

SMALL TOWN STABILITY IN THE HISPANIC
COMMUNITY OF DIXON, NEW MEXICO

by

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ABSTRACT

The 1970 United States Census revealed a fundamental change in the migration pattern of the United States. Rather than heading toward the cities, the majority of migrating people are now leaving the large urban areas. This surprising change, the urban-rural turnaround, has sparked new interest in America's small towns. Recent small town studies in the north and mid-west United States revealed that many small towns are now stable or growing. There is now a need to see if the factors promoting stability and growth in these communities are applicable to small towns across the United States.

One group of small towns which has not been studied in view of the new theories on small town stability is the Hispanic villages of the Southwest. Previous studies on Hispanic communities predict decline do to the loss of economic functions. These studies do not, however, consider the recently found factors promoting small town stability. This study investigates the stability of Dixon, a typical small town in the hispanic core of New Mexico.

Dixon's stability is effected by many of the factors promoting stability in other areas of the United States. The important stability factors include: technological

improvements in transportation and communication, which increases commuting and reduces isolation in rural areas; the increasing importance of environmental amenities to migrating Americans; and an increase in rural job opportunities in "footloose" industries and the service sector of the economy, particularly enterprises supporting leisure activities such as tourism, recreation, and retirement. Other factors promoting Dixon's stability are a low cost of living, the presence of relatives in the area, and a desire to maintain the family farming tradition. This study did not find that the Hispanic culture played an important role in Dixon's stability. The primary methods of research used in this thesis were library research, and interviews with Dixon residents.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I	Introduction.....	1
	Background.....	1
	Thesis Topic.....	3
	Literature Review.....	4
	Hypotheses.....	10
	Research Methods.....	12
II	The Study Area.....	17
	History.....	17
	Study Site.....	20
	The Stability of Dixon.....	21
III	Factors Leading to Stability in Dixon.	31
	Why People Want to Stay in Dixon.	31
	Factors Allowing People to Stay in Dixon.....	38
IV	Conclusions.....	44
	Role of the Hispanic Culture.....	44
	Role of Technology.....	45
	Loyalty.....	47
	Future Research.....	49
	Summary.....	50
Appendix		
1.	The Interview Background Information Sheet.....	52
2.	General Highway Map: Dixon and Vicinity 1979.....	54
	Bibliography.....	56

List of Tables and Figures

Tables		Page
1.	Demographic Data on Interview Participants.....	15
2.	Comparison of Demographic Data: The Hispanic Core Area and the State of New Mexico.....	16
3.	Population of the Dixon Division.....	24
4.	The Number of Homes in Dixon.....	26
5.	Dixon Elementary School Average Daily Attendance.....	27
6.	Median Value of Owner Occupied Housing in Northern New Mexico.....	33
7.	Town of Employment for Dixon Residents Interviewed.....	40
8.	Commuting in Northern New Mexico.....	40
Figures		
1.	New Mexico's Hispanic Core Area.....	22
2.	Northern New Mexico Cities and Roads....	23
3.	Indicators of Population Stability in Dixon, New Mexico.....	28

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Background

Throughout American history people have believed that small towns are the citadels of American values and mores. Somewhat paradoxically, though, while people have cherished the ideals of the small town, they have also tried to escape from these towns. For many decades the migration flow in the United States was out of small towns and rural areas toward the larger cities. Only high birth rates allowed small towns to maintain their population size. When birth rates started to drop people started to worry about the demise of America's small towns. Small towns started to lose their stores and industries, and many scholars predicted that a large number of villages would become ghost towns. It was during this period of pessimism that many small town case studies were conducted, including several for Hispanic villages. These case studies focused almost exclusively on the economic vitality of the villages [e.g. Leonard and Loomis (1941) and Carlson (1971 and 1975)]. These studies asserted that social and cultural ties would be insufficient to prevent community decline, but failed to investigate these aspects in any detail.

In the early 1970's widespread interest arose in small town vitality. The United States census for 1970 had revealed a startling change in migration patterns. During the 1960's more people migrated out of urban areas than migrated into them. This trend continued during the 1970's. According to Morrison and Wheeler (1976, p.1), "each year between 1970 and 1975, for every 100 people who moved to the metropolitan sector, 131 moved out." This new migration pattern came as a surprise to most population geographers, and renewed their interest in small towns.

Studies based on the 1970 census have shown that many small towns are growing, and some were never in decline! For example, a study by Fuguitt (1971, p. 460) found that "there has been little change in the size-of-place distributions over the past two decades. Approximately 90 percent of the places stayed in the same size class during each decade. The change that has occurred is one which on balance has favored growth and new incorporation over decline and disappearance." The assumption, which many scholars had made, that the decline of economic functions in small towns was indicative of population decline, was wrong. Since the publication of the 1970 census many theories have been developed to try to explain what is attracting people to small towns. Most of the work, however, has been limited

to the Middle West and northern sections of the United States, and to Canada.

Thesis Topic

As was indicated above, most of the literature on the stability of Hispanic communities in northern New Mexico reflects the old 'decline and desertion' school of thought. Very little work on these Hispanic villages has focused on the effect of cultural and social factors on population stability, or on the economic advantages of small town living. This thesis is an initial attempt to fill this need. Dixon, New Mexico, a town which has had a stable population for several decades, was chosen as the study area. The various theories which recently have been developed to explain village stability were investigated in this Hispanic setting, and several were found to be important to the residents of Dixon. A number of cultural and economic factors were discerned that have helped Dixon maintain its community size and strength despite the lack of economic opportunity in town.

This paper investigates only one community, but its results indicate that the old theories of village decline may be as inaccurate for Hispanic villages as they are for the small towns of the Middle West. Northern New

Mexico has been a poverty stricken area for many decades. For a long time policy makers have hoped that out-migration would be the answer to this poverty problem. One writer in the 1960's was astute enough to see that "the rate of movement from the area has been relatively low in recent years, considering the general economic position of the rural population.", but later advocated that a program be developed "to induce outmigration." (Taylor,1960,pp.18,28) My study shows that at least one Hispanic community is stable, and that its residents are happy with their town. Under such circumstances a policy of out-migration would probably be ineffective. If the results of this study can be repeated in other Hispanic communities, policy makers should seriously consider directing funds away from out-migration programs and toward community improvement.

Literature Review

The literature relevant to this thesis can be divided into two sections: discussions of the population trends of small towns in the United States, and discussions of Hispanic farm communities in the American Southwest. The articles and books presented in this review are representative of the best literature I found

on these topics. A complete listing is available in the bibliography.

Small towns, which are frequently considered the cultural heart of America, have been extensively studied. In the past many scholars saw the decline of economic functions in these places as leading to desertion. This assumption was based on the general migration pattern of population from rural to urban areas, and the logical supposition that people would leave a town which no longer provided good economic services. The studies on northern New Mexico communities cited above are typical of this view point. Since 1970, however, the traditional migration of people from rural to urban areas has stopped in the United States. Once it became apparent that migration was moving from urban to rural areas, scholars started to doubt that small towns were destined to decline or die out. Research on the vitality of small towns has, therefore, suddenly increased. First, a number of studies were done to establish that small towns were, in fact, growing. Two good examples are "New Lease on Life for Small Towns" by Hodge and Qadeer (1980), and Fugitt's "The Places Left Behind" (1971). These papers, and others like them, showed that many small towns were either stable or growing, and sparked interest in why people were choosing to move into small towns and rural areas. A well balanced bibliography of literature

supporting the decline of villages as well as literature supporting the stability or growth of villages is Small Town Population Change in Kansas 1950 to 1970 (Groop 1976).

A number of theories have been developed trying to explain the migration shift described above. The three most frequently stated ideas are: modern transportation routes and communication advancements have reduced the isolation and increased the mobility of rural families; environmental and cultural amenities of rural areas are becoming increasingly important in migration decisions; and changes in American industry have attracted businesses and industries to nonmetropolitan areas, thereby creating a larger nonmetropolitan work force. Each of these ideas deserves elaboration.

Nearly all writers have noted that better roads and communications have changed rural areas from backwaters into extensions of metropolitan areas. According to Beale (1977, p.125), for example, "by relaxing distance constraints, successive advances in transportation have enabled more and more people to settle in places separate, but not isolated, from large urban centers." Fuguitt (1963, p.248), continues the general argument: "The wider geographic circulation of city newspapers and magazines in rural areas and the diffusion of the newer medias, radio and TV, has brought the city world to the

country person's mailbox, and into his living room." Other relevant discussions are Fuguitt (1971), Morrison and Wheeler (1976), Wardwell (1977), Meyer (1981), and Hodge (1983).

Since small towns are no long isolated from urban areas, the amenities which these areas offer such as clean air, low noise levels, pristine views, low crime, and open space are attracting many former city dwellers. The effect of rural amenities on migration decision making is discussed in Fuguitt (1971), Morrison and Wheeler (1976), Blackwood and Carpenter (1978), Bourne (1980), and Meyer (1981).

The third theory states that there has been an increase in rural and small town employment because of growth in "footloose" industries and in the service sector of the economy. "Footloose" industries, defined by Thoman and Corbin (1974 3rd edition, P.220) as industries which have "little investment in plant and a set of production costs that do not vary much geographically" have moved out of cities because their largest economic cost, labor, is generally lower in small towns. Rural and small town employees frequently accept lower wages than urban employees, because rural areas offer a better environment and a lower cost of living, and because rural workers are generally less unionized. Service industries have blossomed in rural as well as

urban settings in recent years. Education, recreation, and retirement facilities have grown especially fast in rural areas as people have increased the amount of time spent in leisure activities. The movement of industry into nonmetropolitan areas is discussed by De Jong and Humphrey (1976), Beale (1977), Wardwell (1977), and Bourne (1980).

I have divided the literature on the Hispanic farm communities of Northern New Mexico into three categories: the history of settlement in New Mexico as a whole, research concerning the small Hispanic villages of New Mexico, and information directly dealing with the study area of Dixon. The first category is extensive, but a recently published bibliography, Borderlands Sourcebook, A Guide to the Literature of Northern Mexico and the American Southwest (Stoddard, Ellwyn, Nostrand, and West editors 1983), provides an excellent guide to the major works. The chapter entitled "A Changing Culture Region" is particularly useful. This book will provide the reader with an excellent variety of both historical and present day information on Hispanic communities from scientific and literary sources.

The second area pertinent to the study is literature on Hispanic communities in northern New Mexico. Information on these towns is quite sparse, and dated. There are two geographical studies on the Hispanic

farming community of El Cerrito, New Mexico: the original by Leonard and Loomis (1941) under a "New Deal" program, and a follow up by Nostrand (1982). Another 1930's project, the Tewa Basin Study, includes economic and cultural information on several Hispanic communities, and has been reprinted by Weigle (1975) as Hispanic Villages of Northern New Mexico. During the 1960's a number of articles were written concerning the economic plight of northern New Mexico's small farming villages. Studies of this type include Taylor's: "Rural People and Their Resources, North-Central New Mexico" (1960), Knowlton's "One Approach to the Economic and Social Problems of Northern New Mexico" (1964), and Maloney's "Recent Demographic and Economic Changes in Northern New Mexico" (1964). All of these papers explain in considerable length the loss of economic functions in Hispanic farming towns, and conclude that this loss of economic viability will lead to village desertion. This thesis investigates if these conclusions of Hispanic small town decline are accurate in light of the recent national migration trend toward small towns.

Research on Dixon, the town examined in this study, is very sparse. Weigle has a good portrait of the community during the 1940's in Hispanic Villages of Northern New Mexico (1975). The only other paper dealing specifically with Dixon is Ebright's historical article

concerning the Embudo land grant, "The Embudo Grant: A Case Study of Justice and the Court of Private Land Claims" (1980).

Hypotheses

As was mentioned earlier, there is a need to apply the new theories of small town stability to the Hispanic communities of northern New Mexico. This project looks at a single case study, a place known to have a stable population over the past several decades. No claims are made for it being typical of all Hispanic farm communities in northern New Mexico. Some undoubtedly are in decline, but my focus here is why at least one village is not. This thesis investigates the following hypotheses.

1. The town of Dixon, New Mexico is not in a state of Decline. In fact, considerable new construction and new events such as a fall fiesta indicate possible growth.
2. The decision to live in Dixon is primarily an economical one. Since most Dixon residents own their land, they can live in Dixon for less than in communities where they would have to rent or purchase a home at higher real estate rates. Also there is some employment available within Dixon.
3. Most Dixon households receive at least part of their income from areas outside the community. The presence of several larger towns within commuting distance has allowed farming to take a secondary position to commuter jobs. Urban jobs reduced the economic strain of rural living, and allowed people to remain in Dixon.

4. Strengthening the economic incentives outlined in hypothesis two is the Hispanic culture. The Hispanic culture has a strong tradition in Dixon, and is valued and actively cultivated by its residents.
5. Dixon will remain an active and stable community because of the advantages that people nationwide are seeking in small towns. The theories which have been developed to explain small town stability in other parts of the United States are applicable to the Hispanic communities of northern New Mexico.

The five hypotheses were derived in several ways. The first hypothesis was necessary in order to establish clearly that the study area was stable. Without proof of a stable community, the rest of the study would be meaningless. The second hypothesis is intended to investigate the attractions of small towns, and to establish that Dixon can offer a viable economic alternative to city life. Hypotheses three and five are derived from the recent literature on why small towns are currently attractive to Americans. These hypotheses focus on whether Hispanic towns are attracting people for the same reasons as small towns in the Middle West. The fourth hypothesis suggests that the Hispanic culture may have a unique effect on the stability of northern New Mexico communities. The conclusions reached in this thesis support all of the above hypotheses except number four. From the evidence gathered, it was not possible to show that Hispanic culture played a critical role in town stability for Dixon. The Hispanic culture probably does

effect the decision to the stay in these small communities, but factors such as kinship, town values, economic costs, and others are more important. Each of the hypotheses, and the information gathered to support or refute it, will be discussed in the body of the thesis.

Research Methods

The research for this project was conducted in three phases and utilized two basic tools. The three phases were collecting background material on Hispanic villages, small towns, and the study site; determining that Dixon is a stable community; and creating a list of factors that have allowed Dixon to remain active and stable. Library research and interviews were the two primary methods of data collection.

Background material for the study included both historic and economic information on the northern New Mexico Hispanic villages, and a review of the material on small town stability in North America. Extensive materials on Hispanic settlement are available in the University of New Mexico Library in Albuquerque and the New Mexico State Historical Library in Santa Fe. Economic and population statistics on the study area were obtained mostly from United States census materials, and

other state and federal sources. Information on small town stability was gathered primarily from journal articles.

The primary assumption of this thesis, that Dixon is not in a state of decline, was initially verified through federal census data, which indicated that Dixon's population has been stable since at least the 1930's. Further evidence of stability was sought from school attendance records and by comparison of old and new highway survey maps, which show the number and location of buildings.

The last section of the thesis, which was also the most challenging, involved determining why Dixon's population has not declined, and whether decline is likely to occur in the near future. The information for this section was gathered by interviewing 50 Dixon residents. The interviews consisted of two parts: an interview sheet (see Appendix 1), and an open discussion. By combining an interview sheet with an open discussion, background data on the interview participants could be collected as well as attitudes and emotions toward life in Dixon. The background sheet also helped me to direct the open discussion.

Some examples illustrate how the interview sheet was used to direct the interviews. Long time residents were asked about the history of the area and changes in the

community. Young adults were asked if they intended to remain in Dixon and if they had ever left the community for an extended period. Commuters were asked why they preferred to live in Dixon rather than in the town of their employment. People with children were asked about the advantages and disadvantages of raising children in Dixon. The interviews involved discussions both of economic and cultural factors. Economic questions, concerning things such as home ownership, cost of living, place of employment, and amount of farming done, were asked to help determine if it is economical to live in Dixon. Indications of cultural and social cohesion were sought through questions on such things as involvement in community programs (church, school, fiestas, and irrigation), and feelings of loyalty or responsibility toward others.

The interview sheets also were used to assure that the study sample was representative of the town's population (cf. Tables 1 and 2). The background data were also useful for determining how attitudes expressed in the open discussion varied with age, sex, and ethnic origin. Interviews were conducted during both day and evening hours in order to assure that both employed and unemployed residents were represented in the study sample. Once all the interview information was obtained the data were analyzed to determine the validity of the

hypotheses outlined earlier. The theories found in the articles on small towns were compared with the information gathered on Dixon to see what similarities could be found. Finally, a group of factors was developed to explain the stability of Dixon.

TABLE 1. Demographic Data on Interview Participants

<u>Number of People in Each Age Category</u>					
<u>Ethnic Origin</u>	<u>13-18</u>	<u>19-40</u>	<u>41-65</u>	<u>over 65</u>	<u>Total</u>
Hispanic	3	18	15	6	42
Male	0	5	7	2	
Female	3	13	8	4	
Anglo	0	2	5	1	8
Male	0	1	3	1	
Female	0	1	2	0	
<u>Total</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>50</u>

TABLE 2: Comparison of Demographic Data:

The Hispanic Core Area and the State of New Mexico.

Geographic Area	Percentage of Population from Spanish Origins	Median Age of the Population	Percentage of Population Over 65 years of Age	Percentage of Population Under 18 Years of Age	Annual Mean Income	Percentage of White Families Below the Poverty Line	Percentage of Population in Rural Areas
State	36.6	27.5	8.9	32.1	18,955	10.3 Urban 9.3 Rural 13.6	27.9
Hispanic Core Area	76.2	27.0	10.1	34.4	12,247	26.1	62.9
Rio Arriba County	74.4	25.6	8.2	36.4	12,579	25.1	80.1
Dixon Division	72.3	30.5	10.7	33.0			

*The category "white" includes Anglos and Hispanics, but not Indians or Blacks.

Source: The United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1980 Census of Population for New Mexico.

CHAPTER II
THE STUDY AREA

History

In order to view the Hispanic villages of Northern New Mexico properly, it is important first to know the general history of the area. This segment outlines the primary events of New Mexico's settlement and its transfer from Mexican to American jurisdiction. Against this general background the history of Dixon will be discussed. Many historical accounts of New Mexico's settlement exist, a large number of which are listed in Borderlands Sourcebook (1983) edited by Stoddard, Nostrand, and West. Twitchell's (1911) The Leading Facts on New Mexico History is complete but lengthy. A good shorter account is in Land Title Study (White, Koch, Kelley and McCarthy 1971).

The Spanish settlement of New Mexico was initiated by Juan de Onate in 1598. Although the Spaniards were forced out of New Mexico by the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, settlement was reinstated by Captain General Diego de Vargas in 1693. From that time until the area was acquired by the United States, Spanish settlers continued to move into the New Mexico area. The goal of both the Spanish and Mexican governments was effective occupation

of Mexico's northern territory. They encouraged settlement by awarding land grants to groups of 12 to 60 people who were willing to settle permanently. Colonies rather than individuals were the preferred vehicle for settlement.

In 1848 Mexico was forced to relinquish the New Mexico territory, along with parts of Texas and California, to the United States. With this land, the United States also acquired the area's inhabitants. According to the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which authorized this transfer of territory, "the property of every kind now belonging to Mexicans now established there shall be inviolably respected" (White, Koch, Kelley and McCarthy 1971 p.34). However, as is often the case when new territory is acquired, the conquerors were not very sympathetic to the needs of their new citizens. To establish whether land claims by the Hispanic settlers in the Southwest were valid a special Court of Private Land Claims was established in 1891. Unfortunately for the Hispanic residents, the United States required stricter proof of land ownership than that required previously by the Mexican government. Of the 282 New Mexico land grant claims which the Court of Private Land Claims heard only 82 were confirmed (White, Koch, Kelley, and McCarthy 1971 p.34). The court's denial of land grant ownership forced

many rural New Mexicans into a continuing position of poverty.

The establishment of Dixon, New Mexico was part of the general settlement pattern described above. In 1725 a colony of eight families obtained a grant of 25,000 acres called San Antonio de Embudo. Dixon is the town which was established on that grant. The grant was acknowledged by the Spanish government, and the title papers were duly processed.

Sixty-one years later the title papers for the Embudo Grant were replaced with copies made by the alcalde of Santa Cruz de la Canada, because the originals were badly worn. Normally Spanish and Mexican titles were copied only by officials known as escibanos, but since there were no escibanos in the New Mexico territory, alcaldes made copies when necessary. In 1898 the Court of Private Land Claims refused to recognize the alcalde copy of the San Antonio de Embudo grant. The court claimed that only copies made by escibano's could be accepted as valid proof of ownership. The court refused to change its ruling even though proof of continuous occupation was available, and thus Dixon residents were denied title to their land. Some of the local people bought their land back from the government in order to obtain a clear title. Many, however, have

titles that are still unrecognized by the United States government.

Dixon acquired its very Anglo name in 1900 when the town's newly established post office was named after its postmaster, Mr. Dixon. The post office was not named Embudo, the town's previous name, because a post office 1-1/2 miles down the Embudo River had already pre-empted that name (Weigle 1975, p.184). Over a period of time the local population gradually applied the post office name to the community generally.

Study Site

Dixon was chosen as the study site for this project because it is a fairly typical Hispanic community in the New Mexico Hispanic core area of Guadalupe, Mora, Rio Arriba, San Miguel, and Taos counties (Figure 1). Dixon is located in the county of Rio Arriba, between the larger towns of Espanola and Taos (figure ?). These counties range in Hispanic population from 86.6 percent to 69.1 percent. After this group of counties there is a drop of 13.5 percentage points to Santa Fe county with a Hispanic population of 55.6 percent. The Hispanic core is a contiguous region extending along the tributaries of the Rio Grande and Pecos Rivers. It was settled by

Hispanics during the 17th and 18th centuries, and has had very little recent migration from Latin America.

Table 2, shown above, illustrates how the Hispanic core area differs from the state in general, and shows that the Dixon census division and Rio Arriba county are representative of the Hispanic core area. When compared with the state averages, the core area, and specifically Dixon, is heavily Hispanic, has a high percentage of young and old people, has a below average income level, is heavily rural, and has a large commuting work force. Dixon residents do some farming, but the majority of the community's income comes from other sources. Some people work in the community; more are employed in neighboring towns. Dixon was also a good study area, because I had contacts within the community. These contacts helped relieve the suspicions that many small town people have toward strangers.

The Stability of Dixon

One of the primary hypotheses for this project was that Dixon has had a stable population for some time. Although little information was available concerning the exact number of people in town, a number of indirect measures were investigated: census statistics for the Dixon division, a series of highway maps, school

attendance records, and interviews with young adults who had left Dixon and later returned. Each of these indicators has its drawbacks. Taken together, however, the composite picture of town stability is consistent and convincing.

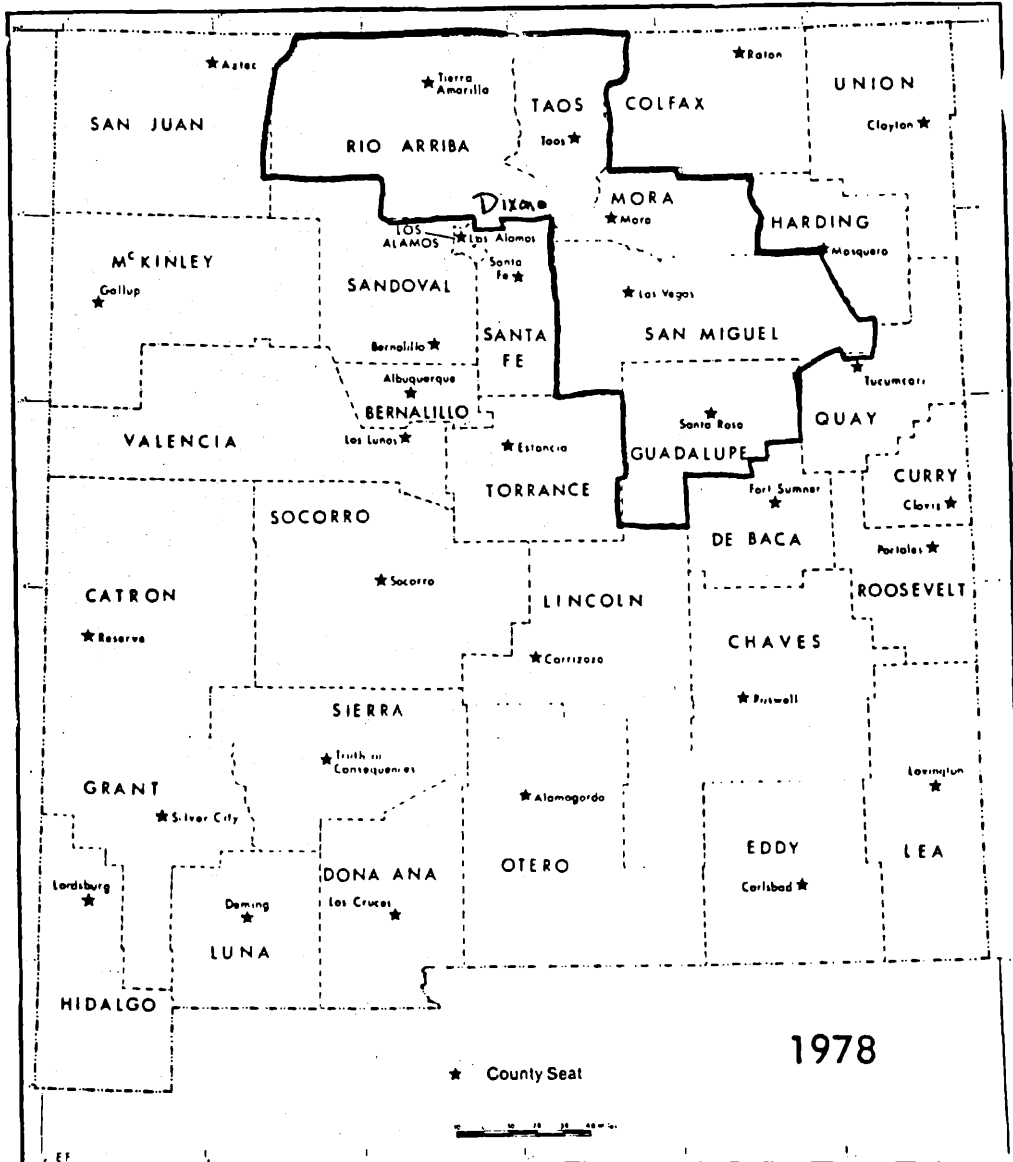


FIGURE 1: New Mexico's Hispanic Core Area

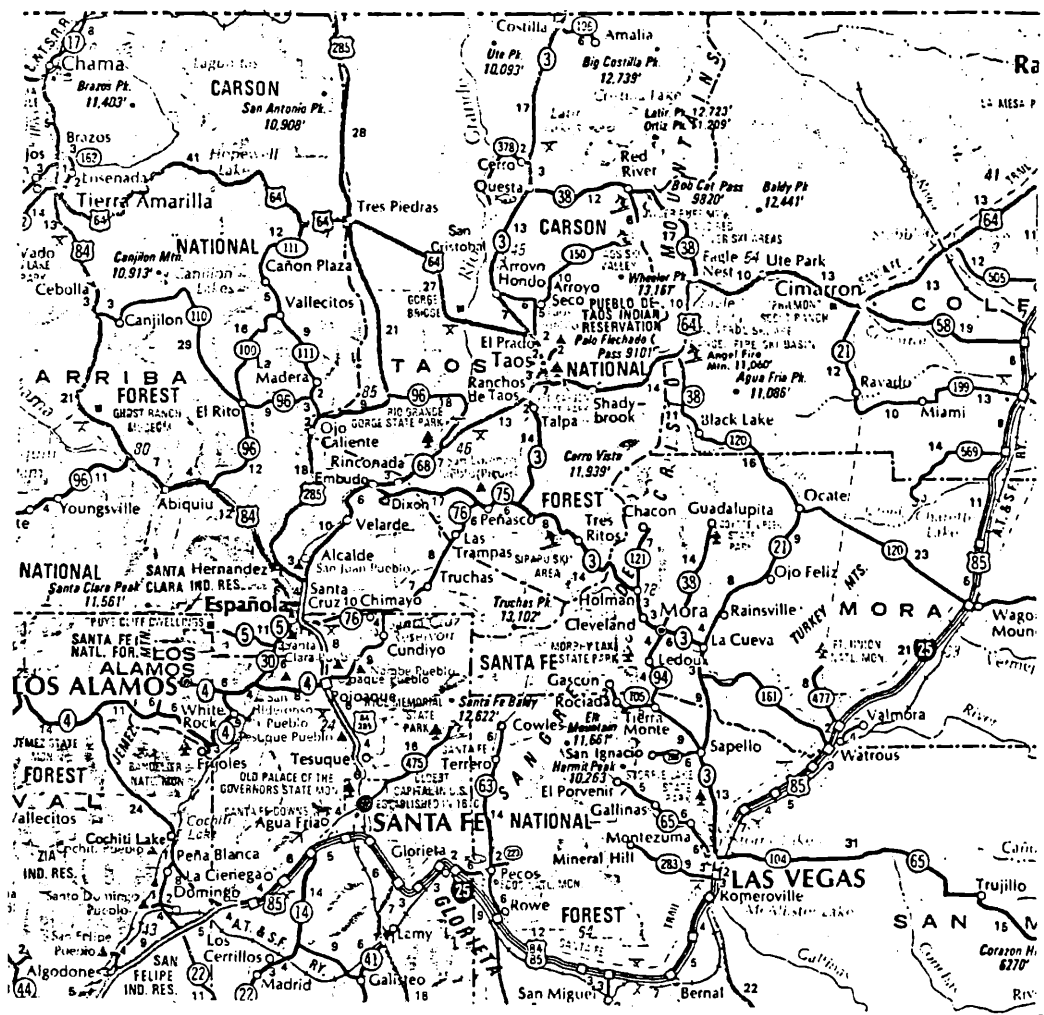


FIGURE 2: Northern New Mexico Cities and Roads

Since Dixon is an unincorporated community, census data are not available for Dixon alone. Its population along with that of the surrounding farm area, is enumerated as the Dixon division. Dixon is, however, the only sizable community in the district. Information on the Dixon division is available since 1930, and the figures show that while the population has fluctuated over the years, there is no strong sign of either growth or decline (Figure 3 and Table 3).

TABLE 3. Population of the Dixon Division

<u>Year</u>	<u>Population</u>
1930	1,000
1940	1,507
1950	1,592
1960	1,313
1970	1,153
<u>1980</u>	<u>1,365</u>

Source: United States Census Bureau, Census of Population General Characteristics for New Mexico, Rio Arriba County, Dixon Division. 1950, 1960, 1970, and 1980.

Another indirect method of determining community size is to count the number of homes in a town. Although family sizes do vary, so that some homes may contain either several families or just an individual, the number

of occupied homes in a community should reflect its population size. In New Mexico, the Department of Transportation periodically updates General Highway Maps for each part of the state. These maps are detailed and show the location of each occupied and unoccupied home in the small rural communities. Maps that include Dixon are available for the years 1953, 1966, and 1979. The number of occupied homes found in the Dixon community fluctuates over time in a manner similar to the census population figures (Figure 3, Table 4).¹

There is no consistent pattern of growth or decline. In 1935, when the Tewa Basin study of Dixon was conducted, there were 214 families counted in Dixon, Apodaca, and Canoncito. It is difficult to know what measure of family was used for this study, but if one assumes that the number of occupied homes is fairly representative of the number of families in a community, there was an increase of approximately 100 families in Dixon between 1935 and 1953. This increase is not an unreasonable one when compared with the population increase for the Dixon division.

1. In order to determine how much area should be considered Dixon, I asked several of my interview participants exactly what area they considered to be the Dixon community. The consensus was that Dixon, Apodaca, and Canoncito form the community called Dixon. The area covered by these subdivisions is outlined on the 1979 General Highway Map (appendix 2).

TABLE 4. The Number of Homes in Dixon

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>OCCUPIED</u>	<u>UNOCCUPIED</u>
1953	309	67
1966	239	58
<u>1979</u>	<u>299</u>	<u>49</u>

Source: New Mexico Department of Transportation, General Highway Map, Dixon and Vicinity, Rio Arriba County. 1953, 1966, and 1979.

The third indirect measure of community stability which was investigated was attendance at the Dixon elementary school. This school serves the communities of Dixon, Apodoca, Canoncito and Embudo, and has classes for kindergarten through sixth grade. Since school attendance is mandatory, the enrollment figures should reflect the population between the ages of 5 and 11 or 12. The figures on average daily attendance were rather sporadic and do not go back very far, but as with the other indicators there is no strong trend to indicate that the community is in decline (Figure 3 and Table 5). The recent drop in enrollment, while it could indicate community decline, may also be the result of a shifting population structure, or a dip in the fluctuating enrollment pattern preceding it.

TABLE 5. Dixon Elementary School Average Daily Attendance

<u>SCHOOL YEAR</u>	<u>ATTENDANCE</u>
1967-1968	147.5
1969-1970	149.5
1970-1971	141.1
1971-1972	130.6
1972-1973	120.8
1974-1975	145.9
1977-1978	126.0
1978-1979	136.0
1979-1980	149.0
1980-1981	142.0
1981-1982	124.0
<u>1982-1983</u>	<u>114.0</u>

Source: Rio Arriba County School Attendance Records.

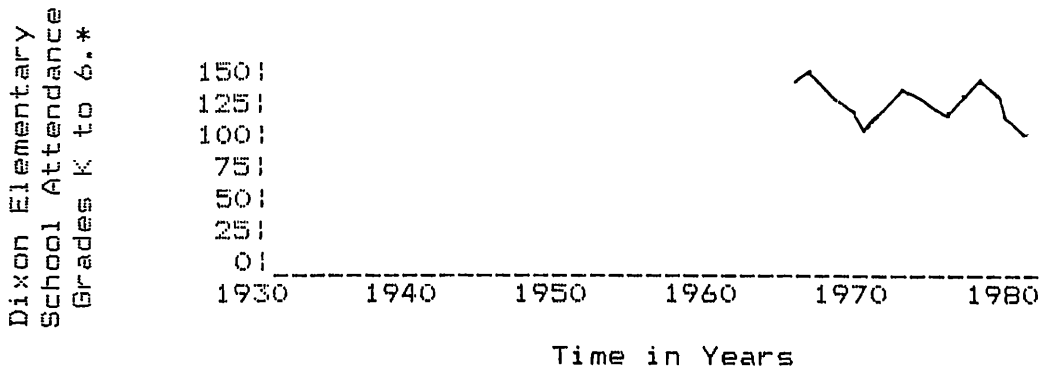
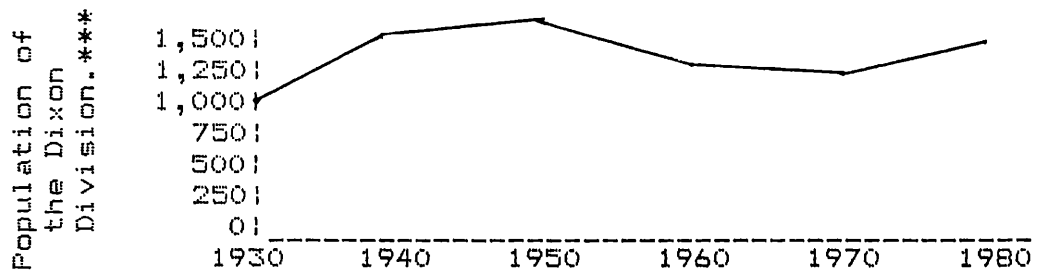


FIGURE 3: Indicators of Population Stability
in Dixon, New Mexico

- * Rio Arriba County Public Schools.
- ** Weigle, Marta, Tewa Basin Study, and the New Mexico State Highway Department Maps.
- *** United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1980 Census of Population.

The last indicator of community stability, and by far the least objective or quantifiable one, is a series of interviews I conducted with Dixon residents who left Dixon and later returned. One of the arguments used by researchers who believe small towns are in decline is that small towns are not attractive to young adults, and therefore are unable to keep their youth from leaving the area. Although towns like Dixon may not appear to be attractive to teenagers, this does not mean that young people leave the area permanently. I interviewed 18 people in the 19 to 40 age category, and 28 percent of these people had left Dixon as young adults but later had returned. These figures indicate that at least some working age adults are choosing to return to Dixon after having tried life elsewhere. These results are supported by Taylor (1960). In the sample taken for Taylor's study, which covered four northern New Mexico counties rather than just one town, 51 percent of the children no longer living with their parents still lived within the study area. Some of these children had no doubt moved to larger towns, but my 28 percent return rate is not unreasonable in light of Taylor's results.

Four different indicators thus show that Dixon has a stable population. The census data and building count show that although Dixon did experience a drop in population during the 1950's and 1960's, the population

rebounded during the 1970's. The percentage of returning youth indicates that this stability is not entirely a result of new people entering the area, but also a product of the return flow of people raised in the town.

CHAPTER III

FACTORS LEADING TO STABILITY IN DIXON

Now that it has been shown that Dixon has a stable population with no signs of decline, the next step is to explain why the community is stable. The reasons for stability can be divided into two major groups: factors that make people want to stay, and factors that allow people to stay. To have a stable community, factors from both of these categories must be present.

Why People Want to Stay in Dixon

According to my interview results, there are several reasons why people have chosen to live in Dixon: the low cost of living, the small town atmosphere, the presence of relatives, the availability of farm land, and the rustic atmosphere. No one of the characteristics listed above is powerful enough to maintain community stability. Each of these factors is attractive to some portion of the population. When all of the factors are joined together, there is enough incentive to maintain the community's size.

There are several strong economic reasons to explain why people have chosen to remain in Dixon. The ability to own land inexpensively and a lower cost of living were

both mentioned by interview participants as influential factors in the decision to live in Dixon. Inexpensive land is available because of family ties and the town's location. A quarter of the residents interviewed said one of the reasons they lived in Dixon was because they could afford to own their home. These people had either inherited land or had bought land inexpensively from relatives. The ability to own a home is not only socially advantageous, but also allows the money previously used for rent to be spent elsewhere.

For those people who either did not own land or who had bought land from non-relatives, inexpensive housing in Dixon was still a factor in the decision to live in that town. As with real estate across the United States, rural land is less expensive than urban land, and the purchase or rent of a home in Dixon is much lower than in the surrounding towns. In the five county Hispanic core area there are four towns of more than two thousand people. In every case the value of the houses in these larger towns is higher than the average value of housing for the county as a whole (Table 6). The combination of inherited or inexpensively bought land, and the lower value of housing allows the residents of New Mexico to live less expensively in small towns like Dixon.

In addition to the lower initial cost of owning a home, Dixon also has a lower cost of living than the

surrounding urban areas. Several people mentioned that the community run water system, although unreliable at times, was very inexpensive (five dollars per household per month). Several people also claimed that gardening, which can be done inexpensively because of the low cost of irrigation water, helped to lower their food costs. In all, 21 percent of the men and 26 percent of the women interviewed included low economic cost as one of the reasons they had chosen to live in Dixon.

TABLE 6. Median Value of Owner Occupied Housing
in Northern New Mexico

<u>County Name</u>	<u>County Median Value</u>	<u>City Name</u>	<u>City Median Value</u>
Guadalupe	\$15,700	Santa Rosa	23,500
Rio Arriba	\$31,500	Espanola	47,500
San Miguel	\$25,200	Las Vegas	28,200
Taos	\$41,500	Taos	50,800
Mora	\$11,700	No city with a population of more than 2,000 people.	

Source: Bureau of the Census, 1980 Census New Mexico, Summary Characteristics for Governmental Units and SMSA's. Table 2.

The most frequently mentioned reason for living in Dixon was that the residents liked the community's small town atmosphere. The residents seemed to like the lack of noise and crime more than anything else. Many residents who had lived in urban areas before moving to

Dixon were particularly impressed with the quiet atmosphere of the town. The small town advantages were important to both men and women. Fifty three percent of the men and 42 percent of the women interviewed mentioned lack of either noise or crime as a major reason for liking Dixon. The small town advantage was also mentioned in relationship to raising children. Some residents liked exposing their children to farm work, whereas others liked surrounding their children with a 'natural' rather than an 'urban' environment. As might be expected the advantages for children were more frequently mentioned by women. Thirteen percent of the women and 5 percent of the men mentioned raising children as a reason for living in Dixon. These factors are interesting because they reflect an anti-urban attitude which has been suggested by other authors as the reason for rural community growth (Blackwood 1978, Meyer 1981).

The factors discussed above were found fairly uniformly across all sex and ethnic groups in Dixon. This was not true of other factors. The role of relatives as a staying force was especially important for Hispanic women. Twenty-two percent of the Hispanic women interviewed mentioned relatives as one of the major reasons they liked living in Dixon. Only seven percent of the Hispanic males saw relatives as important. One interview participant said he had considered moving to

Espanola once, but his wife had said, "If you go your going alone, I'm not leaving my family.", so he decided not to move. Relatives were not of importance to Anglos, undoubtedly because most of the Anglo population in Dixon is first generation.

Forty-two percent of the men interviewed listed farming opportunities as an important reason they liked living in Dixon. This seems especially significant since none of the interview participants claimed to be full time farmers. It appears that the tradition of farming is still strong among the male population. The love of farming crossed ethnic boundaries with both Anglo and Hispanic men listing farming in about equal percentages. Only 10 percent of the women stated that farming was one of the reasons they lived in Dixon.

The factors of kinship and farming, which were expressed along gender lines, reflect the traditional Hispanic sex roles. Men are associated with the land, and women with the home. I believe, however, that both factors are ways of expressing loyalty to the family and home town. The men would be considered too feminine if they expressed much concern over kinship. By stressing the importance of the family farm, perhaps the men were not only expressing their desire to live in their home town, but indirectly showing concern for the well-being of their relatives. One elderly man explained it this

way, "If a father can leave his children with a little land, they can build their homes and raise their families not having to worry about being put out and left to wander" (Archuleta 1980, p.31). On the other hand, women who showed concern about strong kinship ties may also be concerned with the financial well-being of the village as a whole. Kinship and economics are linked in the Hispanic culture because, "the extended family is still the most important unit in such areas as economic cooperation and recreation" (Gonzalez 1969, p.60). When the reasons for remaining in small towns are expressed along gender lines, it is difficult to determine the actual importance of either kinship or farming. However, it can still be concluded that family ties and farming both contribute to the stability of Dixon.

For the Anglos who have settled in Dixon, the community provides a rustic 'back to the earth' atmosphere. The Anglos who have settled in Dixon tend to be either artisans or farmers attempting to live a self-sufficient life style. Many northern New Mexico artisans consider Dixon a sort of new Taos, a place not yet commercialized like Taos and Santa Fe, and still relatively inexpensive in which to live. In 1982 the Dixon Arts Association held a studio tour of 23 Dixon artisans. The 1983 tour included 28 local artisans. In both years only 2 artisans had Hispanic sur names,

indicating that the craftsmen of Dixon are primarily Anglo (Dixon Arts Association 1982, 1983). These artisans are an excellent example of rural employment made available because of increased American interest in tourism and recreation, as was suggested by authors such as Beale (1977) and Bourne (1980).

The second motivation which Anglos expressed when asked during interviews why they live in Dixon was a desire to be self-sufficient. Many Anglos have the idea that Hispanic farmers make most of their income by selling apples and vegetables at farmers markets. In reality most Hispanics make their income through wage labor jobs, and farming is more of a hobby than a career. This myth of Hispanic self-sufficiency, which has been maintained by Anglos, has produced a reversal of roles in rural farming communities like Dixon. The Anglos who have settled in the area are more self-sufficient than the Hispanic population. One Anglo farmer felt he had an obligation to be active in community projects such as maintaining the acequias (irrigation ditches). This man felt that since the arts and crafts he sold drew outsiders into the area, he therefore should try to counteract this invasion by helping to preserve the old ways of farming. As is the case with this man, who sells crafts as well as farm produce, almost no one in Dixon supports themselves through farming alone. Most Anglo

farmers either hold part time jobs or supplement their income through craft sales or some other outside source of income.

Factors Allowing People to Stay in Dixon

As has been shown above there are a number of reasons for wanting to live in a rural community such as Dixon. It is important to realize, however, that a desire to live in such a community is not the only factor that effects community stability. There must also be employment available. Employment can be either inside the community or within commuting distance of it. Both options exist for Dixon residents, and the combination has allowed Dixon's population to remain stable.

Although it is true that the majority of the workers from Dixon are employed outside the community, I believe that the amount of employment within Hispanic villages is generally underestimated. For example a quarter of the people interviewed who held jobs were employed within Dixon. The largest local employer is the elementary school. The school employs twenty people: a principal, seven teachers, six teacher's aids, one secretary, two custodians and three cooks. Other local employers include the general store, the post office, the senior center, construction firms, and some of the resident

artisans. It is difficult to estimate how many people work in Dixon, because much of the work is seasonal, part-time, or self-employed. If the self-employed artisans are added to the list above, however, the number of people working in Dixon easily reaches fifty, and may be higher depending on the time of year. It can be seen, therefore, that Dixon does provide employment for part of its population. The local workers tend to be Hispanic women and Anglos. Still, of the employed male Hispanics interviewed, 20 percent worked in Dixon. Work within Dixon is probably dominated by women because the work tends to be either part time or seasonal, which allows the women to care for their children and homes also.

Work outside of Dixon tends to be more permanent and higher paying. My sample showed commuting workers to include 80 percent of the working Hispanic males, and some women and Anglo males. The most frequent places of employment are Espanola, Santa Fe, and Los Alamos (Table 7, Figure ?). It is clear that good transportation routes have become important for the small Hispanic villages, since the majority of the workers must commute into the neighboring towns for work.

Commuting plays an important role in the economic stability of Dixon. Without jobs within commuting distance Dixon would probably have declined in size long ago. Traveling to jobs, however, is not a new phenomenon

for Dixon residents and is not unique to this particular Hispanic town (Table 8).

TABLE 7. Town of Employment for
Dixon Residents Interviewed

<u>Number of People</u>	<u>Town of Employment</u>
7	Dixon
8	Espanola
3	Santa Fe
3	Los Alamos
<u>6</u>	<u>Elsewhere</u>

TABLE 8. Commuting in Northern New Mexico

<u>Area</u>	<u>Percentage of the Population Working Outside Their Home Town</u>	<u>Percentage of the Population with a Commuting time of 45 minutes or more</u>
State	1.8%	7.9%
Core Area*	20.1%	17.1%
<u>Rio Arriba</u>	<u>38.5%</u>	<u>26.9%</u>

* The Hispanic core area consists of Guadalupe, Rio Arriba, San Miguel, Taos, and Mora counties.

Source: United States Census Bureau, 1980 Census New Mexico, Characteristics of the Population: General Social and Economic Characteristics, Tables 65 and 174.

According to local residents the people of Dixon have traveled to work for many generations. Mr. Atencio, the oldest lifetime resident of Dixon, says that in his memory Dixon has never been a self-supporting community. People have always had to supplement their income from outside sources. The earliest forms of outside work tended to be seasonal in nature. The men would leave during the summer to take outside jobs, and then return in the winter. Mr. Atencio claims that his grandfather took horses and mules to California during the gold rush era, because he could make more money selling them there than if stayed home all summer. The traveling of New Mexico Hispanics is also well documented in historic and geographic literature. During the period from 1920 to 1940 Hispanic people from northern New Mexico frequently worked as migrant pickers in the San Luis Valley of Colorado (Carlson 1973, p.100). Other seasonal jobs, including work on the railroad and work on government relief projects, were mentioned by both local residents and scholars (Gjevre 1971, p.46 and Weigle 1975, pp. 192-193).

According to Mr. Zeller, a retired Dixon store keeper, it was not until World War II that the road from Dixon to Espanola was paved, making daily commuting possible rather than seasonal or weekly employment trips. With the advent of World War II, several new employment

possibilities arose. The Hardy lepidolite mine near Dixon was put into full operation, and "the construction of the Atomic Energy Commission facility at Los Alamos absorbed a considerable amount of the surplus labor of northern New Mexico" (Carlson 1973, p.101). Many of the older residents remember that a large truck with a pot belly stove and benches in the back used to come through local villages to pick up men who worked in Los Alamos during the Second World War.

Since World War II improvements in road conditions and motor vehicles have made commuting an increasingly attractive option for Dixon residents. The growth of Espanola as a commercial center, and increased tourism and government jobs in Santa Fe have added to the earlier employment possibilities. Although commuting an hour to work in Los Alamos or Santa Fe may seem excessive, most Dixon residents do not seem to mind. Many use car pools or buy space in a cooperative van to ease the burden and cost of commuting. These are the more modern versions of the truck with the pot belly stove. Several commuters pointed out that lots of urban dwellers spend just as much time getting to work. The only difference they see is that their driving is on the open road whereas urban commuters must fight city traffic.

The attitudes expressed by Dixon residents toward commuting probably do not differ from the attitudes of

rural Americans everywhere. As long as the roads are good most rural Americans consider a job in town, or weekly trips to the grocery store to be only minimal inconveniences. This attitude toward rural-urban travel was expressed well by Beale (1977, p.125): "by relaxing distance constraints, successive advances in transportation have enabled more and more people to settle in places separated, but not isolated, from large urban centers."

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS

Role of the Hispanic Culture

In reviewing the hypotheses stated at the beginning of the project, there is one which I was not able to substantiate. Hispanic culture apparently has not played an important role in the stability of Dixon. At least, I was unable to find any concrete evidence to support this theory. Certainly, there are some social organizations in the community that are frequently identified with the Hispanic culture, such as the Catholic church and the Penitente brotherhood. These organizations support the Hispanic community by using the Spanish language and upholding Spanish tradition. Most residents, however, felt that participation in church activities was in decline. Other social groups such as the volunteer fire department, the community forum, the American Legion, and the Presbyterian Church are available but were also seen as having poor attendance. Social interaction appears to occur mostly on an informal basis through visiting friends and relatives. Kinship ties are strong and widespread in the community, a trait characteristic of but not unique to Hispanic culture.

Role of Technology

The role of technology has been discussed earlier in reference to job possibilities for Dixon residents. It is such an important force in small town stability, however, that it deserves elaboration. Technological advances in transportation, communication, and public facilities have made it possible for even remote areas to be in constant contact with the outside world. This contact has reduced the isolation of rural families.

Transportation routes in northern New Mexico until recently were poor. The side road which runs from the Taos-Espanola highway into Dixon was not paved until the 1940's when good access to the lepidolite deposits of Hardy Mine was needed during World War II. The Hardy Mine is located about three miles past Dixon. As was discussed earlier, improved transportation made commuter jobs much more attractive to Dixon residents. The improved roads also opened up the community in other ways. Children were able to attend the larger junior high and high schools in Espanola, and thus acquired a broader view of the outside world. Being able to travel by car rather than train also gave residents more freedom to shop in Espanola or Santa Fe without having to spend the whole day.

Advances in communications have also had a large effect on the residents of Dixon. During World War II there was only one phone in Dixon. It was in the general store, and the store owner was responsible for relaying important messages (Wiston 1983, p.83). Now almost every home has a telephone line. Another major communications advancement for Dixon was television. Although some people have owned televisions for quite some time, it was not until the early 1970's when a transmitter was placed on a hill near town that good reception became available (Rattlesnake Pueblo 1981, p.6). Television and telephones play important roles for Dixon residents, particularly the housewives. When I was interviewing during the day there were very few homes in which a television was not turned on. Many housewives commented that television and telephone contact prevented them from feeling lonely or isolated. Since it is the women who spend the most time in town, and have stronger feelings about being near their relatives, it is important that modern communications have helped reduce their isolation.

Utilities such as running water and electricity have also reduced the gap between rural and urban living. The utilities in Dixon have been installed by obtaining government grants, and are maintained by local committees. This has allowed the residents to increase their standard of living without significantly increasing

the cost of living. These modern conveniences, like better communications, have decreased the liability of not living in a larger city. Dixon residents can now live in their friendly, pollution free small town, while enjoying T.V. and a good paying urban job. In New Mexico and across the United States, the draw of the big city is considerably weaker than it was twenty or thirty years ago.

Loyalty

While interviewing the residents of Dixon, I was struck by their loyalty to their home town. Frequently at the end of an interview, when I would ask if there were any additional reasons why they stayed in Dixon, the participants would reply: yes, this is just where I belong. The interview participants were never able, however, to explain why they felt such loyalty to their town. Gonzalez also observed this reaction in Hispanic people (1969, p.65): "the individual identifies strongly with his natal village and retains a sense of loyalty to it throughout life, even though he may reside elsewhere temporarily or permanently"(1969, p.65).

I inquired about this loyalty to two scholars of Hispanic culture, Margaret Vazquez-Jeffroy an Anthropologist at Highlands University in New Mexico, and

Alvar Carlson a geographer at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. Both of them stated that they were aware of these loyalties, or actually experienced them themselves, and yet had never been able to pin down the cause either. Perhaps the best explanation I heard was, that those things which a person (or his ancestors) worked hardest for are the things a person values the most. This idea was expressed by Ben Marsh (1984, p.196) in reference to the small coal mining towns of Pennsylvania. The miners of Pennsylvania and the settlers of New Mexico are similar in that both groups have been relatively isolated and existed in a subsistence level economy for many generations. Therefore, I feel Marsh's statement that these small towns still exist, "because of, not in spite of, physical, political, and economic hardship," may be equally applicable to the Hispanic villages of New Mexico.

The Hispanic feelings of loyalty to their home towns reaches beyond the areas of economics and social structures, and into the more abstract areas of psychology. The lack of firm evidence makes it impossible to present these loyalties as a concrete cause of Hispanic town stability. Rather, I present these ideas as food for thought and fuel for future research.

Future Research

By showing that Dixon, New Mexico is indeed a stable community, this study has challenged the theory of rural Hispanic decline. In order to show that Hispanic villages generally are not destined to decline, it will be necessary to study other similar communities. Only by providing multiple examples of stability in Hispanic towns can the old theories of decline be adequately evaluated. One of the major reasons for Dixon's stability is its location within easy commuting distance of a number of larger cities. Studies done on more isolated Hispanic communities may uphold the theory of decline, while studies on communities within commuting range may show results similar to those in this project. Overall, I suspect that the very remote villages of New Mexico have already suffered decline or desertion, and that most of the villages still in existence have had time to adjust to modern transportation and communication abilities, and therefore are now relatively stable.

Another possibility for future study is the role of ethnicity in community vitality. This thesis was not able to show conclusively that the Hispanic culture was important, but by studying small towns from a number of other ethnic backgrounds, and comparing them to Hispanic

villages, it may be possible to see how ethnic culture affects stability.

Summary

This project has shown that Dixon, a community typical in many ways of small towns in the Hispanic core area of New Mexico is indeed a stable community. Factors that have been shown to affect small town stability in other parts of the United States are also important in Dixon. The principal factors are: improvements in transportation and communication, the increased importance placed on environmental amenities by the American people, and an expanded job market in rural industries including recreation, tourism, and retirement facilities. Other major reasons Dixon residents like their town, is that the cost of living is lower than in the larger towns near by, and many people have family in the area or want to maintain the family farm. It was not possible to show conclusively that the Hispanic culture has a strong effect on Dixon's stability; further research is needed in this area.

In conclusion, I believe that Dixon has successfully adjusted to modern society while maintaining its cultural identity. The community appears to be stable, and I cannot foresee any reason for decline. If future studies

come to similar conclusions for other Hispanic villages,
northern New Mexico has a bright prospect.

APPENDIX 1

The Interview Background Information Sheet.

Hello, I am gathering information on Dixon and its residents for a project which will complete my college degree. Your name is not requested, and all information will be kept confidential. Once you have completed this sheet I would like to ask you a few questions. Your help is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Laura Lunsford

1. Age

0-12 13-18 19-40 41-65 over 65

2. Sex Male Female

3. Occupation(s) _____

4. Town(s) of Employment _____

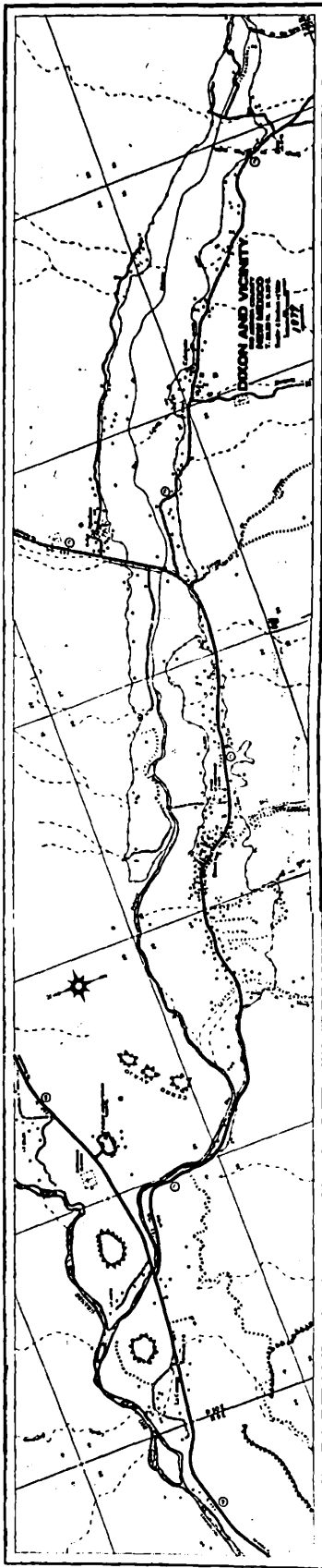
5. How long have you lived in Dixon? _____

6. How many children do you have, and what are their ages?

7. Please list the community activities which you are involved in. This list should include activities in school, church, clubs, government, or informal gatherings.

APPENDIX 2

General Highway Map: Dixon and Vicinity 1979



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