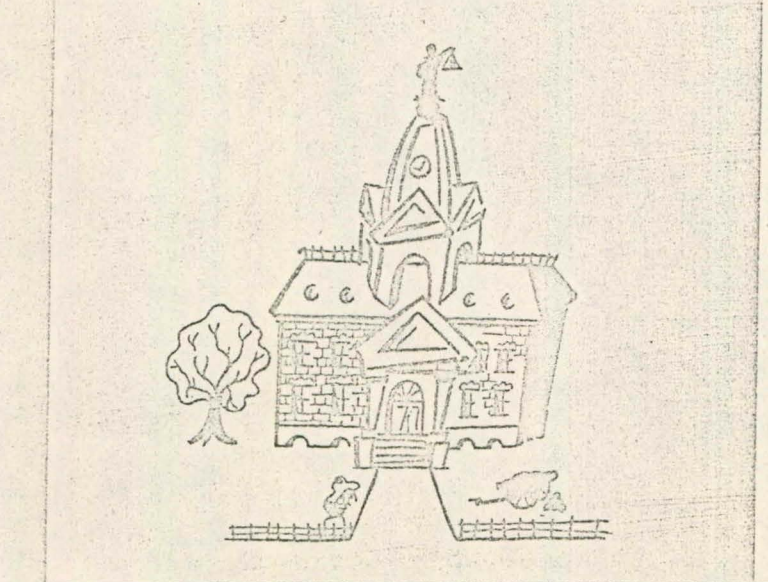


County Government in Iowa



by
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prepared for the
Iowa College-Community
Research Center

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PREFACE

This study by Professor Donald E. Boles of Iowa State University was done under the auspices of the Iowa College-Community Research Center. The Center is jointly sponsored by the Committee for Economic Development, the State University of Iowa and Iowa State University.

The study summarizes two longer and more comprehensive reports prepared for the Center:

1. An Evaluation of Iowa County Government, by Donald E. Boles and Herbert C. Cook (1959); and
2. Welfare and Highway Functions of Iowa Counties: A Quantitative Analysis, by Donald E. Boles and Karl A. Fox (1961).

Supplies of the Boles-Cook study are exhausted. A limited number of copies of the Boles-Fox study are still available, and individual copies may be obtained by writing to Karl A. Fox, 207 East Hall, Iowa State University in Ames. Copies of both studies should be available for consultation in public libraries.

County Government in Iowa provides a convenient summary of the two earlier reports. It omits the wealth of historical and statistical analysis which has attracted favorable attention to those reports from professional researchers in this field and concentrates on the major findings and recommendations made by Professor Boles and his co-authors.

It should be stressed that the recommendations in this report are those of Professor Boles and his co-authors and have not been endorsed in detail by the research committee of the Center. As in the case of the earlier reports, the research committee believes this study provides valuable information on some important problems of local government and commends it to the attention of Iowa citizens.

The recommendations of the research committee of the Center are contained in its own report entitled The Major Spending Functions of Iowa Counties. While many of the committee's recommendations have been stimulated by the studies of Professors Boles, Cook and Fox and a related study by Professor Russell M. Ross and Mrs. Ethel G. Vatter of the State University of Iowa, the committee has also drawn upon other sources of advice and upon the experience and judgment of its members.

Copies of the research committee's statement may be obtained from Professor C. Woody Thompson, Director of the Bureau of Business and Economic Research at the State University of Iowa, who served as executive secretary to the research committee.

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COUNTY GOVERNMENT IN IOWA

Introduction

Thomas Jefferson gave a cogent answer to those who claimed the federal government was usurping the states' authority. He explained that this trend could be stopped only by the states themselves establishing and maintaining wise and strong government. State government can be strong only if its local governments are effective and efficient. This is especially true in Iowa where well over one-half of the state tax funds collected are returned to the counties.

But Iowa county government is backward and inefficient. It has changed little since pioneer days. Major policy decisions must be faced by Iowans if they wish the county to be able to adopt some of the modern principles of business administration which are common to industry and enlightened municipal governments.

Historical Background

In this day of rapid communication and transportation several questions frequently arise concerning county government. Why do we need counties today? What purposes do they serve now? What purposes did they serve?

Counties emerged as a fundamental governmental and administrative unit of the British system. They met the need for governmental services and were adapted to the systems of transportation and communication in England during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

Other nations with similar problems, however, did not use the county system of local government. Moreover, some nations which developed in the English political tradition did not adopt the county system. And certain English colonies in the New World, particularly New England, did not follow this pattern.

Most of the terms and the very form of American county government were common to eleventh century England. The office of sheriff, for example, developed in England during 800-900 A.D. when it was called the shire reeve. The coroner, justice of peace and grand jury were recognized agencies of county government in England by 1066 A.D.

The county officers in early England were agents of a centralized authority -- the king. This fact was ignored when the county form was transplanted from England to America. The clear lines of responsibility which governed the officers in England are not present in the United States, since no powerful executive founded on the pattern of the early English kings exists.

In the United States, forms of county government developed differently in various regions. In the southern states, where English institutions were most faithfully copied, the county developed without the townships as

subdivisions. On the other hand, there was almost no emphasis on the county as a unit of government in New England. There, the town (not to be confused with the township) became the basic unit of government. Central states, such as New York, evolved a compromise between the southern plan and the New England approach by establishing counties but subdividing them into townships.

As the nation expanded, new states usually adopted local government forms similar to the government of the states from which came their first major permanent groups of new settlers. Iowa was no exception.

The first two of the present Iowa counties---Dubuque and Des Moines -- were created in 1834, when Iowa was part of the Michigan territory. These counties were divided into townships, and the township-supervisor plan of government was established with three supervisors and fifteen other officers selected by the governor of Michigan to govern each county.

Various changes in the form of county government in Iowa were made between 1834 and 1870 when the present arrangement was finally inaugurated. In 1838 the county commissioner system which originated in Pennsylvania was adopted. This resulted in the discontinuation or merger of many county offices and disregarded the township as a basis of representation on the county governing board. In 1851 the Iowa legislature drastically changed county government organization by abolishing the county commissioner system, and replacing it with a one-man county judge. The county judge was the chief executive, legislative, and judicial authority.

The county judge system was abolished in 1860 in favor of the township-supervisor plan similar to the one first adopted when Iowa was part of the territory of Michigan. This plan was abolished in 1870 and replaced with the county supervisor system of today in which counties were given the option of 3, 5, or 7 member boards of supervisors to be chosen either at large or from districts. The supervisors' relationship to the township was supervisory rather than representative.

A historical review of county government produces some insight into the local governmental process. First, the administration of county government functions has not been considered to be static. In Iowa it has been conceived rather to be a dynamic process; one in which the functions, programs and indeed the actual form were adjusted to meet the needs of changing times, albeit with some major delays and frictions.

Second, it is clear from looking at the Western World and the United States that counties are not essential to an efficient local governmental administration. It is possible that the county as an administrative and governmental unit might disappear, much in the fashion of the township in Iowa. The citizens of the state may logically, therefore, seek legislation formalizing the historical evolution of governmental administration from the township through the county perhaps to the state level. Alternatively, they might seek a pattern involving fewer and larger counties with functions redesigned and boundaries adapted to the automobile age just as present boundaries were designed for a horse and buggy era.

The Evolution of Iowa County Government

The pattern of Iowa county government was set during a period very different from the nuclear age in which we live. Counties were formed when federal and state taxes were almost negligible. Farming frontiers were expanding and farm population was growing. Counties were established to come to grips with these developments. But the frontier period ended well before the turn of the century, when the rural population of Iowa reached its peak.

After 1900, new trends, unlike those of the county's formative period, came into being. More people moved into municipalities. Many municipalities began to change from "county seat" places to metropolitan areas, giving rise to all of the economic and social problems of urban habitations.

In addition, technological changes brought revolutionary developments in transportation and communication. As the twentieth century unfolded, these technological advances tended to weaken the original rationale upon which county governments were based. With an automobile, an Iowan could travel through four or five counties in the same time it formerly required to go from his home to the county seat.

Population and technological changes produced new problems to confront law enforcement officers and administrators of public health and welfare programs.

A major consequence of the changes in the twentieth century was an increased demand for public services on all levels. With the increase in automobiles, for example, came a demand for better highways. There was a greater demand for schools and public higher education. Indigents in metropolitan places could not fall back on home-grown foods for subsistence, so they became candidates for more public aid.

Since the county was the primary unit of local government and since local government was considered to be a major source of public services during this period, the county was called upon to shoulder these burdens. But county government was ill-equipped to grapple with such problems because of limited financial resources and statutory restrictions.

Twentieth century integration of the economy also had implications for local and county governments. While the relationship of the individual to the local government is still intimate, local governments are now tied to the state and the federal government in ways that were unknown before 1900. Through a liberal interpretation of statutory provisions and the federal constitution -- such as the national defense clause -- the federal government has provided techniques for cooperating with the state and local governments in operations which were traditionally restricted to them alone. An example is the federal government's activities in the field of education, an area formally considered exclusively a matter of state and local governmental concern.

Another factor, which has complicated the administration and operation of county government today, is the growth of metropolitan areas. Boundaries of metropolitan areas frequently cross county lines -- and sometimes state lines, too. The tidy administrative techniques of county government in the nineteenth century have difficulty meeting the problems of conflicting jurisdictions in metropolitan living.

Changes from the old forms are needed in the location of political and administrative responsibility. One might inquire into whether rural secondary roads should be permitted to end at county lines instead of becoming part of a state and local secondary road network. In the field of education and welfare, one might ask whether administration of school laws and welfare laws should differ sharply between counties. Most people would agree that the complex, inter-connected age in which we live demands a degree of uniformity, while at the same time permitting freedom to deal with strictly local problems. It seems strange that there has been little effort to apply broad scale planning to county government.

Such a planning analysis could proceed on two levels: one, an investigation of structure, the other, a functional investigation. A variety of techniques might be considered. For example, the present county government structure could be maintained but the degree of state supervision could be increased to insure a greater degree of uniformity where found necessary. On the other hand, the present functions of the counties could be maintained but their structure could be changed. For example, counties might be enlarged in size and reduced in number. Another possibility would be to devise methods for permitting consolidations of functions across county lines. This is presently done in the cases of some Iowa county superintendents of schools, where one man serves two or more counties.

Structure of Iowa County Government

Today, Iowa county government is a welter of elected and relatively independent offices plus a wide variety of semi-autonomous boards, commissions and councils. While the board of supervisors ostensibly makes county policy, the legislature controls the structure and functions of counties. This has insured the absence of any truly executive authority, and has made many of the county agencies nearly independent of the board so far as receipts and expenditures are concerned. The following organizational chart shows the present structure of Iowa county government. (Figure 1.)

County Governmental Administrative Costs

Recent studies reveal that the area of a county has no important bearing on the administrative costs of county elective offices.^{1/} Administrative costs are likely to be as high or higher in one of the geographically small counties as they are in some of the largest counties.

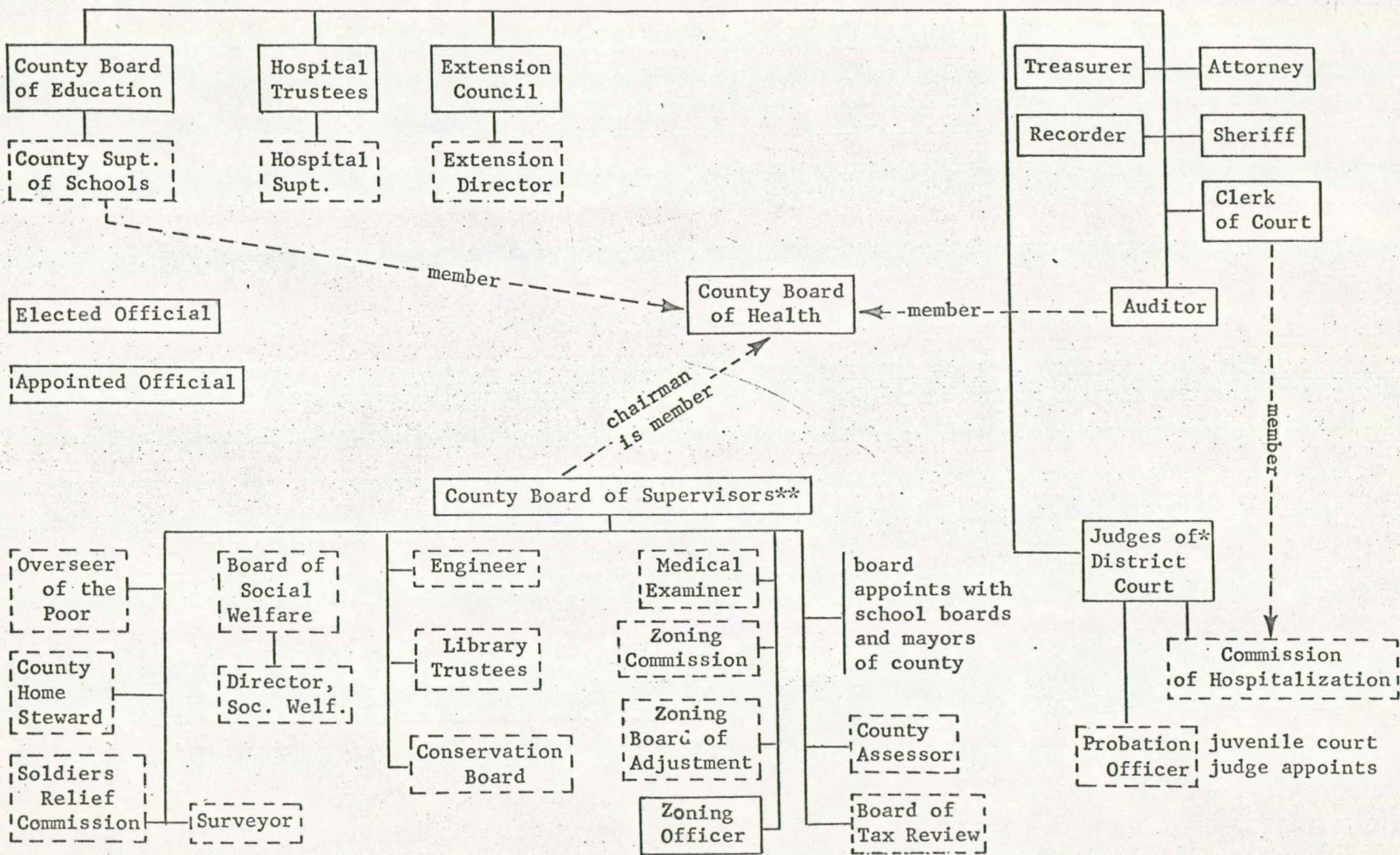
Population was the most significant element in explaining the cost of county administration in Iowa. Costs analysis reveals that the total cost of the board of supervisors increased about \$86 for every 1,000 persons in total population. A strikingly different picture appears when one views per capita costs for boards of supervisors. There is a strong inverse relationship between population and per capita cost for county elective

^{1/} Donald E. Boles and Herbert C. Cook, An Evaluation of Iowa County Government, Iowa College-Community Research Center, 1959.

FIGURE 1

HOW AN IOWA COUNTY GOVERNMENT IS ORGANIZED

THE PEOPLE OF THE COUNTY ELECT



*Elected by voters of the Judicial District.

**A board of supervisors also has the authority to determine the number and salaries of employees in the offices of the treasurer, recorder, coroner, attorney, sheriff, clerk, and auditor and to approve or disapprove appointments of employees in these offices

offices. For example, Adams County with the lowest population had a per capita cost for supervisors of \$1.17, the highest in the state. Polk County, on the other hand, the most populous county, had the lowest per capita cost for supervisors, \$0.11.

There is a tremendous variation in the per capita costs of county administration among smaller rural counties. This suggests wide variations in the efficiency of the various county offices and the manner in which the officials -- especially the boards of supervisors -- define their functions. A board of supervisors which confines itself to policy formulation will meet less frequently and incur smaller operating expenses than one which becomes involved in a host of administrative details.

Only 56 percent of the variation in the total costs of boards of supervisors was associated with the factors of area and population. Other county offices reveal similar tendencies. Thus, 44 percent of the variation in county administrative cost must be attributed to factors other than population and area.

Variation in the efficiency of different boards of supervisors would presumably be a significant factor. It is not, of course, automatically true that boards of supervisors with higher per capita operating expenses are doing a poorer job than those with extremely low operating costs. Definite conclusions on this point would require a management study of individual county boards of supervisors.

Committee meetings, which are not limited in number by law, clearly are a major factor in explaining the expenses of county boards of supervisors. In the period 1952-1955, 86 percent of the total cost for all meetings was expended for committee meetings. Moreover, 89 percent of all mileage paid for supervisors' meetings was spent for committee meetings. This means that the average supervisor traveled annually about 7,200 miles for committee work but only 840 miles for regular meetings.

The area of the county was not controlling here. In Emmett County, Iowa's smallest, each supervisor traveled approximately 10,094 miles, but in one of the largest counties, Pottawattamie, the mileage per supervisor was only 7,705. Emmett County is one-half the size of Pottawattamie and both counties have 5-member boards of supervisors.

It is important to remember that while the administrative costs of county elective offices in Iowa are not in themselves huge, the amounts being administered are substantial. Thus, if analysis of administrative costs suggests wide ranges in the efficiency of county officials, it seems reasonable to infer that there are sizeable differences among counties in the amounts of services they provide to their residents per tax dollar.

County Welfare Functions in Iowa

Welfare programs financed or administered at the county level are only one segment of the public and private means that are used in our society to cope with the problems of reduced income or lack of earning power.

The proper balance between these programs changes over time. The balance appropriate in 1860 for a nation of farmers and small businessmen

is no longer appropriate for today's society in which only one-fifth of the working population is self-employed.

In the United States generally, one person in fifteen changes his county of residence from one year to the next and one person in thirty changes his state of residence during the same period. Recent trends suggest that not more than one person in five will spend his entire working life in a single state and not one person in ten will spend his entire working life in a single county.

In recognition of this fact, the major social insurance program (Old Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance or OASDI) is already administered on a national level. From the national point of view, there is no longer a justification for state residence requirements as a prerequisite for public assistance. Residence requirements on a county basis are even more incongruous in our mobile society.

An idea of the magnitude of various social insurance and public assistance programs available to Iowa residents may be given by pointing out that total payments to Iowans under such programs in 1958 exceeded \$250 million.^{2/} This is approximately five percent of all personal income received in Iowa that year. Programs accounting for more than \$200 million of these payments, however, were administered directly by the federal or state governments. Only in the public assistance programs, totaling a little less than \$50 million, do the counties of Iowa play an important part in administration or finance.

Basic standards for three of the major public assistance programs -- Old Age Assistance, Aid to the Blind, Aid to Dependent Children -- are established by national legislation. Only federal and state funds are involved in the Old Age Assistance program. County funds are involved in Aid to the Blind and Aid to Dependent Children. The total cost of ADC payments from county funds is several times larger than the total cost of county payments for Aid to the Blind.

At present, the cost-sharing formulas provided by federal and Iowa legislation are different for each of the three categories. Each state decides how far it wishes to go in setting its standards of assistance for each category, recognizing that the amount of federal funds it will receive depends on the standards set by the state. There are tremendous variations among the states. For example, in 1958, Old Age Assistance payments per recipient ranged from \$29.56 a month in Mississippi to \$111.50 in Connecticut. Aid to Dependent Children per family ranged from \$27.85 in Alabama to \$164.64 in Wisconsin.

Problem Areas in Iowa Welfare Programs

Selection of assistance standards by the individual state often leads to striking disproportions in payments among the different public assistance programs within the state. Old Age Assistance payments, for example, tend almost everywhere to be relatively more adequate than those for Aid to

^{2/} See Chapter III, Table 1 in Donald E. Boles and Karl A. Fox, Welfare and Highway Functions of Iowa Counties: A Quantitative Analysis, Iowa College-Community Research Center, 1961.

Dependent Children. Legal requirements and policies for OAA, AB, and ADC programs in Iowa are supposedly set entirely at the federal and state levels. The county's function is to (1) determine eligibility for assistance, (2) apply federal and state criteria in determining the amount of assistance due, and (3) to provide such casework services to recipients and public assistance as are necessary.

Iowa counties appear to administer programs of assistance to the aged and blind with a reasonable degree of uniformity. Old Age Assistance payments per county resident ranged from \$5.02 to \$31.53 a year among Iowa counties in 1955. But more than two-thirds of this variation could be explained in terms of such factors as the percentage of aged persons in the county population and the median level of family income in the county.

Aid to Dependent Children

Quite a different situation exists with respect to the Aid to Dependent Children program. Payments of this type per county resident ranged from \$0.66 to \$7.61 a year in Iowa counties in 1955. The ratio of the highest to the lowest cost was twice as large in the case of ADC as in that of OAA. Moreover, less than one-third of the variation in ADC payments among counties could be explained by such differences in their economic and social characteristics as could be measured by published data.

Community attitudes toward the ADC program vary widely from county to county. Certain causes of broken homes involve religious or moral values for some people. Parents incapacitated for work may look healthy to casual observers and members of some communities may feel that teen-agers should quit school and go to work to keep their mother and younger siblings off public assistance. Though standards and eligibility for ADC are nationwide in scope, the number of eligible persons who apply for ADC is influenced by the community attitudes. Furthermore, it appears that some of the policy-makers connected with social welfare are also influenced, consciously or unconsciously, by community attitudes so that some eligible persons are discouraged from applying.

In our study it was impossible to separate the effects of variable administration from those of variations in community attitudes. Our best estimate is that something like 40 percent of the total variation among Iowa counties in ADC costs per resident in 1955 was attributable to the combined effect of these factors. This figure can be compared with not more than 10 or 15 percent due to such factors for OAA.

This variability of "community attitudes plus administration" among counties with respect to ADC programs is well known to state officials. In a matter of minutes, a state official identified 21 counties in which he believed the combination of administration and community attitudes led to fairly uniform results, closely in line with the intent of federal and state legislation. He also identified 20 other counties in which he thought the two factors led to highly variable results.

It seems clear that there is sufficient know-how among professional workers in the State Department of Social Welfare to achieve a significant improvement in the administration of ADC, given proper authority and support by legislators and state officials. To the extent that community attitudes are responsible for variations in use of the program by eligible persons,

the problem is more subtle. Here too, the most promising approaches may be known to professional workers at the state level. Strong leadership at the state level in an effort to inform community leaders about the ADC program and to reduce opposition based on misunderstanding seems to be called for. The apathy of citizens toward county government, the absence of a real county executive, and the responsibility of the county boards of social welfare to the 99 different boards of supervisors who appoint them, seem to militate against rapid improvement on a state-wide basis.

A significant problem which may have a bearing upon community attitudes confronts county administration in this field. It has been pointed out that most of our counties have too small a population base to achieve low-cost performance of many public services; also, that county lines were drawn more than a century ago in a social context radically different from that of the 1960's. Purely on statistical grounds, we should expect much less variation in community attitudes among counties of 40,000 minimum population than among counties of 10,000 minimum population.

With a larger population base we would expect a representation of age groups and social backgrounds more nearly like that of the state as a whole. In addition, the size of the population base would tend to reduce the pressure of particular community attitudes both upon needy families and upon the welfare administrators. Some of these advantages could perhaps be attained if two or more counties were permitted to pool their welfare directors and staff.

Uniform administration is perhaps not the most important issue with respect to the ADC program. In the past few months, the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare has laid increased emphasis upon goals such as (1) rehabilitation and retraining of adults who are unemployable, or only marginally employable, with their present skills, health, or attitudes and (2) encouragement of older children on ADC to work and save money toward college educations instead of having all their earnings offset by current reductions in their family's ADC grant. This emphasis would require more trained social workers and more frequent contacts with each family. Two by-products of this would be (1) a reduction in cases of fraud and (2) greater uniformity of administration. An additional goal would be to reduce the number of families receiving ADC by helping them to become permanently self-supporting.

Whether the new emphasis is implemented or not, however, variability of administration is an aspect of the ADC program which is highly relevant to an appraisal of the efficiency of county government in carrying out currently prescribed program objectives.

Soldier's Relief Program

Welfare programs administered and financed exclusively at the county level show even greater variability than does Aid to Dependent Children. Differences among counties in the per capita cost of Soldier's Relief seem to be entirely random. Conceivably, the incidence of need and eligibility for Soldier's Relief could itself be more or less random. But the secrecy with which this program is surrounded, its lack of coordination with professional social welfare agencies, and its lack of professional supervision or staff in most instances probably accounts for the absence of consistency. This program should either be abolished or turned over to the county departments of social welfare for administration.

In the long run, this would probably be to the advantage of veterans in need of such services. The mill levy fixed by statute is limited. As a result, veterans who are forced to utilize the services of the Soldier's Relief programs before or instead of the general relief programs find themselves receiving considerably less assistance than they would under programs of general relief.

Poor Relief Outside of County Homes

Cost of assistance to poor families outside the county homes shows wide variation from county to county. These variations appear to be wholly unrelated to factors such as the percentage of old people in the population, the level of family income in the county, and the relative distribution of population between farm and city -- factors normally associated directly or inversely with a need for public assistance. One can only conclude that policies and administration of the general assistance program are extremely variable from county to county and that a more uniform administration could greatly increase the effectiveness and equity of this program.

County Homes

The cost per county resident of maintaining county homes shows some relationship to the percentage of aged persons in the county and the proportion of the county's population that lives on farms. These factors, however, explain less than one-third of the variation among counties with respect to cost and maintenance of county homes. County homes vary greatly in size, from less than 10 to more than 100 residents. As of 1955, the number of mentally ill persons maintained in these homes exceeded the number of indigents. It must be remembered that the county home was originally established to care for the indigent. From the standpoint of caring for the mentally ill, it appears that some county homes may be performing a valuable social function. Some of them serve as protective way-stations for patients released from mental hospitals as improved but not yet ready to return to their homes and communities.

There is, however, no real assurance that the county home can provide the trained personnel necessary in caring for the mentally ill. Moreover, there is at present no general inspection or supervision of a significant nature exercised over the county home by state agencies with personnel capable of evaluating care and treatment for the mentally ill.

Considering the time and the predominantly rural farm environment in which the county home system was founded, and the lack of change, it is no wonder the system is obsolete. Most of the residents of the county home, not mentally ill, are elderly people. Nationally, the increasing number and proportion of aged people in our population are forcing drastic revisions in our concepts of appropriate treatment of the aged. The present trend is toward making elderly persons productive and comfortable and maintaining them in normal communities to the maximum possible extent, with the help of special services adapted to their declining vigor.

Another problem in this area is the inflexibility of the fund system. Revenues provided for the mentally ill in a county home may be limited because of the Iowa fund system which prohibits shifting money from the county

home to the fund for the insane. Thus, while the majority of the inmates in the county home may be mentally ill and few of them indigent poor, funds that are available for the indigent may not be transferred to care for the mentally ill.

Administration of County Highway Programs

In 1956-57, more than \$150 million was spent in Iowa on its primary and secondary road systems -- an amount equivalent to three percent of the income of all residents of the state. About \$100 million of the money spent on highways came from state taxes, over \$30 million came from local property taxes and other taxes collected at the county level, and a little less than \$20 million came from federal aid funds.

Total expenditures for highways amounted to almost \$60 per capita of Iowa's population. The amount was almost equally divided between primary and secondary road systems. Primary roads are financed entirely by federal and state funds, local secondary roads are a county's responsibility, and farm-to-market roads involve some funds from all three levels of the government. In terms of costs, the construction and maintenance of secondary roads are one of the most significant functions of county government.

Obviously, a highway network is not an end in itself. It exists to serve the needs of the economy, for movement of goods and movement of people. As the number of passenger cars and tons of motor freight originating and terminating in each city and township change over the years, the quality and extent of the highway network should be modified to accommodate them.

Variations Among Counties in Highway Cost

About 90 percent of the differences in Iowa county mileages of secondary roads are related to differences in county area. About 72 percent of the variation is associated with differences in farm population, but only 43 percent is associated with differences in farm and rural nonfarm population combined.

It seems clear that the mileage of secondary roads maintained is heavily dominated by the tradition of a nearly complete grid of section roads and has not been fully responsive to the changing needs of rural people.

Fifty percent of the variation in maintenance costs on primary roads during 1956-57 was associated with differences among the counties in area and in soil types. These same factors, plus an index of roughness of terrain, explained only 33 percent of the variation among counties in maintenance cost per mile of secondary roads.

Construction expenditures for primary roads in a given county show tremendous variations from year to year. The average county has only 87 miles of primary roads. In some years there will be no construction project at all in the county involving primary roads, but in another year several million dollars may be spent in the county on primary road construction projects.

The average county has about 930 miles of secondary roads. This should be enough to provide a good deal of stability of construction expenditures on secondary road systems from year to year.

It was possible, however, to explain 37 percent of the variation among counties in primary road construction costs (per mile of all primary roads in the county) by means of variables such as population density per square mile and the rate of population growth or decline from 1950 to 1960. In contrast, only 14 to 18 percent of the variation among counties in construction cost for secondary roads could be explained by these and other factors.

There is a strong presumption that much of the unexplained variation among counties is caused by differences in factors under administrative control. It seems clear that the secondary road system, which is under county control, receives considerably more variable treatment than the primary road system, which is under state jurisdiction.

Highway Cost Analysis

We asked an official in the Iowa Highway Commission to select 20 counties in which he believed the secondary road program was well administered (called "Class 1" counties below) and 20 other counties in which he felt the secondary road program was rather poorly administered (called "Class 2" counties below). The eight most urban counties in Iowa were excluded from the study so that the counties selected in each group of 20 would be primarily rural in character.

The state official in making his selection considered such factors as the professional ability of the county engineer, his length of tenure in the county, his ability to work with people and the willingness of the board of supervisors to delegate operating decisions (as distinct from broad policy decisions) to the engineer. On the average, counties of Class 1 (well administered counties) have the same area and about the same farm population as Class 2 counties. The Class 2 counties had about 80 percent as much rural nonfarm population as Class 1 counties, and only one-half as much urban population. The Class 2 counties averaged about 12 percent lower in median family income and nearly 20 percent lower in total assessed valuation of rural property. The Class 2 counties also had rougher terrain (though no worse than the state average) and poorer soil types from the standpoint of low-cost construction and maintenance of roads. Finally, the Class 2 counties showed an average decrease in population of 6.7 percent from 1950 to 1960; the Class 1 counties showed an increase of 0.4 percent.

The two classes of counties differed very little on the average with respect to the mileage of primary and secondary roads maintained or to the total amounts expended on secondary roads. The Class 2 counties did, however, spend 30 percent more per mile on maintenance of secondary roads and 20 percent less on construction. Also, the Class 2 counties spent about one-third more in "other" or indirect costs of secondary road programs than did the Class 1 counties.

An earlier study^{3/} pointed out that the majority of county boards of supervisors spend many more days each year on committee work than could be

3/ Donald E. Boles and Herbert C. Cook, An Evaluation of Iowa County Government, Iowa College Community Research Center, 1959.

justified by their policy functions. The only possible conclusion was that board members spend a great deal of time on operating details or administration as distinct from policy-making.

As a result of these findings, the research committee of the Iowa College Community Research Center recommended that committee work pay for boards of supervisors be abolished and that all boards of supervisors be placed on a salary basis. The main object of this recommendation was to eliminate any special incentive for the boards to go beyond their policy-making functions into detailed interference with the administrative work of other county officers, including the county engineer.

In the highway experiment, the counties of Iowa were divided into four categories in terms of the committee work cost incurred by their boards of supervisors during 1954-55. Fourteen of the more populous counties had salaried boards in that year but, since eight of these counties had been explicitly excluded from possible selection by the official of the Highway Commission, only six of the counties with salaried boards had a chance of selection. All other counties were eligible for selection.

The comparative distribution of Class 1 and Class 2 counties was most striking. Of the six "eligible" counties with salaried boards, three were selected for Class 1 and none for Class 2. Of the ten counties having committee work costs less than \$5,000, five were selected for Class 1 and only one for Class 2. Statistical tests of the differences between Class 1 and Class 2 distributions indicated that there was less than one chance in fifty that the differences observed were of a random nature.

The results of this special experiment seem plausible. The existing pattern of county government in Iowa lends itself to wide variation in judgment and efficiency among counties on any given program and within counties on different programs. It seems likely also that the average level of efficiency on many county programs is low, as a result of the small scale of operation, the method of selecting (or electing) operating personnel, and the salaries paid.

The results of this study suggest that the burden of proof might reasonably be shifted to county officials to explain and justify the wide variations in expenditures for highway programs among the various counties.

In general, taxation and allocation formulas are based upon fairly simple factors such as population, per capita income, assessed value of property, gasoline or retail sales tax collection, and the like. But such factors explained only 14 to 18 percent of the very substantial differences among counties in construction expenditures per total mileage of secondary roads. Moreover, only 33 percent of the variation in per mile costs of maintaining secondary roads can be explained by a combination of economic, demographic and physical factors. If some real factors have been omitted from these equations, county engineers and supervisors should be able to specify such factors and indicate the direction and magnitude of their effects on highway expenditures.

Similar questions could, of course, be put to the State Highway Commission with respect to variation among counties in expenditures for maintaining and constructing primary roads. Here one would expect to find more consistent explanations and perhaps some additional measurable factors, such as traffic

flows over particular sections of roads, that would justify a considerable part of the thus-far unexplained variation.

Recommendations on County Government

Administrative Problems

A conspicuous shortcoming in the form of Iowa county government is the fact that necessary executive powers are not vested in a single person. They are instead spread among a board of supervisors and even to other elective county officers in the field of budget-making. Thus, the county citizens have real difficulty in fixing responsibility for county policies. Moreover, dynamic and rapid decision-making, when necessary, is impossible to attain under this arrangement.

Another problem that students of public administration are quick to point out is that under present law too many elective officers have duties which are in nature administrative only. Democratic theory has always stressed that policy-makers should be elected but that administrators (those who carry out the policy) should be appointed. There is no more logic in electing officers such as the clerk of court, the coroner, the treasurer or auditor for example, than in electing a stenographer in a county office. There seems even less reason to continue electing township trustees and clerks when the township as a unit of government has virtually disappeared in Iowa.

Some practical problems in appraising or improving county administration in Iowa are traceable to the fact that the state law permits large areas where no specific information need be placed in written records or where nonuniform recording is permitted. Thus, it is impossible to make accurate comparisons of different counties' activities.

Another problem confronting county governmental operation concerns the inflexibility of the county fund system, which is crystalized by state law. County auditors are regularly criticized by the State Auditor's examiners for shifting funds in a manner contrary to law. More clearly drawn laws and simplification or reduction in the rigidity of the county fund system would be helpful.

A variety of suggested improvements in the administration of Iowa county government were given in our earlier study, An Evaluation of Iowa County Government. These may be considered to fall into two classes -- the long-run or the ideal on one hand and, on the other hand, those less dramatic, but apparently more quickly, achieved.

Geographic Consolidation

Geographic consolidation of the present 99 counties would be considered among the ideal or long-run solutions to county governmental problems. Geographic consolidation would require a constitutional amendment or a favorable vote by the people in those counties concerned.

The per capita cost of several county administrative offices and functions declines rapidly with increasing population up to 40,000 or 50,000 people.

Per capita cost of certain offices and functions appears to decline gradually with further increases beyond 50,000 people, but the evidence is inconclusive and the analysis does not allow for the cost of city governments (for streets and the like) which becomes increasingly important in the more populous counties.

But even if counties were consolidated geographically, a major problem in county administration would remain unsolved. The county would still lack an executive officer and as a result be missing the unity of office with clear responsibility for decisions and policies. Some states, such as New York, have remedied this situation by adopting legislation providing for an elected county executive. This officer, while part of the board of supervisors, has additional powers giving him the authority necessary to provide leadership required of an executive.

County Manager System

A common plan for providing executive and administrative leadership in counties is the use of the county manager system. This is similar in organization and approach to the city manager plans adopted in many cities. Under this arrangement, the elected board of supervisors appoints a county manager who serves at its pleasure and is the chief administrative officer of the county.

Under the manager's control are several administrative departments where hired personnel perform the same functions that are carried on by officials which previously had been elected. Notable savings have accrued to the taxpayers of counties in those states utilizing the county manager plan.

Functional Consolidation of County Offices

One of the most meaningful plans for improving the administration of counties would be for the state legislature to provide legislation permitting the functional consolidation of county offices across county lines. Some legislation of this nature exists at present in the statute permitting joint county agreements in appointing a single county superintendent of schools to serve two or more counties.

Legislation of this nature should be expanded to permit counties, if they so desire, to select other officers whose jurisdiction would cover two or more counties. Ultimately this procedure might go far toward accomplishing the goals envisioned by geographic consolidation of counties.

Consolidation of Offices Within a County

A noteworthy measure passed by the general assembly of Iowa in 1959 permits the people of a county to consolidate into various departments all elective offices of the county except for the county supervisors and the county attorney. This measure also permits the consolidation of many appointed county officials and commissions. Such consolidation can take place when 25 percent of those voting in the last election, for the county office receiving the greatest number of votes, petition the board of supervisors to submit the question of consolidation of county offices to the people for approval at the next election and the proposal is approved.

Some of the advantages of the county manager system, such as efficiency and economy, would be approximated if counties would consolidate their officers within the county. Moreover, the ballot would be shortened and the voters would be in a better position to make informed and intelligent decisions on those officials who are elected. So far no county in Iowa has seen fit to utilize the provisions of this law.

Welfare Recommendations

The citizens of Iowa have it in their power to make great improvements in state welfare programs. Iowans should also reconsider the level of public assistance grants for Old Age Assistance, Aid to the Blind, and Aid to Dependent Children categories. Such reconsideration should include the average level to which they aspire and the relative levels of assistance for the different categories.

We recommend that a special study be made of the county home system in Iowa in relation to the general study of problems of care of the aged. Such a study could learn much from reforms already carried out or experiments now underway in other states.

Sweeping changes in the other welfare programs may be precipitated by new legislation on the federal level. In January, 1960, the Advisory Council on Public Assistance made its report to the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare and to the Congress of the United States. Its recommendations included: (1) barring from federal grant-in-aid assistance the welfare programs of those states which impose residence requirements on a needy person before he may receive the help to which he is otherwise entitled; (2) encouraging the states to apply the same assistance standards to all categories of needy persons and ensuring that similar treatment is accorded persons in similar circumstances regardless of the form of public assistance; (3) adopting a single formula for federal financial participation to apply to all categories of assistance and to all assistance expenditures, thus promoting equitable standards among the different categories; (4) extending coverage to financially needy persons regardless of the cause of need -- for example, the unemployed, the under-employed, and the less seriously disabled; and (5) giving states freedom of choice in determining whether public assistance should be administered as a single program or as separate categorical programs.^{4/}

With such pressures at the national level to abolish residence requirements, to eliminate distinctions among categories (including general assistance) and to reduce differences in assistance levels and policies among states, it seems likely that the state government in Iowa will be required to assume more complete supervision over the county program and perhaps to assume responsibility for certain programs which are now exclusively in the county's domain.

Sharing of supervisory and casework personnel from the staffs of county welfare departments among two or more counties suggests itself as one method of increasing quality and reducing costs.

^{4/} Based on Senate Document in No. 93, 86th Congress, 2nd Session, Public Assistance: Report of the Advisory Council on Public Assistance Containing Findings and Recommendations, January 1960, United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 1960.

An officer reminiscent of a medieval approach to welfare programming is the overseer of the poor. There seems to be no significant argument in favor of retaining this office. The degree of arbitrariness which can be exercised by an individual holding this position is such as to preclude a systematic and general application of county general relief programs throughout the state. Moreover, it is difficult to fix responsibility for actions taken by this officer, inasmuch as the authority becomes easily confused with actions of the county board of supervisors in individual cases involving general relief.

An intelligent answer to this problem and one that has proved workable in a number of counties is to transfer the functions of overseer of the poor to the county director of social welfare. This could be easily accomplished by altering the provisions of the statute passed by the legislature in 1959^{5/} making discretionary the consolidation of county welfare functions, so as to require the integration of such functions in a county. This would also ensure that a professionally trained social worker would head up the welfare activities for the county.

Functional reorganization of welfare administration on a state level is also worth considering. The two agencies primarily concerned in this field are the State Department of Social Welfare and the State Board of Control. While there is no indication that the relationship between these two agencies at this time has been anything but harmonious, principles of public administration may suggest improved services resulting from shifting and integrating functions of the agencies.

The State Board of Control's diversified activities encompass penal affairs, mental health, and various welfare functions such as certain powers of supervision over county homes. Because of the divergent nature of its duties, it might be at least speculated that this agency could accomplish even greater things if the heterogeneous nature of the institutions under its control was reduced, thus permitting the policy formulators on the State Board of Control to specialize their talents.

One possible approach might be to shift the welfare activities of the State Board of Control to the State Department of Social Welfare, and the State Board of Control's activities in the field of mental health to the State Department of Public Health. This would then leave the State Board of Control with jurisdiction over penal institutions, thereby creating an administrative framework which has proved successful in Wisconsin.

We would suggest a series of conferences between representatives of the State Board of Control, the State Department of Social Welfare and the State Department of Public Health aimed at arriving at a mutually satisfactory and administratively feasible program of reorganization. The professional personnel of the various agencies involved would be in an excellent position to devise a meaningful pattern of administration drawing on the examples of other states.

^{5/} See Iowa Laws, 1959, Ch. 253.

Highway Recommendations

Administrative Planning

The burden of proof for demonstrating the consistency of the highway program could be transferred to county engineers, boards of supervisors, and the State Highway Commission in a variety of fashions. The State Highway Commission could, perhaps, furnish standards for the costs of the particular types of road building and maintenance operations so that these might be used to appraise the technical "on location" efficiency of different county engineers and contractors. Similarly, if two adjacent counties are maintaining quite different rates of expenditures for secondary roads, each county engineer and each board of supervisors might be asked to pass an informal judgment on the plans and operation of the other county.

Workshops or seminars could be held for the county engineers and supervisors in a multi-county district so that individuals would be able to state their policies and criteria for evaluation by other members of the group. Consulting engineers from private firms, federal agencies or highway commissions in other states might be used as resource people for such workshops, as well as personnel in the Iowa Highway Commission.

Revenue and Cost Planning

A "grand strategy" or set of principles for highway evaluation is needed at the state level. A private corporation doing more than \$150 million of business a year in road construction and maintenance on a profit basis would certainly develop measures of cost and returns from different features of the highway system.

This approach might be broadened to consider the effects on highway needs and expenditures of rural zoning and of selective abandonment of some of the secondary roads. The costs and benefits of existing and alternative patterns of rural roads should be carefully estimated in some pilot situations. A grand strategy of this type might apply operations research techniques in an effort to determine "unprofitable" activities and eliminate them or bring them back into line.

The problems of local leadership in working out answers to questions of this sort could be reduced if the task of making decisions concerning highway networks and the technical supervision of construction and maintenance were organized on a multi-county area basis. Perhaps the sharing of a capable engineer by two or more contiguous counties would be a possibility. It is possible also that larger administrative districts could be formalized, on the basis of groups of counties included in the same "rural economic area."

The degree of responsibility of the State Highway Commission could be increased at the administrative district level and uniform policies might be adopted throughout an entire highway commission district. Real efficiencies in the use of equipment and work crews might be better accomplished on a multi-county district basis.

A special study should be made to determine whether an Iowa county is of sufficient size to realize most of the economies of scale available in constructing and maintaining secondary roads. Expenditures on secondary roads in 1957 averaged about \$837,000 per county. This size of operation may be large enough to permit the achievement of physical efficiency in carrying out the secondary road work. However, the great variability of expenditures from county to county suggests that there are serious weaknesses in policy formulation with respect to the secondary road systems.

The County Road Engineer

A panel of outstanding highway engineers or administrators should be asked to re-examine the minimum qualifications established for county engineers. Even accepting the present function of the county engineer, it is possible that the educational or other requirements for the position should be increased. Most professions find ways of recognizing and rewarding differences in performance among persons all of whom have passed some minimum qualifying examination. The State Highway Commission might be asked to devise a set of standards similar to those used in the Federal Civil Service to take account of additional training, experience, and ability beyond the minimum levels. A corresponding salary schedule could also be recommended.

Higher salaries and higher standards of training and experience might be a means for increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of county highway personnel, especially the engineer. For example, while state law requires that all county engineers be registered civil engineers, a number of men presently holding the position of county engineer in Iowa are not civil engineers although they are registered engineers. If there is any merit in the law requiring civil engineers for this position, the law should be obeyed. If there is no reason for this provision, the legislature could consider its repeal.

Along with more careful certification and higher standards (where needed) for county engineers, should go some provision for tenure. At present, a county engineer serves only at the pleasure of the board of supervisors. Some boards have established reputations for arbitrary dismissal of engineers and have had rapid turnover for this reason, along with difficulty in recruiting capable men. Perhaps a county engineer should be guaranteed tenure until the end of the term for which his board of supervisors is elected. He could not be removed before the end of this term except for cause, which would be subject to review by a panel of qualified civil engineers or highway engineering administrators at the state level.

Apart from the specific difficulties afflicting the office of county road engineer, it seems clear that a broader base for long-range planning is called for than seems possible to expect from this office even under optimum conditions. Perhaps an analogy can be drawn from the noted French statesman Clemenceau who commented, "war is too serious an affair to be left to the generals." On the county and state scene it might be suggested that highway programming is too major a governmental function to be left to engineers alone. Broad planning considerations seem to call for the use of an operations research approach utilizing the skills of public administrators, economists, and statisticians as well as engineers.

In conclusion, emphasis must be placed on the evolutionary feature of local government. We have noted earlier how the responsibility for road construction and maintenance was gradually centralized and "passed upward" from section committees through township officials to the county governmental levels. Some functions have been passed upward still further to the state, and on interstate highways to the federal level, through the leverage of grants-in-aid. Perhaps the county should be regarded merely as a way-station in the evolution of a highway system fully coordinated and administered at the state level.

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