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POPULATION TRENDS IN SOUTH DAKOTA COUNTIES,
1880-1980: A GEOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS

BY

ABDUR RAHIM

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
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A. R.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

South Dakota is one of the most sparsely populated states in the nation. According to 1980 census data, the population density of this predominantly agricultural state is 9.1 persons per square mile, compared to a national density average of 64.0 persons per square mile.

The human occupation of South Dakota is characterized by population trends and patterns which exhibit a variety of spatial forms and considerable dynamism over time. After opening of the settlement frontier in the mid-nineteenth century, South Dakota began attracting many immigrants and settlers. The population of the state reached its zenith in 1930, declined during the Depression and drought years of the thirties and experienced moderate growth from the 1940s until 1960. During the 1960s, the state's population declined slightly. Again a population growth trend is evident in the 1980 census. The 1980 population, however, remained below 1930 level.

A detailed analysis of the population of South Dakota from a geographic perspective has never been
attempted. This study represents an attempt to fill this existing gap in our understanding of the state's population conditions and patterns. Geography is one of many disciplines which includes the formal study of human population as a integral component. Population study in geography is concerned with the way in which the human population is distributed through space and time together with various factors which generate changes in the spatio-temporal patterns. The geographer's view of population is broad and comprehensive. Like demographers, geographers are concerned with data, but they study population mainly as a part of geographic landscape. It is the geographer's role to analyze population trends and patterns of a particular area at a particular time in terms of different variables which include many physical, cultural, and environmental factors.

A geographic study of population is very important in order to adopt and implement effective settlement, land use, and resource planning strategies. Such a study gives planners and decision makers a better understanding about the population situation of an area in terms of a number of variables which are directly influencing its population patterns and trends.
Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To examine the trends in population growth and decline in South Dakota counties from 1880 to 1980.
2. To identify the factors influencing the population growth and decline in South Dakota counties and,
3. To evaluate the past and present density patterns of South Dakota’s population.

Methodology

The methodology adopted for this research was developed in four different phases.

First, all needed data for this study were collected from a variety of sources. Second, the acquired data were arranged and analyzed in tabular form. Third, the information was presented on maps and diagrams in order to derive a better understanding of the selected population characteristics of the state. Finally, a population change model, originally used by geographer Wilbur Zelinsky, is used to analyze county population dynamics in South Dakota from 1880 to 1980.

The basic units of this research are the 66 counties of South Dakota. In 1880, the area occupied by
present day South Dakota was divided into 76 counties. The number of counties has been reduced due to the merging of several such administrative units. In some cases county boundaries also have changed. For the purpose of accurate analysis, historical population data have been rearranged according to the present county boundaries of the state.

Review of the Literature and Data Sources

Literature on the population of the United States is abundant, but very few works have been done on the population of South Dakota. The Rural Sociology Department at South Dakota State University has produced several masters theses and doctoral dissertations on population characteristics of the state. These studies, however, are concerned primarily with such features as migration and fertility aspects of South Dakota's population.

Edward Patrick Hogan, in his doctoral dissertation, which was done at St. Louis University, investigated the reasons for out-migration of South Dakota youth. He identifies the reasons for out-migration as being the familial environment (fathers, parents and friends); the social environment (home towns, state, social structure, recreation, communication and transportation); the cultural environment (education, politics, religion,
and military); the economic environment (jobs, wages); and the geographic environment (weather, climate, dust storms, droughts, health, and the appeal of the other areas).

The Agricultural Experiment Station of South Dakota State University has published several bulletins on different aspects of population of the state. Since 1933 it has published four bulletins on trade centers of South Dakota. These bulletins contain short analytical discussions on the population situation of the state. The earliest of these bulletins was written by Paul Landis who analyzed the growth and distribution of population in the state from 1880 to 1930. Douglas Chittick has identified different factors influencing trends of population growth and decline trade centers of South Dakota from 1901 to 1951. John P. Johansen studied population trends of the state from 1890 to 1950. Donald R. Field has analyzed the factors related to population change from 1940 to 1960. Several works have been done on the population of the Midwest and the Upper-Midwest. These studies are concerned mostly with population trends, distribution and density, migration and urbanization patterns since 1930.

One article by a pioneer population geographer, Wilbur Zelinsky, was extremely useful for this study. Zelinsky identified five types of population change in the
counties of the United States. This population change model is used in this study to analyze the population trends in the South Dakota counties since 1880.

Data for this study were collected from the different publications of the United States Census Bureau, South Dakota State University’s Agricultural Experiment Station and the Rural Sociology Department of South Dakota State University, unless otherwise stated.

Organization

This study is presented in six chapters. Chapter II develops the history of settlement in South Dakota Prior 1880 by Indians and Europeans. Chapter III analyzes trends in population growth and decline in South Dakota counties from 1880 to 1980. A model, originally used by Zelinsky, is used to identify types of population change in the state’s counties. Chapter IV investigates different factors which are influencing the growth and decline of population in the state. Population density and distribution patterns are analyzed in chapter V. Chapter VI is devoted to analysis of urban and rural population of the state. Conclusions and comments are presented in the concluding chapter.
NOTES


4 Paul Landis. Growth and Decline of South Dakota Trade Centers, 1901-1933. South Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin No. 279, (Brookings, South Dakota: South Dakota State College, 1933).


CHAPTER II

HISTORY OF SETTLEMENT IN SOUTH DAKOTA PRIOR TO 1880

Indian Settlements

Little is known about the first settlers of present day South Dakota. Archaeological evidence from Shannon County establishes the presence of human settlement in the area circa 9000 B.C. Nearly a thousand Indian villages and camp sites have been found within the state. Artifacts and other remains prove that the state was inhabited during the late prehistoric period. From about A.D. 1000, a number of nomadic tribes occupied the area surrounding the Black Hills.

As early as A.D. 500, a group of people, known as the Mound Builders, inhabited the area east of the Missouri river. Their mounds, which were used mainly as burial chambers, have been found along the Big Sioux River, in the vicinity of Big Stone Lake, and elsewhere along the streams and lakes in eastern South Dakota. The Mound Builders disappeared around A.D. 800 (Figure 1).

During the period A.D. 1250 to 1400, an agricultural people moved into South Dakota and occupied strategic positions along the Missouri river. Mandan Indians may be direct decedent of these people.
Figure 1. Location of Indian Mounds and Early Village Sites.

Around 1600 A.D. the Arikaras or Ree Indians moved to the central part of the state from Nebraska. The Arikaras are known as the first truly identifiable South Dakotans. They settled in villages along the Missouri River. More than fifty Arikara village sites have been discovered along the Missouri river. The Arikaras lived in the vicinity of Pierre until about 1750, when the Sioux Indians reached the Missouri River from the east and northeast. Due to pressure from the Sioux Indians, the Arikaras moved northward in 1795 from near the mouth of the Cheyenne river to the mouth of the Grand River and finally the Arikara villages were abandoned permanently in 1832, when they joined the Mandans who lived along the Missouri river in present day North Dakota.

The migration of the Arikaras marked the documented beginning of changing patterns of settled life in South Dakota. The permanent villages of the Mound Builders, and later the Arikaras, were superseded by the temporary camping grounds of nomadic Sioux or Dakota Indians. The Sioux Indians were divided into seven main groups: the Tetons, Yanktons, Yanktonnais and four bands of Santee. The historical records indicate that the Sioux Indians crossed the Missouri River in 1750.

There was no mass movement of the Sioux into
South Dakota. They came gradually over a period of years and by various routes. The Tetons arrived first and by A.D. 1750 they had reached the Missouri valley in the central part of the state. In 1780, the Yanktons took over the lower part of the James River Valley and the Yanktonnais took over the upper part. The Santees encamped around the Big Stone Lake. In 1776, the Oglala band discovered the Black Hills. Many members of the Tetons maintained their camps on the east side of the Missouri River until A.D. 1800. By the end of the nineteenth century several distinct divisions of the Sioux Indians were scattered over the vast expanse of South Dakota Territory and established settlements (Figure 2).

**European Settlements**

Before the seventeenth century the area now occupied by South Dakota was probably unknown to the whites. The Upper Missouri Valley was a part of the colonial empire established by the French in North America. Before the eighteenth century, however, French traders were probably regular visitors to the state. It has been conjectured that Daniel Greysolon Duluth, as early as 1679, was the first white to enter in the land of South Dakota. A French map published in 1781 contained
Figure 2. Dakota Indian Migration.

geographic details of Indian villages in the eastern part of the present state. By the beginning of 1800 several French traders settled along the Missouri to carry on fur trading with the Indians.

In 1803, the United States bought the French possessions west of the Missouri River, the Louisiana Territory, which is known as the Louisiana purchase.

From 1743 to 1757 several expeditions were carried on in South Dakota by the La Varendryre brothers, Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, Joseph Nicollet, and John Fremont, who mapped and wrote the first authentic written account of the territory. Missionaries Stephen Riggs and Pierre De Smet, natural scientist John Audubon, and geologist Ferdinand Hayden also visited the area during this period. Fur trading and trapping were intensified and many fur trading posts were established. These fur trading posts were usually known as forts, because they were fortified against Indian attacks. The first trading post was established near the confluence of the Bad and Missouri rivers at Fort Pierre.

In 1831, the first steamboat was introduced on the upper Missouri River, an event which brought increased traffic to South Dakota. The year 1855 marked the end of active fur trading in Dakota; the trading post
at Fort Pierre was purchased by the government and reestablished as a military post. Four new military posts were established at Fort Randall in Gregory County to protect settlers from Indian attacks (Figure 3).

In 1851, the Santee Sioux relinquished their lands situated to the east of the Big Sioux River and the government allowed white settlement in a small area near Sioux Falls. The early settlements in the Sioux Valley were made with land speculation as a motive and under the leadership of land companies. In 1857 town sites were established by land companies at Medary, Flandreau and Sioux Falls and rapid settlement took place in these areas from 1857 to 1862; all of these settlements were located on the Big Sioux River in the southeastern of the state. The settlements were deserted completely between 1857 and 1865 due to Indian attacks. People of Medary left the site and established Brookings. In 1865, people returned to their settlements under the protection of the United States troops and this military protection was provided until 1869 as the population started to increase in the region.

In 1858, the Yankton Indians sold the land between the Big Sioux and Missouri rivers and the area was officially open to white settlement. In 1858, trading posts
Figure 3. Location of Early Military and Trading Posts.

were established at Yankton and Vermillion. After the summer of 1859, hundreds of settlers moved into the area within a few weeks. Most of the settlement took place in Bon Homme, Yankton, Clay and Union counties. Towns of Bon Homme, Yankton, Vermillion and Elk Point were established in 1859.

In 1861, Dakota Territory was established by the Congress, to include present day North and South Dakota, most of Montana and parts of Nebraska and Wyoming. In 1882 it was reduced to what is now North and South Dakota.

The first census of the territory was taken in 1861. It disclosed a population of 1186 in the area comprising South Dakota (Sioux Falls, 140; Clay and Union counties, 669; Yankton county, 287; and Bon Homme county, 163.

The Homestead Act was passed in 1862 and it had a tremendous influence on the rapid growth of settlements and population in the state; it encouraged land speculators from eastern settled states and many other countries to gain possession of almost free land. The importance of the Homestead Act on population growth in the state will be discussed in chapter IV.

In 1874, Lieutenant Colonel George Custer led an exploring party to the Black Hills and discovered gold. By 1875, a large number of people moved to the region to
search for gold. In 1877, the Black Hills region was declared open for settlement, a factor that contributed to the rapidity of settlement in South Dakota. This event temporarily turned the tide of settlement from other areas to the Black Hills region where communities such as Deadwood, Lead, Spearfish, Central, Sturgis, and others were established.

During the decades of 1870 and 1880, most of the settlements were in the valleys of the Missouri, Big Sioux and James rivers and in the Black Hills area. Settlement was promoted by river and expanding rail transportation networks as well as by the wagon roads which were opened by the government. The most important part of the road construction was the bridging of the rivers. The period of 1872 to 1880 was marked by the advent of railroads and by rapid population growth in the state. In 1870, the population of South Dakota was 11,776, while in 1880 it had reached to 98,268.

The lure of free land, a gold rush in the Black Hills, good agricultural production, and better transportation facilities due to the expansion of railways attracted a large number of people to the state. By 1880 most parts of the state were settled. What was to
become South Dakota had become part of the new frontier of settlement in the nation. Population increased sharply in the state after 1880, which instituted a new era in the state.
NOTES

1 Larry J. Zimmerman, Peoples of Prehistoric South Dakota (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), p. 52.


4 Schell, 1968, p. 18.

5 Zimmerman, 1985, p. 127.


7 Schell, 1968, p. 25.


12 Peterson, 1904, p. 170.


14 Peterson, 1904, p. 172.

CHAPTER III

POPULATION TRENDS IN SOUTH DAKOTA COUNTIES SINCE 1880

Temporal Pattern of Population Change

After opening of the settlement frontier in the late nineteenth century, population of the area consisting present day South Dakota started to increase rapidly. The total population reached 98,268 in 1880. South Dakota gained statehood in 1889. From 1880 to 1890 the state’s total population increased by 255 percent, the biggest decade increased during the 1880 to 1980 period. From 1890 to 1900, the population growth rate was a low 15.2 percent, though it increased by 45 percent during the decade 1900 to 1910. From 1910 to 1930, population increased by 18.6 percent and by 1930 the state’s population reached its pre-1980s maximum population of 692,849 (Figure 4).

The first major decline in the intercensal rate of increase occurred during the 1930s. The Depression and severe drought combined to cause the state’s population to decline by 7.2 percent. There was some recovery in the rate of growth between 1930 and 1960, when population increased by 5.8 percent, but the decade of 1960 brought a
Figure 4. Population Trends in South Dakota, 1880-1980.
decline in growth of 2.2 percent. During the 1970's, the state's population increased by 3.8 percent over the previous census period.

**Regional Pattern of Population Change**

The state of South Dakota is divided into two distinct natural divisions, delimited by the Missouri River, which runs in an approximate north and south direction through the state. The western part is a dry farming and grazing area, except for the Black Hills, which is mainly a mining and tourism district. The eastern half of the state has more rainfall and is primarily devoted to agriculture. Although the part of South Dakota located west of the river is 8.6 percent larger in area, the number of counties east of the river is twice that (44 counties) of the west river area (22 counties). These two areas of the state are quite different and they represent two distinct patterns of population growth and decline.

The percentage of population increase in the "East River" counties was much greater than that of "West River" counties during the decade 1880 to 1900, when population increased rapidly in the state. During that period East River and West River populations increased by 265.5 and 209 percent respectively. But in the decade of 1910s,
however, West River population increased rapidly (109.5%) in comparison to East River population growth (33.3%).

From 1940 to 1970, East River lost more population than did West River. In the decades of 1950 through 1980, the percentage of increase was higher West River than East River. It is observed that the population the East River area had reached its maxima in 1930 with 526,675, persons, but population of West River reached its peak in 1980 when its population was recorded as 202,448 (Figure 5).

Analysis of county data indicate that from 1880 to 1980, only one county of the state (Minnehaha) has gained population continuously during each decade since 1880. All other counties have lost population during at least one decade of this period. Though the state’s population shows an increasing trend in 1980 census, population has been declining in 43 of the 66 counties; only 22 counties have shown an increasing trend. According to the 1980 census, 72 percent of the East River counties lost population, whereas 50 percent of the West River counties lost population between 1970 and 1980. Though the state as a whole reached its maximum population in 1930, a total of 48 counties recorded their highest populations sometime between 1880 and 1930, while another
18 counties reached their peak between 1940 and 1980.

Types of Population Change in South Dakota Counties

Pioneer population geographer Wilbur Zelinsky has used a model to analyze rural population change in the United States. He identified five types of population change. Zelinsky's population change model has been modified slightly as used here to analyze the population in the counties of South Dakota from 1880 to 1980.

Analysis of South Dakota county population data from 1880 to 1980 reflects six distinct types of population trends (figure 5):

Type 1: Comprises counties where population is increasing continuously without any decline in any decade since 1880. Only one county (Minnehaha) represents this pattern.

Type 2: Representing counties where population is declining after an era of growth, a total of 25 counties are identified as belonging to this group which represents the highest percentage (31%) found in any type category. About 40.9 percent of East River counties and 31.8 percent of those West River show this type of population change.
Figure 5. Types of Population Change in South Dakota Counties, 1880-1980.
Type 3: Shows the trends where population is increasing after a period of growth and decline; a total of nine counties represent this type.

Type 4: Represents counties where the second phase of growth has given way to a second period of decline. Seven counties show this type of change.

Type 5: Identifies the counties in which population is increasing after more than two growth and decline trends. Thirteen counties have experienced this type of population change.

Type 6: Identifies the counties where population is decreasing after two periods of growth and decline. Eleven counties reflect this type of population change.

After 1880, the state’s population grew rapidly, reaching a peak in 1930, then declining in the intercensal period of 1940 and again 1970. In 1980, the state’s population was still below that attained in 1930. The state’s present population has been shaped by trends of growth and decline which have resulted from many factors.
NOTES

1  Paul H. Landis, Growth and Decline of South Dakota Trade Centers: 1901-1933. (Brookings: South Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin No. 279, 1933).

2  East River and West River are widely recognized perceptual culture regions in South Dakota, hence are used by in work as a formal toponyms.


   In this paper Zelinsky identified five types of population change for the American counties:
   Type 1 comprise counties which have experienced continuous increase from 1790 to 1960. Type 2 consists of counties whose population is waning after an era of growth. Type 4 are the counties whose cycle of gain and loss has been succeeded by a second period of growth. Type 5 comprises counties where the growth has given way to a second and continuing period of decline.
Since 1880, the population of South Dakota has gone through some major periods of growth and decline. These trends have been influenced by a variety of physical, socio-economic, environmental, and political factors. The major factors associated with periods of population growth and decline in South Dakota are discussed below.

Factors Contributing to Growth Trends

1. Favorable land legislation

The early settlement and population growth in South Dakota were greatly influenced by favorable land legislation. The Preemption, Homestead and Timber Culture acts had very significant impact on the growth of population in the state. These three acts gave newcomers an opportunity to own land with a minimum payment of fees. The lure of free land was one of the main factors contributing to rapid population growth in the state during the latter half of the 19th century.

The Preemption Law of 1881 gave a person a prior right to own 60 acres of public domain by locating a home
on it. After Dakota became a territory, Congress passed the Homestead Act on May 20, 1862. This act had a very significant influence on population growth. It provided that any one could file claim to 160 acres of public land provided the person resided upon or cultivated the land for a period of five years. The Homestead Act attracted a large number of settlers to the state from other parts of the country and from many European countries as well. In the early days of settlement the largest concentration of population was in the extreme southeastern corner of the state. With the passage of the Homestead Act, landseekers spread out to other parts of the state for settlement. By 1870, the population was recorded as being approximately 14,000. The figure increased to 98,268 in 1880 and 583,888 in 1910. The Homestead Act also provided free land to the railway companies for the construction of railroads, which facilitated rapid immigration to the state.

The Timber Culture Act was passed in 1873 and amended in 1878. The act provided that any person could acquire 160 acres of treeless land simply by planting ten acres of trees.

Though the land speculators benefitted from the governmental land distribution policies, they were one of
the main contributing factors for rapid population growth in South Dakota during its early years of development.

2. **Opening of Indian Reservations to White Settlements**

When the first white men came into South Dakota, the area was divided among different groups of Indians who often created problems for the early settlers. After many wars and negotiations between the Indians and the government, the Indian lands were slowly ceded to the whites and Indian reservations were created. When the ceded lands were declared open to the settlers, rapid settlement took place in those areas and population grew rapidly. Treaties with the Indians and cession of their land created a safe environment for the newcomers to the area. The first Indian lands were ceded in 1851. These lands were in the eastern part of the state bordering Minnesota. A total of four Indian reservations were created and the last Indian land was ceded in 1909.

3. **The influence of Steamboating on the Missouri River**

The Steamboat transportation on the Missouri River had a profound impact on early population growth and settlement in South Dakota. The first steamboat in the state was the Yellowstone which reached Fort Pierre from St. Louis, Missouri, in 1831. From 1831 to
1881 steamboating was the only feasible means of bringing supplies to the Indian Agencies and various military posts which were established along the Missouri River. At the outset, steamboat service was limited to the stretch of the river between St. Louis, Missouri and Fort Union, North Dakota; eventually it was extended as far upstream as Fort Benton, Montana, a connection established mainly for fur trading. Steamboat lines were connected Yankton with Fort Randall, lower Brule, Fort Hale, Chaberlain, Pierre, Fort Pierre and Fort Yates and by 1880 a large number of people had settled alongside the Missouri River in the State. Discovery of gold in the Black Hills region in 1874 brought many people to the territory. Many of them came by steamboat to Fort Pierre and then travelled by overland trail to Rapid City and Deadwood. When railway service was expanded into South Dakota by early 1873, steamboat service declined rapidly. The flood of 1881 in Yankton caused serious damage to many steamboats and brought an end to commercial steamboat navigation on the Missouri River.

4. Railway Transport

The railways played a very significant role in population growth and settlement of South Dakota. During
the late nineteenth century when the wave of newcomers started to move into the state, the most important deterrent to settlement was the lack of a reliable and inexpensive form of transport. Although the early settlers realized the great value of railroads, construction of the railway lines was very slow in South Dakota in comparison to railroad building in other Great Plains states. The first railroad reached Yankton in 1873. By the end of 1870 at least 2,179 miles of railroad tracks were built in South Dakota, including 137 miles in the Black Hills region. Railroads greatly influenced population growth in two ways: they were capable of offering cheap and reliable transportation all year round, and railroad companies actively encouraged settlers to come to the region. Railroad corporations heavily promoted settlement because they needed the business of settlers who built farms, grew crops, and shipped their harvest eastward by rail. Their literature was designed to lure the most skeptical farmer to this newly opened land. After opening of the area by railroads, population grew rapidly. From 1879 to the population of the state increased from 11,766 to 348,600 and the number of farms increased from 1,700 to 50,158.

The most apparent effects the railroad had on
Figure 6. South Dakota Railroads, 1982.

Source: South Dakota Department of Transportation, Division of Railroads, 1982.
settlement in South Dakota were upon the towns. From 1878 to 1890, 285 towns were platted, most of them along the railroads. Railroads continued to play a very significant role as a major source of transport in the state until the arrival of motorized vehicles in the 1920s. Heavy migration and population growth in the state at the early stage of its development would have been impossible without the help of railway services (Figure 6).

5. Gold rush in the Black Hills

The discovery of gold in the Black Hills region played a very significant role in the population growth in the western part of the state. Gold was discovered in the Black Hills in 1874 and by the end of 1876 some 20,000 people had been drawn to the area by the lure of the precious metal. Population grew rapidly in the mining camps and several towns were established. Deadwood, Ingleside, Cleveland, Fountain City, Elizabeth Town, Montana City, Lead and Rapid City were settled by the end of 1880. The Black Hills gold rush not only attracted gold seekers to the area, it also brought the other people who initiated farming which, in turn, influenced the establishment of permanent agricultural settlement in the region. Population of four Black Hills counties (Lawrence,
Pennington, Custer and Fall River) increased from 16,959 in 1880 to 29,776 in 1900. Though the gold rush in the Black Hills declined by the end of 1800s, it had tremendous impact on the population growth of the region.

6. The Great Dakota Boom

During the period of 1876-1886, much of the territory of South Dakota was settled. This era is known as the Great Dakota Boom, a period marked by rapid population growth and extensive settlement. The boom period was made possible by climatic factors. Unusually high precipitation over the span of a decade 'boosted agricultural production.

There were about 80,000 inhabitants outside the Black Hills region in 1880; by 1890 this number and increased to nearly 300,000. It was estimated that almost half of all governmental land taken up in the United States during 1882 and 1883 lay in South and North Dakota.

7. Natural Increase of Population

Data on birth and death rates of South Dakota’s population are available since 1910; they indicate that the state has experienced natural increase in population
(excess of births over deaths) in every census periods since 1910. The highest and lowest natural increase was recorded during the 1920s (2.2%) and 1980s (1%) respectively.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO DECLINE

1. Drought and the Great Depression

It has been observed that drought occurred in the Great Plains states roughly every other decade in 1890s, 14 1910s, 1930s and 1960s. These droughts had a very significant impact on the population decline in South Dakota.

The drought of the late 19th century, which lasted from 1887 to 1889, caused widespread outmigration 15 from South Dakota. The worst drought in the history of South Dakota struck during the 1930s. The period had the most dry years since weather records have been kept. In fact, a 360 year record of dendroclimatological evidence indicates that the 1930s had the worst drought in more 16 than three centuries. Drought, together with the Great Depression of the 1930s, caused a serious economic and environmental problem for the inhabitants of the state.

From 1930 to 1935 when the drought was most severe, South Dakota suffered more from grasshoppers and
other insects than at any other time in its history. The scarcity of rainfall dried out the top soil and produced dust storms. In many parts of the state farms were entirely ruined as the best part of the soil was blown away. The drought and the Great Depression were the main cause of population decline in the state during the decade of 1930s. Just after 1930 an unprecedented exodus of population started. From 1930 to 1940, South Dakota lost 7.2 percent of its population (total 49,888). All counties, except Minnehaha and Pennington, experienced population loss during the decade of 1930s. The total population of the state was 692,849 in 1930 and it dropped to 642,961 in 1940.

Though the drought of 1960s was not as devastating as that of the 1930s, it was the major cause of population decline during the decade of 1960s; in 1960, the total population of the state was 680,514 and it declined to 665,507 in 1970.

2. Mechanization and Commercialization of Agriculture

Improved transportation together with modern agricultural equipment enhanced farm commercialization beginning in the 1920s. Prior to the development of an adequate transportation system, South Dakota farms were
mainly small, subsistence and self supporting. Farm mechanization began slowly during World War II. As farmers turned more toward machinery for farm work, farms became larger. Mechanization reduced the need for extensive use of hired labor on the farm. Machines replaced men in many jobs and the number of farm laborers was reduced sharply after 1930. The capital outlay required for farm mechanization discouraged many farmers with limited capital from continuing farming. Especially the operators of smaller land holdings and the number of tenant farmers decreased.

As the farm size became larger, the number of farms in the state declined sharply. The highest number of farms in south Dakota was recorded at 83,303 in 1935; this number decreased to 37,148 in 1982, reflecting a 55.4 percent drop. On the other hand, the average acreage per farm in the state has increased substantially. In 1935, the average farm size was 440 acres; by 1982 it had increased to 1180 acres. Decrease of rural population after 1930 is directly related to farm mechanization and a decrease in number of farms.

3. Abandonment of Mining Activities

When gold was discovered in the Black Hills near
the end of the 19th century, population of the region increased sharply within a very short period of time. But as ores became exhausted and mines closed, communities were affected and the population of the area dropped sharply. Population of Lawrence county, where most of the mining activities were concentrated, reached 13,248 in 1880; due to the abandonment of mining activities, however, population of this county dropped to 11,673 in 1890. Custer County of the Black Hills region lost 44 percent of its population between 1890 and 1900. Abandonment of mining activities also discouraged a large number of people who may have planned to move to South Dakota.

The state’s population growth and decline trends have been dominated by many factors. Favorable land legislation, particularly the Homestead Act, the development of steamboat and railway transportation, a gold rush in the Black Hills, the Great Dakota Boom and the natural increase of population can be considered as the main factors of population growth in the state. Drought and the Great Depression of 1930s, commercialization and mechanization of agriculture, abandonment of the mining activities in the Black Hills region are the main factors responsible for the state’s population decline.
NOTES


13  Schell, 1946, p. 94.


15  Visher, 1918, p. 158.

16  Warrick and Trainer, 1975, p. 119.


CHAPTER V

DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION

South Dakota is one of the least densely populated states of the United States with an average population density of 9.1 persons per square mile. In terms of population density the state ranks 46th in the nation; on the other hand, it ranks 16th in land area.

The population density pattern of South Dakota counties in 1980 discloses that the population is most dense in the eastern and especially the southeastern part of the state, and is least dense in the extreme northwest part (Figure 7). Population density decreases with increased distance from the southeastern section of the state.

Highest population density in the state is found in Minnehaha county with 135 persons per square mile. Harding County, with 0.6 person per square mile, has the lowest population density. In the western part of the state population density is highest in Pennington County (25.3 person per square mile).

Population Density in Relation to Physiographic Divisions

South Dakota’s population density is very closely
Figure 7. Density of Population by Counties, 1980.
related to the state’s physiographic divisions. South Dakota is a part of the Great Plains, which extends from Texas to Canada. Physiographically, the state is divided into three distinct divisions: the Prairie Plains, the Great Plains and the Black Hills.

The area located east of the Missouri River is the Prairie Plains. This region is essentially a gently rolling plain, except in the extreme eastern part of the region extending from Clay to Roberts counties which is undulating and hilly. A number of glacial lakes are located in this part of the state. The Prairie Plains is the state’s most densely populated physiographic division. It is also the earliest settled part of the state. The region attracted farming people by virtue of its fairly uniform relief, good soil for agriculture, and moderate amount of rainfall (20-25 inches).

Most of the South Dakota’s larger cities are located in this region (1980 population of Sioux Falls, 80,908; Aberdeen, 25,937; Watertown, 15,632; Brookings, 14,915; Huron, 13,000; Vermillion, 10,140; and Pierre, 11,973). These urban centers have a very profound impact on the high population density in this physiographic division. Minnehaha County has the highest density (135 per sq. mile) and Sully County has the lowest density (2
per sq. mile) in this region. Density is higher in the southeastern corner and it gradually decreases toward the northwestern corner of this physiographic region.

The most extensive physiographic division of the state is the Great Plains. This is the long slope from the foothills of the Black Hills and the western border eastward to the Missouri River. In the west, all counties except Lawrence and parts of Pennington, Custer and Fall River lie within this physiographic division. The region is undulating and hilly. The highest part of the plain is about 3700 feet on Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in Shannon County; about the same elevation is attained in the forested buttes of Harding County. The average elevation of the Great Plains is 2800 feet. In comparison to the other parts of the state, rainfall is the lowest in this region (average annual rainfall 15-20 inches) and both soil and terrain are also poor for cultivation. Population density is very low in this physiographic division. Highest and lowest population densities are found in Shannon (5.4 per sq. mile) and Harding (0.6 per sq. mile) counties. No major urban center is located in this area.

The Black Hills region occupies Lawrence County and parts of Pennington, Custer and Fall River counties.
This is a mountainous region with an average elevation of 5000 feet. Much of the area is forested. Average annual rainfall is high (20 inches or more in the mountains), though irrigated agriculture is practiced on lower elevations. The Black Hills is one of the earliest settled part of western South Dakota because of the gold rush in the late nineteenth century. The area supports a high population density, particularly in Pennington (25.5 per sq. mile) and Lawrence (22.9 per sq. mile) counties. The gold rush brought a large number of immigrants who established several urban settlements in the area, namely Rapid City, Custer, Lead, Deadwood and Spearfish. These communities have had a profound impact on the area's high population density.

**POPULATION DENSITY AND LAND USE**

Density of population in South Dakota is very closely related to the state's land use pattern. Highest population density is found in the counties with urban land use (Figure 10). The largest urban land use is located in Minnehaha County, where Sioux Falls (1980 pop. 80,908) is located. Next to the urban areas, highest density is associated with the more intensive agricultural land use. Most of the cropland of eastern South Dakota falls within
this category. This region's agricultural economy can support and provide employment for a relatively large population.

Except in the Black Hills, most of western South Dakota is rangeland, most of which is very thinly populated. Ranching is widely practiced here and crop production is of limited extent.

The major forested area of the state is located in the Black Hills. High population density occurs in this area because of mining, lumbering, and tourist related economies, which contribute to the presence of several large communities. Mount Rushmore in the Black Hills is a major tourist attraction and has drawn many tourist related businesses to the area.

Southern parts of western South Dakota including portions of Pennington, Jackson and Shannon counties, are occupied by barren lands (Badlands). This is an area with limited ability to support life and economic development. In this area population density is extremely low and no large communities exist.

**Miscellaneous Factors Influencing Density**

High population density also is found in the counties where colleges and universities are located.
Brookings (South Dakota State University), Minnehaha (Augustana College and Sioux Falls College), Clay (University of South Dakota), Pennington (South Dakota School of Mines), Lawrence (Black Hills State College), and Brown (Northern State College) have higher population densities because of their higher educational functions.

Density of population in the state is also related to the distribution of road networks. Eastern South Dakota and the Black Hills area are well served by roads and highways and the two regions are the most densely populated parts of the state.

Population density and distribution of South Dakota is directly related to the state's physiographic divisions, land use patterns, road networks and location of educational institutions. Highest density is found in the southeastern corner of the state and in the Black Hills. The State's population density is also greatly influenced by the presence of urban centers.
NOTES


2 Visher, 1918, p. 41.
CHAPTER VI

URBAN AND RURAL POPULATION TRENDS

Population of South Dakota is predominately rural and it is one of the least urbanized states in the nation. According to the 1980 census, only 46.44 percent of the state's population is classified as urban, compared to the national average of 73.7 percent. The trend of urban and rural population from 1880 to 1980 in the state is presented in table 1 (Figure 8).

Urban Population Trend

According to the Bureau of Census definition the urban areas include the aggregate population of the incorporated areas having 2,500 or more inhabitants; all remaining areas are classified as rural. The percentage of urban population in the state stands well below the national average. Prior to 1880 the state's population was mostly rural with only 7.3 percent of the population being classified as living in urban areas (Aberdeen, Sioux Falls, Huron and Watertown). After 1880 the state's population grew rapidly and many new towns were established. From 1880 to 1890, the urban population
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Table 1. Population of South Dakota, Urban and Rural, Percent Increase or Decrease by Decade, 1880-1980.

increased by 296.2 percent, the greatest recorded gain in urban population over any decade; by 1890, 8.2 percent of state's population was urban. From 1880 to 1980, urban population in the state has increased steadily, even though the state experienced population decline during the decades of the 1930s (7.2%) and 1960s (2.1%). During these decades the state's urban population increased by 20.5 and 11.5 percent respectively. From 1970 to 1980, urban population grew by 8.1 percent, which is the lowest rate of urban growth during any decade since the 1880s. In 1980, 46.44 percent of the state's population was classified as urban.

According to the 1980 census, the state's urban population is concentrated within 23 counties. The remaining 43 counties are classified as being rural. East River counties are more urbanized than are those west of the Missouri River. Sixteen East River counties, where most of the urban centers are concentrated, contain 72 percent of the state's urban population. The West River counties contain only 28 percent of the state's total urban population and it is concentrated in seven counties. Minnehaha county, located in the southwestern corner of the state, contains 27 percent of the state's urban population. The state's largest urban center and only
Figure 8. Urban and Rural Population Trends in South Dakota, 1880-1980.
Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA), Sioux Falls, is located in this county. Pennington County, with Rapid City, in western South Dakota has the second largest urban population (17%). Hughes county with the state capital of Pierre, has the highest percentage of urban population (84%). Among the 23 counties with a statistical urban population, Yankton County has the lowest percentage (10%) of its population classified as urban (Figure 9).

In 1880, there were only 4 urban centers in the state, a number which increased to 28 in 1980. Among them, 17 are located in the eastern part of the state and 11 are located in western South Dakota. All larger urban centers, except Rapid City, are located in the eastern part of the state.

Some of the Black Hills cities have shown interesting population trends. In 1890, Deadwood became one of the major urban centers of the Black Hills due to the gold rush and mining activity. Deadwood’s population rose from 3,498 in 1900 to 4,100 by 1940. After 1940 its population started to decline and in 1970 it lost urban status when the city’s population dropped to 2,409. The population of Deadwood further declined to 2,035 during the 1970s. Population of another Black Hills city, Lead, reached 8,392 in 1910 at which time it became the
Figure 9. Percentage of Urban Population By Counties, 1880.
third largest city, surpassed only by Sioux Falls and Aberdeen. But after 1910 it lost population rapidly; Lead had only 4,330 people in 1980. Three other communities which have lost urban status are Fort Pierre (in 1970), and both Chamberlain and Villa Ranchero (in 1980).

According to the 1980 census, 57 percent of South Dakota’s urban population resides in the state’s five largest cities: Sioux Falls (81,182), Rapid City (46,492), Aberdeen (25,956), Watertown (15,649) and Brookings (14,941). Among these five cities, the population of Sioux Falls and Brookings has increased without any decline since 1890. Rapid City’s population has continued to increase since a brief decline in 1890s. After a continuous increase from 1890 to 1970, the population of Aberdeen declined slightly between 1970 and 1980 when it lost 520 people. Watertown experienced a small decrease in population during the 1960s but otherwise has shown constant growth.

Rural Population Trends

According to the 1980 census, 53.56 percent of South Dakota’s population is classified as rural, a figure which is double than the national average (26.3 percent). Of the state’s 66 counties, 43 have no urban
population at all. The rural areas include communities such as rural trade centers, villages and isolated farmsteads with fewer than 2,500 inhabitants.

Data reveal that the rural population of the state was 91,060 in 1880 and that it increased to 561,942 in 1930, a 617 percent increase over a 50 year period. The highest rate of rural gain was recorded from 1880 to 1890, when it increased by 252 percent. After reaching its peak in 1930, the rural population of the state started to decline; from 1930 to 1970 it declined by 34 percent. The rural areas of the state have lost a total of 192,313 persons. The highest loss occurred from 1930 to 1940, when rural population decreased by 13.7 percent, a figure nearly double that of the state's total population loss (7.2 percent) during the same period. From 1970 to 1980, the rural population of the state increased by .1 percent (362 persons). But when rural population is examined as a proportion of the total population of the state, it can be observed that the proportion of the rural population has declined rapidly from 92.7 percent in 1880 to 53.56 percent in 1980; this decline is directly related to the growth of urban population.

County population data reflect that all counties except Union gained rural population from 1880 to 1930.
But only seven counties (Custer, Lawrence, Minnehaha, Pennington, Shannon and Todd) have gained rural population from 1930 to 1980. All other 59 counties have lost rural population. Minnehaha County has the greatest rural population, followed by Pennington and Brown counties; incidentally, these three counties also have the highest total and urban population.

According to 1980 census, South Dakota has 290 rural places with fewer than 2,500 inhabitants each. Among them only 1.7 percent, or five places, have a population of 2,000 to 2,500. Places with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants comprise the highest group, 85 percent of the places (249 communities). Fifty five percent of the state's rural population is living in places having fewer than 1,000 people. Among the state's 312 incorporated places, 287 are classified as being rural in 1980 census and 249 of have fewer than 1,000 inhabitants.

South Dakota is predominantly rural with only 46.44 percent urban population. The urban population of the state has increased steadily since 1890. After reaching its peak in 1930, the rural population has reflected a declining trend. In 1980, the urban population of the state is concentrated within 23 counties. In comparison to the western part of the state, eastern South
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Table 2. South Dakota's Urban and Rural Population as a percentage of Total Population, 1880-1980.

Dakota is more urbanized and most of the larger urban centers are located here.
NOTES

The study of human population is an important part of geography and other branches of sciences. Analysis of population trends and patterns is a well established part of geographic research. Study of population trends is the direct reflection of an area's cultural, historical, economic, transportation and political aspects. The purpose of this study, broadly, was to study trends in South Dakota's population growth and decline since 1880.

This research necessitated the collecting, tabulating, mapping and analyzing of population data for the state. The analysis of data reflects that the state's population has gone through several upward and downward trends since the late nineteenth century.

The area of study is occupied by present day South Dakota and is one which was settled by whites fairly late in comparison to other eastern, southern and western states of the nation. After opening of the settlement frontier in the late nineteenth century, rapid population growth took place in the state. The state's
population started to increase rapidly until its peak was reached in 1930. From 1880 to 1940, it increased by 605 percent, but it declined by 7.2 percent during the decade of 1930s. After a slight increase during the 1950s, it declined again during the 1960s. From 1970 to 1980, it increased by 2.2 percent. It has been observed that the East River area of the state reached it peak in 1930, but the West River area reached its peak in 1980. Only Minnehaha county has gained population continuously from 1880 to 1980. All other counties have experienced population loss, at least in one decade, during this period. According to the 1980 census, 44 of the state’s 66 counties are experiencing population decline. A variety of factors are responsible for roller coaster pattern of growth and decline of the state’s population.

In comparison to the western part of the state, eastern South Dakota has a higher population density; density is lowest in the extreme northwestern part of the state. The population density is very closely associated with the state’s physiographic divisions, land use patterns, road networks and location of universities and colleges.

South Dakota is predominantly rural with only 46.44 percent of the population classed as urban, Among
the state’s 66 counties, urban population is concentrated within 23 of them. From 1880 to 1980, the urban population has increased steadily. Urban growth was not disturbed by the state’s population loss during the 1930s and 1960s. There are a total of 28 statistical urban centers, most of which are located in the eastern part of the state. After reaching its peak in 1930, the rural population has declined each decade.

Population of the state is growing slowly, but the total number of residents was still lower in 1980 than in 1930; the state’s present population is estimated to be 708,000. A large number of people are moving out of the state due to the lack of job opportunities. The farm crisis of the 1980s may have an adverse effect on the state’s population growth. Farm closures will eventually cause unemployment which in turn may initiate population decline through outmigration.

Recently, the state is one of many which is bidding to be the site of a federally funded $6 billion superconducting and supercollider project. Should the state be chosen, the project will bring 2,5000 permanent jobs and an annual budget of around $275 million; it will also require 4,500 construction workers. Should the state get this project, it will have tremendous impact on population growth and economic development.
NOTES


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| South Dakota Total | 98,268 | 348,600 | 401,570 | 583,888 | 636,547 | 692,849 | 642,961 | 652,740 | 680,514 | 665,507 | 690,768 |
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