

POLK COUNTY COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS
Mail (Complete) – Question 1
March 2007

117 Respondents.

WHERE HAVE WE BEEN? Back to the future. What are some significant changes and history of Polk County that have taken place in the last 150 years.

- No comment. (23)
- We have come from a pioneer setting to a more densely settled area with a wide range of density. Agriculture & the support of it is still vital.
- People seem to be more aware that we need to protect our water and air quality – open dumps where anything & everything was a common practice has gotten better but could still be improved.
- Transportation e.g. walking trails – dirt roads – highway – trains to no trains – airplanes. Communication e.g. trips to town a few times a year to pick up mail & supplies – weekly delivery by horse back – RFD & REA (electricity) – telephone – internet.
- The biggest change is probably the increase in our County's population. It sounds as though that will continue to happen, so we need to be ready for it. It will be interesting to watch our housing and jobs in the County, as they hopefully continue to increase. We need to keep encouraging new businesses to come into our County too.
- 150 years ago we were a country covered by tall trees, inhabited by Native Americans and wild animals. Europeans were beginning to immigrate with dreams of freedoms not known in their homelands and with dreams of owning their own land. They first came to Polk County via the rivers which offered the easiest transportation, the St. Croix River the final waterway before disembarking. Once the great forests were harvested, the land was turned into farms. Polk County's soils and climate were conducive to dairy farming and it was the main occupation for its inhabitants for well over 100 years.
- 1900 & on – Logging: provided work, provided capital, denuded the land. Settlers: cultivated the land, established communities – somewhat ethnic but pro-American; created a building boom: farmsteads, schools – 144 rural, churches, town & county government, small businesses; RFD: local post offices – federal dollars, complete trust that goods would be delivered. 1940's & on – farm foreclosures – banks & insurance companies became owners, REA – electricity replaced gas engines, migration out of county: military service and defense factory jobs = money, power farm machinery replaced horse power, 40 & 80 acre farms doubled in size, GI Bill – schooling for jobs and business, strong family feeling – children nurtured at home, Insurance – health insurance helped doctors & hospitals get paid. 1970's & on – homes equipped with labor saving appliances, housewife employed to sustain lifestyle, lower age of starting school and day care facilities, social services requiring mothers find paying jobs, sense of community became a place of employment, sporting activity, and cultural interests, socializing occurring outside the home, advertising became visual and sophisticated – a teacher once remarked that whoever invented a wrapping paper a housewife could see through would make a fortune.
- Loss of loyalty from local communities to regional(?) and beyond.
- A county built on logging and farming was replaced with government, schools, and commuters. A county that was a place to take a weeks vacation in the woods on an underdeveloped lake to a county with highly and in some cases densely developed shore lands.
- 1900 – small subsistence farms – lumber industry in decline. 1925 – cheese factories every 4 miles – still some timber. 1950 – electricity and tractors revolutionize farming – light industry begins. 1975 – Number of farms decreasing – size increasing – commuting to industrial jobs begins.
- Railroad – small towns thrived, logging, cheese factories, school house, railroad gone – large school – cars.
- Polk County has gone from a primarily farming county to a residential and recreational county.
- Population has boomed. Roads have improved from gravel to paved with wider lanes. Vehicles have increased in quantity and speed. Buildings are better quality, more energy efficient, and more numerous. Property taxes have increased with a larger percentage going to education in the last decade.
- We have gone from wooded county to farming county to bedroom county.
- Each small community had its own creamery, store, bar, church, school, feed mill, etc. Families and neighbors worked together and were quite self-sufficient. Railroads provided far-away products and transportation. Electricity and good roads were expanded to the rural family dairy farms. We've now become a mobile society. Population has exploded. Schools have consolidated. Technology has taken over, some for better, some worse. Crime is on the increase.

- Haven't been here that long.
- Government changes – more paperwork – less people involvement. Used to be more pride in communities where you lived. Activities were more centrally located in communities, but now people travel all over, and lots of time use their homes as bases only.
- I've lived here 25 years. It has changed from largely rural dairy to developing. Farms are more crops and development.
- Railroad, consolidated schools, faster road traffic, population increased.
- Loss of agriculture and residential development of land.
- Economy has shifted from Ag to Tourism/Retail. Railroad is no longer a part of life. Out of state tourism has boomed in the area and out of state people are purchasing lake homes for high prices, making it very difficult for old time residents to stay in their homes (taxes & assessment problems).
- Unknown.
- Our county was originally covered with forest. To open it up for early settlement large tracts were given to the railroads. When they determined they didn't need that much they sold the land to timber operations. They logged it off and sold it to farmers who broke the sod and made a living by feeding most of what they produced to dairy cows and sold the milk to make a living for their families. Chickens and hogs were also produced.
- In 1907 cars were just coming in. There were rural grocery stores and in the next 30 years people shopped at them. Then they started to bypass them and go to the villages to shop. Now they bypass them and go to the big cities or towns to shop.
- Biggest change is the loss of the small farms throughout county equals death to small towns.
- Huge decline in the number of small dairy farms. Huge increase in traffic, trucks, and commuters. Rural/urban sprawl (more non-farm residents).
- This area was mainly a farming community. There was lots of wild land for hunting and trapping. The timber harvesting was good. Neighbors knew each other and helped each other out. The farm land is being lost to development. There are a lot less cows and a lot more people with houses dotting the countryside where it used to be fields, meadows and woods.
- Electricity to rural Americans to develop agriculture. Population growth to area with development. Use of cars and improvement of roads has made people and products mobile.
- More residents and traffic. Less open space – more buildings & businesses.
- Roads. Less small farms. More large, corp. farms. More people. Road maintenance improved.
- It seems that Polk County has undergone a steady progression from the early settlement of the county & the basic agriculture that sustained the early settlers through the age of more specialized ag, mainly dairy, to the grain farming & rapid urbanization we see today.
- Horse & buggy to automobiles. Hard surface on main roads. Relocation of county jail from Osceola to Balsam Lake.
- 150 years ago Polk County was new territory with lumbering, railroads, and agriculture the main industries. We have seen vast improvements in infrastructure including roads, airports, sewage disposal and wells, communication systems, street lighting, snow plowing, waste management. Improved schools and education.
- 1850 – 1900: Europeans arrive; destroy natural Native American habitat and lifestyle by cutting down forests, damming rivers, and breaking virgin soil for agriculture. Land is surveyed and divided into the basic 6 mile square townships. Villages and hamlets sprout up about every 5 or six miles throughout the county. 1900 – 1980: Dairy farming dominates economy of Polk County. Commercial retail, light manufacturing, logging, and tourism add to the economy. Lakes become ringed with “cabins” and “bedroom communities” are born for commuters to Mpls/St. Paul.
- All the small business & farms are gone. Big business has taken over, except if it is a special business.
- Change of employment from agricultural to manufacturing & service. Decline of small ag-based communities. Loss of family farm due to residential development and larger commodity based agriculture.
- Growth. Fighting at county level.
- See Rosie Braatz's book.
- I have only lived here for 2 years, so my historical knowledge is lacking.
- This was returned by Bill Bell, Turtle Lake Village Administrator, at my request. Due to a family injury & time constraint, I asked him to return it. I am sure he had a lot of great ideas. Thank you! Laurie Tarman, Village of Turtle Lake President. (Blank survey returned.)
- Changed from a logging and agriculture area to a very diversified community.
- Decrease in agricultural employment & product. Population loss from small communities to metro areas. Both of the above factors resulted in less employment opportunities in county.
- Having lived in Polk County permanently only since 1996 – I really can't comment.

- Have only lived here for nine years. In that time it seems like violent crimes & drug and alcohol have become a significant problem.
- Increased population that works in the city, increased traffic, loss of farms, fragmentation of wild life habitat, reduced open space per person.
- Homesteading, virgin pines cut down, logging had huge impact on the area.
- Preservation of St. Croix River way while at same time witnessing progressive business development along Hwy 8.
- I have only lived here for 35 – but the growth in the Osceola area has been phenomenal. Along with that growth we have had a huge demographics change from rural and farmland to developments and urban living. We are a bedroom community trying to hang on to our historic business district and downtown business district. We look pretty healthy but it is a fine line.
- Some communities have seen major growth in population and development while some areas have remained unchanged.
- Transportation evolution – Importance of Highways. Twin cities urban/suburban sprawl. Migration to urban/metro.
- The change to the St Croix Falls/Hwy 8 corridor. The “Up on the hill” expansion. Manufacturing/industry in the area (some vibrant industrial parks) replacing farming.
- It would appear Polk County really thrived in the beginning with the sawmills. Since then, it seems industry throughout the county comes and goes. Polk County enjoys being a conduit from Minnesota to northern Wisconsin, and points east via Highway 8. This corridor should be capitalized on. The tourism industry is the only industry that appears to continue to grow. The county needs to be more aggressive in bringing in businesses that would benefit from this traffic. The expansion of the trails throughout the county needs to focus on all types of travel and stop the infighting that causes the closure of ones like the one between Amery and Dresser.
- 150 years is a long time! Recent (30 years) Restructuring of the ag community (farm loss). Recreational residential development. Rural residential development (commuters).
- We have moved from a traditional farm-based economy to a service-based and manufacturing-based. In the past this was the norm – now we need to embrace the need for education to develop our best assets our people.
- I am sorry – I really can’t answer these questions – very general. These questions are just too big – I am not an expert.
- Changed from self contained, small towns, farming – hunting & summer tourist areas to easily accessed area by large urban areas i.e. Chicago & Twin Cities. Population & use of technology has increased. Farming and open land has decreased.
- Wow, how will this question be of value . . . it is very wide in nature? The Indians were driven off their lands and Europeans/Americans took the natural resources.
- Growth in population base. Move toward a tourism/service economy.
- You can but he can’t. There was a lot of man wanted buy it. No she said. It can’t be used it’s a more(?) conforming lot. The lot has plenty of foot(?) it is 20(?) ft on the books(?) but it is 200 feet in the for(?). But Gary Hinds buys it right away they build(?) a brick(?) house(?) on it a big garage. It looks to me like a dictatorship. I can pay taxes for 60 years but I can not do anything with it unless she says I can. It was a free world but it ain’t any more. There was a man at the old Halfmoon store he wanted to sharp saws but they wanted \$500.00 to give him a permit. It’s getting to be a dictatorship. They talk about old country we got it right here.
- There has been a decline in the dairy farms in the county. The influx of “bedroom” people and recreation dollars increased drastically.
- My grandfather (92 yrs old) remembers fondly the train and particularly the Dresser Junction area where his cousin lived. I moved to Dresser in 2000 and don’t have much of a memory of this place.
- I won’t repeat things that I know have already come up at the public hearings – logging, railroads, etc. I do think we should take care to include the history of our predecessors in this place, especially the Chippewa people, who are still here today. Few people know that the St. Croix Band was known as the “lost tribe” because of their failure to ratify an 1854 treaty and thus receive reservation lands. It wasn’t until 1934 – after 80 years of essentially being “squatters” on their own land – that the St. Croix received reservation lands through the Indian Reorganization Act. The lands they were given were on or near areas they had occupied for some 200 years. Along those same lines, a 1983 court ruling created a decade-long controversy involving the Chippewa’s right to hunt, fish, and gather in the ceded territory (including Polk County): *After a series of disappointing legal decisions, the Ojibwe were finally able to exercise their off-reservation treaty rights in 1983, when a federal court—the US Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit in Chicago—asserted that Wisconsin had no rights to regulate fishing on Ojibwe reservations and, more importantly, that the 1837 and 1842 treaties guaranteed Ojibwe rights to hunt and fish off their reservations without being bound by state regulations. This decision, commonly called the Voigt Decision, was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court that same year.* We felt reverberations from this affirmation of the

Chippewa's treaty rights here in Polk County in a major way when large mobs descended on area boat landings in an attempt to interfere with Chippewa spear fishing. This ugly episode shouldn't be swept under the rug.

- I have only lived in the county for two years. I was inspired to move here because of the areas natural beauty and because of its art presence.
- The early industrialists came to this area for timber and minerals. The national westward expansion displaced the aboriginal tribes of a gathering and hunting culture. The European pioneers came for the available and cheap land. They cleared the land for growing grain, for planting their gardens, orchards and for feeding the animals. Comfortable homes were eventually built on the farms and in the villages. Schools, churches, and civic orders were established as the agricultural venture succeeded. Roads were built and electrical power was generated on the rivers and distributed out of the area. People from the Twin Cities came to enjoy the natural beauty of Polk County. They built summer homes on the many lakes. This rural life grew more comfortable as the population stabilized for a few generations. This area had developed ties to the Twin Cities as did many towns up and down the big rivers. The flour mills accumulated huge profits that enabled development into food processing, radio communications and electrical control systems. New materials were invented so that plastics and products made with plastics became part of our lives. After the World War solid state electronics was discovered and many computer companies grew in the Twin Cities and super computers vied for acceptance in the military and business data processing. Spin-off from the high tech was established in small cities in the area. Many new light industries offered employees relatively well paying jobs. The business of farming required fewer workers and to expand the farming operation a lot of capital for expensive equipment. Many older farmers and those with smaller operations rented or sold their land to the large operators and to developers for building homes in the country.
- Take us back to the fifties.
- Along with the rest of the nation Polk County has seen a fall in the number of industrial and agricultural jobs. Additionally, small family farms do not exist the same way they did 150 years ago. The job market has gone more toward service industry or high tech. This leaves behind a large percent of people who are not "college material."
- The "demise" & selling off of many family farms – loss of local business in small towns, (unable to compete with big box stores).
- Population increase. Decrease in percent population employed in agriculture.
- Most recently (in the past 30 years since we've been here) we have seen: transition from predominantly agricultural economy to residential, recreational, leisure & industrial. Increase in the number/percentage of "second home" residences. Decrease in water quality of the lakes and streams. Closing of the township dumps. Loss of "main street" economies/communities. Improved parks and recreation areas. Significant outside pressures for land development, both commercial & residential. Increase in crime, drugs, murder, theft. Increase in incidence of cancer. Pole barns are the "architectural standard" for many new buildings. Increase in number of residents (existing & new) who are interested in the preservation and maintenance of existing natural resources and environmentally sustainable lifestyles.
- This question has had excellent input at the local meetings.
- The most significant changes that have taken place in the last 150 years have been settlement by non-native immigrants, the development of an efficient transportation system, and the recent urbanization of the southern portions of the county. Within the past 30 years, the county has seen a rapid transformation from a small farm economy to a commuter-based urban economy. The county has become a housing location and a playground for Twin Cities residents. Because of the shift to transportation by trucks and automobiles, the network of rail lines in the county has been lost.
- I have only lived in Polk County for 8 years, so am unqualified to comment.
- Change from primarily logging and agriculture (dairy) to small industry. Largest employers became the county, hospitals, and school districts.
- The dominant means of transportation has changed from being by foot or animal to motorized vehicles. This has increased the ability of people to move about within the county and move outside of the county for economic and cultural purposes. A major metropolitan area has grown within a shorter and shorter travel time from Polk County.
- Construction of the hydropower plant at the falls of the St Croix. Arrival of first railroad in 1890. Construction of highways.
- The demise of the forest product and farming industries. The mega growth of County Government.
- The entire area has been logged over, I would guess at least twice, so that our current forests are valuable mostly for their scenic beauty and for firewood.
- Change from agriculture being the dominant industry.
- Growth – more commerce, more housing, improvements in schools, social services.
- I have lived in Polk County only 7 years, but spent summers here as a child. I don't see huge changes over the 50 years that I have summered here, but since moving here, there have been most noticeable changes in the shopping and housing options, i.e., mega stores on Highway 8, townhouses, home developments in Osceola and

elsewhere, even more apartments. Ironically, I notice much more wildlife too including bald eagles, loons, wild turkeys, foxes, pheasant, more deer, possum, river otters, swans, green and gray heron and a greater variety of migrating birds both spring and summer.

- We have surrendered our heritage to industrialization, our timberlands are mostly gone, the railroads and highway systems have dominated the development of our lands.
- The past is great but it is History! Leaders must focus on the future.
- I can speak only to the last 20 years, the time of my residence here. When we came in 1986, Polk County was losing farm families more rapidly than any other Wisconsin county. There were few jobs for those displaced people and other capable people with good work histories also were unable to find work. Over the 20 years, job opportunities increased but two worker families became the norm, as Polk County's low wages made it difficult to support a family on one income. In 1986, there were no FAXs nor computer modems. My fellow St. Paul Pioneer Press Correspondent, Peggy Ryan, filed her first story from here by computer in 1987. We could get a "tie line" to The Cities for \$200 a month. (Now, for \$5 a month, one can get an 800 number and pay for the calls you receive.) The Cities have been growing in our direction during the past 20 years at a pace that seems to be accelerating. I did a survey of Appalachia's Polk Counties—everyone "knows" Appalachia is one of the nation's poverty areas, right? – and found out our Polk County's per capita income was lower than any of Appalachia's Polk Counties.
- We moved up here in 1981 from St. Croix County after I retired. We love Polk County but we are afraid we are going to get taxed out of our home on Blake Lake. When I hear of improvements I think what is it going to cost me.
- From logging industry and small farms all rural area.
- I walk on Highway 48 and there are always beer cans to pick up from people who have thrown them out while drinking and driving.
- The time frame of this question is too long as it encompasses most of Polk Co. European settlement, decimation of native culture, women's suffrage and supposed liberation, six wars, advent of electricity, radio, automobiles, television, prohibition and casinos . . . Of more recent significance: loss of the "great generations" – dying off of generations with connections to the pioneering principles and values of a mostly agrarian culture. Maturing and retiring of "baby boomers" – aging of population. Advent of electronics & digital technology; super stores; transient lifestyles. Influx of "new populations" not related to agriculture and "community values" like 4-H; emergence of bedroom communities; industrialization.
- We've lived in Osceola area for 17 years and have noticed so many new homes go up around the area. Also the town has expanded outward. But the biggest change that we notice and benefit from is the growth of organic food industries in the area. (4 CSAs and one organic dairy) Also the preservation of the bluff land has been a big achievement.
- More people, more deer, more disease.
- We have gone from a lumbering economy to a farm economy to varied commuter and other local jobs. Our family homesteaded in 1879 so several generations have lived through the changes. We now have more workers than jobs. The farms are being consolidated. Much of the trees are being harvested for economic survival.
- I hope you consider these points and not get involved in major complex plans. People were self sufficient and took care of each other. They were responsible for each other. Gov't was very small and there were not all the taxes and social programs.
- Well, like the rest of the world, Polk County has undergone a mighty transformation in terms of infrastructure, technology, life-style, etc., over the last 150 years. I do not think the past is as important at this point as the future. We need to visualize what we would like to have in the future and undertake preparations and plans as to how to get there. So, I am very happy the county is undertaking this process and I hope you will stay true to your word and actually listen to the people who live here now.
- This county has moved from a focus on agriculture with supporting businesses and services to a diverse economy of small businesses, agriculture, and tourism. We have also become a county of commuters who have a different sense of ownership in the community than 50 or more years ago. Our local communities no longer are the center of life as so many people are spending most of the day at an outstate job and in a vehicle commuting. They shop where it is more convenient and less expensive not because it is the neighborhood business. Churches are no longer a consistent source of community.
- I have lived here for 18 years. In that short time I have seen a lot more housing developments, I've seen some land being set aside for protection from development (ag land and land for wildlife). I've seen dairy farms go out of business because there was no one to take over. I've also seen more organic farms like our own start up and survive.
- World Globalization. Closer connection to large metro areas: Mpls/St Paul, Chicago, Eau Claire, etc. Increased population. Moving from an agrarian society to an industrial society.