THE SETTLEMENT AND THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE POPULATION IN WISCONSIN*

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HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

The westward movement of settlers from the Atlantic seaboard into the virgin lands beyond the Appalachians is epochal in American history. The pioneers of early American stock were joined by the foreign immigrants and together they pushed westward into the new lands. After 1763 there began a steady stream of frontiersmen who cut away the forests and established permanent settlements as soon as, and even before, the land was acquired from the aborigines. Everywhere they were confronted with differing physical conditions to which they consciously or unconsciously adapted their activities.

About 1820 the frontier of settlement reached that portion of the Old Northwest that was later to be circumscribed by the boundaries of the State of Wisconsin. The new lands of the future state presented to the settlers a variety of habitats each differing more or less from the others. These differences in regional geography have produced a population sectionalism that has persisted for a hundred years.

Preliminary Exploration. The geographical conditions of the State of Wisconsin, since the visits of the first white men, have invited and guided exploration, immigration and settlement. No doubt, the unwritten history of the aborigines is filled with episode and incident reflecting the influences of forests, prairies, lakes, and streams upon the trails followed for game or for enemies, upon the selection and division of hunting grounds, and the reservation of ceremonial and burial sites.

Not only did the geographical conditions within the state

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influence the course of history, but the orientation of lakes and streams beyond the present boundaries guided and directed explorers toward Wisconsin. Schafer writes that,

... The imposing geographic arch formed by the Mississippi lands on the one hand and those of the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence basin on the other has for its keystone the territory embraced within the boundaries of Wisconsin. Resting lightly on Lake Superior but with a long shore line on both Lake Michigan and the Father of Waters, that territory also holds the most convenient line of communication between the two systems, the Fox and Wisconsin Rivers, separated by a single short portage. This explains why so much of the early history of the State not only connects but mingle and blends with the French history of Canada and Louisiana...

Miss Kellogg, in one of a series of articles on the early history of Wisconsin, has called attention to the importance of geography in the discovery and exploration of the region. She notes that,

... Wisconsin's position at the headwaters of the two great valleys of North America—the St. Lawrence and the Mississippi—has been of supreme importance in the history of the State. To these advantages of position is due its early discovery, its thorough exploration, and its value as a link in the penetration of inland America.

Turner, the foremost student of American frontier history, has made the following observation in his studies of the fur trade.

... The importance of physical conditions is nowhere more manifest than in the exploration of the Northwest, and we cannot properly appreciate Wisconsin's relation to the history of the time without first considering her situation as regards the lake and river systems of North America.

The French Régime, 1634–1763. The first white man to set foot upon the territory, which was later to be included within the boundaries erected to delimit the Territory, and still later the State of Wisconsin, was Jean Nicolet. His

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journey under the direction of the indefatigable Champlain illustrates not only that the latter "... wished to test his theory that the route to the East lay through the Great Lakes," but how the lakes and tributaries from the beginning directed the course of exploration toward Wisconsin.

Nicholet ascended the Ottawa River and crossed by way of Lake Nipissing into Georgian Bay which gave him easy access by way of the Straits of Mackinac to Lake Michigan and its important arm, Green Bay, near the head of which he landed in 1634. (Fig. 1).

... We are now able to see how the river-courses of the Northwest permitted a complete exploration of the country, and that in these courses Wisconsin held a commanding situation. But these rivers not only permitted exploration: they also furnished a motive to exploration by the fact that their valleys teemed with fur-bearing animals ... The hope of a route to China was always influential, as was also the search for mines ...

There were manifold motives that directed the pioneer explorers into Wisconsin. To some the impelling motive was a search for a passage across the North American continent to the Pacific Ocean, and the discovery and exploration of the Great Lakes stimulated this vain hope. To others exploration was secondary to the diplomatic services they might render in securing the friendliness of the Indians with whom the fur trade was to become the economic basis of an important commerce. Still others hoped to find mines and duplicate the wealth Spain was reputed to have won from the Indians of Mexico and South America. Whatever motive was dominant the orientation of the lines of communication brought Wisconsin in touch with the settlements along the lower St. Lawrence River at an early date.

After Nicholet's visit of 1634 exploration progressed rather slowly because of the hostility of the Iroquois Indians, but the explorers, missionaries, and traders gradually worked westward from lower Canada into the Upper lakes country. Among the missionaries were the explorer Louis Joliet and Father Jacques Marquette who in 1672

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4 Louise Phelps Kellogg. The French Régime in Wisconsin and the Northwest, p. 78.
5 Turner. Ibid. p. 562.
ascended the Fox River, portaged to the Wisconsin and
descended it to its junction with the Mississippi.

Up to the end of the French and Indian War in 1763 Wis-
consin’s bordering lakes and penetrating streams guided

the hardy pioneers into the heart of the area. The many
straits, portages, river mouths and important lakes became
the strategic sites of the fur trading posts, and Green Bay
became the commercial capital of Wisconsin.
The traffic in furs was of such importance that the profitable returns stimulated the traders to penetrate farther into the interior of the country, and while very few of these French, and French and Indian half-breeds became permanent settlers there must have been a few hundred of them who spent a major portion of their lives in Wisconsin. They came, principally, from Quebec with their many iron implements and interesting trinkets, guns, and ‘fire water’ with which they bargained for the furs. This systematic trade with the Indians put into their hands a new weapon and stimulated the Indian to hunt the fur-bearing animals beyond their own requirements. “They passed also from the economic stage in which their hunting was for food and clothing simply, to that stage in which their hunting was made systematic and stimulated by the European demand for furs.”

The traffic in furs led to an exploitation which was in some ways detrimental to the Indians, but the traders rendered a valuable diplomatic service in preparing a way for the people who were to come later. They became the liaison agents between the Indians and the miners and farmers who were soon to follow. Also they constituted the vanguard of the sedentary population.

The British Sovereignty, 1763–1816. The fall of Quebec in 1760 virtually ended the French sovereignty in Wisconsin, but the change to the British control altered only slightly the fur trade so far inland as Wisconsin. The British began to displace the French in some of the important posts and significant changes were made in the organization of the industry. With the coming of the British—particularly the Scotch, “... there began that long and brilliant dynasty of Scotch fur barons which has endured down to our own day.” The French-Canadians were not displaced but merely utilized to carry out the details of the traffic directed and financed by the British who established posts and invited the Indians to bring in their furs. Under this plan another step toward the permanent occupation of the land had been taken.

* Ibid., pp. 21–32.
American Control after 1816. The Treaty of Paris in 1783, which marked the close of the Revolutionary War and transferred Wisconsin from the British to the Americans, was only a 'scrap of paper' so far as any change in the fur trade was concerned. The traffic was maintained after the war as before with little or no opposition except from a few American traders. And concomitant with the commercial activities there was maintained a virtual political sovereignty of territory no longer British. John Jay was sent to London to make a commercial treaty with the British involving among other things a settlement of the northwest boundary troubles. He received a promise to withdraw in 1796, at which time Wayne's army took over the post at Detroit. From that date to the War of 1812 America extended her sovereignty over Wisconsin, only to relinquish it at the outbreak of hostilities when the British "... with Indian assistance, seized the American posts up to a line indicated by Toledo Bay, Fort Wayne, Peoria and St. Louis." After the war American sovereignty was again established and Federal troops were sent to Green Bay and Prairie du Chien in 1816, when control by the United States became effective for the first time.

The geographical remoteness of Wisconsin is an important circumstance explaining this vacillation in political sovereignty and the delay in settlement of an area so long known to white man. But after American dominance was established this section of the Old Northwest began to attract settlers.

The First Settlements. By 1820 the white population had begun to localize in one or two places, making possible an estimate of the actual number of permanent settlers. Green Bay and Prairie du Chien were the only important settlements in Wisconsin at this time. "The former, chiefly limited to the stretch of five miles up the Fox River from its mouth, consisted of about sixty houses, with a population of perhaps 500 souls, besides which was a garrison." Many of these people were settlers who utilized the land and

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POPULATION MAP
of
WISCONSIN
1850

LEGEND
CITIES AND VILLAGES
- 200 - 1000
- 1000 - 2500
- 5000
- 10,000
- 25,000
- 50,000

Each dot represents 25 rural people localized by civil townships. The location of approximately 8000 Indians in northern Wisconsin is not shown on the map.
POPULATION MAP
WISCONSIN
1870

LEGEND
CITIES AND VILLAGES

- 200-1000
- 1000-2500
- 5000
- 10,000
- 25,000
- 50,000

Milwaukee - 71,440 in 1870
Each dot(s) represents 25 rural people localized by civil townships.
The location of approximately 6000 Indians in Northern Wisconsin is not shown on the map.
Population Map of Wisconsin 1920

Legend:
- Cities and villages
  - 200 - 1000
  - 1000 - 2500
  - 2500
  - 5000
  - 10,000
  - 25,000
  - 50,000

Milwaukee - 457,477 in 1920
Each dot(*) represents 25 rural people localized by civil townships.
the soil for agricultural purposes. They were tillers of the soil for they raised "... potatoes, maize, oats, peas, spring wheat, pumpkins, melons, cabbages, onions, and other common vegetables." The ownership of the land was of certain importance for they had divided the area, according to the Canadian custom into narrow strips abutting upon the river, the pioneers' principal highway.

The farms were ribbon-like cotes common to Canadian settlements, from one and one-half to eight arpents* wide and running back eighty arpents from the river. As a rule, only about two or three acres of this were cultivated.11

Prairie du Chien was the only other settlement of any significance as measured by the number of people. In 1820 there were in the settlement approximately 600 people including the 100 soldiers stationed at Fort Crawford. Like the Green Bay settlement, "The farms were the narrow fields running back from the river and there had been a common field where the inhabitants cut hay." 12 This common meadow probably was one of the open prairie areas found along the flood plain and on the terraces of the Wisconsin and Mississippi Rivers. The farm pattern shows a French Canadian influence that has persisted down to the present.

THE SETTLEMENT OF THE LEAD REGION OF WISCONSIN, 1820–1850

The active settlement of southern Wisconsin was accomplished in the three decades following 1820. This westward migration into Wisconsin may be considered as a part of the great population readjustment that was taking place in eastern United States. The sale of public lands—all of which were west of the Appalachians—reflects the movement of people from the east to the west. Sales increased rapidly after 1813, when only 140,000 acres were sold, to 1819, when 5,110,000 acres were purchased from the gov-

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11 Arpent (linear measure) 192 feet and 6 inches.
12 Turner, Ibid., p. 92.
13 Ibid., p. 92.
ernment, and then came a decrease to only 780,000 acres in 1821. The westward expansion from the American seaboard into the Mississippi Valley reached its most spectacular development in the 'great migration' which brought into the Union Indiana in 1816, Mississippi in 1817, Illinois in 1818, Alabama in 1819, Maine in 1820, and Missouri in 1821. "With the admission of Missouri the great migration came to an end so far as new states were concerned, and the heavy shift of population subsided for another ten years." Just as this historic movement began to abate and readjust itself to the very large area contained within the borders of the new states, Wisconsin was opened to settlement. The first movement into the territory was slow, echoing the decreasing vigor of the declining years of the great migration.

Green Bay and Prairie du Chien were the only settlements of any importance before 1820. These were occupied because of their strategic location for commerce in furs and for the military advantages that their sites offered. These functions were not materially altered until after 1835 when the agricultural frontier approached more closely and the Indian menace had been removed.

The Lead Region. The lead deposits of the Upper Mississippi Valley had been discovered more than a century before the beginning of active settlement about 1820. Even before white man came the Indians had their 'lead diggings.' Later under the French influence, mining was stimulated, particularly by Nicholas Perrot, who purchased lead from the Indians in 1695. From that time until the end of the French régime about 1760 "... the lead mines were worked more or less constantly both by the Indians and by whites, who used the product to supplement the fur trade." A few traders found it profitable to barter for lead, and some of the Indians willingly consented to mine rather than hunt the fur-bearing animals. This new adaptation of industry culminated in the settlement of this section after 1820.

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13 Paxson. Ibid., p. 221.
14 Ibid., p. 219.
This lead region lies . . . chiefly in Wisconsin, including, however, a strip of about eight townships of land in Iowa, along the western bank of the Mississippi, the greatest width of which strip is on the Little Mequoketa, about twelve miles from east to west, and including about ten townships in the northwestern corner of Illinois. The portion of this lead region in Wisconsin includes about sixty-two townships, or two thousand eight hundred and eighty square miles; being about one-third larger than the state of Delaware. The extreme length of this region, from west to east, is eighty-seven miles; and its greatest width, from north to south, is fifty-four miles.16

For more than 150 years, from the discovery of Wisconsin in 1634 until after 1800, the traffic in furs was the dominant industry. Lead had made an ineffectual appeal to the natives except when a few traders were able to stimulate the mining industry. The continual exploration revealed more and more the mineral wealth of the lead region, but the distance from the markets and the state of scientific knowledge precluded any intensive utilization of the resource. Under such conditions, the early mining, viewed from the perspective of over a hundred years, appears more as ‘a promise than a performance.’

In 1804 the Sauk and Fox Indians ceded to the United States the larger portion of the lead bearing region of the Upper Mississippi Valley. The treaty among other things provided that “As long as the lands which are now ceded remain their property, the Indians belonging to said tribes shall enjoy the privilege of living and hunting upon them.”17 This stipulation was one of the indirect causes of the Black Hawk War. The pioneers who passed beyond the agricultural frontier encroached upon land used and jealously guarded by the Indians and any unlicensed intrusion was regarded as trespass.

The active mining of lead began in Illinois about 1822 near the present city of Galena, and shortly thereafter pioneer miners penetrated into Wisconsin. “In one sense the settlements were an expansion of those of northern Illinois, a widening circle of adventurers, who, not finding the ‘hoped for’ wealth in the mines about Galena, pushed on.

into Southwestern Wisconsin to seek for richer 'leads'."\(^{18}\)

It was not until after 1827 when the Winnebago disturbances had quieted down that the miners became more daring. "... they ventured far beyond that protection which numerical strength and the defensive organizations near Galena secured."\(^{19}\)

The number of people in the lead region was very difficult to determine but the report of the Superintendent of the Mineral Lands stated that,

I am enabled to give with accuracy the number of persons at the Public Mines of Illinois only, or rather at the mines near the north boundary of that State, which are supposed to be within its limits, commonly known as the Fever River Mines, viz. On the first day of July, 1825, there were at those mines about one hundred men; on the thirty-first of December, 1825, one hundred and fifty-one men; on the thirty-first of March, 1826, one hundred and ninety-four; on the thirtieth of June, 1826, four hundred and six; and on the thirty-first of August 1826, (the date of last report,) there were four hundred and fifty-three men. You will observe the increase has been gradual, and the numbers are still augmenting.\(^{20}\)

From this Illinois nucleus the settlement spread northward into southwestern Wisconsin.

As the frontier came nearer, the lead region tapped the stream of migration and deflected a part of it northward into the lands along the Upper Mississippi River.

The time had now come when this beautiful country was to be occupied by a hardy, resolute, adventurous and persevering population. The laws which, as a rule, generally confine the migration of the human race to isothermal zones and similarity of climate, were to be set at defiance, and the emigrant from the mild climate of Tennessee, Kentucky, Missouri and southern Illinois was to exchange, the balmy and genial atmosphere to which he had been accustomed, for one in which during nearly half the year all nature is bound with icy chains and covered with its robe of snow.\(^{21}\)

This explains how so many people of southern origin found their way into southwestern Wisconsin.


\(^{21}\)Moses M. Strong. History of the Territory of Wisconsin from 1836 to 1848, p. 118.
Influence of Geological Conditions. The mere presence of lead in Wisconsin was not the only factor which induced the migration of pioneer miners, for the mode of occurrence of the lead-bearing minerals determined to a notable degree the distribution of the inhabitants. Within the mineralized areas there is a zonal arrangement of the principal minerals.22 Near the surface and some places at the surface, the lead ore, occupies the upper zone, occurring as large cubical crystals of galena. The fortunate circumstance that abundant ore occurred above the water table made it possible for individuals to engage in the mining industry. This created a population dispersion from the outset. Some of the miners, who later were able to purchase land for agricultural purposes were engaged in both industries, depending upon season or price of lead to determine to which they would give their services.

From Mining to Agriculture. Mining required less capital than farming. “A miner could carry practically all of the tools necessary for his work. Mining leases cost only a share of the profits.”23 Gradually there came a shift from mining to agriculture. “As agriculture developed and mining became more difficult because the surface ores had been removed, farmers turned their attention more and more to the profits of agriculture to the neglect of mining.”24 The peak of lead production was reached about 1845 after which date the amount decreased to less than half of the production of the early forties.

The Black Hawk War of 1832 removed the last menace to white man’s occupancy of the lead region. At first the semi-nomadic trader stimulated the Indians to search for furs. Over this primitive occupation the miner overlaid a new industry characterized by the intensive search for lead, and localized effort replaced the extended activities of the hunter and trader.

The coming of the farming element after 1832 added

hundreds to the population, and the concentrated occupancy of the land completely displaced the aborigines and erased their culture from the land that had maintained them for centuries. Cultural conditions of another order displaced the old when white man replaced the red man.

The land with its fertile soil and the extensive prairie areas was capable of yielding crops—particularly wheat—that would equal those of other states. According to Owen’s report the land of this section was originally about 37 per cent prairie and 63 per cent woodland. This combination of woodland interspersed with prairie was a fortunate circumstance for the early farmers, but many did not realize it.

The Land Survey. It is significant that southern Wisconsin was surveyed from the west toward the east. The land survey was begun in 1833 by the erection of the Fourth Principal Meridian through the heart of the lead region where a nucleus of permanent settlers required a title to their land held previously by leases or by ‘squatters’ rights.

The survey initiated a speculation in land, particularly in sections adjacent to the mineral lands reserved from sale. Probably two thirds of the land sales prior to 1837 were to speculators. The ‘specie circular’ issued at the stipulation of President Jackson ended speculation. The President desired to prevent public lands from falling into the hands of capitalists who might do injury to settlers in search of new homes. Speculation was curtailed, and the settlers continued to press against the cutting edge of the frontier.

Statistical Measure of Settlement. The first reliable quantitative data on population, other than estimates and partial enumerations in Green Bay and Prairie du Chien, are contained in the United States Census of 1830 which gives a population of 3,245 for the three Wisconsin Counties, viz, Brown County 964, Crawford County 692, and Iowa County 1,589. Almost half of the people were in Iowa County,
which included the lead region, and the remainder were in the two long established posts of Green Bay and Prairie du Chien.

Fig. 2. The population of Wisconsin in 1836. (Data from the First Census of Wisconsin Territory, taken in July 1836.)

Wisconsin was organized as a Territory in 1836 and the next census\textsuperscript{25} taken in July of that year gives the population as 11,683. Brown county had 2,706 inhabitants, Crawford

850, Iowa 5,234, and Milwaukee 2,893. The lead region continued to be the most densely settled section.

The two counties of Grant and Iowa included one fourth of the population of the Territory. But with the rapid growth of population in eastern and south central part of the Territory the lead-producing counties had only 17 per cent of the total in 1846, and by 1847 this was decreased to

![Map of Wisconsin population in 1838](image-url)
13 per cent. Lead mining was declining but settlers continued to come into the area. The gold rush to California attracted many miners but the influx of agriculturalists prevented a decrease in population.

FIG. 4. By 1840 the frontier had crossed the southeastern quarter of Wisconsin. (Data from the Journal of the Convention, January 3, 1848, pp. 156-163.)

With the exhaustion of the easily mined lead deposits, the lands previously reserved from sale were placed upon the market. Congress provided that the President be
authorized, as soon as practicable to cause the reserved lead mines and contiguous lands in Wisconsin belonging to the United States, to be exposed to sale, in the same manner that other public lands are authorized by law to be sold." By the time Wisconsin was admitted to the Union in 1848 the population of the lead region was approximately 30,000. In 1825 there were only a few score in the region, and in 1836 when Wisconsin became a Territory the number was only 5,234, but rapid settlement in the middle forties changed the lead region into an agricultural section.

THE SETTLEMENT OF EASTERN WISCONSIN
1832 TO 1850

After 1832 the southeastern part of Wisconsin began to tap the stream of western migration and by 1850 most of the area from Lake Michigan westward to the lead region, and northwestward toward the Fox River was completely settled, and the frontier moved on. The United States Census for 1850 gives in detail the population of the state, and the map prepared from these data pictures graphically the distribution of the inhabitants. The map shows the rather even film of rural population thinning out along the frontier, and the concentration of the people in urban communities where the advantages of site or situation provided the bases for the agglomerations.

The frontier of settlement, by 1850, was approaching, and in a few places had crossed the Fox and Lower Wisconsin Rivers. That indefinite boundary between the settled and the unoccupied land was a progressively shifting agricultural frontier. The westward and northward movement of this frontier up to 1850 had left behind it over 90 per cent of the total population, or 287,730 settlers, including 37,225 in the three lead mining counties of the southwest. The remaining 17,660 people were in the ten or more northern wilderness counties.

The Beginning of Settlement. The settlement of southeastern Wisconsin after 1832 is epochal. The lead region

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*U. S. Statutes at Large. Vol. IX. July 11, 1846, p. 87.
was first settled by a final wave of the great migration, but southeastern Wisconsin was peopled by a current from the Jacksonian migration which started about 1832, so far as Wisconsin is concerned, and reached its crest about

![Map of Population of Wisconsin 1842](image)

**Fig. 5.** Between 1840 and 1842 the population of Wisconsin increased from 30,945 to 44,478. (Data from the Journal of the Convention, January 3, 1848, pp. 156-163.)

1837; but for many years thereafter the irresistible human horde sought the newly opened lands. Most of the land was entered either by speculators or by the actual settlers in the years of 1836, 1837 and 1838. Even after 1840
there was considerable land to be settled, but the major portion of the government lands had been sold. Resale by speculators permitted an intermingling of new settlers with those who had preceded them by only a few years.

**Fig. 6.** By 1846 southern Wisconsin had a population of approximately 150,000. (Data from the Journal of the Convention, January 3, 1848, pp. 156–163.)

Just as the explorers and traders sought the waterways in their penetration of Wisconsin, the settlers were guided in their great 'trek' to the new lands. They were ever
mindful that to depart from the waterways was to find as obstacles, swamps and forests that were traversed only with great effort. The first settlers into the lead region came from the south and created a nuclear settlement that expanded eastward. There were more people from Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri in the lead region in 1850 than in all the remainder of the state. Southeastern Wisconsin drew homeseekers from New York, New England and other eastern states, thus the movement into Wisconsin after 1832 was an along-the-parallels migration.

The new settlers came by way of the recently completed Erie Canal and the Great Lakes to the western shore of Lake Michigan. From the Ohio Valley many descended the Ohio River to Cincinnati where they deserted nature’s highway and come across Indiana and Illinois to Wisconsin. Enroute they were joined by natives of the states they were traversing until the newcomers represented a homogeneous mixture of native Americans and their immediate foreign born ancestors. Among the immigrants from Indiana and Illinois, came many people, who had participated in the great migration.

The manuscript census for 1850 records many families in which the father and mother were born in New York, and two or three children in Indiana, and two or three more in Wisconsin. Similarly many of the foreign born came westward as far as Ohio and then moved on to Wisconsin after a few years. The peopling of Wisconsin had become a psychological movement, and the news accounts in the eastern papers accelerated the migration.

Schafer, writing about the southeastern section of the state, notes that,

The movement of settlers into the region was well started by the spring of 1836. Most of the emigrants came by sloop or steamer on the lakes, debarking at Milwaukee, Racine, or Kenosha, or else at Chicago whence they made their way up the coast. (See figures 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7)

The Land and Its Utilization. Southeastern Wisconsin is almost entirely within the physiographic province called

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*The manuscript census reports for 1850, 1860, and 1870 have been deposed in the Library of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

**Joseph Schafer. Four Wisconsin Counties, Prairie and Forest, p. 64.
by Martin "The Eastern Ridges and Lowlands." (See fig. 8). This region is underlain by eastward dipping sedimentary formations of the Paleozoic system. In pre-gla-

Fig. 7. In 1847, on the eve of the admission of Wisconsin into the Union, the population was 210,546. (Data from the Journal of the Convention, January 3, 1848, pp. 156-163.)

Fig. 7. In 1847, on the eve of the admission of Wisconsin into the Union, the population was 210,546. (Data from the Journal of the Convention, January 3, 1848, pp. 156-163.)

...cian time the area had been maturely dissected into a relief of approximately 300–500 feet. The major topographic features are the cuestas developed upon these slightly dip-

ping sedimentary rocks. Superposed upon the maturely dissected cuesta landscape is a veneer of glacial drift which has reduced the relief and replaced the erosional topography with a depositional topography. However, along the escarpment margin of the cuestas the drift is thin and the bed-rock makes its influence felt through the mantle of drift.

![Map of Wisconsin physiographic provinces](image)

**Fig. 8.** The physiographic provinces of Wisconsin. (After Martin.) ( Courtesy of the Geographical Review published by the American Geographical Society of New York.)

In the southern tier of counties from Lake Michigan to the Mississippi there were originally extensive prairie areas. Northward the prairies were smaller and not so closely spaced. Around the prairies were the ‘oak openings’ and the more densely forested areas which took on a distinctly primeval aspect farther north.

The distribution of improved land in 1850, and particularly the number of acres per capita indicate with fair accuracy the progress of settlement in Wisconsin. Rock County ranked first with 143,235 acres; Walworth was second with 116,750 acres; and Waukesha third with 105,269. The counties having over 5 acres of improved land per capita were Rock, Walworth, Dodge, and Green. In general
the amount of improved land decreased rapidly toward the frontier and particularly northward along the lake shore where the heavy forests effectively retarded the improving of the land.

Washington County had 2.2 acres of improved land per person, Sheboygan 1.6 acres, and Manitowoc only 0.3 acres. Similarly there was at that time a concomitant relationship in the number of people in these three counties. Washington had a population of 19,485, Sheboygan 8,379, and Manitowoc only 3,702.

![Map of Wisconsin](image)

**Fig. 9.** The prairie areas—in black—in southeastern Wisconsin. (After Martin.) (Courtesy of the Geographical Review published by the American Geographical Society of New York.)

This region to the east was heavily forested and the conversion of the unimproved to improved land required years of strenuous labor; and then the stumps remained for a generation, hindering the cultivation of the land.

*The People.* The value of any area for agricultural purposes is largely determined by the conditions of the natural landscape, soil, climate, and proximity to other areas which offer opportunities for exchange of products and ideas. But under almost ideal environmental conditions a region might remain undeveloped. "The lands of any country are important for the human opportunity they represent. The use which is made of them depends upon the people who come into their possession."

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"Joseph Schafer. A History of Agriculture in Wisconsin. p. 28."
In southeastern Wisconsin there has developed a sectionalism where the conditions of the physical landscape were more or less uniform originally, except for a difference in the natural vegetation. The southern part of this area was characterized by the open oak forest with the extensive prairies. (Fig. 9). Just to the north of the southern tier of counties was a hardwood forest of maple, and some oak and beech. Along the eastern coast a strip of conifers began just north of Milwaukee and extended northward, becoming wider until it embraced all of Door Peninsula.

In the settlement of southeastern Wisconsin, there was enacted what may be called an experiment in historical geography. The southern division was settled by the Yankees and the British and the forested section by the Teutons. When the Yankees settled the southern row of counties they did not, for long at least, shun the prairie lands as has often been stated. However, it is true that certain prairie sections were not entered until a few years after the wooded areas had been sold. Schafer has shown . . . that the Yankee settlers in a prevailingly prairie township of Racine County took up first every acre of forested land, together with the prairie lands and marsh lands adjoining the woods, while they shunned for some years the big, open, unsheltered prairie where farms would be out of immediate touch with the woods.84 (Fig. 10).

These homeseekers were not destitute, and with the credit extended to them by their friends and relatives, and because of a tradition distinctly British in origin, the purchase of a farm was looked upon as a method of creating an estate. Large farms were the rule.

The number of Germans in Wisconsin before 1850 formed an important nucleus which determined the population conditions in the forest section of eastern Wisconsin (Fig. 11). The 38,064 Germans made a noteworthy contribution to the vital statistics.

About 30,000 old Lutheran subjects of Prussia . . . are shortly to come over and settle in these United States. It is a religious movement, these people preferring the good old orthodox doctrines to the modern philosophy of Berlin. There are men of very large for-

Fig. 10. The number of German inhabitants in Racine, Kenoshia, and Walworth Counties in 1850 was small. The British and the Yankees were the predominating population groups. Each symbol represents 25 inhabitants; the dots, German and the circles, British. (Data from a hand count made from the 1850 manuscript census for the State Historical Society of Wisconsin by M. M. Quaife and an assistant.)

Fig. 11. The distribution of German and British born settlers in Dodge and Washington Counties in 1850. Each symbol represents 25 inhabitants; the dots, German, and the circles British. Note the general decrease in the Germans westward from Lake Michigan. In 1850 Washington County included the present Washington and Okaw-kee Counties. (Data from a hand count made from the 1850 manuscript census for the State Historical Society of Wisconsin by M. M. Quaife and an assistant).
tunes among them; old German noblemen whose pedigrees date back to the thirteenth century. They will make excellent western farmers, and are about to settle in Wisconsin—the coolest spot they can select.  

These German immigrants coming to America took the densely wooded areas. Why this selection? Schafer gives an answer in the following statement.

It is at bottom a question of economic ability, not of personal or racial tastes. The poor immigrants and the poorer natives also, with, of course, many exceptions, settled in the woods because they could not afford to encounter the risk of taking an ideal farm in the 'Congress Land' districts, nor could they afford to buy such land from speculators or from farmers. They took what was at hand, the heavily wooded lands avoided by persons who were in position to pick and choose. In many cases they might have found lands on the open prairies, which . . . were taken later than the other lands even by Americans who had some means. But the person without means would have been helpless in such a situation. He would need money to buy lumber both for building and for fencing, while in the timber his personal labor supplied these essentials, without cost, in the process which at the same time cleared his land.

The Germans who settled in the rural communities generally purchased small farms, from 40 to 80 acres, and this had the effect of creating a dense rural population in this area which was originally a maple forest. And after three-quarters of a century the small farms are common, in many of the counties averaging less than a hundred acres. (Fig. 20). No other part of Wisconsin has so dense a rural population as this German settled section.

In a generation or two the forest had been removed and the two sections were essentially the same. Both the German settled section northwest of Milwaukee and the Yankee settled strip along the southern tier of counties present a cultural landscape of beauty and prosperity. This type of controlled geographical experiment illustrates the importance of nationality, a social element, in influencing the relation of man to his habitat.

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*Niles' National Register. June 17, 1843, chronicle from the St. Louis Republican June 7.

THE NORTHWARD MOVEMENT OF THE FRONTIER IN WISCONSIN 1850–1880

In the period from 1850 to 1880 the movement of population into Wisconsin completed the agricultural settlement of that part of the state underlain by the Paleozoic sediments. In central Wisconsin the earlier glaciated and driftless portion of the older crystalline area also received a large number of people, and across the heavily forested Northern Highland thin threads of settlements followed the rivers, roads and railways leaving isolated blocks of untouched wilderness. By 1880 the frontier of settlement had crossed Wisconsin, but within the state there remained wilderness sections, around the periphery of which, the frontier slowly encroached and penetrated.

The frontier seemed to be pivoted at Green Bay and swept northward more rapidly across the Western Upland. As it approached the densely forested upland to the north the settlers departed from the deployed formation to one of concentrated invasion along important salients. This single-file invasion has had the effect of leaving sections of vir-
gin forest and cut-over land unoccupied down to the present time.

With the extinction of the Indian titles, the lumbermen with axe and saw overlaid a new culture on the site of the fur-trading industry, which had declined after 1834 until it was of little importance, and the roving hunters and traders were replaced by more sedentary, yet transient, pioneers. Lumbering became the dominant industry and the removal of the forest prepared the way for the agricultural settlers who were soon to follow.

Wisconsin has been crossed by a succession of frontiers, but due to the time of settlement the sequence has not been the same in all parts of the state. Generally speaking the earlier settled sedimentary Wisconsin was crossed by the frontier of the hunter and trader in the period from 1634 down to 1820. This frontier prepared the way for the miner in the southwestern part of the state. In less than twenty years the pioneer agriculturists occupied the southern part of Wisconsin, and along the frontier the farmers exploited the soil by raising wheat to the exclusion of soil conserving crops. And finally a diversification of agriculture,—supplemented at first by dairying, and later made subservient thereto—slowly advanced a new kind of frontier across the land.

The westward movement involved the wasteful removal of the forest to prepare the land for agriculture. This was the guiding principle as the frontier marched westward across the Old Northwest. But as the frontier advanced northward into the highlands of the northern peninsula of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, the destruction of the forest did not leave in its wake farm land of such high potential value as in the hard-wood forests to the south.

The settlement of the prairie areas of the Mississippi and Missouri Valleys created a demand for lumber which the Upper Lakes country was made to supply. Northern Wisconsin with Michigan and Minnesota became commercial lumber areas where the removal of the forest for its lumber was the principal motive in clearing the land and not a preparation for agriculture. In fact the forest was gone before much of the land was wanted for agricultural purposes.
In spite of more invulnerable obstacles in the creation of a livable habitat out of the new lands the settlements in Wisconsin "... moved at least one degree farther north ..." in the decade between 1850 and 1860.

The Settlement of Western Wisconsin. In 1850 there were more than 9,000 people in western Wisconsin beyond the lower Wisconsin River. Most of these were in Sauk, Richland, and Crawford Counties and constituted an advance guard of homeseekers who were pushing northwestward to settle the available lands of the Western Upland and the adjacent Central Lowland. Settlement progressed in a wave-like formation, the crest of which swept northwest in the three decades from 1850 to 1880.

The 9,000 of 1850 were increased to over 100,000 in 1860. The decade of the sixties added 98,645, bringing the total to over 200,000. By 1880 the population of this part of Wisconsin exceeded 300,000. Each of the three decades added 100,000, and, in effect, accomplished the settlement of the area, for in the decade of the eighties the increase had dropped to about 75,000. The frontier of the farmer had passed beyond the Western Upland into the crystalline Northern Highland.

As previously stated western Wisconsin was settled by a wave of homeseekers who pushed northward after 1850. Sauk, Richland, and Crawford Counties were peopled in the decade of the fifties; Vernon, Monroe, and La Crosse Counties constitute the section that was settled in the sixties; and in the decade of the seventies the wave of settlement had advanced to the latitude of Pierce and St. Croix Counties. (See population maps for 1850, 1860, 1870 and 1880).

The Settlement of Central Wisconsin. The frontier passed very lightly across the sandy plain of central Wisconsin. By 1880 the stream of settlers had pushed beyond the plain into the southern segment of the Northern Highland. The several counties that lie wholly or partially in the sand country present an aspect of a flat plain with poor sandy soil unsuited to intensive agricultural development.

*U. S. Census, Population, 1880, p. XVIII.*
In 1850 the population of this section was about 10,000. In 1860 Adams County which lies entirely in the plain had 6,492 inhabitants; in 1870 the number had increased to 6,601, and by 1880 the number was 6,741. Settlement was practically complete by 1870, and later enumerations showed only slight increases, except in the strategically situated cities and villages, and an increment in numbers was due essentially to the excess of births over deaths. Emigration from the area had not yet become a population readjustment.

The Settlement of Northeastern Wisconsin. The northeastern part of the state that was settled in the three decades from 1850 to 1880 included Brown, Door, Kewaunee, and Outagamie Counties, and approximately half of Marinette, Oconto, and Shawano Counties. Much of this area was either pine covered or there was an important mixture of the conifers with the hardwoods. Door Peninsula was more primeval in aspect than the section farther south, and consequently, offered a more hostile environment to the incoming settlers. Furthermore, the retarded settlement in the peninsula was due to its location as a projection out into the lake, and in effect it was passed by.

This section bordering Green Bay had about 35,000 inhabitants in 1860. By 1870 the number had doubled, and the enumeration of 1880 gave these seven counties a total of nearly 120,000. The following table shows the growth of population in two lake shore counties.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1860</th>
<th>1865</th>
<th>1870</th>
<th>1875</th>
<th>1880</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sheboygan</td>
<td>26,875</td>
<td>27,671</td>
<td>31,749</td>
<td>34,021</td>
<td>34,206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manitowoc</td>
<td>22,416</td>
<td>26,762</td>
<td>33,369</td>
<td>38,456</td>
<td>37,505</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These counties did not fill up so completely as some of the southern sections largely because of the retarding influence of the forests.

Brown and Outagamie Counties with the more valuable agricultural lowland and the advantages of urban sites along the Lower Fox River received the major portion of the settlers in the northeastern part of Wisconsin. Brown County increased from 11,795 in 1860 to 34,078 in 1880, and in the same period the number in Outagamie County in-
creased from 9,587 to 28,716, and because of the advantages
in this lowland, continued their growth after 1880.

Marinette and Oconto Counties were still in the pioneer
stage of their settlement in 1880. This is the only section
of sedimentary Wisconsin that was not completely settled
by agriculturalists by 1870. There is no doubt that the
pine forest operated as a deterrent to agricultural settle-
ment. One writer describes the pine lands as follows:

There is comparatively very little farming done in the lumber re-
gion. The country is rugged; there are few roads; and to man in
search of a home it looks like the work of a lifetime to acquire a foot-
hold there. There are fairer fields; there are softer climates; there
are roads and school-houses, and more social advancement, farther
southward. So he turns away; and so we go on, year after year,
heaving down our wealth of timber and carrying it off to keep up the
prosperity of other states.88

The Settlement of Northern Wisconsin. That part of
Wisconsin, which lies north of the northern boundary of
Clark, Marathon, and Shawano Counties, was only sparsely
settled prior to 1880. In 1850 approximately 500 pioneers
had ventured into this region; in 1870 there were still less
than 2,000; but by 1880 the number was approaching the
10,000 mark. Before 1880, that part of Wisconsin under-
lain by the ancient crystalline and associated rocks had not
participated in the active settlement of Wisconsin. Only a
scant 10,000 were in the region in 1880, but ten years later
the population was over 85,000, so the settlement of that
section of Wisconsin north of the latitude of the northern
boundary of Marathon County belongs to a later period
than the interval required for the agricultural occupation of
the crescent-shaped area north of the Lower Wisconsin and
Fox Rivers.

A small segment of the crystalline area embraced in
Clark, Marathon, Portage, Waupaca and Wood Counties
was settled before 1880, and from the standpoint of time of
settlement belongs with the regions to the south rather than
the more northern highland wilderness.

88 Charles D. Robinson. The Lumber Trade of Green Bay. Trans. Wis.
Population Changes in Older Wisconsin. Behind the frontier there was an intensification that tended toward filling the vacant spaces. The three counties in the lead region increased very slowly from 1850 to 1870 when there began a decrease in population. From 1870 to 1880 Grant County decreased 127, Iowa 916, and La Fayette 1,880, an aggregate decrease of 2,423 people. Lead, and after 1865 zinc, had attracted into the region more people than the mineral and agricultural resources could support, and emigration became a necessary population readjustment.

In southeastern Wisconsin the decade of the fifties was a period of active settlement. Several counties, particularly those nearer the frontier, doubled in population. Dane County increased from 16,639 in 1850 to 43,922 in 1860; Dodge went from 19,138 to 42,818; Fond du Lac from 14,510 to 34,154; Manitowoc from 3,702 to 22,416; Winnebago from 10,167 to 23,770; and Milwaukee from 31,077 to 62,518. In the decade of the fifties, older Wisconsin, or that section south of the Lower Wisconsin and Fox Rivers, received two-thirds of the people who contributed to the population increase. Not a single county showed a decrease.

Between 1860 and 1870 the increase continued, but the section had less than half of the increase for the state. The three counties of Kenosha, Ozaukee, and Walworth showed a decrease in population. In the ten year interval from 1870 to 1880 the increase in population in the state was 260,827 and older Wisconsin accounted for less than a quarter of the total gain. It is obvious that the cutting edge of the frontier was the site of the greatest increments to the total population.

Population Growth and Readjustments 1880–1920

The history of the settlement of Wisconsin prior to 1890 is a narrative of human conquest of unoccupied lands. But toward the end of the last century the new lands of Wisconsin had been so reduced in area that the frontier was practically gone except in the more remote sections to the north. In the United States Census for 1890 it is recorded that the “Lumbering and mining interests have practically obliterated the wilderness of Michigan and have reduced that of
Wisconsin to less than one-half of its former area." This decrease in the wilderness was accompanied by a reciprocal increase in land in farms contingent upon the northward movement of the agricultural population. The retarding influence of the unfavorable geographical conditions was being overcome, and the desire for new agricultural land was

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* U. S. Census. Population, 1890, p. XXVIII.
opening the north to settlement. "The census of 1890, which notes the passing of the frontier, establishes a convenient base from which to compute the pressure of that land short-

Fig. 14. Cartogram showing the general distribution of improved land in 1920.

age which gradually brought the vast and fertile areas of northern Wisconsin into requisition for general farming."\(^{40}\)

The distribution of land in farms is closely related to the distribution of the rural population. (Figs. 12 and 13).

\(^{40}\) Joseph Schafer. *A History of Agriculture in Wisconsin*, p. 139.
The amount of improved land, and the proportion of the land in farms that has been improved, are also closely related to the number and distribution of the rural inhabitants. (Fig. 14). The maps showing the land in farms and the improved land illustrate graphically the value of the land for human occupancy.

Population Growth in Wisconsin. The settlement of Wisconsin began about 1820, at a time when Pennsylvanina, one of the old states, already had a population of over a million. It required fifty years, from 1820 to 1870, for Wisconsin to reach the first million, and thirty years to add the second, and probably the number will reach three million by 1930.\(^4\)

### Population Growth in Wisconsin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>30,945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>305,391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>775,881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>1,054,670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>1,315,497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>1,693,380</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the decade of the fifties the number added to the population of Wisconsin was 470,490, a total greater than any other ten year period in the history of the state. In the decade of the sixties only 278,789 were added, and in the seventies the declining rate of increase added but 260,827. Between 1880 and 1890 the stream of immigration contributed large numbers to Wisconsin’s population, for the increase was 377,838. This was maintained in the nineties for an increase of 375,712. The two decades of the twentieth century added respectively 264,818 and 298,207 to the population. (Fig. 15).

The continued growth of population has been maintained, not only by an excess of births over deaths, but by a continued immigration from foreign countries and from the older states. In 1920 the native born Americans numbered 2,171,582 out of the total 2,632,067 people.

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\(^4\) Estimates by the U. S. Census Bureau for July 1 of the respective years.
The westward movement that brought so many people from the northeastern quarter of the United States waned somewhat with the passing of the new lands in Wisconsin, but did not become extinct. The migration along the parallels had gained a momentum that continued in spite of the counter current that contributed so materially to the growth of cities.

![Map of Wisconsin with counties showing a decrease in population between 1910 and 1920.](Image)

**Fig. 15.** Seventeen counties showed a decrease in population between 1910 and 1920. (Courtesy of the Geographical Review published by the American Geographical Society of New York).

The movement of native Americans to Wisconsin has been offset by emigration in recent years. There were living in the United States in 1920 a total of 2,460,101 Wisconsin-born people, of which 1,852,574 were still living in the state. Over 600,000 Wisconsin natives had left the state, but the loss was offset by a number, almost twice as great, that had come to Wisconsin from other states. Emigration from Wisconsin has been to the adjacent states where there is always a mutual exchange of peoples, to the older northeastern states that contributed such a large number to the early stock, and to the new western states. The exodus to the western states began about 1850 when the California gold rush stimulated the trans-Rocky Mountain ‘trek’ to the Pacific states. Wisconsin then had much unoccupied good land, and emigration did not take many
people from the state. The passing of the easily cleared and prairie lands about 1880, and the availability of new government lands in the west caused the emigration to the trans-Mississippi states. This large number of emigrants is indicative of the passing of the frontier in Wisconsin.

Population Decrease. Population growth in Wisconsin has been attended by a readjustment in distribution that reflects the influence of geographic and economic conditions. Between 1880 and 1890 six counties showed a decrease. These were Fond du Lac, Grant, Iowa, LaFayette, Ozaukee, and Washington, all in the section that could be called older Wisconsin where a shift in population was a normal readjustment, and in certain sections the decrease was only temporary. In the last decade of the century practically every county showed an increase, only Fond du Lac continued to decline.

Between 1900 and 1910 nineteen counties declined in population, and most of these were located in western Wisconsin, which was settled between 1850 and 1890. Now a wave of emigration was carrying away the people.

The oldest part of Wisconsin was the first to be affected by emigration. Green County had its maximum population in 1870 when there were 23,611 people in the county. The maximum population for Iowa County was recorded in 1870. Similar conditions existed in LaFayette County. Emigration from the lead region set in about 1870, a few years earlier than in most parts of older Wisconsin.

In the decade from 1910 to 1920 the population of Wisconsin increased 12.8 per cent, but seventeen counties recorded decreases. This continued increase in population with the shifts from the rural to the urban communities is indicative of important readjustments in the social order. (Fig. 16).

The two sections of Wisconsin that have suffered most in the withdrawal of people are the Western Upland and the Central Lowland. Under the economic conditions then prevailing, the excess of births over deaths and continued immigration produced a pressure of population upon a land unsuited to continued economic development. As a result an emigration movement set in about 1900—locally even
earlier—and has removed many people from the farms and smaller villages. The new farm lands in the west and the greater opportunities in the larger urban centers have absorbed the emigrants.

Counties such as Walworth, Ozaukee, and Kewaunee, within the industrial shadow of Milwaukee and other large cities, have experienced a decline in population. In Ozaukee County even the city of Port Washington decreased from 3,792 in 1910 to 3,010 in 1920.

![Map showing population decrease](image)

**Fig. 16.** Twenty-eight counties showed a decrease in rural population between 1910 and 1920. (Courtesy of the Geographical Review published by the American Geographical Society of New York).

The only county in northern Wisconsin to show a decrease was Vilas, which declined from 6,019 in 1910 to 5,649 in 1920. The very small population was materially reduced by the removal of the transient lumbermen with the passing of the pinery. In general, northern Wisconsin has been increasing in population since the first pioneers threaded their way through the forests. The decline of the lumber industry did not seriously affect the total population, for the farmers followed close upon the lumbermen. However, in Vilas County the high percentage of sand and swamp land has retarded the agricultural occupancy of the land.

**Urbanization in Wisconsin.** In Wisconsin as in many other states there has been a tendency toward urbanization
of the population. In 1890 two thirds, or 66.8 per cent, of
the people were rural and 33.2 urban, a condition differing
only slightly from the average for the whole country; at
that time the people of the United States were classified as
64.6 per cent rural and 35.4 urban. Ten years later, at the
beginning of the twentieth century, the average for the
country was 60.0 per cent rural, and 40.0 per cent urban.
Similarly Wisconsin showed an increase in the proportion
of urban population; the rural inhabitants made up 61.8 per
cent and the urban 38.2 per cent. Wisconsin has lagged a
little behind the United States in the movement of the peo-
ple to the cities. In the nation 54.2 per cent were rural
and 45.8 per cent urban in 1910, but in Wisconsin 57.0 per
cent remained rural and 43.0 per cent urban. The census
of 1920 indicates that industrial development continued to
draw the people away from the rural communities to the
urban centers.

This change in the division of the population does not
mean that the rural population decreased. As a matter of
fact the rural population of Wisconsin has steadily in-
creased.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>1,131,044</td>
<td>562,286</td>
<td>1,693,330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>1,278,829</td>
<td>790,213</td>
<td>2,069,042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>1,329,640</td>
<td>1,004,320</td>
<td>2,333,960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>1,387,499</td>
<td>1,244,568</td>
<td>2,632,067</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because of the nature of the physical habitat, Wisconsin
combines within its borders an older settled section with a
frontier area in such a way that the population changes in
the state approximate those of the nation. Concomitant
with the expansion of agriculture in the north there has
been a decrease in the rural population in the older sections.
However, the net result of this change has been an increase
in the rural population. From 1900 to 1920 the number of
rural inhabitants increased at the rate of 5,000 per year.
In the same two decades the urban population increased
from 790,213 to 1,244,568 or a rate of over 21,000 per an-
num for the first decade and over 24,000 per annum for the
latter.

The city of Milwaukee had, in 1920, 17.4 per cent of the
population of the state, and if the metropolitan district beyond the city limits is included the proportion is increased to 20 per cent. (Fig. 17).

The nine cities that had over 25,000 each contained almost 29 per cent of the population. According to the classification by the 1920 census there were a total of 82 urban centers in the state, having an aggregate population of 1,244,568 or 47.3 per cent of the total. In addition there were 271,900 people living in the 375 incorporated cities and villages having less than 2,500. These are classed as

![Graph](image)

**Fig. 17.** The growth of population in Wisconsin has been steady in spite of sectional decreases. (Courtesy of the Geographical Review published by the American Geographical Society of New York).

rural by the Census Bureau, but they constitute 10.3 per cent of the population and when added to the 47.3 per cent swell the total to 57.6 per cent. These may be considered as strictly urban, reducing the rural element to only 42.2 per cent of the total population of the state.

The accompanying dot maps show graphically the distribution of the principal cities and villages. Lake Michigan has been of major importance in concentrating the population.

On the western boundary of Wisconsin is another waterway, once regarded as an important traffic route; but the usefulness of the Mississippi River to Wisconsin makes a poor showing when compared with the Great Lakes. Ten manufacturing cities have grown up along
the shore of Lake Michigan (including Green Bay) but only two on
the Mississippi River . . .\(^{43}\)

The five largest cities are Milwaukee, Racine, Kenosha, Sheboygan and Manitowoc. From the time of the settlement of eastern Wisconsin down to the present the lake shore cities have attracted a high percentage of the population. The advantages of water transportation caused the selection of urban sites along the lake. Later when the railroads came competing for the traffic, which had been almost exclusively handled by lake carriers, the growth of cities was in no way retarded. "These lake ports were the termini from which the early railroads pushed their way into the back country; consequently, they became the gateways through which the products of farm and forests proceeded to market . . . .\(^{44}\)

The Fox-Winnebago Valley is second only to the Lake Michigan shore as a contributing factor in the growth of urban communities. From the time of Nicolet's visit in 1634 down to the present the Fox River Valley has been an important highway. The easy portage between the headwaters of the Fox and the Wisconsin made the Fox River one of the principal routes followed into the interior of Wisconsin during the French and English régimes. Hardly had the agricultural settlers entered the valley before there came a demand for an improved waterway to give them the full advantages of the river which nature had not made entirely navigable. The river was improved only to meet the competition of the railroads, and its usefulness as an artery of commerce declined. However, the nuclei of the present cities had been formed and other advantages within the valley contributed to urban development. The availability of water power along the Lower Fox has been of major importance in the growth of several cities. Green Bay is—and always has been—a commercial city, and owes its growth and importance to its strategic situation near the head of the bay bearing the same name. Many other cities as De Pere, Wrightstown, Kaukauna, Kimberly, Appleton,


\(^{44}\) Ibid p. 32.
Menasha and Neenah, are located on water power sites. Oshkosh on the western shore of Lake Winnebago is located at the point where the Upper Fox River enters the lake. This is a favorable location, for during the high tide of the lumber industry Oshkosh became the center of the industry that flourished along the Upper Fox and Wolfe Rivers.

Fond du Lac at the southern end of Lake Winnebago enjoys the advantage of a site favorable to commercial development.

In the lumbering days Fond du Lac derived a large advantage from the water transportation afforded by the lake. While its recent growth has but little connection with lake transportation, yet the lake is the main natural factor, though an indirect one, in the city’s development. This comes about through the influence which the lake exerts upon the railway routes. The steep bluff of limestone along the eastern shore of the lake renders that side less suited to the growth of towns, and hence less attractive to railroads, and so the north-and-south railways follow the west side of the lake. Lake Winnebago is a barrier to east-and-west lines, and any such lines must bend north or south around the lake. This causes Fond du Lac to be something of a converging point for railway lines...

In 1920 the eight cities along the Fox-Winnebago Lowland having more than 5,000 people, had a population of 132,668, or almost five and a half per cent of the total for the state.

In southern Wisconsin along the Rock and Yahara River Valley have grown up several important, though smaller, cities of Wisconsin. Madison, the capital is the largest. The others are Janesville, Beloit, Watertown, Fort Atkinson, Jefferson, Edgerton, and Stoughton.

Along the Wisconsin River a chain of cities reflects the usefulness of the river as a means of transportation and as a source of power in the lumbering and wood using industries. Northward from Portage, in order, are Wisconsin Rapids, Stevens Point, Wausau, Merrill, Tomahawk and Rhinelander.

The Chippewa with its two important cities of Eau Claire and Chippewa Falls reflects on a smaller scale the same history of urbanization as occurred along the Wisconsin River.

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La Crosse is the only city of any size on the Mississippi River, although Prairie du Chien is an older, but smaller city, that owes its early importance to the advantage of a strategic position at the junction of the Wisconsin with the Mississippi River. The Black River, like the Chippewa and Wisconsin, drains the northern pinery, and La Crosse at its mouth flourished during the lumbering period. Its position on the Mississippi is at a point where the east-west lines of transportation, after crossing the Western Upland, reach the city by following the La Crosse River Valley.

Only two cities of any size have grown up on the Wisconsin shore of Lake Superior. These are Superior and Ashland which had in 1920 a population of 39,671 and 11,334 respectively. Superior had 40,384 in 1910, a slight decrease from the previous enumeration. Ashland decreased from 13,074 in 1900 to 11,594 in 1910, and a further decrease brought the total down to 11,334 in 1920. These two cities not only serve a local community, but the more extensive hinterland which has been the most important factor in their growth. The passing of the lumber industry has produced a slight and temporary decrease in the population, but continued agricultural expansion in northern Wisconsin will furnish a new basis for a revival in growth.

In addition to the lake shore and river sites which have been so important in the localization of the major urban communities, there are numerous situations which are ideal for smaller cities, which serve as collecting and distributing centers each for a local community. Many of these smaller cities as originally planned were expected to grow into large cities. In pioneer days these sites were purchased by speculators and held for prices above the government figure. Many of these so called ‘paper towns’ have become the villages and the smaller cities, except in the cases where the sites have proved to be favorable to continued population growth. The dot maps present a vivid picture of these smaller urban communities.

One important result of the urbanization in Wisconsin is shown by the movement of the center or population southward and eastward after 1900. (Fig. 18). For each of the last five census enumerations the center of popula-
tion has been in Marquette County. From 1880 to 1900 it moved almost directly northward, but only half as far in the nineties as in the eighties. Settlement along the frontier had slowed down by 1890. From 1900 to 1910 the center moved eastward and slightly southward. This indicates clearly that the intensified urban growth more than balanced the northward movement. In the next decade from 1910 to 1920 the movement was slightly southeastward, illustrating Wisconsin's trend toward an industrial state.

![Diagram](image)

**Fig. 18.** A map showing the movement of the center of population since 1880. Note the eastward and southward movement since 1900. (After the Statistical Atlas of the United States, 1924).

**Regional Readjustments**

Population distribution in Wisconsin can be effectively studied by dividing the state into regions, each of which has rather uniform environmental conditions over the entire area, or because its history deserves especial examination. (Fig. 19).

The federal census classifies all cities and villages under 2500 as rural, but in this regional study the people have been separated on the basis of the incorporation of cities and villages. All people living in incorporated districts are classed as urban, and the remainder as rural. This division, while still more or less arbitrary, separates more ex-
actly the agricultural inhabitants from those who derive their livelihood from other occupations. It is true that the small incorporated villages have within their limits many people who are strictly agricultural. Similarly, there are

unincorporated hamlets with many people engaged in occupations not directly concerned with farming. These two cases mutually offset each other and probably balance any apparent inaccuracy.
The dot maps were constructed from data as reported in the United States Census, and all people living in cities and villages having a population less than 200 have been shown as rural. But there are many hamlets and larger towns having a population of more than 200—a few over 1000—which, if shown as rural, would give an inaccurate picture. Other sources have been consulted, such as local histories, Polk's gazetteers, and particularly the many annotated maps in the collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. In the newer parts of northern Wisconsin the lumbering towns grew so rapidly that they attained a size much larger than many of the incorporated villages of older Wisconsin, yet they remained unincorporated, perhaps awaiting the time when the lumbering industry would remove many of the people to newer towns in the virgin forest.

The Lead Mining Region. The early settled lead mining region of Wisconsin experienced the population readjustments characteristic of mining areas. A general increase continued up until 1870 when the maximum number of inhabitants was recorded. Between 1890 and 1900 there was a slight increase from 79,033 to 82,954 for the three counties of Grant, Iowa and La Fayette. After 1900 a decrease brought the total down to 80,550 in 1920. If the number living in cities and villages is deducted from the totals as reported by the census the decrease in the rural people is more marked. In 1890 there were in these three counties 18,534 who lived in incorporated cities and villages, and the remaining 60,499 lived in the rural districts. The subsequent decennial enumerations for 1900, 1910 and 1920 reported respectively 27,685, 28,022, and 30,705 living in cities and villages. Corresponding to this increase there was a reciprocal decrease in the rural peoples. In 1900 the rural population was 55,269; by 1910 the number declined to 53,557 and in 1920 to 49,845. Part of the increase in the urban and the corresponding decrease in the rural population was due to the incorporation of six villages having a total of 1928 people. The density of the rural population in this section was only 19.2 persons per square mile in 1920 and the Agricultural Census of 1925, while not exactly comparable, indicates a further decrease to 15.5 per square mile.
The old lead mining section of Wisconsin was once the goal of many pioneers, but a century has wrought changes of far reaching importance. Like the rest of western Wisconsin the land is no longer attractive to homeseekers and a decrease in rural people is the important change to be noted. The land is only slightly less valuable than it was a hundred years ago. General farming with dairying as the specialized accompaniment has maintained the productivity of the soil. In the century that has elapsed since the first settlers penetrated the region in search of lead, the land has been continually improved. But the changing economic conditions of the country, and the use of improved labor saving farm machinery, have made it possible for fewer farmers to do the farming and at the same time increase production.

_South Central Wisconsin._ The counties drained by the Rock River, and adjacent sections may be called South Central Wisconsin. It is the Rock River Valley that unifies the region, though Green, Walworth and Columbia Counties are on the periphery of the area. These may be considered as transitional regions. Columbia County for example has a sandy portion along the Wisconsin River that makes it resemble very much the Central Plain, but the eastern part is more densely populated and the section is capable of supporting a larger population than the western part. Similarly Green County reflects a condition more like the three lead mining counties but Green County has never been a producer of lead. It is not only midway between the old lead mining country and the Rock River Valley but it is transitional in population conditions. Walworth, between the lake shore counties and Rock River Valley has suffered an isolation that is comparable to the handicap imposed upon Green and Columbia Counties. These three counties have shown very little growth in population since 1890. In fact Green County showed a steady decrease in total population. Dodge and Jefferson with a location similar to that of Walworth showed increases of less than the average for the state.

Dane and Rock Counties which include the three largest urban centers in south central Wisconsin have shown the greatest growth in the three decades under discussion.
Madison, the state capital, and Beloit and Janesville, industrial cities on the Rock River have absorbed the major portion of the increase in population of the two counties since 1900. Between 1900 and 1920 the total population of the seven counties increased from 285,157 to 321,709, a gain of 36,552. The aggregate population of Beloit, Janesville and Madison increased from 42,785 to 77,955 in the same period, a gain of 35,170 or 1382 less than the total increase for the entire area.

The result of this urbanization has been a gain in population greater than the average rate of increase for the entire state between 1910 and 1920. After 1900 there has been an exodus from the farms that has reduced the strictly rural population from 166,174 to 140,102 in 1920. The land has ceased to be of fundamental importance in the growth of population.

The Lake Shore Region. The lake shore counties extend from the Illinois boundary to Door Peninsula, a distance of more than 200 miles. Washington and Waukesha Counties are included although they do not touch the lake. Because of the latitudinal extent of the region it may be subdivided into a northern and a southern section, but the place of division is more or less arbitrary.

Door and Kewaunee Counties to the north are agricultural and contain no large urban centers. Sturgeon Bay, in Door County, is the largest city and in 1920 had a population of 4553. The configuration of the peninsula limits the commercial hinterland to the extent that this eastern projection of Wisconsin has been passed-by. Farther south Manitowoc and Sheboygan Counties, because of a more favorable physical landscape and better commercial opportunities, have a much larger population. Sheboygan illustrates the growth in population, for the number in 1890 was 42,489, in 1900 it had increased to 50,345, in 1910 to 54,888 and in 1920 the total was 59,913. In contrast the last four decennial enumerations have recorded for Kewaunee successively 1890—16,153, 1900—17,212, 1910—16,784, and 1920—16,091. Kewaunee is one of the fifteen counties that showed a net decrease from 1900 to 1920, and one of the seventeen recording a decrease from 1910 to 1920.

The southern lake shore counties showed a remarkable
growth from 1890 to 1920 increasing from 358,914 to 754,354. The large total and the marked growth are due to the urbanization that has concentrated so many people in the three cities of Milwaukee, Racine and Kenosha. The growth of these cities has caused the removal of rural people from some of the adjacent counties. Ozaukee increased slowly from 1890 to 1910 but in the decade from 1910 to 1920 a decrease reduced the total below the number for 1900.

Washington and Waukesha Counties because of their inland location did not grow so rapidly as the three southern lake shore counties, but their proximity to Milwaukee is an advantage and not a handicap. This German settled section with its small farms averaging less than 100 acres has the densest rural population in the state. Urbanization has produced a decrease in the rural inhabitants, but in 1920 Washington had 41.3 persons per square mile, and Waukesha had 48.7.

Milwaukee, the smallest of the counties had the largest population in 1920. The city of Milwaukee, the metropolis of the state had in 1920 a population of 457,147, over 17 per cent of the total population of the state. If the metropolitan district is included the proportion becomes 20 per cent.

Both Racine and Kenosha Counties, like Milwaukee, have an important urban population. The city of Kenosha increased from 6,532 in 1890 to 11,606 in 1900, to 21,371 in 1910, and to 40,472 in 1920. Racine the second largest city has had a similar growth, reaching a total of 58,593 in 1920.

All of this lake shore section except the northern peninsula has maintained a large rural population. The geographical conditions are favorable to a dense agricultural population, but there can be no doubt that a social factor is of some importance, for many of the German immigrants purchased small farms from 40 to 80 acres, and from the beginning of settlement this section has been very densely peopled. (Fig. 20).

The Fox–Winnebago Basin. The six counties included in the Fox–Winnebago Basin constitute a convenient unit. Whitbeck included only Brown, Outagamie, Winnebago and Fond du Lac in his Geography of the Fox–Winnebago Val-
ley, but Green Lake and Calumet are included in this area because of their proximity and the difficulties involved by including them respectively in the Central Plain or the Lake Shore provinces.

These six counties showed a consistent gain in population from 1890 down to 1920, increasing from 203,841 to 269,121 a gain of 55,280, or over 1800 per annum. At the beginning of the period the rural exceeded the urban population, but by 1920 the urban inhabitants had been increased to almost two-thirds of the total. In 1920 the eight principal cities had almost half of the population.

Accompanying the urbanization there has been a reciprocal decrease not only in the proportion of rural population, but in the aggregate. From 1890 to 1920 this section has lost approximately 360 persons per annum from the farms. Like all of older Wisconsin, the passing of the frontier has brought in its wake a depopulating of the older agricultural sections. Still the average density of the rural population remains over 30 per square mile, less than in Washington.

Fig. 20. The small farms of less than 100 acres are found along the German-settled Lake Shore counties and along the frontier in northern Wisconsin. (Courtesy of the Geographical Review published by the American Geographical Society of New York.)

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County and greater than in the more rugged Western Upland.

The Central Plain. The seven counties of Adams, Juneau, Marquette, Portage, Waupaca, Waushara and Wood are not entirely within the sandy Central Plain; Adams, Marquette and Waushara belong to the sand country and may be chosen to illustrate the influence of the land conditions upon density of population. Since 1900 the population of the seven counties has increased slowly, reaching a total of 168,143 in 1920 or about 32 persons per square mile, or only 20 rural inhabitants per square mile. The total area of these seven counties is almost 5000 square miles. The reduction in rural population was at the rate of 400 per year for the two decades after 1900, which means that each year every 12 square miles of area lost one rural inhabitant.

A comparison between Adams and Waushara illustrates the influence of glaciation on the habitat. Adams County is in the Driftless Area and Waushara in the glaciated region. In 1920 the population of Adams County was 9,287 or 13.6 persons per square mile. If the people living in the three incorporated villages are deducted the density was only 11.3 per square mile. Waushara,—like Adams in all essentials except that it was glaciated,—had in 1920 a population of 16,712 or 25.9 persons per square mile, or if only the strictly rural population is considered the density was almost 20 per square mile. It is a significant conclusion that the Central Plain was benefitted by glaciation. Every square mile of the glaciated plain supported at least one more family than did the driftless portion of the plain.

Western Wisconsin. The fourteen counties of western Wisconsin north of the Lower Wisconsin River showed an almost static condition of the total population after 1900. From 1890 to 1900 the population increased from 307,313 to 341,984, a gain of 11 per cent as compared with the 22.2 per cent for the state. Between 1900 and 1910 there was a slight decrease, but by 1920 an increase brought the aggregate up to 347,274, the maximum attained in any enumeration.

An examination of the cities and villages reveals quite a different condition. In 1890 the urban population numbered 93,867, almost a third of the total. The steady increase in
the urban population has materially reduced the rural element. In 1920 the urban element made up 41 per cent of the total. This change is due not only to urbanization characteristic of older Wisconsin, but emigration has played an important part, particularly between 1900 and 1910.

Vernon County represents a fair cross section of the rugged and unglaciated portion of the Western Upland. The region is maturely dissected, but there are preserved upon the upland broad areas that were originally prairie. The slopes are too steep for utilization other than for pasture and woodland. From 1890 to 1920 the increase in the total population was only 4,141. In the same period the incorporated cities and villages grew from 2007 to 7614, a gain of 5607; the increase in the urban group not only absorbed the total gain of the county in the thirty years but effected a decrease in the rural population. The emigration from the farms averaged almost 49 people per year for the 30 year period from 1890 to 1920.

In Vernon County as in most of the Western Upland the momentum of settlement imposed upon the land too many people who looked to it as a source of livelihood. The decline in the rural population is a normal readjustment, and a continued decrease would help to relieve the agricultural situation.

Northern Wisconsin. The newer northern part of Wisconsin contained after 1880 much land that was still to witness the coming of the agricultural pioneers. The lumbering industry was at the height of its activity preparing the way for the farmers who were cautiously penetrating the wilderness and taking up the new lands.

The sixteen modern counties constitute a frontier section of the state where the growth of population repeats the conditions of a half century ago when southern Wisconsin was on the frontier. The growth in population is accounted for by an increase in both the rural and urban elements, with the rural increase exceeding the urban.

Adjacent to these sixteen counties of northern Wisconsin are eight others that occupy a crescent shaped area near the southern boundary of the Northern Highland. The total area of these eight counties is somewhat smaller than
the more northern counties but the population conditions are strikingly different. In 1880 the northern counties had only 11,710 people as compared with the 89,517 in the border counties. At the subsequent decennial enumerations the border counties failed to maintain this large margin in population. By 1900 the border counties had a total of 222,790 and the northern counties 161,698, and two decades later (1920) the border counties had 293,452 and the northern, 260,743. The two areas showed a growth of both rural and urban population. Ashland and Superior, the two largest cities in northern Wisconsin and serving a larger hinterland than the adjacent tributary area, made up a large proportion of the population. These two lake shore cities contained half of the urban population in 1890.

The census enumerations for 1900, 1910 and 1920 show that both the urban and the rural populations grew steadily until there were 260,743 in the northern section in 1920. Of this number 113,117 were urban, with the combined population of Superior, 39,671, and Ashland, 11,334, making up almost half of the total, a condition that obtained 40 years previously. In 1900 the urban population in the border and the northern sections was approximately equal, but by 1920 the people living in incorporated cities and villages numbered 113,117 in the northern counties and 102,511 in the border counties. This leaves a larger rural population in the smaller border section where agricultural conditions are better.

The value of the cut-over land in northern Wisconsin has been frequently over-stated. The land companies are anxious to dispose of the land to settlers, and exaggeration of the real value has caused much hardship. However, there have been made more reliable statements that have served to make some of the settlers more cautious in the selection of land. In 1896 Henry\textsuperscript{47} estimated that one to one and a half million acres have swamp or humus soils and, therefore, unsuited to agriculture. Interspersed between the patches of wet and otherwise inferior land are extensive areas of valuable land which await the coming of far-

mers who are willing to devote a lifetime to the removal of the forest.

In recent years a more conservative estimate of the northern land deserves a wider circulation than it has received. Packer and Gunderson estimate that "forty per cent of our unoccupied cut-over land is unsuited to farming . . . ."48 One of the tragedies of agricultural settlement on the poor land is a realization after a few years of the futility of labor. A farmer and his family may have come hundreds of miles to a new home which has been described to them as offering advantages and opportunities approaching their greatest ambitions. When all of their resources are invested in the land they cannot afford to leave nor can they see a prosperous future. In a few years it becomes home to them. Though they remain poor struggling farmers, their sentimental attachment to the soil is too firm to be broken by changing economic conditions. They find consolation in the hope that increased land values will repay them in some measure for their years of toil.

In spite of the handicaps imposed by a more or less hostile environment the better farm lands of the northern part of the state have been brought under cultivation. Steadily the agricultural frontier encroaches upon the cut-over land, and the increase in improved land is most marked along the crescent margin of the northern highland, the area already referred to as the border counties. The settlement along the periphery of the northern section has been delayed because the Central Plain acted as a deterrent.

It has been said that if all the settlers who in the past 50 years have been sold land in the sandy central plain of Wisconsin and have failed in consequence had been taken a few counties farther north and sold some of the good silt loam lands, most of the good land in northern Wisconsin would now be in farms. In Wisconsin in particular the crescent-shaped . . . plain stretching all the way from Burnett County in the northwest to Marinette County in the northeast, and more than two counties wide in the center, has served as a very effective barrier against development north of it.49

The settlement of the more northern part of Wisconsin has been in progress for half a century. The agricultural expansion began about 1880 yet only about six per cent of the area yields harvested crops. “At this rate it would take over 750 years to complete the conquest of the northern woodland.” 50 It is obvious that the settlement of northern Wisconsin in recent years resembles only slightly the frenzied western migration that began the settlement of older Wisconsin a century ago.

CONCLUSION

In the settlement of Wisconsin there has developed a sectionalism in the distribution of the population which reflects the physical conditions of the landscape, the soil, the climate, as well as the social elements. The changes wrought in almost three centuries of history present a sequence of cultural stages. The type of people and the stage of their civilization determine the use that they will make of their regional habitat and the number that a given area may support. “... each mode of life has its own space requirements which are larger for the hunter or shepherd than for the agriculturist ...” 51

During the period of exploration, Wisconsin supported a few hundred whites and a few thousand aborigines who hunted, almost to extermination, the fur-bearing animals. The effects of the glacial climate of a past geological period persist into the present, creating an ideal habitat for the fur-bearing animals. For more than a century a few thousand people in a primitive stage of civilization lived in Wisconsin and won a livelihood from the fur industry. Only when the agriculturalists with their higher cultural aims came into possession of the land was the intrinsic value of the soil fully realized. Gradually the development of commerce, manufacturing and service occupations has produced readjustments in population distribution in keeping with the cultural progress of mankind.

Beneath the film of population unevenly spread across the regional landscape of Wisconsin the effects of soil, drainage, relief, and climate persist as the eternal economic bases of the relation of man to his habitat. But it must be remembered that man, because of his intelligence, can exercise judgment in his relations to his physical environment. He is not as specialized as the lower animals, "... for his mentality and communal co-operation are such that he alone of the animal kingdom can produce artificial harmony between himself and the environmental complex where disharmonies actually occur."52 Furthermore, social inheritances may impel man to act in certain ways while his neighbor, because of a different inheritance, behaves differently. In spite of the influence of social conditions "It is more than probable that soil and climate influence the distribution of men on the surface of the globe, and facilitate or hinder their concentration or dispersion. It is for demography to undertake the study of both that concentration and that dispersion."53 In Wisconsin the settlement and the distribution of the inhabitants reflect in a variety of ways the significance of the frontier and the persistence of the regional geography in the development of a population sectionalism.

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52 Raymond Swann Lull. The Ways of Life, p. 244.
53 Lucien Febvre. A Geographical Introduction to History, p. 34.