



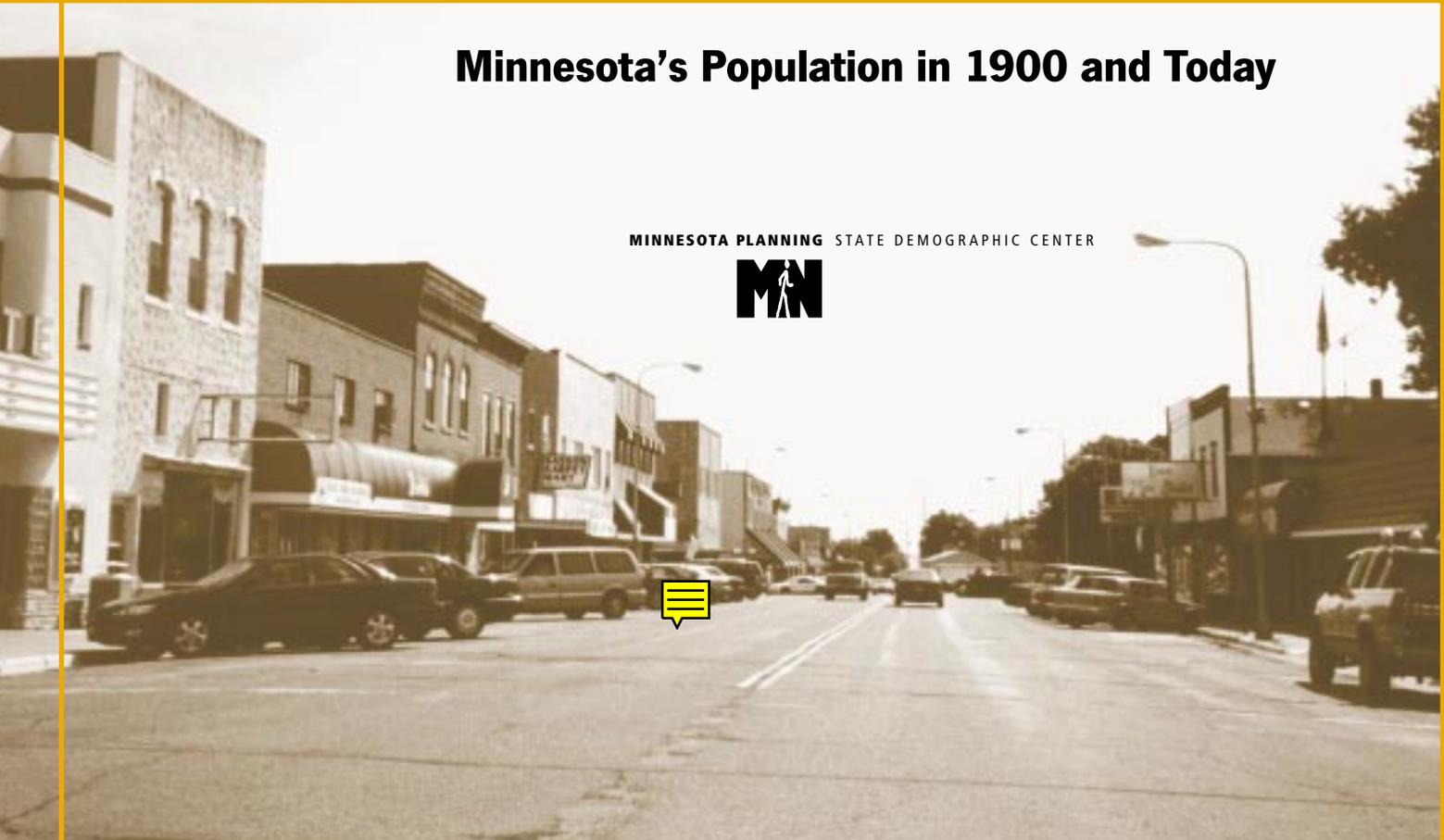
MINNESOTA PLANNING STATE DEMOGRAPHIC CENTER

Photoby Gould.

# Turn of the Century

Minnesota's Population in 1900 and Today

MINNESOTA PLANNING STATE DEMOGRAPHIC CENTER



## Minnesotans Greet the New Century ... on January 1, 1901

*I*t is believed that arguments may be heard tonight regarding the beginning of the Twentieth Century, some men insisting that it began Jan. 1, 1900. For the benefit of those who share in this delusion it may be stated that the administration, national, state and municipal, and Pope Leo XIII, believe that the dawn of Jan. 1, 1901, means the birth of the Twentieth Century. — MINNEAPOLIS TIMES, DECEMBER 31, 1900

*H*undreds of Minneapolis people were up last night to bid a farewell to a passing century and usher in the new. Churches ... were aglow with light and religious fervor. Impressive ceremonies were held, and the fleeting moments of the dying century were passed in prayer and meditation. ... The devout ones who were there had never before been in the very presence of a new century; they never will again, and this very fact seemed to add to the impressiveness of the occasion. — MINNEAPOLIS TIMES, JANUARY 1, 1901

*W*hat shall the new century bring forth? ... It is not too much to hope that we shall conquer the air...and fly from place to place as free as birds. ... With the terrible advances we have made in the naval and military arts of destruction, may we not hope that an era of international arbitration is dawning? Shall we not look, too, for an advance in the science of human government leading rapidly to less corruption ... and more wisdom in the collection of revenues and their disbursement? — MINNEAPOLIS TIMES, JANUARY 1, 1901



Bertha Marie Brechet looking in mirror, circa 1897. Photo by Joseph Brechet, Minnesota Historical Society.

*J*ames McIlrath, Jr. and Tom L. Bird of St. Paul completed the first century [100-mile bicycle race] of the century yesterday at 10 o'clock in the morning. ... Lyman Myers and Carl Hagelin, the Minneapolis boys who started, had bad luck. At the end of the first twenty miles Hagelin's feet were so benumbed by the cold that he could ride no more. Myers plugged along alone, and finished the century in eleven hours. Myers had a puncture when within a mile of the Flour City cyclists' clubhouse, 1801 Park Avenue, and covered that distance on foot, carrying his wheel. — MINNEAPOLIS TIMES, JANUARY 2, 1901

*F*ine day. Wind south. At-home. — DIARY OF ALLEN DAWLEY, JANUARY 1, 1901

# Turn of the Century

## Minnesota's Population in 1900 and Today

SIZE AND GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF THE POPULATION.....	1
AGE, SEX AND MARITAL STATUS .....	4
RACE AND ETHNICITY .....	7
FERTILITY AND MORTALITY .....	8
FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION .....	12
SCHOOL ATTENDANCE .....	13
EMPLOYMENT STATUS AND OCCUPATION .....	14
AGRICULTURE AND INDUSTRY .....	16
HOMEOWNERSHIP, VOTING AND RELIGION .....	19
PROFILES OF MINNESOTANS FROM THE 1900 CENSUS .....	20
SOURCES .....	22

Minnesota Planning develops long-range plans for the state, stimulates public participation in Minnesota's future and coordinates activities among state agencies, the Minnesota Legislature and other units of government.

*Turn of the Century: Minnesota's Population in 1900 and Today* was prepared by Martha McMurry of the State Demographic Center. Research assistance was provided by the Minnesota Historical Society and by Wilson Library, University of Minnesota.

Cover photos are Main Street, Kasson, Minnesota, circa 1900, by Stella Gould, Minnesota Historical Society and Main Street, Kasson, Minnesota, 1999, by Martha McMurry.

Upon request, this report will be made available in alternate format, such as Braille, large print or audio tape. For TTY, contact Minnesota Relay Service at 800-627-3529 and ask for Minnesota Planning.

November 1999

For additional copies of this report or other population information, contact the State Demographic Center helpline at 651-296-2557.

MINNESOTA **PLANNING** STATE DEMOGRAPHIC CENTER



658 Cedar St.  
St. Paul, MN 55155  
651-296-3985  
Fax: 651-296-3698

[www.mnplan.state.mn.us](http://www.mnplan.state.mn.us)

## Census Topics: 1900 vs. 2000

The data collected and published in the decennial census tells a lot about how people lived at that time. Census data also reflects current issues and interests of the period when they were collected. Much of the information collected in the 1900 census and in the upcoming 2000 census will be similar: age, sex, race, place of residence, relationships among household members, and type of employment. The categories may be different, or the questions asked in a different way, but these basic topics remain central.

In other ways data differs greatly from what is collected today. Compared to more recent censuses, the published data from the census of 1900 reveals a greater interest in immigration and little or no interest in household type or income. It is evident that the government was concerned about the assimilation of immigrants and their possible effect on elections. The 1900 census asked not just whether each individual was foreign-born, but about the birthplace of his or her parents. Many of the tables in the 1900 census reports contain data separated into three categories: foreign-born, native-born with foreign-born parents, and native-born with native-born parents.

Even with renewed interest in immigration, this topic will not be as prominent in the 2000 census as in 1900. For example, the upcoming census will not ask about birthplace of parents.

The 1900 census also recorded whether each person age 10 or older could read and write. Most Minnesotans were, or at least claimed to be, literate, but illiteracy was common in some states and may have been perceived as a major social problem of the time. The current census does not ask about literacy, though it does record extensive data about educational attainment and school attendance.

In 1900, women were asked how many children they had ever had and how many were still living. Neither question will be on the 2000 census form. Trends in fertility and child mortality are still tracked, but mainly through vital statistics records rather than the census. As recently as 1990, the census contained a question about children ever born, but the question about how many are still living has not been on the census form for many years, a testament to how much child mortality has declined during the century.

Though the 1900 census asked about children ever born and children still living, the published reports did not contain much if any information on these topics. There was enough concern to ask questions about childbearing history, but not enough to tabulate them.

Household type and composition appear to be of more interest now than in 1900. The 1900 census collected information on how each household member was related to the "head" of household, a concept no longer used in our more egalitarian age; however, not much use was made of this information in the published reports. For example, no data

was published on the number of married couples, single-parent families, or families with and without children, though this information could potentially have been tabulated.

Race data was collected in 1900, as it is now, but racial definitions were different. Published reports contain substantial information about white; "colored," or all nonwhite; and "negro," equivalent to black or African American, racial groups. Minimal data was reported for American Indians, Japanese and Chinese. Other than Japanese and Chinese, no information was collected for Asians.

On other topics now of great interest, the 1900 census collected no information. For example, the 1900 census form contains no questions on Hispanic or Latino origin. The concept of a special Hispanic origin group simply did not exist among census officials. Other items not covered were income; cost or type of housing, other than whether it was rented or owned; disability; educational attainment; veteran status; commuting and many other topics that will be in the 2000 census.



**Boarding house residents near Troy Mine outside Eveleth, circa 1905.** Minnesota Historical Society.

# Turn of the Century

## Minnesota's Population in 1900 and Today

Minnesota in 1900 was a dynamic, young, fast-growing state with a large immigrant population and an economy based on farming and natural resources. The state was changing rapidly, however. The rate of population growth was high, but tapering off from earlier decades. The level of immigration was falling, and the large immigrant population was becoming assimilated. Farming remained the dominant economic activity, but more Minnesotans were working in factories, railroads and other emerging industries. Most women were full-time wives and mothers, but increasing numbers were entering the paid labor force. Birth rates remained high by contemporary standards, but there was a marked trend toward smaller families. The majority of Minnesotans lived in rural areas, but many resided in large cities.

On the eve of a new century, Minnesota looks notably different than it did in 1900. The state's population is much larger, much older and more urbanized. The economy, family size and structure, and birth and death rates have all changed dramatically since 1900. *Turn of the Century*, drawing largely on census data and other official records, points out the major population changes of the past 100 years.

Populations are always changing. Even in 1900 there were harbingers of the population patterns of today — lower fertility, more women in the labor force, fewer people working on farms. Perhaps today's trends provide clues about what Minnesota's population will look like in 2099, but these clues may be more evident in retrospect than they are now.

### Share of nation's population living in Minnesota is smaller now

The Minnesota population count in 1900 was 1,751,394. About 2.3 percent of the total U.S. population lived in the state. In 1998, Minnesota's estimated population was 4,725,419. Though this number was much larger than in 1900, the share of the nation's population living in Minnesota had shrunk to 1.7 percent. As a result of its declining share of the national population, Minnesota has one less Congressional seat now than at the turn of the century. In 1900, the state had nine representatives in Congress, up from seven in 1890. The number of seats peaked at 10 in 1910, then declined to nine in 1930 and eight in 1960. Since 1960, Minnesota has had eight Congressional seats.

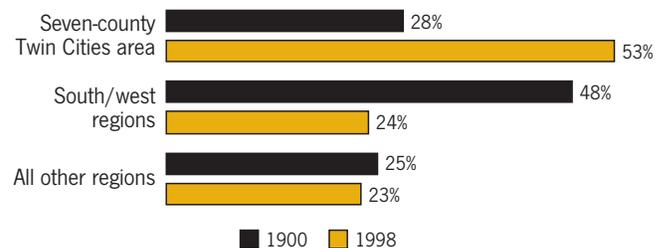
Minnesota's population was growing rapidly in 1900, posting a 33.7 percent gain since 1890. This was well above the national average of 20.7 percent. Oklahoma, still a territory at the time, had the highest rate of gain, with the population more than quintupling. Rapid growth also occurred in a band of states and territories extending westward from Minnesota to Washington, in Hawaii and Alaska, and in Texas, New Mexico and Florida. The slowest growth occurred in Kansas and Nebraska, in northern New England, and in a band of states extending from Indiana eastward to the Atlantic.

Though Minnesota remained among the faster-growing states in the country in the 1890s, growth was slower than in earlier decades. The rate of growth was 68 percent during the 1880s and 78 percent in the 1870s.

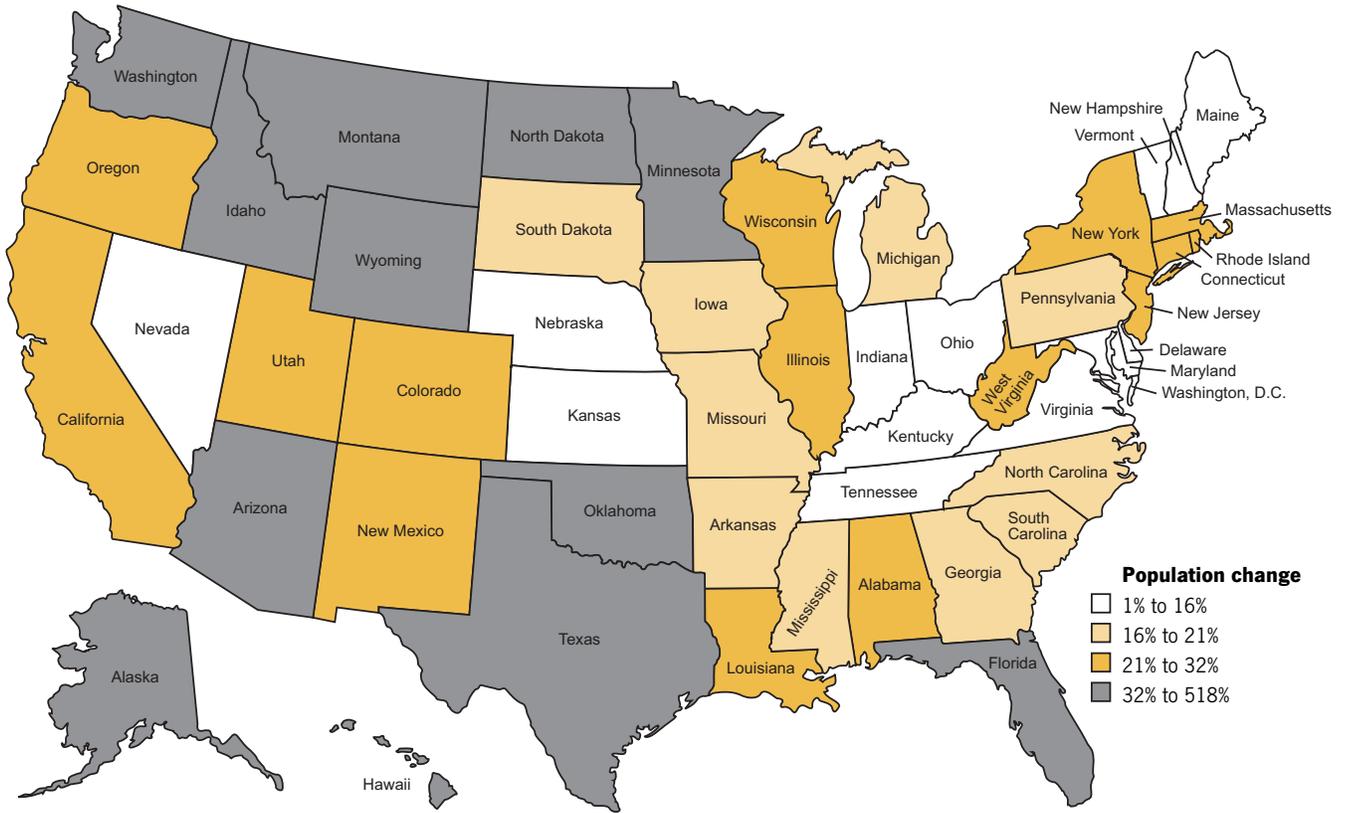
Today the nation as a whole and most of the states are growing much slower than at the turn of the century. Between 1990 and 1998, Minnesota's population grew 8.0 percent, close to the national average of 8.7 percent. The fastest growing states in the 1990s are in the southeast and in a belt of states running from Washington and Oregon down through Texas. The northeast and mid-Atlantic states are growing slowly. Most midwestern states have seen moderate growth during this decade.

### More people live in Twin Cities area

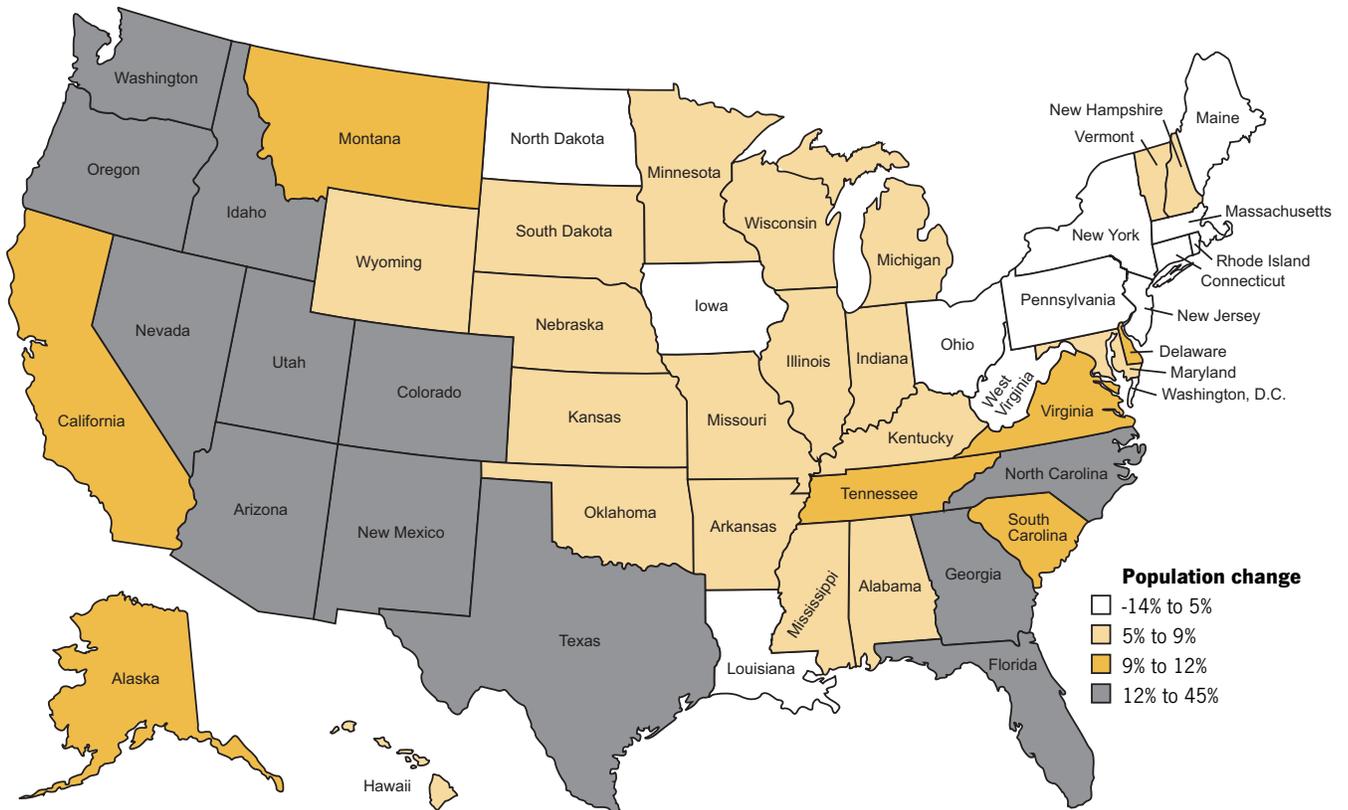
Minnesota's population was more evenly distributed in 1900 than now, with a much smaller concentration in the Minneapolis-St. Paul region. About 28 percent of the people lived in what is now the seven-county Twin Cities region, compared to 53 percent now. The proportion living in the north central, northeast and central regions has changed little. The big losers have been the south and west, which contained almost half of Minnesota's



**Twin Cities has larger share of Minnesota population today.** Percent of total population, by broad region. *Sources:* 1900 census reports; State Demographic Center estimates.



**Minnesota was among the faster-growing states from 1890 to 1900.** The U.S. population grew 21 percent from 1890 to 1900, while Minnesota grew 34 percent. *Source:* 1900 census reports.



**Midwest grew moderately during the 1990s.** Minnesota grew 8 percent compared to the national average of 8.7 percent. *Source:* U.S. Census Bureau estimates.

population in 1900 but only a quarter in 1998. Several counties in western and southern Minnesota — for example, Fillmore, Traverse and Big Stone — have fewer people now than in 1900.

Minnesota is much more urban today than in 1900. About 72 percent of the population was urban in 1998, compared to 33 percent in 1900.

Hennepin and Ramsey counties ranked first and second in population in 1900, as they do today. The other top-ranking counties in 1900 were all outside the Twin Cities area. In 1998, the list of largest counties is dominated by the Twin Cities and its suburbs, though the largest of the state's other metropolitan areas are also represented by St. Louis, Stearns and Olmsted counties.

The 1900 list of smallest counties includes several northern Minnesota counties. It also includes Sherburne County, now part of the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area and one of the fastest-growing counties in the state. The 1998 list of smallest counties includes more counties in western Minnesota. Cook and Traverse counties are on both lists. Two of the smallest 1998 counties, Mahnomon and Lake of the Woods, did not exist yet in 1900.

Minneapolis and St. Paul were the largest cities in the state in 1900, as they are today. Many of the other top-ranked cities in 1900 have fallen off the list of largest cities, though all remain important regional centers. The exception is Stillwater, which has been swallowed up by

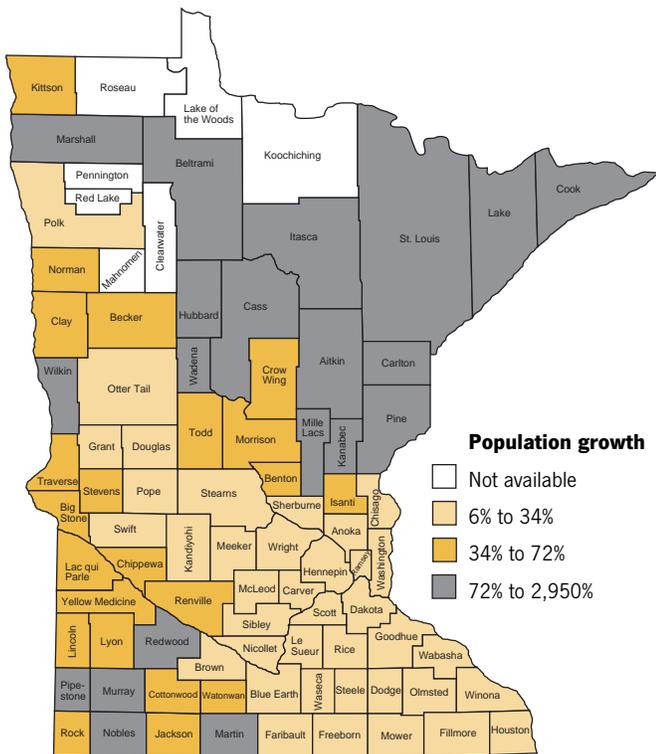
the advancing Twin Cities area. Most of the cities on the 1900 list are located on major rivers or on Lake Superior, underscoring the importance of water transportation and water power in the 19th century.

The 1998 list of largest cities is dominated by Minneapolis, St. Paul and their suburbs; only Duluth, Rochester and St. Cloud are outside the Twin Cities region. Most of the suburbs that now rank among the state's largest cities were not even incorporated in 1900. These cities have grown as highways supplanted rivers and railroads as major avenues of development.

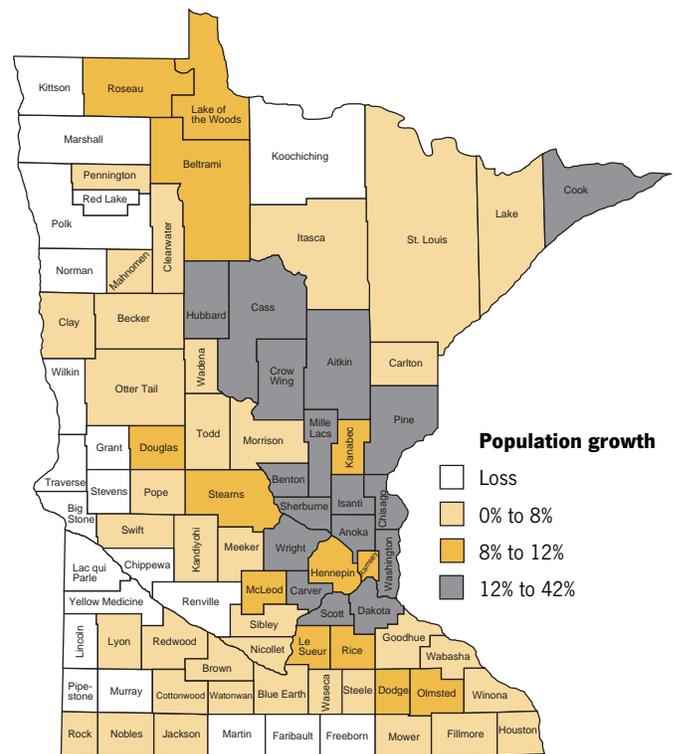
In 1900, northern Minnesota was the fastest growing region of the state, though it remained sparsely populated relative to other areas. This was the last part of Minnesota to be settled by people of European origins. Growth of the logging and mining industries played a role in this rapid growth.

Western Minnesota, especially the southwest, was another region of strong growth in the 1890s. Rapid expansion of agricultural settlement was the major reason for this trend.

Growth was slower in the more settled areas of southeastern Minnesota. It is startling to see Scott, Dakota, Washington and Carver counties, now suburban counties of the Twin Cities, on the list of slowest growing counties between 1890 and 1900. In 1900, these counties had already seen an initial growth spurt and were growing at only a moderate rate. Now they are some of the



**Northeast and southwest Minnesota grew fastest between 1890 and 1900.** Minnesota grew 34 percent. *Source:* 1900 census reports.



**Suburban and north central areas are big gainers from 1990 to 1998.** The state average was 9.3 percent. *Source:* State Demographic Center estimates.

### Minnesota's fastest growing counties (% change)

From 1890 to 1900		From 1990 to 1998	
Beltrami	2,950.3%	Sherburne	42.9%
Cook	616.3	Scott	34.7
Itasca	425.0	Washington	32.3
Hubbard	365.9	Carver	32.2
Cass	332.7	Chisago	31.8
Lake	258.3	Wright	23.6
Kanabec	192.2	Dakota	23.3
Pine	184.9	Anoka	19.4
Mille Lacs	183.5	Crow Wing	16.6
Aitkin	173.9	Cook	16.4

### Minnesota's slowest growing counties (% change)

From 1890 to 1900		From 1990 to 1998	
Houston	5.1%	Big Stone	-6.5%
Winona	5.6	Kittson	-5.4
Carver	6.1	Marshall	-4.8
LeSueur	6.2	Traverse	-4.8
Washington	7.0	Lac Qui Parle	-4.3
Dakota	7.4	Norman	-4.3
Goodhue	8.1	Lincoln	-3.6
Fillmore	8.7	Faribault	-3.0
Rice	8.8	Koochiching	-2.9
Scott	9.5	Red Lake	-2.7

### Largest counties in Minnesota (population)

1900		1998	
Hennepin	228,340	Hennepin	1,081,875
Ramsey	170,554	Ramsey	498,090
St. Louis	82,932	Dakota	339,256
Otter Tail	45,375	Anoka	290,871
Stearns	44,464	St. Louis	199,454
Winona	35,686	Washington	192,979
Polk	35,429	Stearns	131,981
Blue Earth	32,263	Olmsted	119,038
Goodhue	31,137	Wright	84,926

### Smallest counties in Minnesota (population)

1900		1998	
Cook	810	Traverse	4,250
Itasca	4,573	Red Lake	4,404
Kanabec	4,614	Cook	4,501
Lake	4,654	Lake of the Woods	4,553
Hubbard	6,578	Mahnomen	5,190
Aitkin	6,743	Kittson	5,455
Roseau	6,944	Big Stone	5,875
Sherburne	7,281	Grant	6,201
Traverse	7,573	Lincoln	6,644
Wadena	7,573	Wilkin	7,316

### Largest cities in Minnesota (population)

1900		1998	
Minneapolis	202,718	Minneapolis	360,591
St. Paul	163,065	St. Paul	268,667
Duluth	52,969	Bloomington	87,476
Stillwater	12,318	Duluth	85,249
Mankato	10,599	Rochester	80,186
St. Cloud	8,663	Brooklyn Park	63,940
Red Wing	7,525	Plymouth	62,979
Rochester	6,843	Coon Rapids	61,904
Fergus Falls	6,072	Eagan	60,073
Little Falls	5,774	St. Cloud	59,584
Owatonna	5,561	Burnsville	58,705
Austin	5,474	Minnetonka	52,691

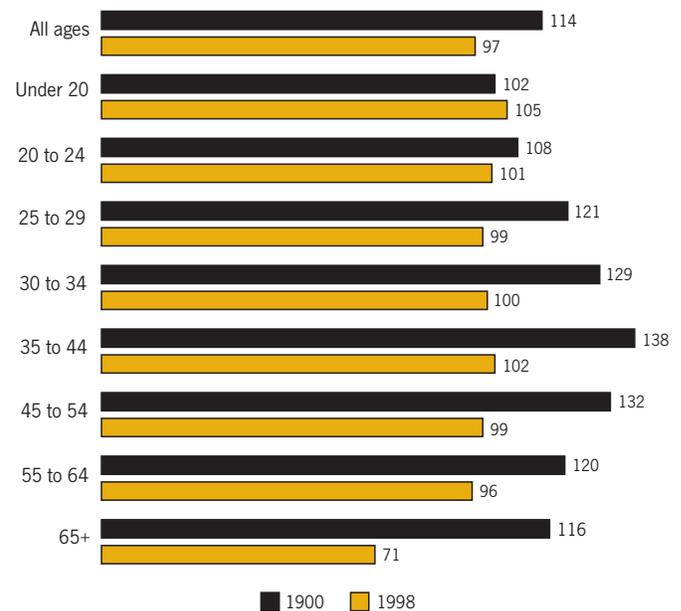
Sources: 1900 census reports; 1990 census reports, 1998 State Demographic Center estimates.

fastest-growing counties in Minnesota. The list of slow-growing counties in 1998 is dominated by agricultural counties in western and southern Minnesota.

### Minnesota population was younger, with men outnumbering women

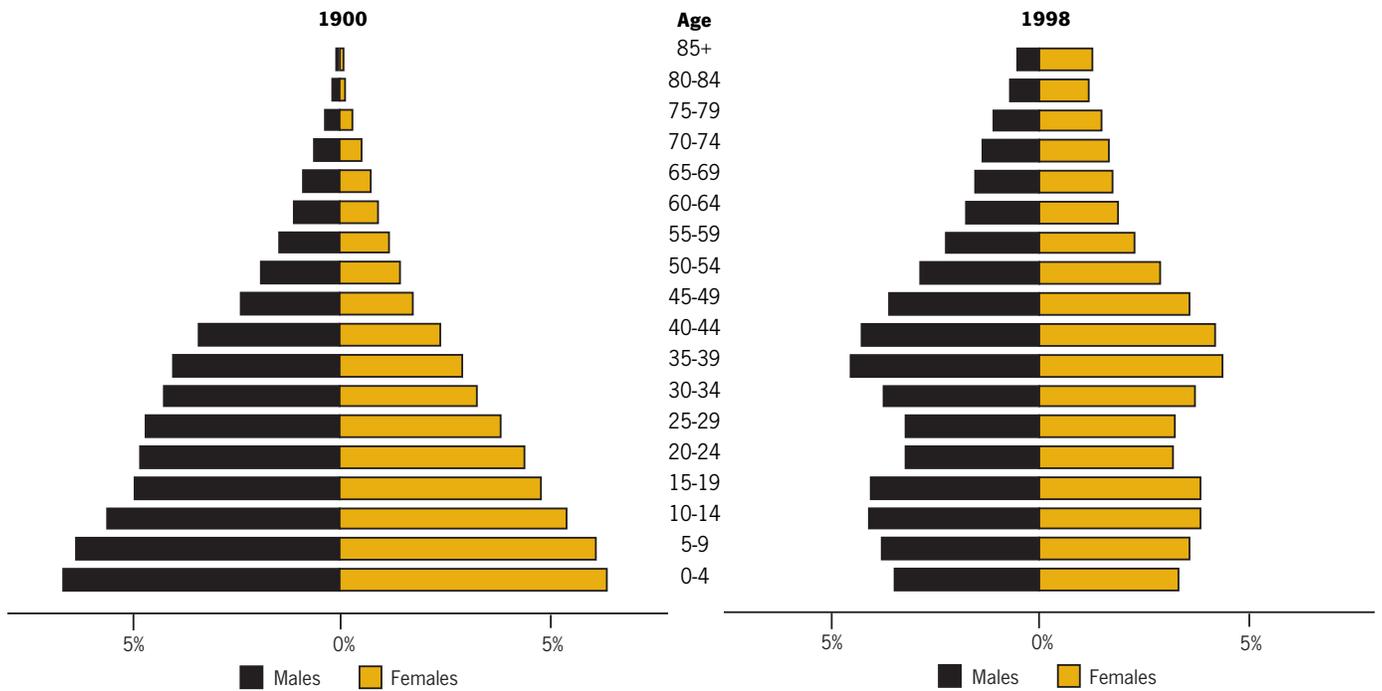
The Minnesota population was much younger in 1900 than it is now. The 1900 age structure resembles the classical pyramidal shape, with large proportions at younger ages and small proportions at older ages. This pyramidal shape is typical of populations with high rates of both birth and death. Forty-six percent of the population was under age 20 in 1900, compared to 30 percent in 1998. The percentage of people age 65 and older was only 4 percent in 1900 but 12 percent in 1998. By 1998, the age distribution's resemblance to a pyramid has been lost and the older age groups make up a much larger share of the population. The median age of Minnesotans in 1998 was 35.2 years, compared to 22.0 years in 1900. The median age is the midpoint of the distribution; half the population is that age or older and half is younger.

In 1900 there were considerably more men than women in Minnesota, 113.7 males per 100 females, while in 1998 females slightly outnumbered males. The 1900 ratio reflects migration patterns. Migrants in 1900, especially those from foreign countries, were disproportionately young unmarried men. Minnesota attracted numerous immigrants in the late 19th century, and one result was a high sex ratio. The sex ratio among the foreign-born was 132.3, compared to 107.2 for the native-born population. This high ratio among the foreign-born pulled up the overall state number.



In 1900, adult men substantially outnumbered women in Minnesota. Males per 100 females. Sources: 1900 census reports, Census Bureau 1998 age estimates.

**Minnesota's population is much older today**

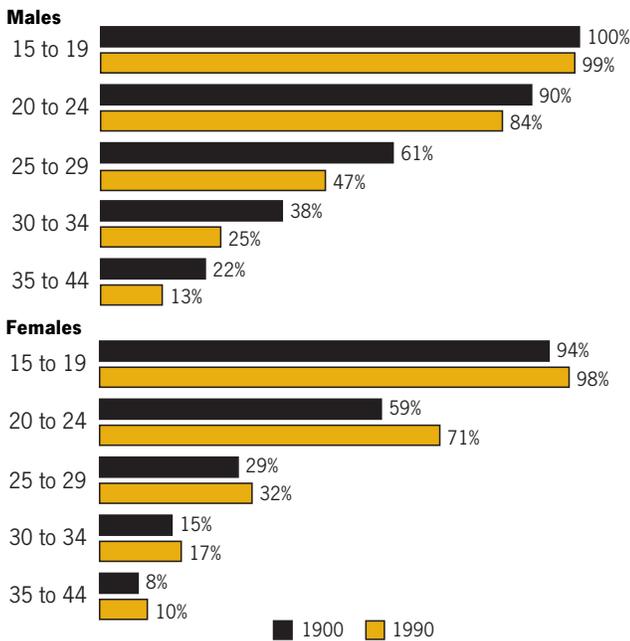


Percent of total population. Sources: 1900 census reports and Census Bureau age estimates.



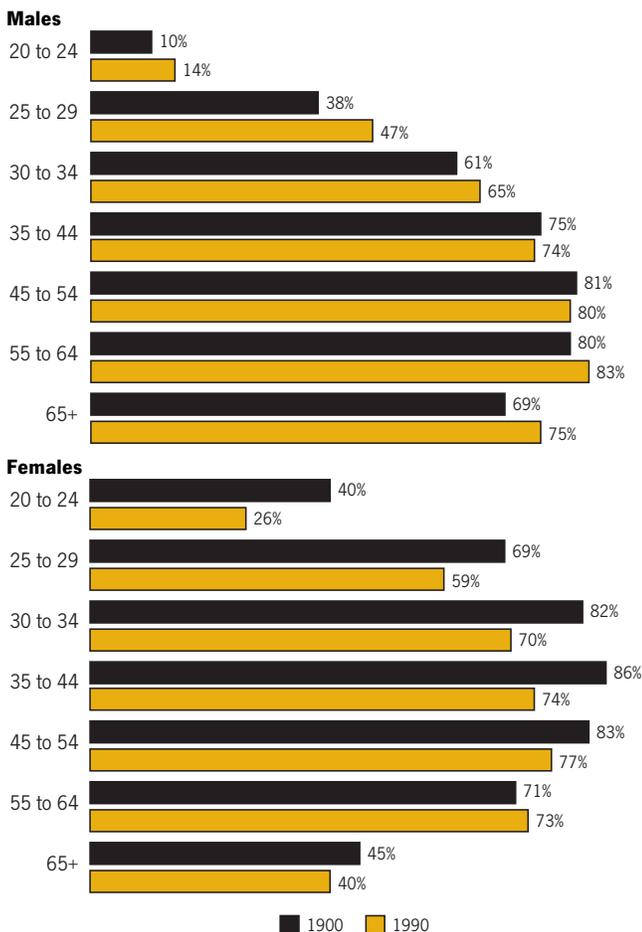
Three workers for the Boyd Mill, posed with signs painted on the soles of their shoes, Boyd, circa 1905. Minnesota Historical Society.

### More Minnesota men remained single in 1900



Percent never married by age and sex. Sources: 1900 and 1990 census reports.

### Marital status in Minnesota varies dramatically by age, sex and time period



Percent currently married by age and sex. Sources: 1900 and 1990 census reports.

The highest sex ratio was in the 35-to-44 age group, where there were 138 men for every 100 women. Among children, where migration was not much of a factor, the sex ratios were fairly similar in 1900 and 1998. In these younger ages, the sex ratios reflect biology rather than migration. Since slightly more baby boys are born than baby girls, boys slightly outnumbered girls in both periods.

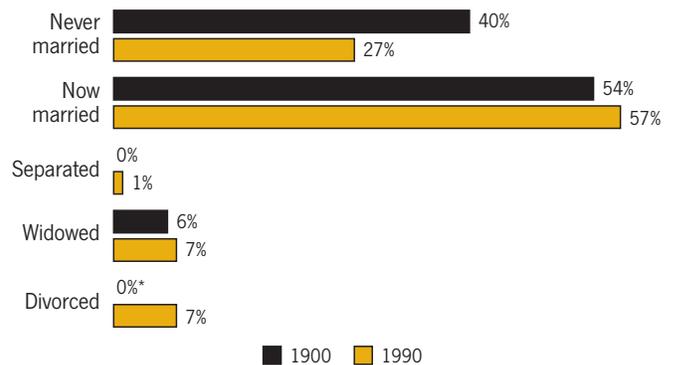
### Changes in marriage patterns have been different for men and women

Marital status has changed rather dramatically since 1900, with more people divorcing, more men marrying and women remaining single longer. In the 1900 census, the term “conjugal condition” was used instead of marital status. The 1900 categories were married, never-married, divorced and widowed. The category of separated was not used.

Overall, the proportion of people age 15 and older who were currently married was fairly similar in both eras, while the proportion never married was much greater in 1900. If data is broken down by age and gender, a different picture emerges. First, it appears that younger men were less likely to ever marry in 1900 than in 1990. For example, at the dawn of the 20th century, about 22 percent of men in the 35 to 44 age group had never married, compared to 13 percent of men the same age in 1990.

For women, the reverse was true, though the differences were not as dramatic. The contrast was greater among younger women. Among women age 20 to 24, 71 percent had never married in 1990, compared to 59 percent in 1900. By age 35 to 44, the proportion never married was fairly similar.

Men in 1900 were more likely to remain single than men today. For women the differences in remaining single are not that great, but women of 1900 married at a younger age. The large number of men who remained single may be related to the sex ratio. Because men outnumbered women, it was probably harder for them to find spouses.



Marital status of Minnesotans age 15 and older shows both similarities and differences over time. Percent of Minnesotans age 15 and older. Data on separated people not collected in 1900. \*Less than half of 1 percent. Sources: 1900 and 1990 census reports.

Though women married younger in 1900, teenage marriages were not the norm. Few teenage women were married, and even among women in their early 20s, fewer than half had married.

The overall percent of adults who were widowed was similar in 1900 and in 1990. Within each age group, however, the percent of people who were widowed was higher in 1900 than in 1990. For example, among men over age 65, about 26 percent were widowed in 1900, compared to only 13 percent in 1990. The higher rates of widowhood in 1900 reflect the higher death rates of that era. They also reflect lower divorce rates. Since few couples divorced, they remained married until one of the partners died.

In both 1900 and 1990, women were considerably more likely to be widowed than men. This occurs because typically women live longer than men and because men are usually older than their wives.

### Households were larger at the turn of the century

Minnesota households were on average almost twice as large in 1900 as they are today. In 1900 there were



**Bride and groom, Morrison County, circa 1900.** Photo by Brooks, Minnesota Historical Society.

*D*ate of birth. — The object of this question is to help in getting the exact age in years of each person enumerated. Many a person who can tell the month and year of his birth will be careless or forgetful in stating the years of his age, and so an error will creep into the census. This danger can not be entirely avoided, but asking the question in two forms will prevent it in many cases. —  
INSTRUCTIONS TO ENUMERATORS OF THE 1900 CENSUS

4.9 persons per private family, a concept closely related to our current definition of a household. In 1997 the average number of persons per household was 2.55.

There are many reasons for this decline in household size. Women had more children at the turn of the century than they do now and divorce rates were lower. The trend to more independent living has also reduced the average household size. Few people lived alone in 1900; solitary living is now quite common. In 1900 only 1 percent of Minnesotans lived alone; in 1990 almost 10 percent lived by themselves. In 1900 only 6 percent of private families were one-person households, compared to a quarter of all households in 1990.

Many Minnesotans, especially young men, lived in boarding houses or lodging houses in 1900. About 6 percent of the total population, more than 100,000 people, were classified as roomers, boarders or lodgers. Almost two-thirds of these were men age 20 to 39, most unmarried. In an age without easily prepared food and washing machines, boarding houses offered a convenient and affordable living arrangement, especially for single people.

Minnesotans are less likely to live in group quarters today. Fewer than 3 percent of Minnesotans lived in group quarters in 1990, compared to 7 percent in 1900. The boarding house is a nearly extinct institution. Nursing homes, college dormitories and correctional facilities are now the most common types of group quarters.

### Minnesota is more diverse today

Minnesota was very racially homogeneous in 1900. The census found that 99.2 percent of the population was white. There were 14,358 Minnesotans identified as “colored,” a category that included everyone who was not white.

The largest nonwhite racial group was American Indians. The census counted 9,182 Indians, subdividing them into categories of “taxed” (7,414) and “not taxed” (1,768). Taxed Indians were either living apart from their tribe or were living on a reservation where they had received an allotment of land. Indians who were not

*The data relating to births are the most incomplete and unsatisfactory of any treated in this report. — 1900 CENSUS REPORTS*

taxed either lived on a reservation without an allotment or were “roaming over unsettled territory.” Indians who were in the not taxed group were excluded from the census count used to reapportion congressional seats. Only Indians who adopted “the habits of civilized life” and took title to allotted land could become U.S. citizens; others did not become citizens until 1924. Most Minnesota Indians lived in the northern part of the state, with the largest numbers living on the White Earth Reservation and in Beltrami, Cass, St. Louis and Itasca counties.

The census found 4,959 African Americans, referred to as “negroes” in its reports. African Americans generally resided in more urban areas. Most lived in Ramsey or Hennepin counties. Several hundred lived in St. Louis County.

The census of 1900 did not have a separate Asian category, but it did report the number of Chinese at 166 and Japanese at 51. Most lived in the Twin Cities or Duluth areas. The most noticeable feature of the Japanese and Chinese populations was that there were almost no women or children. The 1900 census found only five Chinese females and one Japanese female in Minnesota. Most Japanese and Chinese immigrants came over as young single men. The Chinese Exclusion Acts of 1882 and succeeding legislation prohibited most Chinese immigration after that date until immigration reform in the mid-20th century. Japanese immigration was still permitted in 1900, but the small number of Japanese immigrants coming to Minnesota did not bring families.

Minnesota today is more diverse than in 1900, though the nonwhite and Hispanic proportions are still much lower than the national average. The Census Bureau estimated that about 8 percent of Minnesotans were nonwhite or Hispanic in 1998, compared to a national average of 28 percent. Blacks were the largest minority group in Minnesota, with about 146,000 residents, followed by Asians and Pacific Islanders at 124,000, Hispanics at 87,000 and American Indians at 57,000.

### Women now have fewer children

Women had more children in 1900 than they do now, but fertility was declining, with urban and native-born women leading the trend toward smaller families. These conclusions are based on piecing together highly imperfect data from several sources. Unfortunately the quality of birth statistics for 1900 is poor. The total fertility rate

— births a woman would have in her lifetime if the current age-specific rates remain constant — could have been as low as about 4 or as high as 5.3, depending on which data source is used and what assumptions are made.

Registration of births in 1900 was fairly complete in Minnesota’s larger cities, but in many rural areas the system of recording births was haphazard. Births may have been underreported by as much as 40 or 50 percent in some places. Minnesota was not the only state with this problem. To get around problems with the birth recording system, the U.S. Bureau of the Census attempted to make an independent estimate of the number of births. In addition to asking the regular census questions, the 1900 census enumerators were supposed to ask about all deaths that had occurred in each family during the past year. The count of the number of infants who had been born and died within the preceding year was added to the population under age 1 to estimate the number of births. However, Bureau statisticians calculated that on the national level, this method continued to underestimate births by about 29 percent. Not only were births underregistered, but also young children, especially infants, were severely undercounted in the census.

Adding the population under age 1 to the count of those who were born and died in the census year, the Census Bureau estimated that there were 46,947 births in Minnesota in 1900. Assuming the same 29 percent underestimation as in the national data, the actual number of births would have been about 64,000. This translates into a general fertility rate of 168 births per 1,000 woman age 15 to 44, more than two and a half times higher than the 1997 level of 61 per 1,000. Assuming the same ratio between the two fertility measures,



**Grandma, Marie Madison King and Frederick crying, 1905.**  
Photo by Dr. Emil King, Minnesota Historical Society.

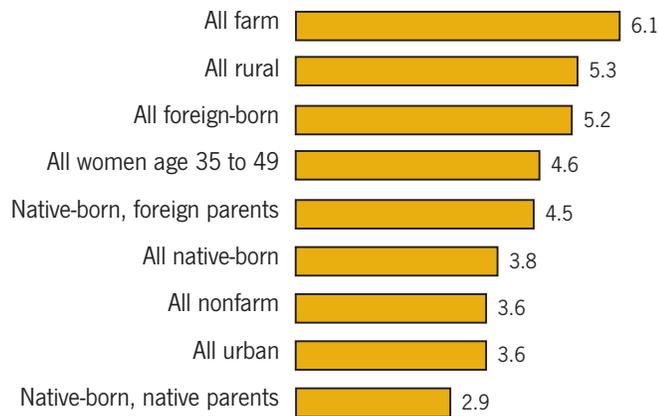
this would mean that the total fertility rate in 1900 was about 5.2 to 5.3 children per woman.

Other sources suggest this figure may be somewhat on the high side. Using Integrated Public Use Microdata Series data, it is possible to look at the 1900 data on children ever born. This data shows that the average number of children ever born to women age 35 to 44 was 4.3. In the 1990 census, the number of children ever born to women in this age bracket was 2.01. This suggests fertility rates were slightly more than twice as high in 1900, translating into a total fertility rate of 4.0 and a general fertility rate of 142 per 1,000 women age 15 to 44.

In 1900, there were marked differences in family size between farm and nonfarm, urban and rural, and foreign-born and native-born women. Farm women age 35 to 49 had given birth to an average of 6.1 children, compared to 3.6 children for nonfarm women. Differences were also substantial between rural and urban women, 5.3 vs. 3.6. The rural category in 1900 included nonfarm women living in the countryside and those living in small towns as well as women living on farms.

Women born outside the United States had an average of 5.2 children, compared to 3.8 children among native-born women. Among the native-born, those who had at least one foreign-born parent had more children than those who had American-born parents, 4.5 vs. 2.9. This could mean that as women became more assimilated to American life, they had fewer children.

Fertility rates were declining in 1900. This is suggested by an analysis of the child-woman ratio, a measure that can be used to look at fertility trends when birth registrations are considered inadequate. The child-woman ratio is the ratio of children under age 15 per 1,000 women age 15 to 49. In 1900 the child-woman ratio was 1,273, considerably lower than the 1880 and 1890 ratios of 1,777 and 1,572 respectively. The steady drop over



**Urban and native-born women had smallest families in 1900.** Average number of children ever born to women age 35 to 49. *Source:* Integrated Public Use Microdata Series.

*When all the data are available it will be found, undoubtedly, that the proportion of children borne by women of native extraction is very much less than that for women of foreign birth or parentage ... the principal cause is found in the disinclination of this class of women to rear large families. — 1900 CENSUS REPORTS*

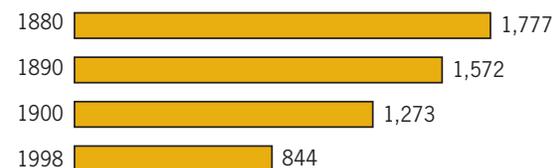
this 20-year time span suggests that more couples were limiting family size.

Another indication of the falling birth rate is provided by the data on the average number of children by age. Women who were age 40 to 44 in 1900 had on average 5.3 children, compared to only 3.4 children for women age 35 to 39. Though women in their late 30s might have additional children, they would probably not have an average of 1.9 children in the next five years. Though not conclusive, this data suggests a break in fertility patterns, with women born after 1860 having fewer children than those born earlier. This is consistent with national data showing that the average number of children ever born was considerably lower for women born after 1860, especially after 1865, than for women born in the 1850s or earlier.

### Few mothers were unmarried in 1900

Mothers were much more likely to be married in 1897 than they are today, and were less likely to be teenagers. Data on characteristics of mothers comes from an 1897 vital statistics report published by the state and containing information on 37,144 births. This total is obviously much too low, since births in 1900 were estimated to have been in the range of 47,000 to 64,000. Although the registration of births was incomplete in 1897, information on the characteristics of mothers is probably more reliable.

Fewer than 1 percent of mothers were unmarried in 1897, compared to one-quarter in 1997. Births to unmarried mothers may have been underreported in 1897 because the stigma was so great, but even if undercounted, it is clear that out-of-wedlock childbearing was rare at the turn of the century.



**Child-woman ratio in Minnesota fell in the late 1800s.** Children age 0-14 per 1,000 women age 15 to 49. *Sources:* 1880, 1890 and 1900 census reports; Census Bureau 1998 age estimates.

**IS THERE CAUSE FOR ALARM IN THE DECREASED BIRTH RATE IN MINNEAPOLIS**

*At the present rate of decrease in the number of births compared with the number of deaths in Minneapolis, the city will eventually be depopulated unless the arrival of persons from other parts of this and foreign lands continues ... [The excess of births over deaths] is smaller than in any of the last five years. ... In general, these figures show ... there may be a time in this country when maintaining the ratio between births and deaths will be as serious a thing to face as it is now thought to be in France. —*  
MINNEAPOLIS TRIBUNE, JANUARY 1, 1901

Only 4 percent of mothers were teenagers in 1897, compared to 9 percent in 1997. The low teen birth rate of 1897 is related to the low frequency of out-of-wedlock childbearing. As noted earlier, teenage marriages were unusual in 1900, though more common than today. Only 6 percent of Minnesota women had married by their 20th birthday in 1900. Since few women married as teens and few had children outside marriage, the rate of teenage childbearing was quite low.

Mothers over age 40 were more common in 1897 than in 1997, 7 percent of the total vs. 2 percent. The high proportion of births to women over age 40 in 1900 may reflect less use of birth control and sterilization. Though birth control was used in 1900, it was not used as much as it is today and was probably less effective. Many women continued to have children until menopause.

The proportions of births to women age 20 to 39 were almost identical in 1897 and 1997. About half of all mothers in both years were age 20 to 29, and the percent who were age 30 to 39 was also almost identical at 38 percent in 1897 and 39 percent in 1997.

**More people died from infectious diseases in 1900**

Death rates were much higher in 1900 than in 1997. The difference was particularly striking in the youngest age groups. Infant mortality rates were extremely high in 1900. In the cities of Minneapolis, St. Paul and Duluth, where registration was considered fairly good, infant mortality was estimated to be about 90 to 100 deaths per 1,000 births. The comparable statewide number in 1997 was 5.9 infant deaths per 1,000 births.

For all Minnesota children under age 5, the death rate was 2,216 per 100,000 in 1900, compared to 145 per 100,000 in 1997. As noted earlier, young children were undercounted in the census of 1900, so the true death

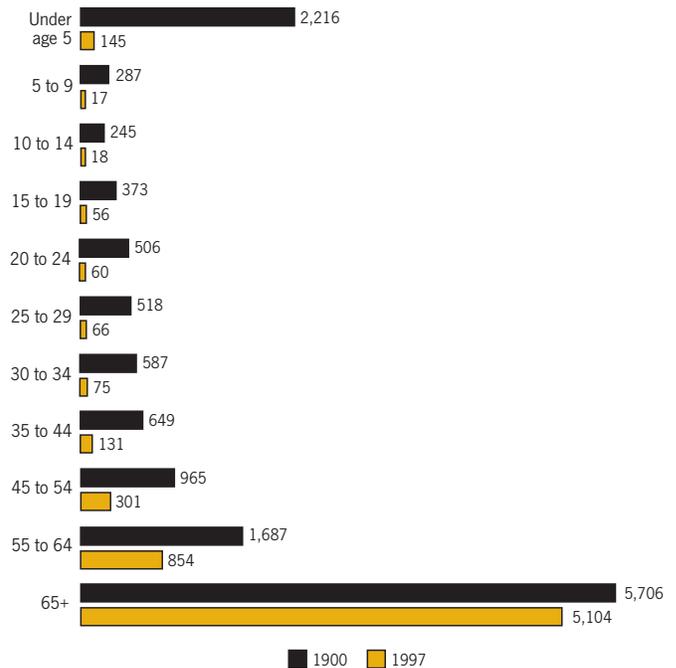
rate was probably somewhat lower, but even taking this into account, child mortality was much higher in 1900.

The census data on children ever born and children still living emphasizes again how common death at a young age was 100 years ago. Two-fifths of Minnesota mothers in 1900 had experienced the death of at least one child. Not surprisingly, this proportion rose with age. Almost two-thirds of mothers over age 45 had lost a child. Even among younger mothers, those age 25 to 34, almost a quarter had lost a child.

Deaths in both 1900 and 1997 followed the same general age pattern: a relatively high rate for young children, much lower rates for older children and young adults, then a rapid rise at advanced ages.

Causes of death were different a century ago than today, and they were also understood and defined differently. The leading cause of death in Minnesota in 1897 was given as “old age,” no longer considered an adequate explanation of death; even very old people are assumed to die of some specific cause. Stillbirths were counted as deaths in 1897, in the category of “developmental diseases of children,” but not today. Labels such as “miasmatic diseases” and “softening of the brain” do not appear in modern lists of causes of mortality.

Taking these differences into account, it is clear that infectious diseases and child mortality were major causes of death in 1897. Chronic diseases such as heart disease and cancer, the leading causes of death today, did not even make the Minnesota top 10 list a century



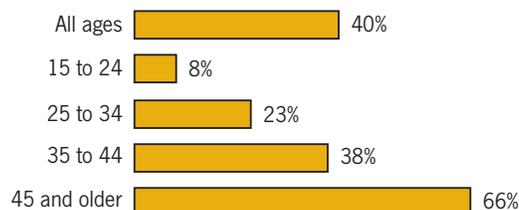
**Minnesota death rates were much higher in 1900.** Deaths per 100,000 population, male and female data combined. Sources: 1900 census reports; Minnesota Center for Health Statistics; U.S. Census Bureau age estimates.

ago. The second leading cause of death in 1897, after old age, was tubercular diseases. Miasmatic diseases, largely typhoid fever and diphtheria, and diarrheal diseases were also on the top 10 list. Developmental diseases of children such as stillbirth and prematurity were common causes of death, and many children also died of diarrheal, tubercular and other infectious diseases.

The 1900 list of major causes of death was somewhat different for the United States as a whole than for Minnesota, with the national data showing more significance for age-related diseases. The national data in this report is based only on information collected in registration areas, the cities and states where the Census Bureau deemed the quality of vital statistics reporting to meet minimal standards of adequacy. It is unclear whether the difference in the U.S. and Minnesota rankings reflect real differences in cause of death, or just the general sloppiness of the death reporting system in Minnesota at the time. In the nation as a whole, pneumonia and consumption (tuberculosis) were the first and second leading causes of death, with virtually identical numbers. Heart disease, not even among the top 10 in Minnesota, ranked third nationally, followed by diarrheal diseases, diseases of the kidney and apoplexy, which would probably now be called stroke.

In 1997, the most common causes of death were ones that primarily affect older people. Diseases of the circulatory system (heart disease and stroke) and neoplasms (cancer) accounted for the largest share of deaths.

According to the Census Bureau's vital statistics reports, mortality rates in 1900 were generally higher in urban areas than in rural areas. Presumably this was because crowding and the mixing of large numbers of people promoted the spread of infectious diseases. Minnesota's large cities appeared to have relatively low mortality rates, however. The death registration systems in St. Paul, Minneapolis and Duluth were considered good enough that mortality data for these cities was included in census reports. St. Paul and Minneapolis in particular had age-specific death rates well below the national norms. The estimated U.S. total death rate for the 1890 to 1900 period was 17.4 per 1,000. The comparable 1900 figures for Minneapolis, St. Paul and Duluth were 10.8, 9.7 and 13.2 per 1,000.



**Four of 10 Minnesota mothers in 1900 had experienced the death of a child.** Age and percent of mothers who had lost a child by 1900. *Source:* Integrated Public Use Microdata Series.

*Another grave defect which impairs the value of the statistics is the large number of cases in which the cause of death is given as 'heart failure,' 'exhaustion,' 'debility,' 'collapse,' 'asthenia,' 'natural causes,' 'prostration,' etc. Such returns are practically useless. —*

1900 CENSUS REPORTS

### Leading causes of death in Minnesota in 1897 and 1997 and in the United States in 1900

#### Minnesota, top 10 causes in 1897

Old age	1,906
Tubercular diseases	1,619
Diseases of nervous system	1,417
Ill defined or not specified	1,213
Respiratory diseases	1,137
Miasmatic diseases	1,090
Developmental diseases of children	1,001
Diarrheal diseases	929
Accidents, injuries	757
Diseases of digestive system	626

#### United States, top 10 causes in 1900

Pneumonia	55,296
Consumption	54,898
Heart disease	38,608
Diarrheal diseases	24,509
Diseases of the kidney	24,124
Apoplexy	19,173
Cancer	17,296
Old age	15,558
Bronchitis	13,903
Cholera infantum	13,754

#### Minnesota, top 10 causes in 1997

Diseases of the circulatory system	13,664
Neoplasms	8,877
Diseases of the respiratory system	3,397
Injury and poisoning	2,318
Mental disorders	1,608
Endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases	1,390
Diseases of the nervous system and sense organs	1,285
Symptoms, signs and ill-defined conditions	1,180
Diseases of the digestive system	1,124
Diseases of the genitourinary system	750

**Minnesota, 1897.** Diseases of the nervous system include softening of the brain, meningitis, infantile convulsions and diseases of insanity. Miasmatic diseases include typhoid fever and diphtheria. Developmental diseases of children include stillbirth and premature birth. *Source:* *Fifth and Sixth Biennial Reports on Vital Statistics of the State of Minnesota for the Years 1894-1897 Inclusive.*

**United States, 1900.** U.S. data is for the registration area only and does not include all deaths. *Source:* 1900 census reports, Volume III. Vital Statistics, Part I.

**Minnesota, 1997.** *Source:* 1997 Minnesota Health Statistics. Minnesota Center for Health Statistics, Minnesota Department of Health.

**N**ote, also, that the language spoken is not always a safe guide to the birthplace. This is especially true of Germans, for over one-third of the Austrians and nearly three-fourths of the Swiss speak German. In case a person speaks German, therefore, inquire carefully whether the birthplace was Germany, Austria, or Switzerland. ... If the birthplace reported is Canada or Newfoundland, ask whether the person is of English or French descent. Write Canada English or Canada French, according to the answer. —  
INSTRUCTIONS TO ENUMERATORS OF THE 1900 CENSUS

### Foreign-born population was large in 1900

Most Minnesotans were close to their immigrant roots in 1900. The census found that 505,318 Minnesotans, 29 percent of the total population, were foreign-born. A majority of the remainder had at least one, and in most cases two, foreign-born parents. Only a quarter of the population was native-born with native-born parents.

In 1900 the presence of immigrants was greater in Minnesota than in most other states. Minnesota ranked

seventh among states in the number of foreign-born people and ranked fourth in the ratio of foreign-born to native-born, with 40,553 foreign-born per 100,000 native-born. In the ratio of foreign-born to native-born, Minnesota trailed only North Dakota, Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

Though the foreign-born population was large in 1900, it was not growing as fast as the native-born population. The growth rate for Minnesota's foreign-born population between 1890 and 1900 was only 8 percent, compared to 48 percent for the native-born. In part the slower growth of the foreign-born is due to a tapering off of immigration. It also represents a rapid growth in the number of children born to immigrant parents. These offspring swelled the ranks of the native-born population.

The census data suggest that most immigrants were becoming assimilated to American life. Only 93,966, about 20 percent of the total where data was available, had arrived since 1890. More than 40 percent of the foreign-born had immigrated before 1880. The great majority of adult immigrants spoke English, according to the census. The naturalization figures also support the picture of a relatively assimilated population: 73 percent of foreign-born males of voting age had been



Aho family in front of their home in Karvenkyla, north of Chisholm, circa 1905. Minnesota Historical Society.

naturalized and another 16 percent had filed for naturalization. Data on citizenship was collected only for adult males, probably because only men were eligible to vote.

In 1990, the number of foreign-born Minnesotans was much smaller, 113,039, than in 1900. The foreign-born population has probably increased recently because many immigrants have moved to Minnesota, but the year 2000 number will still be much lower than the number in 1900.

At the turn of the century, the foreign-born population in Minnesota was overwhelmingly from one of three countries: Germany, Sweden or Norway. These three accounted for two-thirds of foreign-born residents in 1900. Immigrants today are from much more diverse origins. In 1990, the three top-ranking sources of immigrants — Laos, Canada and Vietnam — accounted for only 29 percent of the foreign-born.

One amazing similarity between now and 1900 is in the proportion of American-born residents who were born in Minnesota. Despite better roads, cars and airplanes, most American-born Minnesotans were born in Minnesota both now and then. In fact, excluding immigrants, the percentage of Minnesotans who were born in Minnesota was actually slightly higher in 1990 than in 1900, 76 percent vs. 72 percent. In both time periods, most of the native-born who were not born in Minnesota were born in another midwestern state.

In 1900, the census counted 75,071 people over age 10 who could not speak English. Most of those who could not speak English were foreign-born, but about 3,400 were American Indians. Women who could not speak English outnumbered men by a considerable margin. About 8 percent of women over age 10 could not speak

English, compared to 4 percent of men. Men may have been more pressured to learn English in order to get a job, conduct farm business or qualify for citizenship.

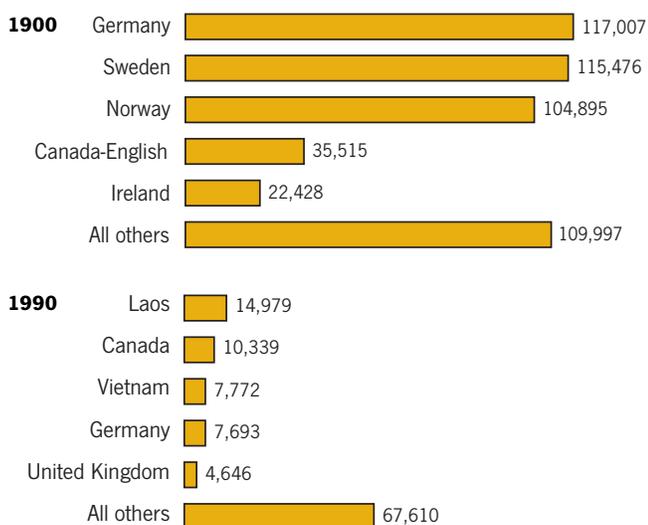
The 1990 number of Minnesotans who did not speak English very well or did not speak it at all was surprising similar to the 1900 number, about 79,000. The 1990 number is of course a much smaller fraction of the total population. In 1990 the question was asked in a different way and was asked of children age 5 to 9 as well as older people, so the numbers are not exactly comparable. Since 1990 many immigrants have moved to the state, adding to the number of Minnesotans who are unable to speak English. On the other hand, some of the people who could not speak English in 1990 may have improved their English skills since then.

### Children now stay in school longer

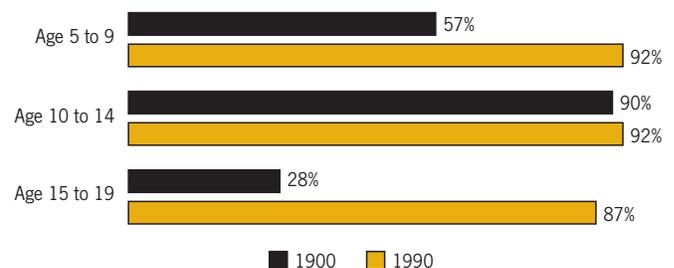
The rate of school attendance is higher today than in 1900, but most Minnesota children at the turn of the century did attend school at some point during childhood. Boys and girls were equally likely to attend school. The rate of school attendance for children age 10 to 14 in 1900 was almost 90 percent, similar to the rate in 1990. Only 57 percent of those age 5 to 9 were recorded as attending school in 1900, however. The lower attendance rate for younger children pulled down the overall average for children age 5 to 14 to 72 percent, well below the 92 percent rate in 1990.

Attendance rates for teenagers age 15 to 19 were much lower in 1900 than in 1990, 28 percent vs. 87 percent. For most of the young people, education stopped after eighth grade. Receiving a high school diploma was a relatively uncommon achievement, and many people probably considered it unnecessary. Few people over age 21 attended school and the majority of those were men.

Although most Minnesota children went to school at the start of the 20th century, many did not attend for a full school year. One in five spent fewer than six months in school during the year preceding the census. Some children may have been kept out of school for part of the year to work at home or on the family farm.



**Number of Minnesota foreign-born was much larger in 1900, but origins of foreign-born were more diverse in 1990.** Foreign-born totaled 515,318 in 1900 and 113,039 in 1990. Sources: 1900 and 1990 census reports.



**School attendance rates in Minnesota for children age 10 to 14 were similar in 1900 and 1990.** Percent attending or enrolled. 1990 data combines 5-9 and 10-14 age groups. Sources: 1900 and 1990 census reports.

*The doing of domestic errands or family chores out of hours, where a child regularly attends school, is not an occupation. But if a boy or girl, above 10 years of age, is earning money regularly by labor, contributing to the family support, or appreciably assisting in mechanical or agricultural industry, the kind of work performed should be stated. —*

INSTRUCTIONS TO 1900 CENSUS ENUMERATORS

The 1900 census reported that 52,946 Minnesotans, 4.1 percent of those over age 10, were illiterate, including 18,599 who could read but not write and 34,347 who could neither read nor write. People who could read and write in their native language but not in English were considered literate. Illiteracy was a topic of great interest in the 1900 census; now that information is not collected. Data from 1900 showed high rates of illiteracy in the southern states, but elsewhere illiteracy was relatively uncommon.

Though most foreign-born Minnesotans were literate, they were less likely to be literate than the native-born. Almost 80 percent of the illiterate population was foreign-born.

### **Number of working women has skyrocketed**

Employment rates were much lower in 1900 than today, mainly because so few women engaged in “gainful occupations.” Instead of asking about labor force participation, the 1900 census asked whether each person over age 10 was “gainfully employed.” Among males age 10 and older, 77.7 percent were engaged in gainful occupations. For women the figure was 16.2 percent. In 1997 the labor force participation rates — for age 16 and over instead of 10 and over, and including those looking for work as well as the currently employed — were 81 percent for males and 68 percent for females.

Though few women were engaged in “gainful occupations” in 1900 compared to now, the rate had been rising for several decades. In 1880, 9.9 percent of Minnesota women were gainfully employed, vs. 14.9 percent in



Class activities in Maxfield School, St. Paul, circa 1905. Minnesota Historical Society.

1890. Urban women were more likely to work for pay than rural women. The proportions of women working for pay in St. Paul, 26.5 percent, and Minneapolis, 25.0 percent, were considerably above the state average.

### Many more people worked in agricultural occupations in 1900

Occupational categories are not directly comparable between 1900 and now. What stands out is the importance of agricultural employment at the turn of this century. Fully 40 percent of the employed population were engaged in “agricultural pursuits.” Only 5 percent of working Minnesotans were in professional service. The remainder were about equally distributed among domestic and personal service, trade and transportation, and manufacturing and mechanical pursuits.

Most of Minnesota’s agricultural workers were men. Of the 548,946 males who were employed, 152,094 were described as farmers, planters and overseers and 92,889 as farm laborers. Of the farm laborers, 53,427 were family members employed on a farm operated by a relative.



Hired girl Ella Erickson hanging out wash at Vitalis home, Franconia, circa 1900. Minnesota Historical Society.

*If a married woman has a gainful occupation, return the occupation accordingly, whether she does the work at her home or goes regularly to a place of employment, and whether she is regularly or only occasionally employed. For example, ‘milliner,’ ‘dressmaker,’ ‘nurse,’ etc. — INSTRUCTIONS TO 1900 CENSUS ENUMERATORS*

Other common occupations for men were general laborers, 54,111; steam railroad employees, 17,014; merchants and dealers, 15,656; carpenters and joiners, 15,183; clerks and copyists, 12,260; and draymen, expressmen and teamsters, 10,856. The emerging industries of logging and mining were also represented. Almost 5,000 men were employed as lumbermen and raftsmen and more than 5,500 worked in iron ore mining.

Almost half of working women were employed in domestic and personal service, working as servants, 34,598, housekeepers, 4,211 and laundresses, 3,237. Women were also overrepresented as professional service workers. Fourteen percent of women worked in professional services, compared to 3 percent of men. This high representation in professional jobs occurred because women dominated the school teaching profession. More than 80 percent of school teachers, 10,818, were women.

Other occupations with large numbers of women were dressmakers, 8,582; farmers, planters and overseers, 5,402; seamstresses, 3,063; saleswomen, 2,601; clerks and copyists, 2,423; stenographers and typewriters, 2,416; and milliners, 2,037.

### SALESWOMEN

*In the vast retail establishments of large cities, many women are employed as saleswomen. Men formerly held the positions that women now hold, and while women’s organism is less strong than men’s, they are expected to do the same work. Their duties compel them to be on their feet from morning to night, and many of them, in a short time, contract those distressing complaints called ‘female diseases.’ ... In such cases there is one tried and true remedy: **Lydia E. Pinkham’s Vegetable Compound** at once removes such troubles. ... — ADVERTISEMENT, MINNEAPOLIS TIMES, JANUARY 1, 1901*

*Many a person who does not follow any occupation still has an income. In that case indicate the source of the income. Report a person whose income comes from the rent of lands or buildings as 'landlord.' Report a person who receives his income, or most of it, from money loaned at interest, or from stocks, bonds, or other securities, as a 'capitalist.'* — INSTRUCTIONS TO ENUMERATORS OF THE 1900 CENSUS

### More and smaller farms 100 years ago

Minnesota's 155,000 farms were the major basis of the state's economy in 1900. However, Minnesota was moving towards a more diversified economy. The percent of workers employed in agriculture had declined from 52 percent in 1880 to 40 percent in 1900.

Eighty-two percent of Minnesota farms were operated by the owner in 1900, while 17 percent were operated by tenants. A handful were run by managers. About two-thirds of Minnesota farms were classified as hay and grain farms, based on the principal sources of income. Livestock farms were second most common, accounting for about 12 percent.

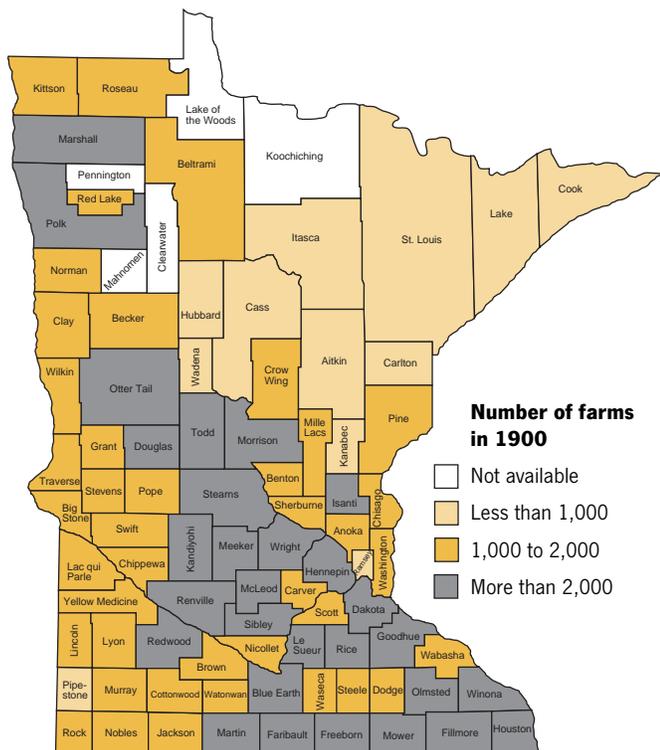
Otter Tail County had the largest number of farms (6,227), followed by Stearns and Polk counties. These

are large counties geographically and also contain ample amounts of good farm land. Generally counties in southeastern and central Minnesota had the most farms, while counties in the northeastern part of the state had the fewest. Sparse population and the unsuitability of much of the land for farming explain the low number of farms in the northeast. There were only 19 farms in Lake County and only 36 in Cook County.

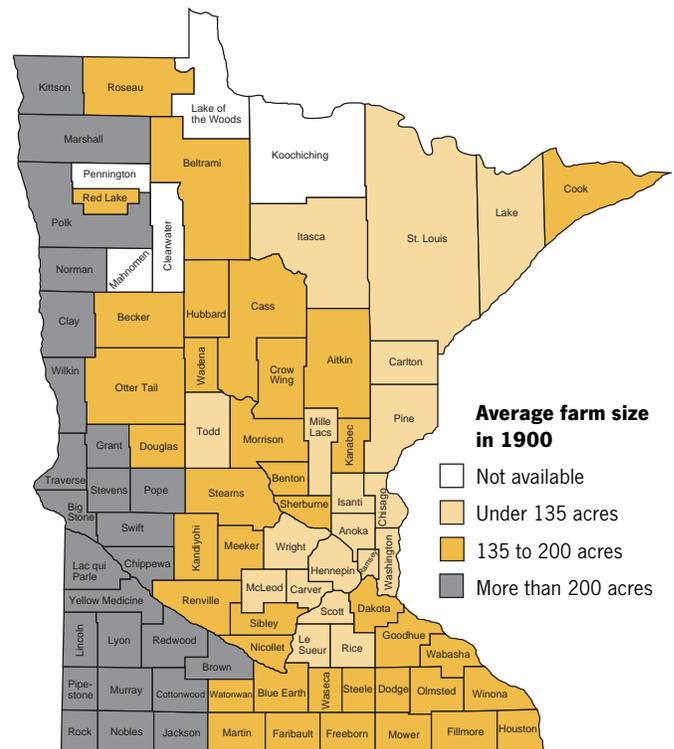
Farms in western Minnesota were generally larger than those in other regions of the state, while farms in counties closer to Minneapolis and St. Paul were smaller. The largest average farm size was found on the White Earth Reservation (415 acres), but the number of farms on the reservation was small and the average was affected by a few very large farms. Traverse (290 acres), Wilkin, Clay, Stevens, Kittson and Big Stone, all in western Minnesota, were the counties with the largest average acreage. Western Minnesota was settled later, and farmers took advantage of recent advances in mechanization that allowed them to cultivate larger amounts of land.

The smallest farms were in Ramsey (66 acres) and Hennepin (81) counties. Farmers in these more urban counties may have chosen to grow more valuable crops, such as fruits and vegetables for the city markets, thus allowing them to make a living on smaller parcels of land.

The number of farms was increasing in Minnesota, showing a gain of 32 percent between 1890 and 1900. The spread of farm settlement to southwestern Minnesota played a role in this growth.



**Most farms located in south and central regions.** *Source:* 1900 census reports.



**Largest farms in the west.** *Source:* 1900 census reports.

Today agriculture remains an important industry in Minnesota, but there are many fewer farms and only a small fraction of the population is employed in agriculture. In 1997 there were 73,367 farms, and about 3.4 percent of all employment was in agriculture. Despite these enormous changes, the number of acres farmed was almost identical in 1900, 26.2 million acres, and 1997, 26.0 million acres. Mechanization has allowed each farmer to cultivate a much larger amount of land. As the amount of land farmed remained steady and the number of farms shrank, the average farm size rose from 170 acres in 1900 to 354 acres in 1997.

### **Flour and lumber milling led Minnesota manufacturing in 1900**

More than 77,000 Minnesotans worked in manufacturing industries in 1900. The most important manufacturing industries, based on the value of products produced, were flouring and grist mill products and lumber and timber products. These two industries together accounted for almost half of all manufacturing value produced in the state.

By 1900 Minnesota had become the nation's leading flour milling state. The development of new milling technologies in the late 1800s made it easier to process the spring wheat grown in the Midwest, enhancing de-

*A most important factor in the added income of the North Central and Western divisions is found in the greater use of farm machinery and of horse power in performing the agricultural work of these sections. — 1900 CENSUS REPORTS*

mand and setting off a boom in the milling industry. Flour mills were found throughout the state, but Minneapolis was the major center.

A plentiful supply of lumber, especially white and Norway pine, and the ease of water transportation helped make Minnesota one of the country's leading lumber-producing states. Minneapolis was the leading site for the lumber industry, though lumber mills were located in many other areas as well.

Manufacturing growth was only moderate between 1890 and 1900. The value of products and capital investment grew more than the number of employees, suggesting more reliance on capital instead of labor. The number of wage-earners in manufacturing rose by 10 percent during the decade, while the value of manufactured products went up by 27 percent.



Threshing, L. Sahnov farm, Bellingham, circa 1905. Minnesota Historical Society.

## Minnesota's leading manufacturing industries in 1900, ranked by value of products

Industries	Year	Number of establishments	Average number of wage-earners	Value of products, including custom work and repairing
Flouring and grist mill products	1900	512	4,086	\$83,877,709
	1890	307	3,509	60,158,088
Lumber and timber products	1900	438	15,140	43,585,161
	1890	392	16,170	25,075,132
Cheese, butter and condensed milk, factory product	1900	596	740	8,479,896
	1890	106	783	2,958,476
Slaughtering, total	1900	20	668	7,810,555
	1890	18	222	2,510,431
Cars and general shop construction and repairs by steam railroad companies	1900	39	4,700	6,319,876
	1890	18	1,951	2,628,174
Foundry and machine shop products	1900	175	3,139	5,975,077
	1890	92	1,289	2,835,024
Printing and publishing, newspapers and periodicals	1900	560	2,714	5,790,148
	1890	341	2,143	4,157,026
Liquors, malt	1900	78	856	4,456,928
	1890	66	548	2,206,366
Lumber, planing mill products, including sash, doors and blinds	1900	61	1,639	3,988,276
	1890	54	2,530	4,943,451
Boots and shoes, factory product	1900	16	2,025	3,615,801
	1890	8	1,099	2,032,814
Oil, linseed	1900	5	155	3,272,598
	1890	3	90	1,547,719

Source: 1900 Census Reports, Volume VIII, Manufactures, Part II.



Load of logs, Nester Brothers Lumber Company, north of Two Harbors, 1899. Minnesota Historical Society.

### **More Minnesotans were renters in 1900 than now**

Minnesotans were less likely to be homeowners in 1900; overall, 64 percent of Minnesota families owned their homes, while the other 36 percent “hired” their dwellings. The level of homeownership was much higher among farmers, probably because ownership of the dwelling usually came along with ownership of the farm property. Eighty-three percent of farm homes were owner-occupied. By comparison, only 47 percent of nonfarm families owned their homes.

In 1998, 75.4 percent of all Minnesota households owned their homes, according to Census Bureau estimates. The rate of homeownership has increased in the 1990s thanks to lower mortgage interest rates and the generally strong economy.

### **Political power is shared among more parties today**

An estimated 76.7 percent of eligible Minnesota voters went to the polls in the presidential election of 1900, casting a majority of their ballots for the victorious Republican incumbent, William McKinley. Minnesota’s electoral votes went to the Republican presidential nominee in every election from 1860, the first time a presidential election was held in Minnesota, through 1928, when Herbert Hoover carried the state.

Minnesotans also favored Republican candidates for governor and the state legislature in 1900. Republican Samuel R. Van Sant was elected governor, defeating Democratic incumbent John Lind. Republicans won 43 of 69 Senate seats and 94 of 109 House seats.

In November 1996, 64.8 percent of eligible Minnesota voters went to the polls, with Democrat Bill Clinton carrying the state’s electoral votes. Though the voting rate was lower than in 1900, the share of population eligible to vote was, of course, much higher. Women were not allowed to vote at the turn of the century, and many foreign-born men could not vote because they were not citizens.

Minnesota political offices are not dominated by one party in 1999. The Senate has a majority from the Democratic-Farmer-Labor party, with 40 of 67 seats. Republicans control the House (70 of 134 seats), and Governor Jesse Ventura is from the Reform party.

### **Majority of Minnesotans with a religious affiliation are either Roman Catholic or Lutheran**

The Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches were the two major religious groups in Minnesota at the turn of the century, and they retain this position today. The



Portrait of farm family in front of their house, Lac qui Parle County, circa 1905. Minnesota Historical Society.

## Profiles of Minnesotans from the 1900 Census

U. S. census data is confidential for 72 years. During that time, no names or other personal information can be made public. After 72 years, the original returns become public information. Microfilms of enumeration forms from the 1920 and earlier censuses are widely used to study family history or do other types of research.

Ten Minnesotans were randomly chosen from the microfilm of the 1900 census. Census information was recorded by enumerators who went door to door, asking the names, ages and occupations of residents, whether they owned or rented their homes, and other questions. Enumerators varied in how thorough they were and in the quality of their handwriting. Some of the entries, particularly names, are difficult to read, and in some cases information is missing.

Seven-year old **Emma Granman** (or Granmer) lived with her mother, stepfather and five siblings in Brown Valley Township in Big Stone County. Stepfather Adolph Granman, age 30, was born in Wisconsin; mother Ella Granman, age 32, was born in New York. Adolph and Ella Granman owned a farm which they had not finished paying for yet. Ella and Adolph had been married for six years. Together the couple had three children: Mary, age 4; Florence, age 3; and Ada, age 8 months. Emma, Arthur, age 11, and Thomas, age 9, were probably children of Ella's earlier marriage. Ella also had given birth to two children who had died by 1900. Like all her siblings, Emma was born in Minnesota. Older brother Arthur attended school nine months per year, but there was no notation that Emma or Thomas attended school.

**Harry McAnson** (or McAnna? McKenna?), age 24, lived in Minneapolis with his wife, also age 24, and their 10-month-old son, Vance. The couple had been married for one year and this was Mrs. McAnson's first child. Harry and his son were both born in Minnesota. His wife, a native of Sweden, had immigrated to America when she was about 5 years old. Harry was employed as a machinist. The couple rented their home.

Thirteen-year-old **James Dermedy** lived in Minneapolis with his Canadian-born parents, James, 38, who had immigrated in 1870 and was a naturalized citizen and Bridget, 39. Bridget, who had been married to James for 20 years, was the mother of five children, three still living. Edward, 19, John, age 10, and James all were born in Minnesota. The family had two railroad workers. James Dermedy, Sr. was employed as a switchman and his son, Edward, worked as a lineman. James and John attended school. The Dermedys owned their home with a mortgage.

**William (or William) D. Firestone**, age 2, lived in Itasca County with his parents, T. Firestone and Nellie Firestone. The couple had been married for 5 years. The family also included William's brother Charles, 2 months old. Both of Nellie's children were still living. T. and Nellie were both born in Wisconsin; William and his brother were born in Minnesota. T. Firestone was a farmer.

**Christine Nilson**, age 41, lived in Mille Lacs County with her husband Hans Nilson, a 49-year-old farmer. The couple had been married 15 years. Both were born in Sweden and immigrated in 1887, after their marriage. Hans was a naturalized citizen. Christine had given birth to five children, but only two were still living in 1900. The surviving children, Carl, age 10, and Adam (or Oscar?), age 8, were both born in Minnesota. Hans was a farmer; the couple owned their farm outright.

**Agnes Halardeau** was an unmarried 38-year-old resident of Belle Plaine Township in Morrison County. She was employed as a servant in the household of John Jerome (?), a French-born Catholic priest. Agnes was born in Canada and immigrated in 1890. The priest's household also included an 11-year-old boy, Alexander Marbrau (?), who was employed as a servant and attended school. Alexander was born in Minnesota. The home was owner-occupied.

**Cedric Johnson**, a 59-year-old widower, resided in High Forest Township in Olmsted County with his four children. Cedric and his sons John, 21, and Chris, 19, were all born in Norway and immigrated to the United States in 1883. Daughters Betsey, 16, and Magdalina, 11, were born in Minnesota. It was not possible to tell from the form if Cedric had become an American citizen. Cedric worked as a tailor, John was a salesman, and Chris was a day laborer, but was unemployed for part of the year. Betsey and Magdalina attended school. The family rented their home.

**William James**, age 32, a car builder, lived in St. Paul with his wife Laura, 26, and daughters Rosa, 4, and Laura, 2. William was born in Wales and immigrated to America in 1886. His wife was born in Illinois. The couple rented their home. Both daughters were born in Minnesota.

**Katherine Lilly**, age 35, lived in St. Paul with her husband Donald, 41. The couple had been married for 16 years and Katherine was the mother of six children, four still living. The surviving children were Richard, 15; Leonard, 12; Mary, 9; and Lawrence, 4. The three older children attended school. Katherine was born in England and immigrated to America when she was about 4 years old. The Lilly household also included Katherine's sister and brother-in-law, Elizabeth and William Enright, and Bridget McAndrews, an 18-year-old servant. Donald Lilly worked as a machine operator, Elizabeth Enright worked part-time as a nurse, and William Enright was a traveling salesman. The family rented their home.

**Minnie Altgradt**, age 50, lived in Utica Township in Winona County with her 60-year-old husband, Ferdinand. Minnie and Ferdinand were both German-born; Minnie immigrated in 1864 and Ferdinand in 1840, apparently as an infant. Ferdinand was a naturalized citizen. Minnie had given birth to five children, three still living. Lewis, 13, and Edwin, 10, were still living at home and attending school. Ferdinand Altgradt was employed as a wagon painter. The family rented their home.

1906 census of religious bodies, conducted by the Census Bureau, reported that 45 percent of the Minnesotans who were formal communicants or members of a religious group were Catholic, 32 percent were Lutherans, and 21 percent belonged to other Protestant denominations. The religious census was based on correspondence and “the employment of special agents.” The decennial census did not collect information about religious affiliation.

In 1990, 39 percent of religiously affiliated Minnesotans were Catholics and 39 percent were Lutherans. As in 1900, most of the religiously affiliated who were not Catholic or Lutheran were connected to other Protestant denominations. Data on religion is now collected by a consortium of religious groups rather than the Census Bureau. It is not clear whether the altered balance between Lutherans and Catholics from 1900 to 1990 represents a real shift in religious affiliation, or whether

it stems from major differences in how the data was collected.

### **The future is always unpredictable**

Few Minnesotans alive in 1900 could have anticipated the enormous technological, cultural and political changes of the 20th century. What does the coming century hold for Minnesota? Current projections are for an aging, slower growing, more metropolitan population. But if history has demonstrated anything, it is the difficulty of trying to see into the future. As the *Duluth News Tribune* wrote on January 1, 1901, “Those who tell us what the Twentieth Century is to bring forth are making mere vague guesses. ... The Twentieth Century is to us an unfathomable mystery as its predecessors were to other men in times gone by.” The same could be said of the 21st century.



Reverend Saevig and confirmation class, Fillmore County, circa 1905. Minnesota Historical Society.

## Sources

- Borchert, John R., and Gustafson, Neil C. *Atlas of Minnesota Resources and Settlement*, 3rd ed. Minneapolis: Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, University of Minnesota, and the Minnesota State Planning Agency, 1980.
- Bradley, Martin B., et al. *Churches and Church Membership in the United States 1990: An Enumeration by Region, State and County Based on Data Reported for 133 Church Groupings*. Atlanta: Glenmary Research Center, 1992.
- Compton's Encyclopedia Online. Asian immigration laws. [www.optonline.com/comptons/ceo/00305\\_A.html#003](http://www.optonline.com/comptons/ceo/00305_A.html#003)
- Ebbott, Elizabeth, for the League of Women Voters of Minnesota. *Indians in Minnesota*, 4th ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985.
- Everton, George B. *The Handy Book for Genealogists*, United States of America, 8th ed. Logan, Utah: Everton Publishers, 1991.
- Fifth and Sixth Biennial Reports on Vital Statistics of the State of Minnesota for the Years 1894-1897 Inclusive*. St. Paul: Pioneer Press Company, 1901.
- Gyory, Andrew. *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics and the Chinese Exclusion Act*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.
- Minnesota Department of Economic Security. 1997 labor force participation rates.
- Minnesota Secretary of State's Office. 1996 voter participation.
- Minnesota State Demographic Center, Minnesota Planning. 1998 city and county population estimates.
- Minnesota State Legislature. 1999 Minnesota House of Representatives political party affiliations. [www.leg.state.mn.us/lrl/histleg/caucush.htm](http://www.leg.state.mn.us/lrl/histleg/caucush.htm).
- Minnesota State Legislature. 1999 Minnesota Senate political party affiliations. [www.leg.state.mn.us/lrl/histleg/caucuss.htm](http://www.leg.state.mn.us/lrl/histleg/caucuss.htm).
- 1900 census on microfilm, Minnesota State Historical Society, St. Paul.
- Peterson, William. *Population*, 3rd ed. New York: Macmillan, 1975.
- Ruggles, Steven, and Sobek, Matthew. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 2.0. Minneapolis: Historical Census Projects, University of Minnesota, 1997, [www.ipums.umn.edu](http://www.ipums.umn.edu).
- U.S. Bureau of the Census.
- *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*, bicentennial ed. Washington, D.C.: 1975.
  - Homeownership rates by state. [www.census.gov/hhes/www/housing/hvs/annual98/ann98t13.html](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/housing/hvs/annual98/ann98t13.html).
  - *The Methods and Materials of Demography*, by Henry S. Shryock, Jacob S. Siegel, and Associates. Washington, D.C.: 1973.
  - National population estimates by race and Hispanic origin. [www.census.gov/population/estimates/state/srh/srhus98.txt](http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/state/srh/srhus98.txt).
  - *1990 Census of Population, General Population Characteristics, Minnesota*. Washington, D.C.: 1992.
  - *1990 Census of Population, Social and Economic Characteristics, Minnesota*. Washington, D.C.: 1993.
  - Special Reports, *Religious Bodies: 1906*, Part I, Summary and General Tables. Washington, D.C.: 1910.
  - State population estimates for 1998 and change from 1990 to 1998. <http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/state/st-98-3.txt>.
  - *200 Years of U.S. Census Taking: Population and Housing Questions, 1790-1990*. Washington, D.C.: November 1989.
- U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. SPI State Personal Income 1929-1997, CD-ROM, RCN-0208, September 1998.
- U.S. Census Office.
- 1900 Census Reports, *Twelfth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1900, Vols. I-II*, Population. Washington, D.C.: 1901-1902.
  - 1900 Census Reports, *Twelfth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1900, Vols. III-IV*, Vital Statistics. Washington, D.C.: 1902.
  - 1900 Census Reports, *Twelfth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1900, Vol. V*, Agriculture. Washington, D.C.: 1902.
  - 1900 Census Reports, *Twelfth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1900, Vol. VIII*, Manufactures, States and Territories. Washington, D.C.: 1902.
  - *Report on Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census, Part II*. Washington, D.C.: 1897.
  - *Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census ...*. Washington, D.C.: 1883.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture. 1997 Census of Agriculture. CD97-AG-1B, Geographic Area Series 1B, March 1999.



**Christmas at the House of the Good Shepherd, Blair Avenue, St. Paul, circa 1900.** Photo by *Minneapolis Journal*, Minnesota Historical Society.