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VILLAGE COMMUNITIES

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"SURVEYING YOUR COMMUNITY,"
ETC.

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INTRODUCTION

This volume is the last of a series of five embodying the results of a national study of the agricultural village and its community in the United States made by the Institute of Social and Religious Research during 1923, 1924 and 1925.¹ The first part of the book summarizes the results of the entire study. The second part contains individual studies of eight of the 140 villages surveyed. Obviously, in a summary it has not been possible to give all the data for all statements made. The data will be found in the other volumes of the series, to which frequent reference will be made.

For the purposes of this study, an agricultural village was defined as an incorporated place whose population ranged from 250 to 2,500, whose location was in a strictly farming area, and whose chief function was to act as a service station to the surrounding countryside. Purely industrial villages, such as those found in the coal regions, or in cotton-mill areas, and villages in resort or suburban communities, were excluded from the investigation.

The data used in this study were gathered from two sources; from unpublished United States' census figures secured through the cooperation of the Director of the 1920 Census and Dr. Charles J. Galpin, of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, and from actual investigations of villages made by trained field workers. The villages to be surveyed were chosen only after preliminary investigation and in cooperation with state agencies, such as colleges of agriculture and boards or departments of education and agriculture.² The study was limited to incorporated villages, because the census data could not be obtained separately for unincorporated villages.

Many of the facts obtained are arranged and compared on a regional basis, for which purpose the country was divided into

¹ The other volumes are *A Census Analysis of American Villages*, *American Villagers*, *United Churches*, and *American Agricultural Villages*.

² For a full discussion of the material and methods of the study, see Appendix A in *American Agricultural Villages*.

four regions—Middle Atlantic, South, Middle West and Far West—some of which include two or more census divisions, as is here shown:

<i>Institute Regions</i>	<i>Census Divisions</i>
Middle Atlantic	Middle Atlantic
South	{ South Atlantic East South Central West South Central
Middle West	{ East North Central West North Central
Far West	{ Mountain Pacific

Of the contribution which the study may make in the field of social research, others will judge better than those who are responsible for this work. Some considerations that bear on this point, however, may be permitted in this final summary of the results of the investigation.

1. The study was conducted in a field of social research where previous contributions were both few in number and limited in geographical extent. This investigation has been national in scope; and it is believed that the volumes in this series, taken together, furnish the beginnings for a sociology of village life.

2. The tabulation of the census material on the 177 villages from which the 140 studied on the field were selected, is a clear gain. Never before has it been possible to secure, for this type of community, tabulations of census material on age-, and sex-distributions, nativity, occupation, marital status, school attendance, and the other items now made available through the courtesy and cooperation of the Census Bureau.

3. Furthermore, so far at least as the writer knows, it has not previously been possible to combine on so large a scale, and on a national basis, census material and field data on individual rural communities. The handling and correlating of these two sets of data raised some interesting methodological problems. Some of the solutions arrived at, which are apparent from a reading of the text, especially of *American Villagers* and *American Agricultural Villages*, may possibly prove suggestive elsewhere.

4. The technique developed in dealing with the relatively simple problems of village life, such for instance as the finding of a wealth index, may perhaps permit of expansion, and then of use in the approach to more complex social organizations such as the town or city.

5. This study is a first, not by any means a final, word on the American agricultural village. It is more in the nature of a reconnaissance. In no one state has the sample of villages been large. Problems have been raised that need further investigation before any solution can be advanced. More intensive studies of local situations within states can also be made in the light of the results of this national study, especially with the funds now made available to colleges of agriculture for social studies by the Purnell bill. It is earnestly hoped that this investigation will stimulate such studies.

6. The findings of this investigation may be of value to educational and religious administrators, social organizations, government agencies and business concerns ready to found policies upon the results of research; for this investigation has at least produced some certainty where before there was conjecture; it has replaced some misconceptions by facts. Main Street has an importance beyond its size. To the city, it is the representative of rural America; to the farmer, it is the interpreter of the city. Both need it; neither fully understands it. By opening the way to a better understanding of the status and function of the village in our national life, this pioneer adventure into the field of village sociology will, we trust, make an important practical contribution.

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