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The Social Status and Occupational Prospects Of Married Farm Laborers In Cherokee County, Iowa, 1949

by Robert A. Rohwer

Department of Economics and Sociology



AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION, IOWA STATE COLLEGE

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SUMMARY

In this study 100 married farm laborers in Cherokee County, Iowa were interviewed in 1949. For comparison, 100 married farm operators were randomly selected from age categories so that their ages were comparable to the ages of the married hired men. The same questions were asked of both groups. Similarities and differences are presented.

Married hired men on farms in Cherokee County showed a number of significant differences when they were compared with an equal number of farm operators of the same age.

1. The married hired men had not lived in the locality in which they were living in 1949 nearly as long as had the farm operators.

2. Fewer parents of hired men owned farms, but most hired men were not sons of hired men. Parents of both hired men and farm operators were nearly all farmers.

3. Fewer hired men had completed a high school education. Wives of married hired men had less formal education than had the wives of farm operators.

4. More of the wives of hired men were employed outside the home.

5. The hired men left home at younger ages than did the farm operators. Hired men had spent more years in nonfarm work.

6. Families of married hired men belonged to and attended the meetings of fewer organizations than did the families of farm operators. Half of the hired men's families included one or more persons who belonged to or attended the meetings of more than one organization. Half of the operator families included one or more

persons who belonged to or attended the meetings of six or more organizations.

7. Fewer families of hired men included persons who belonged to a church. Of those who did belong, members of hired men's families attended less regularly than did members of operator families. Fewer hired men's families belonged to auxiliary religious organizations.

8. Fewer of the hired men's families included one or more family members who were officers or committee members in some local organization.

9. Hired men did less visiting in other homes; had fewer guests or visitors. Hired men's families visited more with other hired men or with families of nonfarm workers. Operator families visited more with other farm operators and with business and professional people.

10. Social status scores (Sewell) averaged 20 points lower for hired men than for operators.

11. Hired men, their employers and the comparison group of operators agreed that, in general, few married hired men would ever become farm operators. However, nearly all of the hired men personally expressed a desire to become a farm operator, and two-fifths of them expected to become operators within 5 years.

12. A majority of the farm operators received some type of family help in getting started as an operator. Three-fifths of the hired men said they could expect no help from relatives.

13. The employers of these married hired men averaged 6 years older than their employees. Half of the employers were tenant-operators.

The Social Status and Occupational Prospects of Married Farm Laborers in Cherokee County, Iowa, 1949¹

BY ROBERT A. ROHWER²

More than 20,000 married men were employed on Iowa farms in 1940.³ At that time there was one married hired man for every 10 farm operators in Iowa. Yet little information was available about the farm families whose agricultural income is wages.⁴

This study was undertaken to answer questions such as the following for one of the above-average farming areas in Iowa. Do families of married farm laborers participate in the group life of the community where they live and work? Do married farm laborers and their families have social status comparable to that indicated for other farm families? Do married farm laborers expect to become farm operators?

PROCEDURE

The first step in this research was the formulation of five major hypotheses to be tested, together with several more specific subhypotheses under each. The following statements were tested as the basic propositions of the study:

1. The social relations, status and occupational prospects of married farm laborers and farm operators of comparable age are conditioned by their family background.
2. Married farm laborers and their families do not belong to the same organized groups as farm operators.
3. Married farm laborers' families and farm operators' families do not choose each other as informal associates or friends.
4. Married farm laborers occupy a lower status posi-

¹ Project 1067, Iowa Agricultural Experiment Station.

² Formerly instructor and research associate in sociology, Iowa State College.

³ Data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census. Similar data for 1950 are not available at the Bureau of the Census or the Department of Agriculture.

⁴ A married hired man was defined as a married man working for wages on a farm for someone other than his own father or father-in-law, during the period of the interviewing (May and June, 1949). Farmers working 80 acres or more whose farm income came from their production, not from wages, were called farm operators. A few of the youngest related tenants were on a more or less "labor-share" arrangement with their parents but, in almost every case, a lease more favorable to the tenant was in prospect. They were included as farm operators. Sons employed by fathers were left out because they usually have operatorship in view and are only temporarily employed; also, others living in the community regard the kinship as more important than the employment.

tion in their communities than do farm operators of comparable age.

5. Farm operators and employers view farm labor less optimistically as a step toward farm operatorship and eventual farm ownership than do farm laborers.

The basic design of the study was a comparison of married hired men with an equal number of randomly chosen farm operators of approximately the same age in the same area.⁵ The attitudes, characteristics and activities of the 100 farm operators reported in this study did not represent the farm operators of the area. They are not representative of the farm operators because they were a comparison group, selected to match the age of the married hired men, and not a sample of all operators.

The principal statistical device used to determine differences between hired men and operators was the Chi-square test of the significance of the difference between two frequency distributions. Only significant or highly significant differences are reported.

The findings of this study apply only to the area of the investigation, approximately the northern two-thirds of Cherokee County, Iowa—an area where gross farm incomes are higher than in most of the rest of the state.

FINDINGS

Findings will be presented under seven headings: (1) family backgrounds of married hired men and the comparison group of farm operators, (2) personal and family characteristics, (3) occupational experience, (4) participation in organized groups, (5) participation in informal or unorganized groups, (6) social status and levels of living and (7) occupational prospects of the married hired men. Information concerning the employers of married hired men and their farms is also given.

⁵ Beginning at the north edge of Cherokee County, Iowa, a systematic search was made to locate all of the married hired men in the specialized service area of the city of Cherokee, which includes five or six smaller communities.

A complete list of the farm operators for the current year, 1949-50, was made. The age and marital status of every farm operator was determined from the assessor's records and from other sources where necessary. The farm operators were classified in age strata, and those who constitute the comparison group were randomly drawn from the appropriate age strata.

The field work for the study was ended when 100 married farm laborers, their employers, and 100 other farm operators had been interviewed. None of the nearly 300 farmers contacted refused to be interviewed.

FAMILY BACKGROUNDS

FAMILY RESIDENCE

Most farm operators in the comparison group were born in Cherokee County. Two-thirds of them in 1949 lived in the same communities where they were born, and one in five operated the farm where he was reared. On the other hand, four-fifths of the married hired men originated outside Cherokee County, and more than two-fifths of them were born in other states.

Nine in 10 of the farm operators had either parents or parents-in-law living in the same community where they lived, as compared with only one-third of the married hired men. Three-fifths of the operator couples were the third or fourth generations of their families to live in the same community. Over half of the married hired men's families had lived in the community only a year or two. Farm operators and their wives had *local* family backgrounds, and married hired men and their wives did not.

PARENTS' OCCUPATIONS

Hired men and farm operators were alike in the occupational backgrounds of their families. Nine out of 10 men in both categories were farm born and farm reared. About three-fourths of the wives of both the hired men and the farm operators were born and reared on a farm.

Almost every hired man and farm operator interviewed had either a father or a father-in-law who had once farmed. Married hired men and farm operators were alike in the proportions of their parents whose *main work* had been farming. At the time of the interview the occupations of the parents and parents-in-law of both groups were similar, but more of the parents of farm operators were retired.

FARM OWNERSHIP

When account is taken of variations of circumstances within the general occupation of farming, some differences appear between the hired men and the operators. Twice as many married hired men as farm operators were not sons or sons-in-law of a farm owner: almost four-fifths of the married hired men were not farm owners' sons; only two-fifths of the farm operators were not. Over half of the married hired men had neither a parent nor a parent-in-law who owned a farm in 1949; but only one-fourth of the farm operator couples did not have parents who were farm owners.

Not only did more of the farm operators' parents own farms, but also their farms were larger than those owned by parents of married hired men.

FAMILY MISFORTUNE

Finding that operators' parents were more likely than hired men's parents to own a farm suggests the possibility that the parental families of hired men may have suffered more personal misfortunes and financial reverses than did the parents of farm operators and their wives. Significant differences did not appear between married farm laborers and farm operators in the numbers of farms lost or long illnesses reported for the parental families. More hired men than farm operators had parents who had been widowed or divorced and had remarried; the hired men had more half-siblings and step-siblings. More of the hired men came from broken homes, but the possibility that more of the hired men's

parental families had lost farms or had suffered long illness was not supported by the data of this study.

A popular belief is that married hired men are the children of married hired men. This belief was not supported by the data.

PERSONAL AND FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS

AGE

The farm operators and the married hired men included in this study were alike in age because the study was designed that way. However, the married hired men averaged 9 years younger than all the farm operators in the county.⁶

FAMILY COMPOSITION

Only farm operators and hired men who were married were interviewed. Both groups had been married about the same length of time. Significantly more hired men's wives were employed for pay outside their own homes.

The hired men and the farm operators were not significantly different in the number of children in their families. The operator households included some single hired men.

EDUCATION

Married hired men were less likely than farm operators to have finished high school and were more likely to have stopped their schooling with 8 years or less. The wives of married hired men also had fewer years of formal education than did operators' wives. The average differences in education between husbands and wives were alike for operators and married hired men.

WAGES

The cash wage paid most married hired men was \$125 to \$130 a month for 12 months. One man in four received an additional bonus. In addition to his cash wage, the man usually received a rent-free house, electricity, 2 quarts of milk a day, 2 dozen eggs per week, approximately two hogs per year and a garden plot.⁷ The income of the farm operators was not included in this study.

OCCUPATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Married hired men had spent more years as married hired men than had the men who were farm operators. The farm operators had spent more years as farm tenants and farm owners than had the hired men. But it should be noted (table 1) that the 100 farm operators collectively had spent a total of 65 years as married hired men and the 100 married hired men, collectively, had spent a total of 267 years as farm tenant-operators and 19 years as farm owners. The married hired men had spent one-fourth as many years as farm operators as had the operators.

The married hired men left the home farm at younger ages and spent almost three times as many years in non-farm work and as single hired men on farms than did the

⁶ The average age of the 100 married hired men interviewed was 35.2 years. The best available estimate of the ages of the farm operators in the area studied in 1949 is found in the 1950 U.S. Census of Agriculture, Volume I, part 9, pages 180-181. The average age of the farm operators in Economic Area 1a was 44.3 years. Cherokee County is centrally located within Economic Area 1a.

⁷ For a more detailed discussion of wages and perquisites for these 100 men, see: Rohwer, Robert A. Hired man's wages. Iowa Farm Sci. 4:135-136. March 1950.

TABLE 1. OCCUPATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF MARRIED HIRED MEN AND FARM OPERATORS IN CHEROKEE COUNTY, IOWA, 1949.

Type of experience	Years of experience spent by:	
	Married hired men	Farm operators
On home farm	1,638	1,909
At home, nonfarm	115	89
Nonfarm work	277	101
Military	139	82
Single hired man	476	160
Married hired man	550	65
Farm tenant	267	780
Farm owner-operator	19	332
Total	3,481*	3,518*

*The totals are not identical because a few years are unaccounted for and also the two categories are not perfectly matched in age.

farm operators. The married hired men also had more years of military experience.

The occupational experience of each married hired man and of each of the farm operators in the comparison group may be seen in figs. 1A through 1D. Each bar in the charts terminates on the right with the year 1949 so that a vertical line on the chart will show what each man did in any given year.

FORMAL SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

TOTAL PARTICIPATION IN ORGANIZATIONS

Married hired men's families participated in formal organizations much less than did farm operators and their families.⁸ This is shown in table 2.

All farm operator families in the sample belonged to at least one organization or attended meetings. However, one married hired man's family in every six belonged to no organization and attended no meetings. One-third of the hired men's families belonged to or attended the meetings of only one organization. More than another third belonged to only two or three organizations. Less than one in seven of the hired men's families participated in more than three organizations.

Half of the operator families participated in six or more organizations. Only a fifth of the operator families participated in as few as three organizations.

RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

Married hired men and their wives participated less in church and church-sponsored activities than did farm operators and their wives.⁹

Neither spouse belonged to any church in two-fifths of

⁸ A part of this difference results because families who move often join and attend fewer organizations than do families who live in one place longer. One would need to be able to hold mobility constant to know how much of the difference in social participation to attribute to other factors.

⁹ When considering the participation of husbands and wives in religious organizations, it is useful both to separate and to combine membership and attendance.

TABLE 2. ORGANIZATIONS BELONGED TO OR ATTENDED BY MARRIED HIRED MEN AND FARM OPERATORS AND THEIR WIVES, CHEROKEE COUNTY, IOWA, 1949.

Total number of organizations belonged to or attended	Employed couples	Operator couples	Total
0	17	0	17
1	33	4	37
2-3	36	17	53
4-5	10	26	36
6-11	4	53	57
Total	100	100	200

the hired man couples and in one-eighth of the operator couples (see table 3).

Three-fourths of the operator couples went to half or more of the regular church services. About half as many employed couples attended half or more of the regular church services. One employed couple in three and one operator couple in sixteen did not belong to a church or attend church at all.

Sunday School was not attended by most farm adults in this area. Three-fourths of the operator couples neither attended nor belonged to a Sunday School, and more than nine-tenths of the employed couples neither attended nor belonged.

If religious meetings other than regular church and Sunday School—such as women's associations and choir—are called religious auxiliaries, then four-fifths of the hired men couples and one-third of the operator couples neither attended nor belonged to a religious auxiliary organization, including all other church groups. This is indicated in table 4.

One should not conclude from these data that hired men are antichurch while farm operators support the church. Fewer hired men and their wives belonged to any organizations than did farm operator couples. Seventeen percent of the employed couples belonged to no organization at all; in 37 percent of the employed couples one or both spouses belonged to a church but to nothing else; 36 percent belonged to a church and to some other organization, and only 10 percent of the employed couples belonged to some other organization but not to any church. Religious organizations absorbed the major portion of the employed couples' organizational efforts.

NONRELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

Three of the 100 hired men belonged to a farmers' cooperative. Two-thirds of the farm operators belonged to a cooperative: one-third belonged to one cooperative; one-third belonged to two or more cooperatives. Since a farmers' cooperative is an economic rather than a social organization, one expects that more farm operators than hired men will belong. In this area, however, consumer cooperatives for the purchasing of gasoline and oil were

TABLE 3. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP OF MARRIED HIRED MEN AND FARM OPERATORS AND THEIR WIVES IN CHEROKEE COUNTY, IOWA, 1949.

Church membership possessed by:	Employed couples	Operator couples	Total
Both spouses	47	82	129
One spouse	13	5	18
Neither	40	13	53
Total	100	100	200

TABLE 4. MEMBERSHIP IN A RELIGIOUS AUXILIARY ORGANIZATION AMONG MARRIED HIRED MEN AND FARM OPERATORS AND THEIR WIVES IN CHEROKEE COUNTY, IOWA, 1949.

Membership in a religious auxiliary organization (not church or Sunday School) possessed by:	Employed couples	Operator couples	Total
Both spouses	5	12	17
One spouse	11	50	61
Neither	84	38	122
Total	100	100	200

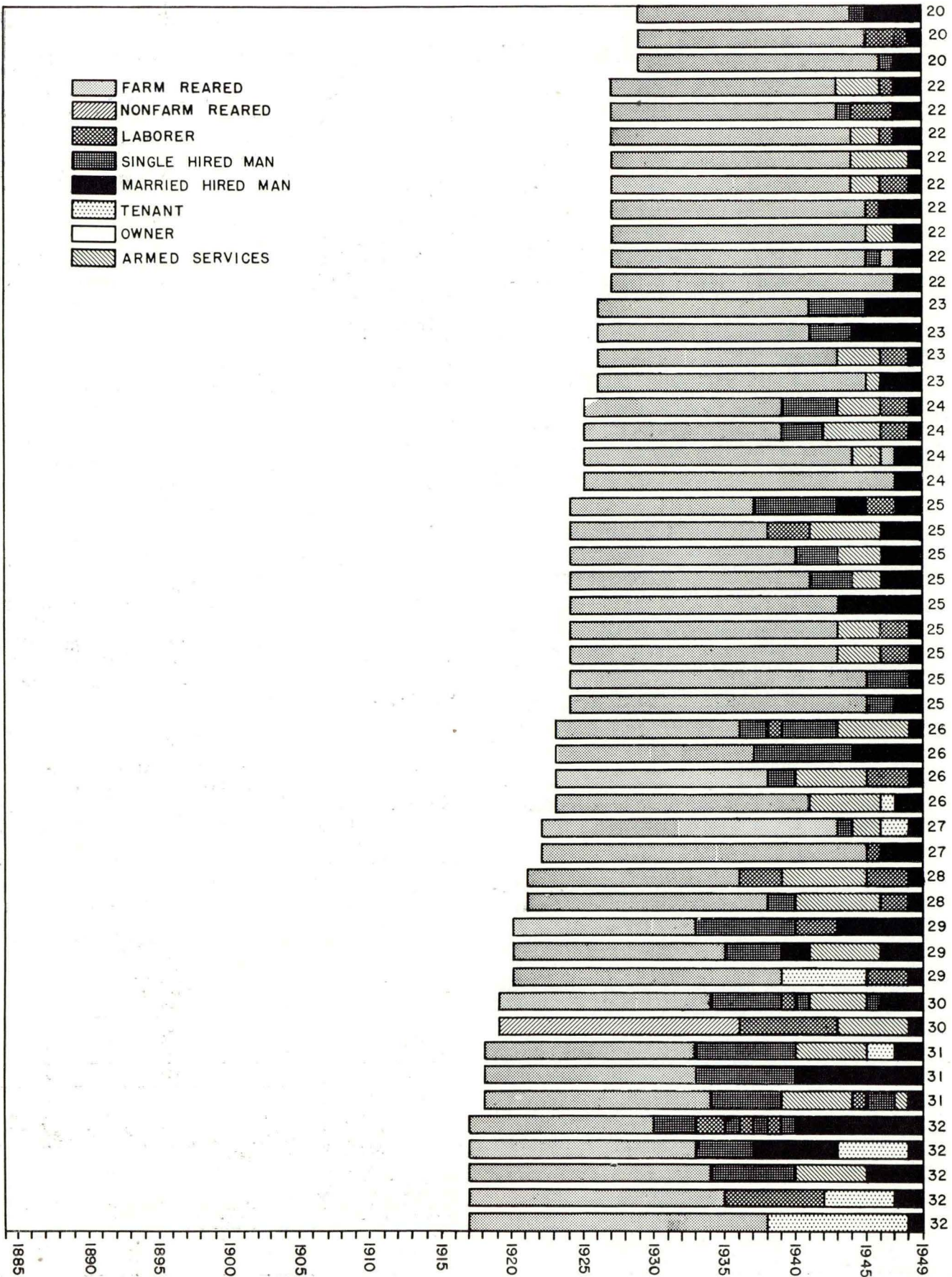


Fig. 1A. Occupational histories from birth to 1949 of young married hired men, Cherokee County, Iowa.

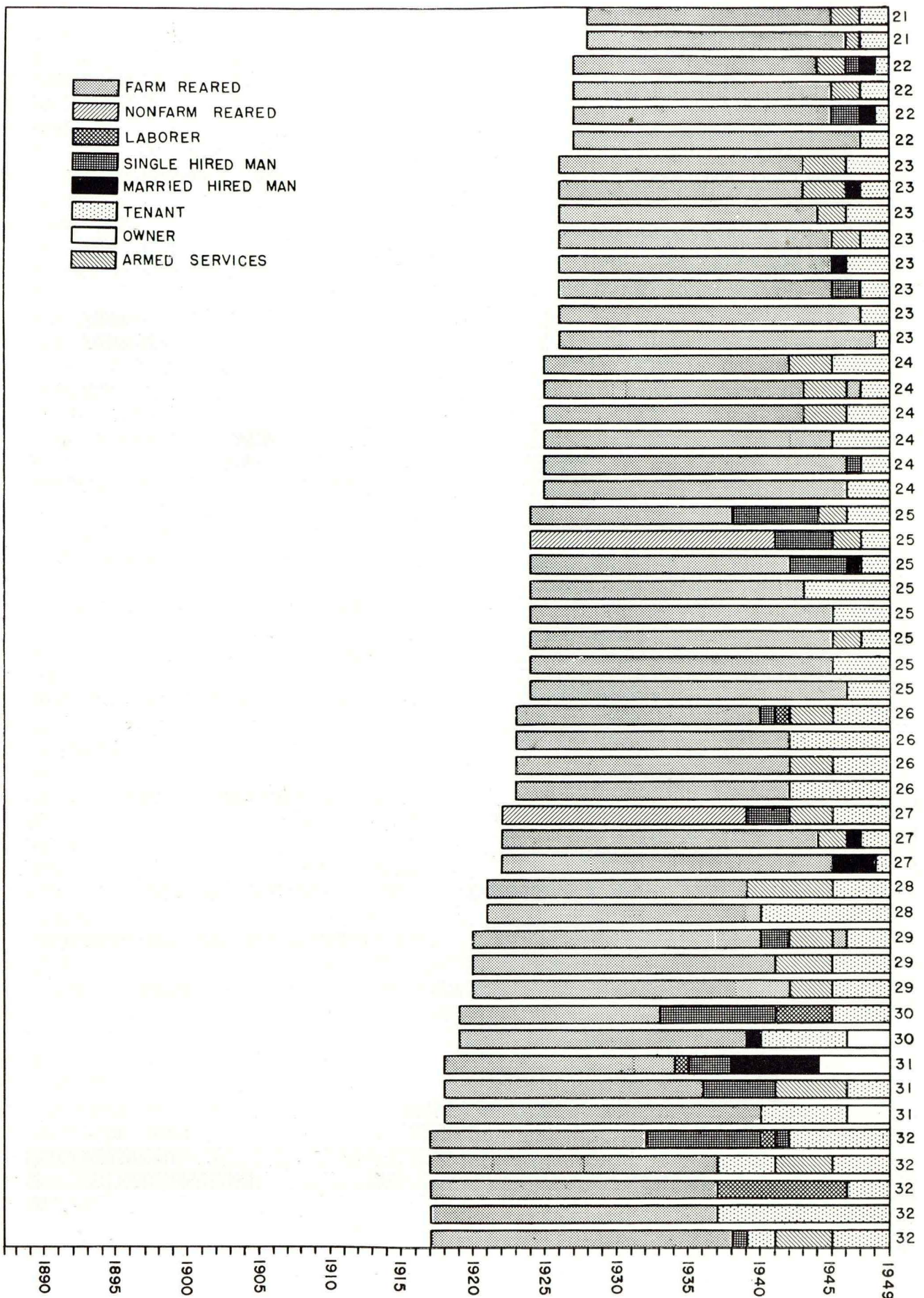


Fig. 1B. Occupational histories from birth to 1949 of young married farm operators, Cherokee County, Iowa.

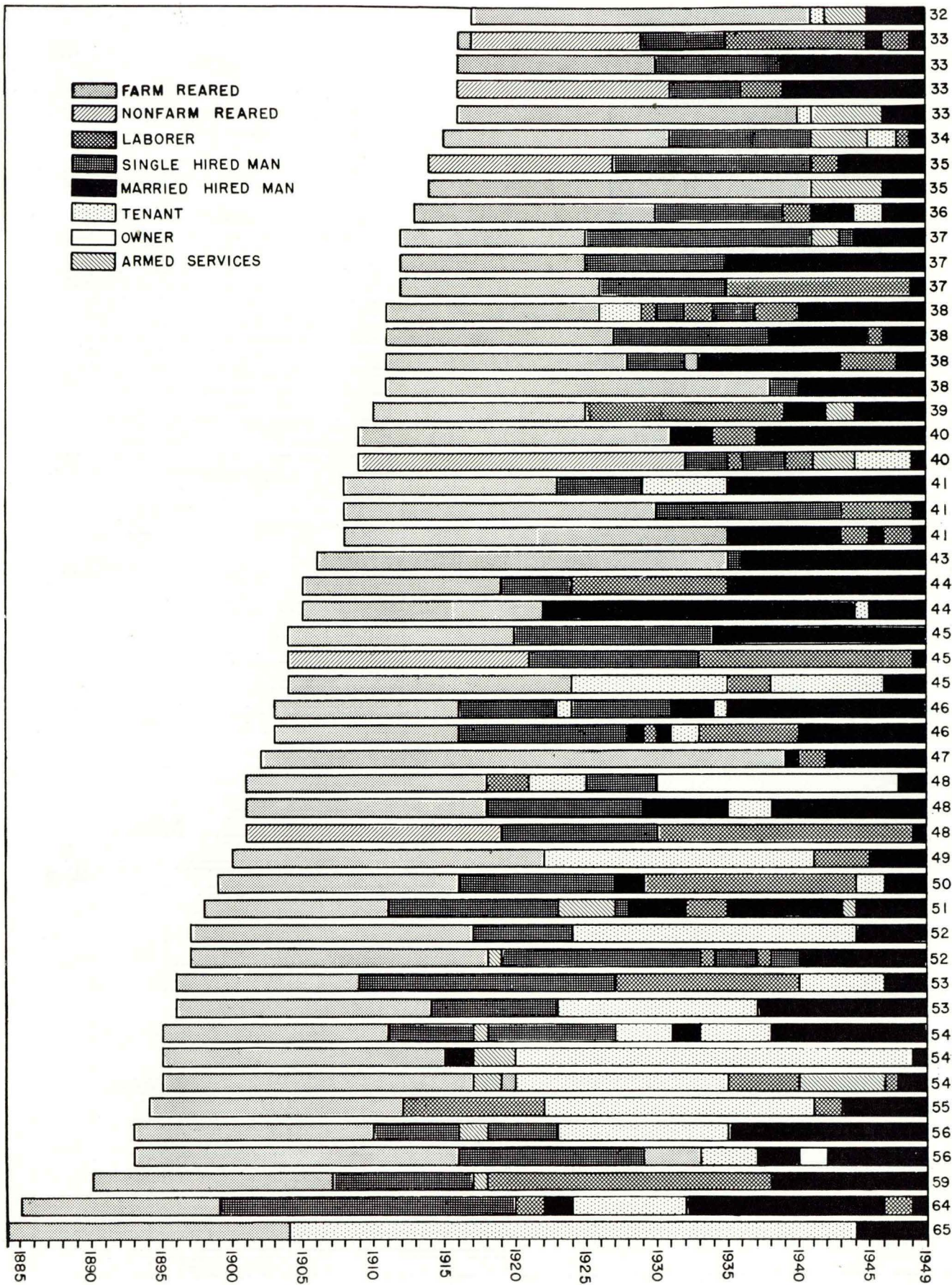


Fig. 1C. Occupational histories from birth to 1949 of older married hired men, Cherokee County, Iowa.

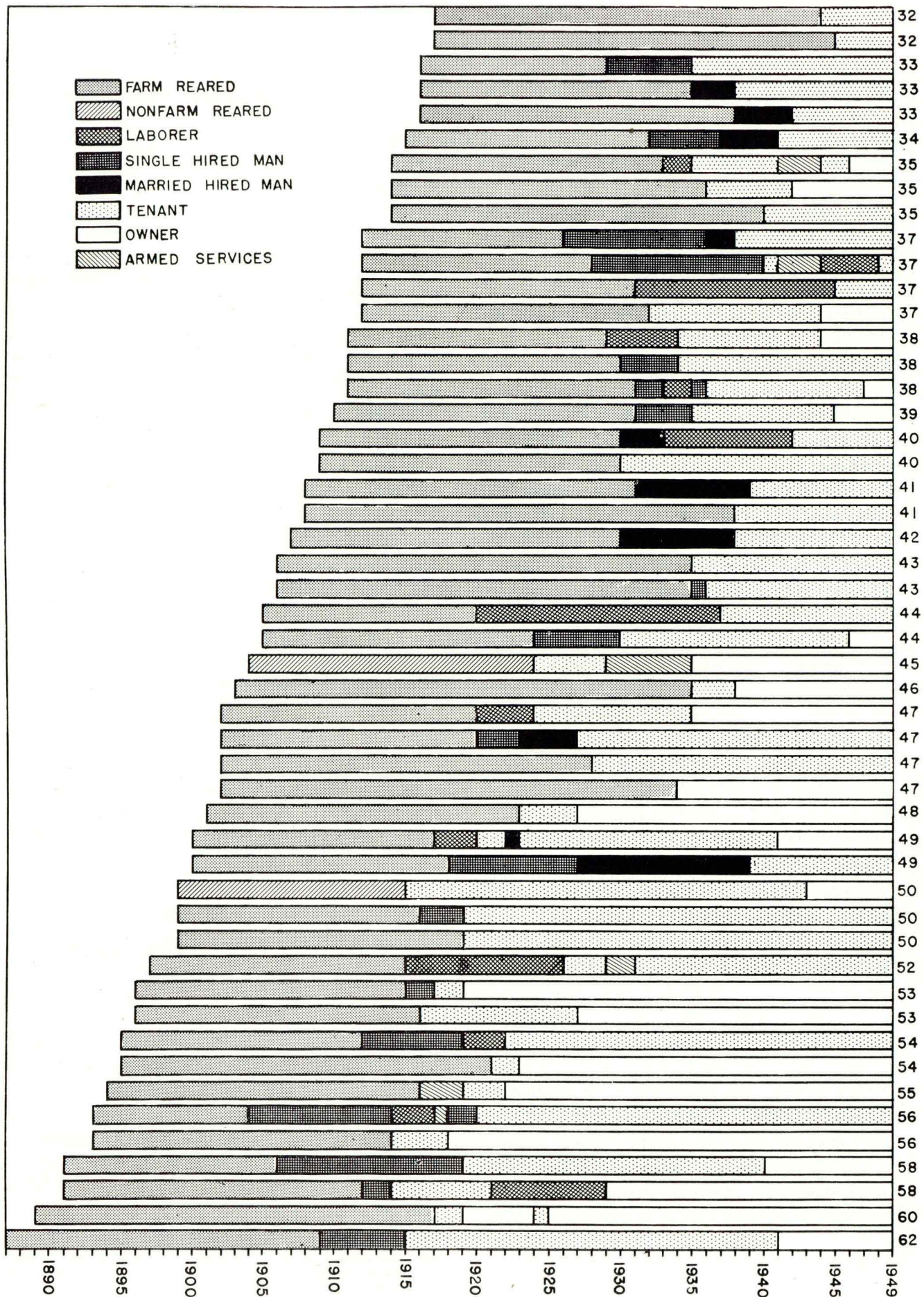


Fig. 1D. Occupational histories from birth to 1949 of older married farm operators, Cherokee County, Iowa.

especially strong, and most hired men owned automobiles. The potential membership of hired men in these cooperatives was not as limited as was their actual participation.

Nine-tenths of the hired men and one-fourth of the farm operators had not joined the Farm Bureau and did not attend its meetings. The remainder either belonged or attended or both. Seven percent of the hired men's wives and 36 percent of the operators' wives attended the extension home demonstration meetings near them.

Nine-tenths of the hired men and four-fifths of the operator families did not belong to any fraternal organization. Even fewer hired men or their wives attended the meetings of a fraternal organization.

The only organizations in which the membership and attendance of employed couples and operator couples was not significantly different were the parent-teachers' association and veterans' organizations. However, the majority of both married hired men and farm operators did not participate in either the PTA or the veterans' organizations.

One-eighth of the employed couples and nearly two-fifths of the operator couples participated in some other organization not previously discussed in this report.

LEADERSHIP

One in 20 married hired men or their wives were officers or committee members in one or more organizations (table 5). In one-third of the farm operator couples, either the husband or the wife or both were committee members or office holders.

INFORMAL SOCIAL PARTICIPATION FREQUENCY

Wage-earning families visited other homes approximately once a week. The farm operator families visited other homes twice as often. One employed family in 12 never visited in other homes. No farm operator family failed to visit other homes at all. Infrequent visiting was more often found among the hired men and frequent visiting was most often found among the operator families. Data on visiting frequency of both groups are presented in table 6.

The frequency with which married hired men and farm operators entertained guests or visitors in their homes was approximately the same as their visiting other homes. A third of the employed families reported visitors once a month or less.

PLACES VISITED

Half of the farm operators visited relatives who lived in the same community. Most of the other farm operators visited relatives who lived close to the community. A fourth of the married hired men visited relatives who

TABLE 5. ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP AMONG MARRIED HIRED MEN AND FARM OPERATORS AND THEIR WIVES IN CHEROKEE COUNTY, IOWA, 1949.

At least one officership or committee held by:	Employed couples	Operator couples	Total
Both spouses	1	12	13
One spouse	4	21	25
Neither spouse	95	67	162
Total	100	100	200

TABLE 6. INFORMAL VISITING IN OTHERS' HOMES BY MARRIED HIRED MEN AND FARM OPERATORS AND THEIR WIVES IN CHEROKEE COUNTY, IOWA, 1949.

Frequency of informal visiting in others' homes	Employed couples	Operator couples	Total
Not at all	8	0	8
Less than once a week	34	13	47
Once a week	25	25	50
More than once a week	33	62	95
Total	100	100	200

lived in the same community, and almost half of the hired men went outside the communities where they were employed to visit kinfolk.

Nonrelatives visited by farm operators were more often near at hand than were those visited by married hired men. One hired man's family in four visited nonrelatives who lived outside the community only; they visited none in the communities where they were employed nor in adjacent communities.

ASSOCIATES

In their exchange of visits, married hired men and their wives were more likely than farm operators to visit other hired men and people in clerical, skilled and unskilled labor occupations. Farm operators were more likely to visit other farm operator families and business and professional people.

Married hired men and their employers seemed either to be boon companions or to avoid each other almost completely. Both tendencies are understandable. The men would perhaps see so much of each other in their working hours that each would seek other associates when not working. If husbands, wives and children of both the employer and employee families were congenial, the nearness of their homes would enable them to see each other very often. Comments made by members of a few employing families indicated that they thought those working for them were their social inferiors. As many or more employer families indicated that they made special efforts to assure their employees that they were regarded as highly as anyone else.

SOCIAL STATUS

Perhaps the simplest and best measure of social status for rural families is the long form of the Sewell socioeconomic status scale.¹⁰ Scores of married hired men and farm operator families are compared in fig. 2. The average score for the married farm laborers on this scale was 176; for the comparison group of farm operators, it was 205.

Analysis of variance shows the difference in status scores between the hired men and the farm operators in this study to be highly significant.

A supplementary indicator of social status is the occupations of the siblings of hired men, farm operators and their wives. Differences were statistically significant. The siblings of hired men included fewer farm owners and farm tenants, more hired men, fewer professional

¹⁰ Sewell, W. H., The construction and standardization of a scale for the measurement of the socioeconomic status of Oklahoma farm families. Okla. Agr. Exp. Sta. Tech. Bul. 9, April, 1940.

The scores of the farm laborers approximate the scores for the Oklahoma open country population that Sewell used to standardize the scale. The scores of the operator comparison group are almost all above the mean scores for farm laborers and Oklahoma farm operators.

PERSONS

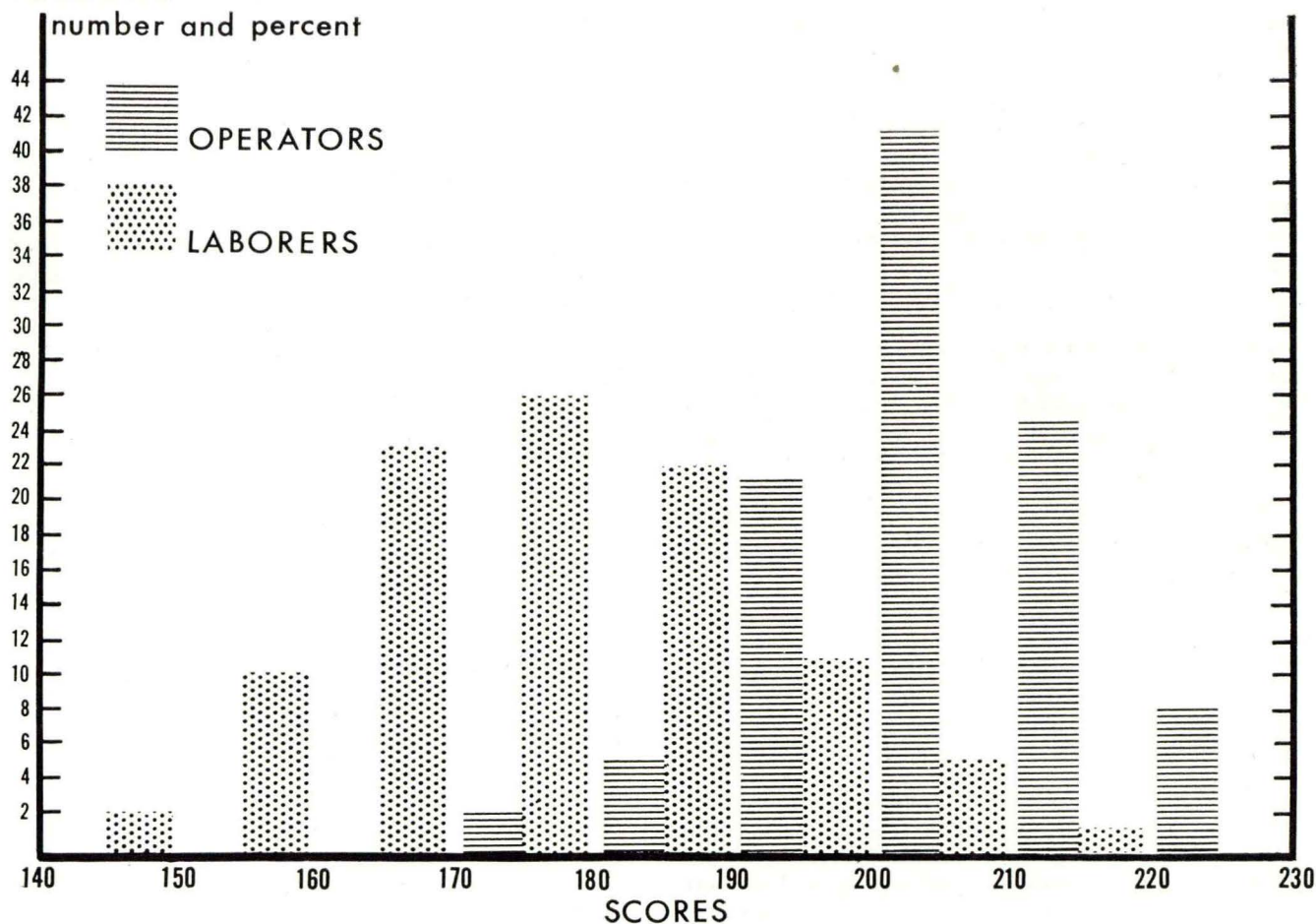


Fig. 2. Scores on the Sewell socio-economic status scale of married hired men and farm operator families in Cherokee County, Iowa, 1949.

persons and more unskilled laborers than were found among farm operators' siblings. If the status hierarchy of occupations usually found in community prestige studies is used as a guide, the siblings of hired men and their wives worked in occupations of somewhat lower prestige rating than did the siblings of farm operators and their wives.

Although the Sewell socio-economic status scale is sufficient for analyzing the social status of farm operators and farm wage workers, a comparison of some of the specific level-of-living items may be of descriptive interest.

Highly significant differences were found on the following: Hired men more often had small houses than did farm operators. They more often used bare floors or linoleum instead of carpets and rugs. Fewer hired men had telephones in their homes. Ninety-nine percent of the farm operators owned refrigerators compared with 53 percent of the hired men. More of the hired men drove old model automobiles of the cheaper makes; more farm operators drove late model automobiles of more expensive makes and had a garage. Ninety-one percent of the farm operators owned life insurance compared with 56 percent of the married hired men. More hired men than operators did not have their furniture insured. Employed families subscribed to fewer magazines and newspapers than did farm operators, but neither hired men nor farm

operator families owned many books or were members of a book club.

More farm operators possessed kitchen sinks and had plumbing in their homes. More farm operators had electric or gas kitchen stoves instead of kerosene or wood ranges, and more of them had a locker or owned a freezer unit. More operators had radios in their cars. Operators' houses were not newer but were of better type construction.

The two groups were not significantly different in having electricity or power washing machines in their homes. These were almost universally present.

Both farm operators and married hired men were asked how well they thought married hired men's families were received in the communities where they lived. The two sets of opinions were not significantly different. About three-fifths of both groups thought married hired men's families were received about the same as others. Occasionally the opinion was expressed that communities and neighborhoods made special efforts to be nice to the wage earning families. One-fifth thought that employed families were neglected or ignored.¹¹ The rest either thought that the hired man group was not accepted

¹¹ A remark heard while interviewing could have been made by any of several of the older hired men: "I was good enough to stack their straw, but not good enough to eat ice cream with them at the thresher meeting."

or they did not comment. A few persons among operator, employer and employee families were outspoken and indignant about what they regarded as community mistreatment of hired men and their families.

OPINIONS ABOUT OCCUPATIONAL PROSPECTS

Almost two-thirds of the farm operators expressed the opinion that most hired men would never be able to start farming for themselves. Nearly a third of the operators expressed the opinion that half of the married hired men might sometime start as farm operators. Very few operators expected that a majority of hired men would sometime become operators.

The employers of the hired men were asked the same question. The employers were no more optimistic about the likelihood that most hired men would start farming than were farm operators. Hired men themselves were not much more optimistic about the likelihood that they, as a category, would ever become farm operators.

Despite this pessimism on every hand concerning the occupational prospects of other married hired men as a category, each man as an individual was more optimistic about himself. Forty-two percent of the men expected to be farm operators within 5 years. Eight percent expected to be in nonfarm work; 25 percent expected still to be working as hired men on farms; and 25 percent said they did not know what they would be doing within 5 years. Almost all indicated that they *would like* to become farm operators.

GETTING STARTED FARMING

Previous research has shown that family background is a major factor in getting started in farming in the Midwest.¹² A beginner's family can give him both direct and indirect help. From this point of view, the parents' occupation about the time that the young man comes of age is important.

A difference is found between the occupations of farm operators' parents and hired men's parents at the time that the sons were in their early maturity. More operators' parents owned farms then. More hired men's parents were themselves married hired men, unskilled laborers or farm tenants. More farm owners were found among the parents-in-law of operators than were found among the parents-in-law of hired men at the time when the wives were young women.

The majority of the farm operators interviewed were actually helped in various ways by their families to get started. Approximately half of them began on farms owned by relatives, and another fifth found their first farms with the assistance of relatives. The farm operators with nonlocal family background more often than other farm operators found their first farms without help from relatives.

Three-fifths of the married hired men reported that they could not expect relatives to help them start farming for themselves. Occasionally it was mentioned that a relative could help but that he probably would not help. A few said that they would not accept or ask aid from relatives. Those who thought they might be helped by relatives regarded the lending of machinery as the most

likely type of aid. To borrow machinery effectively the beginner would need to find a farm fairly near the relative's farm—a very difficult requirement in Cherokee County in 1950. To find an available farm at all would be difficult.

Occasionally a married hired man was about to begin as a farm operator with the help of his employer. Most of the other hired men who had any sort of definite plan for beginning farm operation in the near future were planning with their relatives. When and if they started, it was likely that they would return to the communities in which they were reared.

Some of the hired men had been farm operators before. As compared with the farm operator group, they had started with less help from relatives, on poorer farms and with a more precarious set of beginning financial arrangements.

THE EMPLOYERS AND THEIR FARMS

Most of the employers of these married hired men were themselves active farmers. Two-thirds of them were between 30 and 50 years of age. The oldest was 67; the youngest 23.

Few employers hired more than one man. The average size of their farms was 340 acres. Less than 1 in 10 of the employers' farms was over 500 acres. Farms of 200 acres or less on which a married hired man was employed were more numerous than those over 500 acres. On some of the smaller farms, a married hired man was employed because the employer suffered ill health.

The employers were more likely than the comparison group of farm operators to have attended college. Employers' wives and other farm operators' wives did not differ significantly in the years of schooling received.

Seven percent of the employers had at one time been married hired men. A third of them had worked as single hired men. The farm experience of the majority of employers had been only as farm operators or as workers on the home farm.

Employers averaged 6 years older than the married hired men. One employer in four was younger than the man he hired, in some cases from 10 to 30 years younger.

Half of the employers were tenant operators. The others were owners and part owners. A third of the employers operated farms that included two sets of buildings. Very few controlled three or more sets of buildings.¹³ The employers preferred a married man to a single man, usually because a married man did not share the employer's home.

About half of the employers made some effort to encourage the hired man to share in the management of the farm. The others did not. A third of the employers thought they could safely leave their hired man in charge of the farm for a month or more. Almost a third thought they would need to instruct their hired man daily. These employer opinions probably reflect both the performance of the hired men and the temperaments and habits of the employers.

¹² Rohwer, Robert A. Beginning as a farm operator. Rural Soc. 14: 325-335. Another indication is the numerous bulletins published by state colleges on the topic of father-son farming agreements.

¹³ The operation of two or more farms and farmsteads by one farmer and his employee was singled out for unfavorable comment by numerous farm operators and hired men interviewed, especially when the two places had formerly been operated as two separate farms by owners or renters without employees.

Most of the employers thought it unwise to encourage married hired men to have separate enterprises of their own, such as chickens or cows, while working for someone else. Many thought that the man's own enterprises would be given his best attention. Half of the employers had at least given a thought to the possibility of helping their employee get started as a farm operator. Some had already helped one or more men to begin farming for himself. Many employers were not well enough established themselves to give major thought to helping someone else.

CONCLUSIONS

The foregoing findings justify the following conclusions which apply to the area of investigation at the time of the interviewing:

(1) Married hired men and their families participate in the organized life of the rural community much less than do farm operator families of the same age.

(2) The wage earning farm families live a less active informal social life than do the self-employed farm families.

(3) The social status position of married farm laborers is lower than that of farm operators of comparable age.

(4) The backgrounds and experience of the hired men are different from those of the farm operator comparison group: The families of operators interviewed had deeper roots in the community, as indicated by much longer local residence and more farm ownership by parents. The hired men had fewer years of formal education. They had spent more years away from home, off farms and working for others than the operators had spent.

(5) Farm people generally are pessimistic about the likelihood that married hired men will start farming for themselves. Yet most of the hired men surveyed wanted to start farming for themselves, and more than two-fifths of them expected to start within 5 years.

DISCUSSION

These findings also have relevance for some broader propositions concerning social and economic phenomena. The data from this limited study are far from conclusive evidence for these propositions, of course, but they do support certain theories concerning current trends, and detract from others. Possibly some of their pertinence should be pointed out.

In the northern states formal social participation is often not significantly associated with farm tenure.¹⁴ The findings of this report reveal a contrast between the participation of farm operators and married hired men. This suggests that participation differences among tenure classes in the northern states will be found if the full range of tenure categories—laborer families, as well as owners and tenants—is included.

¹⁴ A typical illustration is a finding in Greene County, Iowa: "There is a distinct lack of tenure class differences in social participation among farmers living in the prosperous area that we studied." Anderson, C. Arnold and Ryan, Bryce. Social participation differences among tenure classes in a prosperous commercialized farming area. *Rural Soc.* 8: 281-290. Sept. 1943.

A mitigating factor should be noted concerning our first conclusion that married hired men and their families participate in formal organizations less than do farm operator families. Participation is often found to increase with length of residence in the community.¹⁵ The married hired men had lived fewer years in the communities where they worked than had the farm operators. One would need to hold mobility as well as age constant in order to know how much of differences in social participation to attribute to tenure and other factors.

The agricultural ladder is the name given to the expectation that a young man will begin as a farm laborer, climb successive steps such as tenancy and part ownership and finally become an unencumbered farm owner.¹⁶ The finding that married hired men in this area were younger than farm operators, on the average, suggests that they may still have opportunity to move to the next rungs of the ladder. On the other hand, finding one-third of the married hired men 40 years old or older and more than another fourth of them between 30 and 40 years of age casts doubt on the expectation that they will reach the top of the ladder in the active years remaining to them.

Social scientists are recognizing the importance of family and kinship ties in present day rural life,¹⁷ in spite of the larger trend of increasing secularization with its specialization, division of labor and commercialization.¹⁸ In this local area, farm operators were related to land-owning parents or parents-in-law more often than were men of the same age who were employed by other farmers. The operators also had received more family help in starting as farm operators than the hired men expected to receive. These findings support the contention that the importance of kinship in rural areas is persisting and that the family unit may help its members to survive economically in a society that is becoming more secular and pecuniary.

In a frontier society there tends to be a minimum of class distinctions, but social stratification tends to become more rigid with the passing of time.¹⁹ Family tradition and family status then become prominent among the factors affecting the rural class structure. In the Cherokee area it was found that farm operators tended to come from families that had lived in the community a long time and that married hired men were comparative newcomers. The operators' higher social status was indicated by their scores on the Sewell scale, the occupations of

¹⁵ Beal summarizes several studies: "Most research shows that those who live in a given community over a long period of time are more apt to be members of associations than those who have resided in the community a relatively short time." Beal, George M. The roots of participation in farmer cooperatives. Distributed by the Iowa State College Bookstore, Ames, Iowa. 1954. page 38.

¹⁶ W. J. Spillman's article is usually cited as the classic statement of this concept. Spillman, W.J. The agricultural ladder. *Amer. Econ. Rev. Supplement.* March 1919. pp. 170-179.

¹⁷ Marshall Harris has proposed "A New Agricultural Ladder" on which the rungs are heavily intra-family compared with the original. Harris, Marshall. A new agricultural ladder. *Land Econ.* 26: 258-266. Aug. 1950.

¹⁸ T. Lynn Smith has expressed essentially this point, citing the persistence for centuries of the Jews and Spanish Americans in urban environments which "suggest(s) that only the possession of strong family organization enables a society to cope successfully with the perplexing problems of urbanization." Smith, T. Lynn. The sociology of rural life (rev. ed.). Harper & Bros., N.Y. 1957. page 382.

¹⁹ Sanderson, Dwight. Rural sociology and rural social organization. John Wiley and Sons, Inc., N.Y. 1942. Ch. 25, pp. 587-610.



their siblings, their choice of informal associates and their greater formal social participation and leadership. These findings point to the relationship between family affiliation and social rank and to the correctness of Sanderson's assertion that "there are more class distinctions due to family ties in almost every older rural community than is apparent to the outsider."²⁰

The most rigid form of social stratification is the caste, for in a caste system "there is no opportunity for members of the lower groups to rise into the upper groups or for the members of the upper to fall into the lower ones."²¹ If one evaluates the occupational prospects of these 100 married hired men from the theory of caste, expecting that no farm wage worker would ever

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 602-603.

²¹ Warner, W. L. American caste and class. *Amer. Jour. Soc.* 42:234. Sept. 1936.

become a farm operator, he finds considerable rural social mobility. If one evaluates the occupational prospects of these wage workers with the expectation that every hired man "should some day fulfill his hope to become a farm operator, so far as upward mobility within the farming occupation is concerned one finds considerable rigidity of social classes."²²

²² The belief that they could rise to a higher tenure status was strong in the thinking of the hired men interviewed. This hope for ultimate self-employment appeared to be a state of mind incongruous with the reality within which it found itself, for employers, farm operators in the community and even individual hired men estimating the chances of most other farm laborers were pessimistic. Yet almost every hired man wanted to become a farm operator. Many were confident that they would start for themselves rather soon. The hope of becoming self-employed farmers seems to be what keeps many of the hired men in agriculture.

Most of the 100 farm wage workers interviewed did not refer to themselves as "farmers," in spite of the fact that they worked full time in farming. Probably they regard self-employment as a more important part of being a farmer than the fact that they worked full-time tending animals and plants and operating farm machinery.