

HAMLET AND VILLAGE POPULATIONS IN ILLINOIS

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This paper is a report of four investigations pertaining to Illinois hamlets and villages. As measured by population, hamlets are communities with less than 250 inhabitants, while villages have at least that number but less than 2,500.

I.—In 1912 an article in *The Journal of Political Economy* contained a prediction that many of the then existing hamlets and villages in Illinois would decline in population and disappear. This was based on the assumption that improvements in the means of communication and transportation would eliminate the need for as many small communities with their local business establishments as existed. The aforesaid prediction has *not* been fulfilled so far as *incorporated* hamlets and villages are concerned. This is proved by Bureau of Census records which show 922 incorporated hamlets and villages in Illinois in 1910 and 934 in 1940.

Incorporated hamlets and villages constituted only 44.4% of all hamlets and villages in 1930. From this fact it is clear that the validity of the prediction in question cannot be judged by data pertaining only to incorporated communities. Serious difficulty is encountered, however, when one undertakes a study of unincorporated hamlets and villages for no precise statistical data are available regarding them. In spite of this students have assembled such data as they could procure. The most complete recent study of such communities in Illinois, so far as the author knows, was published in 1938. It reports that in 1930 the number of such places was 357 less than in 1910. This conclusion arouses curiosity about the source of information. When that is examined, one finds that what this recent study actually discovered was that in 1930 there were 357 less unincorporated communities in Illinois *that contained one or more business establishments rated by a national financial agency* than was the case in 1910. But the disappearance of business establishments does not necessarily indicate the extinction of the hamlets and villages in which they were lo-

cated. The author of the study in question recognized and acknowledged this fact. No available evidence known to the author demonstrates the validity of the prediction that Illinois hamlets and villages would disappear as the means of communication and transportation improved.

II.—The second investigation shows that a correlation, but not a direct causal relation, exists between the size of hamlets and villages and the probability of their growth or decline. Larger percentages lose population each decade of hamlets and small villages than of large villages. Tests of this were confined to incorporated hamlets and villages. These communities were classified under three categories, namely, places with populations of less than 500; of 500 to 999; and of 1000 to 2499. The percentages of each class of community which lost population beginning with the largest are:

For the decade 1920-1930, 46.4; 62.2;
and 73.9.

For the decade 1930-1940, 22.9; 22.4;
and 39.5.

The correlation postulated above was found to exist in an analysis of incorporated hamlet and village population changes in 75.6% of 36 states for the last intercensal decade and in 86.1% of these same states for the decade 1920-1930. Size is not in itself a direct cause of population changes but the causes of population changes are, with a high degree of consistency, related to size, so that the smaller the place the more liable it is to lose population and the larger the place the less this liability.

III.—The third investigation was conducted to test the hypothesis that proximity to urban centers lessens the liability of hamlets and villages to lose population while remoteness from such centers increases that liability. Only incorporated hamlets and villages were considered. The investigation consisted of a study of six cities in Illinois selected on the basis

of size and distance from other competitive communities. Around each of these cities three concentric ten mile wide zones were marked and the number of hamlets and villages in each zone and the numbers of them which lost population during the last decade were counted. Communities were classified under four categories, instead of only three as in the last investigation, by making hamlets into one class and villages with populations of from 250 to 499 inclusive, another. The assumption was that if the hypotheses were valid the percentages of communities which lost population would be greater in zone three, the most distant one, than in zone two, and greater in zone two than in zone one. Because communities were divided into four categories this test could be applied to each category for each city and also to the totality of all communities for each city. This provided 30 opportunities to test the validity of the hypothesis. Four of these had to be discarded because of the lack of hamlets of certain categories in some of the zones. In only 7 instances out of 26 did the percentages of communities which lost population increase with the distance from the urban center. In 19 cases out of 26 no progression is exhibited. In other words, conformity to the criterion employed to test the validity of the hypothesis was found in only 27% of the tests, which means that in 73% of the tests the results were negative. Similar tests were applied to a study of 5 cities in Iowa and to an additional 6 metropolitan cities and with much the same results. In the tests for these 11 cities conformity to the criterion was found in only 22% of the cases, while 78% were negative.

From these facts we are forced to conclude that proximity to urban centers

does not lessen the liability of incorporated hamlets and villages to lose population nor remoteness from such centers to increase such liability.

IV.—The fourth investigation was to ascertain whether any significant correlation exists between the percentage of people on relief in Illinois counties and the growth or decline of the hamlets and villages in those counties. The five counties which had the smallest percentages of their population on public relief in 1940 were contrasted with the five counties which had the largest percentages on public relief.

In each of the five *low* relief counties a majority of the hamlets and villages *gained* population. However, in two of those counties the number that gained population was only one greater than the number that lost. In the other three counties the number that gained was a sufficiently large majority so that the percentages of all hamlets and villages in the five *low* relief counties that *gained* population was 71.4%. In contrast, a majority of the hamlets and villages in the *high* relief counties *lost* population, the percentage that gained being only 46.6% of the total. This seems to indicate that *low* relief is correlated with the village growth and *high* relief with village decline. When losses and gains are studied by counties, however, the correlation disappears. All of the hamlets and villages in one of the *high* relief counties *lost* population while in another all of them *gained*. In two of the remaining three counties a majority *gained* while in one the majority *lost*. From these facts we conclude that no significant correlation is established between the percentage of people on public relief and the tendency for hamlets and villages to increase or decrease in population.