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HAVING BABIES OR NOT

HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION AND FERTILITY IN RURAL IOWA AND NEBRASKA, 1900-1910

DEBORAH FINK AND ALICIA CARRIQUIRY

How did life change for people from the eastern prairie or forest regions when they crossed the Missouri River to settle in the Plains of Nebraska? The land presented its own social, economic, and environmental problems for the settlers. While some historians have emphasized the resourcefulness with which settlers adapted to maintain the lifeways of the rural regions to the east, others have pointed to the cultural and social shifts effected by the plains environment. Considerable social divergence occurred within the plains population, even within the dominant northern European American ethnicity. This study addresses the lives of rural women using quantitative methods and

census data along with historical narratives to explore the dynamics of childbirth decisions made within rural homes at the turn of the century. Comparing the birth patterns of a rural county in eastern Nebraska with those of a rural county in eastern Iowa, we find that on Nebraska farms the degree of social and geographic isolation of individual couples was significantly correlated with the number of children that women bore. Household composition mattered on the Nebraska frontier in a way that it did not in rural Iowa at the time. Frontier Nebraska women's high levels of fertility can be understood, in part, in terms of their relative isolation.¹

Data come from 1900 and 1910 manuscript census forms for Bruce and Homer townships and the county seat town of Vinton in Benton County in east central Iowa; and Boone, Midland, Oakland and Plum Creek precincts and the county seat town of Albion in Boone County in east central Nebraska. The census forms, available seventy-two years after collection, include name, age, marital status, and nationality for each member of each household. For the first time, the 1900 and 1910 censuses listed the total number of children born and the number of surviving children for each woman, thus

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allowing the analysis of fertility variation among households and among different age groupings.

Benton County was settled in the 1850s and 1860s, Boone County some twenty-five years later; thus the 1900-1910 comparison of the two areas encompasses different settlement stages. By 1900 Benton County, with a population of 25,177, had a well-established and stable farming population, serviced by the county seat town of Vinton, which had a population of 3499. Boone County, with a population of 11,689, was still receiving homesteaders and other settlers after 1900. Its population increased by 12 percent between 1900 and 1910, and forty-one thousand acres of its land were first improved in that decade. The county seat, Albion, had a population of 1369 in 1900. Unlike the rural region of eastern Iowa in 1900, rural Nebraska was in the midst of the rapid development and growth that accompanied the claiming of the plains region for European American agriculture. The farming precincts of Boone County had a population density of 11.7 persons per square mile as compared to 17.9 persons per square mile in the farming townships of Benton County.²

Besides the difference in settlement stage, an enduring difference in the general prosperity of the two regions was developing. Benton County, in the middle of the Cornbelt, was well watered, with a thick layer of rich topsoil that year after year would yield abundant crops of corn and hay. Boone County, on the western border of the Cornbelt, had thin, readily erodible topsoil and only marginally sufficient rainfall for corn production. Although Boone County farmers had some years of remarkable production, they also saw extended periods in which rainfall was insufficient to sustain the farming economy. In 1910 Boone County farmland was worth an average of \$61.33 per acre, as compared to \$106.94 per acre for Benton County farmland. Although Benton County is smaller than Boone County, the value of both crop and livestock production in Benton County consistently exceeded that in Boone County. For example, in 1929 Benton County crop production totaled \$6,971,386; its livestock pro-

duction totaled \$6,840,298. Boone County farmers raised crops worth \$4,730,615 and livestock worth \$4,405,425 in 1929.³

On the whole the population of Boone County was poorer than that of Benton County. Yet Boone County covered a larger area, meaning more fences and bridges to build and more miles of roads to lay and maintain. Taken together, the comparative lack of wealth, the more rudimentary infrastructure, and the sparser population limited the interaction among the farm people of Boone County. Compared to a Benton County farm woman, the average Boone County farm woman had to travel a longer distance to see her neighbors, she was less likely to have access to means of transportation, and she was more likely to be faced with road problems along the way—as late as 1940, 80 percent of the farms in Boone County lay on ungravelled dirt roads as compared with 38 percent of the farms in Benton County.⁴

But beyond the economic and demographic differences, which distinguished rural Iowa and Nebraska populations in general, the populations of Benton and Boone counties were similar. Their lives revolved around the farming seasons. Both groups had roots in northern Europe. The majority of both farmers and town dwellers were native-born, although a greater percentage of the farming population were born in Europe. Both Benton and Boone counties had Germanic minorities—in 1900 23 percent of the married women in Boone County and 32 percent in Benton County had been born in Germany or Scandinavia.⁵

FERTILITY OF U.S. WOMEN

The fertility of U.S. women as a whole declined by approximately 50 percent during the nineteenth century, a decline that continued up to the post-World War II baby boom. Contrary to demographic transition theory, this decline preceded rather than followed a reduction in childhood and infant mortality. Although immigrant women themselves tended to have large numbers of children, the birthrates of their daughters were lower than those of women born

to native-born parents. The declining birthrate, linked to rising living standards, extension of schooling, and enhanced economic opportunities for the working class, was first apparent in the cities. Rural women, who had consistently higher levels of fertility than urban women, also decreased their childbearing in the late nineteenth century, but a significant rural-urban fertility differential remained. Census distinctions between farm and nonfarm rural populations, which first appeared in 1920, made it apparent that within rural populations, farm women were having the most children.⁶

Yasukichi Yasuba theorized that the higher birth rates observed among U.S. frontier populations were a response to the increased availability of land, a theory that has generally held in subsequent studies of U.S. populations, albeit with modifications. But land availability is a cultural rather than a natural fact, and the theory does not tell us why the fertility rate might have responded to land economics in the way it seems to have done. Moreover, the historical decline in fertility occurred in sparsely populated areas as well as in urban areas. Modifications of the land availability theory suggest that such variables as prospective income from land and changing economic expectations were mediating conditions.⁷

A closer look at the pattern of the historical fertility decline in the northern rural United States further refines the land availability theory. Richard Easterlin, using data from the 1860 census, classified sample townships in terms of the ratio of improved agricultural acres to the maximum number of acres subsequently improved for agricultural purposes. The newest settlement areas had the lowest percentage of improved acres; the areas of longer settlement had a relatively greater percentage of improved land. Dividing the townships into five categories, he found a slight increase in fertility from the areas of newest settlement to the areas of slightly longer settlement; after that there was a steady decrease in fertility as the settlements became older. This study, like Yasuba's, shows farm families limiting their fertility as available farm land was taken up. Another study has found

TABLE 1.
FERTILITY RATIOS¹

		1900	1910
Nebraska ²	farm	1320	960
	town	782	723
Iowa ²	farm	1031	954
	town	610	437

¹Fertility ratio: [(number of children ages 0 to 4) divided by (number of married women ages 15 to 44)] times 1000.

²Boone County, Nebraska, farm precincts (Boone, Midland, Oakland, Plum Creek) and county seat (Albion); and Benton County, Iowa, farm townships (Bruce and Homer) and county seat (Vinton).

Source: Computed from U.S. census manuscripts, 1900, 1910; Vinton figures based on an every other household sample.

that a relatively higher ratio of males to females, the scarcity of women noted on many frontiers, correlated with a higher fertility level. After an initial period of frontier adjustment, birthrates were high in newly settled regions but declined in succeeding generations.⁸

FERTILITY IN BOONE AND BENTON COUNTIES

The observed fertility patterns in Boone and Benton counties are consistent with these studies. Farm women had significantly more births than did town women; women on the Nebraska frontier had more births than did the women on established Iowa farms. Fertility levels of all groups decreased from 1900 to 1910, as happened in general throughout the country. (See Table 1.) There is no reason to believe that the fertility of the women of Boone County and Benton County was unrepresentative of general U.S. patterns.

TABLE 2.
AVERAGE NUMBER OF BIRTHS TO MARRIED WOMEN BY AGE OF WOMAN

			Age 15-24	Age 25-34	Age 35-44	Age adjusted average
1900	Nebraska	farm	1.31	2.72	5.72	3.25
		town	1.00	2.64	4.01	2.55
	Iowa	farm	.97	2.49	5.00	2.82
		town	.70	1.91	3.21	1.94
1910	Nebraska	farm	1.03	2.73	5.37	3.04
		town	1.17	2.25	3.67	2.36
	Iowa	farm	.78	2.64	4.38	2.60
		town	.56	1.27	3.11	1.65

Farm and town populations as defined in Table 1.

Source: Computed from U.S. census manuscripts, 1900, 1910.

The numbers of births to women of different ages reveal something of the pattern by which women were or were not limiting births. Table 2 gives the average number of births to women in different age groupings. The higher number of children born to Nebraska women under age twenty-five probably reflects an earlier age of marriage, consistent with frontier practices. By the twenty-five to thirty-four age grouping the women (except for Iowa town women) were nearly even in number of births. It was among women age thirty-five to forty-four that the most pronounced differences in fertility are observed. While we discern the beginning of the higher farm birthrate and the higher frontier birthrate pattern among women from ages twenty-five to thirty-four, the pattern is clearest among the women from age thirty-five to forty-four. Some systematic birth limitation occurred before age thirty-five, but the key to the variation exists in the childbearing patterns of women who were between thirty-five and forty-four.

Since the overall trend was toward diminished childbearing, we might expect to see the

women who were age twenty-five to thirty-four, who had roughly the same number of births by 1900, continue this similarity. Yet in 1910 we again observe the 1900 pattern, albeit with less extreme contrasts—except for the Iowa town women who led the way toward ever greater birth limitation at all ages. For the other women, the most significant differences in childbearing again appeared among the women ages thirty-five and over.

FERTILITY AND HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

A closer examination of childbearing patterns within the age groupings reveals that on Nebraska farms the number of children a married woman had was closely related to the composition of the household in which she lived. In general the common assumption that U.S. households were overwhelmingly nuclear in composition—that is, composed of husband, wife, and offspring—has diverted researchers from exploring household composition as a factor in fertility differentials.⁹ But census forms

TABLE 3.
PERCENTAGE OF NUCLEAR, EXPANDED, AND SMALLER HOUSEHOLDS

			Nuclear	Expanded ¹	Smaller ²	Number in Sample
1900	Nebraska	farm	60.7	23.5	15.8	501
		town	57.2	27.6	15.1	304
	Iowa	farm	37.9	44.8	17.3	277
		town	53.7	26.0	20.3	443
1910	Nebraska	farm	63.1	25.8	11.1	531
		town	56.0	25.3	18.7	375
	Iowa	farm	48.3	41.4	10.3	232
		town	49.1	29.5	21.4	491

¹Expanded: Nuclear unit plus other persons.

²Smaller: No married couple in households.

Farm and town populations as defined in Table 1.

Source: Computed from U.S. census manuscripts, 1900, 1910.

of both Benton and Boone counties reveal a substantial number of households that were not composed of nuclear families.

We have classified households in three categories: 1) nuclear family households with or without children present; 2) households with a nuclear family unit plus additional persons (extended family members, multiple families, servants, boarders); 3) households without a married couple (single person, unrelated persons, siblings, widowed, separated, or divorced). The numbers of each of these populations can be seen in Table 3.

The Iowa farm population tended to have the greatest number of households with complex organization and the fewest number of nuclear family households, probably because Benton County was older, more prosperous, and more densely settled. There seem to have been multiple and perhaps competing tendencies toward nuclearity, complexity, and simpler kinship structures in household organization. Overall, however, nuclear family households did not constitute an overwhelming majority in any

of the subpopulations. In each case expanded households represented more than 20 percent of the total; on Iowa farms they were more than 40 percent of the total. Smaller than nuclear households were found more frequently in the towns than the rural areas.

Analysis of household composition is complicated. Census instructions drew a broad definition of household, encompassing such institutions as prisons, hospitals, and hotels along with family homes. In town, keeping boarders was a common source of income for a woman, and these persons would be considered household members by census definition. The classic study of urban boarders concluded that urbanites took in boarders when space was available, and boarders would predictably be found in households with fewer children. This study concluded that ties between transient and permanent household members were weak.¹⁰

But the situation on the plains frontier diverged from that of the study in significant ways. The sense of urban crowding was alien to plains settlers, and lack of space does not appear to

have limited household size. In many one- or two-room frontier sod houses, having an extra member of the household didn't hinge on whether or not there was enough room. People slept in close proximity on the floor or in the barn if a house was crowded. Mari Sandoz, who grew up on a Nebraska homestead in the early 1900s, wrote of how deeply she and her mother treasured the presence of Mari's grandmother and aunt and of their bitter disappointment at the aunt's departure. The Sandoz family hung curtains to separate sleeping quarters or nailed together another room to accept newcomers. Luna Kellie, who with her son Willie preceded her husband J.T. to rural Nebraska in 1876, lived with her widowed father and siblings in a two-room soddy for a period, sewing and cooking for them. After she and J.T. had their own one-room house and a growing family, her brothers Fred and John stayed with them at different times to go to school or work. The lack of a bedroom did not prevent Luna and J.T. from welcoming a variety of persons to their home over the years. In addition to the presence of non-nuclear kin, many farms had hired hands; few had persons classified as boarders. Most of the persons living in farm households worked daily with the farm family members.¹¹

But not every frontier household was equally integrated into the growing farm community. Weeks or months of oppressive isolation might pass during which a farm woman saw no one outside her own household. Lack of privacy seems to have been the least of the frontier farm woman's worries; loneliness was of greater concern. Luna Kellie, writing her memories in the mid-1920s, recounted the names, personal characteristics, and life stories of people she had met briefly forty years before as she and J.T. homesteaded and raised their children in central Nebraska. The vividness of the memories reveals how noteworthy these encounters were. As a rule, frontier dwellers welcomed newcomers; people shared their homes, provisions, and life stories freely, even when they were strangers.¹²

It was among Nebraska women, who had a substantially higher birthrate than Iowa women,

that we find a consistent, statistically significant association between household composition and number of children born. Women who saw any adults other than their husbands on a daily basis had substantially fewer children than did women whose only daily human contact was with their husbands and children. While a slight tendency in this direction existed among Iowa farm women and among town women in both states, only among the Nebraska farm women was this difference marked enough to be statistically significant.

Fifteen- to forty-five-year-old married women who were living in households with persons beyond the nuclear family had, in general, fewer children than did their counterparts living in nuclear family households. (See Table 4.) The differences were largest among married women from thirty-five to forty-four—i.e., those women who had come closest to completing their childbearing. Among Nebraska farm women at ages thirty-five to forty-four, the difference in childbearing by household structure is statistically significant in both 1900 and 1910. The differences were not significant for any age group of Iowa farm women or for any women in the twenty-five to thirty-four age grouping. Considering the number of children surviving rather than the number of children born, we find an even stronger level of significance among Nebraska farm women ages thirty-five to forty-four, both in 1900 and 1910.¹³

INTERPRETING THE RESULTS

Statistics establish linkages, but explaining and interpreting these linkages entails a creative response that makes sense of the reality the statistics describe. Historically women have had babies in part because they have wanted to have them and in part because they have been unable to prevent pregnancies. In either event, isolation of Nebraska farm women seems to have driven them toward higher birthrates. While Nebraska farm women in general had high birthrates, those whose husbands were the only other adults in their households had especially high birthrates.

TABLE 4.
CHILDREN¹ IN NUCLEAR AND EXPANDED HOUSEHOLDS

		Nuclear Households		Expanded Households	
		Average Number of Children	Number of Households	Average Number of Children	Number of Households
Nebraska	farm	3.59	203	2.60	84
	town	2.72	120	2.26	54
Iowa	farm	3.02	68	2.56	92
	town	2.16	142	1.44	54

¹Number of children born to married women as adjusted by mean age of mothers under age 45. Expanded households as defined in Table 3; Farm and town populations as defined in Table 1. Source: Computed from U.S. census manuscripts, 1900.

Children were, first of all, wanted on Nebraska farms. Luna and J. T. Kellie homesteaded in Nebraska because they wanted space for a large number of children. When an aunt asked Luna how many children she wanted to have, her answer was "As many as I can." Having a large number of children eased the loneliness that so many women felt in settling on the frontier. Children, from birth to later years, provided diversion, company, and emotional support to women. Many of these women had recently left kin and friends in Europe or eastern North America and were acutely aware of the emotional void this uprooting entailed. Children, perhaps, would fill this void.¹⁴

Children were also needed as farmworkers and household helpers. Children as young as three were doing chores and by the age of six many were putting in hard days of work on farms. Having a lot of sons, in particular, increased the number of acres that a farmer could work and made it more likely that the family would stay on the farm. The ready availability of land made hired labor scarce and expensive, and Nebraska farm children did some of the work assigned to hired hands in more densely populated and prosperous farm populations.¹⁵

But children had their costs as well as their benefits. Women assumed a heavy burden in bearing and rearing children on the frontier. Besides endangering a woman's health, frequent childbearing presented her with a greatly expanded workload. In the absence of running water, central heating, washing machines, and household assistance a woman worked hard to keep a small child minimally clean, healthy, and warm. Having several small children increased her work. In a one-room house toddlers lived in close proximity to knives, cooking fires, and food supplies. On many farms small children could not play outside safely and freely by themselves. While children provided company for a mother, the need for childcare curtailed her mobility and limited the contacts that she could have outside the home. The burden of bringing children to the age of productive labor was born almost entirely by mothers.

Supporting and educating children beyond the bare minimum was expensive for rural Nebraska families. While most farm children received only a rudimentary grade school education, those children who attended high school usually needed to be transported and boarded in town. This, together with the labor

forgone, was prohibitive for most families. It was women, however, who were most likely to agonize over children's overwork, lack of education, and limited nonfarm opportunities.¹⁶

While Nebraska farm women wanted children, they had reason to be concerned about unregulated childbirth. A woman's interests in her own and her children's health, recreation, and future might in fact run counter to the monumental labor demands of a developing farm operation, which tended to be the focus of the male world. Thus, fertility decisions within families were undoubtedly negotiated in terms of competing interests. Although some demographic historians have used family consensus models in analyzing fertility decisions, discarding a consensus assumption leads us to examine inequality within families and the effects of economic and political inequalities outside. Nowhere is the issue of gender inequality more salient than in fertility decisions, since everything about having children is different—biologically, socially, and legally—for men and women. A balanced, non-gendered consideration of fertility decisions as family strategy becomes strangely unbalanced when we consider that women's childbearing is the most basic difference between men and women.¹⁷

In reflecting on the complexity of the various questions of fertility control, Daniel Scott Smith risked a broad generalization: "At a superficial level, fertility control within marriage is a reform analogous to temperance, abolitionism, and the extension of public schooling." According to Smith, fertility control represented a new level of autonomy for women within marriage. Yet curiously, in terms of the findings of this study, he attributed this increased autonomy to an increasing emphasis on conjugality and on the changes that occurred with the movement to the frontier. The evidence of this study suggests that newly settled women whose lives, in terms of household composition, most strongly emphasized conjugality—those living in nuclear family households—exercised the least control over their fertility.¹⁸

How much did women know about controlling pregnancy? Both abortifacients and con-

traceptives were part of women's folk medical resources in preindustrial Europe. Although the growing medical establishment, with the cooperation of governments, tried to root out women's medical practices, birth limitation measures persisted in women's culture in the nineteenth century. The 1873 Comstock Law, prohibiting the publication of birth control information or possession of birth control devices, suppressed the medical establishment's development or dissemination of birth control, but it could not stop the flow of information within women's networks. Since descriptions of birth control could not legally be put on paper, no explicit and comprehensive discussions of rural women's birth control methods have been passed to succeeding generations. The evidence that exists for the period before the courts reinterpreted the Comstock Law in 1936 is necessarily scanty and anecdotal.¹⁹

There is evidence of the flow of birth control advice among white women of the U.S. Plains in the late nineteenth century, although the accuracy and efficacy of the advice must have been uneven. Some farm women in North Dakota had access to contraceptive diaphragms as early as 1885. Women writing to the *Nebraska Farmer* in the 1890s and early 1900s had discussed birth control issues and generally agreed that, while every woman should have children, having too many children was irresponsible. Although the Comstock Law prohibited the printing of specific information, the women indicated that birth control was not only possible but morally dictated. Some women performed home abortions on themselves and their neighbors, and medical personnel also performed abortions occasionally.²⁰

Evidence of the desire and the means to limit births, together with the continuing decline in fertility in all segments of the U.S. population throughout the nineteenth century, implies a measure of control. A recent and comprehensive study of the fertility of Mormon women indicates that even in this pronatalist society, some birth control was being practiced—even Mormon women with many children often gave birth to them early and limited births in their

later childbearing years. This does not, however, indicate that birth control information was available to all women. The Mormon study did not address the possibility of household differences—such as household composition—as a fertility variable. But just as not every American woman in the 1990s has access to birth control measures that are generally available within our society, we can safely assume that not every rural woman of one hundred years ago had access to birth control information. Some did; others didn't.²¹

Given the informal channels in which birth control information moved during the period of the Comstock Law, nothing would have affected a woman's access to birth control as much as the nature and frequency of her contacts with other women. A woman who was in frequent and intimate contact with another woman would share in her information. If knowledge of birth control can be inferred from the evidence of birth limitation, it appears that Nebraska women living in structurally larger than nuclear family households had more and better information on birth control than did women living in households in which the only other adults were their husbands. We can speculate that another adult woman in a household might have provided birth control information or might have intermittently taken over certain household responsibilities for the wife, thus freeing her to visit friends for an afternoon or longer or to be generally more mobile.

Even an extra adult male in the household might have freed a woman or a nuclear family to have more extensive social contacts than the nuclear family alone could have had. A Boone County woman whose first son was born on a farm in 1932 described an example of such freedom. Although her husband was disinclined to care for the baby, their hired hand picked up the little boy and played with him in the house or put the baby into his jacket and took him outside, propping the child up to watch the man take care of animals. When this woman traveled away from the farmhouse she frequently took the hired man along to help her with the baby. While this attachment may not be represen-

tative of all farm households, it is reasonable to suppose that on a farm where a hired hand was available to milk cows and do other routine chores a woman would be more mobile than she would if living in a household whose only workers were her husband and herself.²²

A hired hand might also enable an entire family to do more traveling and visiting than they would if they had no help. During visiting that involved entire families it was common for men and women to segregate and talk about gender-specific concerns, which for women must have included birth control. Women in nuclear families appear to have had fewer social contacts in the sparsely settled Nebraska farming region.

In addition Nebraska women, faced with the more recent disruption of their female networks at the time they moved west, would have been most vulnerable to isolation within their nuclear family households. Iowa women, more firmly established in their home communities and having closer and more accessible neighbors, would not have been as intensely dependent upon the people living in their households. Not only would they have had a readier access to birth control information, they would have been less dependent on children for companionship and emotional support and therefore less likely to want a large number of children.

Women living in nuclear families in town would logically have been less isolated than would farm women, since they could reach other women comparatively easily. The absence of a uniform association between nuclearity and higher fertility among farm women in Iowa suggests that a more compact settlement, a longer period of residence, a more developed communication infrastructure, and a generally higher level of prosperity might have promoted more intimate ties among women from different households regardless of who was living with the women.

Of perhaps equal significance with the knowledge of birth control was the willingness to use birth control and possibly the ability to convince a husband to go along with birth limitation practices. Both of these would logically

have been affected by a woman's daily contacts with adults other than her husband. Association with other women might have helped a woman to find a sympathetic female comrade, thereby helping her, even in small ways, to define a self that was to be cared for and respected. Close associations outside the nuclear family might also have afforded a woman protection and support in pressing for her interests in the conjugal relation. Cross-cultural studies of women, kinship, and residence patterns have shown that women who have significant social contacts beyond the nuclear family have relatively more autonomy within the conjugal unit as well as in the larger society.²³

The correlation demonstrated in this study supports the hypothesis that for frontier Nebraska women geographic or social isolation from other women tended both to increase the number of children a woman wanted and also to impede her access to birth control information, thereby leading to a larger number of children. This does not imply that isolation was the only factor in women's birth decisions. The variations in fertility among town women seem to be responding to economic and social conditions not addressed in this study. Women's isolation was not a function simply of life on a farm but of the economics of the farm community and the community networks available to the women. Isolation may also be related to the relative power of women both within the household and within the larger society and therefore to the amount of control a woman could exercise over childbirth decisions.

Luna Kellie and Mari Sandoz are among those who have given us distinctive and intimate insights into the private lives of rural Nebraskans in the frontier period. Yet writers represent a small and probably unrepresentative sample of Nebraska women. Census data, while not as readable as narratives, provide a breadth of view that we never experience in personal accounts. Interpreted in the light of narratives and secondary sources, these data provide a wealth of information on the lives of persons who etched themselves into plains culture as deeply and

definitively as did those whom historians have named.

NOTES

An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the annual meeting of the Social Science History Association, October 1990, in Minneapolis. The authors thank Dorothy Schwieder for her suggestion of Benton County as a suitable Iowa comparison to Boone County.

1. For a study emphasizing the continuities between prairie and Plains see Glenda Riley, *The Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on the Prairies and the Plains* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1988). See Carl Frederick Kraenzel, *The Great Plains in Transition* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955) or Deborah Fink, *Agrarian Women: Wives and Mothers in Rural Nebraska, 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992) for analyses of the disjunctures.

2. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910: Population*, Vol. 2, Alabama-Montana (Washington: GPO, 1913), pp. 585-86, Vol. 3, Nebraska-Wyoming (Washington: GPO, 1913), p. 24; *Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910: Agriculture 1909 and 1910*, Vol. 7, Nebraska-Wyoming, p. 30; and *Twelfth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1900: Population*, Pt. 1 (Washington: GPO, 1901), p. 145.

3. 1910 *Agriculture Census*, Vol. 6: 520, Vol. 7: 30; Bureau of the Census, 1930 *Agriculture Census*, Vol. 2, Pt. 1 (Washington: GPO, 1932), pp. 962, 1269.

4. Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: Agriculture 1940*, Vol. 1, Pt. 2 (Washington: GPO, 1942), pp. 194, 644.

5. Birthplaces of married women taken from U.S. census manuscripts, 1900 and 1910.

6. Rural is defined as anything outside a population aggregate of 2500. Richard A. Easterlin, "Factors in the Decline of Farm Family Fertility in the United States: Some Preliminary Research Results," *Journal of American History* 63 (1976): 600-614; A.J. Jaffe, "Urbanization and Fertility," *American Journal of Sociology* 48 (1942): 48-60; Miriam King and Steven Ruggles, "American Immigration, Fertility, and Race Suicide at the Turn of the Century," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 20 (1990): 360-63; Bernard Okun, *Trends in Birth Rates in the United States Since 1870* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1958), pp. 67, 78, 85; Daniel Scott Smith, "Differential Mortality in the United States before 1900," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 8 (1983): 735-59, and "'Early' Fer-

tility Decline in America: A Problem in Family History," *Journal of Family History* 12 (1987): 73-84; Maris Vinovskis, "Socioeconomic Determinants of Interstate Fertility Differentials in the U.S. in 1850 and 1860," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 6 (1976): 375-96; Robert V. Wells, *Revolutions in Americans' Lives: Perspective on the History of Americans, Their Families, and Their Society* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1982), p. 93.

7. Yasukichi Yasuba, *Birth Rates of the White Population in the United States, 1800-1860: An Economic Study* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1962); Morton Owen Schapiro, *Filling Up America: An Economic Demographic Model of Population Growth and Distribution in the Nineteenth Century United States* (Greenwich, Connecticut: JAI Press, 1986).

8. Easterlin, "Factors in Decline" (note 6 above); Vinovskis, "Socioeconomic Determinants" (note 6 above).

9. Carl N. Degler, *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 3; Scott G. McNall and Sally Allen McNall, *Plains Families: Exploring Sociology Through Social History* (New York: St. Martin's Press), p. 19.

10. For census definitions of household, see Carroll D. Wright, comp., *History and Growth of the United States Census* (Washington: GPO, 1900), pp. 151, 184. For urban boarders, see John Modell and Tamara K. Hareven, "Urbanization and the Malleable Household: An Examination of Boarding and Lodging in American Families," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 35 (1973): 474; James R. Barrett, *Work and Community in the Jungle: Chicago's Packinghouse Workers, 1894-1922* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), p. 99.

11. Mari Sandoz, *Old Jules* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1935), pp. 212-23; Luna Kellie, *A Prairie Populist: The Memoirs of Luna Kellie*, Jane Taylor Nelsen, ed. (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), p. 69.

12. Mary W.M. Hargreaves, "Women of the Agricultural Settlement of the Northern Plains," *Agricultural History* 50 (1976): 182-83, and "Space: Its Institutional Impact in the Development of the Great Plains," in *The Great Plains: Environment and Culture*, ed. Brian W. Blouet and Frederick C. Luebke (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), pp. 205-23; Laura Ingalls Wilder, "Favors the Small Home," in *A Little House Sampler*, ed. William T. Anderson (1911; rpt. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), p. 102; Elizabeth Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself: The Private Writings of Midwestern Women* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 39.

13. Statistical significance of fertility differences was determined using a linear, least squares model. A difference was regarded as statistically significant,

i.e., unlikely to have occurred by chance alone in a sample of this size, if the probability of its chance occurrence was less than five in 100 ($p < .05$). In addition to the Nebraska farm women, the difference in the number of children born to women in nuclear and expanded households was statistically significant for women age thirty-five to forty-four in Vinton in 1900 and in Albion in 1910. The difference in surviving children was significant in Albion in 1910. We do not discuss these findings in this paper.

14. Fink, *Agrarian Women* (note 1 above), p. 140; Kellie, *Prairie Populist* (note 11 above), p. 32; Hargreaves, "Women of Agricultural Settlement" (note 12 above), p. 183.

15. Mari Sandoz, *Sandhills Sundays and Other Recollections* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), p. 21; Elliott West, *Growing Up in the Country: Children on the Far Western Frontier* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), p. 140.

16. Hattie Byfield, "The Farmer's Children," *Nebraska Farmer* 20 (1896): 504; Nellie Hawks, "My Boy," *Nebraska Farmer* 20 (1896): 568; Alvin Johnson, *Pioneer's Progress* (New York: Viking, 1952), p. 23; Herbert Quick, "The Women on the Farms," *Good Housekeeping* 57 (1913): 426-36.

17. For critique of a family consensus model see Judith Bruce and Daisy Dwyer, "Introduction," in *A Home Divided: Women and Income in the Third World*, ed. Daisy Dwyer and Judith Bruce (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), pp. 1-19; Heidi Hartman, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union," in *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*, ed. Lydia Sargent (Boston: South End Press), pp. 1-41. For a recent example of the use of the consensus model, see Mark J. Stern, *Social and Family Strategy: Erie County, New York, 1850-1920* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987).

18. Smith, "'Early' Fertility Decline" (note 6 above), p. 82 (quoted); Daniel Scott Smith, "Family Limitation, Sexual Control, and Domestic Feminism in Victorian America," in *Clio's Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women*, ed. Mary S. Hartman and Lois Banner (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), p. 126.

19. For European women's fertility control, see Tereza Burmeister et al., *Heks, Hore, Aerbar Kone: Kvindeliv paa Landet i 1800-tallet (Witch, Whore, Decent Wife: Rural Women's Lives in the 19th Century)* (Skive, Denmark: Chr. Erichsens Forlag, 1987), p. 77; and Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers* (Old Westbury, New York: Feminist Press, 1973), p. 11.

20. For discussion of midwestern women's birth control practices, see Riley, *Female Frontier* (note 1

above), pp. 82-83; Hampsten, *Read This Only* (note 12 above), pp. 102-11; and Lillian Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey* (New York: Schocken, 1982), p. 111. Nebraska women's discussions of birth control can be found in Mrs. M.E. Sparks, "The Large Family," *Nebraska Farmer* 35 (1903): 799; Nelly Hawks, "Maternity," *Nebraska Farmer* 20 (1896): 489; and in Fink, *Agrarian Women* (note 1 above), p. 147.

21. Lee L. Bean, Geraldine P. Mineau, and Douglas L. Anderton, *Fertility Change on the American Frontier: Adaptation and Innovation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 245.

22. Deborah Fink, interview in Boone County, 1987.

23. Laurel Herbenar Bossen, *The Redivision of Labor: Women and Economic Choice in Four Guatemalan Communities* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984); Patricia Draper, "Kung Women: Contrasts in Sexual Egalitarianism in Foraging and Sedentary Contexts," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), pp. 77-109; and Karen Sacks, *Sisters and Wives: The Past and Future of Sexual Equality* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1979).