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Public Service Patterns in a Border Community: College Corner, Ohio-Indiana *

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Political boundary lines commonly delimit administrative regions. The lines, though invisible, can modify significantly the appearance and the organization of the regions concerned. This paper treats one aspect of the foregoing theme. It considers the Ohio-Indiana boundary and the degree to which the boundary has modified the public service¹ pattern of College Corner, a small village located some forty miles northwest of Cincinnati, Ohio. The village is well-suited for the study of the effects of a boundary upon the service structure of a community as a result of its site astride the Ohio-Indiana state line. About a third of the village lies in Ohio, the remainder in Indiana.

Congress delimited the Ohio-Indiana boundary in 1803, the year it carved Ohio out of the old Northwest Territory.² Permanent settlement on what now is the site of College Corner began six years later. The first structures were erected on Indiana territory, but settlement gradually spread across the boundary, and the middle of the 19th century found the village firmly established on both sides of the state line.³

Railroad construction through village limits in 1868 transformed the quiet, agricultural community into a commercial entrepot for produce passing between its rural hinterland and markets in Cincinnati and Indianapolis. Prosperity followed, and the end of the century found College Corner near the peak of its affluence. During these economically propitious years the state boundary appears to have played a relatively minor role in modifying the public service structure of the village. Statutes regulating contact across the state line were less numerous than at present, and the enforcement of existing regulations seems in many cases to have been relatively lax.⁴

The area and population of College Corner today remain approximately the same as they were in 1900: about 175 acres and one thousand people. During the same interval of time, statutes regulating interstate contact have increased, methods of enforcing compliance have become more efficient, and the boundary has assumed an increasingly divisive function in the service structure of the village.

The last sixty years also have seen the village gradually change from an agricultural service center into a semi-rural residential community for people employed in neighboring urban areas. This slow accumulation of residents with urban attitudes and tastes has initiated demands for public services comparable to those available in larger cities, and satisfaction of these demands has

come to depend upon the ability of service agencies to overcome administrative intricacies associated with the political division of the community.

At the present time, residents in College Corner obtain their public services from organizations subject to federal, state, and local village jurisdiction. The effect of the state boundary upon the operational pattern of any particular agency depends to a great extent upon its rank on the above-mentioned scale.

As might be expected, the operational pattern of organizations which operate on a national scale and submit to federal jurisdiction indicate little modification to the boundary. A good example is the College Corner post office which provides uniform service to both halves of the village and to adjacent areas in Indiana and Ohio as well. Services provided by a local Western Union telegraph office also transcend the boundary with little modification.

Public service organizations operating under state jurisdiction are obliged to pay closer attention to the state line. Indeed, the boundary generally defines the areal limits of their recognized authority. One product of this situation are the two companies which supply the village with electrical service. One firm is licensed to operate in Indiana, the other in Ohio, and each is responsible for the maintenance of facilities solely on its own side of the state line. The firm supplying Ohio consumers lacks direct connections with its own sources of power, but it compensates by purchasing electricity from its Indiana competitor. A master meter measures the amount of current to cross the boundary. Costs are billed to the Ohio firm which reciprocates by collecting from the residents of the Ohio corporation.⁵

Local telephone service reveals a slightly more refined compromise. A firm licensed to operate in Ohio maintains all telephone facilities in both parts of the village — this thanks to special legislation which enables the company to bypass regulations prohibiting interstate service by an organization licensed to operate in a single state. The firm maintains separate accounts for each part of the village, and these are submitted periodically to the appropriate state communication commissions.⁶

Services which are the responsibility of local village authorities have been most susceptible to limitations imposed by the state boundary. As a result of the presence of the line, the thousand or so inhabitants of College Corner have managed to obtain self-government only by creating within their community two distinct political corporations — College Corner, Ohio, and West College Cor-

ner, Indiana. Each government provides services for its part of the village alone. This division of administrative authority proves both cumbersome and inefficient. Neither corporation commands a tax base large enough to finance extensive projects of its own, and state regulations prohibit either from appropriating funds for projects to be inaugurated in the neighboring part of the community. As a result, the range and quality of services available to villagers fall below the level that probably would be the case were the community a single administrative unit.

Police protection and sewage facilities are cases in point. In spite of persistent demands by residents and entrepreneurs, College Corner lacks a police force. Neither corporation is large or wealthy enough to support officers of its own, and both corporations are unable to hire one and the same individual since state regulations forbid an employee bonded for a specific job in one state to obtain a bond for a similar job in another state. As a result, villagers are obliged to rely on such protection as is provided by county sheriffs and state police; and these agents, when required, are too often far from the local scene.⁷

Difficulties crop up also in connection with sewage disposal facilities. Privately-owned septic tanks and cesspools handle the present disposal requirements of the village. A limited amount of sewage also finds its way into a small creek which meanders through both corporations. Of late, the Ohio Water Pollution Board has begun to pressure the Ohio corporation to install a central sewage disposal plant to serve its half of the community. The aim of such construction in as far as the water pollution board is concerned is to reduce the contamination of sub-surface waters on the Ohio side of the state line. Ohio corporation officials complain that construction financed by their corporation alone will not adequately solve the local pollution problem since traces of Indiana sewage will continue to cross the boundary via ground waters and the creek which links their area with the Indiana corporation.⁸ A more judicious solution, they contend, would be a disposal plant financed by both corporations and commodious enough to handle the requirements of the entire community. Indiana residents view the suggestion with askance, probably because they are reluctant to incur the expenses that cooperative effort would entail. In order to force the issue, Ohio corporation officials have brought the local pollution problem to the attention of the Indiana State Board of Health, but with little success.⁹ The only results to date have been strained community relations. Given these circumstances, the Ohio corporation soon may be forced to finance construction which runs contrary to its own desires.

Such discord contrasts markedly with instances in which mutual cooperation has enabled both parts of the village to overcome services deficiencies. Examples of such action are projects undertaken to supply the village with water supplies and educational facilities.

Privately-owned wells and a cluster of natural springs located northeast of the village long were the primary

sources of water for College Corner. Unfortunately for those concerned, fluctuations of ground water levels produced recurrent problems of supply. In 1953 village officials chose to remedy this situation by financing the construction of a new water works. After due consideration, the authorities decided to tap the water supply of a stream which flowed across the state boundary about a half of a mile north of the village. Construction was initiated in 1953 and completed in 1954. All work took place on the Ohio side of the boundary; primarily because the Ohio corporation already owned a water tower and other primary distribution facilities, and because construction on Indiana territory would have made it difficult for the Indiana corporation to use these facilities without incurring administrative difficulties.¹⁰ In order to bypass state regulations which forbade the Indiana corporation from appropriating funds for a project inaugurated on Ohio territory, the Ohio corporation agreed to meet all immediate construction costs with revenue bonds issued for the purpose. In return, the Indiana corporation contracted to pay for half of the bonds via the medium of a monthly water bill. An agreement signed at the same time guaranteed equal rates to citizens on both sides of the state line.¹¹ As a result of this cooperative maneuvering, the village now possesses its own water works, and maintenance costs are apportioned justly between beneficiaries of the new service.

Provisions for educational services illustrate a second example of harmonious cooperation. Until the late 19th century each College Corner corporation supported a school of its own. Since neither area possessed a population large enough to provide an adequate range of educational facilities, local authorities eventually seized the idea of obtaining special permission to build a new and larger school building, one which would straddle the state line and thereby be able to provide both parts of the village with a wider and better assortment of educational services. The Ohio and Indiana state boards of education granted the requisite permission, construction ensued, and the boundary-bisected school building became a reality in 1896.¹²

A larger building replaced this original structure in 1925. Like its predecessor, the new structure lies half in Indiana, and half in Ohio. The building and surrounding grounds are owned and operated by the Union Joint School District — an administrative entity encompassing both corporations and parts of adjacent townships served by the school. The Ohio and the Indiana segments of the district share equally all expenses associated with permanent improvements to the existing plant. Operating costs, on the other hand, are assessed in direct proportion to the number of students attending the school from each side of the state line.¹³

Recent enrollment increases have brought new demands for additional floor space, and current debate centers about the question of where new construction ought to take place. Consulting engineers sponsor an annex joined to either the Ohio or the Indiana end of the present building. Local residents have different plans: some desire two new additions, one at each end of the

present building; others envision the construction of a new and separate structure astride the state line. Many of these residents are interested in perpetuating the symmetrical division of facilities for purely sentimental reasons. A few sponsor the move in the hope of thereby balancing construction costs between the two parts of the village. They remain unaware that both corporations will share expenses regardless of whether work takes place on the Ohio or the Indiana half of the school grounds.¹⁴

In sum, then, residents in College Corner obtain public services from organizations subject to federal, state, and local jurisdiction, and the effect of the Ohio-Indiana state line upon the operational pattern of any particular agency depends to a great extent upon its administrative ranking. The patterns of public service agencies which operate on a national scale and submit to federal jurisdiction exhibit little adjustment to local political circumstances, while the service patterns of agencies subject to state and to local jurisdiction indicate a distinct accommodation to the state boundary.

NOTES

*The fieldwork for this study was conducted during the summer of 1956. For a more detailed treatment of the topic covered see R. A. Helin, "An Investigation of the Effects of the Ohio-Indiana Boundary upon the Service Functions of the Village of College Corner, Ohio-West College Corner, Indiana" (Unpublished Master's thesis, Department of Geography, Miami University, 1956).

¹*Public service*: the business of providing some service to any or all members of a community where the exercise of the calling requires some legal privilege.

²The political and administrative preliminaries which preceded

the final delimitation of the boundary line are discussed in G. Pence and N. Armstrong, *Indiana Boundaries, Territory, State, and County* ("Indiana Historical Collections," Vol. 19; Indianapolis, Indiana: 1933).

³*Atlas of Union County, Indiana* (Chicago: J. H. Beers and Co., 1884), 38; and *History of Preble County, Ohio* (Cleveland: H. Z. Williams and Bro., 1881), 238.

⁴Personal interviews with W. Bright, Auditor, Union County, Indiana, 12 June 1956; and L. Samuelson, Owner, Samuelson and Son, Retail and Wholesale Goods, West College Corner, Indiana, 23 June 1956. See also the description of early 20th century College Corner in B. S. Bartlow *et al.* (eds.), *Centennial History of Butler County, Ohio* (Hamilton, Ohio: B. F. Bower and Co., 1905), 352.

⁵Personal interview with R. Sheridan, Manager, Public Service of Indiana, Branch Office, Liberty, Indiana, 21 June 1956. Verified in correspondence with W. Beckjord, Secretary, Cincinnati Gas and Electric Co., Cincinnati, Ohio, 9 July 1956.

⁶Personal interview with B. Barnard, Chief Operator, General Telephone Company of Ohio, Branch Office, College Corner, Ohio, 8 June 1956.

⁷Personal interview with D. Spenny, Chief of Police (Retired), College Corner, Ohio, 1 June 1956.

⁸Personal interviews with H. Pults, former mayor of College Corner, Ohio, and present manager of Farmer's State Bank, West College Corner, Indiana, 1 June 1956 and 29 June 1956.

⁹Personal interviews with E. Reister, Superintendent, Water Works, College Corner, Ohio, 1 June 1956 and 15 June 1956.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹Personal interviews with H. Pults.

¹²Personal interview with H. Brauchla, former superintendent of Union Public School and present owner of Brauchla's Grocery, West College Corner, Indiana, 7 June 1956. See also W. E. Baldwin, *Baldwin's Ohio School Laws* (Cleveland: Banks-Baldwin Co., 1940), section 7620-1.

¹³Personal interview with C. Coblenz, Superintendent of Schools, Preble County, Ohio, 15 June 1956.

¹⁴Personal interview with F. Gilmore, Trustee, Union Public School, West College Corner, Indiana, 28 May 1956.