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"LOCAL GOVERNMENT"

Report of a demonstration in public discussion,
held during Farm and Home Week,
College of Agriculture, Madison--February 2, 1934.

The Program

The program that was followed and the persons who took part in the program were as follows:

Chairman: H. L. Ewbank
Department of Speech
University of Wisconsin

- I. Discussion topic: "Local Government"*
1. The forms of county government in the U. S. and the changes that are under way.
--Mrs. Gertrude Anderson
 2. The work of the county board of supervisors.
--G. H. Stehr
 3. How the commissioners run the county.
--G. J. Justus
 4. Politics and efficiency of the commission form of government.
--Henry Sillman
 5. Comparison of the commission and the supervisory forms of county government.
--B. L. Murch
 6. The merits of the county manager form of government as compared to the commission and supervisory forms.
--Mrs. Isabelle McCarthy

Three of these speakers have been selected to represent Dane County and three to represent Rusk County. Each speaker is allotted not to exceed ten minutes for his presentation.

- II. Questioning of Speakers and Discussion from the Floor.
- III. Summary of the Discussion.
- IV. Decision by the Judge with Reasons and Comments.
--Prof. Karl Windesheim--Dept. of Speech
University of Washington.

*Some suggestions for studying local town and county government and a bibliography of the materials in the field which was used in preparing this demonstration are given in a circular entitled Town and County Government by H. S. Merrill, George S. Wehrwein, A. F. Wileden, and H. L. Ewbank of the University of Wisconsin. Copies may be secured from the Dept. of Debating and Public Discussion, University Extension Division or the Department of Rural Sociology, College of Agriculture, Madison.

H. L. Ewbank (Chairman):

This meeting is serving a two-fold purpose. In the first place it is a demonstration of a type of program that we hope you will like so well that you will want to use it in some of your local organization meetings. It provides for the cooperative study of the topic concerning which the club desires information. The results of this study are presented in a series of informal talks, followed by informal discussion in which all present are given the opportunity to take part.

We are especially fortunate in our choice of the subject for this demonstration. Few of us are fully informed on the workings of our county government, and most of us have very little knowledge about the types of local government that exist in different parts of the country. This meeting will serve a second purpose in bringing us information that is both timely and valuable.

Three of our discussion leaders live in Dane County, under the supervisory system of county government. The other three have come all the way down from Rusk county to tell us about their experience with the commission form of government.

Each discussion leader will have a maximum of ten minutes. The timekeeper will give a warning signal at the end of eight minutes and again when the total time has expired. Following the six talks, we will have half an hour in which we will all join in the discussion.

The first step in the investigation of any subject should be to learn as much as possible about its history. So, to begin our discussion, Mrs. Gertrude Anderson will tell us something about the four different forms of county government.

The Forms of County Government in the U.S.

and What Changes are Under Way

Mrs. Gertrude Anderson
Basco, Wis.

The county has been called the "Jungle of American Government". In no other unit are there so many independent and irresponsible elective officials. As a result, county affairs in many parts of the country are extravagantly and corruptly managed. An examination into the records of a certain county in New York State recently revealed county expenditures for such things as solid sets of silver, table knives and forks, for certain officials. In a county in our own state, a very prominent official who had held office for many years committed suicide last summer because he could no longer conceal his guilt in the misappropriation of the people's money. More recently, we have been amazed at the number of unscrupulous men who had themselves appointed to act as distributors for the C.W.A. fund in various communities in order to use it for personal or political purposes. In Michigan there is scarcely a county which has not had some official scandal sometimes bordering on criminality.

These evils are but few of the examples we could find of the widespread conditions promoted by a confused and decentralized form of county government existing in practically every state in the Union. And yet, what does the term "county government" mean to you and me? I venture to say that until recently it meant nothing more than that once every two years we went to the polls in April and checked a long list of names of candidates who were running for county offices. After the election, if we were at all interested in the outcome, we merely wondered if the names we had so haphazardly checked, happened by chance to correspond with the names of the successful candidates. Why this utter lack of interest? Conditions were good. The majority of us had enough money to spend for food, clothing, shelter, and plenty for luxury. What did it matter what any unit of government did with our tax money?

But the depression has changed things--we have become anxious about the ways and means in which our tax money is being used, because we find it so hard to scrape it together. As a result we have become more than mildly interested in county government and the men who guide it. In other words, we have become "government conscious" and for this I say, "Thank God for the depression". With this new consciousness comes the realization that we know but very little about the mechanism or set-up of the county government machine. I shall try very briefly to outline the various forms of county government in the U. S. today, the need for change, and the changes which are already under way.

The county, which is the largest division of local government, exists in all states except Louisiana. However, there is a great difference in the relative importance of the county in different sections of the country. In New England, the township is the leading unit. In the South and in the West, there are some twenty-five states where the township exists in name only and the county is the important unit. In the centrally located states, 17 in all, around the Great Lakes and west to Montana, there are both townships and counties. However, in the northern states of this group the township is more important than the county and in the south central section, the township is subordinate to the county.

The most important organ of the county is, of course, the county board, which is to be found in every state except Rhode Island. There are two general types of boards. First there is the large board of supervisors representing the various townships in the country; second the small board of commissioners generally elected at large. There are many variations from these two general types.

Throughout the country within the past year, there seems to be a definite sort of expanding in the people's thinking along the lines of county government. We pay a lot for our love of tradition. It is queer how easily we can junk a 1928 automobile or discard out-of-date clothing, though it may be perfectly good, and yet how doggedly we have held onto a 17th century form of government which may have been all right in the days of the spinning wheel and seventeen petticoats, but now belongs in a museum along with George Washington's ensemble of silk stockings and knee breeches together with his carriage, coachmen and all other accoutrements of the epoch. That the county government we have persisted in hanging on to is archaic

and, therefore, defective has been proven by numerous surveys made of counties throughout the nation.

All of these surveys agree in at least four of the major defects. They are: 1st, the county lacks an executive; 2nd, the number of elective officials is too large; 3rd, its administrative methods are poor; and 4th, in many counties, the boards are too large to operate efficiently. With these defects in mind, let us see what definite progress has been made and is being made in county government throughout the nation. Realizing the need of a single responsibility at the head of the county unit, two counties in California and one in Virginia have adopted the county manager plan, 41 counties in 15 other states are considering it. This plan is undoubtedly the newest pattern in county government, it functions much as the city manager plan which operates in Janesville, and Beloit, and, as the clerk of San Mateo County, California, writes in a recent communication "It is the ideal plan of local government, if the people will keep the political boss and his dirty hands out of the dough."

Various remedies for the second defect, namely that the number of elective officials is too large are being tried. We find that in Missouri, West Virginia and in Ohio, certain county offices are consolidated. Consolidation of counties likewise would do away with a great number of elective officials in that the same number of officers required to do the work of one county would then do the work of two or three counties. Consolidation measures have been considered by at least 20 states, but as yet, the original 3072 counties in the U.S. still numbers 3069. Consolidation, therefore, seems to be still just in the minds of people rather than in legislative action.

Third, administrative methods are poor. In many counties in various states, methods are being improved by installing the budget system, centralizing the purchasing and using up-to-date accounting methods. In others, some of the functions of the county have been taken away entirely and given to the state. This is what Virginia and North Carolina have done with highways and schools. This leads us into another line of thought - may not the county disappear entirely? Don't you think with me that in a state the size of Rhode Island where the entire area is smaller than that of a county in the west, people could think in terms of state rather than country?

Fourth, many boards are too large. In Minnesota each county has five commissioners who are elected from districts. Even Hennepin county where Minneapolis is located has but five commissioners. In our own state, Rusk, Vilas, and Burnett Counties have adopted the commission form which reduces the membership of the boards by a large number. Reports from counties using the plan show that it works efficiently.

Changes are bound to come though ever so slowly. The old form of government in any unit, large or small, is on its last legs and the hullabaloo we witness today in Germany, Italy and Poland and even in our own glorious republic is but the death gurgle of an organism that has served its day of usefulness. A new social order is upon us and the old must get out. Social progress must not be thwart-

ed. If this is to be accomplished all forms of government as we know them today must pass off the stage. Perhaps to perform this huge task by beginning with county government may seem as impossible as trying to slaughter an elephant with peanut shells and our work at it may seem as ineffective as the efforts of a canary bird trying to chisel away the Rock of Gibraltar. In spite of that, it behooves you and me to study the possibilities for progress in county government because it is also true, that "Tiny strokes fell big oaks". In any case, even tho it be on a micro-metric scale, we must go FORWARD and not backward in our new awakening.

Mr. Ewbank (Chairman):

We are now ready to take up the different forms of county government so that we can consider the advantages and disadvantages of each. We in Wisconsin are most familiar with what we have called the supervisory system. Mr. G. H. Stehr, who has had first hand experience with this system, will tell us about the work of the county board.

The Work of the County Board of Supervisors.

G. H. Stehr,
Cottage Grove, Wis.

The work of the County Board of Supervisors consists of governing the County. Let us view briefly the procedure. At the spring election, the voters of each township, incorporated village, and city ward, elect a supervisor to represent them on the County Board, which in this county, consists of 81 members.

This body meets in three regular sessions during the year, but is subject to the call of the chairman at all times. Their pay is limited to 20 days for the year. The first of June session is the organization session, when the board elects its officers and organizes itself into a working unit. This is a five day session. The November meeting, a ten day session, is the business session when the budget must be prepared, taxes levied, etc. The January session of five days is mostly to gather up loose ends and wind up the business of the year as much as possible. Their first duty when this body meets to organize is to elect their officers. They then proceed to elect a committee on committees whose duty it is to appoint the members of the seventeen standing committees. As most of the work is done in these committees, I shall try to give you a brief summary of some of their most important duties.

The Highway Committee consists of three members who are elected by the County Board. It is their duty to buy and sell road machinery as authorized by the County Board, to determine whether state aid construction projects shall be let by contract or be done by day labor, and enter into proper contracts for the construction and maintenance of highways and bridges. They have a right to enter private lands with their employees and agents to remove weeds and brush and to erect snow fences, to keep the highways reasonably free of snow. They have supervision over the expenditures of all gas tax funds. They must meet from time to time at the County seat, and together with the County Clerk, audit all payrolls and material claims resulting from state aid highway work.

Let us take a certain project and view the methods by which it is put on its way to construction; for instance, a certain town wishes to build a highway. The town board estimates the cost at \$4,000. The first thing to be done is to draw up a resolution giving a proper description of this road and the nature of the work to be done, such as grading, draining, and surfacing, and the kind of material to be used in surfacing. It must carry an appropriation of \$2,000. This resolution must be voted on at the town meeting and if it is carried a certified copy must be submitted to the County Board, together with a petition asking them to appropriate a like amount of \$2,000. It is the duty of the Highway Committee to look over this project to determine whether the expenditure of this amount of money is justified. They will submit their report and findings to the County Board, and if favorable action is taken, the county will take over all funds and responsibility, build this highway, pay the bills, all under the supervision of the County Highway Committee.

The Finance Committee consists of nine members who shall set upon salary increases, additional employees, and act as an emergency board. It is their duty to prepare a budget, a copy of which shall be placed upon the desk of each supervisor on the first day of the November session. In preparing this budget each department head such as the County Clerk, Sheriff, Treasurer, etc., must hand in an estimate as to the amount of money he will need to defray the expenses of this office for the coming year. It is the duty of this committee to go over these estimates and raise or lower them as they see fit. If the County Board accepts this budget, the total sum of the estimates contained therein will be the amount of County tax to be levied against all the taxable property of the county.

The Auditing Committee consists of five members, one from each assembly district, one at large, and the chairman of the board ex-officio. It is their duty to audit all bills regardless of size, and no bill can be paid unless it has received their O.K. It shall not permit any officer or department to exceed their budget limit without authorization of the Finance Committee.

The County Buildings Committee consists of seven members, who shall have charge of repairs and maintenance of all county buildings and provide temporary quarters if needed.

The Welfare Committee consists of five members, one from each assembly district and two at large. They have supervision over all relief and relief workers.

These are the five basic committees and carry the burden of the work.

The Judiciary Committee to whom all matters of banking, bonds, and litigation must be referred, consists of nine members. All claims for damages done by dogs to sheep and other domestic animals must be referred to the chairman of this committee for investigation, if the amount claimed exceeds \$100.

The Taxation Committee has nine members. It is their duty to see that each municipality bears its just share of county tax.

The Legislation Committee. All matters relating to proposed or needed legislation shall be referred to this committee.

The Agricultural Committee consists of seven members. It is their duty to look after the interests of agriculture.

The Education Committee consists of five members, two from each Superintendent district and one at large. It is the duty of this committee to advise the board on matters pertaining to education and schools.

The Public Health Committee consists of five members. This committee shall direct the work of the county nurses and advise the board on matters pertaining to public health.

The Dance Hall Committee has general supervision over the dance hall ordinance and advises the county board on matters relating to dance halls, road houses, and other public places of amusement.

The Printing Committee lets the printing contracts and has supervision over all county printing matter.

The Mileage and Per Diem Committee audits and allows mileage and per diem for board meetings.

The Traffic Committee acts as an advisor to the highway committee on all matters relating to traffic supervision and control and shall aid in the appointing of motor cycle officers.

The Juvenile and Mothers' Pension Committee consists of three members, one from each assembly district. They must meet from time to time with the Juvenile Judge and assist him in the care of delinquent, neglected, and dependent children, and aid him in granting Mothers' pension.

After these committees have gone over their work thoroughly, they submit their reports to the board in session, together with such recommendations as they deem advisable. The board, after due discussion, votes to decide whether to accept or reject them. All these activities of course, are governed and limited by law.

After viewing the methods by which this work is done, you can readily see that if you elect honest, capable, and efficient supervisors, you are reasonably certain to receive a square deal as to the amount of the tax burden you shall bear, and also receive a fair share of the benefits which the county has to distribute.

In closing I would like to leave this thought with you. The work of the board can at times be very trying, as for instance when the cost of relief mounts by leaps and bounds and the amount of delinquent taxes rises at a faster pace. So do not be too hasty with your criticism as it might prove to be unjust.

Mr. Ewbank (Chairman):

I have recently learned that we now have three counties in Wisconsin with the commission form of government. Mr. C. J. Justus will tell us how this system works in one of these counties.

How the Commissioners Run the County

G. J. Justus
Holcombe, Wis.

Commission form of government, from the standpoint of economy, shows from our own experience, that there is a decided saving. In Rusk County, from 1922 to 1928, the County Board of Supervisors expended \$14,086.26. Under the new three (3) man commission from 1928 to 1933, the total expenses were \$8,640.24, saving of \$5,446. or an average of \$907.67 each year.

Under the fifty-fifty plan the county pays half of bridge and road construction and the town the other half. In 1927 the towns paid their share in full, but the county could not meet the appropriation and was behind \$8,285. In 1928 the commission form came in and in 1932 the county's deficit was only \$1,804. showing greater efficiency in handling highway matters. For road construction the deficit was \$22,840. in 1927, but by 1930 the county had paid up this sum and expended another \$7,268. At the present time there are no deficits in any of the highway accounts and the combined credits to that department are approximately \$15,000. This is a record any county might well be proud of.

In the bonded indebtedness, Rusk County has \$9,000. Compare this with some of the other counties. Last year we built a new bridge in Ladysmith, our county seat. The state highway engineer condemned the old bridge and figured that a new one would cost \$120,000 of which the County of Rusk and the City of Ladysmith would have to raise \$60,000. The commissioners turned down the proposition because they knew the county could not afford to pay that much money. The bridge job was then left to the lowest bidders and it cost \$73,000 and the state paid the entire cost.

From the standpoint of efficiency in operation, we also contend that a County Board of Commissioners is better than the Board of Supervisors. Under the old form, a careful and well-planned budget was almost impossible because of lack of cooperation among the members. As will be pointed out to you by a later speaker, each supervisor is a political officeholder out to get everything he can for his particular village, town or city ward so that he can corner enough votes to be reelected next spring. He certainly isn't going to vote for anything in the line of economies that will cause the loss of any of these votes.

When we have only three men who are dealing with the affairs of the county as a whole, there are no political favors to be considered and they work from the standpoint of what will benefit the entire county. Let me cite to you an example of how money is saved

today by our County Commissioners. A few months ago the Town of Grow raised \$2,000 at its annual meeting to build a new bridge and under the fifty-fifty plan the Town Board asked the County Commissioners to appropriate an equal amount. The County Commissioners refused to raise the amount and the bridge was repaired for \$175.00 and guaranteed by responsible engineers to last for 20 years. Another similar example occurred in the village of Hawkins. The village board asked for \$400. appropriation for a bridge. The County Commissioners were willing to appropriate the money but ordered the bridge inspected by the highway commissioner which was done and the bridge was repaired for \$66.00 and is good for another sixteen years. With the balance of the money one and one-half miles of road in the Town of Hawkins was gravelled. This certainly shows efficiency in handling expenses.

From the standpoint of responsibility to the people and the ability of the people to keep informed about their county government, we believe that a small body of commissioners is much better than the old large body of supervisors. Under the old system, the board met twice a year, committees were appointed according to political plan, proceedings of the board as a whole, discussions, etc. were published in the county papers and in the Official Proceedings of the Board. Probably the interests of a fair number of people were really aroused as to what actually was done. But after that, how many people bothered to find out what those committees did, how many meetings were held or if the members really performed their duties or not? By the time the next meeting rolled around, the people had forgotten all about the original issues and consequently very few had a clear understanding of just what laws were being made by the County Board.

Now let us see what happens under the three-man board. First they meet regularly twice a month and special meetings may be called at any time. Any citizen who has any business to take up or any questions to ask may attend the meetings. All current bills are audited and a full and complete account of all matters acted upon at the meeting is published in the county papers the following week. Consequently any citizen who wishes to be informed, has only to read and talk with some one who has attended the meetings. As in the case of the old board, there were too many people who had no understanding of government functions or who worked only from selfish or political motives. Many of these men had difficulty in keeping the affairs of their town straight. Responsibility for various departments was spread among too many people. With a three-member board, the entire board acts as a committee for each department. When trouble arises or information is desired, no one member can shirk or pass the responsibility on to another's shoulders.

* * *

Mr. Ewbank (Chairman):

Two questions that always arise concerning the small board or commission are: (1) Do political influences creep into the work of the board, and (2) Can the few commissioners do all the work of the county government efficiently? These questions will be discussed by Mr. Henry Sillman.

Politics and Efficiency of
the Commission Form of Government

Henry Sillman,
Ladysmith, Wis.

With the paying of taxes becoming more and more an exception than a general rule, governmental economy and efficiency are the topic of discussion everywhere today. As a consequence, many activities of our County Governments are either curtailed or entirely eliminated.

As soon as we are in a position to do so, we trade our old obsolete and inefficient car in on a new, modern, economical and efficient automobile. Is it not as logical for us to trade off our old-fashioned, obsolete and inefficient form of government for one that is modern, equitable, economical and efficient?

Take the Supervisor form of County Board. They give us every opportunity for inefficiency and needless waste. In the first place, the Supervisor Form of County Government does not give equitable representation. For example, in Rusk County we have several towns with around one hundred population. Under the Supervisor form of Government, the Town Chairman of such sparsely populated towns would have as much power in determining the policies and practices of the County as a Chairman of a Town with five hundred or a thousand population.

In such cases much "peanut politics" or political maneuvering, can and does take place in pairing with other Supervisors to steamroller projects through at the expense of the other Towns and the County.

The Town Chairmen have charge of spending funds appropriated for County projects in their respective towns. As a consequence, many Town Chairmen are in favor of high levies for the large sums of money it gives to spend, and the possibility of giving out jobs, thus creating political power.

Under the Commission plan, the towns are districted according to population, eliminating this evil.

In view of the fact that Supervisor County Boards are required to meet once, and do not meet over three or perhaps four times a year, much detailed work is allotted to committees. This creates a mad scramble for committee places in order to receive favors or be able to give them. With the Commission form of Government we have in Rusk County, this is eliminated by the Board being the one and only committee. With the Commissioner more remote from local influences, than is the case with the Supervisor, better and more capable men are elected to office.

I have known of men being elected to Town offices, not on their merits, not on their ability to perform in the interest of all concerned, but because the person needs the office for the wage it gives. Feature such a man serving on the County Board of Supervisors, running the affairs of the County when he is a failure in

his own business. They would merely be rubber stamps to the more aggressive leaders.

With three or four leaders running the Supervisor Board, why not adopt the Commission Form of County Board, and eliminate the "dead timber"?

The question immediately arises, has the Commission Form of County Board any effect or influence on the election of the other County Officers? No, the Commission Form of County Board merely reduces the number of men on the board. The other County Officers, as Sheriff, Treasurer, Superintendent of Schools, etc., etc., are elected as usual.

Another question which may frequently come up is, how is the County districted? The county is districted by the County Board, on the same basis as the states, Senatorial and Congressional Districts are divided; on the basis of the census as taken by the United States Government.

In voting for Commissioner, the voter only votes for the man representing his district.

A very gratifying example of speed and efficiency of the Commissioners is shown by the way the farmers feed loans were handled in Rusk County. The Commissioners laid out a program of road construction or rebuilding in various parts of the County and today almost all of the feed loans have been worked off. In an adjoining county, to my knowledge, nothing has been done in regard to working off the feed loans, up to the present time.

I have here an article appearing in a recent issue of Madison, Wisconsin, Capital Times which I will read in part:

"Rusk County saves 39% by Board change. If Dane County adopts the Commission Form of Government, it is reasonable to suppose that savings here would be as great as those of Rusk County.

In the past six years, including 1933, costs of operating the Dane County Board of Supervisors have totalled \$67,700.18.

If Dane County could cut 39% from its governmental operating costs as did Rusk County, the savings for a six year period would be \$26,403.07, or \$4,400.00 per year.

The old County Board cut appropriations to the bone in the fall of 1927, knowing that the administration would fall in the hands of the Commissioners the next year.

The Commissioners not only lived within the appropriations, but made savings in several accounts."

The obligations totalling over \$22,000 were contracted by the County Board of Supervisors during a period of prosperous years, and were paid off by the Commissioners during the World's greatest depression, without handicapping any necessary County Governmental functions.

Such evidence speaks well for the Commission Form of County Government.

On April 5, 1932, after four years of operation, a referendum ballot was submitted to the voters to either retain the Commissioner Form of County Board, or go back to the Supervisor Form. The resulting ballot was very decidedly in favor of retaining the Commissioners.

* * *

Mr. Ewbank (Chairman):

We are naturally interested in comparing the supervisory and commission forms at as many points as possible. Mr. B. L. Murch will compare the two systems on points not covered in the last two speeches.

Comparison of the Commission
and the Supervisory Forms of County Government

B. L. Murch,
Weyerhalsner, Wis.

It may be interesting to you people to know background of the delegation from Rusk County. Perhaps you think that we are hand-picked Marinetts coming down here to give the opinion of the minority of the county and therefore we do not represent the true sentiment of the county. This is not the case. Mr. Justus is President of the Holstein Breeders Assn. of Rusk County and is supervisor of his town, Mr. Sillman is Secretary of the Rusk County Farmers' Union and I, the least respectable of all, belong to the American Society of Equity, The Milk Pool, The Holiday Assn., and have joined the most militant group of the Farmers' Union. If there is any possible chance to kick, believe me, I will use my mouth if not my brains and make plenty of noise about it.

If I were asked what were the worst mistakes of the commissioners, I would have to say as yet we have been unable to find any bad ones. If I were asked, what was the main reason why we changed from the Supervisors to the Commissioner Form, I would say as I look back to those meetings which were held throughout the county back in 1927 that it was the impossibility of placing responsibility and the use by the supervisors of that principle so well developed, if you will scratch my back, I will scratch yours.

To make that clear I will have to explain the law known on the Statute Books as improvement of town and village initiative. Under this law a town may raise this money by taxing all taxable property in the county. It is clear then that one section of the county had to pay for improvements in the other and if a town were to receive any benefit from the money it paid in, it must have road or bridge improvement work going on all the time. Much of this improvement was not needed and a lot of it was very wasteful. Our county had raised money and spent it liberally yet in the peak of our Coolidge prosperity we had not been able to get the money to pay for this work as fast as the county was committed to spend it.

I wish to say that the Commissioners have not had an application put through under this law since they took office. Our purpose, coming as we do from Rusk County which has experienced both the Commissioner and Supervisor Form of County Government, is to bring you our experiences under both forms in the hope that it may help you decide which is the most economical, most efficient, and the least cumbersome and least unwieldy.

A very important problem to us is delinquent taxes and here the commissioners have effected great savings. To prove this I will have to show how the situation is handled by the Supervisors and by the Commissioners. When land becomes delinquent the Government receives no revenue from it from private sources, and an endeavor should be made to get it back into private hands and if it cannot be used this way it should be entered into forest crop area. Our Commissioners are taking title to this land and selling it to farmers for woodlot and pastures and are blocking off large sections for private game reserves and the remainder is being entered into forest crop area where the zoning and planning laws utilize these marginal lands to their best advantage. The supervisors are not in favor of the county taking title because these delinquent lands can be turned in as a towns' share of county taxes. One county has received as little as \$200. cash money, the rest delinquent taxes. A forty cornering one has been used for this purpose until there are \$250 back taxes. The Commissioners sell such forties from \$40 to \$150. The town has been reaping taxes as high as \$38 yearly from this at the expense of the county. If I should buy this land the assessed value would have to come down and the town would receive about \$4 or \$5 yearly. The commissioners for some years have kept the county government going by the sale of these lands. We received \$182,000.00 from this source last year.

Now I wish to compare the two systems as a facility. The Commissioners act as all committees. Therefore, matters pertaining to road and bridge problems, poor relief, equalization, etc. can all be taken care of at the same sitting. Matters which pertain to or effect several committees under the Supervisors system are handled by the same men at the same time in our plan. In this way the business of the committees is correlated and the county does not suffer the lack of team work due to grudges and jealousies which arise from personal ambition. One department is used sometimes for the benefit of the whole. For instance last year the court house was run on the appropriations of the road and bridge committees. The constant day-to-day contact of the three men with the county's business give them a wonderful understanding of all the problems that come up. This also makes it hard to sell the county at a long price, as an illustration a Casualty Insurance agent tried to raise Rusk County's rate due to high experience, when the particular experience was not due to county negligence.

When a C.W.A. Director or conservation officer or anyone else enters Rusk County and is entitled to a hearing the board is called together by telephone and that day or next the board sits down with the representative and as soon as possible an opinion or decision is reached. On account of this Rusk County was off in a

hurry on the C.W.A. program much sooner than other counties. I wish to emphasize the simplicity with which the three men operate. Mr. Mrouse may have a problem brought to him or a problem may come to the chairman Mr. Ellingson. The two men talk to each other by phone. They decide to settle the matter, each step into their cars and in twenty minutes are in conference with Mr. Bissell in Ladysmith. Compare that with waiting for the semi-annual meeting of the general board.

This brings to my mind the meeting of the Board of Supervisors back in 1922. I had been appointed on a committee of the Rusk County Union of the American Society of Equity to investigate graft in the county. I found some of the talk was rumor but there was one case substantiated with state evidence of graft. I took the case before the board of 39 members which then consisted of a few active members and the rest inactive or inexperienced or uncapable. Most of the farmer members were unable to address so large a formal gathering so said nothing. The foreign born saloon keeper from a town adjoining me understood little of what went on and had to question the supervisor from my town during the intermission to find out how to vote. In regard to the town chairman in whose town the graft took place he stood up very embarrassed and read and said something about "It's all right now." I never could decide what ailed him. Whether he was stage struck or whether "The powers that be" had promised him road improvement for his town, at any rate, he showed he wished the subject dismissed. No one cared to lose his influence or his committee appointment which would reflect back into losing his position in the town by championing this case against the interest of the ring which at that time controlled the county.

Because you may wish to compare the chances for graft under the two systems and because it is such an all important consideration in considering any form of government I wish to point out that the large number of men on the board of supervisors was no insurance against graft. I wish also to point out that it would have been covered up had I, an outsider, not forced my way in and brought it to the attention of the county and that though it was fully aired in the county papers yet the ring was so well fortified in its control of the board that the ring stayed in control. One of the last acts of one of these ring leaders in the new order was to be caught by Commissioner Hubbard stealing bridge steel for use in his garage.

Rusk County has not come to Madison to tell other counties what kind of government they must use but we wish to say we have kicked back-alley politics out of our county by adopting the Commission form and we can now place responsibility on a few men and can view their proceedings as published from month to month. While we are not free from the possibility of graft, at least we feel we have as close an approach to a modern system of county government as we can get. We radicals of Rusk County are proud of it.

* * *

Mr. Ewbank (Chairman):

A very few counties in the United States have adopted what

we might call the county manager plan. The picture would not be complete without a presentation of this method of county government. Mrs. Isabelle McCarthy is going to tell us of the merits of the county manager form of government as compared with the commission and supervisory forms.

The Merits of the County Manager Form of
Government as compared to the
Commission and Supervisory Forms.

Mrs. Isabelle McCarthy,
Cottage Grove, Wis.

Ex-Governor John Harmill of Iowa in his inaugural address in 1929 said, "County Government is trying to do 1929 business with a 1900 model. It is high time a survey be made of our forms of County Government to ascertain whether or not the most possible service for the tax dollar is being given." Apparently such a survey has been made in three counties in Wisconsin and a change in local government deemed advisable. However, in all three counties the change was made to the Commission form of government.

There is another form of County Government being used quite extensively throughout the United States, but of which the average citizen has heard very little. This is known as the County Manager Plan. During the past few years several counties in Virginia, North Carolina and Montana have adopted this form of county government and it has proven very successful in all instances.

I should like to quote from H. S. Gilbertson's, "The County, The Dark Continent of American Politics," "The County of the future will employ a manager, chosen appropriately with sole reference to his fitness to manage public affairs, and without regard to residence, religion, or his views on the Mexican situation, who will pick up the authority of the county where the board of directors leave it off." If this is to be a fact perhaps it would be well if we consider the merits of the County Manager Plan as compared with the Commission or Supervisory Systems of Local Government.

Perhaps the first thing to consider is how the County Manager Plan is organized. The County Manager Plan is similar to the Commission Form of County Government in that they both provide for a small board of Supervisors. There are usually from five to nine members of this board and they are elected by the people from the county at large. This Board of Supervisors hires the County Manager and as he need not be a resident of the county it is usually possible to hire the best man obtainable, a man who has made a thorough study of county government and is a successful executive. The Manager is to the county what a general manager is to a corporation, thereby putting the county on a business basis.

The duties of the County Manager are very definite. They are as follows:-

1. Appoints all county officers, except the district attorney, judge and sheriff. He hires these persons not on how good a politician they are but on their qualifications for the particular position they are to hold. They will be hired as stenographers, bookkeepers and accountants and not as county clerk, treasurer, etc.

2. The County Manager must attend all meetings of the Board of Supervisors. He must submit his plans to them and see that all orders and resolutions given by the Board are carried out as planned.

3. The County Manager must prepare a tentative budget and present it to the Board for their approval.

The Board may grant the county manager the power to enter into contracts not to exceed \$500; and to purchase all supplies for the county, thereby effecting a saving by buying in large quantities.

The County Manager Plan has many merits over either the Commission or Supervisory systems. In the first place it provides the county with an administrative head. No matter how small an organization or unit of government you consider they all have one person at the head of it. The school district has the clerk; the township a chairman; the city or village a mayor; the state a governor; and the United States a president. At the present time in Wisconsin who is at the head of the counties. Is it the county clerk, treasurer, or sheriff?

Today in Dane County we have eighty-one members on the County Board. With this number there certainly is an opportunity to shift responsibility. The only time a member of the County Board will assume responsibility is when something has been done that has the approval of the people in the county. In that case every member tries to claim the credit. With a small board of five to nine members this shifting of responsibility would be impossible. This board under the County Manager Plan is directly responsible to the people and the County Manager is in turn responsible to the Board.

At the present time our county officers are elected for two years. They must spend a part of the two years campaigning for re-election. They must be paid a substantial salary as a portion is necessary to pay campaign expenses. Under the County Manager plan the county officers are hired by the manager and would devote their entire time to their positions. They would be directly responsible to the Manager and should they prove inefficient he would have the power and authority to dismiss the person and fill the vacancy. Can you imagine the state of affairs under our present system should a county officer be found inefficient. By the time an investigation has been conducted, election time would have come and gone and the party being investigated no doubt re-elected, especially if he happened to be a member of the most popular party, for instance, in 1932 a Democrat.

One authority on County Government states that under our present system we have several government-ettes rather than one united system.

The County Manager plan would eliminate the worthless long ballot. With our present system it is impossible to study the qualifications of the candidates on the ballot and in most instances we vote by party only. In the election in 1932 many persons were elected only because they were Democrats. After election many of the candidates were as surprised at their election as we were to think of some of them as now being county or state officers. R. S. Childs states "The long ballot is the politician's ballot."

Last year the County Board of Supervisors in Dane County cost the county \$11,509.56. It is reasonable to believe that the County Manager plan would be more economical.

The County Manager would be on the job all the time and the Board of Supervisors would meet every month. With our present system the Board meets twenty days during the year and with the Commission Form the Commissioners would meet once a month. Under these systems there is no one "on the job" between meetings. I believe we can apply that age-old proverb of "one boy will do one days work, two boys will do one-half days work and three boys will do no work at all". to the average county board of Supervisors.

When we consider the success of the County Manager in Virginia and North Carolina and in several foreign countries namely, France, Germany and England, we must realize that it is no longer just an experiment. All counties that have tried this plan have found that it improves the calibre of the board of supervisors, it gives the county a budgetary control such as has not been possible under the Supervisory System, and it has proven more economical in its operations than any other system tried.

Alfred E. Smith, ex-governor of New York in his message to legislature in 1926 said "Local government has made practically no change since 1676, the local tax system is a joke and something has to be done about it." He made two recommendations, first a plan of local government similar to the County Manager Plan and second a shorter ballot which he said was essential to better government.

Therefore, I believe that the County Manager plan which provides for a small board of supervisors, and a manager who is an executive, appointed and subject to dismissal by the board in case of incompetency would prove more economical, business-like, serviceable, and progressive than either the commission or supervisory systems.

* * *

Mr. Ewbank (Chairman): As we have listened to these six discussion leaders, we have wished that we might interrupt them to ask questions. Perhaps we wished to express our agreement; or it may be that we disagree with them and desired to express our opposing opinion. Some have information that the rest of us should know about. The time for this informal exchange of opinions and information has now arrived. Who will be first?

Mrs. Groth: I would like to ask Mrs. McCarthy if she could explain the statement pointing out how the short ballot is the people's ballot and a long ballot the politicians ballot?

Mrs. McCarthy: When you consider that on the long ballot, for instance, last year when the Democrats went in really as a party, some of us were surprised at some of the people that went in. We did not have time to study the qualifications of the person running for office. We voted for them because they belonged to the Democratic party. I could cite one instance right now. There is at present a person I know who used to be a Progressive but who is now a Democrat. He is now a Democrat because he wants to run as state senator and might stand a chance of being elected if he runs on the Democratic ticket. He wishes to get in. The short ballot is the people's ballot. With the city manager plan of government they are hiring the person because of his qualifications for that position, just the same as the manager of an organization hires his office people. Petty officers are also eliminated.

Mrs.-- : I thought there might be another reason. In a long ballot a politician may choose a candidate for coronor because he has a great many relatives and friends; and choose a sheriff from another part of the county because he will bring in a certain number of votes with him. I think that is why it is called a politicians' ballot.

Mrs. Kerkoff: Under the County Commission system, does that do away with the township form of government?

Mr. Ewbank: In general that answer is no.

Mr. --: No, but there is just one advantage. We have a chance under that form to have a county assessor rather than a local assessor, which is one improvement.

Mr. Ewbank: The township does lose its identity, in other words.

Mr. --: No.

Mrs. Kerkoff: What is the advantage in the redistricting?

Mr. Murch: Larger districts do away with the effect of local strife. You elect a man from such a large district that local strife does not come in.

Mrs. Kerkoff: Then the township does lose its identity in that case?

Mr. Murch: It does, in this case.

Mrs. Kerkoff: Then you elect a group from a district rather than from a township?

Mr. Murch: Yes.

Mrs. --: How do they vote?

Mr. Murch: People vote by districts.

Mrs. - -: How about population?

Mrs. Kerkoff: Then under that form you still have your township officials doing a small part of governmental work. Under that form of government your district does not become the unit, but only for the election of the three commissioners. Is that right?

Mr. Murch: Yes.

Mr. - -: Won't this lead to consolidation of small towns so that we can have economy closer at home?

Mr. Murch: Yes. We need consolidation, not only of towns, but of counties.

Mr. - -: How are taxes collected?

Mr. - -: They are collected by towns, as usual.

Mr. - -: In the county assessor system, which you have adopted there, how satisfactory is that to the people, over the old system?

Mr. Murch: That has just come in of late and we have not had a chance to try it.

Mr. - -: Has it been tried at all?

Mr. Murch: No.

Mr. Sillman: I must submit a theory in line with that. Take the present assessor-- there is a possibility for the assessor to extend favors to his friends. If he has twenty-six friends, that allows twenty-six possibilities to favor. In the county assessor, that would be eliminated.

Mr. Branch: I should like to ask: how do you administer your road funds in this commissioner system? Does the township still take care of it individually, or does the county, as a unit, control it?

Mr. Justus: The cash money is spent by each town, but in the spring of the year the town lay out where they want to spend that cash money and the commissioner plans accordingly. If the town wants to appropriate money in the town for other roads, that is up to the town board.

Mr. Branch: But they still have the town road system as they want it?

Mr. Sillman: Yes, just like before.

Mrs. - -: Under the manager form, would it not be possible for certain political forces to obtain control of the supervisors, and in this

way control the manager and in this way, even if he is a good man, have him dismissed?

Mrs. McCarthy: The supervisors would be elected from districts, and I do not think this could happen, because they would have to have a very good reason for dismissing their county manager.

Mrs. --: In a council of limited size that controls the city manager they have had some pretty difficult times. I should think that element would enter into the managerial form of county government.

Mrs. McCarthy: No matter where you study the city manager form of government, they are satisfied.

Mrs. --: They have changed individuals, but not the form.

Mrs. Sharp: As I understand it, in some of these cities where they have difficulties with the city manager, it has sometimes been because the city manager has been appointed from the city and he was a politician to begin with, and the managership was only a political job of trying to control the policies of the government, instead of just trying to do the administering. Very often he was not especially trained for that job, and difficulties would arise.

Mr. Stehr: It appears to me that everybody is talking for the commissioner or manager form of government. Just a word or two for the supervisory type. Throughout Europe the governments are going back to dictatorship. Isn't there a danger that we are doing the same thing? It is evident if you cut the Board of Supervisors out, you will not have a representative form of government as we have today. The manager form of government is very fine as far as it goes. We have had officials such as our sheriff, etc. that are institutions established by state constitution and state law, and cannot be removed. On the other hand shortening the ballot seems doubtful to me. The long ballot is not created by the Board. Now then, on the other hand, if you go to the manager form of government the man allotted from the district is going to be a county officer instead of the town, and instead of shortening the ballot you are going to make that long ballot longer.

Mrs. --: I would like to know why, when a referendum was asked for consolidation, what reason would the counties have for vetoing it?

Mr. Wehrwein: I did not see the veto message of the governor. To put that to a vote in the local counties would cause an awful lot of dissatisfaction and until there was some unanimity of opinion apparent, the counties did not think it should be put to a vote.

Mr. --: How can you tell about the opinion until you do have a vote?

Mr. --: That is for the governor to say.

Mr. --: Another reason seemed to be because certain local politicians did not want it.

Mr. McCarthy: I want to question the last gentleman from Rusk County that spoke especially on Dane County lowering the administrative expense. I believe under our state laws it would be possible for a commission form of government to cost just as much and possibly more than our present supervisors system, due to the fact that this supervisory system is limited as to the number of times it meets, although a public spirited official may put in more time than he can receive pay for, but under the commissioner type he would be entitled to pay.

Mr. --: You were quoting from a newspaper article, were you not?

Mr. Sillman: The only thing I can apply to that is milk stool philosophy. But here is one thing that is quite obvious. The salary is limited. But if it would cost as much for administering the county board, it is quite obvious that due to the efficiency of the commissioner, the saving is still far greater than over the supervisor form. And as I have stated, the proof of the pudding is in the eating--we had a referendum vote after having a commissioner form of government for four years, and we still have that form of government.

Miss --: Isn't it set up in a statute that they can have no more than \$1,000 besides a salary, for a meeting, so that there could not be \$2,000 allotted?

Mr. Sillman: They are entitled to \$1,000 salary and \$1,000 expense money.

Mr. Wehrwein: On no account does the county need pay \$1,000 if it does not want to. Just like all other salaries that have been fixed, the upper limit is set by law. That would be the upper limit, that is true, but the salaries can be fixed at a lower limit if you want to.

Mr. Ewbank (Chairman): It is unfortunate that we cannot continue this discussion. We have not nearly finished, but, in a moment, we must adjourn for the next meeting.

For the regular club meeting it is not necessary to have a judge to pass judgment on the speakers. Today, it seemed to us that such a judgment might serve to set standards that will guide you in preparing programs for your organization. We have, therefore, invited Professor Karl Windesheim of the University--to serve as judge.

Prof. Karl Windesheim (Judging): This was a very interesting discussion and my business was to rank the six individuals without knowing from what counties they came.

The four questions* which I kept in mind, and which I used as the basis for judgment, are:

1. Was the delivery direct and interesting?
2. Did the speaker discuss one phase of the subject or did he wander over the field?

3. Did the speaker present evidence to prove his point of view?
4. Did the speech fit into the previous discussion as presented?

On the basis of these points my judgment is that the best individual speaker on the program was Mrs. Anderson. After I made my individual list, Mr. Wileden handed me a list of the counties which the different speakers represented. On totalling these placings, I find that the winner is Dane County.

* * *

*Score cards to use in making such placings are available from the Rural Sociology Department, College of Agriculture, Madison, Wis.

REPORT OF A
PUBLIC DISCUSSION DEMONSTRATION
on
"LOCAL GOVERNMENT"

Held during Farm and Home Week
February 2, 1934 at
Madison, Wisconsin

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