

County Consolidation and Reorganization In Nevada

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FOREWORD

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COUNTY CONSOLIDATION AND REORGANIZATION IN NEVADA

I. INTRODUCTION

With but a general knowledge of the State of Nevada and local conditions in its various counties, this study represents an effort to work out some system of reducing the number of counties, and at the same time move certain county boundary lines so that outstanding examples of incorrectly attached areas are eliminated.

Although the information contained herein is of general nature, it is believed to be accurate information, and broad enough to provide for a very general study of the subject. Further research and field work in all counties would be necessary to provide the State with an absolutely accurate and detailed study of the situation. In most cases use has been made of existing boundaries, so as not to blur the reader's vision of the general changes suggested. Extensions of existing boundary lines have been made so that the picture presented is not a complete one, but one that can be easily grasped and retained.

If a thorough study were made of county reorganization, many minor and perhaps a few major changes would result so that the map as it now stands would be considerably changed in many localities. However, it appears that those changes would not be great enough to change the generalities presented by word and map in this preliminary study. Although it is recognized that a minimum of about 30,000 people is required for efficient county government, Nevada presents problems in sparse population and great distances that might alter this national figure by at least 50 percent in some cases. The minimum of nine counties arrived at in this study probably will not change with a detailed study of the situation, unless an effort is made to reduce the number of counties to four or five, which would mean that boundaries could be drawn anywhere.

It is evident that reduction in the number of counties in Nevada is not to simplify the work of future map makers, but to render a vast saving to the taxpayers of the State itself. It is only natural to expect that a reduction in the number of county staffs and buildings and equipment used by counties will save dollars from the start. It is true that some counties will have to enlarge their staff and equipment to cope with the administration of territories attached to them, but this enlargement, in no conceivable instance, can swallow up the saving in the abolishing of entire county organizations. Working with greater sources of funds, and a more contiguous and compact area, counties should experience much greater efficiency in their assessment, highway, school, and many other aspects of administration. It is especially burdensome for taxpayers in counties with small populations and small assessed valuation to have to pay for the luxury of an antiquated and inefficient system of government at the county level.

An effort has been made to consider with equal degree such factors as economics, community interests, distances, geography and terrain,

over-all balance and continuity of area, and political factors which might lead to rejection of parts or all of the plan. If the plan were adopted in its entirety it is quite likely that Nevada would need no new taxes for many years, and might enjoy even more and elaborate services to its people for the same amount of tax money now being disbursed. It is even possible that tax rates could be lowered everywhere in the State and still we would be able to afford more service to the people than they now enjoy under an archaic system of county government.

The principal bar to consolidation of counties, in the sense that it is doubtful that anyone would campaign in a given county for abolition of the county, is section 36 of Article IV of the Constitution of the State of Nevada, which became a part of the Constitution in 1940. The section reads as follows:

SEC. 36. The Legislature shall not abolish any county unless the qualified voters of the county affected shall at a general or special election first approve such proposed abolishment by a majority of all the voters voting at such election. The Legislature shall provide by law the method of initiating and conducting such election.

II. SOUTH-CENTRAL REORGANIZATION AND CONSOLIDATION

Starting with one of the most obvious corrections in county reorganization, attention is given first to south-central Nevada where Tonopah and Goldfield are found as county seats of Nye and Esmeralda Counties, respectively. Legislative action has cut the area of Esmeralda County to the point where it does not encompass sufficient area to find itself with any logical degree of assessed valuation upon which to tax for operation. The problem becomes increasingly obvious when we consider that Esmeralda's only railroad has been dismantled recently. Let us consider the county from another viewpoint—that of its county seat and its accessibility to the residents of Esmeralda County. Residents of the Fish Lake Valley region and the northern part of the county must go first to Tonopah, and then proceed to Goldfield. As the distance from Goldfield to Tonopah is only twenty-six miles, it, therefore, seems that the other residents of the county from Goldfield and the few points farther south might well transact their business in Tonopah with even less inconvenience than many of the residents of Esmeralda County now experience. Tonopah stands on the very edge of the boundary line between Nye and Esmeralda Counties, and is very well situated to serve the entire area of Esmeralda County even better than it now serves much of its own county. The two counties have the same economic interests of mining and range agriculture. It is, therefore, obvious that for the sake of efficiency and economy the entire area of Esmeralda County should be attached to Nye County.

This does not completely solve the problem in this part of the State, because there are vast areas of present Nye County which cannot be properly administered because of their great distance from Tonopah, the county seat. To somewhat balance the annexation of an entire

county to Nye, and at the same time render more efficient and economical county service to other residents of south-central Nevada, we must relocate the boundary lines of present Nye County. Our first step is to cut off the southern portion of Nye County and attach it to Clark County. The only paved highway available to the average resident of this area is U. S. Highway No. 95 into Las Vegas. The Pahrump Valley area of southern Nye is much closer to Las Vegas via this highway than it is to Tonopah. This is so with most of the rest of the area south of the Third Standard Parallel South, and for this reason this has been selected as the southern limits of Nye County. As a matter of fact, the parallel crosses Highway No. 95 at a point about equidistant between Las Vegas and Tonopah. It will be noted that the Third Standard Parallel South is a westward extension of the present Clark-Lincoln boundary line.

In still another portion of Nye County we find ranches and cattle areas which are much closer to the Lincoln County seat of Pioche. Not only are these areas closer to that county seat, but they are economically a part of that county. Cattle grazing in the area of the White River Valley are owned mostly by Lincoln County men. The residents of this area petitioned the Legislature some years ago to be attached to Lincoln County. It is very difficult for highway crews from Nye County to operate in that remote corner and to properly service the roads that do exist in the area. Even geographically we find that the Grant and Quinn Canyon Ranges practically cut this area from Nye county, and for this reason those ranges have been selected to represent the eastern boundary of Nye County in that area.

Where Nye County extends to the White Pine County boundary, we find a situation where people are living much closer to the county seat at Ely. The travel distance to Ely is but one-third that of a trip to Tonopah; consequently, most of these residents trade in Ely rather than Tonopah. It is, therefore, logical to attach the area to White Pine County. Since there are but few residents to the west of the Pancake Range, we have not gone to the extreme of locating a point equidistant between Ely and Tonopah for boundary purposes.

Let us now look at our newly-arranged portion of south-central Nevada. We find that our county seat of Nye County with its new boundaries is located reasonably close to the geographic center of the county and very close to the population center. At least, the old system of two county seats with their illogical locations has been very largely improved upon. The question might be asked in rebuttal, would it be more desirable to preserve the two counties as they are, and to designate other towns more readily accessible to the people as county seats? The answer is a simple one; there are no other towns which would be close enough to the centers of population, and certainly none located on main lines of travel should they prove to be in that mathematical position.

What about the assessed valuation of Nye County with its new boundaries? Will it lose or gain by having areas cut from it and one county attached to it? Estimated valuations as of July 1948 are as follows:

| | |
|------------------------|-------------|
| Present valuation..... | \$4,600,000 |
| New valuation..... | 5,500,000 |

It is obvious that Nye County will, therefore, become more self-supporting, and easier to manage and administer. Conveniences rendered to its present residents and vast savings in over-all county cost of government make this move not only feasible but necessary for efficiency and economy.

III. CENTRAL REORGANIZATION AND CONSOLIDATION

Central Nevada offers another possibility for economy in county government. Neither Lander nor Eureka County possess sufficient population to justify maintaining county governments. It is regrettable that population centers are far apart, as in Lander County, where the situation is obvious. In Eureka County there is a similar situation with a north and south center of population, both many miles apart. Even if most of the people of each of these counties lived in one town in their respective counties, it would be difficult to justify the maintenance of theoretical towns. It might well be that a county could be maintained for Lander and Eureka Counties *combined* if there were to be found a town of sufficient size located near the population center of such a combined county, and fairly accessible to the rest of the towns. But such is obviously not the case. Is it possible to dissolve these counties, and render more convenient and efficient county government to its residents without working a hardship on the majority? The following is offered as a sensible solution to this problem.

An examination of the Battle Mountain area and the valley to the south indicates that for many years the people of this area have been strongly tied to Winnemucca because of geographic conditions. The distance to Winnemucca is almost half the distance to Austin, the Lander County seat. In addition, road conditions have been an important factor. Paved highways and railroads have linked this area strongly, overshadowing even the mileage factor. No effort has been made to attach any of the area of northern Lander to Pershing County because of the difficulties that would arise in traveling to the Pershing County seat. The attachment of Lander County to Churchill County is admittedly a harder choice in that the residents of Austin would have to travel to Fallon on county matters. However, the trip over the paved U. S. Highway No. 50 connecting Austin and Fallon probably would induce less grumbling than now arises when the residents of Battle Mountain travel over the unpaved trail that leads to their county seat at Austin.

It is to be noted that an effort has been made to keep a continuous north-south line in dividing these counties among their neighbors. This line was not picked at random, but only after careful study of the region through which it passes. It crosses Highways No. 40 and No. 50 at points which are equidistant between Winnemucca and Elko, and between Fallon and Ely, which would be continued as county seats. Thus, people living along these highways, or adjacent to them, will travel to their nearest county seat with maximum convenience. In addition, it is to be noted that the line passes through high mountain areas, leaving valley undivided between counties, and simplifying assessment problems.

The southeastern part of Lander and the southern part of Eureka

have been attached to White Pine County. At the present time the town of Eureka is within a few miles of White Pine County, and the remaining parts of the southern half of the county are closer to Ely than to Elko. Without making a detailed study, and for the sake of simplicity, the White Pine-Elko boundary was extended in a westerly direction to the north-south line previously mentioned. Northern Eureka County and northeastern Lander County have been attached to Elko County because of distance factors, and because they are attached to Elko County economically and geographically by the valley of the Humboldt River. The north-south line cuts the irrigated lands of the Humboldt River at a point equidistant between Elko and Winnemucca with reference to highway mileages.

IV. WESTERN REORGANIZATION AND CONSOLIDATION

The attachments and annexations so far discussed are heavily involved with the distance factor, which is almost everywhere a dominant factor in Nevada, a land of great distances. We now turn to a county where distances become decreasingly important because of its small size and proximity to large cities. Storey County, conjured up out of the political dealings and imagination of Senator Stewart, has long ceased to be a necessary separate political unit except in a traditional sense, and the attachment of this county to another, and its complete dissolution, would render very slight inconveniences because of the small distances involved. The entire area of Storey County should be attached to Washoe County for the following reasons: There are only two population centers in the county, that of Virginia City and that area along the Truckee River. Both of these are strongly tied in an economic sense with Reno and to consider them a part of any other county would be disregarding that fact. It cannot be assumed that Carson City, Yerington, Minden, or Fallon (county seats of near-by weaker counties) will attract much wholesale or distributive business away from Reno, and thereby be a justification for attaching Virginia City to counties that are weaker than powerful Washoe County. It appears that the logical choice is Washoe County.

In the northern part of Washoe County there is an area which has long been isolated from its county seat at Reno, and compensation for the attachment of Storey County to Washoe County may be made by alleviating the existing condition in the Vya area. Thus, while we add to Washoe County, we also subtract from it. This portion of Washoe County should be attached to Humboldt County because of the shorter distance to Winnemucca, and also because of the highway connecting the area to Winnemucca now under construction. Perhaps economic interests are tied more closely to Winnemucca than to Reno, and will continue to grow after the highway is complete, because Winnemucca's cattle interests are similar to those of the Vya area. It must be remembered that this part of Washoe County became a part of Washoe County only because there was no other place to attach that portion of Roop County, when said county was abolished, and when the Susanville area was found to be in California. So our former lawmakers did not envision Washoe County extending to Oregon when they laid out the State at the beginning.

It may be that a reduction of four more counties would achieve additional efficiency in county government in Nevada if things were carried to a logical conclusion. For political reasons, Senator Stewart obtained the division of the western part of Nevada into many small counties. Let us examine the remaining two small counties of Ormsby and Douglas. All of Ormsby County and most of Douglas County lie within the strong economic sphere of Reno, and the valleys between the Sierras and the Pinenut Range fall into one united geographic series of small valleys. Agricultural and town interests are akin in these valleys and the reason for their division among many counties is found only in the history of the State. Using economic and geographical common sense, and disregarding traditional boundaries, it is obvious that all of the area west of the Pinenut Range and north of Antelope Valley should be united with Washoe County, thereby creating some semblance of order out of chaos.

Some might ask why not combine all these smaller counties into one large county by itself, and not attach to an already powerful county? A study of the matter indicates that to combine Storey, Ormsby, Douglas, and Lyon Counties creates a distance problem, aggravated by the fact that there is no town that could be designated as the county seat near the center of such a combination. In a county of this nature, all important towns would be located around the perimeter of the county. To get from the farthest one to any one of them chosen as county seat would work a hardship upon many people. It appears more advisable to attach them to stronger counties than try to arrange them all within a new county. Lyon County is large enough to remain a county with some revisions. Consideration must be given to the situation of several small counties united into one county, each of them having been about equal in strength before consolidation. In many matters of county government there might still be a sectional feeling about their particular area, ranging all the way from choosing the county seat to deciding what roads should be paved or which schools improved. Whereas, if they were abolished and became a part of a strong county, they might operate as a healthy balance to a powerful urban group in that strong county, which would tend toward sensible county government.

In preserving Lyon County, but dissolving Mineral County, vast changes in county boundaries have been made. Northern Lyon County has been cut off and placed with Churchill County because this area is closer to Fallon and has easy highway connections thereto. This eliminates the situation where Fernley people must travel to the county seat at Yerington, a greater distance than to Fallon. The Fernley and Fallon areas have a common agricultural interest and a similar irrigation system. The area around Dayton and Silver City has been awarded to Washoe County because this area falls within the scope of the western slope of the Pinenut Range. Distances are also shorter for these people to Reno, and their interests and location in relation to Reno are similar to those of Ormsby and Storey Counties. Eastern and southern Douglas County has been attached to Lyon County because this area lies east of the Pinenut Range and geographically belongs with Lyon County. The Antelope Valley region of Douglas County has been attached to Lyon County because it is closer to Yerington than to Reno, local interests are akin to Yerington,

and the region has a similar irrigation district on a common river, the Walker River.

The remaining part of Lyon County has been enhanced in area by the attachment of most of Mineral County, thus replacing railroad assessed valuation lost in north Lyon County. The southeastern limits of Lyon County have been drawn at a point which is approximately halfway between Tonopah and Yerington, the county seats that would remain. This line also follows highland in the area, thus placing range lands wholly within one or the other county, and avoiding the split proposition existing in many parts of the State. Luning and Mina have been placed in Nye County because the area is closer to Tonopah than to Yerington, and also the mining interests in this area are akin to those of Tonopah. Since the Hawthorne area is closer to Yerington than to any other county seat that would continue to exist, logic demands that the area be attached to Lyon County, when and if Mineral County is dissolved.

Our last revision concerns the enlargement of Humboldt and Churchill counties and the abolition of Pershing County. This can be done in the following manner: Let us start where we left off in Mineral County, where we did not discuss the northeast portion of that county. An extension of the Lyon-Churchill boundary line in a southeasterly direction follows roughly the Gabbs Valley Range and is a good extension as far as range lands are concerned. The part of Mineral County thus cut off should be attached to Churchill County because of the accessibility of this "Rawhide" area by feeder road to U. S. Highway No. 95 into Fallon. At the same time, the northwest tip of Nye County should be annexed to Churchill County, since this area is much closer to Fallon by feeder road than to Tonopah over the wandering Highway No. 95 through the Coaldale area. This would place all of Gabbs Valley in one county. We have already mentioned the southwestern portion of Lander County and its annexation to Churchill County. We have reconstructed the Washoe-Churchill line so as to throw Wadsworth into its common interests with Fernley and the Fallon area, and cut a small portion of Storey so that it falls within this common sphere. This north-south line is approximately equidistant between Reno and Fallon, distances as well as community interests and economics being factors here.

Lovelock and Fallon have like agricultural interests and should be kept within the same county if any split is made of Pershing County. A large factor in the split of Pershing from Humboldt in 1919 was this difference in interests between Winnemucca and Lovelock, the former with mining and range interests and the latter with irrigated ranch interests. To tie them again might not be logical; an effort should be made to attach the Lovelock area to an area of common interest. Another matter that should be kept in mind in connection with this problem is the fact that eventually a paved road may be constructed from Lovelock to Fallon, thereby binding the areas even closer together. The balance of Pershing County has been given back to Humboldt County because of the proximity of the Humboldt County seat to that part of Pershing County. Roads running north and south in eastern Pershing County provide better contact with the Winnemucca area than is provided by the greater distances and poorer roads to the Fallon county seat. Interests in eastern Pershing

County are akin to those of Winnemucca in that they are of a mining and range nature.

This leaves a total of nine counties whose assessed valuations are of more nearly equal amounts. Because of shifts in boundaries more people would be closer to a county seat, and counties would be able to give them more efficient service at less over-all cost. Those people who would now find they are farther away from county seats have sacrificed convenience for the benefit of the vast majority of the people of the State, but would have gained for themselves a less-costly and more efficient county government. There is little sense in living a few blocks from a county court house if the luxury means increased expense and less efficiency in government at the county level.

Approximate new county assessed valuations would be as follows:

| County | Present* | New† |
|-----------------|---------------|---------------|
| Churchill..... | \$11,000,000 | \$21,000,000 |
| Clark..... | 52,041,000 | 52,500,000 |
| Douglas..... | 4,750,000 | |
| Elko..... | 40,600,000 | 48,000,000 |
| Esmeralda..... | 1,656,000 | |
| Eureka..... | 6,700,000 | |
| Humboldt..... | 15,680,000 | 29,000,000 |
| Lander..... | 6,250,000 | |
| Lincoln..... | 9,600,000 | 10,000,000 |
| Lyon..... | 8,767,000 | 11,000,000 |
| Mineral..... | 6,000,000 | |
| Nye..... | 4,600,000 | 6,000,000 |
| Ormsby..... | 3,665,000 | |
| Pershing..... | 13,700,000 | |
| Storey..... | 2,085,000 | |
| Washoe..... | 75,000,000 | 83,000,000 |
| White Pine..... | 22,000,000 | 24,000,000 |
| Totals..... | \$284,094,000 | \$284,500,000 |

*Estimated as of July 1948. †Estimated.

V. COUNTIES AND THEIR GOVERNMENT

The Legislative Counsel compiled statistics from County Auditors' reports on total county disbursements for all counties in Nevada during the fiscal year 1946-1947, as follows:

| | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Churchill..... | \$711,234.61 |
| Clark..... | 3,742,795.64 |
| Douglas..... | 218,914.90 |
| Elko..... | 1,357,537.35 |
| Esmeralda..... | 98,504.65 |
| Eureka..... | 180,573.27 |
| Humboldt..... | 755,162.93 |
| Lander..... | 249,470.55 |
| Lincoln..... | 519,282.07 |
| Lyon..... | 510,531.61 |
| Mineral..... | 626,513.53 |
| Nye..... | 352,282.53 |
| Ormsby..... | 232,392.57 |
| Pershing..... | 516,049.13 |
| Storey..... | 103,679.27 |
| Washoe..... | 4,116,909.02 |
| White Pine..... | 921,206.70 |
| Total..... | \$15,213,040.33 |

During the same fiscal year of 1946-1947 the Report of the State Controller indicated that total disbursements for the State government amounted to \$16,954,106.41. This means that the 140,000 people in the State of Nevada were supporting a government at the State and county level whose combined disbursements amounted to \$32,167,146.74. It is to be noted that disbursement figures given in the State Controller's Report and reports of the County Auditors include various off-sets, transfers, etc., and, consequently, actual expenditures may be several million dollars less at each level of government.

If, during the fiscal year 1946-1947, nine sets of county officials had been functioning instead of seventeen, it would appear that a very conservative estimate would indicate a saving of at least one-twentieth over the total amount disbursed, or a saving of \$500,000, to \$1,000,000.

But, consolidation of counties might not be the only thing to strive for. Since the Second World War there has been a Nation-wide revival of interest in good government. Scores of municipalities have rid themselves of outdated charters and adopted the council-manager plan. Sickness in local government is padding the tax bill and cheating the people of good service. "Sickness" does not mean corruption or waste, but simply that counties are muddling along with antiquated systems—county officials do not have modern organizational tools with which to work.

The National Municipal League of New York has gathered extensive information on the consolidation of counties and the reorganization of county governments. In general, the problems facing Nevada counties are no different than those facing other counties in the

United States. The National Municipal League, in its pamphlet entitled "The County Manager Plan," remarks as follows:

Our local self-governing system is the foundation of our democracy. It is only natural to fear that the tendency toward centralizing power in State and National governments might ultimately destroy the democratic processes.

Merely expressing this fear solves nothing. Strong local governments are not created by criticizing central governments. Local governments cannot be strong today organized and operating much as they were in the nineteenth century. The first line of defense for local governments is their efficiency. If they can be organized so as to perform essential services capably, the centralizing movement can be stopped and the people can be served better.

Our cities have already blazed the trail. Shortly after the beginning of this century, cities began to tackle the problem of correcting the loose-jointed condition of their governments. The centering of responsibility in a qualified administrator appointed and controlled by the legislative body was a sound, democratic, and successful cure. This plan, called the council-manager plan, is the most effective of governmental set-ups for cities, and before 1945 was in use in more than 600 communities and a few counties. This plan has the approval of political scientists and administrative authorities generally, and seems destined to become the standard plan for American cities. Counties can learn from this extensive municipal experience and can save themselves by following the example.

Increasingly, counties are becoming aware of their plight. During 1944 Warwick County, Virginia, became the eleventh county manager county in the United States. Oregon, in November 1944, cleared away a constitutional barrier by adopting an amendment enabling the Legislature to provide the county manager plan as an optional form of county government. The demand for the modernization of county administration is widespread and growing.

Counties are potentially important units of government. Clerical and recording functions, protection and judicial duties, education, welfare, health, highways and agriculture extension are some of their major responsibilities. But some functions, traditionally those of counties, have shown a tendency to become centralized in the State and National governments. Here is the main dispute. Are counties capable of administering a significant part of these activities?

The ordinary form of county government provides for some elective officials, some appointive. The power of appointment is sometimes vested in county officials, frequently not. The district judge or a State agency commonly appoints certain county officers. The elective officials make a long list; a board of commissioners or supervisors, judge, attorney, sheriff, clerk, treasurer, auditor, assessor, register

of deeds, surveyor, coroner, superintendent of schools, and sometimes others.

As a form of government—if, indeed, so formless and ramshackle a thing can be said to have a form—it is distinguished from the best practice in other governmental units by four characteristics: Lack of any central executive, popular election of numerous administrative officers, dispersion of the appointment power in many different hands and among several levels of government, and limited discretion of the board over allocation of funds and over policy generally.

Most counties have no president, no governor or mayor, no office remotely comparable to any of these. The resulting situation is similar to that of a business corporation with a board of directors but no general manager, a school district without a superintendent of schools, a department store with department heads but no manager, a city with neither manager nor mayor, a State without a governor.

Many of the county's administrative officers are elected. This means that technical work requiring highly developed professional ability, such as building and maintaining highways and roads, the assessment of property, law enforcement, the handling of finance, is under the supervision of persons whose only qualification for their jobs may be political connections or personal popularity.

Moreover, the occasional elected administrator who happens to be competent to carry out his job is limited in his powers to do his work, for county officers usually have little discretion over the work they do and have no appointive power beyond their own assistants and clerical staffs—and even that is frequently dictated by a "political leader." The resulting predicament is similar to that of any manager who cannot hire or fire his subordinates.

The county board holds the purse strings. The other officers must come to it hat in hand once a year for money; but they come strong in the knowledge that their salaries or fees are fixed by law, anyway; that in fixing the appropriation the supervisors have little discretion. Indeed, it is more usual for each officer to run his office according to his own lights. His only contact with the board may be when vouchers, covering expenditures already made, are presented for the board's audit and approval, such piecemeal action being about as near to a budget and an appropriation as a typical county board ever gets.

Individual board members have power to annoy the other county officers, so it pays the latter to keep friendly. But the board as a whole would be helpless and ineffective if it attempted to utilize its power of the purse to enforce economy and efficiency among its independently elected associates. Each can rightly claim a "mandate from the people." Moreover, being a board—a board that meets once a month or once a quarter—it is quite unable to operate as an executive

or follow its resolutions through to secure wholehearted compliance.

In principle and in practice, as abundant experience in almost any county will attest, each elective officer is in effect an independent government in himself. The typical county is not a government but a headless collection of six or more government-ettes.

The county board cannot even control those officers who are appointed. It is given, usually, only a small portion of the entire appointment power. District and county judges are given control over several appointments. State agencies, anxious to expand their control over local administration, appoint others. As a matter of fact, many State officials look upon counties as mere administrative districts in which they have field officers that they control. Thus, for example, the State Department of Education seeks control over the county superintendent of schools, the State Department of Welfare over county welfare work, the State Department of Highways over the county engineer, and the State Department of Health over the county health officer.

It is obvious that such practices tend to prevent counties from being real units of local self-government. There is no coordination of county activities at the county level. When there is a controversy between county officers, their only common superior to which they can appeal is the remote State Legislature or administration. The Legislature by law may, for example, settle the issue of what salary a sheriff may pay his wife for services as cook in the county jail. Or the State may have to settle conflicts between health and welfare policies in the county.

Starting with the county board, let's reorganize the county on modern lines to see how it would look.

The county board ought to have a county-wide viewpoint. To eliminate such common abuses as log-rolling, trading, mulcting of the city by the rural towns, and similar evils, the board should be elected at large.* Its membership should not be too large—five, seven, nine, or eleven—to avoid a long ballot and the consequent obscuring of responsibility. The board of supervisors should appoint a county manager, a professional public administrator.

In a small county there may be little reason why one person cannot be treasurer and county clerk and register of deeds and court stenographer, no reason why the road commissioner cannot also do the work of the surveyor and be helpful at court. Indeed, administratively, the manager himself may be almost "the whole works."

In a larger county he may act as sheriff and supervise all the rest of the county administration without being overworked.

In a still larger county, with fifty or a hundred employees,

*Election at large by proportional representation helps safeguard minorities.

he can save his salary many times a year by expressing in daily contact with the staff the demand of the public for efficiency and economy, and exercising practical controls to those ends.

Under this plan all fees should go into revenue and pay should be according to work done regardless of whether one office shows a profit and the next a loss. Employees should be shifted from one department to another as work varies, and should be kept at work full time.

Without a central executive with power to direct, to appoint, to remove and to discipline, such flexible and economical practice is impossible.

Leaving the various officers separately elected would make the manager a useless spectator of their work. The county board, even if it appointed all the administrative officials, could not by resolutions and intermittent joint action at its infrequent meetings operate the mechanism without an executive to follow up its decisions; a board cannot be an executive. But the moment an executive is installed with appropriate authority, including power to appoint subordinates, there is organization, one government, a unit capable of coordinated and orderly effort.

A county adopting such a plan of government could hardly fail to increase the efficiency of its offices, save money, and give better service. * * *

It might seem remarkable that, despite a generation of urging by authorities on governmental organization and local civic leaders, and despite its already demonstrated effectiveness, the manager plan should be in operation by 1945 in no more than eleven counties in the United States. But this slow progress in bringing light to "the dark continent of American politics" is in part a "tribute" to the bitter and steadfast opposition of entrenched politics and in part the result of popular indifference or lack of information.

Indeed, the success of the few places which have tried it is dramatic. Interest in multiplying this success is widespread and many civic groups are continuing the fight against constitutional barriers, political special privilege, adverse judicial decisions, and general inertia.

The adoption of a manager plan, although a large step in the right direction, does not necessarily solve all governmental problems of a county. In many metropolitan areas it obviously would be desirable to consolidate city and county governments and the many governments of the satellite suburbs. Denver is an example of this. In sparsely populated rural areas, some counties have found it best to revert to unorganized status and have the State or adjacent counties administer the few necessary services. It has been suggested that a population of at least 30,000 to 35,000 is needed for maximum service at minimum cost. Three-fourths of the counties in the United States fail to meet this standard. Thus consolidation may help to solve the problems of many

counties. Recognizing this need, in some cases several counties have formed larger districts to administer such activities as health.

Nevertheless, small Petroleum County, Montana, with a population of less than 1,200, has provided an excellent example of successful operation of the county manager plan.

The functioning of a county manager form of government can be helped in another way. Not all governmental problems are structural. Citizens must be alert and demand that the tools of government be used in the best way. The best form of government should be supplemented by an active citizenry.

The need for an alert citizenry was demonstrated by the experience of San Mateo County, California, which had the county manager plan from 1933 to 1937. After initial success, the reform groups lost control, and politics entered the picture, making such bad news that the plan was abandoned in 1937.

What the county manager plan does do is to release alert citizens and competent administrators from outmoded organization and traditional bad habits.

If counties once became efficiently organized and capable of taking on large tasks, they would speedily become great rural municipalities, solving many of the social problems of country life and bringing to rural dwellers many of the benefits of modern science which cities give to their people and which will be increasingly demanded by county dwellers as urban populations continue to disperse. For many activities, the county is the natural unit. The State is too big, too remote; the township and village are too small to be able to command expert service. But the county, frequently comparable in population and in many of its problems to a city, could be a practicable working unit for real service of the kind the city man gets.

Public health is one field in which the remodeled county can be effective. The health department of a county can have a trained administrator, a laboratory, field nurses, a sanitary engineer, a policy of systematic attack on disease—and a lower death rate. It is not generally realized that rural regions frequently have a higher death rate than the city, that a child's statistical chances of living are better in the slums of New York City than in, let us say, the Arkansas mountains, thanks to the city's modern health services.

For *hospitals* the county is again the natural unit. If the city builds the hospital the surrounding countryside will come to it for its human repairs, anyway. This does not mean that the county must have just one hospital—it may require several—but the problem of their strategic location so that any mother in childbirth, for instance, can be rushed to an operating table, if necessary, is a proper county matter.

The county already is the unit for *welfare administration*. In several States counties administer the categorical aids

program of the Social Security Act besides administering relief.

For *education* the county should be used more than in the past. It may often be the appropriate unit for high schools, technical schools, adult education, public libraries, and recreation.

The efficient county could plan its *roads* on an economic rather than a political basis.

It could provide *technical and marketing* services for farmers in intimate extension and local application of the more general work done by the State and Federal governments. The extension service is tackling the problem, but this is an aspect of government that is local in character, and should receive greater attention.

The county is the logical unit for *assessment* to end the loose habits of the too neighborly town assessors and the inter-town bargaining over "equalization."

There should be growth in functions at the expense of the village and township units. The county road engineer, more expert than the amateur committee of the village, should build the village roads in many cases or provide technical advice.

It is not a specific picture, this rural municipality of tomorrow; it cannot be, for all counties cannot grow in exactly the same way.

Mr. Harry Allen, Director of the Nevada Taxpayers' Association, has suggested that the Legislature allow counties to pool certain of their functions and resources in intercounty cooperation plans, and that constitutional provisions requiring a uniform system of county government throughout the State be changed to permit other types of administrative set-ups wherever feasible. In discussing these proposals, he has explained the possibility that legislation might be enacted to permit county commissioners to meet with neighboring commissioners and work out their mutual problems collectively on a common basis. For example, highway maintenance equipment could be paid for and used by two or three counties, libraries could serve more than one district, and county hospitals might be made available on a joint county basis. These suggestions should be carried into effect to the fullest extent possible, not only to promote efficiency and reduce costs of operation, but as the first step towards full cooperation and mutual understanding between counties.

