

**Selected Documents in the History of
the Rural Sociological Society**

**Congress Strikes Again:
The Era of the ‘Big Chill’**

For Display Only

Congress Strikes Again: The Era of the ‘Big Chill’

This publication is one of five display volumes created for the
75th Anniversary of the Rural Sociological Society.

The idea for the volumes came because of a request from the conference program chair, Keiko Tanaka, that artifacts from the history of the Society be on display during the 75th Anniversary celebration. Given the fragile nature of the original documents and a need to contextualize their importance, a decision was made to create this series of display volumes.

Most of the documents included herein were originally copied from the RSS Archives for the 6-part series on the history of the Rural Sociological Society written by John Holik and Edward Hassinger for the 50th Anniversary of RSS. The series was published in *The Rural Sociologist*.

“The Rural Sociological Society: Its Beginnings.”

1986. 6(5):331-340.

“The RSS: Coming to Formalization.”

1986. 6(6):407-420.

“The RSS: Ties that Bind.”

1987. 7(1):3-18.

“RSS During the Depression and World War II Years.”

1987. 7(3):154-165.

“RSS in Midlife: 1950-1962.”

1987. 8(1):5-31.

“The RSS: Reaching Outward and Inward, the 1960s and 1970s.”

1987. 8(5):385-404.

Complementing the archive documents are copies of documents from the RSS Historian’s Files and selections from journals including the *American Journal of Sociology*, the *American Sociological Review*, *Sociologia Ruralis*, and *Rural Sociology*.

In addition to these volumes, posters with photographs of past presidents, editors of *Rural Sociology*, editors of *The Rural Sociologist*, Distinguished Rural Sociologist award winners, previous archivists/historians, and a 75-questions trivia game were also created and displayed during the 2012 conference.

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*By seeing and reading the words of those who created our history,
it is hoped that these documents will help to bring
our organization's history to life.*

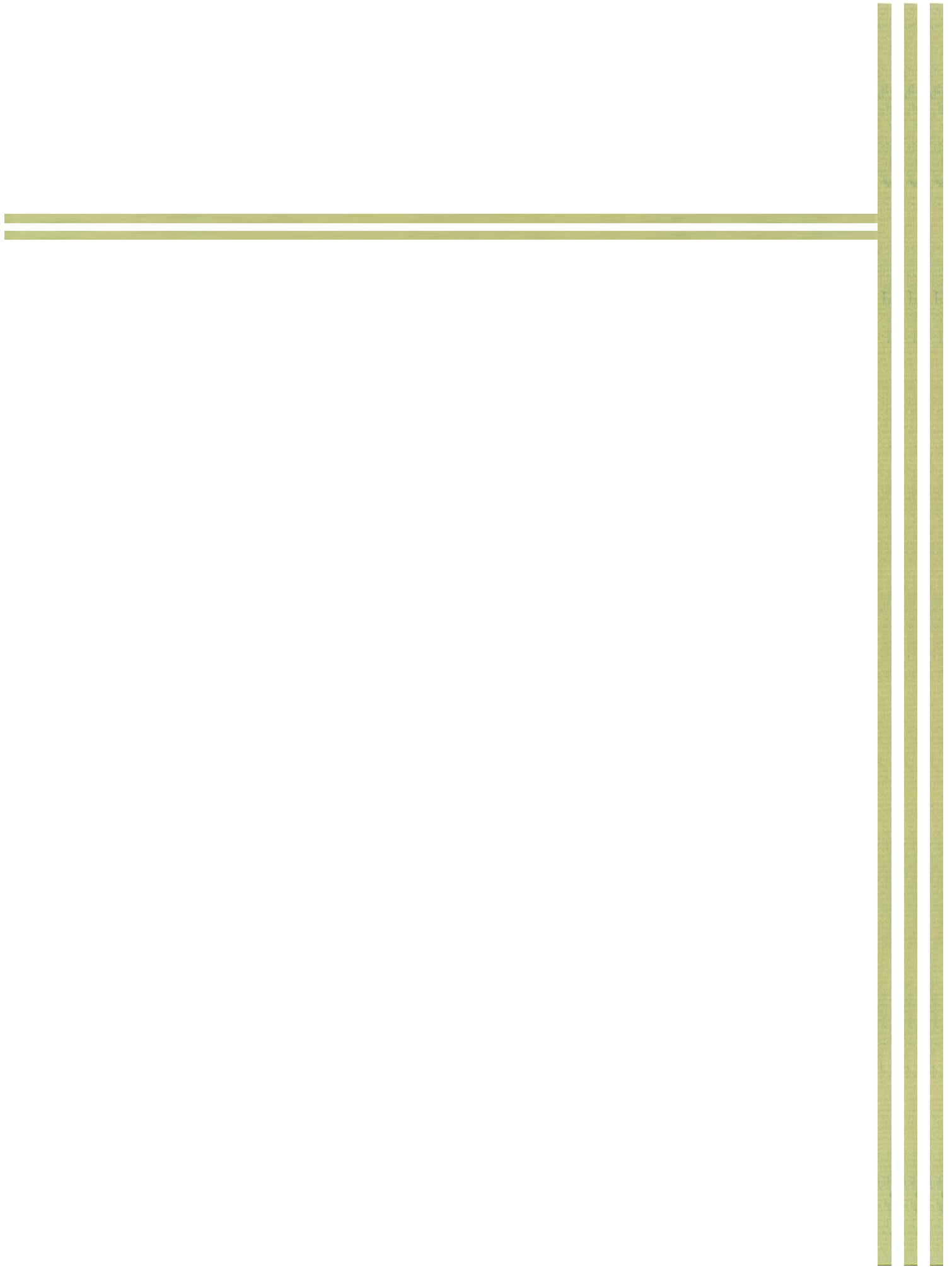
This booklet is for display purposes only.

Unless otherwise indicated, documents included herein are from
the Archives of the Rural Sociological Society.

Located at the University of Missouri,
the collection is managed by the State Historical Society of Missouri.

<http://shs.umsystem.edu/manuscripts/descriptions/desc-socsci.html>

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Congress Strikes Again: The Era of the ‘Big Chill’

The 1950s were years of change for the Rural Sociological Society. Progressive era models were giving way to new frameworks – particularly about the ‘proper’ role for social scientists and the USDA. The RSS struggled during this time to find a new path [Tab 3; Tab 5]. While the organization would emerge in the 1960s with a new structure that offered new opportunities for members, it came after many challenging years and two important events during the 1950s: the 1953 ending of the USDA’s Division of Farm Population and Rural Life and the 1955 Congressional appropriation hearings [Tab 1].

With Congressman Jaime Whitten from Mississippi leading the attack, during the 1955 Congressional appropriations hearings, rural sociology was singled out as among USDA research that was “nonessential and nonproductive” [Tab 1]. The statement submitted with the Conference report read:

“In view of the urgencies for research on basic problems, the Conference Committee insists that research projects of limited value, such as orchids of Guatemala, flora of Dominica, differences of clothing of farm and urban people, **population dynamics, rural sociology**, methodology, child rearing practices, and projects undertaken primarily for the benefit of employees doing graduate work, be discontinued in favor of more important work...”

The 1955 Congressional hearings were not the only time that rural sociology research had ‘gotten into trouble’ (Zimmerman 2008). As far back as the 1920s, rural sociology research conducted through the USDA was questioned either for its usefulness or for its conclusions (Larson and Zimmerman 2003:50).

The 1955 hearings were also not the only time that Jamie Whitten took aim at rural sociology. Whitten was also a prime mover in the 1946 Congressional appropriation hearings in which he targeted Frank Alexander’s study of Coahoma county, Mississippi (Alexander 1944) and which led to both staff reductions and budget cuts.

Frank Alexander’s study of Coahoma county, Mississippi was one of the 71 “laboratory” counties selected for the cultural reconnaissance survey project conducted by the USDA’s Division of Farm Population and Rural Life. In a draft of his report, the first in the project to be completed, Alexander described the social organization in the Mississippi county. In Coahoma, an important feature of life in the county was a complete separation between whites and Blacks. Among his descriptions, for instance, Alexander noted that law enforcement was left to the white plantation owners while Blacks were not allowed to vote, hold office, or participate in county organizations (Alexander 1944; Larson and Zimmerman 2003:51-53; Zimmerman 2008).

Alexander’s study of Coahoma county was not the first conducted by the USDA’s Division of Farm Population and Rural Life to describe race-based inequities (e.g. Doggett 1923), nor was it particularly different from the other cultural reconnaissance surveys in the South (e.g. Montgomery 1945; Raper 1944b; Pryor 1945). Even still, Congressman Jaime Whitten and other officials in Mississippi took great umbrage with the report (Kirkendall 1966; Larson and Zimmerman 2003:51-53; Zimmerman 2008).

During the 1946 hearings, Whitten referred to Alexander’s report as “vicious attacks on a county and its people” (U.S. Congress, House 1946: 238), “slanderous” (1946:235), a “gross misrepresentation,” and an “indictment” of the “fine folks” of Coahoma county (1946:241).

While not the only reason behind the reaction to Alexander’s report, it was used as one part of a larger attack on what the ‘proper’ role should be for the USDA (Kirkendall 1966). In the appropriations bill that followed, funding and other cuts also included a specific ban on using the funds for “cultural surveys.”

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At about the same time as Coahoma, another study from the Division of Farm Population and Rural Life was also drawing political fire. Walter Goldschmidt's study on Arvin and Dinuba counties in California had revealed important differences between communities and farm size. The smaller scale farming community had a greater number of businesses, retail sales, a larger and more diverse array of social and educational facilities and institutions and it also scored better on the level of living index. By contrast, the large scale farming community had a higher proportion of agricultural and unskilled laborers, fewer professionals, and fewer full owners. Because of these results, Goldschmidt concluded that “The basic cause of the impoverished social conditions in Arvin as contrasted with Dinuba...” (Goldschmidt, 1944:227) was the differences was the size of the farms.

Needless to say, Goldschmidt's findings ran counter to powerful interests in California. Fearing that the study would provide support for limiting irrigated acreage for subsidized water from Bureau of Reclamation projects, the study met with resistance from the start. In the end, Secretary of Agriculture Clinton P. Anderson not only denied approval for publishing the research results, by his order, he terminated Goldschmidt's position (Goldschmidt 1978).

In 1953, the Division of Farm Population and Rural Life saw its final blow when Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Benson abolished the Bureau of Agricultural Economics (BAE) and with it, the Division. By Benson's executive order, not only was the first (and for a time the only) unit of the federal government devoted to sociological research ended, but a key source of support for the RSS was eliminated (13 RSS presidents spent some point in their careers working in the USDA's Division).

Benson's reorganization cut up the BAE with parts going to the Agricultural Research Service and parts going to the Agricultural Marketing Service (Baker et al. 1963:463-466, 498-501). Downgraded to a ‘branch,’ the majority of the Division's work was moved to the Farm Population and Rural Life Branch of the Agricultural Economics Division in the Agricultural Marketing Service.

In 1961, with another reorganization, the current USDA Economic Research Service was established.

- Alexander, Frank D. 1944. “Cultural reconnaissance survey of Coahoma County, Mississippi. For administrative use.” Dittoed. Atlanta, GA: USDA. BAE. [Division of Farm Population and Rural Welfare].
- Baker, Gladys L., Wayne D. Rasmussen, Vivian Wiser, and Jane M. Porter. 1963. *Century of Service: The First 100 Years of the United States Department of Agriculture*. Washington, DC: USDA, Centennial Committee.
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- Raper, Arthur F. 1944. “Cultural reconnaissance: Greene County, Georgia.” [For administrative use]. Dittoed. [Washington, DC: USDA. BAE. Division of Farm Population and Rural Welfare].
- U.S. Congress, House. 1946. *Hearings before the Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations. Agriculture Department Appropriation Bill for 1947*. 79th Congress, Second Session. Washington, DC: GPO.
- Zimmerman, Julie N. and Olaf F. Larson. 2010. *Opening Windows onto Hidden Lives: Women, Country Life, and Early Rural Sociological Research*. RSS Rural Studies Series. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Zimmerman, Julie N. 2008. Voices from the Past, Lessons for the Future: Learning from the History of Sociology in Government.” *Equal Opportunities International (Now: Equality Diversity and Inclusion – An International Journal)*. 27(2):132-147.

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Documents

Tab 1. Attacks in Congress

- a) Excerpt from the Report of the Conference Committee on the Appropriations for the Agricultural Research Service, USDA. May 16, 1955.
- b) Conference Report submitted by Jaime Whitten. May 19, 1955.
- c) Typed excerpt of hearings transcript. February, 1955.

Tab 2. RSS Reacts

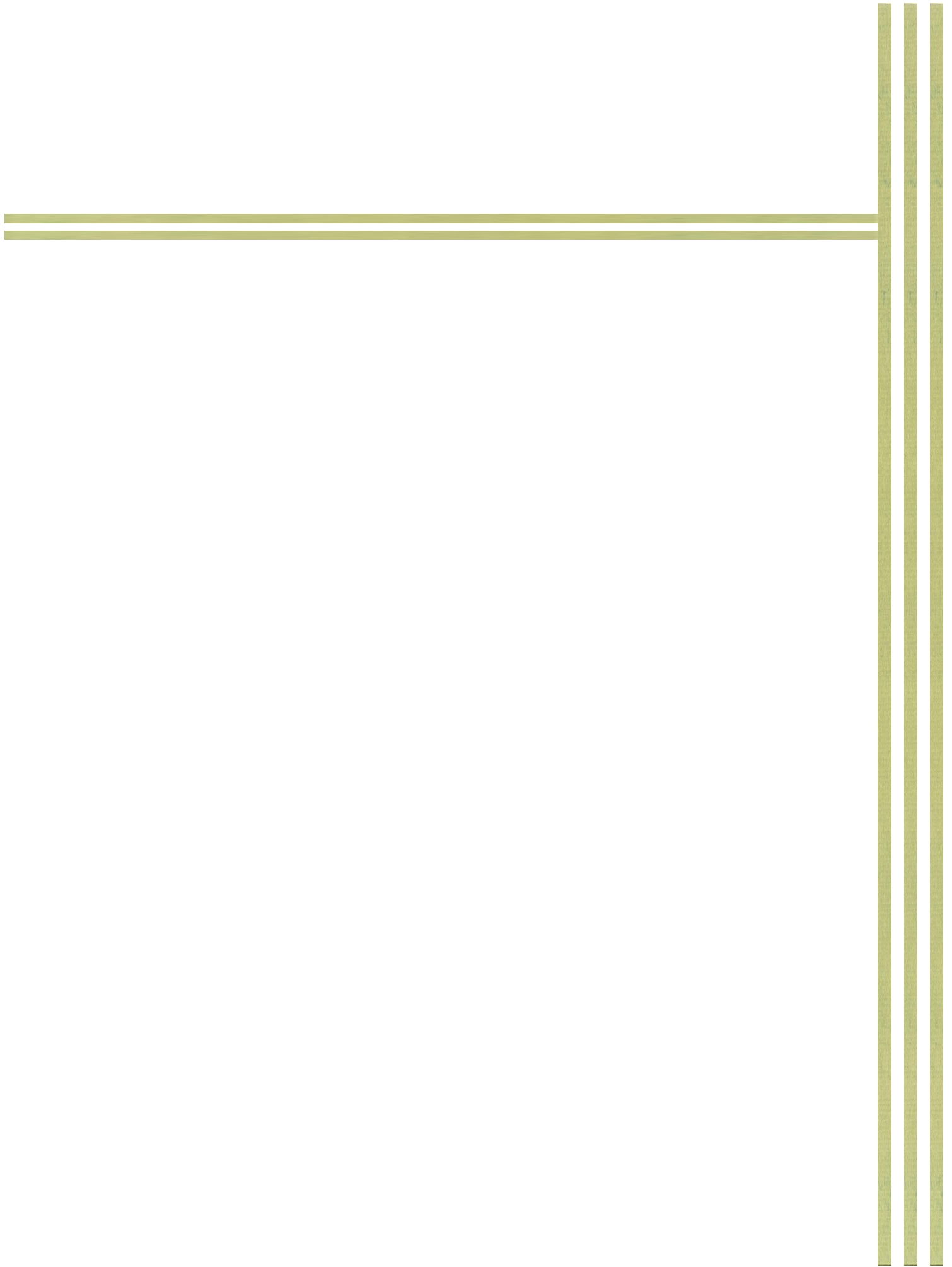
- a) William Sewell's memo to RSS Executive Committee and others concerning the Conference Report and requesting suggestions for further action. May 27, 1955.
- b) William Sewell's letter providing an update to Margaret Hagood, Farm Population and Rural Life Branch, USDA. May 27, 1955.
- c) Margaret Hagood's response (as president-elect to the RSS) to Sewell. June 6, 1955.

Tab 3. Responses and Suggestions

- a) O.D. Duncan. (Head. Dept of Sociology and Rural Life. Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College.) May 31, 1955.
- b) C. E. Lively. (Chairman. Dept of Rural Sociology. University of Missouri.) June 2, 1955.
- c) Nathan Whetten. (Dean. The Graduate School. University of Connecticut.) June 2, 1955.
- d) C. Horace Hamilton. (Head, Rural Sociology Department. North Carolina State College.) June 2, 1955.
- e) F. D. Farrell. (President Emeritus. Kansas State College.) June 3, 1955.
- f) Harold Kaufman. (Division of Sociology and Rural Life. Mississippi State College.) June 6, 1955.
- g) Ray Wakeley. (Head of Sociology. Department of Economics and Sociology. Iowa State College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts.) June 7, 1955.
- h) A. R. Mangus. (Professor. Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology. The Ohio State University.) Incl. handwritten notes from Wade Andrews. June 7, 1955.
- i) Robert Polson. (Department of Rural Sociology. Cornell University.) June 10, 1955.

Tab 4. O.D. Duncan letter to Sewell with update on his actions in Oklahoma. June 13, 1955.

Tab 5. Sewell letter to Harold Kaufman summarizing replies to his May 27th letter and request to serve on a committee to "make plans for a concerted campaign." July 16, 1955.



**Copies of Archive
and other documents**

Archives of the Rural Sociological Society

State Historical Society of Missouri
Social Sciences and Humanities Collection Descriptions
<http://shs.umsystem.edu/manuscripts/descriptions/desc-socsci.html>
(List Downloaded: March 2012)

- Rural Sociological Society of America Archives, (WUNP4618)
2 linear feet. Addition. Development Committee materials, presidential papers of C. Milton Coughenour, and RURAL SOCIOLOGIST manuscripts for volume 4.
- Rural Sociological Society of America Archives, (WUNP4585)
2 linear feet. Addition. Includes material from Daryl Hobbs, Willis J. Goudy, 1983 program materials and copies of publications.
- Rural Sociological Society of America Papers, (WUNP4244)
2 linear feet. Addition to professional organization's archives. Detailed inventory in accession folder. Addition. Files on OUR CHANGING RURAL SOCIETY, edited by Tom Ford.
- Rural Sociological Society of America Papers, (WUNP4296)
1 folder(s). NEWSLINE, 1979 issues; 1979 annual meeting program; RSS annual meeting abstracts; preliminary program for 5th World Congress of Rural Sociology.
- Rural Sociological Society of America Papers, (WUNP4358)
2 linear feet. Addition. See accession folder for inventory.
- Rural Sociological Society of America Papers, (WUNP4463)
2 linear feet. Addition. Correspondence, committee and council meeting minutes, printed material from Society.
- Rural Sociological Society of America Papers, 1910-1973 (C3305)
Inventory: <http://shs.umsystem.edu/manuscripts/invent/3305.pdf>
MICROFILM
9.6 linear feet. 2 volumes, 2 audio tapes, 27 rolls of microfilm
The papers of the Rural Sociological Society of America contain presidential and committee correspondence and includes accounts of how some of the first rural sociologists became interested in the profession. Microfilm is available for Rural Sociology, the official quarterly.

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(List Downloaded: March 2012)

(continued)

Rural Sociological Society of America, Archives, (WUNP5646)

8 linear feet. INVENTORY. Addition of research project files; committee files; presidential papers; secretarial papers; annual meeting records; publications; endowment committee materials; audio and visual materials; histories; and miscellaneous.

Rural Sociological Society of America, Archives, (WUNP5223)

0.4 linear feet. INVENTORY. Addition of annual meeting materials, administrative records, publications and other materials.

Rural Sociological Society of America, Archives, (WUNP5071)

MICROFILM

1 linear feet. INVENTORY. Addition to records of the Society. Includes correspondence, photographs, meeting materials, publications, and records of the International Rural Sociological Assn.

Rural Sociological Society of America, Archives, (WUNP4971)

MICROFILM

0.8 linear feet. INVENTORY. Addition to the correspondence, records, and publications of the Society.

Rural Sociological Society of America, Archives, (WUNP4787)

MICROFILM

7.9 linear feet. INVENTORY. Publications, directories, programs, pamphlets, conference files, video tapes, photographs and minutes of the Society.

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The **Rural Sociological Society** is a professional social science association that promotes the generation, application, and dissemination of sociological knowledge. The Society seeks to enhance the quality of rural life, communities, and the environment.

For additional information and resources on the history of the Rural Sociological Society or Rural Sociology, visit the Historian’s page at www.ruralsociology.org

This publication was created by
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Any questions, comments, or suggestions can be sent to:
jzimm@email.uky.edu

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The American Sociological Society's Section on Rural Sociology

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Creating the Journal: *Rural Sociology*

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Establishing the Rural Sociological Society

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Organizing the 1st World Congress of Rural Sociology: The Beginnings of the International Rural Sociological Association