

Why Ames is not Lawrence, Kansas

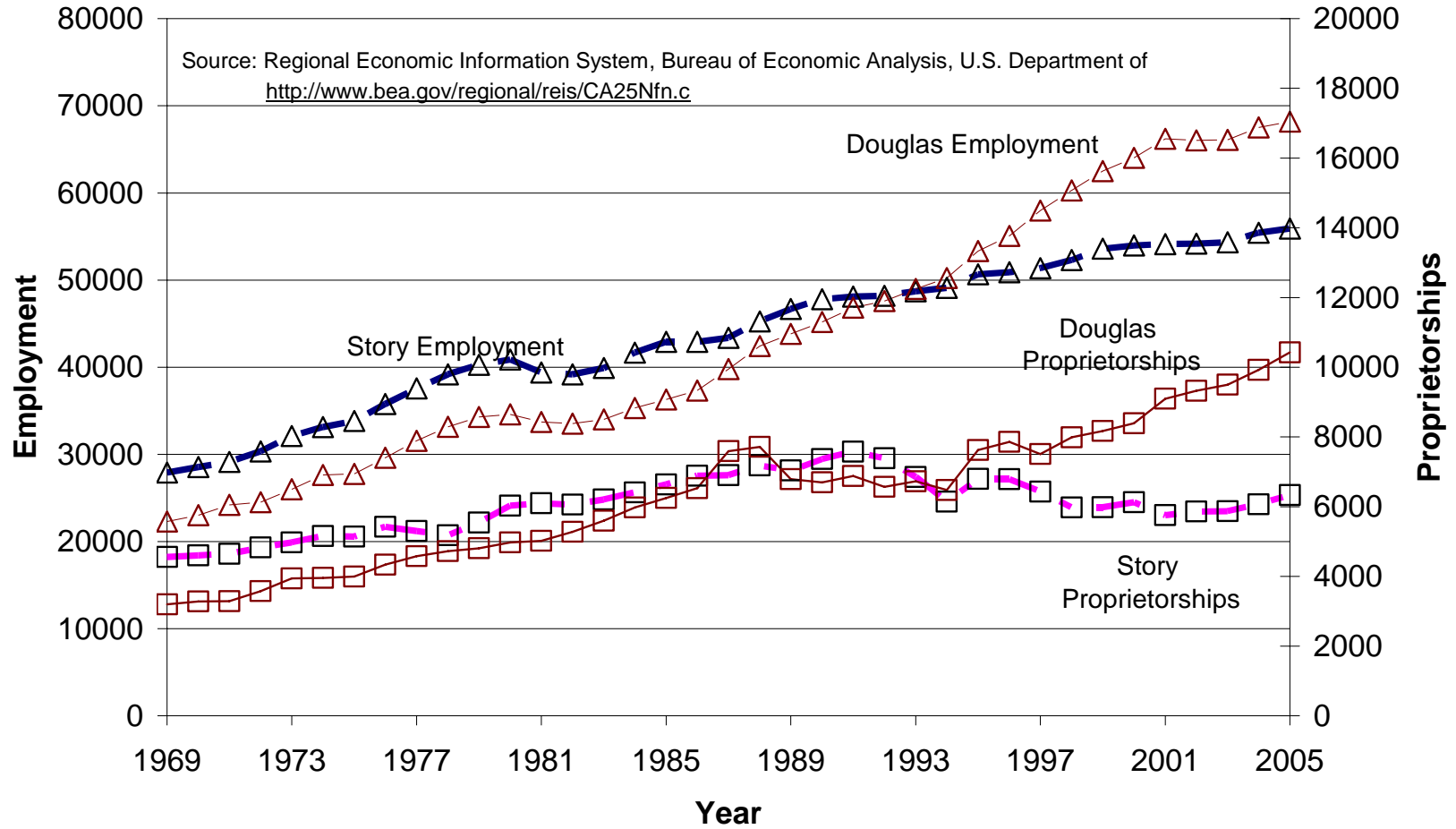
Every once in awhile Dick Hawes writes in the *Ames Tribune* about how much he enjoys walking through the Lawrence, Kansas downtown. It has quaint clothing shops, interesting restaurants, several art stores, and a music hall. Style conscious clothes shoppers with whom I am acquainted look forward to trips to Lawrence, even though they rarely shop here in Ames. Lawrence seems to have more options—and it does. The Ames downtown is half the size of Lawrence.

One might think the reason that Lawrence has so many local shops is that it has prevented big box stores from driving out its main street merchants, but that is not the case. Travel down Iowa Avenue, 6th, or 24th Streets in Lawrence and you will see the same stores you see on Duff, plus several others we do not have.

The reason Lawrence has more quaint shops and more cultural events (and more schools and more pools) is that it has 40% more people and 22% more jobs than Ames. But that was not always the case. When I was a student in Lawrence in the early 1970s, Story County had 24% more jobs and 7% more people than Douglas County. By 1992, employment was equal in Douglas County and Story County. Since then, Douglas County has added 21 thousand jobs and 26 thousand people, compared to Story's 8 thousand jobs and 5 thousand people. The larger employment and population growth in Lawrence has helped pay for the improvements to the downtown and the support of the quaint shops, not protectionist restrictions on competition.

The business climate in Lawrence is best exemplified by the fact that since 1992, they have added 59% more proprietorships—new businesses that are critical to the economic health and vibrancy of a local economy. Over the same period, the number of proprietors in Story County has declined by 14%. Could there be a more dramatic indictment of the business climate in Ames?

Growth of Employment and Proprietorships, Story Cty, IA and Douglas Cty, KS, 1969-2005



Populations of Story Cty, IA and Douglas Cty, KS, 1969-2005

