

## Smithville, Amo, and Coatesville

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Most Americans, including those who live in them, believe that our villages are dying, if they are not actually dead. This notion was dramatically presented on the nation's television screens in the Spring of 1962 (1). But contrary to popular opinion, villages in the Middle West, at least, have not been dying, if one defines a village as an incorporated place of less than 1,000 persons which is outside an urbanized area, and if one defines the demise of the village in terms of population decline. In 1960 a nine state area in the Middle West contained almost 4,000 villages, or about two-fifths of the national total. Some 219 of these villages had been incorporated since 1950, and thus no data have been published on their 1950 population (Table I). Of

TABLE I

Number of Incorporated Places of Less than 1,000 Persons,  
Outside Urbanized Areas, by Rate of Growth, 1950-1960

|                         | Nine Middle Western<br>States |            | Indiana |            |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|------------|---------|------------|
|                         | Number                        | Percentage | Number  | Percentage |
| Total number            | 3,943                         |            | 275     |            |
| Incorporated since 1950 | 219                           |            | 11      |            |
| Remainder               | 3,724                         | 100.0      | 264     | 100.0      |
| Plus 10% or more        | 1,106                         | 29.8       | 101     | 38.2       |
| Plus 0-9.9%             | 880                           | 23.6       | 72      | 27.3       |
| Minus 0-9.9%            | 839                           | 22.5       | 60      | 22.8       |
| Minus 10% or more       | 899                           | 24.1       | 31      | 11.7       |

the remaining villages, just over half had more people in 1960 than they had had in 1950, while just under half had lost population. In many villages, however, the gain or loss was so slight that it appears reasonable to assume that the population did not change at all, and I decided quite arbitrarily that a gain or loss of 10 percent or less represented essentially no change in the size of the village population. Viewed in this light, almost a third of the villages gained population, roughly a quarter lost, and almost half remained essentially stable.

The fact of village growth was even more impressive in Indiana, where two-fifths of the villages grew more than 10 percent, and only one in ten lost more than 10 percent of its population, while two-thirds of the villages in the state experienced some growth in population during the decade.

The continued, and generally unsuspected, growth of our villages necessitates re-examination of a number of stereotypes which have been based on the assumption that villages are fading away. Doesn't the

village population consist largely of widows and retired farmers? Isn't the village merely a "fished-out pond" consisting almost entirely of people who remain there simply because they have lacked the initiative to leave? Would young couples actually be willing to live and raise their families in a village? And what do the village people do for a living?

A research program to provide answers to some of these questions was initiated during the first Big Ten Faculty Field Research Seminar, held at Gull Lake, Michigan, in early September 1961, when two villages in southern Michigan were investigated in some depth. The questionnaire used in this pilot study was subsequently refined, and it has been used in a series of village investigations in Indiana, Iowa, Illinois, and Wisconsin. The author shares the direction of the larger village research project, of which this paper is a partial product, with Professor Neil E. Salisbury of the State University of Iowa, whose counsel has been of the greatest value. The data presented here were collected by graduate students at Indiana University who were enrolled in Geography G502, Field Methods, in the Spring Semester, 1962; the author expresses his appreciation to Joyce Kyei, Harry Margulis, John Ntimba, Jerry Poling, Dale Stevens, Charles Tatum, and James Wheeler for their conscientious efforts and constructive suggestions. This paper presents data gathered, and some tentative conclusions reached, in the investigation of three villages in Indiana.

Smithville, about 7 miles south of Bloomington in the southern Indiana limestone belt, is not properly a village as we have defined it, for the community is not incorporated; the 1962 population was estimated to be about 340 persons. Smithville was chosen as an example of an unincorporated village in a limestone quarrying area, and also because of its proximity to a city of medium size (Bloomington; 1960 population, 31,357).

Amo and Coatesville are 27 and 32 miles, respectively, west of Indianapolis, and 13 and 16 miles east of Greencastle; both villages are on paved secondary roads about 5 miles north of four lane U. S. 40. The population of Amo has grown continuously since 1920, when it had 274 people, to 1960, when it had 437. Coatesville grew from 472 persons in 1910 to 522 in 1920, then dropped to 377 in 1940, and grew once again to 497 in 1960. Both Amo and Coatesville grew more than 10 percent between 1950 and 1960.

Smithville and Amo both give a subjective impression of decline. Several years ago a fire destroyed the ramshackle structure housing Smithville's only general store, which now struggles along in a former private residence. Amo likewise has only one general store, and it does not appear to be suffering any great surfeit of prosperity either. The feeling of decline in both villages is reinforced by the fact that more than half of the houses in each were estimated to have been constructed before the First World War (Table II).

Coatesville has almost as high a proportion of older houses as the other two villages, and like them has one house in four which has been built since 1944, but its business district is much more modern and gives

TABLE II  
Questionnaire Results from Indiana Villages, 1962  
With Estimates for Indiana and the United States, 1960, for Purposes of Comparison

|                                                        | Smithville |            | Amo    |            | Coatesville |            | Indiana     | United States |
|--------------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|--------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|---------------|
|                                                        | Number     | Percentage | Number | Percentage | Number      | Percentage | Per-centage | Per-centage   |
| <i>Year in which the house was built</i>               |            |            |        |            |             |            |             |               |
| Number of houses                                       | 100        | 100        | 107    | 100        | 134         | 100        | 100         |               |
| 1913 or before                                         | 53         | 53         | 64     | 60         | 62          | 46         | 40          |               |
| 1914-1944                                              | 23         | 23         | 15     | 14         | 39          | 29         | 25          |               |
| 1945 or later                                          | 24         | 24         | 28     | 26         | 33          | 25         | 35          |               |
| <i>No response</i>                                     |            |            |        |            |             |            |             |               |
| Number of houses                                       | 100        | 100        | 107    | 100        | 134         | 100        |             |               |
| Vacant                                                 | 5          | 5          | 1      | 1          | 4           | 3          |             |               |
| Nobody at home                                         | 27         | 27         | 21     | 20         | 46          | 34         |             |               |
| Refused to answer                                      | 12         | 12         | 9      | 8          | 18          | 13         |             |               |
| <i>Age of the population in households interviewed</i> |            |            |        |            |             |            |             |               |
| Total population                                       | 188        | 100        | 283    | 100        | 218         | 100        | 100         | 100           |
| 0-19                                                   | 65         | 35         | 96     | 34         | 62          | 28         | 39          | 38            |
| 20-34                                                  | 53         | 28         | 83     | 29         | 64          | 29         | 19          | 19            |
| 35-64                                                  | 49         | 26         | 80     | 28         | 58          | 27         | 34          | 33            |
| 65 and over                                            | 21         | 11         | 24     | 9          | 34          | 16         | 9           | 9             |
| <i>Size of the family in households interviewed</i>    |            |            |        |            |             |            |             |               |
| Number of families                                     | 56         | 100        | 76     | 100        | 66          | 100        | 100         | 100           |
| 1-2 persons                                            | 8          | 14         | 14     | 18         | 16          | 24         | 41          | 42            |
| 3-4 persons                                            | 26         | 47         | 29     | 38         | 27          | 41         | 37          | 36            |
| 5 or more persons                                      | 22         | 39         | 33     | 44         | 23          | 35         | 22          | 22            |

an impression of prosperity in contrast to the apparent stagnation of Smithville and Amo. In actual fact, however, the appearance of Coatesville is deceiving, for it is a product of catastrophe, not prosperity; much of the center of the village was destroyed by a tornado in 1948, and new modern buildings were erected with insurance money.

By the time we had completed our interviewing, in fact, our initial impressions had been reversed. Coatesville, which had initially appeared the most attractive and progressive of the three villages, was considered the most provincial and backward of the three. Our conclusions here strongly support Mather's warning on the danger of basing field work solely on morphological observations, without interviews to substantiate the impressions gained from these observations (2).

Interviews were conducted in Smithville and Coatesville on Saturday mornings, and in Amo on Saturday afternoon, but we are not prepared to suggest that this fact alone accounts for the higher response rate in Amo. A remarkably small fraction of the houses in the three villages were vacant, but a fifth to a third had nobody at home when the interviewer called. Roughly one household in every eight flatly refused to answer our questions. Our rate of response ranged from 50 percent in Coatesville to 70 percent in Amo.

We found an astonishingly high proportion of young adults, aged 20 to 34, in each of the three villages, and have been somewhat surprised that this concentration of population in the child-bearing years was not matched by a concentration in the childhood years, aged 0 to 19. This is doubly puzzling because of the comparatively large number of large families, with five or more persons. On the other hand, the percentage of the population aged 65 and over appreciably exceeded the national norm only in Coatesville, and neither Smithville nor Amo fit the stereotype of a village consisting largely of elderly widows and retired farmers.

Almost half of the families interviewed reported that they have lived in the village since the family was formed, although movement from house to house within the village has not been uncommon (Table III). Roughly a quarter of the families in each village moved to the village from a farm, and the remainder came to the village from another village or from a town or city. Contrary to popular notions, however, only Smithville received more "immigrants" from urban areas than from farms, and Smithville is a mere seven miles from Bloomington. The continued growth of Amo and Coatesville appears to have been nourished primarily from within, from surrounding rural areas, and from other villages, sometimes at surprising distances. In both Amo and Coatesville, for example, we encountered families which had moved to Indiana from farms or villages in other states because the family breadwinner had obtained a job in a city nearby, but the family had rejected the idea of living in that city and had preferred to live in the village instead.

More than half of the families in Amo had lived there less than five years, and three-quarters had lived there less than ten. Recency of arrival was not quite so pronounced in Smithville and Coatesville, and yet even here roughly half of the families had been in the village ten years or less. This may not be as surprising as it seems, in view of

TABLE III  
Questionnaire Responses Concerning Migration to Indiana Villages, 1962

|                                                                   | Smithville |            | Amo    |            | Coatesville |            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|--------|------------|-------------|------------|
|                                                                   | Number     | Percentage | Number | Percentage | Number      | Percentage |
| <i>Where did your family live before you moved to this house?</i> |            |            |        |            |             |            |
| Number of respondent families                                     | 56         | 100        | 76     | 100        | 66          | 100        |
| Always lived in this house                                        | 11         | 20         | 9      | 12         | 15          | 23         |
| Another house in this village                                     | 15         | 26         | 24     | 32         | 15          | 23         |
| On a farm                                                         | 12         | 22         | 19     | 25         | 18          | 27         |
| In another village                                                | 4          | 7          | 12     | 15         | 9           | 13         |
| In a larger place                                                 | 14         | 25         | 12     | 16         | 9           | 14         |
| <i>When did you move to this village?</i>                         |            |            |        |            |             |            |
| Number of respondent families                                     | 56         | 100        | 76     | 100        | 66          | 100        |
| Less than 5 years ago                                             | 15         | 27         | 44     | 58         | 24          | 36         |
| 5-10 years ago                                                    | 15         | 27         | 14     | 18         | 8           | 12         |
| More than 10 years ago                                            | 26         | 46         | 18     | 24         | 34          | 52         |
| <i>Why did you move to this village?</i>                          |            |            |        |            |             |            |
| Number of respondent families                                     | 56         | 100        | 76     | 100        | 66          | 100        |
| Born here                                                         | 21         | 38         | 26     | 34         | 25          | 38         |
| To be close to family/friends                                     | 7          | 13         | 11     | 15         | 7           | 11         |
| Larger/cheaper house                                              | 12         | 21         | 7      | 9          | 8           | 12         |
| Found a job locally                                               | 8          | 14         | 13     | 17         | 12          | 18         |
| Other                                                             | 8          | 14         | 19     | 25         | 14          | 21         |

the presence in all the villages of comparatively large numbers of young married couples whose marriages have been formed for less than ten years, but neither is it compatible with the stereotype of the village as a "fished-out pond" with little attraction for non-villagers, and especially little for young married couples!

The reasons given for moving to the village were rather diverse. A third of the families were here because one spouse, or both, had been born here, and more than ten percent of the families had moved here—most commonly from adjacent rural areas—because the village was part of their native community of family and friends. Although some of these were retired farm families, the group also included relatively young families which had decided to give up farming for some other occupation, but which wished to remain in the native community. The capital invested in village houses, which commonly are both large and surprisingly cheap to buy or rent, was also an attraction to former farm families. The roominess and cheapness of village housing was especially attractive to Bloomington workers in the lower income brackets, and a fifth of the residents of Smithville gave this as a reason for moving here. Job opportunities were of little more importance than ties of friendship and kinship in attracting newcomers to the villages. This is partially due to the limited economic opportunity of the village, although many of the "local" jobs which attracted people to the village could be considered local only in the very loosest sense; jobs more than 25 miles away in Indianapolis, for example, attracted Kentucky people who preferred village life to braving the perils and temptations of the big city, and these people truthfully informed us that they had moved to the village because they had found a job locally.

What did they do for a living? All three villages had more than their share of retired people, but only Coatesville (with 28 percent of its labor force in this category) truly seems to fit the stereotype of the village as consisting primarily of retired people (Table IV). Each village had less than the national percentage of its labor force engaged in the service occupations, and only Amo approached the national percentage of white collar workers, while each village had more than its share of skilled and unskilled workers.

The places where its residents are employed provides a fairly convenient summary of the nature of the three villages. Smithville, in the limestone quarrying belt, is essentially a dormitory village for quarry workers who are employed in the surrounding countryside, and for blue collar workers employed in Bloomington. Amo is a dormitory village for Indianapolis, 27 miles away, although it is so close to U. S. 40 that it provides a convenient base for traveling men who are free to select a residence over a fairly large territory. The dormitory function, for both Indianapolis and Greencastle, is of some importance in Coatesville, but Coatesville is also a village of many elderly and retired people, and a sizable proportion of the village labor force is locally engaged in serving their needs. This, in addition to the benefits of tornado insurance, appears to explain the greater economic activity of Coatesville, the activity which made such a favorable first impression before we had probed beneath the surface.

TABLE IV  
Characteristics of the Labor Force in Indiana Villages, 1962

|                                | Smithville |            |        | Amo        |        |            | Coatesville |            |        | Indiana    |            | United States |            |
|--------------------------------|------------|------------|--------|------------|--------|------------|-------------|------------|--------|------------|------------|---------------|------------|
|                                | Number     | Percentage | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage | Number      | Percentage | Number | Percentage | Percentage | Percentage    | Percentage |
| Total Labor Force              | 71         | 100        | 87     | 100        | 74     | 100        | 74          | 100        | 74     | 100        | 100        | 100           | 100        |
| Retired                        | 12         | 17         | 15     | 17         | 21     | 28         | 21          | 28         | 21     | 28         | 10         | 10            | 10         |
| Unemployed                     | 4          | 6          | 2      | 2          | 0      | 0          | 0           | 0          | 0      | 0          | 6          | 6             | 6          |
| Employed Labor Force           | 55         | 77         | 70     | 81         | 53     | 72         | 53          | 72         | 53     | 72         | 84         | 84            | 84         |
| <i>Major Occupation Groups</i> |            |            |        |            |        |            |             |            |        |            |            |               |            |
| Employed Labor Force           | 55         | 100        | 70     | 100        | 53     | 100        | 53          | 100        | 53     | 100        | 100        | 100           | 100        |
| Professional/Managerial        | 4          | 7          | 13     | 19         | 9      | 17         | 9           | 17         | 9      | 17         | 18         | 22            | 22         |
| Clerical/sales                 | 3          | 5          | 14     | 20         | 9      | 17         | 9           | 17         | 9      | 17         | 21         | 21            | 21         |
| Craftsmen/foremen              | 13         | 24         | 22     | 31         | 16     | 30         | 16          | 30         | 16     | 30         | 15         | 18            | 18         |
| Operatives, etc.               | 29         | 53         | 18     | 26         | 14     | 26         | 14          | 26         | 14     | 26         | 28         | 23            | 23         |
| Service workers                | 6          | 11         | 3      | 4          | 2      | 4          | 2           | 4          | 2      | 4          | 11         | 13            | 13         |
| Farm                           | 0          | 0          | 0      | 0          | 3      | 6          | 3           | 6          | 3      | 6          | 7          | 8             | 8          |
| <i>Place of Employment</i>     |            |            |        |            |        |            |             |            |        |            |            |               |            |
| Employed Labor Force           | 55         | 100        | 70     | 100        | 53     | 100        | 53          | 100        | 53     | 100        | 100        | 100           | 100        |
| In the village                 | 10         | 18         | 15     | 22         | 20     | 38         | 20          | 38         | 20     | 38         | 38         | 38            | 38         |
| On a farm                      | 0          | 0          | 0      | 0          | 3      | 6          | 3           | 6          | 3      | 6          | 6          | 6             | 6          |
| In the country nearby          | 16         | 29         | 1      | 1          | 0      | 0          | 0           | 0          | 0      | 0          | 0          | 0             | 0          |
| In a larger place              | 27         | 49         | 44     | 63         | 29     | 54         | 29          | 54         | 29     | 54         | 54         | 54            | 54         |
| Travelling                     | 2          | 4          | 10     | 14         | 1      | 2          | 1           | 2          | 1      | 2          | 2          | 2             | 2          |

In conclusion, our survey did find signs of the traditional stereotype of the village, but it appears that the stereotype has been considerably exaggerated. The villagers were not so elderly as we might have expected, and we found that the villages are continuing to attract young families who, for the most part, have farm or village backgrounds and prefer life in the small community to life in complex urban society. Although they have few of the economic functions which are supposed to maintain the viability of central places, the villages do have one very great asset in the capital invested in their houses, and the continued growth of villages in the Middle West suggests that not enough attention has been paid to the dormitory function as one of the basic functions which supports and maintains population growth in small central places.

#### Literature Cited

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