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**AN UNEXPECTED LEGACY:
WOMEN, EARLY RURAL SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH, AND THE
LIMITS OF LINEARITY**

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ABSTRACT

We often think of history in linear terms: past as prologue, one event following another, one year leading into the next. In a Rostowian-styled model of development, this kind of linear progression prefigures not only conceptualizations about the past, but also assumptions about the present. This paper reexamines the unexpected appearance of women and women's lives embedded in early rural sociological research to consider how implicit assumptions about the past prefigure what we expect to "see" and influence the way we make sense of it.

How do we engage the past?¹ Is it something that exists far back in time separating us from a long ago yesterday? Does the way in which we conceptualize the past affect how we think about our intellectual heritage? With the recent commemoration of the Rural Sociological Society's 75th anniversary in 2012 and the 100th anniversary of the American Sociological Association (Blasi 2005; Calhoun 2007a), questions such as these hold particular relevance.

By establishing and/or reinforcing a particular past as shared, collective commemorations such as anniversaries play important roles in identity formation, solidarity, and group boundaries (Assmann 2008; Assman and Czaplicka 1995; Jansen 2007; Jedlowski 2001; Schwartz 1998). In other words, the manner in which the past is recounted reinforces a particular collective identity. As a result, moments of collective remembering can raise questions about how we view and engage our history. Do we leave it to the past or do we see memory not as something retrieved, but as something that is constructed, as Halbwachs argued ([1925] 1992; Maier 1999; Pléh 2000)?

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When it comes to thinking about the past, while it is not the only framework, conceptualizations of linearity and progressive development are often implicitly employed.² We can see them at work in some of our symbolic representations of the past such as chronologies and times lines. Embedded within representations like these can lay implicit assumptions that the linearity also represents progressive development. For disciplines, the past is often seen as moving from the simple to the more complex by overcoming the shortcomings of the past.

Yet linear frameworks of progression not only affect how we see the past. They also frame our assumptions about the present. Having overcome or addressed previous shortcomings, the present is assumed to be more developed than what came before. For disciplines and disciplinary history, it assumes an accumulating nature to the field's theory, methods, and knowledge.

Once we assume that our theoretical models and methods of analysis have overcome earlier shortcomings, they are often seen as more mature and more developed than those that came before. Bounded by echoes of evolutionary models, in this approach previous achievements become viewed as outdated, with little relevance and little bearing on what we do today. Inconsequential for how we engage the contemporary world, the past becomes constructed as a historical object disconnected from the present – a kind of archeological landscape consisting of dates to be recalled and artifacts to be displayed, particularly at times of commemoration.

Using research conducted on the USDA's Division of Farm Population and Rural Life (DFPRL), the following analysis examines how assumptions about the past can prefigure and delimit what we *see* and how we interpret it. To do this, the unexpected discovery within our history is used: the appearance of women and women's lives embedded in some of our early research. While the USDA's DFPRL has been considered elsewhere (Larson and Zimmerman 2003; Zimmerman 2008), the following draws from the more detailed analysis in Zimmerman and Larson (2010) to approach the work from a different perspective and it includes details not included in the original work.

²This is not to argue that linearity or progressive development are the only ways of conceptualizing the past. For example, both Abbott (1999) and Lengermann and Neibrugge (2007) suggest different approaches. Still, notions of linearity and progressive development often inform our commonly held understandings especially of intellectual and disciplinary history.

A CURIOUS PATTERN

In the late 1980s, former members of the unit's professional staff Olaf F. Larson and Edward O. Moe began work to document and understand the contributions of the USDA's Division of Farm Population and Rural Life to knowledge about rural life and agriculture and to understand its place in our intellectual history. "The Division," as it was called, was the first time that a unit of the federal government was devoted to sociological research (rural or otherwise) and it conducted much of the first systematic research on rural America. Existing from 1919-1953, research conducted by Division staff resulted in more than 1,200 publications and 21 books (Larson, Moe, and Zimmerman 1992) with names reading like a veritable "who's who" of the time (Levine and Zuiches 2003:ix). Thirteen presidents of the Rural Sociological Society (RSS) had Division experience, including Margaret Jarmon Hagood, the first woman to be president of RSS.³ At the time, the Division's work was "by far the most dominant element in the field of rural sociological research" (Smith 1957:13).

The first step in the project to understand the Division's work was to compile a bibliography. Easier said than done, the process included contacting former Division staff members and occasionally rescuing boxes from attics of surviving relatives.⁴ Using a system of keywords, every piece of research that could be located was examined. As dominant trends emerged, so too did a curiously consistent pattern: time and again, rural and farm women appeared in the studies.

Several traits of the recurring inclusion of women's lives in the research conducted by the Division stood out. First, and perhaps most obvious, was that decades before the emergence of women's studies, details about women's lives were there at all. Yet, interwoven repeatedly were descriptions of rural and farm women's activities and data documenting their varied work – on the farm, in the community, and in the agricultural labor force.

A second aspect that stood out was the repeated nature of the appearance of rural and farm women's lives. Women were a part of several research areas. One area was the early standard of living studies conducted soon after the Division was

³In addition, three presidents of the American Sociological Association (ASA); Carl Taylor, Kimball Young, and Charles P. Loomis; worked at some time in the Division (see Larson and Zimmerman 2003:36). Head of the Division at the time, Carl Taylor was also the first person in a nonacademic position to be ASA president (see Odum 1951:205).

⁴For a complete description of the methods and sources used, see Larson et al. (1992). As new electronic search engines have been developed, additional publications produced by the Division have been located which were not included in the original bibliography. These are noted in Zimmerman and Larson (2010).

formed (e.g., Kirkpatrick 1926; Rankin 1923). Another research area where rural and farm women were interwoven were community studies including the 71 'laboratory' cultural reconnaissance studies (the largest research project undertaken by the Division) (e.g., Longmore and Pryor 1945) and the well-known community stability/instability studies (see Zimmerman 2011). Women's participation in the hired agricultural labor force was also documented in demographic analyses of the agricultural labor force (e.g., Ducoff and Hagood 1946; Reagan 1946). While not evident in every piece of research, women were consistently included across several major topic areas and across different methodologies.

Another trait of the repeated references to rural and farm women was revealed when we tried to use the system of keywords to capture the inclusion of women in the Division's research. To facilitate the larger analysis and history of the Division's work, a system of keywords was developed for the bibliography and applied to every research report, book, Bulletin, or journal article produced by the Division. Each keyword was used to indicate the central focus of that research product. However, when it came to capturing the inclusion of women, while they were part of larger studies, women were not the main focus. For instance, while many studies on farm wage rates disaggregated their data by sex, only some of them included a discussion of women in the results. In the community studies, women were but one feature of local life considered. In its 34 years, there was only one instance when women's lives formed the main focus of a Division research project: Emily Hoag Sawtelle's unpublished report "The Advantages of Farm Life: A Study by Correspondence and Interviews with Eight Thousand Farm Women" (1924).⁵

We considered several alternatives in assessing whether the repeated appearance of women's lives in this body of work constituted a larger pattern. One possibility, of course, was that the inclusion of women was nothing more than the overactive imagination of a new graduate student working on the project. Having an interest in gender, references to women understandably stood out, but that did not mean there was anything to it. Similarly, it could be that the inclusion of women in the research was nothing more than a few anomalous and isolated instances. Instead of a larger pattern, they were random and inconsequential, and could be dismissed as part of the ordinary variations one would expect in a body of work.

Another alternative could be that, while the inclusion of women was more than just random occurrences, it could still represent a pattern. Perhaps they were outliers that reflected the work of rural sociologists whose approach was outside the

⁵Sawtelle's report is reprinted in Zimmerman and Larson (2010).

conventions of the time? In other words, the moments of women's inclusion may have been a group of exceptions, but the general trends of the field remained intact. An important aspect of this last approach to understanding the repeated inclusion of women in parts of the Division's research is that it implies that the inclusion of women stood outside prevailing conceptualizations. This alternative also raised the opposite possibility that, instead of being outside the norm, the inclusion of women instead represented something that was inside the norm.

THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

The search to understand the curious pattern of women's inclusion in this body of early rural sociology research raised questions about how to approach research concerning the process and past products of the intellectual enterprise. Considerations of rural sociology's development have often contained admonitions about its early research. With findings portrayed as "relatively crude descriptions" (Stokes and Miller 1985:557), and researchers themselves colorfully called "fact-finders" and "privy counters" (Sewell 1965:441), it is common for early rural sociology to be perceived as banal and consisting only of descriptions. Moreover, while early research was not limited to community studies, a general critique of early rural sociology research cannot be disconnected from the specific critique of community studies as "flimsy," "impressionistic" accounts (see Newby 1980:77-80), and whose "contribution to the discipline is "nil" (Sanders and Lewis 1976:47).

Of course, not all early rural sociology research has been tossed into a figurative dustbin (Gilbert 1996, 2008; Hooks 1983; Hooks and Flinn 1981b; Theodori 2009). Luloff and Krannich (2002), for instance, revisited the six stability/instability community studies conducted by the Division. And, decades afterward his original research, contemporary reexaminations of the Goldschmidt hypothesis can still be found (Lobao, Schulman, and Swanson 1993; Peters 2002).

Assessments have also not always been so dismissive. In their review of the first 50 years of the journal *Rural Sociology*, Christenson and Garkovich (1985) for instance, were hesitant to dismiss early research entirely. While the more recent research published in the journal evinced more "methodological and statistical sophistication," as pointed out by Stokes and Miller's assessment (1985), Christenson and Garkovich also found that the contemporary research was "more limited in focus," compared with the earlier research which "attempted to treat much broader problems" (1985:509).

Seeking to contextualize its distinct early approach and focus, rural sociology's institutional location in land grant universities has been examined (and criticized)

for affecting research decision making (Busch and Lacy 1983; Newby 1980; Sewell 1950, 1965). Even Carl Taylor, writing from within the early years, discussed how interactions with non-sociology audiences influenced the nature of rural sociology (1937). While these and others have sought to contextualize and explain how land grant universities affected rural sociology's particular approach or focus, disciplinary progress over time is still often portrayed and measured as overcoming a limited past, either in relation to theory or in methodological terms.⁶

Trying to understand women's inclusion in this early research at a time when women's roles were more often invisible or subsumed within the home⁷ raised larger questions about implicitly relying on linear frameworks of presumed inherent progress to judge the past. Using this yardstick and from the vantage point of the 1990s after the 'discovery of women' through fields such as women's studies and feminist theory, including women's lives in these early researches was not expected.⁸ If, as disciplinary progress is often presented, knowledge and theories are cumulative over time, then how do we account for the inclusion of women in this research conducted decades before?

The discontinuity between the inclusion of women's lives in these early studies and our expectations based on implicit assumptions of linear progress meant confronting our assumptions and raised a new set of questions. Instead of linear progress, for instance, was it possible to approach previous intellectual contributions as more than artifacts of a different era? In retrospectively reconstructing the intellectual enterprise, are contemporary standards and norms a helpful comparison? Or, do we instead place them within their own historical moment, situating both the research products and research process within their own politics, their own language, and their own cultural norms and standards?

While questions such as these are not strangers in the philosophy and history of ideas (Kasabova 2008; Prudovsky 1997; Spiegel 2002), more often intellectual and disciplinary histories are compartmentalized and treated as distinct entities. Focused on internal debates and developments, research and analyses are more likely to consider each field or discipline in isolation. This approach to intellectual

⁶For a different approach, a good read is Falk, who characterizes the influence of the land grant university setting as "both a boon and boondoggle for rural sociologists" (1996:168). While the early years in rural sociology are often remembered as atheoretical (see, for example, Newby 1980), others have argued that theory was present (Bealer 1975; Brunner 1946, 1957; Picou, Wells, and Nyberg 1978).

⁷While exceptions exist (Allen 1931; Hagood 1939), research that focused solely on rural and farm women was rare.

⁸For example, the first Conference on Rural and Farm Women in Historical Perspective was held in the 1980s (Fink, Grim, and Schwieder 1999; Jensen and Efland 2001).

and scholarly history characterizes disciplines as if they were, to use Zerubavel's phrase, "islands of scholarship" (1995:1094).⁹ Another feature of disciplinary histories is that, while the institutional context of universities and land grant universities have been considered (Busch and Lacy 1983; Camic 1995; Camic and Xie 1994), relationships beyond the academy have typically not been a part of these types of analyses.

INTERSECTIONALITY AND CONVERGING PATHS

Seeking an alternative approach to understanding the appearance of women in the early research conducted by the Division meant looking across disciplinary boundaries and considering the roles of both academic and nonacademic landscapes. It meant locating rural sociology in relation to agricultural economics, sociology, and home economics. And, it meant considering the roles played by actors and contexts beyond the academy. Using this broader approach, what we found was that the interwoven nature of women's lives within this early research reflected a larger underlying approach (Zimmerman and Larson 2010). Moreover, instead of linear paths of isolated development, what are often seen as separate paths converged, each had a connection to the Division, and through their intersectionality they played a role in laying the conceptual foundations for the inclusion of women in the Division's research.

Rural Holism

For rural sociology, key factors in its emergence lay in the nonacademic landscape. The role and importance of the Country Life Commission, for instance, has long been acknowledged (Brunner 1957; Nelson 1969a).¹⁰ Formed by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1908, the Commission was charged with examining the social context and conditions surrounding agriculture (Commission on Country Life 1917). With growing concerns over the effects of industrialization and rural out-migration (Gillette 1911; Kinley 1909), the problem was summed up as "the unequal

⁹Approaching disciplines as separate entities itself has its own deep history in the academy (Heilbron 2004). Even in recent analyses that emphasize early interdisciplinary interactions, the focus is more often on establishing the boundaries and separateness of disciplines (see, for example, Gross 2004).

¹⁰For a good brief summary, see Lowe (2010). There are many assessments of the Country Life Commission, including: Bowers (1974), Collins and Hicks (2009), Danbom (1979), Ellsworth (1960), Hooks and Flinn (1981a), Johnstone (1940), McConnell (1953), Nelson (1969a), Peters and Morgan (2004), and Ziegler (2012).

development of our contemporary civilization” (Commission on Country Life 1917:37).

Beyond the impacts of industrialization the prevailing emphasis in agriculture was on increasing agricultural production. However, this approach was coming into question as it was seen as limited in its ability to address larger problems. As a result, an alternative view was developing. This view held that the problems facing agriculture were neither reducible to, nor fixable by, focusing on agricultural production alone. Instead, a broader view was needed – one that captured not only agricultural production, but also the larger context surrounding agriculture.¹¹

Rural holism, or the view that the whole of rural life needed to be examined and considered, was an important part of the viewpoint held by key actors involved in establishing the Division of Farm Population and Rural Life and was communicated by USDA leadership throughout the Division’s lifetime. Secretary of Agriculture David F. Houston, for instance, argued that the needs of agriculture exceeded what could be accomplished by focusing only on individual farmers. In 1913, soon after becoming Secretary, Houston (1914a) described his plans for the USDA to the American Association of Land Grant Colleges:

I am very conscious from my short experience in the Department of Agriculture that we are in a measure entering a new field. For the most part in the past we have dealt specifically and primarily with production, and we have dealt with the farmer individually. I think the time is now upon us when we shall be called to give more particular thought to the newer and complex problems... Whether we like it or not we are face to face with the whole problem of the organization of rural life. I can not look at it partially. We shall not take helpful action unless we conceive it as a unit...” (pp. 21–2)

Houston was a particularly important actor for the Division. He established both the unit that became the Division and its forerunner: the Rural Organization Service – which marked the entry of social science into the USDA (Baker et al. 1963; Effland 2000; McDean 1984; Pinkett 1984; Sanderson 1939). But Houston’s particular views were not unique to him alone. The view that the social context of rural life needed attention was also reflected by many others during this time,

¹¹Reflecting this larger view, Ellsworth later characterized the importance of the Commission’s work as “the first recognition by a federal agency that the production of more excellent citizens on the farm was at least as important as the production of more, bigger and better hogs and cotton, and that the current emphasis upon more scientific production would not solve a host of farm problems” (1960:155–56).

including Liberty Hyde Bailey, Walter Hines Page, Horace Plunkett and others (Galpin 1938a; Larson 1958; Lowe 2010; Nelson 1969b). The theme of holism continued to be heard even after the Division had been established. In the 1940 *Yearbook of Agriculture*, for instance, Hambidge summarized the work within: “what seem like separate problems are often found to be only parts of some larger problem; you cannot solve the parts by themselves; you have to work toward a solution of the whole problem...” (1940:3).

Emphasizing the importance of the social aspects of rural life, a holistic perspective opened the door for the importance of the social organization of agriculture and of the countryside. Often characterized as the ‘human element’ (Galpin 1918; Mumford 1927), pursuing a broader approach meant that facets such as daily life and community participation became important. It also opened conceptual space for including women.

American Sociology

The emergence of a rural holism; with the main features of country life, agriculture, and rural communities seen as integrated entities adding up to more than the sum of their parts; was also compatible with intellectual trends in the young field of sociology. As voices raised concerns over the inadequacies of productionism to address the needs of agriculture and rural areas, ways of conceptualizing society as a knowable (and therefore reformable) social entity were being discussed by those in American sociology.

At the time, sociology’s purview was being defined as the social whole, society in its totality, or an “orderly view of associated human activities as a whole” (Small 1895:13). In describing the uniqueness of sociology, Albion Small called this totality the “unified object of thought” which is “the thing to be explained” (1897:156). For Small, “[t]he point of view of the sociologists focalizes all possible researches about social facts into a composite picture of the whole reality” (1897:168). Describing the unique features of sociological thought in his presidential address, Lester Ward also elicited images of the social as a whole and how sociology saw society as “bound together... into one great system” (1907:584).

The importance of the social whole meant that while society consists of parts, their comprehensibility lay in their relationship to the whole. Using the study of life in a town to illustrate sociology’s unique perspective, Small noted that “each of these portions of the whole called ‘the town’ is meaningless or deceptive if held separate from the other parts” (1897:158). Abbott summed up the school of thought later identified with the University of Chicago in these terms: “... one cannot

understand social life without understanding the arrangements of particular social actors in particular social times and places” (1997:1152).¹²

Today we are more likely to remember the histories of American sociology and rural sociology as disconnected. The separation is commonly traced to the formation of the Rural Sociological Society. Odum, for instance, characterized how rural sociology’s so-called departure through forming the RSS was appropriate given its inclusion of nonacademics (1951:300). In more recent years, Turner and Turner reasoned that rural sociology’s “separation... from the rest of the discipline” came from its “distinct resource base,” which had made its research methodologies either “peculiar” or “biased” (1990:52-53).

Whether rural sociology departed, per se, or something else was going on (Zimmerman 2012), in their early years, American sociology and rural sociology were not so separate. Early assessments of American sociology included rural sociology, such as Bernard (1929) and C. Zimmerman (1929) in Lundberg, Bain, and Anderson’s *Trends in American Sociology* (1929)—the discipline’s “first serious historiography” (Sica 2007:729). In addition, the first course on rural social life (“Social Conditions in American Rural Life”) was given in the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago by Charles R. Henderson (Nelson 1969a:28; Sanderson 1917:437). Franklin Giddings at Columbia University directed three influential doctoral dissertations on rural communities (Brunner 1957:3-4). Since the organization’s inception in 1905, rural life was twice the conference theme for the American Sociological Society (later: Association) – in 1916 under George E. Vincent (American Sociological Society 1917) and again in 1928 under John M. Gillette (who also wrote the first textbook in rural sociology). In 1924, the Section on Rural Sociology was recognized as the “oldest section” in the Society and was depicted as “displaying remarkable vitality” at the annual conference (American Sociological Society 1925:474). More recently, rural sociology has been described as “initially and until World War II one of the field’s largest branches” (Calhoun 2007b:3).

Themes of holism and integration that informed early sociology provided conceptual linkages for those with rural interests and for the emergence of rural sociology. For future Division Head Carl Taylor and others during this time, rural sociology was seen as employing the same fundamental concepts of society as

¹²The literature on Chicago sociology is vast and the interpretations vary (Turner 1988). For analyses that include the many citations that comprise this body of work, see Farber (1988), Abbott (1997), and Camic (1995). A particularly candid assessment of sociology’s turn away from its earlier styled sociology can be seen in Sorokin (1956).

knowable, and an interest in understanding its social organization. Still, it did so for rural society, agriculture, and rural communities (1923).¹³ Pitirim Sorokin and Carle Zimmerman (1929) described the field in their book *Principles of Rural-Urban Sociology*:

...rural sociology... does not artificially isolate one side of the phenomena from others, and does not treat the objects studied as though they were "independent" from all other forces, factors, and conditions. It studies them in their complexity, intercorrelations, and interdependence with other phenomena (P. 9).

Agricultural Economics

The need for a broader view of agriculture like that heard in the Country Life Commission was also being voiced in the growing field of agricultural economics and in both academic and nonacademic contexts. Within farm management, a new perspective was taking shape; one that looked beyond the needs of individual farms and individual farmers to their collective relationships and relationships with other social forces.¹⁴

While many factors contributed to the formation of agricultural economics, ultimately it boiled down to two sides (Jesness 1959; Taylor and Taylor 1952:84-98). One side focused on farm management and on the individual farm as a business. On the other side were those who focused on the larger context surrounding individual farms. The second of these viewpoints, the self-named agricultural economists (as opposed to those who focused on farm management), took a broad view toward agriculture and the role of country life – providing a conceptual common ground between rural sociology and agricultural economics.

¹³Sociology's holistic approach to understanding the organization of society, while providing a conceptual parallel for rural holism, also combined with precepts of evolution and natural selection from the natural sciences. After all, if social change is directed by evolution, then reform is not needed. It was this approach that led sociologists Franklin Giddings and Lester Ward to differing conclusions about the issues facing agriculture and those living in rural areas in the late 1800s (American Economics Association 1893, 1897).

¹⁴For instance, the need to consider factors larger than production on individual farms led to increasing attention on the role of marketing agricultural products and cooperative organization of farmers (Marlin 1932; Sherman 1937). As Secretary Houston put it: "I, personally do not believe that the farmer can solve the problem of marketing individually" (Houston 1914b:21-22). Moreover, just as marketing needed collective action (action beyond the individual), so too was the need for collective action extended to issues in communities (Carver 1915).

Henry C. Taylor was at the forefront of the developing agricultural economists. As Penn noted at the time of his death, Taylor always included “those things important to agriculture that occurred beyond ‘the line fence’ [*sic*]” (1969:1001). Instead of focusing on the management of individual farms, Taylor placed agriculture within the context of “general issues of the rural economy” which included issues of “rural living” (Penn 1969:1001).

For Taylor, the focus for agricultural economics was not just the efficiency of individual producers. It entailed the context within which individual production occurred and the larger forces that affected the farm and the farmer (H. Taylor 1929:367). The approach to agriculture represented by Henry Taylor meant that different issues were brought to the fore such as the standard of living of those in farming and its relationships to broad issues of country and national life (H. Taylor 1927).¹⁵

The importance of Henry Taylor extends beyond his role as a leading voice in the developing field of agricultural economics. He was also an important actor for the Division itself. Secretary of Agriculture David F. Houston brought Henry Taylor to the USDA to head the Office of Farm Management (USDA, Office of the Secretary 1919a). Taylor was a member of the committee that established the subsequent new and enlarged Office of Farm Management and Farm Economics (USDA, Office of the Secretary 1919a) and he was charged to head the resulting unit.

Taylor’s approach to agricultural economics informed his approach at the USDA. In explaining the committee’s proposed new Farm Management and Farm Economics unit at the Association of American Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations, Henry Taylor noted that “[a]ttention has been focused too exclusively upon the field and the feed lot, the crops and the barns for storing them” (1920:241). Describing the importance of the proposed Farm Life Studies subunit in “efforts to improve agriculture,” Taylor (1920) further explained:

When the whole matter is sifted out it will be found that the conditions of living on the farm and in the rural community and the resulting attitude of mind of farm men and women toward their work and the land they till is at

¹⁵Henry Taylor went on to be the first managing director of the Farm Foundation in 1935. While there, he focused the organization on the “broad problems of rural communities” (Penn 1969:1000). His commitment to and concern for the impacts and causes that lay in the larger context surrounding agriculture as well as the farmers’ share of the national income continued throughout his career (H. Taylor 1962).

the root of the difficulties encountered in efforts to improve methods of farming and to promote the conservation of the land (P. 241).

Taylor's approach was reflected in concrete actions on his part – actions that were important for the early life of what became the Division. For instance, Taylor sought to have Farm Life Studies as part of his expanded Office of Farm Management and Farm Economics and he requested that the committee be formed to establish a plan for the unit (H. Taylor 1992; USDA, Office of the Secretary 1919b). To run the unit, Taylor engaged in a bidding war to secure pioneering rural sociologist Charles J. Galpin as its first head (H. Taylor 1992; Galpin 1938b).¹⁶ And, Taylor fought (and saved) the Farm Life Studies Unit from early budget cuts (H. Taylor 1992). In 1922, Taylor's Office of Farm Management and Farm Economics became the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, the parent unit of the Division. It was Farm Life Studies that became the Division of Farm Population and Rural Life.

Positing the importance of relations beyond the individual and beyond individual farms provided a common ground for rural sociology and the broader approach of agricultural economics. This meant that, rather than asserting the primacy of farming, to understand the whole, the social was also important. As Henry Taylor wrote to Galpin 1935:

... you brought to me the impulse to see and understand the social side of rural life... the complex relations of human beings living in rural areas. Due to your influence more than that of any other man in America, agricultural economics has ceased to be simply a farm economics (H. Taylor 1948:129).

The view that rural sociology was uniquely positioned to consider the social whole was still reflected well after the Division was begun. For example, as agricultural economist Marion Clawson put it, sociology's emphasis on "life as a whole" gave it special value and a unique viewpoint not held in other fields (1946:332).

Women's Voices and Home Economics

To understand the inclusion of women in early rural sociological research produced by the Division, two other factors were important. First, rural and farm women's voices were active during this time. Not only were issues of suffrage

¹⁶In his autobiographical *My Drift into Rural Sociology*, Galpin wrote that it was his desire to continue working with Henry Taylor that ultimately drove his decision to go to Washington (1938b:35).

prominent, but letter campaigns focused on questions related to rural and farm women were also being conducted in magazines such as the *Farmer's Wife*, *Farm and Home*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and the *Ladies Home Journal* (Atkeson 1924; Casey 2004; Kline 1997; Sawtelle 1924). In this context, Secretary of Agriculture David Houston sent out 55,000 "letters of inquiry" to farm women that he subsequently used as his basis for arguing that "The Woman on the Farm" needed attention in his first "Report of the Secretary" (1914b:38-41). Others, such as Assistant Secretary Clarence Ousley (1918), also spoke on the role of women and, despite having no women among its membership (Gilman 1909; Ziegler 2012), even the Country Life Commission explicitly named women among the areas needing redress (1917).¹⁷

A second factor that needed to be considered was the field of home economics. As home economics was growing, it was increasingly seen as the intellectual home for inquiry into women's concerns and issues concerning women. Like agricultural economics, home economics touched on both the academic and nonacademic worlds.

In 1908, the same year that the Country Life Commission conducted its inquiry, the American Home Economics Association (AHEA) was being formed. Typical of the holism found in the Progressive Era, early home economists linked women's roles within the home to their responsibilities as "members of the social whole" (Apple and Coleman 2003). However, others would come to espouse the ideals of an urban-based ideology of separate spheres – seeing womanhood in relation to Victorian domesticity and separating the home from community or public affairs (Folbre 1991; Kerber 1988).

Soon after the turn of the century, home economics began its path toward entering the realm of federal support for agriculture. These movements provided new funding, legitimacy, and opportunities for growth. In 1914, the Smith-Lever Act included home economics by name, provided funding for home economics extension work and recognition of education in home economics as a parallel to agricultural extension and education. A year later, the Office of Home Economics was established in the USDA's States Relations Service.¹⁸ In 1923, the same year that the Equal Rights Amendment was first introduced into Congress and three years after women secured the right to vote, the Office of Home Economics became its own Bureau within the USDA.¹⁹

¹⁷For more detail, see Zimmerman and Larson (2010).

¹⁸The States Relations Service was established in 1915 as the "coordinating agency" between the USDA and state-level extension and experiment stations (Baker et al. 1963:80-81).

¹⁹While the establishment of the Bureau of Home Economics placed it on the same organizational level as the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, it ranked lowest of all the USDA Bureaus in its expenditures for "regular work" (USDA 1928:87).

Joining the agricultural sciences helped shift home economics from the broad-based liberal arts education of its earliest approach to a more vocational field and it further facilitated a narrowing focus on the home (Apple and Coleman 2003; see also Powers 1992). For instance, reassurances were given to those at the Association of American Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations that home economics had no intention of being an interloper but instead was focused on that which was already the realm of women – the home (White 1917).

Like agricultural economics, so too was home economics concretely tied to developing the Farm Life Studies unit that became the Division. Seven members of Secretary of Agriculture David Houston's advisory committee that outlined the topics of study for the Farm Life Studies unit were women, including key leaders in home economics such as Florence Ward, Ola Powell, Alice M. Loomis, and Edna N. White. Moreover, the "rural home" was listed first among the topics that the unit was to study (USDA, Office of the Secretary 1919b). The committee's report and prioritizations were important as they laid the foundation for the new Farm Life Studies Unit. After his retirement, Galpin noted that the committee's report "served as the official charter" for the Division (Galpin 1938b:205).

As the field of home economics was growing, questions were invariably raised about the relationship between it and the field of rural sociology (Knight et al. 1928:206). Moreover, rural sociologists such as Galpin had already remarked on the importance of women to the whole of rural life. Galpin, for instance, argued that bettering the home could free women up to participate in community affairs and enable them to be a "leader in rural social enterprises" and in "the modernization of rural institutions" (Galpin 1918:117).²⁰

When it came to the role of women and the relationship of rural sociology to home economics, while rural sociology and the Division's work was distinct from that of home economics, Galpin sought cooperative relationships between the two (1920, 1924). Later, he reflected that he never saw a problem in the fact that farm family living lay "on the borderland between home economics and rural sociology" (Galpin 1917, 1938b:53-54;). In addition, it was the priority given to the rural home by the founding committee that led to the early standard of living studies (e.g., Kirkpatrick, Atwater, and Bailey 1924).

²⁰For home economics, the particular relationship between the home and community often lay in its relationship to supporting family living (Eliot 1927; Thatcher 1925). Still, others would take a different approach and emphasize the national implications of home-based decision making and its relationship to larger social issues and processes (Kneeland 1925).

AN UNEXPECTED LEGACY

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The view that women comprised one part of the larger social whole was also evident under Carl Taylor's headship of the Division. Twenty years after the unit's establishment, the field guide for the community stability/instability studies stated that women's roles were considered part of the totality of rural life. Even still, the guide directed, "areas of behavior usually practiced by housewives" were not the focus for the studies (C. Taylor et al. 1940:25). As a result, rural sociology's focus was on understanding the social organization of rural life as a whole while leaving the study of women within the home to home economics.

CONCLUSION

This paper was titled "an unexpected legacy" because the repeated appearance of rural and farm women's lives was indeed unexpected. Based on linear and progressive conceptions of the past, this repeated pattern of women's inclusion would not have been expected until after the 'discovery of women' decades later (see, for example, Flora 1985; Sachs 1983). Yet implicit assumptions of linear progress produce a particular vision of the past. They not only shaped what we expected to see, but they gave us few tools to understand what we were seeing.

In the end, we pursued what could be called a more "meso historical" (Lengermann and Neibrugge 2007:341) or contextualist approach that placed individuals and their research within their own time. Instead of focusing on boundaries, we examined the roles of various interactions both within and beyond the academy. As a result, a different picture emerged. Because early rural sociology defined its object of study as the totality of rural life, it opened conceptual space for the relevance of a wide range of factors and women were included as one of a multiplicity of facets needed in a holistic understanding of the social organization of rural life.

Just as rural sociology's holistic approach and descriptive accounts made elements of women's lives visible, it also opens another question: could this approach have made other unexpected elements visible as well? In 1965, for instance, journal editor Sheldon Lowry described Lee Coleman's presidential address on race and rural sociology as "a subject of inquiry that is just beginning to emerge" (1965:392; Coleman 1965). Still, Yvonne Oliver's interview with Edward B. Williams – the only African American to serve in a professional role in the Division – suggests that more could be hidden within this early research. In his interview, Williams stated "... had better use been made of these studies, it may have alleviated much of the tension" that later developed in the 1950s and 1960s (Oliver 2003:184-186).

Perhaps our progenitors were not as undeveloped as we sometimes imagine them to be. After all, a linear framework of progress on some level does necessitate an “othering” of the past. As we moved to newer ways of seeing and making sense of the social world (to a different intellectual project - wrought in a different social and political time), perhaps establishing the legitimacy of that movement also required a de-legitimation of what came before. For instance, we rarely remember today that Carl Taylor argued that inequality undermined the development of community (C. Taylor 1927), or that Margaret Hagood tried to explain that rural gender roles did not necessarily fit urban-based models and expectations found in sociology (1949). Even agricultural economist Henry Taylor argued for the need for social justice for farmers in his 1933 address as President of the American Country Life Association (H. Taylor 1992).

Today, sociology is more pluralistic in its approaches. Responding to various issues such as concerns over fragmentation (Bakker 2011), the possibility of an interdisciplinary future (Camic and Joas 2004), or the need to recognize multiple theoretical perspectives (Sica and Turner 2005), alternative ways of being sociological are now more commonplace than was the case when early rural sociology research was characterized as “flimsy” (Newby 1980:77-80) and whose contributions to the discipline were seen as “nil” (Sanders and Lewis 1976:47). Instead of being passé, perhaps early rural sociology does remain relevant – as Abbott has argued about Chicago-styled sociology (1997). Could other aspects of this early research deserve a second look? If linear conceptions of time and frameworks of inherent progress implicitly assign our intellectual progenitors and their work to the shadows of dusty irrelevancy, we will never know.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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