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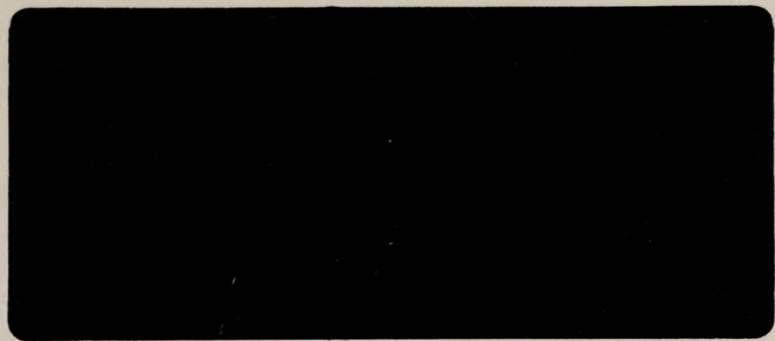
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Colfax - History

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"IN AND ABOUT THE VILLAGE":

Colfax: 1870-1910



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Colfax: 1870-1910

Amy Knutson

May 1986

INTRODUCTION

The small village of Colfax lies at the junction of Eighteen Mile Creek and the Red Cedar River in Dunn County Wisconsin.¹ (See Map 1 and Map 2) Reports indicate that the first pioneers to settle on the village site, J.D. Simons and family, arrived between 1864 and 1867.² Rich farmland and gently rolling hills soon attracted other settlers to the area. Though it would be interesting and worthwhile to continue this saga and complete a history of Colfax, the broad outlines of the project would most likely lead to a shallow and incomplete study. I undertook this paper to identify certain social characteristics of Colfax during a forty year time span. I chose 1870 as the beginning of the study because Colfax first appeared that year in the U.S. Census, though as a township not an incorporated village. I chose to end in 1910 because of the First World War and the possibility that this major event would have had some type of distorted effect on the characteristics being studied.

The study is divided into three main sections: population characteristics, institutions, and fraternal organizations. These main sections are then divided into smaller subsections according to the characteristics of the society. The first area of investigation is a quantitative study of the whole population of Colfax. Using the U.S. Manuscript Census for 1870, 1880, and 1910, it was possible to gather information

relating to gender, age, occupation, birthplace, and parental birthplace. In addition, the 1910 census recorded literacy status. The data gathered were used to analyze the following characteristics of the people and how (or if) these characteristics changed over the forty year time span: ethnic makeup of the settlers, age and gender characteristics of the population, occupational choice in the village, age in relation to occupational choice, nativity in relation to occupational choice, and gender in relation to occupational choice. In addition, the literacy status of the villagers was analyzed for 1910. Information on the ethnic makeup of the society should be interesting. The community has the reputation of being a Norwegian settlement; objective quantitative research using the manuscript population censuses should determine whether or not this reputation is justified.

Determining changes in the average age of the villagers should also prove to be enlightening. Historian Merle Curti identifies a majority of young people (under the age of 40) as a characteristic of an American (specifically Wisconsin) frontier society.³ Thus, as the society developed, one would expect the average age of the villagers to rise. Also, in a frontier society, it seems reasonable to expect that more males would be found in proportion to females, and this ratio should tend to "even out" over time.

Curti also writes that the occupational structure of a frontier village does show changes over a period of time.⁴ This study will determine whether Colfax developed along the

lines of other frontier communities in that the early occupational structure was "simple" and contained little specialization while the later structure shows a definite growth in complexity.

The data gathered on age will also be related to occupational choice to determine if any correlations do exist. One hypothesis I suggest is that young men were restricted to jobs described as general labor or farm work and the older male villagers were the owners of the stores and farms. In a simple society, one assumes that there weren't many occupational choices available to women other than domestic jobs such as housekeepers or servants who worked outside of the home for wages. Furthermore, I suggest that over a span of time, younger women probably had more opportunity to work outside of the home than older women. Also, as education developed within the village, younger people may have seen their career choices change.

In the same manner, I will relate nativity to occupational choice. Did any one ethnic group tend to specialize in a specific area (agriculture for instance)? If this type of occupational segregation did occur, one might suspect that Colfax was not a true "melting pot" of nationalities as American folklore would lead one to believe.

The census data will also be used to determine if there was a relationship between gender and occupational choice. Men and women may have fulfilled different roles in the society based on traditional beliefs, but documented evidence

must be used to support this hypothesis.

Any changes occurring over the forty years studied cannot be determined for literacy status as this factor was only recorded in 1910. However, it should be interesting to see if some segments of the population had a higher illiterate percentage than others, or if age had any relationship to literacy status.

A few explanations need to be given concerning the use of the U.S. Census in this study. For 1870 and 1880, Colfax was listed as a township, not a village. However, divisions were made between the unincorporated village of Colfax and Colfax township. One must assume that these divisions are as accurate as possible and that they measure the same (or very close to the same) geographic area as the Colfax village in the 1910 census. This study has been conducted strictly on the village (unincorporated or incorporated) and does not include the surrounding township.

Unfortunately, census information is lost for 1890 due to a fire that destroyed the documents. In addition, the 1900 census information appears not to have been recorded for the unincorporated village of Colfax, or, if once recorded, has been "misplaced." Calls placed to the Wisconsin State Historical Society in Madison and to the Dunn County Area Research Center in Menomonie confirm this fact.

At this point, it would probably be helpful to give population figures of Colfax for the given census years so that the statistics presented in the study have some relevance

for the reader. In 1870, Colfax had a population of 234; in 1880, the population had increased to 307, a 31% increase over 1870; in 1910, the census reported 701 villagers, a jump of 128% over 1880.⁹ It is also important for the reader to know that the entire population of Colfax was used to analyze characteristics in this study; all of the villagers listed in the censuses of 1870, 1880, and 1910 were coded, and the data were then tabulated using the SPSS program.

The second major area looks at the role of institutions in Colfax, namely the school, the church, and the railroad. In writing a history of the school, certain topics need to be explored. For example, how did the schools develop in the village, and did the society consider the school and its functions important? Who were the teachers, and what type of curriculum did they offer? Also, who attended the school, and how did this relate to the society of Colfax?

Church development can be studied in much the same way as that of the schools. When were churches built in the village? Was there more than one congregation? Who were the ministers? Were there any differences in worship services? Which villagers attended church, and were there any differences among different groups (age, ethnic) in the society concerning church membership?

All of these questions need to be addressed in order to provide useful studies of the school and the church in Colfax during the designated time span. In addition, one is tempted to assume that the Wisconsin Central railway running through

Colfax had a major influence on the village. My investigation will determine whether or not there is any truth in that assumption. Did the changes in occupational opportunity show any relationship to the coming of the railroad in 1884? Does the evidence show that the railroad was of major importance to the people of Colfax? Did the village become less isolated (more cosmopolitan) after the railroad?

The final area of investigation seeks to determine the role of fraternal organizations and other more loosely-based clubs in the lives of Colfax residents. It would be interesting to find out who belonged to them, and the functions of the various organizations. Was there any pattern evident in their development? Did they appear at many different times? What effect did the organizations have on the society? Did they tend to unify or divide the population?

Studying these three main areas outlined will provide a fairly complete view concerning what was happening "in and about the village."

POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

Nativity

A primary consideration of this study is to determine the ethnic makeup of Colfax. In other words, who settled in the village, and why did they come there? In addition, did the

ethnic origins of settlers change over the forty year time span studied?

Analysis of the U.S. Manuscript Population Census for 1870 reveals that the largest proportion of Colfax was either Norwegian-born (36%) or Wisconsin-born (36%). The only other significant representation came from the state of New York, where 12% of the people were born. Other statistics help to further explain ethnicity. For example, the median age for villagers born in Norway was twenty-seven, which was much higher than the median age of villagers born in Wisconsin (six years of age). This suggests that Norwegian immigrants came to Colfax (or Wisconsin) and then had children; they did not bring many children with them from Norway. Further support for this hypothesis comes from the fact that over two-thirds (67%) of the children in Colfax in 1870 indicated that they had foreign-born parents. Thus, it seems clear that Colfax was settled by, and gained its growth from, an initially childless Norwegian immigrant population.⁷

Did this trend continue in Colfax? The percentage of residents born in Norway did fall over the next ten years according to the 1880 census. Only 31% of the population listed Norway as their birthplace. In conjunction with that decrease, the Wisconsin-born realized an increase over 1870, jumping to 55% of the total population. In addition, in 1880 the median age difference continued to be extensive between these two representations. The median age for the Wisconsin-born remained relatively low at eight years, while the median

age for the Norwegian-born rose to twenty-nine years. Tracing the birthplace of the villagers' parents shows that indeed Colfax was still significantly "Norwegian;" two-thirds of all the villagers reported that their parents were born in Norway. Even though in 1880 a smaller percentage of those who lived in Colfax were actually born in Norway, many were still having children, and thus, the percentage of Wisconsin-born but Norwegian-raised was increasing.⁹

The next available data comes from the 1910 census. As one would expect, only 14% of the villagers now listed Norway as their birthplace. Also as expected, the percentage of Wisconsin-born villagers increased to 70%. Still, the most significant birthplace of parents remained Norway, though the percentage had dropped from 66% in 1880 to 38% in 1910. Conversely, the percentage of Wisconsin-born parents rose from 2% in 1880 to 21% in 1910. The obvious point to be made in connection with these statistics is that the Wisconsin-born children of 1880 had now become Wisconsin-born parents in 1910. One can again use the median age factor to support this claim. The median age for those born in Norway had risen to forty-six years, while the Wisconsin-born median age had risen to seventeen years, placing many into the child-bearing age category.⁹

From the above information, one can see that Colfax does deserve the reputation of being a Norwegian village because the most significant immigrant population settling in Colfax was from Norway.

Age-Gender

As a frontier village, one would expect Colfax to have a young population, and one would also expect the overall median age to increase over time. In 1870, the median age for the whole population was nineteen years with only 25% of the villagers over thirty years of age and with only 1.7% over sixty years.¹⁰ In comparison, the median age for the United States population in 1970 was twenty-seven years with fifty-three percent over thirty years of age and fourteen percent over sixty years.¹¹ Though Colfax appears to be a "young" population in its early years, it does not display the young median age one would expect to find in a frontier society. In fact, the median age for the country in 1870 was only a little over nineteen years.¹² One explanation for this is that many of the people who first came to Colfax brought fewer children with them and were more concerned with "establishing" themselves than with starting their families.

The data from 1880 presents a different story--one that suggests that Colfax was indeed a frontier society. The median age for the 1880 census year was fifteen years. Since much of the population was in the twenty to thirty year old age category, possibly a large number of children were born during the ten year time span, causing the median age to drop. Also, only 25% of the society was over thirty-two years of age and only 3% were over sixty, indicating that the

society was still very young. Statistics on the age factor for 1880, more so than for 1870, point to the fact that Colfax was a frontier society.¹³

By 1910, Colfax had undergone a settlement process, and the median age of the village once again compared to the national figure. Colfax reported a median age of twenty-two for that year, while the national median was almost twenty-one years.¹⁴ The population had definitely grown older as 25% of the people were now older than thirty-eight years, and 6% of the people were over sixty.¹⁵

When I analyzed the gender ratio in the village, I expected more young males would be found than females, especially in the earlier years of settlement. The reasoning behind this hypothesis is that I thought young males would settle in the area first (build a home or store, start a farm, etc.) and then bring their wives to the new village. However, according to statistical analysis of the 1870 census, the percentages of males and females in the society were relatively close, and there was not any significant difference between the ages of these two groups.¹⁶

This same finding holds true for 1880 when no significant difference between age or gender could be determined.¹⁷ Again, the 1910 findings indicate that Colfax was a very "balanced" village consisting of 48.6% females and 51.4% males. What is interesting to note concerning age of the population in 1910 is not the difference between the male and female segments of the society (there wasn't one), but the

age difference between the U.S.-born and the foreign-born segments of the society. From the data, it was determined that the foreign-born villagers were generally significantly older than the U.S.-born citizens.¹⁰

Occupational Choice

We are reminded by Curti that the characteristics of a frontier village include a simple occupational structure that grows in complexity as the society develops. This pattern can definitely be traced in the development of Colfax. For instance, in 1870, approximately eight occupations were available in Colfax including farmers, housekeepers, farm workers, a servant, a miller, a clerk, a tailor, and those who were listed as being "at home" (i.e. children). The farmers and housekeepers each represented 20% of the population while farm workers represented another 17% of the villagers. Children represented the largest portion of the population at 39%. (See Table 1)

The occupational structure did expand over the next ten years with fourteen occupations reported on the 1880 census. In addition to the occupations listed in 1870 (excluding the clerk and tailor) were students, teachers, hotel keepers, laborers, a dry goods merchant, a grocer, a wagon maker, a blacksmith, and a doctor. Fewer villagers were engaged in farming as the percentage fell to 14%. The percentage of housekeepers in the village also fell slightly to 18%. The

major portion of the population again were the children "at home" plus those listed as students, bringing that sub-total up to 51%. Farm workers as a group grew rapidly and represented 28.9% of all the villagers in 1880. The other occupations listed represented 1% or less of the village population, and thus, are not considered to be of any real significance. (See Table 2)

Dramatic changes are evident in my analysis of the occupational structure for 1910. In that thirty year time span, Colfax residents' occupations had become quite specialized, leaving one with the impression that Colfax was quite a hub of activity. The census now listed sixty occupations. Some of them probably wouldn't be found in a village not prosperous and growing. These occupations included bankers, librarians, telegraph operators, merchants, clergy, dentists, physicians, etc.. What is interesting to note is that only 1.7% of the village population was directly involved in agriculture (either farmers or farm workers), a significant decrease from 1870 and 1880. This indicates that while Colfax still was probably a "farming community" most people were relying on other occupations for their means of support. Still representing a large portion of all villagers were the children (39.7%). Housekeepers and those who were identified as having no occupation (all adult females) comprised 22% of the population, while laborers (all adult males) accounted for another 11%. (See Table 3) Clearly, Colfax had a much more diversified occupational structure in

1910 than it had in 1870.

Age-Occupation

When analyzing the age of the villagers in relation to the type of occupation they held, one would assume that Colfax showed a pattern similar to that found in other societies. In general, this pattern showed young people either not involved in the labor force, or involved in what are termed unskilled positions (non-wage workers), or working as employees for wages (rather than as owners).

In 1870, the ninety-two villagers listed as being "at home" were not considered to be part of the labor force as the median age of this group was only six years. Of these ninety-two villagers, seventy-seven were born in the United States, sixty-six in Wisconsin. Since occupational choice was limited in Colfax at this time, many young people found themselves entering the agricultural field, though most did so as farm workers not as farm owners. Median age statistics can be used to support this claim, as the median age for farm workers was only eighteen years, while the farmers themselves reported a median age of thirty-six years.

These median age statistics increased slightly for 1880. While the median age for children remained the same (six years), the median age for a farm worker increased to nineteen years and that of a farmer to forty years. Few farm workers over thirty years of age were listed possibly indicating that

many had their own farms by then and were considered farmers, or they had moved on to a different occupation by that age. Other occupations involving people who were under the age of thirty include servants, teachers, laborers, and carpenters. Those occupations held by people over the age of thirty include doctors, blacksmiths, and grocers. Housekeepers were generally found in all age categories (except for the very young), and their median age was thirty-six years.

Age-occupational statistics for 1910 tell much the same story. Those villagers under the age of twenty were, for the most part, living and working at home with a very few also employed as servants. Teachers remained a statistically young group along with laborers who were generally in their twenties or early thirties. Bankers, merchants, managers, medical professionals, farmers, printers, and jewelers remained positions that were held by those over thirty. Elderly people in the village (those aged sixty or older) were listed as having no occupation, or their occupation was "not known."

Study of the age to occupation relationship confirms what was already suspected: the majority of the younger population was not part of the work force and those that were tended to be domestically employed or laborers of some sort. (The exception to this is found in the teaching profession). Thirty seemed to be the age by which many gained either enough experience or enough money to become an owner, manager, or some other professional.

Nativity-Occupation

I have already established that Colfax was a very "Norwegian" village, but did relationships exist between where the villagers were born (mainly Norway or Wisconsin) and their chosen occupation? The 1870 and 1880 censuses both indicate that the majority of Norwegians were either agricultural workers or housekeepers, depending on their gender. The few other occupations that were available in the village were held by those born in the U.S., although the majority of the Wisconsin-born in Colfax were still children in 1880 and were not participants in the labor force.

The 1910 findings are a little more in-depth as there were more Wisconsin-born adults in the labor force. Though fewer were farmers, Norwegians showed significant representation in another traditional field. Thirty-one percent of all Norwegians in the labor force were laborers. Merchants and salesmen each accounted for another 6% of the Norwegian-born labor force; all other occupations did not show any significant numbers of Norwegian-born workers.

A smaller portion of Wisconsin-born villagers were recorded as laborers (25%), but this segment of the population was more involved in the other occupations that had developed in Colfax. For instance, approximately 7% of the Wisconsin-born in the labor force were merchants, another 5% were clerks, 4% each were concrete workers and dressmakers, while

cooks accounted for 3% of the Wisconsin-born in the labor force.

Though there aren't any clear-cut conclusions that can be drawn from the above information, it is probably generally true that most Norwegians were occupied with agricultural jobs or filled general labor positions, while the Wisconsin-born workers in the labor force specialized more and filled the new positions that were being established in the growing village. One possible explanation for this difference is that Norwegians were generally older than the Wisconsin-born, and probably did not have as much education or training in new fields as the younger people did.

Gender-Occupation

Information collected from both the 1870 and 1880 censuses indicated that the society of Colfax was a very limited one. While there was little occupational choice to begin with, what was available was mainly for the male segment. In 1870, the female population in Colfax was occupied exclusively in the domestic realm. Besides the female children living at home (48.5% of all females), 44.6% were housekeepers. One was a servant, and the rest were listed as having "no occupation." During this same time period, the majority of males were working in the agricultural field. However, the other two occupations listed (a miller and a clerk) were held by males.

The 1880 census showed little variation from this trend. Fifty-seven percent of the females were children; the rest of the female population was engaged as housekeepers (39%), servants (3%), and teachers (1%). Besides the positions men occupied in 1870, 2% also became teachers, while others were hotel keepers, laborers, and merchants.

Statistics for 1910 indicate that Colfax had not undergone any dramatic changes concerning the occupational choice open to women. Excluding children, eighty-eight percent of the females in Colfax were still engaged in domestic labor (housekeeping, cooking, cleaning, sewing). Three percent of the women were teachers, leaving 9% of the female work force not significantly attracted to any one profession. The census did report a female photographer, shoe maker, type setter, librarian, banker, printer, clerk, and waitress. The printer and photographer both had husbands in those fields, so those occupational choices were not really "true breaks" from the norm, though they were occupations that were different from 1870 and 1880. Still, though certainly not in any large numbers, more women were working outside of the home in 1910 than had been in 1880.

With an expanded occupational structure in 1910, more males were also entering other fields. Excluding male children, the most significant portion of the men (37%) were working as laborers. Thirty percent were engaged in service-related occupations (barbers, meat cutters, and mail carriers to name a few) while 12% worked in the field of sales

(merchants and salesmen). Professionals (teachers, physicians, dentists, veterinarians, managers, etc.) accounted for another 11% of the work force. Ten percent of the males in Colfax in 1910 did not list an occupation in the census.¹⁹

Literacy

Though literacy statistics were recorded in the 1910 census, one must be careful in estimating their accuracy. It is not known whether census marshals tested peoples' ability to read and write or whether the people realized that the ability to read and write meant in English, not in their native language.²⁰ With this in mind, 85% of the population in Colfax in 1910 were recorded as literate. The illiterate population measured 3.3%, with the rest left unrecorded (mostly young children). Not surprising, the foreign-born accounted for 96% of all those listed as illiterate (78% of whom were Norwegian), with their median age listed as forty-six years.²¹

Though most of the population of Colfax appeared to be English-speaking by 1910, there is reason to believe that the Norwegian language was still being spoken quite often. Dermont Toycen of Colfax reports that even when he moved to the village in 1914, most of the people were still speaking Norwegian.²²

Coming to Colfax

The Europeans' reasons for emigrating to the U.S. were numerous and complex. It is difficult to pinpoint why the foreign-born settled in Colfax. Probably many of the immigrants were farmers who believed that a great agricultural opportunity awaited them in that region. As most immigrants came in units including friends and relatives, initial growth of the village can be explained in that way.²³

Reporting on more specific immigration, historian Frederick Luebke claims that out of all of the Scandinavian people who came to the Great Plains states, Norwegians represented the largest portion of that group. Since Norwegians were mostly farmers settling in the Northern Great Plains, one should not be surprised to find a heavy concentration of this ethnic group in an agriculturally-oriented community like Colfax which is in the area bordering the Great Plains.²⁴

Of non-English speaking immigrants, Scandinavians are reported to have obtained assimilation into a society most rapidly. However, of the Scandinavians, Norwegians are also believed to have held onto their ethnic culture and language longer than others.²⁵ One can see evidence of this characteristic in the Norwegian population of Colfax, particularly in the institutions and organizations whose activities were often centered around the celebration of old

traditions. Study conducted on the institutional aspects of a society can yield much information about the people themselves.

INSTITUTIONS

Schools

As schools became a more valued part of a society, expansion and improvements occurred in several areas. Curti reports that the building structure itself often changed from a log to a frame building as the school became more important.²⁶ Colfax experienced such an evolution in its educational system. Settlers in the village saw four different schools used in the forty year time span being studied. In the earliest years, a crude log structure served as a combined school-church for the settlers. Built on the village site in 1864, this structure was quite small, measuring only sixteen by eighteen feet.²⁷

Accommodations were soon outgrown, and the "old red school" was erected in 1871. This second school measured eighteen by thirty feet and was used to educate the town's children until 1889.²⁸

At this point, the villagers built a two-storied structure measuring twenty-six by fifty feet.²⁹ This three room graded school (primary, middle, and upper divisions) proved to be adequate for the needs of the village for the

next twelve years when a larger school, which added a fourth room, was built.³⁰

Another indication of how much the citizens valued the school was their willingness to pay taxes, and to increase those taxes to support the expansion of the school.³¹

Figures given in the Colfax Messenger beginning in 1897 show that Colfax did indeed agree to taxes that would keep the village school in operation. At the Annual School Board Meeting held in July 1897, a \$450 general tax was decided upon. This same amount was decided upon for the next year also.³² When the Board decided to add a third department to the school in 1898, a special tax of \$225 was agreed upon to support it.³³

At the annual meeting in 1904, a small general tax of \$200 was decided upon, although the villagers did agree to also raise a \$600 special tax to put in a heating plant. With the addition of a fourth room and a fourth teacher, the School Board members of 1905 had to increase the general tax to \$800.³⁴ Figures released for 1908 indicate that the costs of operating the largest school ever to be built in Colfax were much higher. At the Annual School Board Meeting for that year, a general tax of \$2500 was agreed upon.³⁵

It is not known how the taxes paid by the Colfax villagers compared to other towns of similar size, yet it is obvious that the villagers were willing to raise their taxes to build new schools and support school functions. Perhaps this willingness is one indicator as to the value of the

school to the society. If the schools themselves were supported, then the teachers who educated the young people of the village must have filled important roles. In its earlier years, the village employed two teachers to run the school. The structure of the teaching positions in 1898 was such that a male was hired as a principal, while a single woman served as the "underteacher." Both of the positions were filled by people who listed their permanent residence in villages other than Colfax. The principal was from Chippewa Falls while the underteacher was from Rock Falls. The teachers then spent vacations at their permanent homes.³⁶

In 1900, the "School Report" in the Colfax Messenger stated that the teaching staff had expanded to include three teachers who were in charge of the primary room, middle room, and upper room. In 1905, further expansion of the staff occurred when four teachers were hired for the school term.³⁷

Curti provides a description of an average teacher in a frontier village school. One aspect of his description is that teachers usually had less than two years of experience.³⁸ This lack of experience was offset by meetings, conventions, and classes that were designed to train the teachers in their profession. Meetings involving area teachers were held around the county. The programs offered at those meetings included "The Wisconsin Constitution," "School Exercises," "Busy Work," and "The Relation of the Teacher to the School District." Topics presented at other meetings include the use of review in the

classroom, some exercises in fractions, reading exercises, and the "Hygienic Responsibility of the Teacher."³⁹ Some of the programs listed show that the teacher felt the need to teach in areas other than reading and writing. Also, it is apparent that the teachers realized the role they played in the village outside of the classroom and felt the desire to establish good communication throughout the local area.

Besides the county meetings, the teachers were also encouraged to attend meetings of the Northwestern Teachers' Association and the National Teachers' Convention to gain further teaching information.⁴⁰ Continuing education of the teachers in the form of summer school was also encouraged. The first publicized summer school attracted fourteen teachers to the six week course.⁴¹

One particular article written in 1908 gives insight into what it meant to be a school teacher during that time period. Not only did the teacher have to be prepared to teach all subjects and grades in the school, the teacher also needed to be able to build fires, split kindling, be a general "handyman" around the building, know how to raise money and keep records, "know when and where to whip a bad boy," be of good moral character, pass a teaching exam, and pay for summer school, education paper, and pencils for the students all for about thirty dollars per month. One can see that the village teachers were involved in a very time consuming job.⁴²

Curti explains that education in the frontier school

provided for both the intellectual and moral learning by the students. Due to a provision in the Wisconsin Statute of 1889, this education in all "basic subjects" had to be conducted in English.⁴³ In-depth knowledge concerning the Colfax curriculum is scanty, although it is known that math and geography were taught.⁴⁴ Also, a special grammar department provided instruction for all of the grades.⁴⁵ Boys enrolled in the village school were also able to take part in some type of manual training class after sets of tools were borrowed from Mr. Stout in Menomonie.⁴⁶ Besides these classes, students were also required to fulfill other duties such as cleaning tables and boards, carrying water, and helping in the library and with the music program.⁴⁷

Exact enrollment figures are not known for the early years of Colfax. Though the 1870 census indicates that sixty-three students were enrolled, census marshals did not distinguish between those attending school for one week and those attending the entire session.⁴⁸ Though statistics are not available for those early years, one would assume that enrollment generally increased as larger school buildings had to be built during that time period.

The earliest published figures for enrollment I found covered the spring term of 1897 when it was reported in the Colfax Messenger that the school had an enrollment of eighty-two students. For the fall term of the same year, schools opened with an enrollment of seventy-six students.⁴⁹

The most complete enrollment and attendance information

found was printed monthly in the Colfax Messenger for the 1900-1901 school term. (See Table 4) Curti states that it was common for newspapers to report attendance records of students in an effort to get the parents involved. Certain conclusions can be drawn from the data gathered from the newspaper. To begin with, enrollment in the school varied from month to month, growing from 114 in October to an enrollment of 159 in May.⁵⁰ Though enrollment showed a steady increase over the school year, the same can not be said for the average daily attendance. The "best" month for school attendance appears to be December; out of 130 students enrolled, an average of 107 (82%) attended each day. The "worst" month of school attendance was March. Though 147 were enrolled, only an average of eighty students (54%) attended each day.⁵¹

Though these statistics appear to be unusually low, it seems that Colfax was not the only village experiencing difficulty in attaining high attendance rates. Curti claims that other state superintendents in the late 1800s reported attendance to be about half to two-thirds of those enrolled.⁵² Because they lived in an agriculturally-oriented community, many families required the children to provide some, if not a major portion, of the farm labor. Hence, the low attendance figures in the spring months (especially April and May) may be linked to the increasing work that had to be done on the farm. This phenomenon probably wasn't only related to farming. Other business activity probably also picked up in the spring

as the weather, and therefore the travel conditions, improved. Low attendance may also be attributed in part to illness which seems to increase in the early spring.

Churches

According to the Souvenir Number (a special edition of the Colfax Messenger), the people of Colfax considered religion to be one of their most important concerns. Yet, the growing community went without any church buildings providing regular worship services for several decades. During the late 1860's, Colfax was on the route of a traveling minister, but no indication was given as to how long this arrangement lasted.⁵³

The Methodist Episcopal Church was the first to offer services which were held every two weeks in the school.⁵⁴ It is interesting to note that the village was not served by a local clergy member, but instead relied upon a pastor who lived in Eau Claire.⁵⁵ This may have been one factor hindering the establishment of a church in Colfax. Also, this outside influence may have been the reason why a Methodist Church was the first to be organized in a predominantly Norwegian (Lutheran background) village.

While there was no permanent church building, a ladies society did organize in Colfax to set up activities that would pay the salary of the minister.⁵⁶ This religious schedule continued until 1898 when citizens of the community

decided to construct a Methodist Episcopal Church.⁵⁷ Carpenters began working on the project in the spring of 1899, and the first sermon was given in the new church on August 6, 1899. Though services were no longer held in the school, a pastor residing in Eau Claire still served the Methodist Episcopal Church, and thus, services were not held on a weekly basis.⁵⁸

The membership of the Methodist Episcopal Church was large as it was the only church in the village. This changed in 1900, however, when a United Lutheran Society bought a building erected by J. D. Simons, forming their own United Lutheran congregation and drawing members away from the Methodist Episcopal Church. It is unclear how well-established the United Lutherans were for a notice appeared in the newspaper that they offered "services by appointment."⁵⁹

Probably the larger Lutheran movement in Colfax was that of the Synod Lutherans who secured a contract to build their own church in 1902. The \$5000 stone structure took a long time to complete and was not dedicated as the Colfax Branch of the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America until the spring of 1907. This Lutheran Synod Church offered two services--one in Norwegian and one in English and may have been one of the reasons why the Methodist Church became the minority congregation in the village.⁶⁰

After completing his studies on life in small towns, historian Richard Lingeman had concluded that the church had

much more influence on people's lives in the nineteenth century than it does today.⁴¹ Much of that influence was used to maintain Scandinavian traditions such as Lutefisk suppers and services conducted in the people's native tongue. The Synod Lutheran's offering of a regular worship service in Norwegian shows that this idea can be traced to Colfax.⁴² There does appear to be a connection between ethnicity and religious preference in Colfax, and it also seems apparent that the church as an institution influenced members' lives in areas beyond that of a regular Sunday worship service.

Railroad

The school and church may be termed internal institutions because they are established within the village and serve to unite the community. The railroad, on the other hand, may be called an external institution for just the opposite reason. A railway running through a village generally served to lessen the people's isolation by providing them with efficient transportation to populated areas while at the same time bringing new people into the area. This analysis seems to fit a village such as Colfax.

One can study possible effects of the Wisconsin Central railroad on Colfax by examining the village before and after the line was completed in 1884.⁴³

The depot itself was not a major place of employment,

though it is true that men could have worked as railroad laborers somewhere outside of the village.⁴⁴ Actual employment with the Wisconsin Central line itself did not appear to be of major importance to the villagers. However, the occupational expansion that occurred within the village because it was on the railroad was important. A quick review of the occupations available in the village support this hypothesis. (See Tables 2 and 3) Though the expanded occupational choice in 1910 cannot be attributed entirely to the railroad by any means, the Wisconsin Central certainly did play a part in that expansion. In a sense, the railroad helped to put Colfax "on the map." Lucy Glasier, a resident of Colfax whose great grandfather, E. W. Viets, operated one of the earliest hotels in Colfax, said that hotels were very important in railroad towns. Salesmen would travel to towns accessible by a railroad, stay in a hotel there, and then travel to more isolated towns with a hired rig.⁴⁵

Farming was another occupation that related to the railroad in Colfax. Without transportation to markets, this industry would probably have stagnated (and then town growth would probably have stopped). The newspaper reported many shipments of stock and grain indicating how much the farmers depended on the railroad.⁴⁶

Besides contributing to the expansion of the town, it appears the railroad may have expanded the villagers' experiences as well. Excursions to the Twin Cities to watch baseball games, go shopping, or to visit the Scandinavian

Festival were all offered by Wisconsin Central.⁴⁷

In many ways, the railroad "opened up" the village, helped it expand, and offered the villagers a route to "cultural" events that were not offered in Colfax.

FRATERNAL ORGANIZATIONS

Though the railroad was available to take villagers to activities in other areas, Colfax did have much to offer in terms of fraternal organizations and clubs. Organized groups developed in, and became an integral part of, the society in Colfax during the late 1800s and early 1900s. This development seemed to follow the general trend set by other small towns in America. As late as 1870, many towns had few organizations to speak of. After the Civil War, some national lodges did organize in an effort to provide some stability and security for their members who were facing rapid changes in their villages. Other lodges provided members with such benefits as insurance. Curti explains that immigrants in frontier towns often organized their own clubs to practice old customs and traditions from their native lands.⁴⁸

Since there were several clubs and lodges in Colfax, they are easier to study if divided into different categories. First, civic organizations played important roles in the development of the village. The oldest order is that of the Modern Woodmen of America, Red Cedar Camp, No. 2746. Established in 1897, this all-male lodge, consisting

of forty members, met twice a month in the MWA hall in town. The order sponsored such activities as Children's Day exercises and plays that they performed in neighboring villages. Also, many of the members were described as having an "interest in woodcraft."⁶⁹

The ladies' auxiliary society to the Woodmen was the Royal Neighbors of America, Banner Camp, No. 3143. Organized in 1902, this society had a charter membership of thirty-six. The activities sponsored by this group were similar to that of the Woodmen. They put on plays and also set up a pitt and euchre card party. One activity that seemed especially interesting was a "poverty social" given by the society. Members dressed in a "poverty stricken condition," and prizes were awarded for the different costumes.⁷⁰

The Independent Order of Good Templars, No. 170, was organized in 1899 and included both men and women. In the beginning, the lodge met twice a month, but as activity increased, they met every Friday night. This Order was established to promote temperance in the village. Apparently, the movement was successful as there were no drinking establishments recorded in the censuses for this forty year period.⁷¹

The Independent Order of Odd Fellows, known as the Fidelity Lodge, was organized in December 1899. Not much is known about this Colfax Order other than it was an all-male society chartered with eighteen members.⁷²

There is also evidence that a lodge known as the

Evergreen Tent, No. 94, was organized in the village. The first notice found on this lodge in the Colfax Messenger in 1900 indicated that they held meetings twice a month.⁷³

One society in particular supports Curti's claim that some lodges were centered around customs of the native countries of the immigrants. The Independent Scandinavian Workman Association, Nordland Lodge, No. 50, was organized in 1901 and met twice a month. This lodge established a park on the east side of town where annual celebrations were held on May 17 in honor of Norway's Independence Day. At one of those celebrations, held in 1902, the lodge presented speakers for the occasion who gave speeches in both English and Norwegian for the benefit of the community. One other traditional activity sponsored by the order was a lutefisk supper given when they had their installation service.⁷⁴

An insurance order, the Lodge of Beavers, was organized in October 1903 with an initial membership of twenty-six. This all-male society must have been quite popular with the villagers for membership soared to ninety-seven by 1907. The Beaver's auxiliary society, the Lodge of Beaver Queens, known as the Golden Glow Company, was organized in 1904 with about twenty members. Information on the activities of this Lodge was not found.⁷⁵

Another major civic organization, the Ladies Reading Club, seems to have been popular with the villagers also. Established in 1904 by women who were tired of just caring for children and households, this Club's activities were centered

around the idea of establishing a library in Colfax. Initially, members donated some of their own books. In addition, the Club arranged to get the services of the state traveling library. After operating a free reading room for awhile, the Reading Club was finally able to open a public library which was managed by the Club. After this literary goal was met, it seems that the organization became more social in nature, meeting at different members' homes and playing games.⁷⁶

Organized in 1907 to promote skiing in Colfax and the surrounding area, the Holmenkollen Ski Club proved to be very successful in their activities. Skiers used a sixty-foot-high jump located on Swenson Hill. Annual tournaments sponsored by the Club turned out to be major winter events. The tournament held in 1908 was big enough to allow the students to take half a day off from school to watch. It was the tournament held on February 4, 1909, however, that really got the townspeople involved. Village stores closed that day as merchants joined in the crowd of 2500 spectators for the ski riding events held in the afternoon. After that competition, the village took on a festive air, sponsoring a street exhibition on mind reading, followed by a banquet. Evening entertainment included a show by the Swiss Bell Ringers and a Grand Ball.⁷⁷

Organized in 1900, the Twentieth Century Social Club's main function seemed to be putting on dances. An opening ball was held in early November (1900) and was soon followed by a Thanksgiving Ball at the end of that month. Though the club

put on a Masquerade Ball the following February, it's questionable how important the Club was to the society of Colfax because no other information was found regarding its activities.⁷⁸

The second category of organizations studied in the village was that of religious societies. Mite societies operating within a village were generally connected with a church, and the money collected from social functions was used for missionary activities.⁷⁹ Though the Ladies Mite Society in Colfax was clearly church-oriented, much of the money it collected stayed within the village. While it donated \$210 to the new Methodist Episcopal Church, the Mite Society also promised to support the building of a Union Church in the village if that decision were ever made. A typical activity held by this society was the church fair at which the ladies sold crafts to raise money.⁸⁰

The Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor (Y.P.S.E.) was affiliated with the M.E. church. This society tried to provide activities such as musical programs which the young people could use to help raise money for the church. At one point, the Society set up different committees in order to organize different activities. These included the Lookout Committee, the Social Committee, the Prayer Meeting Committee, and the Music Committee.⁸¹

A notice also appeared under the heading of "Church Notes" in the Colfax Messenger that the Norwegian Sewing Society was active. One assumes that since it was connected

with the church, this society's sewing bees centered around the making of clothing, quilts, etc. for the needy.⁸²

Colfax was an unincorporated village struggling for stability throughout much of the time period under consideration. The abundance of civic and religious organizations provided something for just about everyone in the small town, encouraging citizen participation and stimulating the growth of the society.

Still, clubs did not provide the only activity in town. Lyceums were fairly common and provided a stage where villagers could toss around their opinions on issues that were considered important. A few of the debates held in Colfax included "that Lincoln did more for his country than Grant," "that country life is preferable to city life," and "that the steam engine has done more for the world than the printing press."⁸³

Sing fests, hayrides, spelling bees, and box socials (the female decorated a box and filled it with a lunch for two; the males bid for the box, and the money went to some worthy cause) all offered opportunities for the people to gather together.⁸⁴

That in itself appears to be the main story behind organized activities in Colfax. Each event that brought the villagers together created a more united settlement which offered stability and a future for the people. Without these ties binding the people together, one has to wonder what type of growth the village would have experienced.

CONCLUSION

This study was not undertaken to present Colfax as a "typical town" (though some of the things described may very well apply to other societies) or even to present it as a frontier town; rather it was conducted to unearth some characteristics of the society of Colfax during a specific time period using both quantitative and traditional methods of research. The interpretation of the data yielded several conclusions. Generally, the population of Colfax was very "Norwegian" and mainly engaged in agriculture until occupational expansion occurred. Statistics indicate that Colfax did have a young population, especially during the 1870-1880 time period. It also seems apparent that by 1910, the village had a settled population which resembled national characteristics more closely. Surprisingly, the village population was relatively balanced in terms of male/female ratios throughout the forty year period studied. Institutions such as the school, church, and railroad were important to the society for different reasons. The school seemed to have the most unifying effect on the town, while the church tended to split the villagers into different groups based on their faith; unification then occurred within these groups. The railroad tended to open up the town to outsiders and provided the villagers with transportation to societies that differed greatly from Colfax. Lodges, clubs, and other organized

activities provided opportunities for the people to interact with each other, and I believe this had a stimulating effect on the society.

The "melting pot" hypothesis for Colfax is rejected because there is little participation in the society from ethnic groups other than Norwegian. Also, when a different ethnic group possibly did "intrude" into the society (in the case of the Eau Claire minister establishing a Methodist church), the Norwegians tended to join their own establishments.

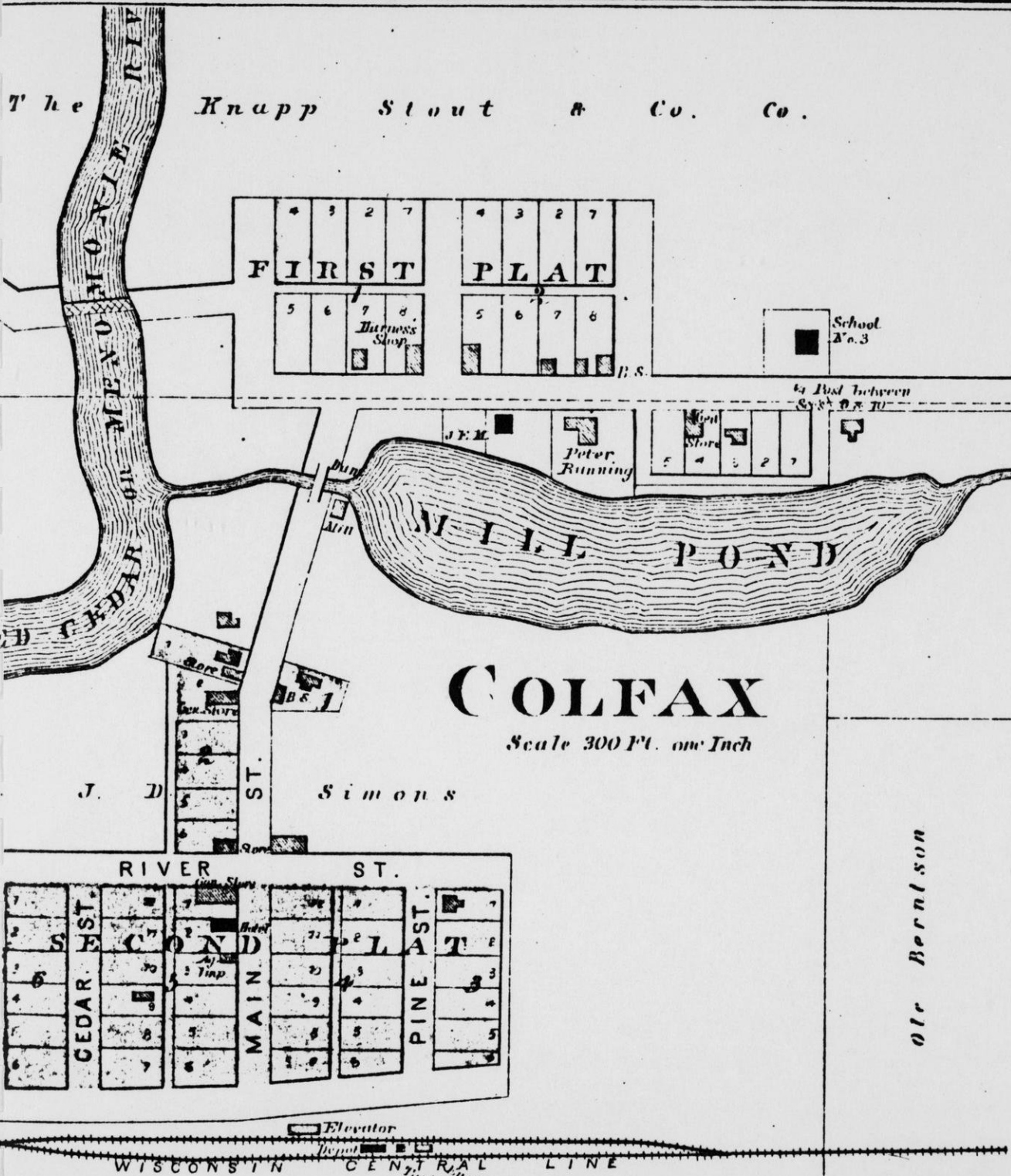
Though the society of Colfax did appear to have a number of frontier characteristics initially, it is also apparent that the society became much more settled by 1910, moving into a new era of existence.

The story of Colfax 1870-1910 is by no means complete. The effects of the Knapp-Stout Co. lumbering operations on the development of Colfax may prove to be an area where further research would be useful. Perhaps a study of the political aspects of Colfax would also yield interesting and useful research. Also, it would be interesting to determine at what point Colfax ceased growing and why.

After reading this paper, one should get a good idea of what was happening "in and about the village."

MAP 2

The Knapp Stout & Co. Co.



Olc Bernlson

The Knapp, Stout & Co. Company

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TABLE 1
OCCUPATIONAL REPRESENTATION
1870

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Percent of Total Population Engaged</u>
Farmer	20%
Housekeeper	20%
Farm Worker	17%
At Home (children)	39%
Servant	*
Miller	*
Tailor	*
Clerk	*

*Represents less than 1%

Sample Size=234 villagers (Universe Sample)

Source: U.S. Manuscript Population Census, Dunn County, 1870.

TABLE 2
OCCUPATIONAL REPRESENTATION
1880

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Percent of Total Population Engaged</u>
Housekeepers	18%
Farmers	14%
Farm Workers	9%
Servants	1.3%
Teachers	1.3%
At Home/School	51%
Hotel Keeper	*
Laborer	*
Merchant	*
Grocer	*
Blacksmith	*
Wagon Maker	*
Miller	*

*Represents less than 1%

Sample Size=307 villagers (Universe Sample)

Source: U.S. Manuscript Population Census, Dunn County, 1880.

TABLE 3

OCCUPATIONAL REPRESENTATION1910

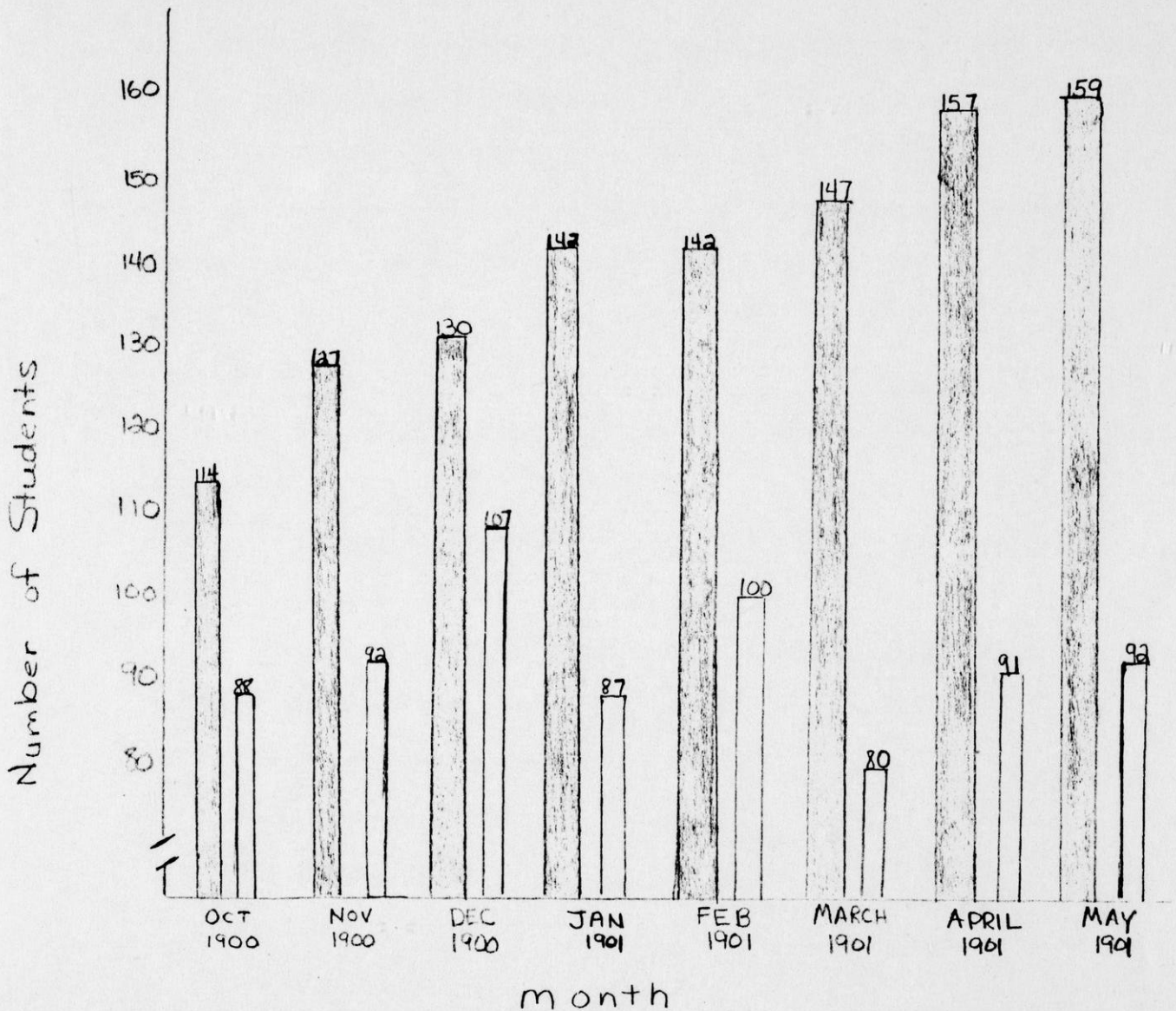
<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Percent of Total Population Engaged</u>
Housekeepers	22%
Laborers	11%
Sales (salesman, clerk, merchant)	3.8%
Professionals (teacher, doctor, clergy, banker, engineer, vet, dentist, postmaster)	3.1%
Agriculture Workers (farmers, farm workers)	1.7%
At Home (children)	39.7%

*The remaining villagers were engaged in occupations that were not statistically significant.

Sample Size=701 villagers (Universe Sample)

Source: U.S. Manuscript Population Census, Dunn County, 1910.

Table 4
 Monthly Enrollment & Average Daily
 Attendance: 1900-1901



KEY:

Enrollment = Shaded bar
 Attendance = White bar

Source: The Colfax Messenger, vols. 4-5.

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Age by gender: Pearson's $R=0.03$ (significance=0.32)
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Age by birthplace: Pearson's $R=0.43$ (significance=0.0)
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- 32 Messenger (July, 9, 1897), p. 1.;
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Ibid., (July 7, 1905), p. 1. (Ref. to addition)
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- 50 Curti, p. 389.
Ibid., (Nov. 9, 1900), p. 5.;
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