

Rural Life in a Modern Age

What does it mean to live a modern life?

Where you live has a critical impact on your lifestyle, your options, community services and even your health. Historically, the transition from rural to urban has meant that a household has options to use specialties the community offers and not to rely entirely on its own resources. A bakery can supply bread, a hospital health care, transportation services like buses or taxis, a school graded classrooms and clubs social outlets. On the other hand, rural families avoid urban noise and often pollution, ethnic tensions from different neighborhoods and sometimes the loss of tight-knit neighborhoods and family connections. Depending on one's priorities, urban or rural living may have more or less appeal.

Rural, Urban Growth

For the first time in American history, the urban population surpassed the rural population in the 1920 U.S. Census. The census showed that 51.2 percent of Americans lived in cities with a population over 2,500 (the definition of urban). In Iowa, rural residents still commanded a distinct majority with 36 percent. But there was a definite trend toward urban living, especially in the big cities in the East, and many Iowans found this disturbing. Descendants of Northern European countries (British Isles, Germany, Scandinavia, Ireland) had traditionally dominated the countryside throughout the 19th century, but Eastern and Southern European immigrants had been swelling Boston, New York, Philadelphia and the manufacturing centers around the Great Lakes. Railroads and automobiles had greatly increased travel exposing Iowa residents to urban values that threatened long-standing traditions. World War I had witnessed the beginning of mass migrations of African-Americans to Northern cities creating new racial tensions. Additionally, due to the collapse of high wartime practices and agriculture growing surpluses created by wartime stimuli, Americans experienced economic hardship.

American values were in flux in the early 1900s. Prohibition was officially the law of the land with the passage of the 18th Amendment but the bootlegging industry and widespread disregard of the law created tensions. The rise of motion pictures and radio brought images of urban life to rural areas. As troops returned home from the fighting in Europe, many hoped that the U.S. could withdraw from international affairs and return to a more isolated foreign policy, but world affairs continued to draw America into diplomatic issues. Technology, economics and political tensions prevented the United States from returning to the pre-war "normalcy" - as President William Harding described it - and the nation would face unprecedented challenges in the coming years with the Great Depression, World War II and the onset of the Cold War in the Atomic Age.

Supporting Questions

What did modern life look like at the beginning of the 20th century?

- [“Typical Eastern City” Newspaper Article, September 1, 1900 \(Document\)](#)
- [State Street in Chicago, Illinois, 1905 \(Image\)](#)
- [Iowa City, Iowa, 1907 \(Image\)](#)
- [Fort Dodge, Iowa, 1907 \(Image\)](#)
- [Interview of Harry Reece about His First Trip to Chicago, Illinois, November 29, 1938 \(Document\)](#)

What did rural life look like at the beginning of the 20th century?

- [Woman, Man and Child Between a Corn Field and a Stream in Iowa, 1897 \(Image\)](#)
- [Rural Wagon Delivering Mail, 1903 \(Video\)](#)
- [“Country Life,” 1904 \(Image\)](#)
- [Excerpts from the Report of the County Life Commission, 1909 \(Document\)](#)
- [“Special Message from the President of the United States Transmitting the Report of the Country Life Commission,” 1909 \(Document\)](#)
- [Family Posed with Haystack and Horse-Drawn Wagon in Dubuque, Iowa, ca. 1910 \(Image\)](#)
- [Children Reading the Sunday Newspaper in Dickens, Iowa, December 1936 \(Image\)](#)
- [Selected Graphs from “Changes in Agriculture,” 1950 \(Document\)](#)

How did rural people advocate for the conveniences of modern life?

- [Excerpt from the Annual Report of the Postmaster-General of the United States, 1891 \(Document\)](#)
- [“Rural Mail Report” Newspaper Article, October 24, 1899 \(Document\)](#)
- [Excerpt from “President’s Message” about Rural Mail Delivery, December 3, 1900 \(Document\)](#)
- [“Electricity and the Farm” Newspaper Article, February 28, 1901 \(Document\)](#)
- [“Telephones on Farms” Newspaper Article, December 30, 1902 \(Document\)](#)

How did rural people advocate for the conveniences of modern life?

- [“The Marvelous Vogue of the Automobile,” August 24, 1899 \(Document\)](#)
- [“Is Our Pace Too Fast?” June 18, 1903 \(Document\)](#)
- [“Physical Culture of Beams and Girders,” May 12, 1904 \(Document\)](#)
- [“Woman and Her Ways,” January 10, 1907 \(Document\)](#)
- [“Thomas Edison Prophecies,” July 10, 1907 \(Document\)](#)
- [“Experienced Teacher” and “Newspapers” Article, October 12, 1907 \(Document\)](#)

[*Printable Image and Document Guide](#)

Additional Resources

“Good Roads and Rural Free Delivery of Mail” by Wayne E. Fuller

This academic journal article was featured in *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* and looks at the transition to rural free delivery of mail around the turn of the 20th century.

“The Changing Nature of Country Roads: Farmers, Reformers, and the Shifting Uses of Rural Space, 1880-1905” by Christopher W. Wells

This journal article follows the progression of road development and its effect on rural America. This includes the passage of the first state-aid road laws, the creation of the first federal road agency and the growth of a strong urban-rural coalition promoting rural road improvements.

“The Revolution in Rural Telephony, 1900-1920” by Claude S. Fischer

This article from the *Journal of Social History* focuses on the evolution of telephone development and technology in rural America.

“Rural Education Reform and the Country Life Movement, 1900-1920” by David B. Danbom

This article, which was published in the *Agricultural History* journal, looks at the parallels of education reform and rural America.

***Born in the Country: A History of Rural America* by David B. Danbom**

This book features a general history of rural America. Ranging from pre-Columbian times to the enormous changes of the twentieth century, the book integrates agricultural, technological and economic themes with new questions social historians have raised about the American experience.

“Typical Eastern City” Newspaper Article, September 1, 1900



Courtesy of Newspaper Archive, “Typical Eastern City,” *The Eldora Herald*, pp. 1, 1 September 1900

Description

This news article described the towns in Hardin County on a drive from Iowa Falls to Eldora, Iowa. While this account was published in *The Eldora Herald*, the story was written for publication in the *Omaha World-Herald*.

[Full Transcript of “Typical Eastern City” Newspaper Article](#)

[Transcribed Excerpts from “Typical Eastern City” Newspaper Article](#)

[Printable Excerpt of “Typical Eastern City” Newspaper Article](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- The title of this article is “Typical Eastern City.” What characteristics of Eldora are included in this story to prove that it is a typical eastern city?
- In [Harry Reese’s interview](#), he described himself and his uncle as feeling out-of-place when they visited Chicago. According to this story, would a visitor from the eastern United States feel out-of-place in Eldora? Cite specific evidence from the text to support your answer.

Citation Information

“Typical Eastern City,” *The Eldora Herald*, pp. 1, 1 September 1900. Courtesy of Newspaper Archive

State Street in Chicago, Illinois, 1905



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Graves, C.H., "State Street, Chicago," 1905

Description

This view of State Street in Chicago, Illinois, is presented as a stereographic image. These images were designed to be used in a viewing device so the viewer would see a 3D image. These images were popular as a way to see other places.

Source-Dependent Questions

- Chicago at the beginning of the 20th century would have been considered a modern city. What features in this photo would support that statement?
- Which of these features would have been more profitable in an area with a higher population, like Chicago?

Citation Information

Graves, C.H., "State Street, Chicago," 1905. Courtesy of Library of Congress

Iowa City, Iowa, 1907



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Bandholtz, F.J., "Iowa City, IA," 1907

Description

In 1900, Iowa City was the 13th largest city in Iowa. While it saw rapid population growth in the 1850s, population growth slowed after 1860 when the state capital was moved to Des Moines. This image shows a panoramic view of an intersection in the business district of Iowa City. A few pedestrians are standing on the sidewalks, and several horse-drawn buggies are tied at hitching posts. The street is lined with two- to three-story brick buildings. Electrical poles are present on both sides of the center street and on one side of the street to the left. Each pole carries several electrical wires.

Source-Dependent Questions

- According to the image, how accessible was electricity to the people of Iowa City? Cite specific evidence in the image to support your answer.
- Compare and contrast Iowa City with [Fort Dodge](#) and [Chicago](#). If Chicago and Fort Dodge could be considered modern cities, could Iowa City be considered a modern city? Cite specific evidence from the images to support your answer.

Citation Information

Bandholtz, F.J., "Iowa City, IA," 1907. Courtesy of Library of Congress

Fort Dodge, Iowa, 1907



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Bandholtz, F.J., "Ft. Dodge, Ia.," 1907

Description

This image shows an intersection in downtown Fort Dodge, Iowa. In 1900, Fort Dodge was the 12th largest city in the state of Iowa. The image shows the streets lined with two- to three-story brick buildings. A few people are walking on the sidewalks. Several horse-drawn buggies are in the street. A couple of cars are driving down one of the streets, and the tracks for a tram run down the middle of one street.

Source-Dependent Questions

- Carefully examine this view of downtown Fort Dodge. What features of modern life are visible?
- Compare and contrast this image with photo of [State Street in Chicago](#). If Chicago is assumed to be a modern city in 1900, could Fort Dodge be considered a modern city? Use evidence from the images to support your answer.

Citation Information

Bandholtz, F.J., "Ft. Dodge, Ia.," 1907. Courtesy of Library of Congress

Interview of Harry Reece about His First Trip to Chicago, Illinois, November 29, 1938

Name to be filled out for each individual	RELATION
FOUR	New York
Circumstances of Interview	
NAME	Earl Bowman
DATE OF INTERVIEW	80 West 12th St. New York City
ADDRESS	Nov. 29, 1938
TITLE	HARRY REECE (DACA)... HIS STORY
SUBJECT	N.Y. 29, 1938; Interview at subject, Harry Reece's Book Store, 63 Washington Square, South, New York City
1. Date and time of interview	
2. Place of interview	
3. Name and address of informant	Harry Reece, 63 Washington Sq. So.
4. Name and address of person, if any, who assisted him, if any	None; assisted him myself. I have known informant personally for more than ten years.
5. Name and address of person, if any, who prompted you	
6. Description of event, scene, surroundings	Informant's own place of business, an old book store, in the basement of 63 Washington Sq. So. N. Y. C. A perfectly typical second hand book place with the intimate, friendly, air of thousands of old volumes cluttering shelves and walls and counters.
(See on many additional sheets as necessary, for copy of the forms, each bearing the proper heading and the number to which the material refers.)	

Courtesy of Library of Congress, Bowman, Earl, "[Harry Reece (Daca)...His Story]," 29 November 1938

Description

This interview was collected in 1938 by the Federal Writers' Project, a component of the Work Projects Administration. In the interview, Harry Reece described his first trip to Chicago around 1900. Reece was born and grew up in rural Illinois.

[Full Transcript of Harry Reece's Interview](#)

[Transcribed Excerpt from Harry Reece's Interview](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- According to Harry Reece, why were telephones, electricity, the phonograph and trolley cars such a curiosity to him?
- According to Reece, why is his Uncle Bill Brandon well respected at home? Cite specific evidence from the document to support your answer.
- How did Uncle Bill Brandon react to seeing a trolley car in Chicago? According to Reece, why did Brandon react that way?

Citation Information

Bowman, Earl, "[Harry Reece (Daca)...His Story]," 29 November 1938. Courtesy of Library of Congress

Woman, Man and Child Between a Corn Field and a Stream in Iowa, 1897



Courtesy of Library of Congress, "Characteristic scene in the great corn belt, U.S.A.," 1897

Description

This image is intended to be used in a stereograph viewer. The side-by-side images in the viewer would provide a 3D image. Stereograph images were popular ways to see the world. This image was sold in the United States, Canada and Britain. These side-by-side images show a man, woman and young boy standing at the edge of a corn field. The corn is on the left of the picture. It has tassled out and is almost twice as tall as the two adults. The two adults are looking towards a tree-lined stream that runs on the right side of the picture. All three people are dressed up, not in work clothes.

Source-Dependent Questions

- According to this image's description, this photo is supposed to be a typical scene in the corn belt. According to the image, what typically happens in the corn belt?
- Compare this image to the [image of the family posed with a haystack](#). What features of this stereograph image suggest it was constructed by non-farming people? Use specific evidence from the images to support your answer.
- Compare this image to the [description of Eldora](#). How were both of these sources creating something that non-farm people would have found familiar? (Hint: Consider the clothes in the stereograph image.)

Citation Information

"Characteristic scene in the great corn belt, U.S.A.," 1897. Courtesy of Library of Congress

Rural Wagon Delivering Mail, 1903



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Weed, A.E., "Rural wagon delivering mail, U.S.P.O.," 1903

Description

In the early 1890s, Postmaster General John Wanamaker proposed the extension of mail delivery service into the countryside. In U.S. cities, mail delivery to homes began in the 1860s. Wanamaker's proposal gained wide support in rural areas where farm families often went without mail for days and even weeks at a time. This video created in 1903 showed a typical rural delivery. The subject of the video is the delivery of the U.S. mail in a rural area. The camera was positioned in full sight of a standard rural free delivery post box located in front of a well-kept house and garden. A small boy and girl walk past the camera position in front of the mail box. At that moment, a standard rural horse-drawn postal delivery wagon comes into sight. The postman places the mail in the box, and the wagon continues on its way.

Source-Dependent Questions

- If this video shows a "typical" farm family, what were the characteristics of that family? List specific details about the people and the grounds.
- One of the strongest objections to John Wanamaker's proposal for rural free delivery of the mails was the cost. If the U.S. post office created this video to challenge those objections, what details in the presentation of this farm family could justify the expense of rural free delivery?

Citation Information

Weed, A.E., "Rural wagon delivering mail, U.S.P.O.," 1903. Courtesy of Library of Congress

“Country Life,” 1904



Courtesy of Library of Congress, "Country Life," 1904

Description

This "Country Life" image was published as part of a collection about rural life. The collection was published in 1904. The bottom third of the image shows a "typical Arabian horse" and a "typical Percheron horse." The top of the image shows a scene with pastures on the left and grain fields on the right. One pasture has hogs and the other sheep. The grain fields show a wheat field after harvest and a corn field growing. The left side of the image reads, "Sheep In Pasture. Hogs In Clover. A Typical Arabian Horse." The right side of the image reads, "Wheat In Shock. Growing Corn. Typical Percheron Horse."

Source-Dependent Questions

- According to this image, what does life in the country include? Does this image suggest a positive view of country life? Use specific details to support your answer.
- If electricity allowed for lighting the darkness, telephones for communicating across long distances and railroads for shortening distances, what do the gravel road and the fences in the center of the image allow for?

Citation Information

"Country Life," 1904. Courtesy of Library of Congress

Excerpts from the Report of the County Life Commission, 1909

20 REPORT OF THE COUNTY LIFE COMMISSION.

be trained. These leaders will see the great underlying problem of country life, and together they will work, each in his own field, for the one goal of a new and permanent rural civilization. Upon the development of this distinctively rural civilization rests ultimately our ability, by methods of farming requiring the highest intelligence, to continue to feed and clothe the hungry nations; to supply the city and metropolis with fresh blood, clean bodies, and clear brains that can endure the strain of modern urban life; and to preserve a new of men in the open country that, in the future as in the past, will be the stay and strength of the nation in time of war and its guiding and controlling spirit in time of peace.

It is to be hoped that many young men and women, fresh from our schools and institutions of learning, and quick with ambition and trained intelligence, will feel a new and strong call to service.

I. GENERAL STATEMENT.

Broadly speaking, agriculture in the United States is prosperous and the conditions in many of the great farming regions are improving. The success of the owners and cultivators of good land, in the prosperous regions, has been due partly to improved methods, largely to good prices for products, and also to the general advance in the price of farm lands in these regions. Notwithstanding the general advance in rentals and the higher prices of labor, tenants also have enjoyed a good degree of prosperity, due to fair crops, and an advance in the price of farm products approximately corresponding to the advance in the price of land. Farm labor has been fully employed and at increased wages, and many farm hands have become tenants and many tenants have become landowners.

There is marked improvement, in many of the agricultural regions, in the character of the farm home and its surroundings. There is increasing appreciation on the part of great numbers of country people of the advantages of sanitary water supplies and plumbing, of better construction in barns and all farm buildings, of good reading matter, of tasteful gardens and lawns, and the necessity of good sanitation.

Many institutions are also serving the agricultural needs of the open country with great effectiveness, as the United States Department of Agriculture, the land-grant colleges and experiment stations, and the many kinds of extension work that directly or indirectly emanate from them. The help that these institutions render to the country-life interests is everywhere recognized. State departments of agricultural, national, state, and local organizations, many schools of secondary grade, churches, libraries, and many other agencies are also contributing actively to the betterment of agricultural conditions.

Courtesy of the Farm Credit Administration, "General Statement," Report of the Country Life Commission, pp. 20-22, 26, 1909

Description

In this summary of their final report, the Commission on Country Life provided information about the strengths of country life but spent most of the report identifying the weaknesses of country life and making recommendations for resolving those problems. This excerpt from their introduction briefly outlines that information.

[Transcribed Excerpts from the Report of the County Life Commission](#)

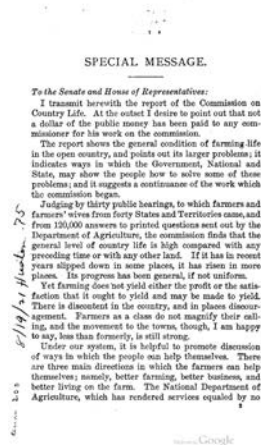
Source-Dependent Questions

- The County Life Commission began with the ways in which rural life was "prosperous and the conditions...are improving." What evidence did the Commission provide to support this statement? (Include at least five.)
- Then the Commission pointed out that farm life should not be measured by how it is better than the past, but how it compared to what farm life could be. To what did the Commission attribute the failure of farm life to live up to its possibilities? (Include as least two.)
- The Commission included the list of questions asked of rural people as part of their study. How could these questions be categorized around different aspects of rural life? If the number of questions are an indication of the Commission's level of concern, about which aspects of rural life was the Commission most concerned? Provide evidence to support your answer.

Citation Information

"General Statement," *Report of the Country Life Commission*, pp. 20-22, 26, 1909. Courtesy of the Farm Credit Administration

“Special Message from the President of the United States Transmitting the Report of the Country Life Commission,” 1909



Courtesy of the Farm Credit Administration, “Special Message from the President of the United States Transmitting the Report of the Country Life Commission,” Report of the Country Life Commission, pp. 3-9, 1909

Description

In 1890, two events indicated the changing nature of American life. For the first time, the value of manufactured goods was greater than the value of agricultural goods produced that year. And following the 1890 census, the Census Bureau declared the frontier closed since no “empty” lands remained to be settled. Thirty years later, the 1920 census showed that more Americans lived in urban areas than in rural areas. In this moment, when industrial urban life was overtaking rural agricultural life, President Theodore Roosevelt created the Commission on Country Life to investigate rural life and to make recommendations for improving it. In this excerpt from Roosevelt’s introduction to the Commission’s report, Roosevelt identified some of the benefits and weaknesses of rural life.

[Full Transcript of “Special Message from the President of the United States Transmitting the Report of the Country Life Commission”](#)

[Transcribed Excerpts from “Special Message from the President of the United States Transmitting the Report of the Country Life Commission”](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- What had the Commission found about country life in comparison to earlier time periods?
- What did President Theodore Roosevelt think of farmers and country life? Provide evidence from the text.
- What problems did Roosevelt identify about country life? Identify at least three.
- Roosevelt stated, “One of the chief difficulties is the failure of country life, as it exists at present, to satisfy the higher social and intellectual aspirations of country people.” What is Roosevelt implying about farm people in this quote? Which of the images in this text set might support that position? Explain your reasoning using evidence.

Citation Information

“Special Message from the President of the United States Transmitting the Report of the Country Life Commission,” *Report of the Country Life Commission*, pp. 3-9, 1909. Courtesy of the Farm Credit Administration

Family Posed with Haystack and Horse-Drawn Wagon in Dubuque, Iowa, ca. 1910



Courtesy of University of Iowa Library and Archives, "Family posed with haystack and horse-drawn wagon, Dubuque, Iowa, 1900s," ca. 1910

Description

This posed image was taken near Dubuque, Iowa, in the first decade of the 20th century. A postcard was created using this image. Postcards were a relatively new invention at the beginning of the 20th century, and a variety of different images were used to create them. A farm family can be seen in the foreground of the photograph. Two adults on the left each hold a small child. Two members of the family pose with pitchforks and hay on the wagon. A fifth member of the family poses on a tall ladder leaning against the pile of hay in the background, and a sixth family member stands next to the wagon. A matched pair of horses are harnessed to the wagon.

Source-Dependent Questions

- Describe the work being done in this image. What type of technology is being used to complete this work?
- Does this image show the effects of modern life? Explain your answer with specific details.

Citation Information

"Family posed with haystack and horse-drawn wagon, Dubuque, Iowa, 1900s," ca. 1910. Courtesy of University of Iowa Library and Archives

Children Reading the Sunday Newspaper in Dickens, Iowa, December 1936



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Lee, Russell, "Untitled photo, possibly related to: Children reading Sunday papers..."
December 1936

Description

This photograph was taken in the 1930s, a couple of decades after the other images in this set. The photograph came from the U.S. Resettlement Administration and was taken during the Great Depression. The agricultural sector was an area of concern for the U.S. government during the Depression, and several programs were established to address rural issues.

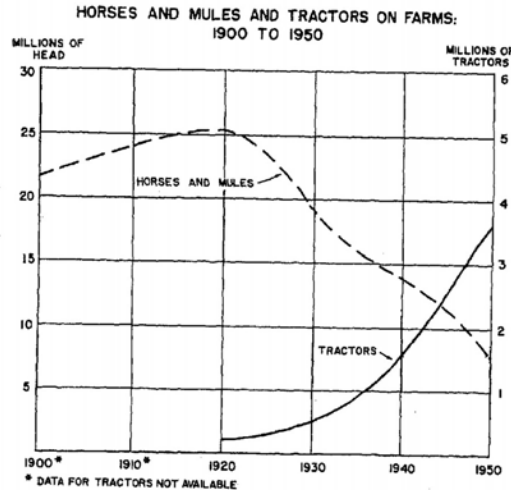
Source-Dependent Questions

- The full label with this photograph is "Untitled photo, possibly related to: Children reading Sunday papers, Rustan brothers' farm near Dickens, Iowa. Note convenience of running water in background. This farm was formerly owner operated but they are now tenants of Metropolitan Life." According to this label, what improvement to rural life did this photo document? What ongoing difficulty with rural life was identified in this label?
- Does this image reflect a similar message as that of the Commission of Country Life? Explain your answer with evidence from the documents.
- How do we know this is a rural home? In what ways could this be considered a modern home?

Citation Information

Lee, Russell, "Untitled photo, possibly related to: Children reading Sunday papers, Rustan brothers' farm near Dickens, Iowa. Note convenience of running water in background. This farm was formerly owner operated but they are now tenants of Metropolitan Life," December 1936. Courtesy of Library of Congress

Selected Graphs from “Changes in Agriculture,” 1950



Courtesy of U.S. Census Bureau, “Changes in Agriculture, 1900-1950,” Agriculture in 1950, U.S. Census Bureau, pp. 78-82, 99, 1950

Description

This series of graphs are from a 34-page document published in 1950, detailing the changes that had occurred in agriculture over the previous 50 years. The report covered changing land use patterns and the major agricultural products produced in the United States during that period, including grain crops, fruits, and livestock. These particular graphs highlight changes to daily life.

Graph 1: This is a line graph showing the decline of the number of horses and mules on farms as the number of tractors on farms increased.

Graph 2: This is a bar graph comparing the number of tractors in use in agriculture to the number of mules and horses. Tractors are reported in the hundreds of thousands and steadily increase from 1920 to 1950. Mules and horses are reported in the millions and steadily decline in numbers in the same time period.

Graph 3: This is a bar graph comparing the number of horses, mules, and tractors in use from 1850 to 1950. The number of horses peaked in 1920 with 20 million. Mules peaked in 1925 at 6 million. Tractors first appear on the graph in 1920 and steadily increase.

Graph 4: This is a bar graph comparing the percentage of reporting farms using a tractor, motor truck, or automobile. In 1920, 30 percent of reporting farms had an automobile, while less than five percent of reporting farms had a motor truck or tractor in 1920. All three categories increased steadily after 1920.

Graph 5: This is a bar graph comparing the percentage of farms with electricity and telephone service. In 1920, almost 40 percent of reporting farms had telephone service. In 1940 that percentage had declined to less than 25 percent before increasing to around 40 percent in 1950. In 1920, less than 10 percent of reporting farms had electricity. That percentage steadily grew to almost 80 percent of reporting farms had electricity in 1950.

Graph 6: This is a line graph comparing the total U.S. population to the farm population beginning with 1910. The graph shows a steady increase in U.S. total population from around 90 million people to around 150 million people by 1950. Meanwhile, farm population declined from around 30 million people to around 25 million people in the same forty years.

Selected Graphs from “Changes in Agriculture,” 1950 continued

Description continued

Graph 7: This is also a line graph, comparing agricultural workers to non-agricultural workers from 1850 to 1950. In 1850, agricultural workers made up over 60 percent of the U.S. workforce. By 1900, agricultural workers were less than 40 percent of the total workforce. By 1950, they were less than 15 percent of the workforce.

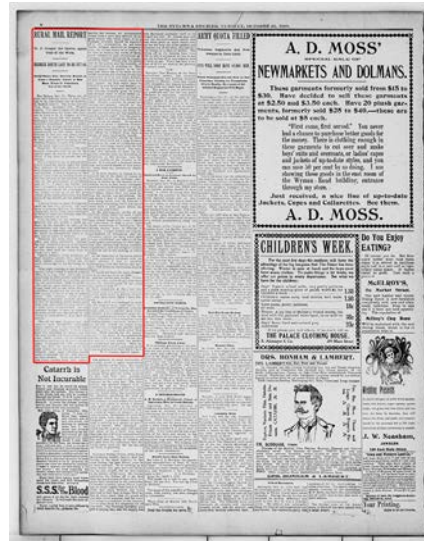
Source-Dependent Questions

- According to the Commission on Country Life, farm families were doing better than they ever had before. What evidence in these graphs would support that claim?
- The Commission on Country Life also indicated that farm life was not living up to its possibilities. What evidence in these graphs would support that claim? Cite at least three of the graphs to support your claim.
- Review the features from [Chicago](#), [Fort Dodge](#) and [Iowa City](#) that were identified as indications of modern life. Were farmers before 1920 sharing in those features of modern life? Provide evidence to support your answer.
- Based on these graphs, would farm life after 1920 have likely lived up to its possibilities? Use evidence from at least three graphs to support your answer.

Citation Information

“Changes in Agriculture, 1900-1950,” *Agriculture in 1950*, U.S. Census Bureau, pp. 78-82, 99, 1950. Courtesy of U.S. Census Bureau

“Rural Mail Report” Newspaper Article, October 24, 1899



Courtesy of Library of Congress, “Rural Mail Report,” *The Ottumwa Courier*, pp. 6, 24 October 1899

Description

Newspapers regularly reported on the expansion of rural free delivery with the opening or surveying of new routes. These news stories often included information about the program and its success. This report came from one of the government officials responsible for developing and overseeing the routes.

[Full Transcript of “Rural Mail Report” Newspaper Article](#)

[Transcribed Excerpts from “Rural Mail Report” Newspaper Article](#)

[Printable Excerpt of “Rural Mail Report” Newspaper Article](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- What effects does W.F. Conger claim rural free delivery has on rural life? Support your answer with specific evidence.
- What reasons did Conger use to argue against city delivery and for rural delivery of the mail? Provide specific evidence to support your answer.
- In the article, Conger stated, “Every community served by rural delivery feels itself set a long distance forward in the scale of civilization and brought into closer touch with the life and progress of the world.” Is he implying that rural families are missing out on modern life? Provide specific evidence to support your answer.

Citation Information

“Rural Mail Report,” *The Ottumwa Courier*, pp. 6, 24 October 1899. Courtesy of Library of Congress

Excerpt from “President’s Message” about Rural Mail Delivery, December 3, 1900



Courtesy of Library of Congress, “President’s Message,” *Evening Time Republican* (Marshalltown), pp. 2, 3 December 1900

Description

In this address, reported in Marshalltown’s *Iowa Times Republican*, President William McKinley acknowledged the benefits of rural free delivery for farm families.

[Transcript of Excerpt from “President’s Message” about Rural Mail Delivery](#)

[Printable Excerpt of “President’s Message” about Rural Mail Delivery](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- According to President William McKinley, what have been the benefits of rural free delivery? Does he consider these improvements as part of the overall changes to the U.S.? Provide specific evidence from the document to support your answer.
- One of the strongest objections to rural free delivery was the potential cost. How does McKinley address that objection? Does he refute it? Provide specific evidence to support your answer.

Citation Information

“President’s Message,” *Evening Time Republican* (Marshalltown), pp. 2, 3 December 1900. Courtesy of Library of Congress

“Electricity and the Farm” Newspaper Article, February 28, 1901



Courtesy of Newspaper Archive, “Electricity and the Farm,” *The Ames Times*, pg. 1, 28 February 1901

Description

At the beginning of the 20th century, several new inventions were changing life for many Americans, especially in the cities. Some changes were spreading to the countryside, like rural free delivery, while others would take longer to spread through the countryside. While not all of this author’s predictions would hold true, they did provide a justification for the spread of modern life to the countryside.

[Transcript of “Electricity and the Farm” Newspaper Article](#)

[Printable Excerpt of “Electricity and the Farm” Newspaper Article](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- What predictions are made in the first half of the news story? How accurate do you think those predictions are? Support your answer with specific evidence.
- How does the author describe the farmer? Does this description justify efforts to expand modern life into the rural areas? Provide specific evidence to support your answer.
- Does the description of the farmer in this article support the idea that farmers deserved access to a modern life? Provide specific evidence to support your answer.

Citation Information

“Electricity and the Farm,” *The Ames Times*, pg. 1, 28 February 1901. Courtesy of Newspaper Archive

“Telephones on Farms” Newspaper Article, December 30, 1902



Courtesy of Library of Congress, “Telephones on Farms,” *The Denison Review*, pp. 2, 30 December 1902

Description

As modern innovations spread in the cities, rural residents also desired access to those conveniences of modern life. Rural life, in particular, was often viewed as isolated, and the telephone seemed a good remedy. This newspaper article looks at the influence and use of telephones on farms.

[Transcript of “Telephones on Farms” Newspaper Article](#)

[Printable Excerpt of “Telephones on Farms” Newspaper Article](#)

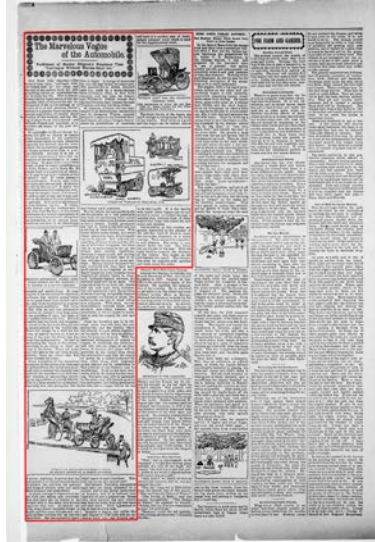
Source-Dependent Questions

- According to the author, what are the benefits of telephones for rural life?
- Why would the phone benefit farm families? Use evidence to support your answer.
- How does this story support the Commission on Country Life’s claim that country life suffered from inequity and injustice? Provide specific evidence to support your answer.

Citation Information

“Telephones on Farms,” *The Denison Review*, pp. 2, 30 December 1902. Courtesy of Library of Congress

“The Marvelous Vogue of the Automobile,” August 24, 1899



Courtesy of Library of Congress, “The Marvelous Vogue of the Automobile,” *Republican News Item*, pp. 3, 24 August 1899

Description

The first automobiles were introduced in the late 19th century. They became more commonly available after 1900 when Henry Ford developed his assembly line production for the Model T.

[Full Transcript of “The Marvelous Vogue of the Automobile” Newspaper Article](#)

[Transcribed Excerpts from “The Marvelous Vogue of the Automobile” Newspaper Article](#)

[Printable Excerpt of “The Marvelous Vogue of the Automobile” Newspaper Article](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- What were the benefits of the automobile?
- Was the author concerned with the costs of the automobile? Why or why not? Use evidence from the article to support your answer.
- The author described the automobile as one of the “marvelous contrivances which modern inventive ingenuity has devised.” What definition of “modern” can be inferred from this quote?

Citation Information

“The Marvelous Vogue of the Automobile,” *Republican News Item*, pp. 3, 24 August 1899. Courtesy of Library of Congress

“Is Our Pace Too Fast?” June 18, 1903



Courtesy of Library of Congress, “Is Our Pace Too Fast?” *White Oaks Eagle*, pp. 6, 18 June 1903

Description

This newspaper article, entitled “Is Our Pace Too Fast?”, focuses on the words of a New Haven physician. The doctor said at an address before the American Therapeutic Society that weakness of the heart and the circulatory system are common among certain classes of men and women to the high tension of modern life.

[Transcript of “Is Our Pace Too Fast?” Newspaper Article](#)

[Printable Excerpt of “Is Our Pace Too Fast?” Newspaper Article](#)

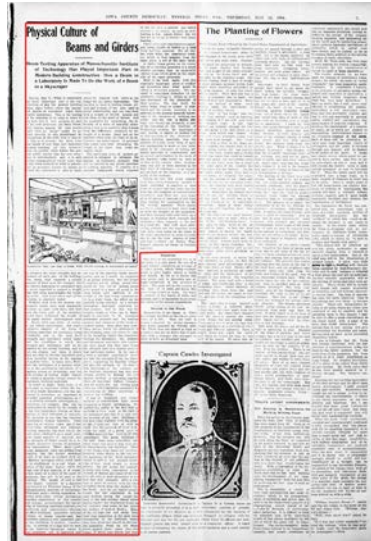
Source-Dependent Questions

- According to the doctor mentioned in the article, why were some people unhealthy? Provide evidence from the text to support your answer.
- What does this article suggest about the costs of modern life? Use specific details to support your answer.

Citation Information

“Is Our Pace Too Fast?” *White Oaks Eagle*, pp. 6, 18 June 1903. Courtesy of Library of Congress

“Physical Culture of Beams and Girders,” May 12, 1904



Courtesy of Library of Congress, “Physical Culture of Beams and Girders,” *Iowa County Democrat*, pp. 7, 12 May 1904

Description

With Bessemer process and later Open-Hearth process, steel could be mass produced and began to be used in a wide variety of ways. In cities, steel girders were used to build much taller buildings.

[Full Transcript of “Physical Culture of Beams and Girders” Newspaper Article](#)

[Transcribed Excerpts from “Physical Culture of Beams and Girders” Newspaper Article](#)

[Printable Excerpt of “Physical Culture of Beams and Girders” Newspaper Article](#)

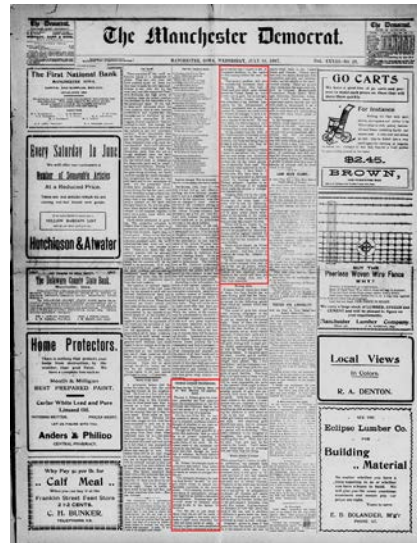
Source-Dependent Questions

- The author uses the phrase “Modern Building Construction” in the title. Based on this article, what were the characteristics of modern buildings and their construction? Use specific evidence to support your answer.
- What does the author consider “modern?” Use evidence to support your answer.
- What are the costs and benefits of “modern building construction?”

Citation Information

“Physical Culture of Beams and Girders,” *Iowa County Democrat*, pp. 7, 12 May 1904. Courtesy of Library of Congress

“Thomas Edison Prophecies,” July 10, 1907



Courtesy of Library of Congress, “Thomas Edison Prophecies,” *Manchester Democrat*, pp. 1, 10 July 1907

Description

By the early 20th century, Thomas Edison was a well-known inventor whose work on the incandescent lightbulb, as well as the phonograph and other inventions would have been well known.

[Full Transcript of “Thomas Edison Prophecies” Newspaper Article](#)

[Transcribed Excerpts from “Thomas Edison Prophecies” Newspaper Article](#)

[Printable Excerpt of “Thomas Edison Prophecies” Newspaper Article](#)

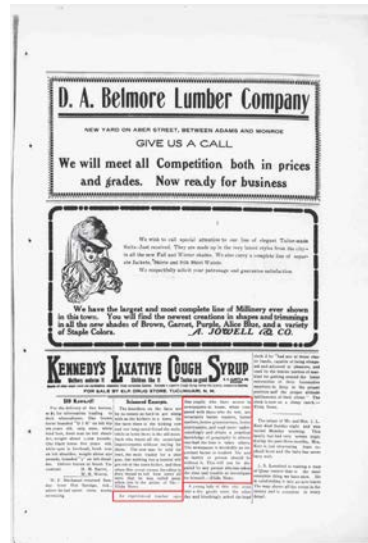
Source-Dependent Questions

- How did Thomas Edison envision modern life? Provide specific evidence to support your answer.
- What does this article imply about the benefits of modern life? What would be lost in Edison’s vision of modern life? Would the benefits outweigh those losses?

Citation Information

“Thomas Edison Prophecies,” *Manchester Democrat*, pp. 1, 10 July 1907. Courtesy of Library of Congress

“Experienced Teacher” and “Newspapers” Article, October 12, 1907



Courtesy of Library of Congress, “An experienced teacher says that pupils...” *The Tucumcari News and Tucumcari Times*, pp. 17, 12 October 1907

Description

By the end of the 19th century, many children were attending primary school, but most did not attend high school and even fewer attended college or university. The newspaper industry was highly competitive. Major urban areas had multiple papers representing a variety of political viewpoints while smaller towns would have had at least one paper to report on local affairs.

[Transcript of “Experienced Teacher” and “Newspapers” Article](#)

[Printable Excerpt of “Experienced Teacher” and “Newspapers” Article](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- Why does this teacher believe that newspapers are important for modern life?
- What definition can be inferred from this article? Is it similar or different from its use in [“The Marvelous Vogue of the Automobile?”](#) Explain your answer using evidence from the articles.

Citation Information

“An experienced teacher says that pupils...” *The Tucumcari News and Tucumcari Times*, pp. 17, 12 October 1907.
Courtesy of Library of Congress