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7-15-1941

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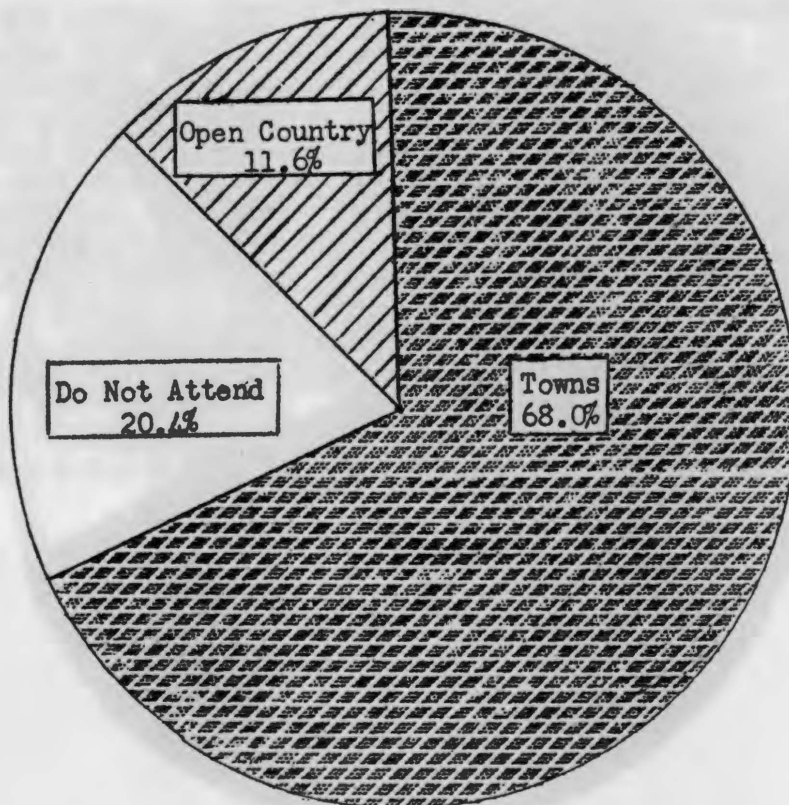
Kumlien, W. F.; Scandrette, C.; and Hatch, Raymond, "The Problem of Over-Churched and Unchurched Areas in Sully County" (1941). *Agricultural Experiment Station Rural Sociology Pamphlets*. 36.
http://openprairie.sdstate.edu/agexperimentsta_rural-socio/36

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The Problem of Over-Churched and Unchurched Areas
in Sully County

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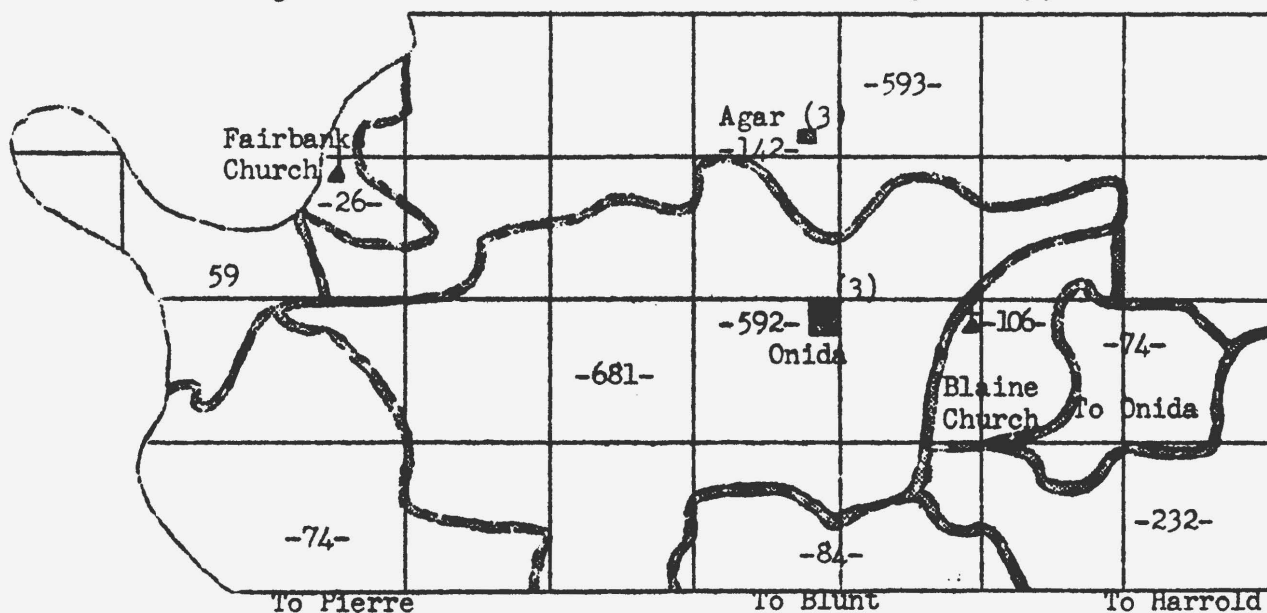
Place of Church Attendance of Farm Families
in Sully County, 1940.



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* **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:** This study was made possible through *
* the cooperation of the State and Federal Work Projects *
* Administration with the South Dakota Agricultural *
* Experiment Station. The project is officially desig- *
* nated as W.P.A. Project No. 665-74-3-143. The authors *
* gratefully acknowledge the cooperation of the Farm Se- *
* curity Administration from whose records considerable *
* data were secured concerning the nationality and tenure *
* status of farm operators. Further acknowledgement is *
* made of the assistance which pastors and laymen of *
* Sully county churches lent to the field worker in ob- *
* taining information on church preference and member- *
* ship. *
* * * * *

Figure 1. Church Attendance Areas in Sully County, 1940.



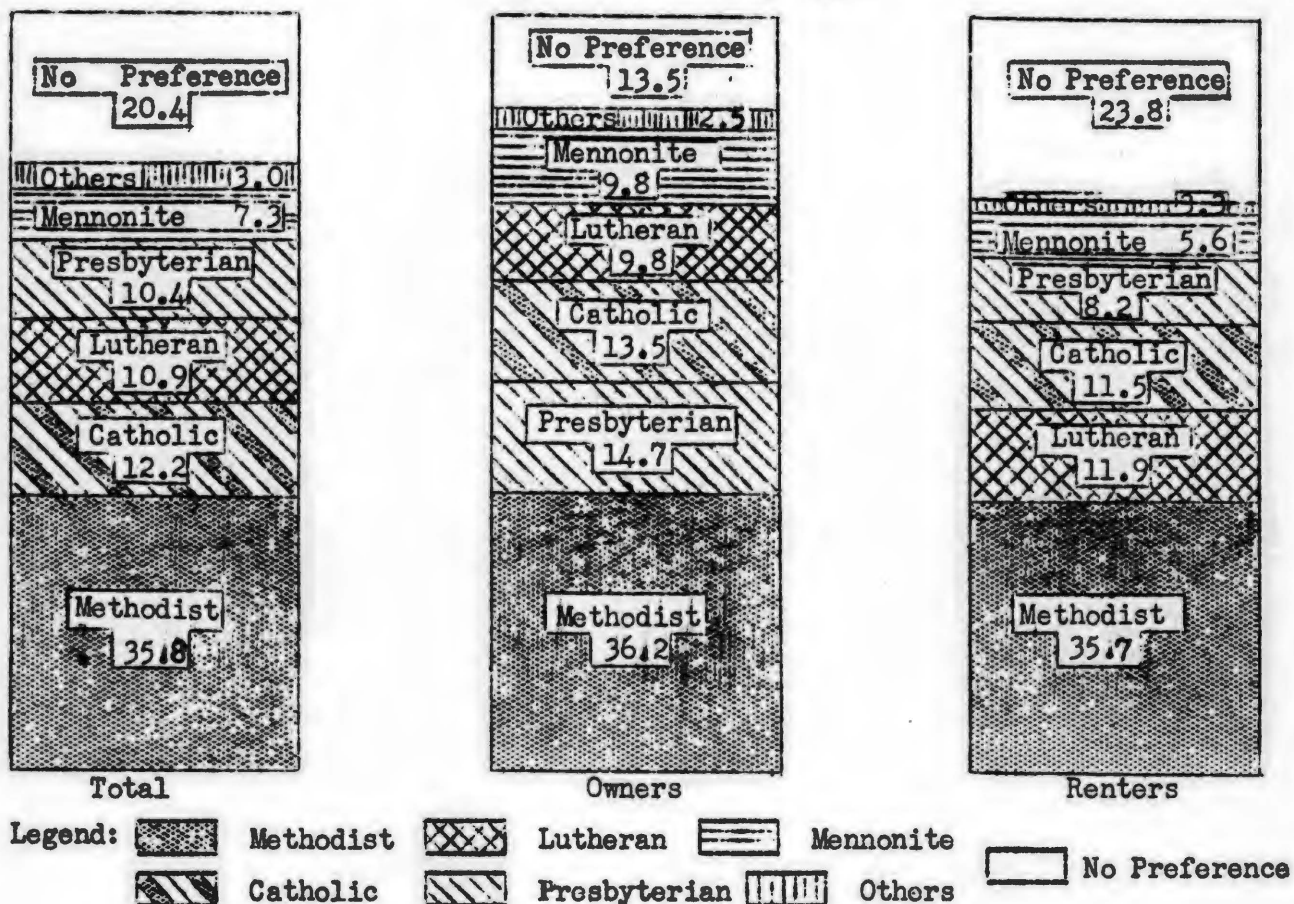
Legend: \triangle Open country church.
 142 \blacksquare (3) Sully county village centers with population and number of churches.
 The number within each church area is the total population of the area (not including village populations).

Figure 1 shows the attendance areas in Sully county of village and country churches located in or adjacent to the county. It will be noted that the areas served by village churches are considerably larger than those of the two open country churches. Three hundred or over two-thirds of the 441 farm families, attended church in villages of Sully and Hughes counties. Fifty-one, or about one-ninth of all farm families, attended country churches; while 90, or one-fifth of the families, did not attend church.

Of the eight churches operating in Sully county in 1940, six were located in the two villages, Agar and Onida, with three churches listed in each.

Two open country churches were operating—the Fairbanks(Lutheran) church and the Blaine (Mennonite) church. The latter drew from a sizeable colony in Buffalo, Blaine, Fairview and Lincoln townships. It will be noted that an area adjacent to and including the Little Bend in the Missouri river in western Sully county is not served by any of the churches. This is a very sparsely settled region, of which a considerable portion has been abandoned to establish a game reserve. The meagerness of the population in the various church areas makes it impossible for any great number of country churches to carry on active programs, or even to exist. The Blaine church has a resident pastor only during the summer months, and the Fairbanks church not at all. Several of the village churches are also without resident pastors, a factor which necessarily limits the general church program.

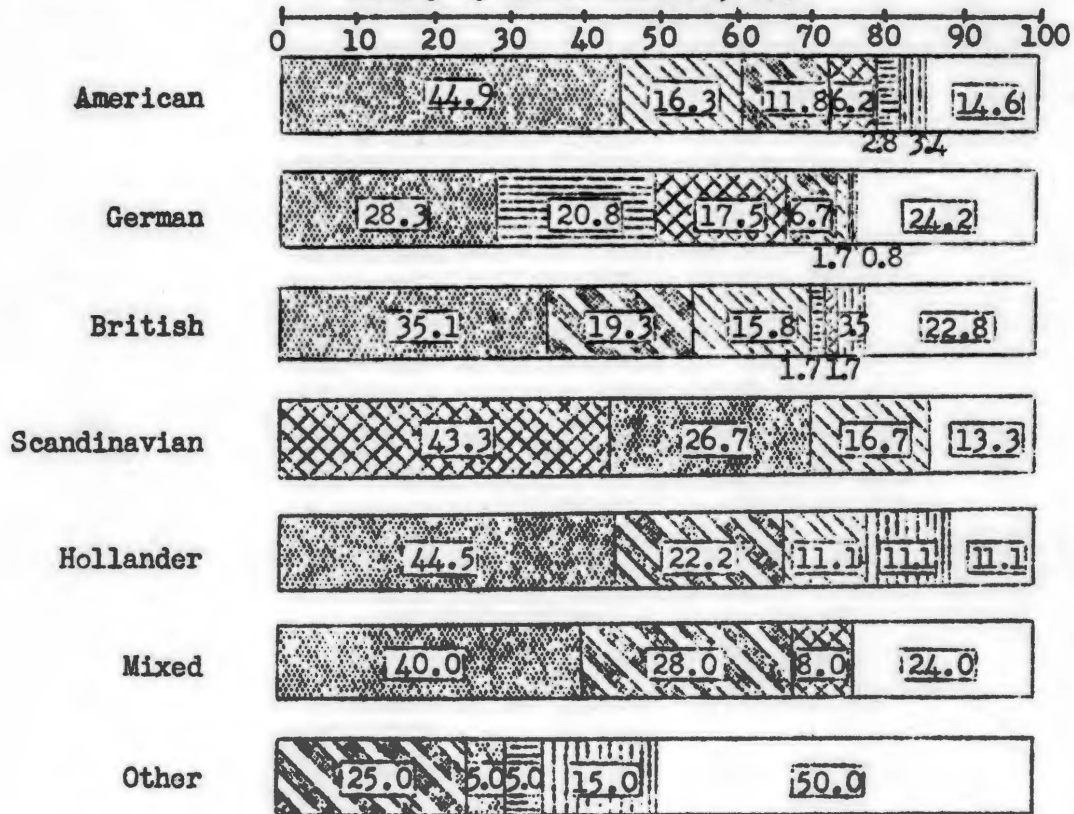
Figure 2. Denominational Preference of All Farm Household Heads in Sully County by Tenure Status, 1940.



Of the 441 farm household heads in Sully county, 351, or 79.6 percent, expressed a preference for one or another denomination. The Methodist church, named by 35.8 percent of all farm household heads, had almost three times as many followers as any other church. The Catholic church ranked second with 12.2 percent of the household heads in its preference group, followed by the Lutheran with 10.9 percent, the Presbyterian with 10.4 percent and the Mennonite, with 7.3 percent. All other denominations enlisted only 3.0 percent of the farm household heads, while 20.4 percent expressed no denominational preference.

When farm owners are compared with farm renters, the most significant fact which is revealed is the relatively large proportion in the former group who express a denominational preference. Eighty-six and five-tenths percent of the farm owners claimed a preference for some denomination, as compared with 76.2 percent of the renters. This difference was supplied by appreciably larger proportions of Presbyterian, Catholic and Mennonite adherents among farm owners than among farm renters. For the Methodist church, only a slightly larger proportion of owners than renters expressed preference, while the Lutheran preference group was somewhat larger among renters.

Figure 3. Denominational Preference of all Farm Household Heads in Sully County by Nationalities, 1940



Legend:

- Methodist
- Catholic
- Lutheran
- Presbyterian
- Mennonite
- Other
- No Preference

Nationality background has always been one of the chief factors influencing denominational choice. The strength of the Methodist church in Sully county is reflected in its predominant position among each of the nationalities with the exception of Scandinavian. The American, Hollander, mixed, and British groups contributed the largest proportion of Methodist followers. Over 70 percent of all persons of British descent expressed preference for the Methodist, Catholic or Presbyterian denominations, indicating the presence of the English, Irish and Scotch elements, respectively. The Lutheran church was the choice of 43.3 percent of the Scandinavian group, and also ranked relatively high among the Germans, with 17.5 percent. Over one-fifth of the Gorman group was affiliated with the Mennonite church.

Although there is a strong tendency for foreign-born settlers and their children to cling to the denominations prevalent in their native lands this adherence, like other features of the foreign culture pattern, tends to disappear with the third and succeeding generations. Especially is this true in thinly peopled areas, of which Sully county is an example, where nationality groupings in any given locality are not sufficiently numerous to establish separate churches. Under these conditions former affiliations are frequently forgotten and persons of various nationality backgrounds band together in the support of churches already established in the community.

Figure 4. Predominant Nationalities and Denominations in Townships of Sully County, 1940*

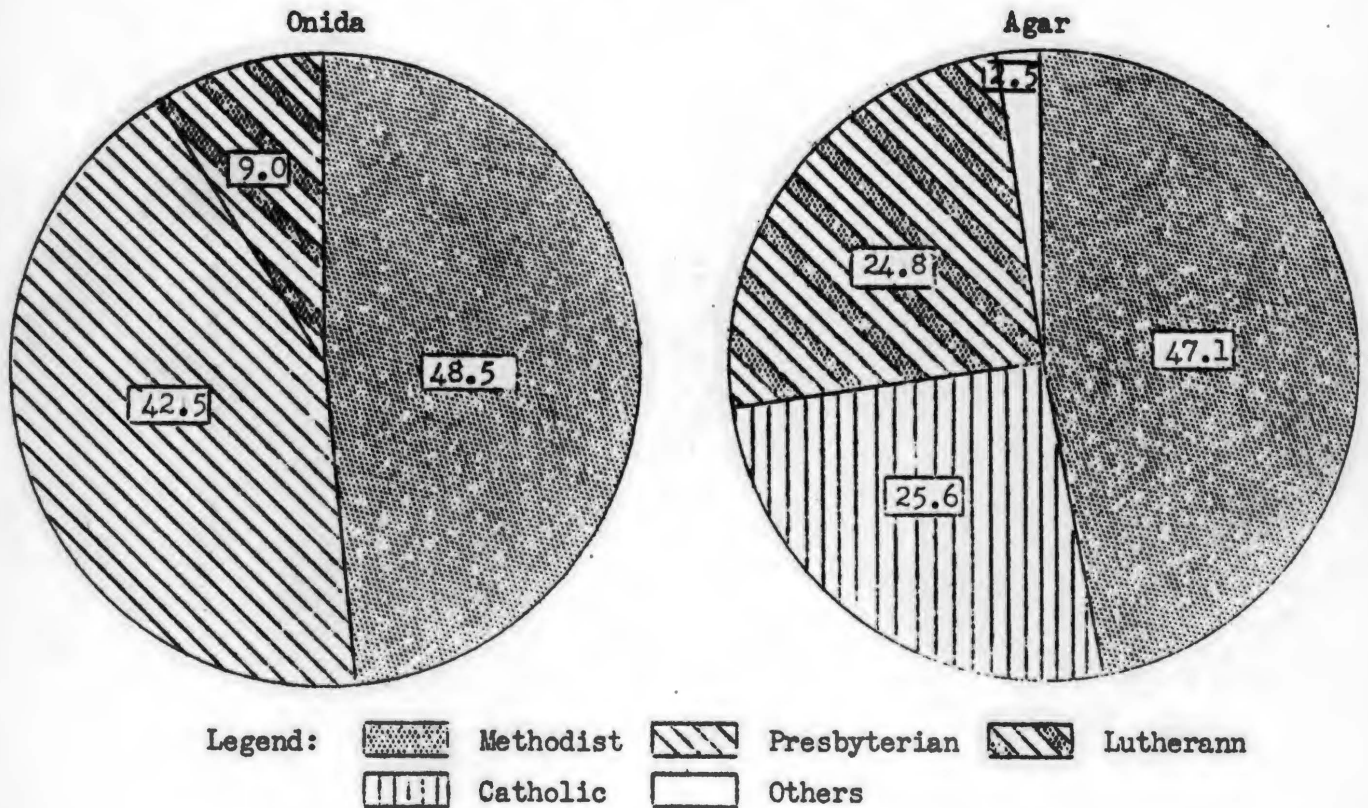
(Little Bend)	(Troy)	(Farmington)	(Milford)	(Harrison)	(Morton)	(Cora)
	Ger. 70.0 Meth. 90.0	Amer. 52.6 Meth. 68.4	Ger. 47.6 Mixed	Mixed Mixed	Amer. 72.7 Mixed	Ger. 50.0 Cath. 35.7
(Fairbanks)	(Pearl)	(Hartford)	(Garner)	(Rich Valley)	(Fairview)	(Norfolk)
Mixed Mixed	Mixed Mixed	Amer. 54.5 Meth. 36.4	Amer. 52.9 Luth. 41.2	Mixed Mixed	Mixed Meth. 53.3	Ger. 42.8 Mixed
(Grand View)	(Okobojo)	(Clifton)	(Onida)	(Blaine)	(Buffalo)	(Pleasant)
Mixed Mixed	Amer. 82.3 Meth. 47.0	Amer. 45.4 Pres. 45.4	Amer. 50.0 Pres. 38.9	Mixed Mixed	Ger. 57.7 Men. 50.0	Mixed Meth. 36.4
(Lewellyn Park)	(Iowa)	(Good Water)	(Summit)	(Lincoln)	(Lake)	(Elk)
Amer. 57.1 Meth. 35.7	Amer. 50.0 Meth. 75.0	Amer. 64.3 Meth. 57.1	Amer. 57.8 Meth. 63.2	Mixed Mixed	Ger. 43.5 Mixed	Mixed Meth. 40.6

* To be considered predominant a nationality or denomination was required to have at least 20 percent more followers than any other single nationality or denomination.

Figure 4 which shows the predominant nationality and denomination in each township of Sully county, demonstrates again the relationship which exists between nationality background and church preference. However, the large number of townships reported as "mixed" reflects the heterogeneity of the Sully county farm population.

In the eleven townships in which the American nationality predominated, the Methodist church was dominant in seven instances, the Presbyterian twice, and the Lutheran and "mixed" once each. Ten townships were listed as "mixed" in nationality composition. Seven of these were likewise mixed in respect to church preference, with the Methodist denomination leading in the other three. Six townships were predominantly German, of which three reported mixed church affiliations, one Methodist, one Catholic, and one Mennonite. In 22 of the 27 townships either Methodist predominance or mixed preference was found, with each taking first rank in 11 townships.

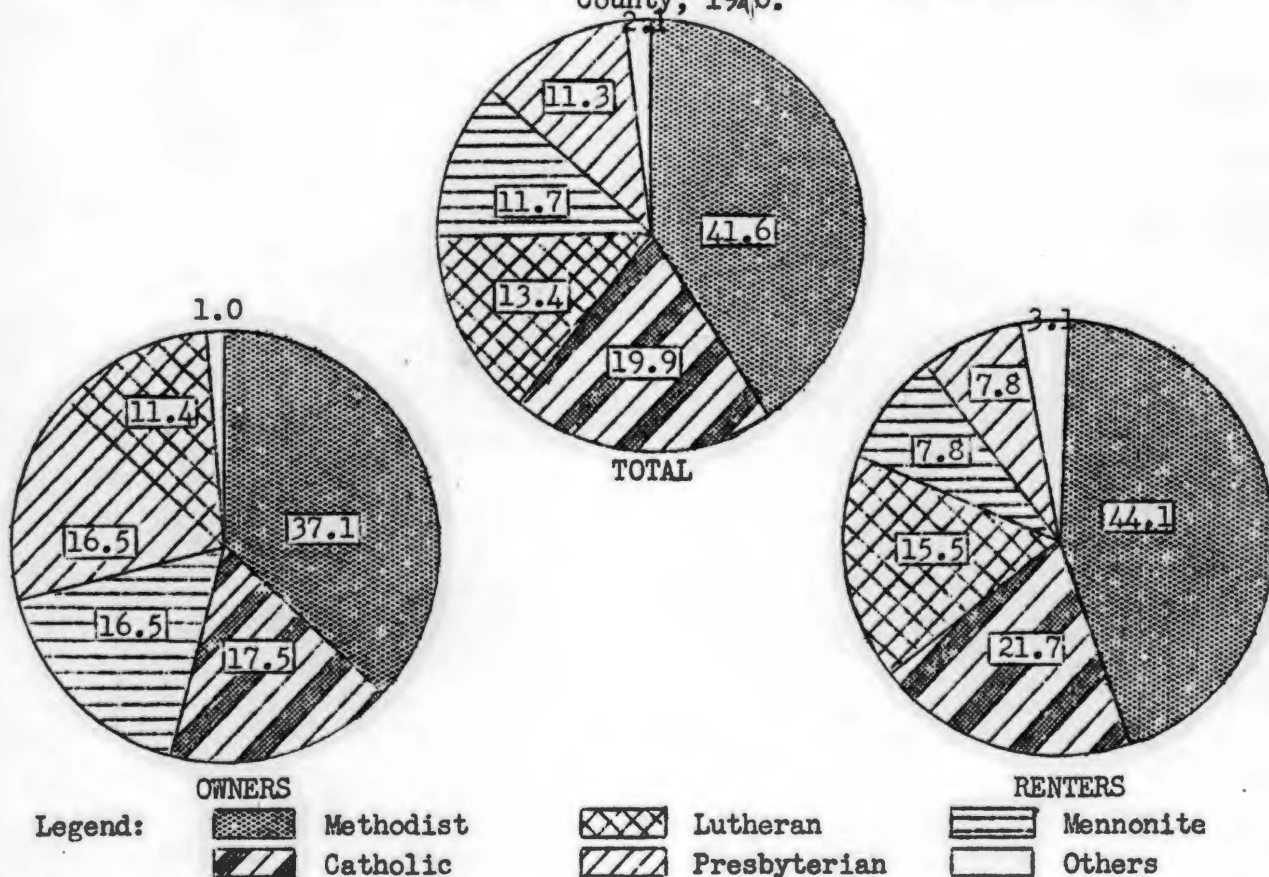
Figure 5. Attendance of Farm Families by Church Preference in Villages of Sully County, 1940



As observed previously 300, or over two thirds, of the farm families in Sully county attended church in town or village centers in 1940. Of these families, 222 were in attendance at the two villages located in Sully county—121 at Agar and 101 at Onida. Figure 5 shows the proportion of farm families who attended each church in these two villages. It will be noted that the Methodist denomination attracted the largest number of farm families (almost one-half) in both Agar and Onida. In Onida, the Presbyterian church followed closely with 42.5 percent, while the Lutheran, with 9.0 percent, accounted for the remainder. In Agar the Catholic and Lutheran denominations enlisted almost equal proportions of the farm families—25.6 and 24.8 percent, respectively.

Seventy-eight farm families attended church in three towns and villages of Hughes county, with Harrold drawing 37, Blunt 21 and Pierre 20. Sixty-two percent of the farm families who attended church at Harrold were Methodists, while the Catholic and Lutheran churches were represented in smaller proportions. The Methodist church at Blunt drew an even larger proportion—over 76 percent—of the Sully county farm families who attended church in that village. The Catholic and Presbyterian churches enlisted smaller numbers of followers from Sully county. Four churches in Pierre—the Methodist, Catholic, Church of Christ and Lutheran—drew farm families from Sully county, the Methodist leading with 55 percent.

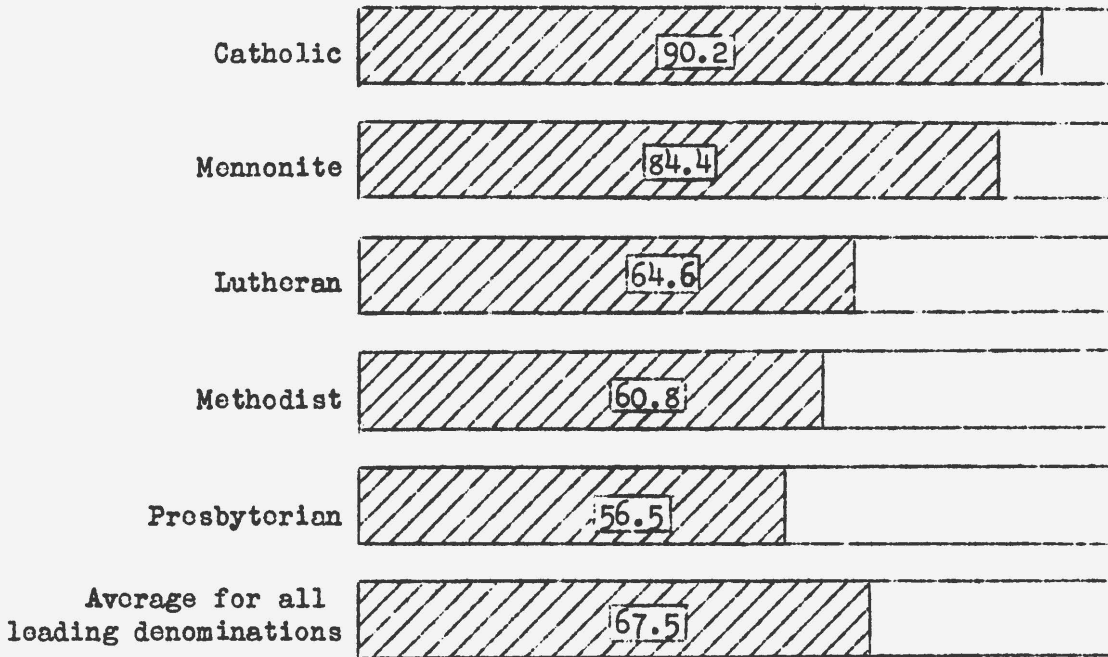
Figure 6. Church Membership of Farm Household Heads in Sully County, 1940.



The number of farm operators in Sully county who are church members falls considerably short of the number who express denominational preference. In 1940, 231, or 52.4 percent, of the farm operators in Sully county were members of some church. The five leading denominations--Methodist, Catholic, Lutheran, Mennonite and Presbyterian--accounted for 97.9 percent of all church members. Over two-fifths (41.6 percent) of all members were affiliated with the Methodist church, 19.9 percent with the Catholic church, 13.4 percent Lutheran, 11.7 percent Mennonite, and 11.3 percent Presbyterian.

Farm owners had a considerably higher proportion of church membership than did tenants--59.5 percent as against 47.9 percent. This adds credence to the belief that ownership makes for better support of community institutions. The two leading denominations; Methodist and Catholic, along with the Lutheran, made up somewhat smaller proportions of the farm owners than of the renters, while the proportions of Mennonites and Presbyterians were appreciably larger among the owners. The latter two groups constituted one-third of all farm owners as compared with little more than one-seventh of all renters.

Figure 7. Ratio of Membership to Church Preference for Leading Denominations, Sully County, 1940.



Slightly over two-thirds of all farm household heads in Sully county who expressed preference for some denomination were church members. It is a well-known fact that certain denominations enroll a considerably larger proportion of their preference group as members than do others. A comparison of the five leading denominations in Sully county shows that the Catholic church leads in this respect, recruiting as members 90.2 percent of all farm household heads who claimed Catholic preference. The Mennonite church also ranked high in the ratio of membership to preference with 84.4 percent, followed by the Lutheran, Methodist and Presbyterian denominations, with 64.6 percent, 60.8 percent, and 56.5 percent, respectively.

The chief explanation for the superior recruiting power of the Catholic church lies in its intensive program of indoctrination. Children are schooled in the catechism and brought into membership at an early age. A strong church loyalty is also evidenced by the Mennonites whose closely-knit social organization and characteristic religious beliefs call for the participation of the entire group. The Lutheran denomination, it will be noted, ranks third in percentage of membership. This can be attributed to the rather intensive confirmation program conducted for their children.

Some of the other Protestant denominations expend less effort in influencing children to come into church membership. As a consequence, many persons reared in these churches drift away because their loyalties have not been cemented by membership. Furthermore, those who continue to express preference for these denominations are less and less likely to become members as they advance in years.

Figure 8. Percentage of Farm Household Heads Expressing Preference and Having Church Membership in Sully County, 1940.

	Troy	Farmington	Milford	Harrison	Morton	Cora
	100.0	89.5	100.0	92.3	90.0	78.6
	30.0	68.4	90.5	92.3	72.7	57.1
Fairbanks	Pearl	Hartford	Garner	Rich Valley	Fairview	Norfolk
61.5	85.7	90.9	76.5	95.5	100.0	71.4
23.1	71.4	36.4	64.7	65.2	86.7	57.1
Grandview	Okobojo	Clifton	Onida	Blaine	Buffalo	Pleasant
61.9	70.5	72.7	83.3	95.2	84.6	72.7
47.6	11.8	45.4	44.4	66.7	50.0	54.5
Lewellyn Park	Iowa	Goodwater	Summit	Lincoln	Lake	Elk
42.8	75.0	92.8	78.9	72.7	73.9	62.5
28.6	25.0	28.6	31.6	68.7	52.2	37.5

Legend: Top Figure - Preference
Lower Figure - Membership

Figure 8 shows the percentage of farm household heads in townships of Sully county who expressed denominational preference, along with the percentage who were members of some church. In three townships--Troy, Milford and Fairview--all of the farm operators expressed preference for one or another denomination. Harrison and Milford townships led in the proportion of farm household heads who were church members with 92.3 percent and 90.5 percent, respectively.

It will be noted that the percentage of membership (and to a lesser extent preference) is excessively low in a number of Sully county townships, particularly in the southern and western portions of the county. In Okobojo township, only 11.8 percent of the farm operators were church members, with a number of other townships reporting membership of less than forty percent. It would appear that farm families in these areas are not being adequately served by existing churches. The solution to this problem will not come, however, through the organization of additional open country churches. Because of the sparse pattern of settlement in Sully county, the country church is not a practical unit. In view of the vastly improved transportation facilities it is felt that a large share of the farm families in areas which now appear to be unchurched could be served by village churches. Over two-thirds of the farm families, it will be recalled, already attend village churches. With a conscious and deliberate program in operation the village congregations could likely bring many of the remaining farm families into church membership.

Suggestions for Solving the Problems of Over-churched and Unchurched Areas in Sully County

The National Home Missions Council has recommended a ratio of one church per thousand of the population. On this basis Sully county, with eight churches and 2,668 inhabitants, is distinctly over-churched. At the same time, large numbers of Sully county residents are not availing themselves of church membership or attendance, thus indicating the existence of unchurched areas. The following suggestions are made for solving the problems of over-churched and unchurched areas in Sully county.

I. Town Areas

Paradoxical as it may seem, over-churching in towns is partially responsible for an unchurched condition there. Either over-churching within a denomination or denominational overlapping has the effect of reducing adequate financial support. Without sufficient finances it is impossible for a church to maintain a program sufficiently vital to attract the unchurched. As C. Luther Fry has expressed it, "A weak and ineffectual church, like the abandoned church, is a burden upon religious faith. It is a feeble symbol (a dying epistle one might say, known and read of all men) that religion as there exemplified approaches impotence." Furthermore, the existence of a large number of small sects, each with a conflicting creed is apt to have a tendency to produce contempt for the Christian religion on the part of the unchurched. The first step, therefore, would be to cut down denominational overlapping by one of the following methods of comity.

- a. Denominational Exchange - This is an arrangement whereby two denominations agree to an exchange of churches in two different localities. Members of a weak church in a given locality agree to merge with a strong church in another denomination. In another locality the opposite process may be carried on within the same two denominations.
- b. Undenominational - In this type of union the uniting churches sever all connections with denominations.
- c. Federated - This is an arrangement whereby two or more denominations maintain a joint local worship but each of the united bodies continues to keep affiliation with its own denomination.
- d. Affiliated - When this type of union takes place, a loose connection is maintained for certain purposes with some one denomination.

II. Country Areas

To enlist the large numbers of farm families in Sully county who are not now availing themselves of church membership it will not be advisable to construct new open country churches. Village churches, which already serve two-thirds of the farm families, are in a better position by virtue of their superior equipment, personnel and program to appeal to the unchurched than are country churches. Special efforts should be made to attract the unchurched farm people through such means as vacation Bible schools in rural school buildings, visiting gospel teams, country evangelistic services, and "Rural Life Sunday" programs.