and real estate brokers, and seven belonged to estates whose administrators rented them out to nonresident operators.

The effect of foreclosure or forced sale to creditors on the farm unit's prospects for survival deserves further consideration at this juncture. Altogether banks and insurance companies or other creditors obtained title to thirty-five of the ninety-eight farms present in 1930. Of these forced transfers two occurred in the late twenties, twenty-eight during the thirties, and five in the early forties. Eventually new owners took up residence on twenty-two of these farms, meaning that thirteen or 37.1 percent disappeared. This compares with only twelve of the sixty-three nonforced transfer farms or 19.3 percent of those units which vanished. The townships with the highest forced transfer rates included large areas of hilly terrain. In those areas much of the land passed into the hands of creditors when the owners gave up farming because of the drouth and left the area. Later it proved difficult to find tenants or resident buyers for these hilly, heavily eroded farms. In contrast, farms in areas of level terrain and good soil readily attracted new residents. Since those buying land for the purpose of expansion already operated a farm elsewhere, they did not relocate on their new farmsteads but merely utilized them for cropping and, to an increasing degree, for pasturing their growing cattle herds. These individuals showed the keenest interest in acquiring the hilly farms which they then converted into permanent grassland.

Between 1950 and 1970 the number of sample farms with resident operators fell a further 36.1 percent from 72 to 46. By the latter date 20 of the 26 farms that disappeared had already merged into other units while the remaining 6 entered the limbo of family estates or absentee owned rental units. Altogether by 1970, 43 of the original 101 farms had vanished entirely while another 12 remained in the hands of absentee owners. On most of the latter

farms the buildings had deteriorated to the point where no future resident operator was likely to appear. They remained waiting for farmers to buy them as permanent additions to operations based elsewhere. Of the 46 farms with operators present in 1970, 16 or 34.8 percent remained in the hands of the family which owned them in 1910. Four of the 12 rental units also belonged to relatives of the 1910 owner. Altogether then, 20 of the 58 surviving farms or 34.5 percent remained in the possession of the 1910 owner's family. Or, stated from another perspective, 20.8 percent of the families owning sample farms in 1910 still held them sixty years later.

What factors determined whether a particular farm would survive? First, a farm must include a substantial amount of reasonably good land. Hilly farms generally disappeared because heavy soil depletion rendered them unproductive. This applied especially to the hilly areas of Fish Creek, Enterprise, Independent, and Springdale townships where residence maps reveal the disappearance of most hill farms. Areas of level terrain and good soil showed far fewer losses. In addition, the farm must include enough land to support a family. Small size as such did not necessarily spell doom if the farm included fertile soil and possessed irrigation facilities. Thus among the seventeen farms covering less than 160 acres in 1910 six or 35.6 percent survived the sixty year period. Among the sixty-two original quarter-section farms thirty-three or 53.2 percent remained in operation in 1970. Of the twenty-two farms that exceeded a quarter section in size in 1910 only seven or 30.4 percent remained under occupation in 1970. Thus over the long run the largest farm units showed the lowest survival rates with most of the disappearances coming after 1950.

An examination of the larger farms which went out of operation by 1970 nearly all occupied inferior upland locations. The larger size eventually proved inadequate to offset the deteriorating quality of the soil. These larger units also experienced a higher degree of forced transfer during the depression. Overall 47.8 percent of the farms exceeding a quarter section in size in 1910 underwent forced transfer compared with 32.0 percent of the smaller units. In some instances the mortgage debt acquired in the process of buying additional land had proved too great. Investments in cattle and machinery on the larger farms necessitated further borrowing on the part of their owners. In addition larger farms faced higher cash expenses for property tax payments than did their smaller neighbors. Hence what John Bennett had called the "conservative

strategy" of survival and what this writer has termed the "security orientation"—i.e., the avoidance of mortgages and the expenses of farm improvements in exchange for greater security—showed itself well adapted to survival in terms of farm ownership during years of unfavorable farm prices.[9]

So much for the farm units that disappeared, what happened to those that survived? Among the forty-six farms with resident operators present in 1970 only four had declined in size after 1910—three of these being large farms which were divided up among the heirs of the original owner. Eleven other farms remained unchanged in size over the sixty-year period. These included an 80-acre tract, eight quarter sections, a 190-acre unit, and a 240-acre operation. More than half of these small farms lay in Arcadia township where they occupied level farmland close to the river. The other units included superior cropland in other township locations. Not surprisingly the large majority of persisting farms grew. Thirty-one or 67.4 percent of these enterprises expanded in size. By 1970 the mean acreage for all remaining farms had reached 470.4 acres, an increase of 139.9 percent over the 1910 figure. Most of these units grew after 1940 although a few had added some acreage prior to that date. The over-all distribution by size for the sample farms in 1910 and 1970 appear in table 22. The acreage figures represent total land held by the owner including noncontiguous tracts. The

TABLE 22
SAMPLE FARM SIZE, 1910, 1970
(RESIDENT OPERATED FARMS)

	1910		1970	
Size (Acres)	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Less than 99	14	13.9	1	2.2
100-159	3	3.0	1	2.2
160	62	61.4	11	23.9
161-319	5	5.0	14	30.4
320-639	13	12.9	7	15.2
640-959	3	3.0	10	21.7
960 And Over	1	1.0	2	4.4
Total	101	100.2	46	100.0

SOURCE: Greeley and Valley County deed records, Greeley County courthouse, Greeley, Nebraska; and Valley County courthouse, Ord, Nebraska.

1970 figures do not include the twelve absentee owned units with no farm operators present at that date.

Individual farms expanded or disappeared in various ways but several basic patterns often recur in these case histories. Relatively little change occurred prior to the late thirties. As a rule expansion prior to that date consisted of the purchase of land adjacent to or very near the home farmstead. Such growth came either when an operator bought a tract that had fallen vacant or when a son who had acquired his own farm bought or inherited his father's farmstead. Such cases proved relatively rare. This situation altered rapidly in the late thirties and early forties as many farms lost their occupants. Land became readily available to those who wished to expand but few had the money needed to take advantage of the opportunity. The return of the rains and the war boom resolved this difficulty as farmers reaped profits sufficiently large to finance land acquisition. Furthermore, a farmer could now travel up to four or five miles away with his tractor to farm cropland while he might also pasture his cattle a dozen miles or more away from his residence, making weekly or semiweekly visits to check on fence conditions and water supplies. Due to the general acquisition of tractors and farm trucks he could now effectively utilize land some distance away from his farmsite and such land could now be easily acquired.

This favorable combination of circumstances contributed to the rapid increase in farm size as the insurance companies and banks willingly unloaded their unwanted farmlands at bargain prices. The process of consolidation slowed down greatly in the postwar decade, however, as the last of the vacant lands went to expanding operators and as an increasing flow of replacement operators onto the farms prevented any more from becoming available. Then with the increasing reluctance of young men to enter farming after the early fifties this replacement pressure diminished. As a result large numbers of farmsteads again fell empty as their owners retired or moved out of the region, thus providing new opportunities for expansion. This development combined with further improvements in agricultural technology, spurred the continued rise in average farm size during the fifties and sixties, a trend which showed no indications of abatement with the arrival of the seventies.

Farm absorption itself usually followed a predictable pattern. Initially the farm supported either an owner operator or a resident tenant. Eventually the owner operator died, moved, or retired, and

after an interval of variable length, tenants became impossible to find. The farm then fell vacant while the buildings deteriorated to the point of complete disintegration. In some cases this took place during the long intervals when the land remained tied up in family estates. In other instances prolonged vacancy came after the land had passed into the hands of a corporate creditor. After 1930 if a farmstead fell empty while part of an estate or while in the hands of a creditor the odds favored its disappearance as a separate entity. In such cases it was merely a matter of time and convenience until the nonresident owner or owners found a local buyer willing to pay a satisfactory price. The land then became part of a new farm which as often as not involved noncontiguous acreages scattered about the region.

Farm reorganization thus occurred in a variety of fashions. The more marginal farming areas lost their occupants and came increasingly to function as pastures for livestock operations based in the river valleys or other superior cropland areas. The redistribution of farm operator residents in the region that accompanied this development paralleled the lines described by Carl Kraenzel in his discussion of residence patterns in the Great Plains. Farm population remained relatively dense in the river valleys and along the major transportation arteries linking them, notably in south central Valley County which included much good cropland. By contrast the hilly uplands underwent rapid depopulation as residents either left the area entirely or moved to better locations in the river valleys. In each instance the choice of location by the farmer who acquired an additional farmstead depended upon such variables as road conditions, the relative state of farm buildings on each farmstead, the distance to town and to rural schools, and the like. This movement too appears likely to continue indefinitely as the more marginal lands continue to shift out of agricultural production.[10]

8. Rural Depopulation and Its Consequences

ALTHOUGH THE POPULATION of the Loup country grew rapidly during the first decade of the twentieth century this trend faded away before the beginning of World War I. The 1920 census revealed an over-all population increase of slightly more than 6 percent in the teens compared with a rise of nearly 30 percent the previous decade. Even Ord, the largest town in the region, gained only 183 residents between 1910 and 1920. Faced with these unimpressive statistics the editor of the *Ord Journal* wrote:

> This figure seems very small to Ord people who have lived here the past years and who are acquainted with the actual facts. The school census would indicate a much larger population than this, but as long as the figures are official we shall have to accept them.
>
> It is certain, however, that if the census were taken again today the report, if covering everyone now here, would show a large [r] figure. We had hoped for a larger increase but shall have to swallow the dose.

In a society that gauged progress in terms of quantitative expansion such slow growth rates exerted a depressing influence. This applied particularly to the village merchant who saw in each individual another potential customer for his goods or services. Fortunately for their peace of mind village observers in 1920 had no inkling of the demographic trends that would characterize the region in the succeeding half-century.[1]

In terms of absolute numbers the population of the Loup country reached its peak in 1920. The farm population had already begun to decline during the teens, however, and in the course of the next fifty years the total population fell by nearly half as the figures in table 23 illustrate. The relatively stable figures for the teens and twenties mislead the reader in that they mask a substantial flow of outmigration from the region that nearly equalled the natural increase in population during the former decade and exceeded it in the latter. The abrupt fall in population in the thirties, therefore, did not stem from a sudden rise in outmigration as one might expect, but resulted chiefly from a combination of reduced migration inflows and declining birth rates. Table 24

TABLE 23
TOTAL POPULATION, THE LOUP COUNTRY
1900–1970

Year	Population	Percentage of Change
1900	11,020	.....
1910	14,147	28.4
1920	15,019	6.2
1930	14,650	–2.5
1940	12,411	–15.3
1950	10,775	–13.2
1960	9,471	–12.2
1970	8,183	–13.5
Total Change, 1920–1970		–45.4

SOURCE: U.S. Census, *Population*, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930, 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970.

TABLE 24
BIRTHS, DEATHS, AND NET MIGRATION
VALLEY COUNTY, 1920–1970

Decade	Births	Deaths	Natural Increase	Actual Change	Net Migration	Rate (%)
1920s	2,007	758	1,249	–290	–1,539	–15.6
1930s	1,552	752	800	–1,370	–2,170	–22.8
1940s	1,450	724	726	–911	–1,637	–20.1
1950s	1,547	783	764	–662	–1,426	–19.7
1960s	971	821	150	–807	–957	–14.5

SOURCES U.S. Census, *Population*, 1920, 1930, 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970. Nebraska Department of Vital Statistics, Lincoln.

gives the net migration rates for Valley County in each of the five decades after 1920. Since effective registration of births and deaths in the state did not begin until 1917 it proved impossible to obtain the data necessary for calculating net migration during the teens. In all probability the net migration rate at that time closely paralleled that of the twenties. But the higher birth rates in the teens more than offset outmigration while the lower rates in the twenties did not.

Where did this stream of outmigrants originate? Clearly the countryside lost a higher proportion of residents than did the villagers. The high level of fertility among farm families ensured that a large number of farm youth would have to migrate in order to secure employment. But while some farmers moved directly out of the region a complex pattern of internal migration within the Loup country also developed. Many farmers moved to town upon retirement in order to enjoy the amenities of village life. At the same time village youth and some adults migrated to urban centers outside the region. Few small-town youths could expect to secure employment or to take over a family business at home. Furthermore, the gulf between town and city did not loom so large as that between farm and city. The townsmen who moved to the city could often find employment similar to that which he had practiced before—as a store clerk, laborer, or professional man. Since the inflow of elderly farmers largely offset the outflow of younger people the actual number of village residents declined much less rapidly than did the farm population. The dual migration process did, however, lead to major changes in the age-sex structure of the village population as we shall see below.[2]

On the basis of general demographic principles one would expect younger people to figure predominantly in the net outflow of population from the region. Owing to the crudeness of the published census data for 1910 and 1920, however, one cannot determine the exact age-sex distribution of net migration in the teens and twenties. In the latter decade members of the age ten through nineteen years group in 1920 did account for 33.3 percent of net migration although they included only 22.8 percent of the population in that year. The population pyramids for 1930 which appear in figure 6 (p. 158) further support the hypothesis that migration in these years particularly affected young people. In comparison with the national distribution of population the Valley County pyramid showed a noticeable deficit in the twenty-five to forty-four years of age category, the usual consequence of heavy outmigration among those in their twenties during the two previous decades.[3]

We can determine the age-sex specific distribution of net migration with some degree of precision for the decades after 1930. The figures which appear in Table 25 are based on the known age-sex distribution of the Valley County population during census years. The author calculated the number of survivors for each decade by applying age-sex specific state mortality rates to these

TABLE 25
NET MIGRATION BY AGE AND SEX
VALLEY COUNTY, 1930–1970

Age Group	1930s male (%)	1930s female (%)	1940s male (%)	1940s female (%)	1950s male (%)	1950s female (%)	1960s male (%)	1960s female (%)
0– 4	–18.4	–7.8	–11.5	–18.4	–7.8	–16.7	–10.0	–10.0
5– 9	–24.8	–22.7	–20.9	–28.0	–19.9	–33.2	–29.2	–27.6
10–14	–39.1	–37.3	–36.5	–48.0	–61.4	–46.0	–68.3	–56.2
15–19	–41.4	–39.6	–35.7	–40.2	–51.0	–38.3	–26.7	–26.2
20–24	–27.6	–29.2	–27.9	–32.9	–24.6	–10.2	–16.7	–14.5
25–29	–17.2	–16.8	–18.4	–21.5	–13.5	–14.0		
30–34	–16.2	–19.1	–16.9	–20.6	–12.6	–19.6	–4.8	–6.2
35–39			–20.5	–22.4	15.2	–13.2		
40–44	–17.2	–17.2	–16.3	–18.3	–11.7	–7.5	–0.5	–4.3
45–49			–9.1	–13.7	–8.9	–14.8		
50–54	–17.8	–15.9	–6.6	–6.0	–8.5	–1.0	–3.0	–4.2
55–59			6.0	–6.5	6.3	3.7		
60–64	0.4	–5.3	13.0	16.8	9.2	–4.6	–8.2	3.9
65–69					0.0	–5.0		
70–74			–6.2	–16.3	–18.8	–30.1	–5.2	–2.2
75–79	–4.5	–4.5						
80–84			19.0	–25.0	–29.7	15.0		
85 & Over								
Those born during the decade (both sexes)	–10.0		0.0		–12.5		–4.1	

SOURCE: Calculated from U.S. Census, *Population*, 1930, 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970; Linder and Grove, *Vital Statistics Rates in the United States, 1900–1940*, p. 165; Grove and Hetzel, *Vital Statistics Rates in the United States, 1940–1960*, p. 358; information from the Nebraska Department of Vital Statistics, Lincoln.

population distributions. However, in the process of compiling these estimates a serious problem developed. The Nebraska Department of Vital Statistics furnished statistics for age at death for the decade of the sixties. For the three previous decades, however, the application of state mortality tables yielded an excess number of deaths compared with the actual figure, reflecting the unusually low mortality level in the region. Excess deaths totaled 8.4 percent for the thirties, 8.1 percent for the forties, and 4.9 percent for the

fifties. We may assume that most of these fictitious deaths occur in the older age brackets, some of which show improbable net immigration. Thus one should view the estimates for age groups in excess of fifty-four years with caution. For the younger age groups, and this is where most of the migration took place, these figures represent reasonably accurate estimates given the small number of deaths likely to occur.[4]

In the years following 1930 the composition of the stream of net outmigration underwent several significant changes. The most striking characteristic of these migrants in the thirties lay in their wide distribution across the age spectrum. The ten- through twenty-four-year-old group experienced the highest rates of outmigration as one would expect, but the more sedentary thirty-five through forty-four and forty-five through fifty-four-year-old age groups also sustained high net outmovement rates of more than 17 percent. In the thirties and early forties, then, the migration stream comprised not only young individuals but also a number of family units including persons of all ages. During the thirties the number of families in Valley County fell by about one hundred and fifty or nearly 8 percent as a result of this type of outmigration. This trend did not grow out of any new mass movement away from the county so much as it reflected the virtual cessation of movement into the drouth stricken area by new families. Judging from the farm operator persistence data examined in chapter 7 it appears that the actual stream of migrants leaving the region in the thirties did not greatly exceed that of previous decades.

The frequency of net family outmigration diminished in succeeding decades as the migration process became increasingly age-selective. The proportion of all net outmigrants concentrated in the ten- to twenty-four-year-old age group rose from 48 percent in the thirties and 49 percent in the forties to 61 percent in fifties and more than 71 percent in the sixties. Ultimately this selective trend exerted a profound influence on the age structure of the residual population in contrast to the earlier migration which had had much less impact. During the sixties this selectivity became particularly acute as less than one-sixth of net outmigrants exceeded twenty-four years of age at the beginning of the decade. The fall in outmigration on the part of young married couples (i.e., age twenty-five through thirty-four years) during the sixties also resulted in decreased outmigration rates among children born during the decade.

Several factors accounted for this change in the age composition

of the stream of outmigrants. Those who had not migrated previously had developed strong ties in the region which presumably strengthened still further with the passage of time. Consequently one would expect increasing persistence on their part for those in their age groups likely to move away had already done so. Furthermore, as they grew older they would become less mobile due to the factor of age alone. At the same time the fifteen- to twenty-four-year-old category became particularly critical in terms of career decision. Prior to the fifties a high proportion of young people did not complete high school. In Valley County, for example, fewer than half the seventeen and eighteen year olds attended school in 1930 and only about five-eighths in 1940. By 1950 the figure had risen to 75 percent and by the late sixties more than 90 percent of the region's youth completed high school, generally at the age of eighteen. At that point the new graduate found himself forced to decide upon his future career. He might continue his education, enter the military, or seek a job either within the region or elsewhere. This decision largely determined the course of his future career and social activity. If he remained home in the region for more than a few years, he formed attachments which could not easily be overcome. If he left he rarely returned except in a few instances after completing military service.[5]

This marked a major change from the pattern of earlier decades. Before high school graduation became the norm large numbers of rural children left school as soon as they reached the maximum compulsory school attendance age. Often several grown sons remained home on the farm even though it became evident that only one of them would eventually take over the operation. Likewise many farm girls remained home for several years after leaving school, helping with the housekeeping and family chores. These children might move to the city in search of employment at any time between age sixteen and the middle twenties. The property tax records of the teens, twenties, and thirties reveal the presence at home of large numbers of these unmarried offspring. Later, as local conditions grew less tolerable and urban opportunities opened up many of these young adults left. By the end of World War II their number had fallen greatly and the practice of remaining at home for several years after completing high school largely disappeared after the fifties.

Another major change in the composition of outmigrants involved their distribution by sex. In the thirties the incidence of migration for males and females in the various age categories

proved quite similar. But in the forties women left with perceptibly higher frequency than men, a trend particularly noticeable in the ten- to fourteen-year-old age group. The fifties saw a reversal of this shift as males in the ten through twenty-four age groups had noticeably higher rates of outmigration than did females. The explanation for these changes appears to lie in the economic conditions influencing the male decision to enter agriculture. In both the forties and fifties female migration rates remained fairly stable, reflecting the presence of widespread employment opportunities in the cities. But the agricultural boom of the late forties and early fifties encouraged many young men to enter farming at that time, leading to a somewhat lower net outmigration rate. In the less prosperous later fifties entry into agriculture declined and net male outmigration again picked up. After 1960 rates for the two sexes again converged at a very high level of over-all outmovement.

II

Six decades of continuous heavy outmigration profoundly altered the structure of the population residing in the Loup country. Figure 6 shows the age-sex distribution of population in the region compared with those for greater Omaha and for the United States as a whole. These population structures did not differ greatly in 1930 although the variations which did exist foreshadowed future trends. Two decades of substantial outmigration had given the Loup country a deficit in the twenty-five- to forty-four-year-old age groups. Conversely Omaha gained from immigration by young people and had an unusually high concentration of residents in those age categories. Omaha's population also contained a high proportion of females, reflecting the attraction of the city for rural women who came to fill positions as store clerks, secretaries, and the like. The relative profiles of the three populations did not change greatly in the thirties since the loss of migrants from the Loup country cut across all age-sex groupings. The major change during the decade came with the steepening of all three pyramids due to the sharp decline in birth rates at that time.

After 1940 the increasingly age-selective migration pattern gave rise to a major divergence between the structure of the Loup country's population and those of both Omaha and the nation at large. Owing to the high rural fertility level of the forties, fifties, and early sixties the relative proportion of persons under age

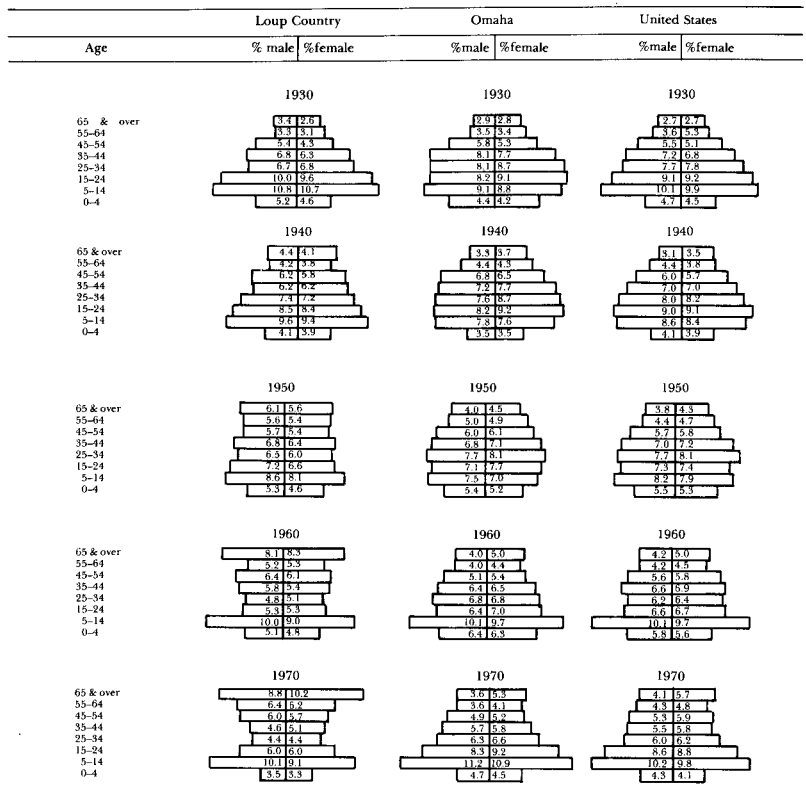

Figure 6. Changing Age-Sex Structures.

fourteen did not differ greatly among the three populations. However, the regional cohorts for ages fifteen through forty-four shrank significantly compared with those of the other populations causing a top-heavy age structure to develop. By 1970 this structure had clearly begun to take the shape of an inverted pyramid, the reverse of the normal pattern of age distribution. With the fall in regional births after 1960 the youngest age cohorts also began to shrink. The two extreme age cohorts provide the best illustration of the growing divergences that developed. In the Loup country children less than five years old accounted for 6.8 percent of the total population in 1970 compared with a figure of 8.7 percent for greater Omaha and 8.4 percent for the country as a whole. By contrast, those over age sixty-five that year included 19 percent of Loup country inhabitants compared with less than 9 percent of Omahans and 10 percent of all Americans. The median age of population offers another convenient yardstick for measuring changes in differ-

ent population structures. The median age of Valley County residents rose from 24.4 years in 1930 to 32.7 years in 1950 and 38.2 years in 1970. In the corresponding period the national median age rose from 26.4 years to 30.2 years, then fell to 28.1 years. Thus while the county population averaged two years younger than the national population in 1930, forty years later it had aged to the point where it averaged ten years older.[6]

Even as the over-all age-sex structure of the Loup country population diverged from that of the nation at large differences within the area persisted. Figure 7 illustrates the changing age-sex distributions of the farm and village populations within the region. Already by 1930 the villages contained a substantially greater proportion of older residents than the countryside, reflecting the movement of retired farmers to town as well as the lower village fertility level. Four decades later this top-heavy distribution had become so great that the resulting population structure assumed the character of a mushroom. By the sixties, though, even the

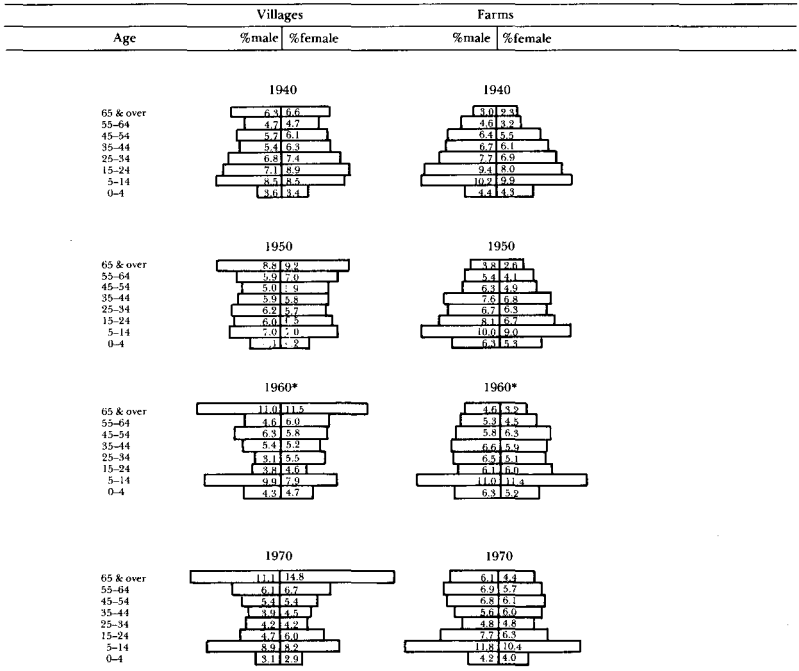

Figure 7. Regional Age-Sex Structures.

farm population showed signs of aging and only the relatively high level of fertility among farm women kept the lowest age cohorts from shrinking to a degree comparable to those of the towns. The villages also exhibited a substantial surplus of females over males in direct contrast to the predominantly male farm population. Two factors accounted for this phenomenon. First, farm operators often included single men but almost never single or widowed women. On the other hand a number of single women operated businesses or worked in the villages. Second, the village population included a large number of older women, chiefly the widows of retired farm operators. Indeed, to cite an extreme case, the median age of women in the village of Comstock averaged 65.5 years in 1970. This concentration of women in the upper age brackets grew out of the seven-year differential in life expectancy between males and females.

TABLE 26
FERTILITY LEVELS
VALLEY COUNTY, 1920–1969

Year	Number of Females Age 15–44	Number of Births	Fertility Rate	U.S. Average White Females
1920	2,086	230	110.3	115.4
1930	2,163	181	83.7	87.1
1940	1,809	137	75.7	77.1
1950	1,371	169	123.3	102.3
1960	1,054	128	121.4	113.2
1969	916	68	74.2	87.6*

SOURCE: U.S. Census, *Population*, 1920, 1930, 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970; Nebraska Department of Vital Statistics, Lincoln.
*All Females

Another noteworthy divergence between regional and national demographic characteristics came in the area of fertility. Unfortunately one can calculate fertility levels for Valley County only in census years although the number of births reported each year provides a guide to changes occurring within each decade. The county and national fertility rates for census years appear in table 26. Given the usual tendency for rural fertility to exceed that of urban areas the low Valley County rates prior to 1950 may appear

somewhat surprising. However, the fact that each of those years—1920, 1930, and 1940—came during agricultural depressions partially accounts for this phenomenon. Also, some underregistration of births probably affected the 1920 rates since registration in the state only began in 1917. During the thirties the level of fertility in Valley County fell below the national level but the return of prosperity in the forties led to an upsurge in births. By the end of that decade the county fertility rate exceeded the national average by one-fifth. Late in the fifties both national and local fertility began to decline but county rates fell perceptibly faster. By 1960 the difference between the two amounted to only half of the 1950 figure and by 1970 Valley County fertility had dropped considerably below the national level.

Several elements contributed to the over-all decline in rural fertility after 1950. The availability of more effective contraceptive techniques furthered this trend as did changing attitudes toward the desirability of large families. In earlier years a large family represented an economic asset given the inefficient use of labor characteristic of most family farming operations. But as the utilization of farm labor grew increasingly efficient additional children ceased to represent an economic advantage. Indeed, as the cost of raising and educating children climbed they came increasingly to represent a financial liability. This in turn caused a sharp decline in the number of farm families with more than three or four children. But this does not in itself adequately explain why regional fertility should have fallen well below the national level by 1970.

That phenomenon resulted in large part from changes in the age structure of the Loup country's population due to continued heavy outmigration. As a result of the increasingly age-selective nature of that outmigration, the proportion of the total population represented by women of childbearing age (fifteen through forty-four years) shrank substantially. From a figure of 22.4 percent in 1930 the proportion fell to 19.0 percent in 1950 and only 15.2 percent in 1970. Thus had fertility rates in the region remained constant throughout the forty-year period the crude birth rate still would have fallen by one-third. Furthermore, the age distribution among the women of childbearing age also altered significantly. By 1970 only 24.9 percent of Valley County women in this category belonged to the twenty- through twenty-nine-year-old age group, compared with a national average of 36.2 percent for white women. This group normally accounted for most births since its fertility

rate averaged more than double that for any other age group in the childbearing category. Thus the over-all fertility level of the county would have remained below the national average even if age-specific fertility had equaled or slightly exceeded the national rates. In all probability the age-specific rates in the region did somewhat exceed those at the national level although the differences doubtless were minor. Here again the operation of a highly age-selective migration process produced unanticipated results among the population remaining in the region.

Declining fertility in the middle and late fifties foreshadowed the appearance of natural decrease in the following decade. In the twenties Valley County births had outnumbered deaths by a margin of nearly three to one owing to a combination of high fertility and a young population subject to relatively low mortality. The decline in fertility after 1920 accounted for part of the declining number of births in later years, but changes in the age-sex structure of the regional population also played a key role in this development, as noted above. Thus the combination of declining fertility and an aging demographic structure subject to higher mortality eventually resulted in a higher number of annual deaths than births in the area. The annual statistics for births and deaths in Valley County appear in table 27. Even had the county experienced no net outmigration during the latter half of the sixties its population still would have declined for this reason, and over the next several decades the process will undoubtedly accelerate.

A decline in average family size paralleled the decrease in population that marked the Loup country in the twentieth century. The shrinkage in the average size of family antedated the general population decline as it began with the census of 1890. In that year the average Valley County household included 4.86 persons. Over the next three decades this figure declined at a steady rate, reaching 4.39 in 1920. The significant drop in fertility in the twenties together with a substantial outmigration of young people brought the average down to 3.46 in 1930. Unfortunately, the published census data for 1940 do not include the number or average size of households, but by 1950 the latter figure had fallen to 3.15. The high fertility level of the fifties slowed the rate of decrease during that decade as the median fell to 3.07. But in the sixties it again plunged sharply, reaching a figure of only 2.62 in 1970.[7]

If decreased fertility accounted for most of the decline in family size prior to World War II, this did not apply so much in later decades. The constriction in the postwar period arose primarily

TABLE 27
BIRTHS, DEATHS, AND NATURAL INCREASE
VALLEY COUNTY, 1920–1969

Year	Births	Deaths	Natural Increase	Year	Births	Deaths	Natural Increase
1920	230	94	136	1950	169	78	91
1921	228	73	155	1951	159	85	74
1922	231	62	169	1952	182	80	102
1923	218	68	150	1953	163	69	94
1924	200	72	128	1954	164	78	86
1925	186	60	126	1955	169	62	107
1926	180	72	108	1956	140	90	50
1927	195	80	115	1957	147	68	79
1928	168	105	63	1958	129	86	43
1929	171	72	99	1959	125	87	38
	2,007	758	1,249		1,547	783	764
1930	181	74	107	1960	128	82	46
1931	203	77	126	1961	129	74	55
1932	168	87	81	1962	120	92	28
1933	141	76	65	1963	106	72	34
1934	165	85	80	1964	104	87	17
1935	146	63	83	1965	84	79	5
1936	162	90	72	1966	82	66	16
1937	129	73	56	1967	70	97	–27
1938	136	66	70	1968	80	79	1
1939	121	61	60	1969	68	93	–25
	1,552	752	800		971	821	150
1940	137	59	78				
1941	128	69	59				
1942	140	59	81				
1943	131	75	56				
1944	139	92	47				
1945	139	62	77				
1946	150	89	61				
1947	159	81	78				
1948	167	76	91				
1949	160	62	98				
	1,450	724	726				

SOURCE: Nebraska State Department of Vital Statistics, Lincoln.

from the outmovement of young people of childbearing age and from the rising proportion of small, older households. As the population of elderly people grew the number of widows and widowers also increased significantly, producing a sharp rise in the number of one person households. In 1930 only 206 of 2,392 households or 8.6 percent of the Valley County total consisted of one person. By 1970 the figure had reached 457 or 22.6 percent of all households. The presence of such a large number of isolated individuals pulled down the size of the average household even when fertility levels remained stable.[8]

Despite the over-all decrease in family size the differences between farm and village households persisted. In 1930 Valley County farm families averaged 3.94 persons each compared with a figure of 2.91 for village families. The difference arose in part from higher fertility among farm women and in part from the concentration of elderly people in the towns. Substantial differences in this area remained visible throughout the period. Among married women thirty-five to forty-four years of age present in 1970, farm women had borne an average of 4.13 children compared with a figure of 3.29 for village women. And, while the average size of farm families ranged widely from one precinct to another, on the whole they still averaged about one-third larger than village families in 1970.[9]

A considerable degree of diversity characterized the patterns of population decrease among the various farm precincts and villages. Net population changes for the six sample precincts appear in figure 8. The aggregate rate of change in those townships almost exactly equaled the average for all farm precincts, but as the graph reveals, different precincts lost population at different rates. Whether a particular precinct experienced a greater or lesser decline in population over time depended largely upon the factor of soil depletion. Given the high rate of population turnover noted in the previous chapter, continued replacement of departing farmers was necessary in order to maintain population stability. Townships in the hilly uplands included a large number of farms which deteriorated to the point where they no longer attracted resident operators and thus lost population most heavily. But which precinct experienced the greatest decline in any given decade depended upon other factors as well.

For example, during the thirties the township of Geranium sustained an over-all population loss of only 6 percent compared with 33 percent in Fish Creek and 45 percent in Independent. The general farming pattern characteristic of the Bohemians in Gera-

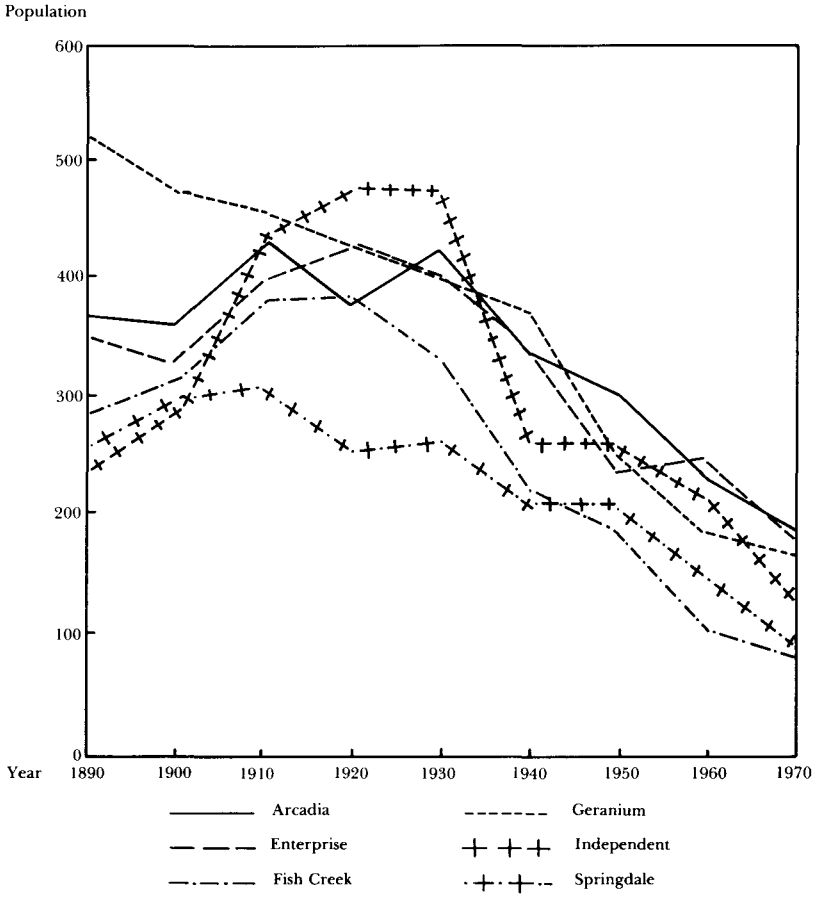

Figure 8. Population Change in Six Selected Farm Townships, 1890–1970.

nium proved much more adaptable to drouth and depression conditions than the more highly commercialized operations in the other precincts. Hence only one-eighth of the farm land in Geranium went to creditors compared with two-fifths or more in the other two townships. But this picture changed drastically in the forties as the rate of population decline reached 33 percent in Geranium compared with 15 percent in Fish Creek and virtually no change in Independent. The relatively low level of living on general farms had had its attractions in the midst of the depression but with the war boom this appeal dissipated. The elimination of most marginal farming units in Fish Creek and Independent the previous decade meant that most of the remaining farms in those

precincts could secure replacements if their operators moved elsewhere in the forties. But now the process of consolidation affected Geranium for the first time. Continued farm expansion in the fifties affected all the townships in the region except for Enterprise which actually enjoyed a 2 percent increase in population that decade. This resulted from a combination of an abundance of fertile land together with the general adoption of well irrigation in the area which resulted in a stable number of farms. With the sixties, however, even Enterprise experienced a 25 percent population decrease. Now, because of heavy net outmigration and farmer replacement at different times in the past, the various farm townships diverged substantially in terms of their age structures. By 1970 median ages in the rural precincts ranged from nineteen years in Liberty to thirty-eight years in Springdale. The former precinct included predominantly farmers in their thirties and early forties with at least several children at home in most families. By contrast Springdale included a disproportionate number of families consisting solely of a couple more than fifty-five years of age. This in turn meant a perpetuation of differences in precinct population change rates. Farm consolidation would advance more rapidly in areas with a high proportion of farmers approaching retirement age, replacing them with younger personnel while the youthful population in other precincts would decline less rapidly.[10]

Although the farm population began falling after 1910 the number of village residents continued to rise during the teens in response to the business boom associated with farm prosperity. The more difficult twenties brought decline to some of the smaller villages and even Ord's population grew less than 4 percent during the decade. The thirties saw substantial losses in most villages. Small-town decline continued throughout World War II but halted temporarily as a major influx of population developed in 1946 and 1947. This inflow of former servicemen and war industry workers precipitated a short-term housing crisis which was not resolved until late 1947 when another major outflow of migration from the area developed. The momentary postwar construction and business boom which resulted from the unleashing of consumer savings accumulated during the war soon dwindled and the pattern of stagnation had largely resumed by 1950. During the relatively depressed fifties the smaller towns experienced heavy population losses and economic deterioration due to a combination of fewer customers and lower farm income. These conditions remained general into the early sixties when a degree of stabilization developed on the

heels of a large migration of retired farmers to town coupled with readjustments in village business operations.[11]

TABLE 28
REGIONAL VILLAGE POPULATIONS
1910–1970

Village	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970
Arcadia	618	745	711	663	574	446	418
Comstock	323	450	450	408	302	235	144
Elyria	.....	.....	.....	77	87	89	55
North Loup	519	637	657	567	526	453	441
Ord	1,960	2,143	2,226	2,240	2,239	2,413	2,439
Sargent	651	1,078	834	847	818	876	789
Scotia	328	559	474	453	474	350	354
Total	4,399	5,612	5,352	5,225	5,020	4,862	4,640

SOURCE: U.S. Census, *Population*, 1910, 1920, 1930, 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970.

On the whole the village population declined much less than did the farm population—17.3 percent between 1920 and 1970 compared with a figure of 62.3 percent for country residents. The statistics for net population changes in the towns appear in table 28. As a result of this disparity the proportion of Loup country residents who lived in the villages rose from 31.4 percent in 1910 to 46.6 percent in 1950 and 56.7 percent in 1970. This change in the internal distribution of population had major implications for the region's political complexion and for the distribution of political power within the area as will be seen below (pp. 177–178). Total village population figures are somewhat misleading in that the actual rate of change varied widely from town to town. Ord, as the largest town within a radius of forty miles had a secure commercial position which was reinforced by its role as a county seat which provided a further stabilizing force. Consequently it experienced an aggregate population increase of about one-fifth between 1920 and 1970. The smaller villages found themselves in a more precarious position and lost three-eighths of their 1920 population over the course of the next half century. The fate of the small hamlet of Horace north of Scotia provided a bleak illustration of the fate that might await the small village. During the town's golden age in the late teens and early twenties it had boasted a lumber yard, railroad depot, barber shop, two stores, post office,

bank, and town hall together with stockyards and county road maintenance shops. During the late twenties and thirties virtually all of these enterprises disappeared and by 1970 only a farmhouse and rural elementary school remained standing in the area.[12]

Individual country towns experienced varying degrees of economic stagnation or depression depending upon a variety of factors such as location, the rate of decline in the nearby farm population, village entrepreneurial leadership, and the like. The village of Comstock in Custer County experienced the sharpest decline and appeared well on its way to hamlet status by the end of the sixties at which time its population totaled less than one-third of the 1920 figure. The major factor responsible for the decline lay in the village's unfavorable location. While useful as a commercial center in the days of railroads and poor dirt roads, the town could not survive the transportation revolution that began in the twenties. Farmers in the vicinity drifted away to Ord, Sargent, or Broken Bow, now easily accessible by graveled or hard-surfaced roads. By contrast, Sargent's location thirty miles from any other town of comparable size made it a natural trade center while the construction of a large irrigation project in the vicinity gave added stability to the farm population. Nonetheless, in the mid-sixties even that village began to lose population. In this particular instance vigorous efforts by the village business community probably helped to reduce the speed and extent of economic decline.

Arcadia, North Loup, and Scotia each lost more than one-third of their population during the decades following 1920. As in the case of Comstock each village lost business to larger towns up and down the highways—to Loup City, Ord, and St. Paul, especially during the fifties. Some degree of stability developed in these villages in the early sixties due to a shift in the nature of their basic economic orientation. This change arose from the movement of increasing numbers of retired farmers to the towns rather than from any rise in the economic viability of the business centers themselves. Village merchants came to deal increasingly with retired residents rather than with the shrinking number of farm dwellers. Farm services remained quite significant but grew fewer in number. Thus the towns came to function as a combination of farm service centers and retirement colonies rather than as simple agricultural trade centers. Given the advanced age of the population moving into the villages at this time the stability that developed appeared foredoomed to disappear within the next two decades as the pool of potential farm retirees continues to shrink.[13]

III

Commercial disintegration in the small towns followed lines similar to those of farm abandonment. A high degree of turnover characterized small-town businesses and replacements became increasingly difficult to secure. In some instances merchants concluded that they could not continue to operate profitably and simply liquidated their holdings. Professional men such as doctors and dentists moved to larger towns and their offices remained empty. Retailers of more specialized and expensive items such as automobiles, furniture, jewelry, and large appliances found survival very difficult outside of Ord due to the limited number of potential customers. Consequently specialized stores largely disappeared from the villages. Firms which retailed basic consumption items or provided services to farmers remained in operation albeit in reduced numbers. These included businesses such as grocery stores, lumber yards, service stations, and the like. In most villages at least one of each type of these basic enterprises could survive given the universal demand for their goods. But in the smaller towns the number of such establishments dwindled until only one or occasionally two businesses of the same type remained. Thus while most towns had several grocery stores and two or more service stations they usually retained only one restaurant, drug store, or hardware dealer. Given the limited volume of turnover and high fixed overhead expenses this meant that retail prices remained relatively high. Prices of consumption goods such as groceries tended to rise above those current in the larger urban centers although other living expenses in the region such as rent and labor services remained relatively low.[14]

Firms which provided services to the farmer remained in operation although their number diminished. Machinery and seed dealers continued to carry on business after many retailers had left while grain elevators flourished in most of the towns. The number of farm implement dealers declined due partly to rising prices and competition and partly to the desire of parent manufacturers to reduce the number of franchises to one per county. In other instances changes in local agricultural conditions or deficient management led to the decline of certain types of businesses, most notably the creameries, the majority of which discontinued operations in the fifties. Obviously a variety of factors determined the nature of commercial change in each individual town. But after these

changes most merchants discovered themselves increasingly reliant upon village customers as the farm population continued to fall.[15]

As the Loup country's population growth slowed in the teens members of the business community viewed the situation with increasing alarm. Soon after World War I they began casting about for some means of encouraging village growth independently of population trends in the surrounding countryside. In 1921 the farm columnist of the *Ord Quiz* outlined a plan for economic development which presaged the direction of efforts of this type for the next half century. First, he suggested harnessing the hydroelectric potential of the North Loup River to supply power for future industry. Then home-town entrepreneurs might establish packing plants, followed by tanneries, shoe factories, butter and cheese factories, and alfalfa mills. Eventually the irrigation development linked to the hydroelectric project would foster sugar beet production and truck farming which in turn would lead to the growth of canneries and sugar refining plants. Although this grandiose scheme never got off the ground it differed only in scope from most later proposals for economic development in the region.[16]

The search for industry as a panacea for the problem of declining population lagged during the remainder of the first half of the twentieth century as other problems diverted the attention of Loup country residents. But the results of the 1960 census which revealed the extent of the population loss of the previous decade galvanized businessmen into action. In June of that year merchants from the various towns joined to form the Loup Valley United Chamber of Commerce. Boosters of the new organization explained that it represented a means of obtaining a fair share of government plums for residents of the area. In evaluating the human resources available for industrial development the organization uncovered an enormous amount of underemployment in the region. Many farmers operated small enterprises which required labor only on a seasonal basis, leaving the owner with time on his hands during the remainder of the year. The proportion of women available for work also proved high. Thus when the Ord Chamber of Commerce prepared a brochure advertising its attractions for industry it found 225 persons or one-tenth of the town population available for work in any new industry which might locate there.[17]

Unfortunately for the proponents of industrialization several major obstacles existed which eliminated any realistic prospects of attracting large-scale industry into the region. Although some de-

centralization of industry did occur in the fifties and sixties the rural areas which benefited generally lay within fifty to seventy-five miles of major metropolitan areas. Or, they were situated along major transportation arteries which made it possible to transport raw materials and finished goods quickly and cheaply. The Loup country lay nearly fifty miles away from the nearest such transportation artery—the Platte River route which includes U.S. Route 30, Interstate 80 and the transcontinental Union Pacific railroad line. While the towns and villages along this route often prospered and grew, transportation linkages with the Loup region deteriorated, particularly with respect to railroad facilities.

Prior to the thirties the Union Pacific and Burlington had maintained daily train service on their spur lines in the region. In the middle and latter parts of that decade they curtailed their services as crop failures eliminated potential outshipments. Although the roads partially restored service during the war they soon eliminated passenger trains. Late in the forties and throughout the fifties and sixties they continued to curtail their services in the face of mounting competition from truck lines. Ultimately in 1970 both lines closed down all of their depots in the region, substituting mobile shipping agents for the displaced employees. Train service in the region now included only twice-weekly freight service on each line.[18]

If the region's isolation and lack of rail shipping facilities raised one barrier to the introduction of industry, the absence of any large urban center posed another. The largest town had fewer than twenty-five hundred inhabitants in 1970 while none of the others exceeded eight hundred residents. This did not provide a sufficiently large labor pool to support any major industrial plant and after seeing a few dreams on the subject shattered local representatives gave up trying to entice this type of operation into the area. Another difficulty arose from the fact that most other small towns in the state joined in the search for industry, thereby providing a formidable degree of competition. Urban firms seeking rural locations had a choice of towns with much better locations and more available labor than any Loup country town could boast. Given these conditions the campaign to lure industry could not realistically be expected to produce striking results.

As part of the search for small industry, village business leaders set up the Valley County Rural Development committee to co-ordinate activity and prevent intracounty rivalries from hindering the effort. North Loup and Arcadia soon disclaimed interest in the type of meat-packing plant that Ord boosters sought to obtain. Un-

fortunately the region lacked the supply of animals necessary to make a beef-packing plant feasible while the smaller towns lacked the water and sewage facilities required by pork-processing plants. Finally, in 1967, Ord scored the only success in the long campaign when a small farm equipment manufacturing company moved there from Neligh, about fifty miles away. Ironically this, the only successful importation of industry, came at the expense of another small town likewise engaged in the struggle for survival.[10]

When small-town businessmen realized that the region could not seriously expect to attract industry they began looking elsewhere in search of enterprises that might bolster the area's economy. Soon they came to focus their attention upon the possibility of acquiring new service type institutions. Some looked into the feasibility of obtaining a state junior college or technical school which could bring a considerable amount of money into the area. Ord interests also made a concerted effort to obtain the proposed new State Game and Parks Commission headquarters to be built somewhere in the central part of the state. Town representatives met with various state legislators who agreed to support their scheme. Then the state senator from Ord introduced a bill into the Unicameral providing for the consolidation of the commission's offices and their removal to Ord where the Ord Development Corporation would provide the necessary facilities. This campaign failed when westerners who wanted to move the commission's headquarters to Alliance at a later date joined with easterners to pass a bill that kept the commission's offices in Lincoln for the time being.[20]

The major service institutions to ultimately appear in the region included hospitals at Ord and Sargent and a nursing home at the latter village. To a considerable degree the presence of these agencies mirrored the growing proportion of elderly residents in the region who required medical and nursing home facilities. Difficulties in obtaining basic medical care had begun some time earlier when both Arcadia and North Loup constructed health centers in order to attract physicians. Arcadia built a $24,500 health center in 1950–1951 through a combination of private subscriptions and a municipal bond issue. In North Loup the Lions Club and the American Legion sponsored the drive for a health center which they financed through the sale of ten-dollar shares to the public. The problem of obtaining replacements for doctors who retired, died, or left the region proved even more formidable than in many other rural parts of the country. The search for physicians by the

village of Sargent during the sixties illustrates the depth and complexity of this problem.[21]

In September, 1961, the only physician in Sargent died. The village chamber of commerce quickly undertook a search to secure a replacement. The recruiting committee soon discovered that most doctors disliked the idea of settling in a town which lacked another doctor for consultation purposes and for sharing emergency duties. In January, 1962, the committee found a medical school intern who expressed interest in moving to Sargent, but he changed his mind shortly thereafter. Eventually they succeeded in attracting a new medical school graduate from California. He bought the equipment left by his deceased predecessor and launched his own practice. Two years later, however, he decided to leave. In their search for a new physician the recruiting committee encountered endless difficulties. Doctors lacked interest in positions situated in isolated villages when they could secure posts in larger towns with relative ease. The expense of purchasing the equipment needed to set up business for himself proved excessive for most recent medical school graduates. Even if a physician did look favorably upon the idea of taking up general practice in a small town his wife usually opposed it. The departing physician urged the town to resolve the difficulty by establishing a clinic to be staffed by several young doctors. This would eliminate the problem of having only one doctor available and would further benefit the town by providing improved medical services and by bringing in other business.

This suggestion won endorsement from the Sargent editor who thought that it might offer a "juicy enough plum" to induce a team of physicians to establish themselves in town. Soon civic leaders launched a drive to construct a new medical clinic. They found ammunition for their campaign in a study carried out under the auspices of the Sears Foundation which reported that Sargent area residents had spent about fifty-five thousand dollars for medical services and travel expenses to other towns the previous year. In addition, those who traveled to other towns primarily for medical reasons also spent an estimated eighty thousand dollars for other items while in those towns. Presumably the establishment of a clinic could bring most of this money back home. In April, 1965, the village electorate passed a bond issue in support of the proposed clinic, but no bids for construction materialized and the town had to satisfy itself with reopening the old hospital when it finally obtained a solitary physician late that year.[22]

Several years later boosters began another campaign for the

construction of a new hospital. The passage of federal legislation requiring the provision of full-time ambulance service added impetus to the movement. Traditionally village funeral homes had provided ambulance service on an emergency basis but they could not possibly hope to meet the new federal standards. As a result it became necessary to set up hospital districts to provide such services as well as for the support of hospitals themselves. In July, 1969, the hospital bond issue passed by a wide margin. This issue authorized the expenditure of nearly four hundred thousand dollars for construction. This time construction bids appeared and work on the structure began without delay. The new facility finally opened in 1970. In the same year work began on a new nursing home financed by a combination of federal funds and village bonds. Thus both major additions to the town's commercial sector during the decade involved health care.[23]

Ord also acquired a new hospital in the sixties. In 1961 the largest convalescent home in Valley County closed, leaving a number of county residents in need of convalescent care for which no facilities existed. The Ord hospital also found itself operating in a financially precarious position at that time. In December the county electorate voted to issue bonds to finance part of the cost of building a new hospital, the remainder of the funds coming from the federal government under the Hill-Burton program. The vote followed the usual localistic pattern as Ordites voted two to one in favor of the project while Arcadians and North Loupers strongly opposed it. Residents of south central Valley County favored the new hospital while the rest of the farm areas opposed it. The decline in farm population had given the Ord vicinity a majority of the county electorate, however, fundamentally altering the local balance of political power. The new hospital eventually opened in the summer of 1964 with wings for both regular and long-term convalescent care.[24]

IV

As the economic structure and orientation of the villages altered, the depopulation process exerted a growing impact upon the political and social institutions of the Loup country. Per capita costs of county and local government rose sharply, leading to periodic financial crises coupled with public outcries for county consolidation to save money. Although these proposals for consolidation pro-

duced no tangible results political units below the county level underwent considerable modification. In 1958 Valley County abolished the township road maintenance system after forty years of debate on the subject. In the mid-sixties Greeley County abolished the sixteen voting precincts in favor of new units centering upon the four villages. The state law requiring three poll watchers from each party in each voting precinct had created an untenable situation in Homestead Precinct which had only a dozen resident voters left by mid-decade. Several years later Valley County followed suit and reduced its number of voting precincts by half.[25]

State action aimed at standardizing political institutions led to further local problems. The most significant of these concerned school district reorganization which will be explored at length in the following chapter. But other measures had a considerable impact as well. In the mid-sixties the state raised the legal minimum salaries for county officials while restricting the use of part-time personnel. Counties with fewer than five or six thousand residents found it increasingly difficult to justify retaining full-time officials on the basis of the amount of work actually done. Both Greeley and Valley counties lost the office of clerk of the district court when their populations fell below the eight thousand minimum figure required by state law. Thereafter the county clerk assumed the functions previously filled by that official.[26]

But minor structural changes of this type could not resolve the problems arising from a small tax base and shrinking population. Since county revenue came almost entirely from property taxes, real estate and personal property tax levies continued to mount. Moreover, the relatively stable village population could now control county elections and force the approval of expensive new programs such as the Ord hospital, designed to benefit the towns. Consequently the old antagonism over taxes revived and a good deal of anti-town rhetoric again arose from among the farmers. In this as in other areas state legislation further complicated matters. Under state law individual counties could not raise their tax levy above 14.28 mills without the approval of the voters in a special election. In 1967 a change in the sponsorship of various state programs forced Greeley County to add special levies of five and three-fourths mills. This forced the tax levy above the legal maximum but county residents voted down the proposed increase in the tax ceiling. As a result the county commissioners eliminated the county bridge fund for the year and sharply curtailed road maintenance operations. In subsequent years the commissioners

found themselves facing an almost insurmountable task in keeping expenditures down so as to prevent a recurrence of this situation.[27]

School districts, townships, and counties were not the only institutions to suffer from the effects of population decline. The number of farmer's clubs, 4-H organizations, and women's extension clubs also fell rapidly, especially during the fifties. In most cases farm residents found themselves compelled to go to town if they wished to continue participating in voluntary associations. Women might join the women's clubs or auxiliary organizations while their spouses drifted into the various clubs, lodges, and service organizations. This proved particularly true after the disappearance of the rural schools which had provided the focal point for farm society. In earlier years country churches had shared this function but a long process of consolidation and attrition eliminated most of them, and by 1970 the region counted only one-fourth as many rural churches as a half century earlier.

Various forces influenced the pattern of church closings and consolidation at different times. For example, the German Methodist church southeast of Scotia disappeared as a result of declining ethnic cohesion among second- and third-generation German-Americans in the area. In some instances the competition for members together with the shortage of ministers led country churches to close down even before the population of their neighborhoods began to fall, as in the case of the Presbyterian church in Mira Valley which consolidated with its Ord counterpart in 1926. The Mira Valley district eventually lost five of the six churches which had been active there in 1920. The two Methodist and two United Brethren churches eventually consolidated into a single Methodist church following the depopulation of the thirties and gas rationing of the early forties. In 1950 the parishioners in the local Lutheran church voted to move to Ord and construct a new church there since they could not hope to increase their membership if they remained in the country.

As a result of this sequence of closings and moves the Mira Valley area contained only one active church by the mid-fifties. Most of the younger churchgoers in the vicinity gravitated to that church, but many of the older residents stopped attending after their own neighborhood church had ceased functioning. Among the churches that remained in operation in the region sagging membership and financial constriction forced an increasing degree of co-operation. Thus the Methodist churches in North Loup and

Scotia supported a single pastor and combined some of their youth organizations in the fifties and sixties. Other churches in the region also shared ministers. The eight Methodist churches in the area joined with several in adjoining regions to form a Loup Valley Parish organization. This institution promoted co-operation among its members in their efforts to resolve the problems of obtaining ministers, combating declining memberships, and sponsoring evangelical crusades. The new organization would ultimately pave the way for further church reorganization and consolidation.[28]

V

If the process of depopulation produced such tangible changes at the institutional level it also gave rise to a more generalized psychological trauma for local residents. Not only did the Loup country decline in population and, in some ways, in economic well-being, but its decline appeared all the greater in comparison with the rising fortunes of the city. Following World War II, for example, village retailers in the area lost a growing share of their business to stores in Grand Island and Kearney to the south of the region. This development naturally rekindled the earlier hostility toward roadbuilding programs which would facilitate the flow of trade to the larger cities.[29]

On a broader level antagonism toward the city took the form of opposition to "centralization" whether it involved highway construction, school reorganization, retailing or political institutions. Merchants fought the chain store which threatened to drive the traditional family-owned store out of business. Similarly the policy of farm implement manufacturers of reducing their number of franchises to one per county led to charges that urban centralizers aimed to destroy the small town. But these issues paled into insignificance compared with the controversy that arose over legislative reapportionment. For such a major redistribution of political power as reapportionment implied could not fail to affect the individual citizen no matter how lowly his position.

The problem of legislative reapportionment in Nebraska was complicated by the existence of a unicameral legislature. The traditional rule of geographical representation in one house and proportional representation based on population in the other did not apply. The senatorial districts varied widely in population with the largest about three times as populous as the smallest in 1962.

Following the 1960 census urban forces began agitating for the use of population as the sole basis for representation. This provoked a counterattack by rural forces who sponsored a constitutional amendment providing that redistricting should proceed on the basis of a formula giving 70 percent weight to population and 30 percent weight to area. Just how this formula would work was not clear but obviously the proposition would strengthen the long-term position of rural areas. The proposed amendment carried the Loup country handily in the wake of warnings by local residents that "once put the Legislature of Nebraska on a strictly population basis for redistricting purposes and we'll face the prospect of an ever widening deadly desert from the grain producing valleys to the cattle producing sandhills. Economic growth in the sparsely populated central and west will freeze." To the consternation of some observers, a number of village residents actually voted against the measure. For these individuals had accepted the notion of political representation based on population, a concept which meant not only urban domination of the state and nation but also village control of the county.[30]

Two years later the *Baker* v. *Karr* decision effectively nullified this rural victory and touched off another editorial uproar. The significance of this decision was not limited to representation at the state level for it also rekindled the old tax controversy by giving a larger share of political power in the county to the villagers. Counties now had to reapportion their commissioners' or supervisors' districts on the basis of population. This development generated a bitter contest in Custer County when farmers demanded continued favoritism in county apportionment, arguing that since they paid the bulk of county taxes they should have more influence in determining how the money was spent. The unevenly distributed population in Greeley County proved impossible to organize on the basis of equal representation, and county officials there eventually resolved the difficulty by providing for the election of county commissioners at large.[31]

Thus the residents of the Loup country found their world changing rapidly due to the operation of both internal and external forces. As the population continued to diminish most of the region's inhabitants came to view the process as inevitable, if undesirable. But this sense of fatalism did not preclude the persistence of antagonism against the increasingly dominant urban sector of American society. At irregular intervals new issues arose which brought the older rural tradition into direct conflict with

new trends just as had happened in the teens and twenties. And, as in the previous decades, local divisions proved nearly as deep as those between the rural and urban sectors of the larger society. A classic illustration of these internal divisions as well as of the larger conflict between new and traditional values appeared during the contest over school district reorganization in the fifties and sixties, a conflict whose echoes still linger in the region.

9. Institutional Change in Rural Education

ONCE THE SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION MOVEMENTS of the teens had subsided interest in educational reorganization gave way to general apathy. During the twenties farmers viewed their schools almost entirely in terms of the property taxes which went to finance them and which invariably seemed too high. With the onset of the depression the basic problem of survival took precedence over all others and school budgets underwent drastic reductions. Teachers' salaries fell precipitously while new construction and plant improvement virtually ceased. In the course of the thirties the rural high schools which had sprung up during the teens and twenties closed down as farmers found the cost of maintaining them excessive. Henceforth only the village schools provided instruction beyond the elementary level.

The thirties also witnessed a significant demographic transformation which would play a major role in future educational organization problems. Under the impact of sharply declining birth rates and of heavy outmigration among farm families the number of school age children began to fall. This trend continued into the forties as heavy outmigration persisted under the stimulus of the urban war boom. At the same time, however, the number of elementary school districts in the area remained unchanged. Consequently the number of children of school age per rural district fell from an average of 30.6 in both Greeley and Valley counties in 1920 to 13.3 and 14.1 respectively in 1950. This meant that the number of children of elementary school age per district dropped from an average of about twenty in 1920 to about nine in 1950. Because of the uneven spatial distribution of these population changes, actual enrollments varied considerably from one district to the next. Upland areas had steeper declines in student population than did the relatively flat regions in the river valleys. Consequently the already substantial variation between districts in terms of the number of pupils, the value of taxable property, the mill levies needed to finance school operations, and per pupil costs increased considerably.

Following World War II social conditions in the Loup country returned to some degree of normality and the subject of school

reorganization once more gained public attention. In the fall of 1948 the *Ord Quiz* responded to this growing interest with a series of articles surveying conditions in the rural elementary (K-8) districts of Valley County. Two of the sixty-nine rural school districts had no children of elementary school age present that year. Hence their only tax burden consisted of the 4.30-mill free high school tuition levy required of all districts by state law. Among districts maintaining elementary schools or contracting, levies ranged from 8.69 mills to 29.42 mills. The total taxable property valuation varied from slightly over $45,000 in the smallest district to over $400,000 in the largest. Per pupil costs, one of the favorite indices of the professional school administrator, ranged from about $80 in the wealthiest district to nearly $240 in eight small districts with a county average of about $160. Some idea of the conditions prevailing in these schools may be gleaned from the fact that only eleven of the fifty-nine operating rural schools had telephones. The highest teacher's salary did not exceed $1,900 and, despite the existence of a state law requiring each district to spend a minimum of $5.00 annually for new library books, the sixty-nine districts in the county had spent a total of only $94.80 for that purpose in 1947–1948.

Ten of the country-school districts in Valley County contracted with other districts for instruction during the 1948–1949 academic year. Although rural districts had long followed this practice it gained considerable momentum during the thirties and forties. The primary factor responsible for this development lay in the difficulty in obtaining teachers for country schools. Although the state teacher certification standards remained undemanding—virtually anyone could obtain an emergency teaching certificate—potential teachers showed limited interest in such positions. One reason for this apathy lay in the absence of job security since rural teaching contracts were issued on an annual basis with no provision for automatic renewal. In addition, the poor condition of roads in the winter and spring made it difficult for teachers to travel far in order to reach their schools. The usual solution to this problem involved boarding with a family in the district but few farm families wished to take in boarders. Evidently the miniscule salaries did not deter young women from the profession since even rural teachers earned more than did the girls who worked in the village stores.[1]

Under the state laws governing the school contracting system as of 1945, a district might, by majority vote at the annual meeting, contract with other districts to educate its resident pupils. It

would send its students to other schools, paying a flat per pupil rate to defray the cost of instruction. This system provided an ideal solution to the problem of keeping taxes low in a district with only a handful of children since it eliminated the expense of actively operating a school. The existence of this practice discouraged any movement toward school district consolidation by providing a third alternative for districts faced with a choice of operating an expensive school or merging with adjacent districts in order to reduce taxes.[2]

II

In 1949 the Nebraska legislature passed an enabling act which included provisions for county-level school consolidation. One section of the new law, the first state action on the subject in nearly thirty years, established a four-mill tax levy on property lying within all Class I (elementary) school districts in the state. This measure sought to prevent certain school districts from escaping taxation, such as when no children of school age were present. The legislature also provided a controversial formula for redistributing the funds accumulated from this levy. Districts which included fewer than five pupils could not receive any of the funds unless the county superintendent ruled that their operation was necessitated by extreme distances and / or the presence of natural barriers. The money raised under the tax would be distributed among districts with five or more pupils—two thirds on a flat per district basis and one-third on a per pupil basis. Ultimately the state supreme court overturned this tax provision and the legislature found it necessary to approach the problem of school reorganization from a different direction.[3]

Despite this failure a few stirrings did appear in the Loup country following the passage of the 1949 act. Voters in each county elected an advisory board to consider plans for reorganization on either a county-wide or partial county basis. As stipulated by state law, a majority of the members on these boards came from rural school districts. Efforts by foes of reorganization to block the enforcement of this provision of the 1949 law failed when the state supreme court upheld its constitutionality in 1954. Despite the creation of these boards and the sporadic meetings that ensued neither the Greeley nor Valley county committees made any progress and meetings soon lapsed. This pattern of inactivity recurred across the state, and spokesmen for the Nebraska State Educational

Association, the major teachers' organization in the state, predicted that progress in this area would not come until the state adopted compulsory redistricting legislation.[4]

Most of the impetus behind state and local school reorganization efforts came from two sources. Professional educators and administrators concentrated their influence at the statehouse level. Most of them wished to raise the standards for admission into their profession as a means of upgrading its status. The fact that in 1950 a Nebraska high school graduate could obtain an elementary teaching certificate and begin teaching in country schools without further training revealed how far they had to go in order to achieve this objective. Educational administrators sought to bring order to the chaos arising from the operation of countless small districts with differing tax levies, school facilities, student-teacher ratios, and per pupil operating costs. These professional educators won a major victory in the early fifties when they secured the passage of a constitutional amendment making the office of state superintendent of public instruction appointive rather than elective. Henceforth an elected State Board of Education and appointed superintendent would shape the state's educational policy.

As a trained educational administrator the superintendent embodied the aspirations of professional educators, and in his official capacity he sought to rationalize and standardize educational practices in the state. The State Board of Education usually followed his lead, thus coming to support such professional goals as the raising of teacher certification standards, school consolidation, and stricter requirements for high school accreditation. As this pattern became evident the superintendent found himself the target of intense hostility on the part of the "save the rural school" organizations which sprang up during the consolidation controversy. Ultimately this led to several campaigns aimed at restoring the superintendent's office to its original elective status.[5]

While professional educators provided the major backing for school redistricting at the state level most of the rural support for consolidation emanated from the villages. Because they supported the operation of costly high schools, village districts incurred a much higher educational expense than did rural districts. This resulted in high tax levies, and in 1948 when rural Valley County school taxes ranged from four to twenty-four mills the figure reached thirty mills at Ord, thirty-one mills at Arcadia, and thirty-nine mills at North Loup. Consequently village residents took up the cry for consolidation as a means of increasing the property

valuation of their districts and reducing their tax rates. With the passage of time village support for reorganization became increasingly intense, for in the mid-fifties state educators began directing greater attention toward the small towns and their often inadequate high schools. As accreditation standards rose and the possibility of losing their high schools became real, villagers sought to expand their districts to include as many resident students of high school age as possible. Thus consolidation became essential for the very survival of the school system which usually represented the small town's largest business operation.

Initially the opposition to school reorganization proposals and policies came almost entirely from farmers. The root issue in most of the proposed consolidation schemes involved taxation. The persistent failure of the state to adopt a sales or income tax together with its refusal to provide any significant aid to education left the individual school district dependent upon property taxes for about 90 percent of its income. The farmers had long expressed their grievances against the system which forced them to pay taxes on their capital equipment as well as their personal goods and correctly assumed that consolidation would mean a substantially higher tax bill. Naturally they strongly opposed reorganization of this type although they occasionally supported merger with other rural elementary districts as a means of reducing taxes.[6]

A less concrete but nonetheless very real issue which loomed large in the school reorganization controversy revolved about the threatened loss of rural autonomy. Most opponents of redistricting paid at least lip service to "local control" of education as opposed to control from the outside—i.e., by the professional educators or other urban-based elements. To many farm parents the reorganization proposals amounted to a demand that they surrender control over their own children to distant forces which sought to lure them away from home. Villagers regarded the slogan of "local control" with some skepticism, pointing out the willingness of its supporters to contract with other school districts, thereby surrendering their control over educational policy as it affected their own children. For the farmer, however, this practice meant retaining at least the appearance if not the reality of continued autonomy, something no longer possible once the country district dissolved and merged into the village school.

The issue of "local control" then, arose from an awareness of and hostility toward the process of cultural homogenization then taking place in American society. This standardization process had

already affected mass communications such as the movies, radio, and television which all shared a fundamentally urban viewpoint. The appearance of the automobile had weakened cultural as well as physical barriers and with the improvement of rural roads the process accelerated. Now the farm neighborhood itself appeared endangered as its basic institutions gravitated to the town. Already the country churches had largely disappeared together with most farm social organizations. Thus the rural school came to represent the last bastion of neighborhood autonomy as opposed to absorption into the new spatially extended, village-based community. The country school educated farm children, providing them with a sense of personal and neighborhood identity. It also performed other social functions, serving as the focus for community social and recreational meetings as parents gathered there with their children for picnics, holiday programs, and school business sessions. Now all of this appeared threatened. Some opponents of consolidation grasped this point clearly and directed their criticism toward centralization, concluding that this trend constituted an evil in and of itself. Others who saw the problem less distinctly sought explanations in terms of conspiracies involving socialists, communists, despotic educators filled with a lust for power, and the like. Hence as the controversy wore on an element of hysteria increasingly colored the dispute. But all this could do little more than delay a process which was inevitable, given the direction of change in the larger American society.[7]

III

Six years of legislative inaction followed the passage of the school reorganization act of 1949 and the number of school districts in the state declined at a glacial pace. In most instances what consolidation did occur came in response to unusually intense demographic or tax pressures in the districts involved. The county reorganization committees generally failed to act and after a few halfhearted meetings usually advised against making any changes and disappeared from sight. But as the influence of professional educators mounted in the mid-fifties demands for compulsory school redistricting legislation increased. This process occurred throughout the midwestern agricultural region, and Nebraskans could look to reorganization laws in neighboring states for guidance in the matter. The legislature steadfastly avoided coming to grips with the problem however, and after persistent lobbying by state educa-

tional organizations contented itself with passing a measure that required county reorganization committees to either submit plans for county-wide redistricting within two years or else to dissolve themselves. In the latter event the county voters would elect a new committee to deal with the question.[8]

After this law went into effect each county in the Loup country elected a new committee to tackle the redistricting problem. This time they began seriously considering the problem with the intent of recommending changes which might later be implemented. The Greeley County committee commissioned a survey of buying habits among farmers in order to determine the boundaries of the trade areas of each of the four villages in the county. This would provide a useful guide to potential future school district boundaries. But after taking this step the committee voted against recommending any reorganization plan. This decision resulted in part from the continued heavy outmigration of farm families which made it difficult to project long-term enrollments. In addition, many local residents evidently did not grasp the concept of multiple schools operating within a single district—assuming that a K-12 (kindergarten through twelfth grade) district could only support a single elementary school whereas the State Board of Education favored the continued operation of a curtailed number of rural elementary schools within the enlarged K-12 districts. The county study of village trade areas concluded that any new K-12 districts must include land outside of the county limits in order to reach the state approved minimum valuation levels. Here the committee raised a more legitimate objection, for the state legislation governing intercounty districts made such reorganization difficult to implement.[9]

After reaching these conclusions the Greeley County committee lapsed into apathy, but as the deadline for submitting a new plan approached some of its members bestirred themselves. The board then hired a reorganization study committee from the University of Nebraska to survey the county and submit a redistricting plan. The study group released its findings in January, 1959, recommending the consolidation of the entire county into a single district centered upon Greeley. Alternatively, the Scotia village district might consolidate into Valley County while the rest of Greeley County formed a single new district. For all the uproar few of the county's residents took the study very seriously and it was never implemented.[10]

Valley County's reorganization committee proved more active

than its Greeley County counterpart. At the urging of the committee four members of the University of Nebraska Teachers College faculty inspected the county's schools and offered several redistricting proposals. First they suggested combining all districts in the county, save for a few near Arcadia and in the northwest corner of the county, into a single district based upon Ord. The new district would include a high school at Ord and elementary schools at Ord, North Loup, and in several rural locations. The northwestern districts should then consolidate into the Burwell district in Garfield County to the north whereas those near Arcadia could either merge into the Ord district or combine downriver with the Loup City district in Sherman County. The Valley County redistricting committee adopted these recommendations as a long-range blueprint for county-wide consolidation but remained powerless to put them into effect.[11]

Even before the Valley County committee adopted these recommendations village residents saw that school consolidation must eventually come. This realization touched off a round of frantic redistricting efforts on the part of the towns which sought to annex nearby rural districts before their rivals could do so. The smaller villages launched intensive campaigns while the Ord district remained relatively inactive in this sphere. Since all the proposed county reorganization plans would ultimately benefit Ord on account of its size and central location, Ordites felt that they had little to lose by waiting. In contrast, Arcadians proposed a consolidation scheme involving twenty-one nearby districts in Valley, Custer, and Sherman counties as early as 1954. The proposal fell through when its sponsors discovered that they must proceed through an almost impenetrable maze of intercounty school district laws in order to achieve their objective. Three years later another Arcadia group proposed a consolidation with seventeen country districts, but like its forerunner this plan quickly came to naught.[12]

Late in 1956 as the Valley County reorganization committee began seriously considering various reorganization proposals the Comstock village editor warned his readers against postponing consolidation unless they wished to find the entire region redistricted into the Ord and Broken Bow school systems within five years. In January, 1957, the Comstock school board revealed a plan to combine twenty-one country districts into the village district. As this proposal circulated heated opposition developed among farmers in the vicinity. As one infuriated countryman wrote:

It looks as though they are out to break the small farmer, from [Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft] Benson right on down to the small town citizen.

While we are at it why not go a little farther and break the small towns at the same time? If the small farmer isn't needed any more maybe the small town isn't either.

If the farmer's children have to go to larger schools and put in long hours each day riding busses, why not do as Ord suggests? Just have one large school in each county. Put all property in the county in one large school district.

Let the small towns as well as the farmers junk their schools, and help pay for new school buildings, school busses, and drivers.

Let the town children ride with the farm children long distances to get to school too. Let the small town people go broke as have so many of the farmers so we can see vacant buildings in town too, as we do so many in the country going to rot.

This letter provoked the editor to countercharge that the town actually subsidized farmers whose children attended high school and only paid a small fraction of the cost under the free high school tuition system. This in turn precipitated a heated debate on the question of taxation.[13]

This exchange revealed the persistence of the old town-country hostility which had flared up so intensively at the time of World War I. It also demonstrated how some farmers perceived the movement toward school consolidation as one more aspect of the general social and economic tendency toward centralization which strengthened the larger farm and town at the expense of the smaller, less efficient farms and villages. At times the expression of this theme approached the paranoid, particularly when it involved the broad proposals of professional educators whom many farmers regarded as small-time czars seeking to expand their autocratic powers. This attitude prevailed among small farmers to a much greater extent than it did among the larger operators who had adapted themselves to the new order of things. Thus, while the farm bureau which spoke for the larger farmers opposed compulsory school reorganization it also supported the practice of appointing the state superintendent of public instruction. In contrast most small farmers vehemently opposed this practice which they regarded as akin to the establishment of an absolute dictator in charge of education throughout the state.[14]

Shortly after the publication of the proposals for school reorganization in Valley County, the North Loup village district launched a consolidation campaign. Wayne Hagmann, the North Loup superintendent charged that the proposed county plan would simply shift Ord's tax burden to the remainder of the county without benefiting the average student. In February, 1957, repre-

sentatives of the North Loup school met with spokesmen from a dozen rural districts to discuss merger. Those present favored reorganization by a lopsided margin and set up a commission to map out further action. Two weeks later thirty of the thirty-eight voters in one rural district and thirty-four of the forty-five voters in another signed petitions opposing consolidation. Hagmann promptly accused the Ord city superintendent of circulating these petitions in order to block any expansion on the part of the North Loup district, thus paving the way for adding these country districts to his own bailiwick. Whether Ord forces actually organized the petition drives remains unclear but obviously rural sentiment strongly opposed immediate consolidation. This proved the case in every instance when a grandiose reorganization scheme came to light. Those who favored redistricting—a faction that generally included from 10 to 25 percent of the voters in a given rural district—attended preliminary meetings in town and voted in favor of consolidation. Those opposed to change ignored the meetings only to turn out at school elections or to sign petitions blocking the proposed mergers.[15]

As the controversy heated up foes of redistricting formed their own organizations to carry on the battle against centralization. The Nebraska Small School Association appeared first but soon gave way to the Nebraska School Improvement Association (N.S.I.A.). This group sought to preserve the rural schools in the state by whatever means necessary. The most obvious target lay in the office of state commissioner (formerly superintendent) of education and the N.S.I.A. launched a drive to return the position to elective status. The question did not appear on the state ballot until November, 1964, however, at which time the N.S.I.A. suffered a crushing defeat. While the proposition carried Greeley County by a substantial margin, it failed to carry Valley County despite the violent feelings aroused there by reorganization. Voting followed a predictable pattern as Ordites favored keeping the office appointive by a margin of more than two to one. North Loup, which had lost its high school, and Arcadia, whose high school faced an uncertain future, both favored election by slight margins. In the southeastern part of the county where rural districts had either consolidated with North Loup or continued to operate relatively strong elementary schools the vote was very close. On the other hand the northwestern part of the county, particularly the Bohemian areas favored election by more than three to one with Eureka township supporting election by a margin of fifty-eight to two. Over-all the areas dominated by small general farmers showed

heavy support for the N.S.I.A. while the areas dominated by larger commercial farms leaned slightly in the opposite direction. The similarity of this voting pattern with the earlier voting on whether to abolish the position of county extension agent appears quite striking and underlines the basic gulf dividing the farm population of the region.[16]

The N.S.I.A. also undertook other efforts to protect rural schools in the state. It lobbied against the passage of legislation requiring college training for elementary teachers. Instead, the organization urged that emphasis be given to "knowledge of subjects and natural teaching ability," a phrase never very clearly defined. The N.S.I.A. also crusaded against a variety of educational practices loosely lumped together under the rubric of "progressive education," urging a return to the "basic" subjects such as phonics, reading, and arithmetic. During the fifties the local organization showered the Greeley County reorganization committee with praise for its policy of inaction.[17]

As the debate over redistricting continued a notable breakthrough occurred when District Five in Greeley County merged with the Scotia district in 1957, marking the first addition to that district since its initial consolidation in 1919. In the same year residents in the North Loup and Scotia vicinities began considering the possibility of combining their village school systems since the two towns lay only four miles apart on a hard-surfaced state highway. Early that year the Scotia Community Club entertained a discussion of plans for a joint school system utilizing both the North Loup and Scotia facilities and during the county redistricting meetings held that year various individuals from each district offered proposals for unifying the schools.[18]

In the summer of 1958 Superintendent Hagmann left North Loup following several major differences of opinion with the village school board. At the same time the state reduced the North Loup high school's accreditation status from full accredited to minor accredited due to the lack of courses and instructors there. After an unsuccessful search for a new superintendent the school board arranged for the new Scotia superintendent to serve half days at North Loup. The new superintendent and board members in each district then began polling residents on the desirability of consolidating the two districts. Enrollment in both schools had dwindled over the years and the four-year high school in North Loup had only sixty pupils—Scotia had eighty-four. In September, 1958, the two school boards instructed an Ord attorney to draw up petitions

for merging the two systems. Under the new plan North Loup would operate the elementary school, Scotia the junior and senior high schools. The projected tax levy of thirty-four mills equaled the current Scotia rate but marked a substantial reduction from the forty-seven mill rate in force in North Loup.[19]

Despite a generally favorable reaction to the proposed merger some opposition soon surfaced. This hostility centered in the North Loup area, particularly in the village which stood to lose its high school. Some foes warned that the proposed unification would not reduce taxes appreciably while Hagmann, the former superintendent, warned against selling the community down the river. A major source of antipathy toward the consolidation evidently lay in the manner in which it occurred. The redistricting action resulted from the joint efforts of the two school boards with the approval of the state and county reorganization committees. School patrons themselves had no opportunity to vote for or against the proposed change, a fact which even some proponents of merger found disconcerting. Despite this the new system began operating in the autumn of 1959 and the tax levy remained at thirty-four mills. Although transportation expenses rose appreciably savings on faculty salaries more than offset them. North Loup emerged from the consolidation without a high school but with a substantially enlarged elementary school and a major tax reduction of one-fourth from the level of the previous year.[20]

School redistricting in the countryside finally got under way in the middle fifties and advanced at an accelerating rate despite the failure of the state to adopt mandatory redistricting legislation. Statistics for Greeley County school districts appear in table 29. Valley County underwent a less rapid reorganization partly because of the absence of any village center to serve as a focus for consolidation in the northwestern corner of the county, and partly because it experienced a less rapid decline in the number of school age farm children than did Greeley County. Rural consolidation began very slowly and not until mid-decade did the number of districts begin to decline appreciably. Once the process began it accelerated for various reasons and by 1971–1972 only three rural schools remained in operation in Greeley County compared with forty-eight such schools twenty years earlier.

The major factor responsible for the decline in rural school numbers lay in the difficulty that they experienced in recruiting teaching personnel. This problem arose largely as a consequence of the actions of the state legislature. For obvious political reasons the

TABLE 29
SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND CONSOLIDATION TRENDS
GREELEY COUNTY, 1945–1971

Year	Total Districts	Village Districts	Graded Schools (Rural)	One Teacher Schools	Districts Contracting	Change in Number of Districts
1945–46	63	4	1	48	10	.....
1950–51	62*	4	1	48	8	–1
1953–54	60	4	0	46	10	–2
1956–57	56	4	1	41	10	–4
1959–60	47	4	1	33	9	–9
1962–63	29	4	1	19	5	–18
1965–66	23	4	2	11	6	–6
1968–69	19	4	2	3	10	–4
1971–72	10	4	1	2	3	–9

SOURCE: Annual reports of the Greeley County superintendent, County Superintendent's office, Greeley County courthouse, Greeley, Nebraska.
* One district had no pupils of school age in 1950–1951, hence appears in none of the subclassifications.

predominantly rural members of the Unicameral avoided acting directly upon the sensitive issue of school reorganization. Eventually, however, the solons approached the question in an indirect fashion. Because the state lacked any significant system of aid to public education it could not exert the kind of leverage on individual school districts that most states could. Ultimately the state senators began applying pressure on the two most critical points in the existing system of rural school operations—minimum teaching qualifications and school district contracting regulations.

The rise in minimum teacher certification requirements came about largely as a result of efforts by the educators themselves. Their professional organizations lobbied in the State Department of Education and sought to influence the state commissioner of education who recommended legislation to the Unicameral. The process of upgrading teaching standards proved a long and tedious one spanning more than half a century. As of 1910 an eighth-grade graduate could qualify by examination for a certificate which allowed him to teach in rural elementary schools. In theory, after 1925 a new teacher must have completed a normal training course in high school as well as passing a state examination, but teachers already practicing could continue to do so even if they had only

an eighth-grade education. A 1953 law specified that beginning in 1956 new teachers must earn twelve college credits and later laws raised this figure to two full years of college training. Again, however, loopholes provided for the continuation of teaching on the part of those already holding certificates. Finally in 1963 the Unicameral authorized the State Board of Education to establish rules governing the issuance of teaching credentials, thus taking the matter entirely out of the hands of the legislators. After that date teaching certification requirements rose as the consequence of administrative decisions rather than of legislative action. By 1970 the state required an associate's degree of new teachers while practicing teachers who had less than two years of college training found themselves forced to attend summer courses in order to remain active.[21]

This gradual upgrading of standards combined with general demographic trends in the fifties to produce a major shortage of qualified teachers. Even the villages experienced difficulty in obtaining teaching personnel due to the general demand created by the baby boom of the preceding decade. Most graduates of teachers colleges could easily secure employment in cities or towns and lacked interest in rural school teaching. The local populace could not provide an adequate supply of teachers, for the natives who left for college rarely returned. This scarcity of teachers eventually forced many rural school districts to contract with other schools in order to provide instruction for their students. Under earlier state regulations they might have carried on this practice indefinitely. But as the fifties wore on the legislature began amending state school laws to discourage the practice of perpetual contracting. A 1953 law required county superintendents to dissolve any district which contracted with another district for five consecutive years. A 1967 measure prohibited a contracting school from resuming operations unless it had a minimum of five pupils present. Finally, in 1969, the state reduced the maximum time limit for contracting with another district to two years. It also prohibited mergers between K-8 districts, requiring them to consolidate into K-12 districts once they could no longer operate their own school or continue contracting.[22]

Despite these developments some rural elementary schools continued to operate in the Loup country during the seventies. Most country school teachers now held bachelor's degrees while the school physical plants conformed with rising state requirements. The establishment of a state aid to education program in the late sixties

gave the State Department of Education greater leverage for imposing and enforcing higher standards in these schools. Thus the country school did not disappear from the scene although it did become an increasingly rare phenomenon. But whereas the issue of rural school consolidation subsided, the controversy over the general question of educational reorganization continued unabated. Now the problems of the smaller village high schools became increasingly prominent. As a rising proportion of rural youth decided to attend college or to migrate to the city in search of employment the availability of strong college preparatory and vocational education curricula became highly essential.

Usually the village school dilemma involved one or both of two major components—tax rates and / or high school accreditation. If the district failed to consolidate extensively enough taxes might reach intolerably high levels. If the school lost its accreditation its graduates experienced some difficulty in gaining admission to college. Furthermore, the loss of accreditation would drive away nonresident youths whose tuition made up an important part of the village school budget. The merger of the North Loup and Scotia school systems in 1959 illustrated one possible solution to the problem. Since the two schools operated in towns of about equal size separated by only a short distance, the consolidation did not entail any great sacrifice on the part of either one. But for the remaining schools in the region the specter of Ord loomed unpleasantly above the horizon. Its high school had a secure future, giving it a commanding position in any negotiations with the smaller villages concerning reorganization. In such a situation the village must inevitably lose its high school. This meant a major loss not only in terms of business activity in the small town but also with regard to village identification and aspirations.

Comstock's village district offers a case in point of how conditions could eventually force the dissolution of the high school. In the middle fifties the district's total valuation did not exceed a half-million dollars and efforts to resolve the problem through a major consolidation with rural districts failed. The high school experienced increasing difficulty in recruiting personnel while the tax levy began to mount. In 1958 rumors circulated that the district would not operate a high school. These rumors frightened away potential nonresident high school students, thus adding further to the district's budgetary woes. In 1960 two rural districts consolidated into the village system but this did not suffice to offset the rising expenses of operating the high school. By 1963 the vil-

lage school levy had reached sixty-five mills and showed no signs of stabilizing. Realizing that the situation was rapidly becoming untenable the school board met with its Arcadia counterpart to discuss possible merger. Several weeks later the Comstockers met with the Sargent school board to explore the possibility of a Comstock-Sargent or Arcadia-Comstock-Sargent consolidation. These negotiations collapsed over the question of whether elementary students from contracting rural districts near Comstock should continue attending school in Sargent or whether they must go to Comstock. The crisis deepened in the summer of 1964 when the Comstock high school's accreditation status fell from minor accredited to approved due to low enrollment and the lack of guidance counseling. Then, just two days before the beginning of the school year the mathematics instructor died in a traffic accident and the district found it impossible to secure a replacement.

After these blows had fallen Comstock began making overtures toward the Ord school board. The two boards met and worked out an arrangement whereby Comstock retained its elementary school while consolidating into the Ord district. The new amalgamated district had a single school board and provided transportation for high school students traveling from Comstock to Ord. This proposal passed review by the county and state reorganization committees and went into effect in the fall of 1965. For Comstock residents the merger meant a fall in the village school tax rate from 72.96 mills to 37.14 mills. On the other hand the action generated much hard feeling against the Arcadia and Sargent school boards whose intransigence had driven the village into the arms of Ord. It also led to some unhappiness in the Sargent area whose school board had missed a major opportunity to bolster its own school's position. The consolidation further fanned suspicions among farm residents between Comstock and Ord that the latter town intended to gobble up all the districts in that part of the county.[23]

The demise of Comstock's high school stimulated other villages to step up their expansion efforts lest they meet with the same fate. Residents of those towns grew especially apprehensive in the late sixties when the State Department of Education commissioned yet another of its studies. This particular report recommended a drastic reduction in the number of school districts, the location of most high schools in towns of more than twenty-five hundred population, and a minimum high school class size of one hundred students. The appearance of this study set off a new wave of vocifera-

tion but the outcry diminished as the legislature followed its usual pattern of inertia on the matter. Nonetheless a considerable degree of bitterness over redistricting continued to pervade the countryside for the new K-12 school district taxes averaged substantially higher than those of the old elementary school districts. Thus while the new schools may have provided superior educational facilities for farm children, they did so at a considerable cost. For those concerned with the passing of a basic way of life this seemed a poor bargain indeed.[24]

Conclusions

THE FIRST TWO-THIRDS of the twentieth century witnessed a series of radical transformations in the agricultural society of the Loup country. A technological revolution occurred in the areas of communications and transportation. The appearance of radio, motion pictures, and television helped to break down the cultural barriers between town and country while the spread of electrification diminished the difference in living standards between those two social sectors. The automobile annihilated the distance between farm and village and between the region itself and the cities lying beyond its boundaries. These developments had a significance reaching far beyond the simple elevation of living standards because they provided the means for effecting basic alterations in the social institutions and attitudes of the rural population. For as the Loup country became increasingly integrated into the larger American society it came to share in the national trends toward centralization, bureaucratization, and standardization.

American economic institutions had undergone the process of centralization well before the dawn of the twentieth century. Terminal markets at Chicago and other major cities determined the prices for agricultural commodities which meant profit or loss for the local farmer. Wholesaling practices in the metropolitan centers could spell success or failure for the village merchant. The availability of credit at home-town banks depended upon decisions made in New York and Washington. But the centralization of power had progressed much less rapidly in the political and social spheres. The federal government continued to play a minor role in the life of the average citizen until the coming of the depression. Likewise, the state government in Nebraska contented itself with performing a few limited functions such as road construction and the maintenance of a few educational and welfare institutions. The primary political concern of the individual focused upon the county, township, and school district levels which most directly affected him both in terms of services performed and with respect to taxation.

After 1930, however, the centralization of political authority increased greatly. Individual farmers found themselves linked di-

rectly to Washington through the operation of the AAA and subsequent agricultural policies. New programs such as social security directly affected countless other individuals and families and added to the general tax burden. The increased role of the military establishment after 1940 meant a sharp rise in public spending while the adoption of peacetime conscription directly touched most rural families. Much the same course of events took place at the state level as the government of Nebraska began to assume additional responsibilities. Conversely the lower levels of government began to atrophy as their relative importance declined. Townships melted away and school districts consolidated, looking up to the state and federal government for increasing financial support. Even counties lost their previously sacrosanct character and began to appear dispensable in favor of larger regional units of government.

At the beginning of the twentieth century decision-making powers remained widely diffused among the social institutions of the region as churches, voluntary associations, schools, and the like enjoyed a substantial degree of local and regional autonomy. But with the passage of time regional and national bodies came to play an increasingly important role within these organizations. Regional institutions such as chambers of commerce and multiple-church parishes sprang up as residents of the smaller villages set aside their traditional localism in order to co-operate in the search for community survival. At the same time the basic social unit of the countryside, the farm neighborhood, began to disintegrate. In earlier days the rural school and church had provided the major focal points in the farm community. But with the general adoption of the automobile the physical isolation which had fostered the growth of these institutions began to break down. Eventually the churches and schools consolidated into their village counterparts and the resulting neighborhoods spread out over a far larger area than had their predecessors. These new "rurban" communities as some have called them included the remnants of many old farm neighborhoods centered upon a village nucleus. But with the expansion of population that occurred with the enlargement of these communities, the new neighborhoods lacked much of the sense of closeness and cohesion that had marked their more compact predecessors.

This movement toward increased centralization promoted the growth of bureaucratic structures which provided the necessary linkage between the remote centers of decision-making power on the one hand and the grass roots community and individual citizen on the other. Hierarchically organized channels appeared which

facilitated the flow of information and funds up and down between those two levels. The farmer quickly became aware of this process in his day-to-day relations with the federal government in connection with various commodity production and soil conservation programs. A county committee initially processed his application which then passed through the hands of a chain of higher administrators for approval before any funds appeared. School administrators found themselves confronted with multiple forms and reports to be furnished to an array of bureaucrats including county superintendents, State Office of Education officials, and federal Office of Education personnel. Church workers waded through mounting floods of paperwork as they provided growing amounts of data to regional conferences and offices. Even the village retailer had to complete a multiplicity of questionnaires providing information to governmental agencies, franchise or chain store officials, and the like. Hence bureaucratic structures and procedures became firmly entrenched within the regional as well as national society.

These basic tendencies combined with the general revolution in technology to produce a growing degree of standardization or homogenization within American society. The mass media brought new urban ideas directly into the home of the most isolated country dweller. New types of mass-produced consumer goods flooded into farm and city households alike, largely obliterating the difference in life styles between the rural and urban populations. Even as living standards converged the rise of bureaucratic structures gave added emphasis to standardization in the area of social organization and practices. In order to function properly these structures required the use of standardized procedures and concepts of operation, even in the most diverse sectors of society. Because of this fact the growth of bureaucracy inspired efforts to restructure local institutions in line with the national norm so as to eliminate potential administrative uncertainty and inefficiency. This impulse influenced the campaign to reform the system of taxation in the state. It spurred on the drive to reorganize the chaotic administration of elementary and secondary education. It figured prominently in the rise of chain stores and franchise operations which led to the appearance of increasingly identical main streets in rural towns across the face of the country. But the advance of standardization or homogenization did not confine itself to the sphere of institutional structure for it also influenced the attitudes and values of rural residents once the protective isolation of earlier days had disappeared.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the inhabitants of the Loup country had shared a fundamentally agrarian outlook. For most of them the basic social values remained the traditional ones of financial independence, a strong community spirit, and the preservation of the established social order. Farming constituted a mode of existence rather than simply a means of making money and farm life itself appeared morally superior to urban living. But as the twentieth century progressed and the physical and cultural isolation of rural areas diminished, farming lost much of its distinctive character and increasingly assumed the aspects of a business enterprise. The older emphasis upon partially subsistence farming with production for home consumption, the avoidance of debt, and the use of the family as a labor force gave way to an emphasis upon productivity and profits, an attitude that ultimately implied the development of agricultural specialization. These changes undermined the older values which appeared less relevant in the new conditions and into their place seeped new values of a previously urban orientation—those of efficiency, stability (in a dynamic sense), and standardization.

Technological advances in agriculture, particularly after 1940, spurred a sharp rise in labor productivity and fostered a change in basic outlook among many farm operators. Now they could substantially expand the scope of their enterprises and by boosting their efficiency reap greater profits. Such an expansion program generally required a high degree of specialization based upon a greatly enlarged capital investment in land and equipment. On the other hand a farmer might choose to avoid the extensive borrowing required to put such a policy into effect, sacrificing potential growth and profits in favor of the traditional goal of security of tenure. For the progressive farmer efficiency became the key to profits and as such a basic factor in his more general outlook onto the world. The traditional farmer eschewed any overriding interest in enhanced operating efficiency but shared in the progressive's desire for stability. To the traditionalist stability meant the continuation of customary values and practices into the distant future. For the progressive farmer, however, stability possessed a dynamic character. One could actively promote stability by eliminating elements of uncertainty from the farming operation—i.e., through the adoption of irrigation, chemical fertilizers, and soil conservation practices which eliminated the hazards of water supply and soil depletion. In a similar fashion federal agricultural programs might ultimately act to stabilize farm prices. With these elements of uncer-

tainty eliminated the farmer could rationally design his expansion program so as to reduce his risk to a minimum. Hence stability provided the basis for accelerating change. A somewhat different process took place in the towns. Some merchants continued to adhere to the long-established progressive orientation, seeking to expand their trade through the adoption of new sales techniques, the addition of extra services, specialization, and the like. Others, however, adopted a policy of gearing their trade to the local clientele, accepting a limited volume of trade and low profit margin in exchange for the traditionalist goal of security and freedom from debt.

The substitution of new values for old ones did not come easily, nor did the new ideas entirely displace their predecessors. The process of ideational change that occurred generated a high level of tension which contributed to the protracted social and political conflict that marked the region. The division between progressives and traditionalists had initially coincided to some degree with the distinction between town and country. But in the teens certain farmers came to admire the urban businessman as a model of efficiency and the original alignment soon broke down. Traditionalists appeared in the villages, especially after the cessation of economic expansion in the teens, and by the end of the period the towns may well have included a higher proportion of traditionalists than did the countryside. Thus cleavages developed within previously unified social categories such as farmers, villagers, and members of the various ethnocultural groups. As these cleavages deepened the older group cohesion distintegrated and two distinct types of individuals emerged, each committed to a different world view.

At the level of individual consciousness the exchange of ideas proceeded slowly and unevenly. Many rural dwellers experienced confusion and uncertainty as components of both systems blended together in their minds. Some farmers who greatly admired certain qualities in the urban businessman led the Nonpartisan League attack upon the city. During the thirties many farm buearu members who supported the AAA joined the hostile Farmers Holiday Association because of an overriding concern with saving their farms. Many progressives in later years opposed school district reorganization which affected their own children although they subscribed to the basic values which school consolidation represented. Even today many individuals in the Loup country share contemporary urban values and conceptions while retaining a sense of per-

sonal identification with a romanticized image of rural America free from the afflictions which characterize the cities.

To what extent did the course of events in the Loup country during the first two-thirds of the twentieth century parallel similar trends in the remainder of the rural United States? On the whole the changes that took place followed much the same pattern everywhere and in this sense the region may be considered typical. The major variations that transpired stemmed from the fact that these shifts occurred in different places at different times. The chief determinants of the rapidity of change lay in the distance between a particular farm region and the nearest urban center and in the political influence of cities within the state involved, for cities provided the focal points from which these changes spread. For example, school reorganization and tax reform came relatively late to the sparsely populated plains states of Nebraska and the Dakotas. Such changes appeared a decade or more earlier in the prairie states. Those states contained a number of large cities which could influence the policies of their governments. They also included a sizeable population which combined the roles of part-time farmer and city worker, a factor of vital significance in transmitting urban ideas and practices into the countryside.

Although social and cultural change in the Loup country followed the same lines of centralization, bureaucratization, and homogenization as did other farming areas, it differed from many of them with respect to the phenomenon of depopulation. In most agricultural regions of the eastern and north central states the presence of small- and medium-sized cities allowed many individuals to remain actively engaged in farming on a part-time basis. The more fertile soil and abundant resources of the corn-belt region meant that farm consolidation there came much more slowly than in marginal farming areas and that farm population declined much less rapidly. Many of those who did leave the farm moved to small cities in the same vicinity so that the population of counties and regions remained stable or even increased as the farm population diminished.

On the other hand, large sections of the rural United States did experience substantial depopulation. These included the transitional farming zone on the Great Plains and the marginal farming areas along the fringes of the corn belt in northern Missouri and in southern Iowa, Illinois, and Indiana. The cutover farming districts of Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan also lost population heavily after 1940 as did large subregions in the southern

Appalachians and the Deep South. Many counties in these areas experienced even greater population losses than did the Loup country with aggregate declines exceeding 60 percent. In some of these localities the median age of the population had climbed to the early or mid-forties by 1970. There the same processes of farm consolidation followed by village decline had occurred. There businessmen had unsuccessfully sought to attract industry. There many country schools closed in the face of dwindling enrollment while the aging population severely overloaded the available health care facilities.

Thus the trends which characterized the Loup country during the early and mid-twentieth century had a significance extending far beyond the boundaries of the three counties involved. To be sure, the process of integration into the national society remains incomplete as many residents cling to the traditional way of life and its values. Traces of the old ethnocultural and town-country divisions persist albeit in weakened form. Resentment of the domination of American society by the great cities still smolders and the village press continues to praise the traditional virtues of rural living. No one can now foresee how much farther rural society will continue to evolve along the lines etched out over the first seven decades of the twentieth century. For the present, however, the inhabitants of the Loup country and of most of rural America find themselves in a society undergoing a painful process of transition into an uncertain future.

Appendix

PRICES PAID AND RECEIVED
AND PURCHASING POWER OF NEBRASKA FARMERS
1910–1970

Year	Nebraska Farm Prices	Prices Paid by Farmers	Purchasing Power (Parity)
1910	101	98	103
1911	87	102	85
1912	100	99	101
1913	103	101	102
1914	108	100	108
1915	105	105	100
1916	122	124	98
1917	197	149	132
1918	215	175	123
1919	226	200	113
1920	200	194	103
1921	108	150	72
1922	112	146	77
1923	113	149	76
1924	127	150	85
1925	145	154	94
1926	150	153	98
1927	142	151	94
1928	142	153	93
1929	146	152	96
1930	120	144	83
1931	88	130	68
1932	62	112	55
1933	62	109	57
1934	84	120	70
1935	121	124	98
1936	121	124	98
1937	136	131	104
1938	105	124	85
1939	99	123	80
1940	103	125	82

APPENDIX—*Continued*

Year	Nebraska Farm Prices	Prices Paid by Farmers	Purchasing Power (Parity)
1941	131	133	98
1942	166	152	109
1943	190	171	111
1944	189	182	104
1945	198	190	104
1946	238	208	119
1947	307	240	125
1948	304	260	125
1949	272	251	108
1950	288	256	113
1951	341	282	121
1952	311	287	108
1953	277	277	100
1954	272	277	98
1955	244	276	88
1956	237	278	85
1957	258	287	90
1958	279	294	92
1959	256	298	86
1960	253	300	84
1961	254	302	84
1962	261	307	85
1963	249	312	80
1964	237	313	76
1965	270	321	84
1966	292	334	88
1967	270	342	80
1968	272	355	77
1969	307	373	82
1970	303	390	78

SOURCE: H. Clyde Filley, *Effects of Inflation and Deflation upon Nebraska Agriculture, 1914–1932*, University of Nebraska Agricultural Experiment Station Research Bulletin No. 71, p. 12. Nebraska State Department of Agriculture, *Nebraska Agricultural Statistics* (annual), passim. U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Agricultural Statistics* (annual), passim.
NOTES: Indices based upon 100 equal to the average for 1910–1914.

Notes

Chapter 1

1. A. T. Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska* (Chicago: Western Historical Co., 1882), pp. 927, 1456; Harold W. Foght, *The Trail of the Loup, Being a History of the Loup River Region with Some Chapters on the State* (Ord, Nebr., 1906), pp. 84–88; Elizabeth V. Shaver, "History of Valley County, Nebraska" (M.A. thesis, University of Nebraska, 1935), pp. I-6, I-7.

2. Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska,* p. 1456; Foght, *Trail of the Loup,* pp. 88–93.

3. Donald J. Bogue and Calvin L. Beale, *Economic Areas of the United States* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), pp. 836–837. For the purposes of this study the Loup valley region or Loup country comprises the 1970 precincts of Comstock, Corner, Douglas Grove, Sargent, and Spring Creek in Custer County; the 1960 precincts of Fish Creek, Parnell, Scotia, and Wallace Creek, later combined into Scotia precinct in Greeley County; and the entirety of Valley County, Nebraska. Because the majority of precincts, particularly in Greeley and Valley counties, coincide with the land survey townships, the terms *precinct* and *township* are used interchangeably. The northern and western boundaries of the region separate it from the grazing districts of the sand hills while the southern and eastern borders mark the external limits of the trading areas of villages contained within it. The transportation network within the area provides its major unifying force, following the rivers in the main but also linking the North Loup and Middle Loup valleys together with the intermediate uplands. The participation of most of the villages in such institutions as the Loup Valley United Chamber of Commerce, the Loup Valley (athletic) Conference, and the Loup Methodist Parish reflects the sense of common identity shared by residents of the region.

4. F. A. Hayes et al., *Soil Survey of Custer County, Nebraska,* U.S. Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Chemistry and Soils, Soil Survey Series 1926, no. 36, p. 2. R. L. Gemmel et al., *Soil Survey of Valley County, Nebraska,* ibid., Series 1932, no. 4, pp. 1, 2, 4; S. R. Bacon et al., *Soil Survey of Greeley County, Nebraska,* ibid., Series 1933, no. 4, pp. 1–4, 11.

5. Gemmell, *Soil Survey of Valley County,* pp. 1, 4; Bacon, *Soil Survey of Greeley County,* p. 4; U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation (Region 7, Denver, Colorado), *Report on the North Loup Division, Nebraska, Lower Platte River Basin, Missouri River Basin Project,* Part 1, May, 1959, "Substantiating Report," pp. 8–9.

6. U.S. Department of Commerce, Weather Bureau, *Climatography of the United States, Decennial Census of United States Climate, Climatic Summary of the United States, Supplement for 1951 through 1960, Nebraska* (Washington, D.C., 1964), pp. 20, 32, 54, 69; *Climatography of the United States, No. 60–25, Climate of Nebraska* (Washington, D.C., December, 1959), p. 5.

7. Yearly rainfall figures appear in the annual volumes of the U.S. Weather Bureau, *Climatological Data for the United States* for 1914 and subsequent years. For earlier years see the *Annual Report of the Nebraska State Board of Agriculture, 1895,* p. 371; *1905,* p. 282; *1916,* p. 187.

8. Bacon, *Soil Survey of Greeley County,* p. 5; Foght, *Trail of the Loup,* p. 64; Gemmell, *Soil Survey of Valley County,* p. 1.

9. Foght, *Trail of the Loup,* pp. 66–69; Solomon D. Butcher, *Pioneer History*

of Custer County and Short Sketches of Early Days in Nebraska (Broken Bow, Nebr., 1901), pp. 133–135.

10. Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska,* p. 56; Foght, *Trail of the Loup,* pp. 30–38; James C. Olson, *History of Nebraska* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1955), pp. 134–138; Addison E. Sheldon, *Nebraska, the Land and the People* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1931), Vol. I, pp. 94–107.

11. Foght, *Trail of the Loup,* p. 83; William L. Gaston and A. R. Humphrey, *History of Custer County, Nebraska* (Lincoln: Western Publishing and Engraving Co., 1919), p. 85; Olson, *History of Nebraska,* pp. 161–164.

12. Foght, *Trail of the Loup,* pp. 148–150, 207–208; Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska,* p. 1457; Gaston and Humphrey, *History of Custer County,* p. 57; Hayes, *Soil Survey of Custer County,* pp. 4–5. County population figures for the years prior to 1885 appear in the *Biennial Report of the Secretary of State of the State of Nebraska, 1886,* p. 192.

13. Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska,* p. 1457; Foght, *Trail of the Loup,* pp. 115–118, 130–133; *Biennial Report of the Secretary of State, 1886,* p. 192.

14. *Biennial Report of the Secretary of State, 1886,* p. 192; U.S. Census Office, *Report on the Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census, 1890,* part 1, pp. 227, 229, 234. The figures for 1885 appear in the manuscript state census of that year preserved in the archives of the Nebraska State Historical Society in Lincoln.

15. Figures for the native-born appear in the U.S. Census Office, *Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census, June 1, 1880,* p. 519. For the foreign-born see the *Eleventh Census, 1890,* part 1, pp. 508, 642, 644. For the distribution of ethnic population consult Shaver, "History of Valley County," p. II-4–II-8.

16. Foght, *Trail of the Loup,* pp. 102–109, 138–144, 148–152, 180–185; Shaver, "History of Valley County," pp. I-27, III-9; Edith Swain McDermott, *Pioneer History of Greeley County, Nebraska* (Greeley, Nebr.: 1939), pp. 92–100; Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska,* p. 928; Butcher, *Pioneer History of Custer County,* pp. 295–298, 339–342; Gaston and Humphrey, *History of Custer County,* pp. 215–217, 180–183.

17. Statistics in the table appear in the federal censuses: *Tenth Census, 1880, Agriculture,* pp. 126, 163, 198; *Eleventh Census, 1890, Agriculture,* pp. 164–165, 219, 298, 338, 376; *Twelfth Census, 1900,* Vol. V, part 1, pp. 104–105, 288, 460–461, 611, 654; *Thirteenth Census, 1910,* Vol. VII, pp. 38, 47, 56. The correspondent's letter appeared in the *Valley County Journal,* April 19, 1881.

18. Foght, *Trail of the Loup,* pp. 223–226; Gaston and Humphrey, *History of Custer County,* p. 155; Shaver, "History of Valley County," pp. III-9, III-18, IV-16.

19. Gaston and Humphrey, *History of Custer County,* pp. 386–388; Shaver, "History of Valley County," p. III-9. The Nebraska State Board of Agriculture's *Annual Report* for 1895 (pp. 150–151) reported 37.75 miles of irrigation ditches completed in Custer County and 48.55 miles completed in Valley County.

20. Shaver, "History of Valley County," p. III-18; *North Loup Loyalist,* September 22, 1892; August 16, 1894.

21. Generally speaking major technological advances in farm machinery did not affect the region's agriculture until the period of World War I. See chapter 2 and chapter 6 below.

22. The average value of land and buildings in Valley County rose from $4.26 per acre in 1880 to $11.88 in 1890 and $10.11 in 1900. This suggests the degree to which farming operations required an increasing volume of capital investment. *1880 Census, Agriculture,* p. 126; *1890 Census, Agriculture,* pp. 164–165; *1900 Census,* Vol. V., pp. 104–105. For a discussion of farm tenancy in 1910 see chapter 7, p. 142.

Chapter 2

1. Crop acreage statistics appear in *Census, 1910,* Vol. VII, p. 47; and in the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, *Nebraska Agricultural Statistics,* annual volumes for 1914, 1919, 1924, 1929, passim.

2. In October, 1916, an Ord implement dealer reported that he had sold fifty-seven seed drills that fall, one indication of the impact of the shift to small-grain production upon the acquisition of farm machinery. *Ord Quiz,* October 5, 1916; April 15, 1915; January 10, 1918; Nebraska State Board of Agriculture, *Nebraska Agricultural Statistics,* 1920, pp. 44.

3. The statistics for mechanization appear in the federal census, *1910,* Vol. VII, p. 38; *1920,* Vol. VI, p. 698; *1925, Census of Agriculture,* part 1, p. 1147; *1930, Agriculture,* Vol. II, part 1, p. 1222. *Annual Report of the Extension Agent, Valley County,* 1929, p. 34 (hereafter cited as VCAR).

4. *North Loup Loyalist,* May 3, 1918; *Annual Report of the Extension Agent, Custer County,* 1919, pp. 3–4 (hereafter cited as CCAR). *Scotia Register,* May 31, 1917; *Ord Quiz,* March 21, 1918.

5. *Ord Quiz,* June 14, 1917; *Nebraska Agricultural Statistics,* 1920, p. 44; *1925,* p. 20; *1930,* p. 20.

6. *Ord Quiz,* April 18, 1920; April 17, June 19, September 18, 1919; County real estate values appear in the federal census: *1910,* Vol. VII, p. 38; *1920,* Vol. VI, p. 698; *1925 Census of Agriculture,* part 1, p. 1147.

7. Monthly prices for farm commodities appear in the Nebraska Department of Agriculture publication, *Nebraska Agricultural Statistics, Historical Record, 1866–1954* (Lincoln, 1956), pp. 139, 141, 156. Tenancy rates appear in *Census, 1920,* Vol. VI, p. 698, and *1925 Census of Agriculture,* part 1, p. 1133.

8. Farm tenancy stood at 44.7 percent in 1930. In the same year mortgage debt averaged 43.1 percent of the actual value of farms for the 64.7 percent of owner-operators who owed money on their farms. *Census 1930, Agriculture,* Vol. II, part 1, p. 1278.

9. *Comstock News,* January 25, 1917; *Ord Journal,* January 12, 1922. Between 1919 and 1929 the Valley County acreage devoted to corn production rose by more than one-third while wheat production fell by five-sixths. *Nebraska Agricultural Statistics,* 1919, 1929, passim.

10. *Comstock News,* December 16, 1910; *1930 Census, Agriculture,* Vol. II, part 1, p. 1268; *Ord Quiz,* January 23, March 13, 1930.

11. *Comstock News,* March 22, 1928; *Ord Quiz,* March 12, 1914; June 26, 1924; April 12, 1928; November 7, 1929; VCAR, 1929, p. 19; *1925 Census of Agriculture,* Vol. II, part 1, pp. 1159; *Census, 1930, Agriculture,* Vol. II, part 1, p. 1268.

12. *Ord Quiz,* November 28, 1918; June 6, 1929; February 20, 1930; *Comstock News,* March 22, 1928; CCAR, 1929, p. 9; VCAR, 1929, pp. 23–24.

13. *Comstock News,* December 16, 1910; *Ord Quiz,* March 12, 1914; December 14, 1911; March 3, 24, 1910; August 1, 1912; August 29, 1918; January 23, February 20, 1930. *Ord Journal,* June 5, July 10, 1913; *North Loup Loyalist,* March 24, 1911. *Nebraska Agricultural Statistics,* 1930, p. 18.

14. *Arcadia Champion,* July 19, 1912; June 11, 1914; *Sargent Leader,* May 2, 1912; *Comstock News,* March 31, 1911.

15. *Ord Quiz,* February 5, 12, 1914; *Comstock News,* August 12, 1913.

16. *Ord Quiz,* June 10, 17, 24; September 9, 16, 23; December 30, 1926; January 6, December 15, 1927.

17. *Ord Quiz,* February 25, 1926; VCAR, 1926, p. 11; VCAR, 1928, n.p.; *Census, 1910,* Vol. VII, pp. 38, 47; *Census, 1930, Agriculture,* Vol. II, part 1, p. 1231; Vol. III, part 1, p. 951.

18. *Census, 1910,* Vol. VII, p. 47; *Census, 1920,* Vol. VI, p. 707; *1925 Census of Agriculture,* part 1, p. 1159; *Census, 1930, Agriculture,* Vol. II, part 1, p. 1273.

19. *Census, 1910,* Vol. VII, p. 38; *Census, 1920,* Vol. VI, p. 707; *1925 Census of Agriculture,* part 1, p. 1159; *Census, 1930, Agriculture,* Vol. II, part 1, p. 1231; *Ord Journal,* February 5, 12, August 21, 1913; January 9, May 22, 1919; *Ord Quiz,* August 21, 1913; May 16, November 21, 1918; VCAR, 1919, p. 2. A later outbreak occurred in 1928, *Ord Quiz,* December 13, 1928.

20. *Ord Quiz.* January 15, 1914; August 15, 1918; February 22, 1923; February 16, 1928.

21. *Census, 1910,* Vol. VII, p. 38; *Census,* 1920, Vol. VI, p. 707; *1925 Census of Agriculture,* part 1, p. 1159; *Census, 1930, Agriculture,* Vol. II, part 1, p. 1231; CCAR, 1918, p. 6; 1922, p. 15; VCAR, 1919, p. 2, 1922, pp. 9–10; 1924, p. 19; 1927, p. 14; 1929, p. 20.

22. *Ord Journal,* August 6, 1914; *Ord Quiz,* February 8, 1923; January 29, 1927; VCAR, 1923, p. 10; CCAR, 1935, pp. 33–34.

23. *Ord Quiz,* February 24, 1910; March 7, 1912; *Sargent Leader,* March 7, 1912; Annual corn yields calculated from *Nebraska Agricultural Statistics,* passim.

24. *Ord Quiz,* April 11, 1929; CCAR, 1919, p. 2; 1929, p. 4; 1931, p. 9; VCAR, 1920, p. 6; 1921, p. 6; 1922, p. 17; 1923, p. 22.

25. *Ord Journal,* October 22, November 6, 1914; *Ord Quiz,* May 22, 1913; July 26, 1923.

26. *Sargent Leader,* April 17, 1924; VCAR, 1919, pp. 4–5; 1920, p. 5; CCAR, 1926, p. 3.

27. The spatial distribution of different types of farms described here remains evident today. That it was also the case in 1930 is confirmed by the precinct level statistics for the value of land, value of machinery and acreage in cropland which appear in the *Census, 1930, Agriculture,* Vol. I, pp. 380, 384, 394.

28. This process has been described above as it affected the dairying and poultry-producing sectors. Unfortunately the incomplete census statistics make it impossible to undertake a similar analysis of the growing commercialization of livestock production.

29. *Ord Quiz,* November 27, 1924.

30. Ibid., March 7, 1912; March 27, 1913; January 30, 1919; October 10, 1929; *North Loup Loyalist,* November 29, 1912.

31. *Ord Journal,* December 24, 1914; March 14, 1918; *Ord Quiz,* February 8, 1917; *Scotia Register,* August 21, 1924; *Annual Report of the Greeley County Extension Agent,* 1934, p. 1 (hereafter cited as GCAR); CCAR, 1918, p. 1; VCAR, 1918, p. 1.

32. VCAR, 1924, pp. 1–2.

33. *North Loup Loyalist,* January 5, 1923; November 14, 1924; VCAR, 1924, pp. 1–2.

34. *Arcadia Champion,* June 16, 1910; December 8, 1911; *Comstock News,* April 11, 1913; *North Loup Loyalist,* August 13, 1915; July 27, 1917; *Ord Journal,* March 10, 1910; November 9, 1911; *Ord Quiz,* June 6, 1912; October 8, 1914; April 26, 1917; *Sargent Leader,* August 4, 1921.

35. *Ord Journal,* March 2, 16, 1916; May 31, 1917.

36. *Ord Quiz,* April 26, 1917; January 16, 1919; May 3, 1923; April 24, 1924; May 5, July 21, 1927; *North Loup Loyalist,* August 24, 1917; September 10, 1920; *Scotia Register,* May 13, 1920; April 10, November 20, 1924.

37. *Sargent Leader,* October 22, 1914; *Comstock News,* December 27, 1928; *North Loup Loyalist,* October 11, 1929.

38. *Ord Quiz,* January 8, 1925; *Sargent Leader,* January 8, 1925; *Ord Journal,* November 3, 1927.

Chapter 3

1. Historians and sociologists alike have tended to overlook social conflict within rural areas in their examination of the broader rural-urban conflict. For

example, Don S. Kirshner in his *City and Country: Rural Responses to Urbanization in the 1920's* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1970) deals almost exclusively with competition between Chicago and a few large Illinois and Iowa cities on the one hand and downstate Illinois and rural Iowa on the other. Although he notes that smaller cities which tended to side with larger ones on certain economic issues such as taxation or highway construction sided against them on social issues such as prohibition, he fails to explore the implications of this fact. Similarly, Harlan Hahn in his *Urban-Rural Conflict: The Politics of Change* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1971) focuses upon rural-urban conflict at such a general level as to miss much of the conflict which marks small-town–country relations. Another fairly recent study by several sociologists focuses primarily upon relations between the rural community and the large city although it does give some consideration to local conflict, particularly to friction arising out of differential structural locations with respect to individual relationships with the larger mass society. See Arthur J. Vidich and Joseph Bensman, *Small Town in Mass Society: Class, Power and Religion in a Rural Community,* rev. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968).

Not all scholars have neglected this area, however. As early as 1915 researchers in Minnesota reported the development of a high degree of social differentiation between farm and village society in the Red River Valley. In that cash-grain farming region country people avoided mingling with villagers and expressed bitterness over the "snobbishness" of those residing in the towns. Some differentiation had also occurred in a corn-belt farming township in southern Minnesota, causing farm and town people to limit their social interaction to lodge membership and church going. However, farmers in that area still felt at ease with merchants in the smaller villages, many of whom themselves owned farms. At a third location in the cutover farming district of northeastern Minnesota differentiation between town and country did not develop. Most merchants there farmed on a part-time basis while many if not most farmers worked part time as laborers or craftsmen in the villages. This overlapping of roles prevented the development of any sharp economic conflict between the two groups. See Louis D. H. Weld, *Social and Economic Survey of a Community in the Red River Valley,* University of Minnesota Current Problems Series, no. 4 (Minneapolis, 1915), and Gustav P. Warber, *Social and Economic Survey of a Community in Northern Minnesota,* University of Minnesota Current Problems Series, No. 5 (Minneapolis, 1915), together with Carl W. Thompson and G. P. Warber, *Social and Economic Survey of a Rural Township in Southern Minnesota,* University of Minnesota Studies in Economics, no. 1 (Minneapolis, 1913).

For a more recent survey of town-country conflict in the Kansas cattle town area in the late nineteenth century see Robert Dykstra, "Town Country Conflict: A Hidden Dimension in American Social History," *Agricultural History,* vol. 38 (1964), pp. 195–204. The existence of town-country conflict and ethnocultural divisions in late nineteenth-century Nebraska are examined by Frederick C. Luebke in "Main Street and the Countryside: Patterns of Voting in the Populist Era, *Nebraska History,* vol. 50 (1969), pp. 257–275; by Stanley B. Parsons in *The Populist Context: Rural Versus Urban Power on a Great Plains Frontier* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1973) and by David F. Trask in "A Note on the Politics of Populism," *Nebraska History,* vol. 46 (1965), pp. 157–161.

2. *Ord Journal,* January 16, 1913; *North Loup Loyalist,* June 14, 1912; *Comstock News,* January 17, 1913.

3. *Sargent Leader,* January 2, 1913; January 28, 1926; *North Loup Loyalist,* December 12, 1913; *Ord Journal,* September 13, 1917; *Ord Quiz,* May 14, July 19, 1928.

4. *Ord Journal,* August 31, 1916.

5. *Ord Quiz,* October 1, 1914; April 2, 1925; July 19, 1928; *Comstock News,* January 8, 1925; *Ord Journal,* January 10, 1918.

6. *Ord Quiz,* October 1, 1914; October 27, 1932; *Ord Journal,* August 25, 1910; January 10, 1918; July 30, 1925; *Comstock News,* March 10, 1921; *Sargent Leader,* January 28, 1926.

7. *Ord Quiz,* December 14, 1922; *Sargent Leader,* October 22, 1914; *Comstock News,* December 27, 1928; *North Loup Loyalist,* October 11, 1929.

8. *North Loup Loyalist,* April 20, 1920; *Comstock News,* March 3, 1911; *Sargent Leader,* January 25, 1912; *Scotia Register,* January 19, 1922; *Ord Quiz,* January 31, February 7, 1918.

9. *Ord Quiz,* March 10, 1921; *Comstock News,* March 17, 1921; *Sargent Leader,* March 17, 1921.

10. *Scotia Register,* June 11, September 24, 1925; *North Loup Loyalist,* March 2, 1928; *Ord Quiz,* June 10, 24, 1926.

11. *Ord Journal,* January 7, February 11, March 4, 1915; February 26, 1925; *Ord Quiz,* January 7, March 4, 1915; January 20, 1916; January 25, 1917; May 6, 1920; July 19, 1928; January 30, 1930.

12. *Sargent Leader,* January 29, 1920; January 14, 1926; April 4, 1929; *Comstock News,* March 8, July 19, August 2, 16, 1928; January 10, 1929; *Ord Quiz,* January 25, 1917; August 7, 14, 21, September 11, 1930.

13. *North Loup Loyalist,* May 10, 1918; *Ord Journal,* May 27, 1915.

14. *Ord Journal,* March 15, 1928; *Ord Quiz,* December 11, 1919; June 8, 1922; December 26, 1930.

15. *Comstock News,* May 12, 1921; *Arcadia Champion,* January 9, 1920.

16. *North Loup Loyalist,* January 6, 1922.

17. *Comstock News,* November 18, 1920; December 3, 1925; *Sargent Leader,* October 13, December 22, 1921. The *Ord Quiz* aptly summarized the negative image of the city in its issue of June 8, 1922, when it asked, "What would anyone want to live in a dirty, smoky, ill smelling city for where there are thugs and crooked policemen and shisters [sic] of all kinds."

18. *Twenty-Ninth Biennial Report of the State Superintendent to the Governor of the State of Nebraska,* 1927, p. 211. *North Loup Loyalist,* July 3, 1914. Of the forty-five pupils who completed the normal training course of study in the North Loup high school in 1924–1928, twenty-nine entered teaching for an average of slightly over seven new schoolmarms annually. Ibid., February 17, 1928.

19. *Scotia Register,* February 15, 1923; August 28, 1924; *Ord Journal,* January 26, 1928.

20. *Scotia Register,* November 6, 1924.

21. For an extended discussion of the general forces involved in the school reorganization controversy see chapter 9. The viewpoint of farmers favoring consolidated rural schools appears in the *Ord Quiz* of December 4, 1913. In that year Governor Morehead established a school law commission to study the subject. In 1915 the legislature enacted a minor voluntary school redistricting law, then in 1919 it passed a mandatory reorganization act. The 1919 measure required each county to set up a three-man commission to redraw school district boundaries within the county. This act led to a flood of protests and the procedures for reorganization following public hearings were never implemented. *General Laws of the State of Nebraska, 1919,* pp. 1006–1010. *Ord Quiz,* December 18, 1913; July 17, August 21, September 11, 18, December 11, 1919; January 1, 8, 1920.

22. *Ord Quiz,* December 1, 1921; *Scotia Register,* November 6, 13, 1924.

23. *Ord Quiz,* November 27, December 4, 1913; April 1, 1915; *Twenty-Ninth Biennial Report of the State Superintendent,* pp. 47, 49, 56.

24. Robert L. Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire: The Nonpartisan League, 1916–1922* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), pp. 26, 87–96.

25. Ibid., pp. 201–215; *Ord Quiz,* December 27, 1917; *Ord Journal,* October 18, 1917; *Sargent Leader,* October 4, 1917.

26. Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire,* pp. 25–31. Initially the league had frowned upon county-level organizations but it reversed this policy at a later date. *Ord Quiz,* March 11, 1920.

27. *Ord Journal,* February 14, 1918; *North Loup Loyalist,* April 26, May 10, 1918. One critic charged that half the membership fee went to the organizer who signed up the individual farmer. *Sargent Leader,* December 16, 1920. Under a later arrangement dues rose to eighteen dollars of which seven remained in the county league treasury. *Ord Quiz,* March 11, 1920.

28. *Ord Journal,* April 18, May, 16, 1918.

29. The errant miller on the council was Herbert E. Gooch, publisher of the *Lincoln Star* and known to farmers as "short weight Gooch." For a discussion of the conflict between the Nonpartisan League and the state council of defense see Robert N. Manley, "The Nebraska State Council of Defense and the Nonpartisan League," *Nebraska History,* Vol. 43 (1962), pp. 229–252. *Scotia Register,* May 31, 1917; *Ord Quiz,* July 18, October 31, 1918.

30. *Ord Journal,* June 13, 20, July 4, 1918; *Ord Quiz,* June 13, 20, July 4, 1918; *North Loup Loyalist,* June 21, 1918.

31. *Ord Quiz,* June 20, July 18, 25, 1918; *Ord Journal,* July 18, 1918.

32. *Ord Quiz,* May 9, July 18, 25, 1918.

33. Ibid., May 12, 1921; February 7, July 18, 1918.

34. *North Loup Loyalist,* May 10, 24, 31, 1918. Editor Davis had already attacked the "Bolshevists" in the league some time earlier. *Ord Journal,* April 25, 1918.

35. *North Loup Loyalist,* October 4, 1918; *Ord Quiz,* July 25, October 31, November 7, 1918. The precinct vote appears in the latter issue.

36. *North Loup Loyalist,* November 7, 1919; *Ord Quiz,* November 6, 1919.

37. *Ord Quiz,* July 15, September 30, November 11, 1920; December 8, 15, 1921; February 23, March 16, April 20, September 11, 25, November 9, 16, 1922. *Ord Journal,* September 25, 1922.

38. *Ord Quiz,* November 16, 1922; May 3, 1923. Supporters of the farm bloc had earlier claimed credit for the passage of various legislative measures dealing with the Federal Land Banks, packer controls, and grain exchange regulation. The fact that members of the bloc met at the farm bureau offices in Washington added to the impression that the bureau had an effective voice in national affairs. Ibid., January 26, 1922. A similar farm bloc group organized in the Nebraska legislature in 1923. Ibid., July 5, 1923.

39. Ibid., February 17, 1921; August 12, 1920; November 16, 1922; May 17, 1928. *Sargent Leader,* January 20, February 10, 1921. The 1922 farm bureau and Nonpartisan League platforms appear in the *Ord Quiz* of June 8 and June 22, 1922, respectively. See also Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire,* p. 350.

40. *Ord Quiz,* August 17, November 9, 1922.

41. *Ord Journal,* May 1, 1924; *Ord Quiz,* October 16, 1924; *Sargent Leader,* July 31, September 18, 1924; *North Loup Loyalist,* September 12, 1924; June 18, 1926.

42. *Ord Quiz,* March 12, 1925; *Ord Journal,* March 12, 1925; *Sargent Leader,* September 10, November 5, 1925; *Scotia Register,* November 19, 1925; *North Loup Loyalist,* July 1, 1924.

43. *North Loup Loyalist,* October 19, November 2, 1928. Votes appear in the *Abstract of Votes Cast* in the county clerks' offices at Ord and Greeley.

44. For a discussion of the decline in the difference in living standards between town and country and the concomitant decrease in the differential in satisfaction levels among village and farm housewives see Lowry Nelson, *The Minnesota Community: Country and Town in Transition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1960), pp. 72–75, and Marvin J. Tawes, "Farm Versus Village Living, A Decade of Change," *Rural Sociology,* vol. 17 (1952), pp. 47–55.

Chapter 4

1. Annual price index figures appear in the Appendix.

2. *Census, 1930, Agriculture,* Vol. II, part 1, p. 1278.

3. Ibid., pp. 1222, 1278. *1940 Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 2, pp. 584, 639.

4. Mortgage statistics appear in the *Index of Instruments Filed* in the offices of the county clerk, Greeley County courthouse, Greeley, Nebraska, and Valley County courthouse, Ord, Nebraska. A description of a typical foreclosure sale appeared in the *North Loup Loyalist* of October 18, 1935.

5. *Ord Quiz,* January 26, February 2, 1933. For a discussion of the Farmers Holiday Association in the state see John L. Shover, "The Farmers Holiday Movement in Nebraska," *Nebraska History,* vol. 43 (1962), pp. 53–78.

6. *Scotia Register,* February 2, 9, 1933.

7. *Ord Quiz,* February 23, March 16, May 4, July 27, September 14, October 12, 1933. The association also endorsed the proposed federal irrigation diversion projects for the North Loup and Middle Loup valleys.

8. Ibid., October 12, November 9, 16, 1933; January 11, 1934. The Valley County association secretary estimated membership at nine-hundred. Ibid., May 25, 1933.

9. Ibid., June 15, December 7, 1933; January 9, 1936.

10. Ibid., November 24, 1932; February 16, 1933; February 23, 1938.

11. Ibid., September 22, October 16, 13, 1932; May 31, November 6, 1954.

12. Ibid., April 6, August 10, 1933. These statistics appear in the *Index of Instruments Filed* in the county clerks' offices in Greeley and Ord. Of the Federal Land Bank loans made in Valley County between June 1, 1933, and May 1, 1934, 94.3 percent went to refinance debt. *Ord Quiz,* May 31, 1934. Prior to World War I most farm mortgages in the region involved loan brokers or mortgage companies such as the Conservative Investment Company of Crete. These firms disappeared during the land price debacle of 1919–1921 and were largely superseded by the insurance companies and banks. After 1933 most farm loans came from federal credit agencies, thus completing a major shift in the sources of agricultural credit.

13. Statistics were calculated from data in the *Index of Instruments Filed.* Statistics for total number of farms and farm ownership appeared in the *Ord Quiz* of February 1, 1939. In the summer of 1937 insurance companies, loan companies and nonresident landowners held 125,265 of the 356,585 acres of farm land in Greeley County. *Scotia Register,* April 1, 1937. The proportion undoubtedly climbed substantially over the next three years.

14. *1940 Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 2, p. 639.

15. *Ord Quiz,* March 10, 24, 31, April 7, 21, May 12, 19, 1932; March 9, 1933; *Scotia Register,* March 15, 1934; *Comstock News,* April 6, 1933. The Comstock editor reported that half the farmers in Custer County obtained seed through the federal government in 1935. *Comstock News,* March 28, 1935.

16. *Ord Quiz,* July 27, August 24, 31, 1933; *Comstock News,* September 14, 1934; *Scotia Register,* October 3, 1935; December 26, 1933; VCAR, 1933, pp. 7–9.

17. *Ord Quiz,* March 22, October 11, 1934; *Scotia Register,* March 8, October 11, 1934; October 3, 1935; CCAR, 1934, pp. 28–30; GCAR, 1934, pp. 4–5, 9–23; VCAR, 1934, pp. 8–16.

18. *Ord Quiz,* October 1, 1931; April 4, October 31, 1935; January 9, 1936; *Scotia Register,* October 31, 1935; November 4, 1937; April 4, 1935; CCAR, 1935; pp. 30–34; GCAR, 1935, pp. 9, 10, 15, 17, 28; UCAR, 1935, pp. 5–6.

19. *Scotia Register,* April 9, 1936; April 6, 1939; *Ord Quiz,* April 2, 1936; December 28, 1938; January 4, March 29, 1939; January 17, April 17, 1940; CCAR, 1936, p. 26; 1938, pp. 31–32; GCAR, 1936, p. 24; 1937, p. 25; 1938, pp. 19–20; 1939, p. 27; VCAR, 1936, pp. 11–17; 1937, p. 17; 1938, pp. 21–23;

1939, p. 25. Comstock's editor reported that 91.4 percent of Custer County farmers participated in the second AAA in 1939. *Comstock News,* December 28, 1939.

20. *Ord Quiz,* March 9, November 23, December 14, 1933; *Comstock News,* December 14, 1933; *Scotia Register,* December 28, 1939; November 28, 1940.

21. *Ord Quiz,* September 16, 1933; May 24, June 28, September 13, 1934; April 18, May 2, July 4, September 5, 1935; *North Loup Loyalist,* March 15, 1935; *Sargent Leader,* November 16, 1933; *Scotia Register,* May 31, 1934; January 3, 1935; *Comstock News,* December 3, 1936.

22. *Ord Quiz,* July 30, 1936; June 30, August 18, 1937. Crop yields were calculated from *Nebraska Agricultural Statistics,* passim.

23. *Ord Quiz,* July 19, August 9, 16, 1934; CCAR, 1934, pp. 21–23; GCAR, 1934, p. 31; VCAR, 1934, pp. 18–19.

24. *Ord Quiz,* December 20, 1934; February 21, March 28, 1935; *Scotia Register,* November 22, 1934; CCAR, 1934, pp. 33–34; GCAR, 1934, p. 5; 1935, p. 9; VCAR, 1935, pp. 11, 13.

25. *Comstock News,* September 26, 1935; April 30, 1936; *Scotia Register,* September 23, 30, 1937; GCAR, 1935, p. 35; VCAR, 1935, p. 17.

26. *Arcadia Champion,* June 30, 1922; *North Loup Loyalist,* October 22, 1926; *Ord Quiz,* April 5, 1928; March 26, 1931; *Comstock News,* August 15, 1929.

27. *Ord Quiz,* September 25, October 2, 30, 1930.

28. Ibid., September 1, 15, 1932.

29. Ibid., February 6, 23, March 9, 30, May 11, June 15, 29, 1933. Since the state had jurisdiction over the water rights involved, it had to approve the project before the federal government would consider financing it.

30. Ibid., December 27, 1934; July 16, August 20, September 17, October 8, 1936.

31. *Comstock News,* February 2, May 18, 1933; August 15, 1935; August 20, 1936; April 8, 1937; August 25, 1938; *Ord Quiz,* May 4, October 12, 1938.

32. *Scotia Register,* March 24, 1932; *Ord Quiz,* December 10, 24, 1931; April 7, 1932.

33. *Ord Quiz,* December 10, 1931; *Comstock News,* April 14, 21, 1932; March 16, 1933. *Scotia Register,* September 28, October 5, 1933; April 8, 1937. *1940 Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 2, p. 639, *Census, 1930, Agriculture,* Vol. II, part 1, p. 1278.

34. GCAR, 1934, p. 28.

35. *1940 Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 2, pp. 584, 651.

36. *Ord Quiz,* July 30, 1936; *Scotia Register,* August 27, 1936; CCAR, 1936, p. 19; 1938, pp. 18 ff; 1939, p. 30; GCAR, 1937, p. 15; 1938, p. 14; VCAR, 1938, p. 10–11; 1939, pp. 12–14.

37. *North Loup Loyalist,* January 31, 1936; *Sargent Leader,* January 14, 1937; CCAR, 1937, p. 20; 1938, pp. 19–20, 23; VCAR, 1937, p. 11. Annual crop acreages appear in *Nebraska Agricultural Statistics,* passim.

38. *Ord Quiz,* April 11, May 23, 1935; *Sargent Leader,* May 23, 1935; *Scotia Register,* November 8, 1934; November 28, 1935; CCAR, 1934, p. 13; 1935, pp. 33–34; 1940, p. 40; GCAR, 1935, p. 11; VCAR, 1935, p. 11, 1936, p. 11; 1938, p. 19; 1939, p. 22.

39. *Ord Quiz,* April 2, 1936; April 14, 1937; August 30, 1939. Participants in the soil conservation program included 97 percent of all Valley County farmers in 1940. Ibid., April 17, 1940. VCAR, 1937, p. 13; 1938, p. 21; 1939, p. 25; CCAR, 1936, pp. 21–22; 1937, p. 26; 1938, pp. 31–32; GCAR, 1937, p. 25; 1938, pp. 19–21; 1939, p. 27.

40. Nebraska Bureau of Banking, *Report of the Department of Trade and Commerce, Bureau of Banking, Nebraska, 1929,* p. xxviii; *Ord Quiz,* October 22, 1931; *North Loup Loyalist,* October 22, November 20, 1931.

41. *North Loup Loyalist,* August 17, 1934; August 11, 1939; *Ord Quiz,* June 1, 1938; July 4, 1946.

42. *Sargent Leader,* February 4, September 8, 15, 1932; June 29, 1933. The final repayment of principal to those with holdings in the pool came in 1943 with the final interest payment following a year later. Ibid., January 7, 1943; May 11, 1944.

43. *Comstock News,* March 10, 1932; August 30, 1934; *Report of the Department of Banking, Nebraska, 1933,* p. xxii; *1937,* p. xviii; *Scotia Register,* February 2, March 16, October 19, 1933; April 5, 1934.

44. *Ord Quiz,* January 5, 12, 19, March 9, 1933; March 26, 1936.

45. Ibid., January 5, August 10, 17, 24, September 7, 1933; August 30, 1934; *Comstock News,* November 2, 1933; *Scotia Register,* September 7, 1933.

46. *Ord Quiz,* August 24, December 14, 1933; January 24, 1934; October 31, 1935; November 29, 1939. The two irrigation projects employed about five hundred men during construction. Ibid., August 20, 1936; *Comstock News,* June 30, 1937.

47. For a discussion of population trends in the period see chapter 8.

48. *Scotia Register,* September 17, 1936.

49. Ibid., July 28, 1937; *Ord Quiz,* October 25, 1939.

Chapter 5

1. *Ord Quiz,* July 31; November 27, 1940.

2. Ibid., November 26, 1941; December 17, 1942; January 14, April 1, October 21, 1943. *Nebraska Agricultural Statistics,* passim.

3. *Nebraska Agricultural Statistics,* passim.

4. Ibid., passim. GCAR, 1944, p. 8; *Ord Quiz,* October 21, 1943. Local butterfat production peaked in 1943. Annual reports of village creamery activity appear in: Ibid., December 17, 1941; December 24, 1942; December 23, 1943; December 21, 1944; December 20, 1945; and in the *Scotia Register* December 26, 1940; December 18, 1941; December 7, 1942; December 16, 1943; December 14, 1944. For erysipelas problems see GCAR, 1945, p. 19.

5. CCAR, 1942, p. 34; 1943, p. 7; 1945, p. 48; GCAR, 1942, p. 3; 1943, p. 3 ff. In the latter report the Greeley County agent observed that migration out of the region would have been much greater had not farms provided a haven for military deferees. VCAR, 1943, pp. 2–4; VCAR, 1944, p. 9; 1945, pp. 21–22. *Comstock News,* July 1, 1943; *Ord Quiz,* July 9, 16, October 22, 1942; June 24, 1943.

6. *North Loup Loyalist,* December 12, 1941; CCAR, 1945, p. 34.

7. *Ord Quiz,* November 19, 1942.

8. *Sargent Leader,* February 5, 1942; *Comstock News,* July 9, 1942. Farm credit gradually eased during the war but remained fairly stringent. In mid-1945 the Federal Land Bank began loaning up to 65 percent of the value of farm land compared with a previous 50 percent maximum. *Ord Quiz,* March 15, July 5, 1945; *1940 Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 2, p. 584. *1945 Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 12, p. 35.

9. *1940 Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 2, pp. 584, 593, 639; *1945 Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 12, pp. 35, 145; *1950 Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 12, pp. 46, 57; *1954 Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 12, pp. 51, 63; *1959 Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 20, pp. 119, 139; *1964 Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 20, pp. 219, 241; *1969 Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 20, sec. 2, p. 705. VCAR, 1945, p. 6. In 1948 the Greeley County agent reported that land holding insurance companies had practically disappeared from the area. GCAR, 1948, p. 43.

10. *Nebraska Agricultural Statistics,* passim; CCAR, 1948, p. 7; VCAR, 1950, pp. 27–28.

11. VCAR, 1962, p. 32.

12. *Scotia Register,* January 26, 1956; January 31, March 28, April 18, September 19, 1957. The North Loup cheese factory closed after officials received warnings from "over zealous inspectors" that a new building would be necessary. *Ord Quiz,* October 2, 30, 1958; April 30, November 5, 12, 1959; *1969 Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 20, sec. 2, p. 706.

13. *Nebraska Agricultural Statistics,* passim; *1945 Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 12, p. 129; *1959 Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 20, p. 147; *1969 Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 20, sec. 2, p. 707.

14. *1945 Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 12, p. 129; *1969 Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 20, sec. 2, p. 707; GCAR, 1944, p. 8; 1945, p. 19.

15. *Nebraska Agricultural Statistics,* passim.

16. The total number of cattle in the three sandhills counties directly north of the region (Wheeler, Garfield, and Loup) rose from 59,430 in 1941 to 116,300 in 1971. During the same period the acreage of alfalfa cut in those counties rose from 3,040 acres to 29,500 acres. *Nebraska Agricultural Statistics,* 1941, pp. 42, 50, 82; 1971, pp. 82, 83, 106. Bogue and Beale, *Economic Areas of the United States,* p. 837.

17. Murray R. Benedict, *Farm Policies of the United States, 1790–1950: A Study of their Origins and Development* (New York: Twentieth-Century Fund, 1953), pp. 415–416.

18. *Sargent Leader,* August 12, October 14, 1948. Due to the limited capacity of federal bins most of the harvest was sealed in farm bins and cribs. Figures for corn loans and other federal programs described below appear in the annual *Nebraska* reports of the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (A.S.C.S.).

19. *Ord Quiz,* October 6, 1949; September 7, 1950, A.S.C.S., *Nebraska* reports, passim.

20. *Ord Quiz,* June 14, July 12, August 2, 1956; January 10, March 14, 1957; *Scotia Register,* February 28, 1957. Late in 1957 the federal government proposed a new program that would allow farmers to retire their entire operations from production for a term of five or ten years. In response to this proposal one-sixth of the farmers in Valley County filed bids to do so. The government then scrapped the proposed scheme, but not before local villagers had reacted strongly to the prospect of losing still more of their farm customers. As one writer put it, "Should all the land that has been bid . . . be taken by the government . . . we would have about as many residents in this section of Nebraska as there are in the Sahara Desert." *Comstock News,* January 30, 1958; *Ord Quiz,* January 30, February 6, 13, 1958. One-quarter of the farmers in Greeley County also offered to retire their operations. *Scotia Register,* February 6, 13, 1958.

21. *Ord Quiz,* September 28, 1961; *Scotia Register,* March 11, September 30, 1965; A.S.C.S., *Nebraska* reports, passim.

22. Figures taken from the annual A.S.C.S., *Nebraska* reports. In 1969 the value of farm products in Valley County totaled about $15,000,000 while federal payments to 417 of 643 farmers in the county amounted to about $1,230,000. *1969 Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 20, sec. 2, p. 707.

23. *Scotia Register,* May 10, 24, 1956; *Sargent Leader,* April 18, 1957; *Comstock News,* March 21, 1957; *Ord Quiz,* January 24, February 21, 1957.

24. *Scotia Register,* February 21, 1957; February 27, 1958.

25. *Sargent Leader,* February 8, 1962.

26. *Scotia Register,* October 8, 1959; *Sargent Leader,* August 30, October 4, 1962; *Ord Quiz,* August 30, September 6, 13, 1962. For a discussion of the national NFO with holding action see John T. Schlebecker, "The Great Holding Action, The NFO in September, 1962," *Agricultural History,* Vol. 39 (1965), pp. 204–212.

27. *Ord Quiz,* April 23, 1964. The failure of the marketing agreement led

to another abortive withholding action involving milk. Ibid., March 30, 1967. For an example of the bitter hostility marking the NFO-farm bureau dispute replete with accusations of attempted murder, communism, and the like, see the *Comstock News,* September 15, November 10, 1966. *Ord Quiz,* August 10, 1972.

28. *Comstock News,* December 6, 1962; *Sargent Leader,* May 2, August 16, 1962

29. For attitudes regarding competition from chain stores see the *Comstock News,* February 28, 1963. For more general attitudes toward corporation farming see the *Sargent Leader,* February 27, 1969.

Chapter 6

1. *1940 Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 2, p. 651. For a general discussion of the adoption of farm machinery see William L. Cavert, "The Technological Revolution in Agriculture, 1910–1955," *Agricultural History,* vol. 30 (1956), pp. 18–27; and James C. Malin, "Mobility and History: Reflections on the Agricultural Policies of the United States in Relation to a Mechanized World," in ibid., vol. 17 (1943), pp. 177–191. For a classic study of technological adaptation see Malin's *Winter Wheat in the Golden Belt of Kansas: A Study in Adaptation to Subhumid Geographical Environment* (New York, Octagon ed., 1973).

2. *1940 Census of Agriculture, Irrigation of Lands,* pp. 377, 383. *Nebraska Agricultural Statistics,* passim. *1969 Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 20, sec. 2, pp. 706, 708.

3. *Nebraska Agricultural Statistics,* 1955, p. 23; 1958, p. 78; 1963, p. 76; 1969, p. 92.

4. *Comstock News,* February 17, March 17, 1949; February 18, 1960.

5. The Sargent district initially organized in December, 1939, but failed in its efforts to secure federal loans in 1941. Proponents of the project revived their plans in 1949. *Sargent Leader,* February 8, 29, April 18, 1940; January 2, 30, July 24, October 16, 1941; November 17, 1949; September 6, 1951, January 17, February 21, November 6, 1952; August 12, 19, 1954; May 2, December 26, 1957.

6. *Ord Quiz,* August 8, 15, 22, 1946; January 23, 30, June 26, September 18, December 25, 1947; March 11, 1948; April 27, 1950; November 8, 1951; May 22, 1952; January 15, March 26, 1953; *Scotia Register,* July 20, 1972.

7. Litigation over water rights began in 1940 when the Loup River Public Power District sued the diversion districts over water appropriation rights. *Comstock News,* July 24, 31, August 7, 1941; *Sargent Leader,* June 2, 9, 16, 23, 1955; *Ord Quiz,* August 7, October 16, 1940; April 2, 1958; May 26, June 2, 9, 16, 23, 1955; *Scotia Register,* June 9, 1955.

8. *Sargent Leader,* August 4, 11, 1955; *Scotia Register,* July 28, 1955; *Ord Quiz,* July 7, 21, 28, August 4, 11, 25, 1955. Eight years of litigation culminated in a court decision reducing the Loup River Public Power District water appropriation for power generating purposes by 85 percent, but the verdict was reversed on appeal. *Ord Quiz,* September 13, 27, October 18, 1956; June 5, 12, 26, 1958; July 25, 1958; *Sargent Leader,* September 20, 1956; January 3, 1963; *Comstock News,* February 27, 1964.

9. The initial booster's organization called itself the Twin Valley Irrigation Association. Eventually this gave way to the Loup Basin Reclamation District which undertook surveys of the area involved. In 1954 the Twin Loups Reclamation District took shape, restricting itself to the project area whereas the earlier group had covered a much broader scope. *Scotia Register,* November 27, 1952; *Ord Quiz,* October 6, 20, 1949; January 15, March 19, June 4, Septem-

ber 24, November 26, 1953; February 18, August 12, 1954; February 3, March 17, 1955; March 22, August 2, 1956; September 17, October 8, November 12, 1959.

10. *Ord Quiz,* October 13, 1960; February 23, April 27, 1961; July 23, 1970; February 27, 1968.

11. *Sargent Leader,* May 8, 1952; *Ord Quiz,* June 7, 14, 21, 1956; *Farmer-Stockman of Nebraska* (Superior), December 4, 1972.

12. *Nebraska Agricultural Statistics,* passim. *1940 Census of Agriculture, Irrigation of Agricultural Lands,* pp. 377, 383; *1945 Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 12, p. 35; 1950, ibid., Vol. 1, part 12, p. 50; 1954, ibid, Vol. 1, part 12, p. 55; 1959, ibid., Vol. 1, part 20, p. 127; 1964, ibid, Vol. 1, part 20, p. 225; 1969, ibid., Vol. 1, part 20, sec. 2, p. 708.

13. *Nebraska Agricultural Statistics,* 1939, p. 46; 1941, p. 20; 1945, p. 46; 1949, p. 56; CCAR, 1938, p. 18; 1939, p. 20; GCAR, 1938, p. 14; VCAR, 1938, pp. 10–11; 1939, pp. 12–14; 1940, p. 10; 1943, p. 9.

14. *Ord Quiz,* June 28, 1945; VCAR, 1944, p. 6; *1940 Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 2, p. 651; *1954,* ibid., Vol. I, part 12, p. 91; *1959,* ibid., Vol. I, part 20, sec. 2, pp. 706, 711; *Nebraska Agricultural Statistics,* passim.

15. *Ord Quiz,* February 7, 1918; April 2, 1936; CCAR, 1936, p. 26; 1938, pp. 31–32; GCAR, 1936, p. 24; 1937, p. 25; 1938, pp. 19–20; 1939, p. 27; VCAR, 19366, pp. 11–17; 1937, p. 17.

16. *Ord Quiz,* September 18, 1940; January 13, 1944; December 27, 1945; *Scotia Register,* September 3, 1942; VCAR, 1940, p. 14; GCAR, 1943, p. 3. Statistics for conservation activities and federal payments appear in the annual *Nebraska* reports of the A.S.C.S., passim.

17. *Census, 1930, Agriculture,* Vol. II, part 1, p. 1278; *1940, Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 2, p. 651; *1945, Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 12, p. 51; *1950, Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 12, p. 64; *1954, Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 12, p. 83; *1959, Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 20, p. 147; *1964, Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 20, p. 281; *1969, Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 20, sec. 2, p. 706.

18. *1950 Census of Agriculture,* Vol. 1, part 12, p. 64; *1964,* ibid., Vol. I, part 20, pp. 281, 291; *1969,* ibid., Vol. I, part 20, sec. 2, p. 706

19. Figures calculated from *Nebraska Agricultural Statistics,* passim.

20. *1945 Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 12, p. 51; *1954,* ibid., Vol. I, part 12, p. 83; *1969,* ibid., Vol. I, part 20, sec. 2, p. 706.

21. *Census, 1930, Agriculture,* Vol. II, part 1, p. 1287; *Census, 1940,* Vol. 1, part 2, p. 651.

22. *1945 Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 12, p. 51; *Ord Quiz,* May 31, November 29, 1945; August 1, 1946; April 17, 1947; May 13, July 1, October 7, 1948; January 20, 1949; August 14, 1952; January 15, 1959.

23. *1950 Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 12, p. 64; *1954,* ibid., Vol. I, part 12, p. 83.

24. *1940 Census of Agriculture,* Vol. I, part 2, p. 584; Vol. II, part 1, p. 784; *1945,* ibid., Vol. I, part 12, pp. 35, 71, 129, 139, 159; *1950,* ibid., Vol. I, part 12, pp. 46, 137; *1954,* ibid., Vol. I, part 12, pp. 51, 75; *1959,* ibid., Vol. I, part 20, pp. 119, 155; *1964,* ibid., Vol. I, part 20, pp. 219, 251; *1969,* ibid., Vol. I, part 20, sec. 2, pp. 705–706.

25. *1940,* ibid., Vol. I, part 2, p. 651; *1969,* ibid., Vol. I, part 20, sec. 2, p. 706.

Chapter 7

1. Harold Foght, *Trail of the Loup,* pp. 221–225.

2. This interpretation has dominated local newspaper writing and oral tradition for the last forty years. On a more general scale it persists in the literature dealing with the regional problems of the Great Plains area. See

Carl F. Kraenzel, *The Great Plains in Transition* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), pp. 138–141, 144–145, 160–161; and, more recently, Howard W. Ottoson et al., *Land and People in the Northern Plains Transition Area* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), pp. 35–38, 49, 90–91, 220–230. On page 230 of the latter volume the author notes that 164 out of a sample of 356 farmers remained on their farms during the ten years from 1946 to 1956. This he calls "a rather surprising mobility of farm people." Actually the rate of 46.1 percent persistence given here is very close to the figure of 47.7 percent for the sample precincts in the Loup country between 1945 and 1955. The lack of historical perspective illustrated here characterizes most literature dealing with recent rural depopulation.

3. Malin's chief contribution appears in "The Turnover of Farm Population in Kansas," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, vol. IV (1935), pp. 339–372. Summaries of this and other research appear in his *The Grassland of North America, Prolegomena to its History* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith edition, 1967), pp. 278–191. A. D. Edwards of the Farm Security Administration basically replicated Malin's work in his *Influence of Drought and Depression on a Rural Community: A Case Study of Haskell County Kansas,* Farm Security Administration Social Research Report no. 7 (Washington, D.C., 1939). The material specifically concerned with farmer turnover and persistence appears on pp. 17–26.

The most noteworthy among other studies of farmer persistence is Merle Curti, *The Making of an American Community: A Case Study of Democracy in a Frontier County* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959). In this examination of Trempealeau County, Wisconsin, Curti reported farm operator persistence rates of 32 percent for the decade beginning in 1860 and 40 percent for the decade beginning in 1870. Among the 264 farm operators present in 1860 forty-nine or 18.6 percent remained on their farms twenty years later. He found little difference between age groups or between those owning different amounts of property. Curti also analyzed persistence among nonfarm groups which proved somewhat higher than among farmers. His findings appear on pp. 65–77 of the study. Several students of Iowa history have also looked into the problem of persistence among farmers. See Allan G. Bogue, *From Prairie to Cornbelt: Farming on the Illinois and Iowa Prairies in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. 25–27; William L. Bowers. "Crawford Township, 1850–1870: A Population Study of a Pioneer Community," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics,* vol. 58 (1960), pp. 1–30; and Mildred Throne, "A Population Study of an Iowa County in 1850," ibid., vol. 57 (1959), p. 305–330.

4. The actual discrepencies between census and assessment schedule family numbers for each decade are:

1910	–0.3%	(excess of census families)	1940	..... (no census families published)
1920	0.4%	(excess of assessment families)	1950	–1.6%
1930	–1.0%		1960	–0.1%

In a few instances due to difficulty in finding the records (many were loosely strewn about a courthouse attic or buried in several vaults) assessment schedules for the proper year proved impossible to obtain. In such cases the author employed schedules for the preceding or succeeding year: Geranium in 1899 instead of 1900; Enterprise in 1904 rather than 1905 and in 1939 instead of 1940; and Springdale in 1941 rather than 1940.

5. The major methodological difference between this study and the work of Malin and Edwards lies in the definition of persistence. This author deals with the persistence of individual farm operators. Malin and Edwards both

defined persistence in terms of family. If an operator retired or died and was replaced by a son Malin and Edwards would consider the new farm operator persistent, but this writer would not. Since it proved impossible to calculate family persistence in this study one cannot compare the rates obtained here directly with those of Malin. However, Malin reported a relatively limited degree of change in ownership within the family during any initial twenty-year period, so that up to that time interval the figures are roughly comparable.

6. The difference in persistence between one base year and another might be partially explained through the use of a two populations concept. That is, one assumes that among those who migrated once the prospensity for migrating again would be higher than among nonmigrants. If we break down the population of each base year into those who had resided in an area for at least five years and those who had not, we obtain an average five-year persistence rate of 71.3 percent (mean) or 73.3 percent (median) for the former together with a mean of 43.0 percent and median of 46.8 percent for the latter. The figures for each period appear in the table.

Year	Persistence Five-Year Residents	Persistence New Residents	Year	Persistence Five-Year Residents	Persistence New Residents
1895	76.4%	46.9%	1935	65.4%	33.3%
1900	71.5	34.4	1940	66.3	47.6
1905	63.8	41.9	1945	70.8	42.5
1910	64.0	61.4	1950	78.6	50.7
1915	57.1	26.6	1955	76.2	30.6
1920	80.1	46.7	1960	73.3	60.8
1925	73.6	41.8	1965	77.2	.....
1930	76.2	48.1			

Among those present in a given area for less than five years changes in economic conditions might easily lead the newcomer to move again. Those resident for a longer period would have closer social and economic ties to the region and would move less often. The far more extreme fluctuation in persistence rates among new residents compared with five-year residents appears to lend support to this hypothesis.

7. In evaluating these data one observes a singular lack of correlation between the rate of turnover, which remained relatively stable over time, and net migration which changed drastically. This points to a major weakness in the current literature of migration theory. For example, in his discussion of rural farm family migration from Oklahoma, Otis D. Duncan defined five categories of factors leading to the decision to migrate. At first glance this seems reasonable, but it fails to account for the relatively stable rate of farm operator turnover during the most widely disparate socioeconomic conditions. Why, for example, should turnover during the sixties differ only in slight degree from that of the supposedly stable twenties?

Similar problems arise with the more general theory of migration advanced by Everett S. Lee. Lee uses the analogy of the balance scale to explain the decision to migrate. Thus when the attractions of the destination outweigh those of the point of origin the individual decides to move. The presence of intervening obstacles such as the expense of moving may delay the decision, but when the scale becomes heavily imbalanced, such obstacles are overcome. This theory assumes that the decision to migrate results from perceived conditions both at the point of origin and at the destination. Thus it explains more

the direction and specific object of movement rather than the actual decision to move as such. The real question here is why an individual begins to consider moving and whether the destination point influences this initial decision, or whether it enters the picture only after the decision to move has already occurred. In other words Lee's theory explains the flow of net migration streams, but it does not adequately explain the basic mechanism responsible for general human mobility and why the rate of mobility remains relatively stable in the most varied conditions. See Otis D. Duncan, *The Theory and Consequences of Mobility of Farm Population,* Oklahoma Agriculture Experiment Station Circular no. 88 (May, 1940). This paper also appears in Joseph J. Spengler and Otis Dudley Duncan, *Population Theory and Policy* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1956), pp. 417–434. Everett S. Lee, "A Theory of Migration," *Demography,* vol. 3 (1966), pp. 47–57.

Recent students of urban history have also discovered evidence of high turnover rates and relatively stable persistence patterns over time in several American cities during the nineteenth century. See Howard P. Chudacoff, *Mobile Americans, Residential and Social Mobility in Omaha, 1880–1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 35–110; Peter R. Knights, *The Plain People of Boston, 1830–1860: A Study of City Growth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971, pp. 48–77; Stephan Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth-Century City* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), pp. 80–114; Stephan Thernstrom and Peter R. Knights, "Men in Motion, Some Data and Speculations about Urban Population Mobility in Nineteenth Century America," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History,* vol. 1 (1970), pp. 7–36.

8. Statistics in this section were compiled from the *Mortgage* and *Deeds* volumes in the office of the county clerks at the Greeley and Valley county courthouses.

9. John W. Bennett, *Northern Plainsmen, Adaptive Strategy and Agrarian Life* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969), pp. 204–245, especially 227–233.

10. Kraenzel, *The Great Plains in Transition,* pp. 194–211.

Chapter 8

1. *Ord Journal,* August 12, 1920.

2. Unfortunately the tax assessment schedules for the villages appear incomplete for the period 1930–1950, thus precluding a study of turnover and persistence patterns comparable to that for farm precincts.

3. These migration figures are necessarily crude inasmuch as no figures for sex distribution appear in the federal census. *Census of Population, 1920,* Vol. III, p. 603.

4. During most of the twentieth century rural areas had notably lower mortality rates for the population under seventy years of age than the state average. Consequently in applying state rates the author allowed a 10 percent reduction for age groups in that bracket. Nonetheless, due to the unusually long life expectancy in the region an excessive number of deaths still appeared.

5. *Census of Population, 1930,* Vol. III, part 2, p. 99; *Census of Population, 1940,* Vol. II, part 4, p. 613; *Census of Population, 1950,* Vol. II, part 27, p. 79.

6. *Census of Population, 1930,* Vol. III, part 2, p. 81; *Census of Population, 1950,* Vol. II, part 27, p. 28; *Census of Population, 1970,* Vol. I, part 29, p. 126; *Census of Population, 1970, General Population Characteristics, United States Summary,* sec. 1, pp. 276–277.

7. *Census of Population, 1890,* part 1, p. 924; *Census, 1920, Population,* Vol. III, p. 603; *Census of Population, 1930,* Vol. VI, pp. 800, 806; *Census, 1950,* Vol. 55, part 27, p. 79; *Census, 1960,* Vol. I, part 29, p. 203; *Census of Population, 1970,* Vol. I, part 29, p. 48

8. *Census, 1930, Population,* Vol. VI, p. 806; *Census, 1970, Population,* Vol. I, part 29, p. 136.

9. *Census, 1930, Population,* Vol. VI, p. 806; *Census, 1970, Population,* Vol. I, part 29, pp. 367, 383. In 1970 the average family size in the farm townships ranged from a high of 3.96 in Liberty to a low of 2.83 in Davis Creek. On the whole farm families in the county averaged 3.35 members compared with a figure of 2.56 for the city of Ord. *Ibid.,* pp. 48, 100.

10. *Ibid.,* p. 100.

11. *Scotia Register,* November 22, 1945; August 7, 1947; *Ord Quiz,* March 14, 21, October 31, 1946; May 27, 1948.

12. *Scotia Register,* March 17, 1960.

13. The Scotia editor noted the changing composition of village population when discussing the closing of the town's largest farm service firm in 1965. *Scotia Register,* October 14, 1965. For a discussion of the multiple and changing functions of the rural village see T. Lynn Smith, "The Role of the Village in American Rural Society," *Rural Sociology,* vol. 7 (1942), pp. 40–52.

14. A prolific body of literature deals with the problem of small-town economic decline. The first outburst came during the twenties when the concept of small-town demise gained general currency. The first major figure to sound the alarm was John M. Gillette of the University of North Dakota. In various writings which he brought together in his *Rural Sociology* (New York: Macmillan, 1922) he warned of the impending disappearance of rural villages. This position came under attack in the writings of Edmund de S. Brunner who reported in *Village Communities* (New York: George Doran, 1927) and with John H. Kolb in *Rural Social Trends* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1933) that the village was more than holding its own.

During the thirties many agricultural experiment stations sponsored studies of rural trade centers aimed at establishing whether they were in fact declining and, if so, the patterns of change involved. Among the more significant of these were: Paul H. Landis, *The Growth and Decline of South Dakota Trade Centers, 1901–1933,* South Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin no. 279 (1933), and *Washington Farm Trade Centers, 1900–1935,* Washington AES Bulletin no. 360 (1938); C. E. Lively, *Growth and Decline of Farm Trade Centers in Minnesota, 1905–1930,* Minnesota AES Bulletin no. 287 (1932); T. Lynn Smith, *Farm Trade Centers in Louisiana, 1901–1931,* Louisiana AES Bulletin no. 234 (1933) and Carle C. Zimmerman, *Farm Trade Centers in Minnesota, 1909–1929,* Minnesota AES Bulletin no. 269 (1930). These surveys generally reported decline among the smallest villages with various patterns of growth and decline visible among the larger ones. On the whole they reported that trade center survival showed a direct correlation with size.

More recently a new group of rural sociologists and geographers have examined the subject. Among the former the major contributions have come from Edward Hassinger in "The Relationship of Trade Center Population Change to Distance from Larger Centers in an Agricultural Area," and "The Relationship of Retail Service Patterns to Trade Center Population Change," in *Rural Sociology,* vol. 22 (1957), pp. 131–136 and 235–240. The major contribution by a geographer has been Gerald Hodge's study of central place theory as applied to the prairie provinces of Canada. He summarizes his findings in "Do Villages Grow?" *Rural Sociology,* vol. 31, (1966), pp. 183–196.

15. *Scotia Register,* March 28, April 18, September 19, 1957; October 14, 1965; *Ord Quiz,* November 5, 12, 1959; October 2, 1958.

16. *Ord Quiz,* May 19, 1921; October 20, 1927.

17. Ibid., June 23, October 13, 1960; *Scotia Register,* January 17, 1957.

18. *Ord Quiz,* July 21, 1960; June 25, 1931; October 2, 1940; December 10, 1941; October 15, 1942; November 13, 1952; September 18, November 20, 1958;

February 9, May 18, 1961; July 31, 1969; December 17, 1970; *Comstock News,* January 19, March 23, 1950; April 24, 1941; *Scotia Register,* December 7, 1939; May 9, 1946; June 10, 1948; January 7, 1969; February 5, 1970.

19. *Ord Quiz,* April 12, 1962; January 10, 1963; May 18, October 19, 1967; Valley County Rural Development Council, "Overall Economic Program for Valley County, Nebraska," Ord, March 10, 1964; *Comstock News,* October 27, November 3, 1960.

20. *Ord Quiz,* May 21, 1964; April 3, May 15, 1969. A later effort to attract the new state law enforcement center to Ord failed. Ibid., January 15, 1970.

21. Ibid., August 16, November 8, 1951; January 24, 1952.

22. *Sargent Leader,* November 23, 1961; January 25, February 15, May 10, 1962; May 14, June 4, 11, 18, 1964. According to a state survey only 315 of the 1,674 graduates of the University of Nebraska Medical School during the fifties remained in the state, chiefly in the larger cities. Ibid., October 1, 8, 1964; February 18, March 11, 18, April 1, 8, August 26, October 14, 1965.

23. Ibid., February 8, 22, July 17, 24, 31, 1968; April 2, 1970. For the impact of new federal regulations pertaining to ambulance service see Ibid., March 21, 1968; *Comstock News,* June 27, July 4, August 8, 1968.

24. *Ord Quiz,* March 16, May 18, September 14, December 14, 1961; July 12, 19, November 8, 1962; August 22, 1963; August 6, 1964.

25. Ibid., July 14, 1949; February 21, 1952. For an editorial opposing county consolidation see the *Scotia Register,* August 2, 1962.

26. *Ord Quiz,* January 11, 1951.

27. *Scotia Register,* August 31, September 7, 1967; July 3, 1969.

28. Ibid., January 31, 1929; March 13, 1930; pamphlet, "Eighty-Fifth Anniversary, 1873–1958, August 24, 1958, The Methodist Church, Scotia, Nebraska," passim; *Sargent Leader,* December 15, 1966; *Ord Quiz,* May 14, 1936; May 23, August 29, 1946; November 23, 1950. The rural Saint Stanislaus Catholic Church serving a Polish-Bohemian area west of Elyria closed in 1970 following eighty-six years of operation. However, Saint Wenceslaus's Catholic Church in Geranium township continued to operate., *Ord Quiz,* April 23, 1970.

29. *Ord Quiz,* June 24, 1954; February 23, 1956.

30. Ibid., August 30, November 8, 1962; *Sargent Leader,* August 23, November 1, 1962.

31. *Scotia Register,* November 26, 1964; *Sargent Leader,* February 22, 1969.

Chapter 9

1. Figures for school age population appear in the Nebraska State Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Biennial Reports,* passim. *Ord Quiz,* September 26, 1946; June 26, 1947, November 18, 25, December 2, 9, 1948.

2. *General Laws of the State of Nebraska, 1945,* pp. 624–626.

3. *General Laws, 1949,* pp. 673–679; *Ord Quiz,* September 19, 1949; May 4, 1959; June 12, 1952.

4. *Scotia Register,* December 15, 1949; December 13, 1951; *Ord Quiz,* December 1, 15, 1949; November 5, 1953; January 7, June 24, 1954.

5. The new arrangement which took effect in 1954 centered upon an elected State Board of Education composed of six members. These could not include teachers or candidates for other state office. The commissioner of Education functioned as an administrator carrying out the decisions reached by the board. *General Laws, 1953,* pp. 1053–1063; *Ord Quiz,* November 25, 1948; February 5, 1953; *Sargent Leader,* July 9, 1953; December 13, 1956; *Comstock News,* September 5, 1953; November 8, 1956.

6. Farm columnist George Gowen summarized the attitude of those farmers who favored the merger of adjoining elementary districts when he wrote: "The benefit of eliminating a great number of the smaller grade schools cannot be

disputed, but the trouble is no one wants their own school to be the one eliminated. In this and any near counties we find school after school with just a handful of students, and each of these schools costing the taxpayer perhaps three times what it might, were it consolidated" (*Ord Quiz,* January 8, 1941).

7. *Comstock News,* March 14, 28, 1957; *Ord Quiz,* February 21, 1957; *Sargent Leader,* December 13, 1956. One specific issue which frequently cropped up during the consolidation controversy involved the problem of transporting farm children to school. Villagers tended to treat the issue as a fictitious one while the tendency of farmers to predict fantastically exaggerated transportation expenses in the event of reorganization weakened their credibility on this point. Some villagers went so far as to suggest that most farm parents would prefer to be relieved of the onerous burden of hauling their children to school themselves—the usual practice in rural districts. *Sargent Leader,* May 1, 1958; *Comstock News,* March 28, 1957; February 18, 1960; March 9, 1961; *Ord Quiz,* March 14, 1929; May 19, June 5, 1955.

8. *General Laws, 1955,* p. 950.

9. *Scotia Register,* December 13, 1951; November 1, 1956; May 2, September 12, 1957; *Ord Quiz,* May 16, 1957.

10. *Scotia Register,* January 29, 1959. A revealing illustration of local sentiment on the redistricting question appeared in the contradictory results of two public meetings held in Greeley in March, 1959, to discuss these recommendations. At the first large delegations attended from the villages of Spalding, Wolbach, and Greeley while poor roads kept many rural patrons home. Those present at this meeting voted 75 to 18 in favor of some type of redistricting and approved the concept of a single county high school by a margin of 63 to 33. Two weeks later another meeting drew more than twice the number of participants including large numbers of indignant farmers. Those present at this meeting not only opposed the idea of a single county high school but rejected the proposal for any redistricting action at all. Ibid., March 12, 26, 1959.

11. *Ord Quiz,* January 12, November 1, 29, 1956. The survey team condemned the North Loup school building as unsuited for any but elementary school use. Ibid., December 13, 1956; January 3, 1957.

12. Ibid., May 13, 1954. Arcadians also unsuccessfully advanced a consolidation scheme in 1955. By 1957 Comstock and Arcadia had begun directly competing for the annexation of several rural districts between the two towns. Ibid., May 26, June 5, 1955; January 24, April 25, 1957; February 20, March 6, 1958.

13. *Comstock News,* November 8, 15, 1956; March 14, 28, April 4, 18, May 2, 1957.

14. *Ord Quiz,* October 27, 1960; January 8, 1970.

15. Ibid., February 14, 28, March 7, 1957.

16. *Scotia Register,* January 10, 17, February 21, 1957; *Ord Quiz,* February 6, November 5, 1964.

17. *Ord Quiz,* November 6, 1964.

18. *Scotia Register,* July 11, October 3, 1957.

19. *Ord Quiz,* August 28, September 18, 25, October 16, 1958; *Scotia Register,* August 28, September 18, 1958.

20. *Ord Quiz,* November 6, 1958; October 23, November 20, 1958; January 8, February 5, 1959; *Scotia Register,* January 8, February 12, 1959.

21. *Revised Statutes of Nebraska, 1909,* sec. 11649–11697; *General Laws, 1919,* pp. 1020–1028; Ibid., *1925,* pp. 470–477; Ibid., *1955,* pp. 998–1000; Ibid. *1957,* pp. 1204–1214; Ibid., *1959,* pp. 1370–1375; Ibid., *1963,* pp. 1569–1573.

22. *General Laws, 1953,* pp. 1005–1007; Ibid., *1969,* pp. 2703, 2726. A 1967 law established the five-pupil minimum requirement for reopening contracting district schools. Ibid., *1967,* p. 1773.

23. *Comstock News,* July 17, September 3, 1958; January 1, 1959; February 18, March 3, 1960; January 18, 1962; December 12, 1963; January 9, February 27, March 16, 1964; February 25, 1965; *Ord Quiz,* February 18, 25, March 4, 25, 1965.

24. The N.S.I.A. assailed the study as the "mein kampf" of the despotic state educators. That November the embittered Comstockers voted 95 to 35 for the N.S.I.A. supported candidate for the regional State Board of Education Position. *Comstock News,* October 24, November 7, 1968.

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