

## 1. Community Life: How to Get Its Pulse

Robert K. Lamb

### SUGGESTIONS FOR A STUDY OF YOUR HOMETOWN

This memorandum is written as if you were visiting Hometown for the first time and as if your company or organization had instructed you to arrive as quickly as possible at a comprehensive knowledge of Hometown so that you might effectively represent it there. Towards the end of the memorandum I shall have something to say about the advantages you, with your long experience in the community, would have over a newcomer in your *own* Hometown.

To do this job of community-analysis there are certain tools you will obviously need. A map of Hometown is your first tool, for a brief glance at it will provide the trained eye with more facts than could be secured from any other source. (This of course depends upon the map; most street maps are featureless without an accompanying street directory).

Once upon a time, about 1890 or before, American street directories were even more useful than they are today, but they are still an indispensable part of any such investigation as this. There are three principal divisions of the average directory: (1) the alphabetical name section for individuals and business firms, organizations, etc.; (2) the street directory listing each house or building, and usually each separate family or business occupant of such buildings; (3) the classified advertising section. Most, if not all such directories also contain an introductory section in narrative style, containing facts about the town sta-

tistically arranged from the census and other sources; there is usually also a section devoted to the city government, giving the principal office holders, and often a great deal of detail about the personnel of the various city services.

For the fastest orientation it is ideal if you can find a series of older maps of the city (usually accessible at the public library) so that you can trace the characteristics of the city's growth.

Before you have gone much further with your investigation it will be advisable to learn more about the earlier inhabitants. For this purpose you will need another tool: one or more volumes of local history, usually to be found in the form of county-wide accounts of the history and biographies of the area, with sections devoted to the towns and cities in each county.

Other tools will be suggested later, but we shall start with those mentioned and see whether after a week in town we could arrive at any understanding of its social structure.

Let us start first with the county history. Here we shall assign fictitious names to typical characters. Sooner or later in the county history we will come across the name of Jedediah Early who was connected with the Early Trust Company; perhaps we shall also be able to establish that William A. Newcomer married one of the Early girls. If we can also connect the Early and Newcomer families with the foundation of the Hometown Manufacturing Company we have a good running start on a reconstruction of the way people have earned their living in Hometown for

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many years. This is, of course, a round-about way of approaching the matter. There are probably in the county history many names of families who have moved away, and others whose names have died out, at least in the direct line, although middle and even first names may survive.

The quickest way to find out where the major economic decisions are made in Hometown is to go to the public library and ask to see a copy of Rand-McNally's *Banker's Register* (if the library does not have it, go to one of the local banks). There you will find the names of all the Hometown banks as of the year of publication; however, because of the mortality of banks after 1929 there are great advantages in looking up two volumes: the current one and one prior to 1929. Take this list of banks and look up another publication, Moody's *Banks*. Here you will find the names of the directors of your Hometown banks, together with the history of the mergers which have taken place and which have contributed to the present condition of these banks. In this book there will also be found a current bank statement of assets and liabilities, and probably the dividend record.

Another set of tools becomes necessary: a card file. Some people prefer 3" x 5" cards because they are handy to carry; others use 5" x 8" because they provide more space for notations. Use one card for each bank and record the names of the directors on the ruled side and the history of the bank on the reverse, unruled side. Then make a separate card for each bank director, with his name (last name first) in the upper left-hand corner. Put his address if it is available on the top right, and his directorships (with his principal connection on top) in the middle. On the reverse side of the card record his personal history, date of birth and parentage at the top, marriage, children, education, etc.

These cards should be alphabetically filed in the boxes in which the cards were bought, thus dispensing with the added expense of buying special files.

Card files become your most important source of information, and you will find that it is necessary to cross-reference them constantly. They constitute the basic difference between our approach and that of the census-taker: we are primarily interested in individuals and their patterns of relationship, while he is interested in the overall statistical aggregates.

With the list of bank directors in hand, turn now to another tool volume: Poor's *Register of Directors*. Here are listed all the most important corporate directors in the United States. These men do not always record their directorships, but the listing is as complete as the editors are able to make it on the basis of their investigations. From Poor's *Register* you can find the *other* corporate directorates held by Hometown bank directors. This will lead you at once to the names of all important Hometown businesses, for banks tend to accumulate to themselves the leading financial and business talent in town. This method of analysis will be successful provided Hometown's bank is not part of a chain of banks which merely maintains a manager in your town. But unless your town is very small it did once have a bank, and not so very long ago, so that a study of earlier editions of the volumes cited above will reveal the names of Hometown's bank directors.

Such volumes as these may not be available in many cities and towns but if there is a university in the neighborhood its library may carry them; they should also be found in large city public libraries. In many cities there are often business libraries attached to the Chamber of Commerce, or elsewhere, and usually your Hometown banks subscribe to some or all

of these publications. If, among its successful sons who have moved away, your town numbers a broker in some big city or a metropolitan banker, a letter to him may bring your library a copy of one or more of these volumes which although perhaps a few years out of date will still be useful for your general purposes. The names of the directors of your banks for the current year can be ascertained by asking the local bank for a copy of its annual statement, which is usually published in a small folder on the back cover of which is a list of the directors. Business connections which are not corporate, such as partnerships or firms, will usually be found in your street directory.

Turn now to the Hometown Manufacturing Company in your directory where the names of its officers and chief supervisory employees will probably appear. This will enable you to plot on the map the residences of superintendents or foremen, and operating management. You will find that while only the top men live on High Street or in "Hills and Dales," the others often tend to live as close to these neighborhoods as they can afford, the older men nearer High Street, the younger nearer "Hills and Dales."

A number of directories also designate the place of employment of those who work in the Hometown Manufacturing Company by some such mark as "Hometown Mfg.," for example. This will enable you to plot on the map the residences of those employed at the factory. When the craft or special skill of the worker is also indicated, as it is in most directories, you can find out where the several grades of workers live. (It should be understood that the word "grades," as used here, has a purely technical usage, such as "machinist" or "foremen," and is a means of distinguishing the probable wage received, since this tends to determine what rent

workers can pay, and other economic facts we are trying to establish.)

Once you have begun to accumulate cards for individual residents in different parts of the city, and have marked their cards according to their occupations, you are on the way to the preparation of a residential map of the city. It will be advisable to devise a system of symbols to designate the different income grades and occupational groups, and attach them to individual residents on the map in order to show the approximate location of their homes on the streets of the city.

Incidentally, if you are enterprising, one map bought from the local bookseller who handles the Hometown street directories will enable you to trace any number of copies on transparent paper. Once you have plotted on your maps the location of your bank directors, corporation directors, superintendents, foremen, and workers in the factory, you are ready to branch out into a neighborhood-by-neighborhood investigation of Hometown; this will include its churches, neighborhood and nationality clubs, formal and informal social groups, political and business groups, etc.

Such an investigation will lead you back in the direction of your census materials, which are also to be found in the public library. But the model for the investigation is not to be found in the census, but in the publications of social workers. For information about census tracts it will be necessary to approach someone connected with a public or private charity, or a governmental office dealing with welfare or relief. In many cities (and their number is increasing), students have made area studies of the different neighborhoods, showing the number of cases of one sort or another falling in a given area; types of sickness, law violations, social maladjustments such as juvenile delinquency, have been indicated area by area on city-wide

maps. This is one of the most fruitful parts of any study you may make of Hometown. However, these findings must be considered very carefully and you should avoid arriving at a hasty conclusion on the basis of any one type of case as it appears on the map.

From this wealth of material, a comprehensive pattern of neighborhood distribution of these various groups will emerge. By turning to the street section of your Hometown directory you may be able to discover whether or not the resident is a home-owner and sometimes whether he has a telephone. This information will help to confirm your guesses about income status. By working back and forth between the street section and the alphabetical section of your volume, you will be able to verify your sampling on a street by street basis. In this way you will soon know a great deal about the distribution of Hometown population—group by group—and income—class by class. If your company were interested, for example, in a door-to-door selling campaign, this information would be of considerable help.

For some purposes it may be necessary for your company to know the national origins of different groups in the community. In past times many of these groups tended to live in their own separate neighborhoods and to develop separate national institutions, such as churches, parochial schools, clubs and organizations of one kind and another. Increasingly these distinctions arising from national origin are breaking down in this country. The younger generation is tending to move out to newer suburban developments where they mingle with people of other national origins. This is part of the "melting pot" of which the Americans are so properly proud. A study of your Hometown map as prepared by the method described above will reveal, however, that the "melting"

process is far from complete in many communities.

Any study of local politics will reveal that politicians are highly aware of group differences of all kinds, including those just described, and that they are a factor in the political, social and economic life of the community. By turning to the first section of your Hometown directory where information about City Hall and other city services is listed, a card file can be made on the political structure of Hometown. A study of this file will show that it reflects some of the divisions within the community, as already indicated in the foregoing.

The life of most communities is still dominated to a large extent by the oldest inhabitants and their descendants. Usually they exercise the chief influence on the boards of local banks, and insofar as businesses are locally owned they tend to retain a controlling interest. But today this is by no means a universal pattern since the influence of out-of-town corporations has become more and more important in all but the leading cities of the country. As a first approximation we can say that the social system of a community (with its various organizations, such as the Community Chest, Red Cross, etc.) leans heavily upon the families of those long established in the community; the economic leadership is drawn from the ranks of newer individuals and groups; and the political leadership is even more frequently in the hands of the representatives of newer groups.

To understand the social system of the community insofar as it can be distinguished from the political and economic systems, it is usually necessary to begin with the churches as the oldest, local, social institutions. These are in turn distributed throughout the community, and a map showing their location will be very instructive and assist in pointing up some of

your other findings. Since most churches are not only religious but neighborhood social organizations, incorporating many non-religious activities, a study of the leadership of these sub-groups within the church will also contribute to your understanding of the community.

Any young businessman coming to the city for the first time and expecting to establish residence there will want to know about the other social and charitable organizations, their functions and their representation of various groups. Some of these can be called "total community" organizations, for instance the Community Chest, or, within the business community, the Chamber of Commerce. Others are representative of special groups in the community. One of the most significant keys to the social grading system is to be found in the structure of the more exclusive clubs. There is usually a club to which only the older inhabitants are admitted, and their method of choosing even among this older group displays their attitude as to the necessary qualifications for membership in the inner circle of their group. If you can secure a list of their membership and compare it with other parts of the social structure, such as leadership in total community organizations, churches, charities, and clubs, you will have a useful key to the relationship between the older and newer groups in town.

In this type of study it is easy to lose sight of the fact that getting a living is the backbone of community life and that the jobs held by men and women are bound to be the ruling factors in their lives. The increase of absentee ownership of factories and stores, and even of newspapers and banks in towns and cities of the United State, makes it more and more difficult to understand the patterns of organization of individual communities. To find out what is happening to these plants and businesses

you need new tool volumes. For industries, consult Moody's (or Poor's) *Industrials*. One or the other of these will give you a picture of the extent to which your local factory is still locally controlled, or to what extent control has passed to out-of-town groups. While these sources are adequate for our present purposes, if a really extensive study of these matters were being made, it would be necessary to consult the records of the Securities and Exchange Commission in Washington. If the language used is unfamiliar, some acquaintance who has experience with reading such source material should be called upon for help. Here you may find that the local company (though still locally owned) has perhaps undergone a series of mergers prior to arriving at its present size; if you are interested in the historical aspects of the community it will be worthwhile studying the companies that merged to form the existing one. The story of your local industries is paralleled by what has happened to your local, privately-owned electric light, gas, water, and street transportation system or systems. A similar tool volume is available for investigation of these companies in Moody's (or Poor's) *Public Utilities*. All of these facts should be recorded on file cards and properly catalogued.

In a short space of time you will now have gathered a very comprehensive picture of the life of Hometown. (The size of the community will of course determine the length of time this job will take, although much will depend upon your previous experience in making such studies.) I venture to say that you will know many things about the community which might have escaped your notice even if you had lived there all your life. Nevertheless there are many things you cannot find out by these mechanical methods. The most important facts which tend to elude this ap-

proach are of a personal order. It is essential to live long years in a community in order to be aware of some of the most important of these facts. As an outside observer, or even one who has had a short residence in the community, you cannot hope to find a completely adequate substitute for this experience. However, as the representative of your company, you are expected to find a short-cut which will be the best possible substitute for such long residence.

The best substitute for your own long residence is to gain access to certain of the oldest inhabitants. Experience will show that there are certain people in the community, not always members of the socially elect group but frequently drawn from among them, whose type of mind reproduces the patterns we have just described, without resort to our complicated methods. Frequently these individuals have recently retired from the most influential positions in the community and are still active in the local historical society. If you are properly introduced and they respect you as a scientific investigator and believe you have the best interests of the community at heart, they will often be of invaluable assistance to you in providing that type of information which can generally come only from a lifetime knowledge of their town or city. You will do well to try to find at least one such person (and if possible several) who is willing to assist you and who will talk to you freely. By working with more than one of these individuals you will be able to triangulate your results and so avoid some of the inevitable effects of bias. Even the most objective of these persons is bound to see the life of his community from a slightly different vantage point than would any other such observer. You must learn to make allowances for these differences of point of view.

If you, the reader, are yourself a lifelong resident of Hometown, you will be able to supply the same sort of information as this oldest inhabitant, and will want to correct your bias by the methods I have described. Nevertheless a lifelong resident will have a great advantage over our supposed representative of an out-of-town company. You will know, for example, who married whom, and what the grandparents and even the great-grandparents of many of your fellow residents contributed to the life of the community. Without having to make maps of the historical growth of the community, you will know at what point in time which suburbs developed, and just when different local businesses came under out-of-town control.

Without referring to the files of the local newspapers (which by the way are indispensable to our visitor-observer) or having to talk to the local newspaper editors, you will know just which events in the life of Hometown are of the greatest importance in the estimation of its citizens. You will know when crises arose in the life of the community and how they were solved. You will know what effect the depression and mass unemployment had on the town or city and what happened when labor tried to organize the local plants and businesses. Above all, you will know the personalities and dispositions of the human beings who make up Hometown, and you will realize what an important part such personal traits can play in the average community. In short, these mechanical methods I have recommended are bound to produce a de-humanized picture. It is essential for the observer to try to restore the characteristics of a living community, with its hopes and fears, its shared pleasures and its sorrows.

One of the most elusive things you must try to understand is "community spirit," and in this connection you must attempt to

discover what individuals or groups in the community hold the symbols of community leadership at any given time.

Outside of the churches there are two places to look for the symbols of community integration. One of these focal points is the cemetery and the other is the patriotic organization. No community, modern or ancient, can be understood without reference to these two sets of facts. It has been said that "the most important people in Hometown are dead." Even to American society, with its gaze fixed upon expansionism and the future, ancestors are of great symbolic importance. If ancestors in general are important, those who participated in our military history are of great significance. Certain patriotic organizations in each community tend to be regarded by the rest of the community as safeguarding the symbols of patriotism. It is necessary to study the structure of these patriotic organizations as an important

factor in the advancement of Hometown life, to be present on the day of their most symbolic activity, Memorial Day, and watch the course taken by the parade—from High Street down through the business section of the town and out to the oldest cemetery. This will usually contribute many useful facts about the nature of community spirit.

All this is bound to sound like an overwhelming job; for the largest cities, of course, it is much too great an undertaking for any single individual to carry out in a reasonable period of time, even as a first approximation. Nevertheless, if you will re-read these proposals with care you will find ways and means for short-cutting and sampling, depending upon the size of your community; after operating with this outline for only a few weeks, the characteristics of your community will take on new significance even if you have lived there all your life.

## 2. Community Needs: How to Identify And Understand Them

Roland L. Warren

### ORGANIZING A COMMUNITY SURVEY

Often during the discussion of a community problem, someone suggests, "Let's have a survey," and the other members of the group, perhaps knowing no other positive course of action, give their assent. A survey may or may not be indicated for the type of program you have in mind. We present below some considerations which

might be weighed before reaching a decision.

1. Are the facts you need already available in usable form? If so, the time and money and energy spent in making a survey might possibly be put to better use in an action program, that is, in doing something to improve the existing conditions.

2. Is the survey likely to be a substitute for action? Often a survey is merely a

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