Comparing Martin County in 1920 & Today

The year was 1920. What was Martin County like at that time some 88 years ago? What has changed, and what has stayed the same?

Martin County, as well as the towns in Martin County, has certainly evolved during its 151 years of existence. The following is based on the *Martin County Plat Book and Livestock Breeders' Guide* from 1920 which provides an objective as well as an anecdotal record of Martin County at that time and records from the U. S. Census Bureau as cited on the web site listed at the conclusion of this article.

In 1920, the county had a population of approximately 22,000, slightly more than the 2000 U. S. Census of 21,802. In 1920, approximately 62% of the population was rural as compared to approximately 28% rural in 2000. The ethnic backgrounds in 1920 were primarily German, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, Polish, and Irish.

Agriculture was the major industry in 1920, and corn was the principal crop. Good farmers of that era considered 60 bushels per acre to be an average yield, and 80 bushels per acre was not uncommon. This is obviously far less than today's standards.

Regarding livestock, dairy farming was considered profitable at that time with numerous creameries available. Poultry was also considered a significant source of revenue.

Crop farming involved oats as the principal grain crop with much of it fed locally. Corn silage was also an important crop in connection with the livestock industry as silos were found on "all the best farms." In addition, sugar beets were prosperous at that time, averaging ten tons per acre with the canning factory in Fairmont serving as a profitable outlet for this commodity. The average price per acre of farmland in 1920 in Martin County was $200.00, hardly comparable to today's prices.

In reference to Martin County cities and towns of that time, Fairmont was the county seat with a population of 4,400 "happy, contented, prosperous people." It was said that the city offered ideal living conditions, was thoroughly modern, and was the "biggest little city in the west." The *Martin County Plat Book and Livestock Breeders' Guide* stated the following about Fairmont: "Gives an impression of being a place of 10,000. Miles of paved streets and alleys. City-owned water, light, and heating facilities. Splendid $200,000.00 high school." The book makes further reference to Fairmont's fraternal organizations, its churches, a daily press, three great railroad systems, two gas engine factories, a canning factory, Interlaken Amusement Park was called one of the largest and finest in the west costing over $100,000.00, having one of the finest golf courses in the country, and it called Fairmont a Mecca for thousands of tourists annually. Fairmont's population was 10,889 in 2000.

Ceylon, in 1920, had a population of 600. It boasted two banks, a cement block and tile factory, a poultry specialty company, three elevators, a thriving business establishment, and its own electric light plant. Ceylon's population was 413 in 2000.

Dunnell, with a population 250 in 1920, had two banks, two elevators, and a thriving up to date creamery. In addition, it had electric lights, a very good school, a garage, and several other "going business concerns." Dunnell's population was 197 in 2000.

Granada had a population of 425 in 1920. It had two banks, elevators, a garage, a creamery, several other business concerns, and one of the best schools in the area. Its electric light and power was furnished by the dam at Rapidan. The 2000 census showed Granada's population at 317.

Sherburn had a population of 1,100 in 1920 compared to 1,082 in 2000. In 1920 it had three banks, three elevators, and one of the most up to date creameries in the state. It had its own electric light plant, excellent schools, a hospital, several garages, and other thriving business concerns.

Triumph, with a 1920 population of 350, had two banks, two elevators, a creamery, a garage, excellent schools, and several more thriving business enterprises.

Monterey had a population of 250 in 1920. It had one bank, one garage, an elevator, and a complete modern school. Triumph and Monterey merged in 1959 to become Trimont. Trimont's population was 754 in the year 2000.

Truman had a population of 350 in 1920. It boasted three banks, four elevators, a new creamery, excellent schools, a hospital, two garages, many other up to date businesses, and obtained its electric light and power from the dam in Rapidan, MN. Truman's population was 1,259 in 2000.

Welcome had a population of 600 in 1920. It had two banks, three elevators, one of the best creameries in the state, a garage, a hospital, several other thriving businesses, and electric lights owned by the city. Its population was 721 in 2000.

The rural landscape of Martin County, as well as Minnesota, has changed significantly from 1920 to the present time. Martin County, and the communities that comprise Martin County, has evolved as have the economic engines that drive them. Gone from many of these small towns are the creameries, the hospitals, the elevators, and their schools. Perhaps the single most significant change agent in the earlier years for these communities was the loss of the railroad. It is interesting to note that the county's population has remained relatively stable from 1920 to the present time, and although several communities have lost population since 1920, many are quite stable and in fact have grown. However, the ratio of rural and city dwellers has changed dramatically. The 2000 census figures revealed that approximately 28% of the county's population is rural compared to approximately 62% in 1920. The one constant appears to be that our county, like our state and our country, will continue to evolve and change over time.

Reference note to reader: Sstatistics provided in this article were taken from the U. S. Census Bureau's American Factfinder website.