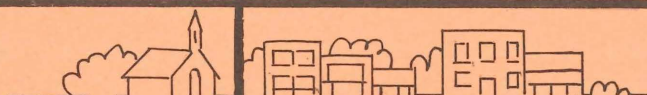
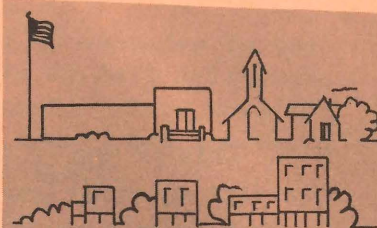


UA  
Cooperative Extension  
Service  
Impact

Iowa, Population

# THE IMPACT OF POPULATION CHANGE ON RURAL COMMUNITY LIFE



## THE CHURCH SYSTEM

Iowa State University of Science and Technology  
Cooperative Extension Service Soc. 8  
Ames, Iowa

In Cooperation with the  
North Central Region Sub-committee on Population (NC - 18)  
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## BACKGROUND

This is one of four publications dealing with the effects of population decline on rural Iowa counties. The publications are summaries of reports from a 6-year study in Greene County conducted by the Department of Economics and Sociology, Iowa State University.

The Greene County study was part of a larger study done under the auspices of the North Central Region Subcommittee on Population Research. The publications were prepared under the guidance of W. Bauder, J. Doerflinger, Wm. Kenkel and R. Klietsch and were based on the working papers of R. Wakely, A. Russel and C. Mulford.

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Like many Iowa counties, Greene County is predominantly rural. It has a high level of living but little manufacturing.

Over the years, technology has reduced the need for agricultural labor, and young families in particular have been leaving the farms. Since the county offers few major employment opportunities outside agriculture, the result has been net out-migration and population decline. Thus Greene County faces the need for adjusting community institutions and services to a declining population.

Greene County is typical of counties in Iowa and other cornbelt states that have experienced heavy out-migration, have low employment in manufacturing and have high farm operator level of living.

Of the 99 Iowa counties, 83.8 per cent in 1950 and 76.8 per cent in 1960 are characterized by high out-migration, high farm operator level of living and low manufacturing based on state averages. Most of these counties are located in the central and northern parts of the state.

Greene County farms generally concentrate on the cash grains and livestock, in that order. There is little dairy farming or poultry production.

The settlement of Greene County was slow until after the Civil War. Then population shot up, climaxing around 1900 with a total population of 17,820. During the next 10 years population dropped, but gradually gained again from 1910 to 1940. The current decline began about then as population fell from 15,544 in 1940 to 14,379 in 1960.

Jefferson, the county seat, was the only community in the county to gain population in the last 20 years. All other towns suffered losses.



## THE IMPACT OF POPULATION CHANGE ON RURAL COMMUNITY LIFE

### ...The Church System

Just as our religions work to shape our society, so are our religious institutions shaped by the society which supports them. One aim of the Greene County study, was to find out how churches were adapting to population decline.

The basic religious structure of the county was changed little by out-migration between 1950 and 1958, but a few trends were noted. Some are more directly attributable to out-migration than others.

Here is a summary of the study's major findings:

(1) Greene County experienced rapid turn-over of its church leadership. Of 19 ministers in three communities specifically studied, only two remained in 1958 who had been there in 1950.

(2) Cooperation among the county's ministers apparently increased during the study period. This was indicated by increased membership in the County Ministerial Association and the achievement of community-wide, church-sponsored activities.

(3) With the exception of churches in Jefferson, the county's churches made few capital improvements between 1950 and 1958.

(4) With one church for about every 100 families, Greene County had two to three times as many churches as suggested standards would indicate.

(5) Churches in areas of population loss were more or less passively accepting declining memberships, lower budgets and other effects of out-migration.

### County Religions

Judging from church membership, Greene County is highly religious. During the study, 97 percent of families claimed preference for a specific denomination.

In 1958 there were 42 churches in the county. Nineteen were in or near Jefferson, Grand Junction and Scranton. There were 15 churches in small rural towns, and the remaining 8 were in open country.

Most of the churches had been in existence for some time. Thirteen churches in the three communities were established in the 1800's. Only two were established since World War II.

Thirty-six of the 42 churches were Protestant; six were Catholic. In sum, Greene County in 1958 had a heavy concentration of Protestants, and a lower proportion of Catholics than the national average. Over 70 percent of church affiliated families belonged to one of five large Protestant bodies. In order of decreasing membership they were Methodist, Christian, Presbyterian, Baptist and Lutheran.

Table 1. Church Preference of Greene County Residents, 1958.

Denomination	Number of families
Protestant	
Methodist	1,553
Christian	593
Presbyterian	458
Baptist	271
Lutheran	229
Other	506
Catholic	580
Other than Catholic or Protestant	42
Total	4,338
No preference	122
Information refused	34
Total	4,494

### Membership Changes

Fundamental change in Greene County religious values might have shown up in gross membership changes. No such change occurred.



The kinds of churches remained relatively unchanged. Between 1950 and 1958 only one new church was established in the county. This was in Jefferson as a result of a schism in an existing church. No churches were closed during the same period.

Any consolidation which might have been caused by out-migration must have taken place before 1950.

Another way to measure modifications in church patterns is to note changes in individual membership. Since definitions of membership vary from church to church, changes recorded must be considered in this light.

There was an over-all church membership increase of about 20 percent in the three communities studied. This increase was not uniform, however, as Jefferson membership increased most, followed by Scranton, while Grand Junction had a slight decline. It is probable that membership in most of the rural community churches declined also.

Not all churches contributed equally to the membership increase. In Jefferson the Methodist, Lutheran and Baptist churches grew more than the 20 percent, while the Christian and Catholic churches grew less.

Many Jefferson ministers said that their increases were in youth memberships, and to a lesser extent in elderly persons. Many young adults could bring a net increase in membership, due to high birth rates from this group, even though out-migration took some families from the community. If increases in membership were mostly in persons under 18 years old, the increases may be only temporary in communities typified by out-migration.

Churches in Grand Junction and Scranton reported that half their members in 1958 were rural residents. There was no indication of how this changed since 1950, but since Greene County has heavy rural out-migration, churches with high rural membership can be expected to show membership decline.

### Leadership Changes

Although the number of churches was stable during the study, this does not mean there was stability in the religious personnel.

The 8 years of the study were marked by dramatic turn-over of ministers. This rapid change in church leadership was experienced by nearly all the churches in the three communities.

Table 2. Number of Churches and Church Memberships in Three Green County, Iowa, Communities, 1950-1958.

Denomination	Jefferson					Grand Junction					Scranton				
	Number of Churches		Membership			Number of Churches		Membership			Number of Churches		Membership		
	1958	1950	Families	In-dividuals	In-dividuals	1958	1950	Families	In-dividuals	In-dividuals	1958	1950	Families	In-dividuals	In-dividuals
Protestant															
Methodist	1	1	550	1100	898	1	1	175	455	502	1	1	200	512	460
Christian	1	1	345	638	571	--	--	---	---	---	1	1	90	220	145*
Presbyterian	1	1	100	250	250	1	1	115	180	170	--	--	---	---	---
Baptist	1	1	135	337	220	1	1	16	58	58	--	--	---	---	---
Lutheran	1	1	125	378	240	--	--	---	---	---	1	1	40	150	130*
Evangelical	1	0	5	18 <sup>a</sup>	10 <sup>a</sup>	--	--	---	---	---	--	--	---	---	---
Gospel	1	1	25	90	45	--	--	---	---	---	--	--	---	---	---
Church of God	1	1	30	66	50	--	--	---	---	---	--	--	---	---	---
Church of Christ	1	1	40*	150*	150*	--	--	---	---	---	--	--	---	---	---
Friends	--	--	---	---	---	--	--	---	---	---	1	1	30	68	105
Subtotal	9	8	1355	3009 <sup>a</sup>	2424 <sup>a</sup>	3	3	306	693	730	4	4	360	950	840
Catholic	1	1	250	850*	800	1	1	75	260	250	1	1	*	*	*
Total	10	9	1605	3859 <sup>a</sup>	3224 <sup>a</sup>	4	4	381	953	980	5	5	360	950	840

\* Information refused or estimates only available.

<sup>a</sup> Church established 1953, beginning and present membership indicated, not included in totals.



In 1950, five out of 17 ministers in the three towns had served more than 10 years. Another eight had served between 5 and 9 years. In 1958 only one of 17 ministers had served more than 10 years, and only three had served from 5 to 9 years.

The explanation for this turn-over was not immediately apparent. It is possible that the churches are serving as training centers for young men who will later move to larger congregations.

On the whole, ministers of the three communities were younger in 1958 than those in 1950. There was only one under 30 years old in 1950, compared to three in 1958. At the other extreme, there were five ministers over 60 in 1950, while there was none in 1958. Interestingly, there were no major changes during the period with regard to the professional training of the ministers.

There was some feeling in Jefferson that new, young ministers had given churches a necessary "shot in the arm." One of the new ministers blamed the difficulties of his church on an older predecessor. "The congregation had recreational and social needs in 1950," he said, "but the minister didn't see these needs as a role of the church, so our congregation turned to other community activities. Now that we define recreation and social activities as a church role, we can't get our congregation back."

Another change in church leadership noted during the study was increased cooperation among ministers. An indication of this was the larger membership of the County Ministerial Association.

Between 1950 and 1958, membership in the association increased from nine to 13. Since many of the ministers in the county serve more than one church, this meant that 26 of 42 churches were represented.

Various people interviewed said that the Ministerial Association had reduced religious friction. In recent years, the organization was successful in planning community services during Holy Week, and in Jefferson the association joined with the Chamber of Commerce in getting a week night set aside for "church night."

A final indication of change with respect to church leadership is the increase in the number of paid employees, other than ministers, between the years 1950 and 1958. In Jefferson, nine persons were employed, on a half-time basis, by the churches in 1950. By 1958, they were employing thirteen persons, only three of them on a half-time basis. The churches of Jefferson thus added the equivalent of seven full-time positions within the study period of eight years. The four Grand Junction churches showed no change in this respect, employing a total of five persons other than ministers in both years. In Scranton the four churches showed practically no change. Three persons were employed in 1950 on a full-time basis and one on a half-time basis; in 1958 four persons were employed on a full-time basis.

#### Changes in Church Activities

In larger urban churches, there is a national trend toward organizing more and more groups within the church and increasing involvement in "secular" matters.

Grand Junction and Scranton were well behind the national pace in this respect during the study. But Jefferson churches were assuming new roles in social and recreational activities which might create a religious climate attractive to larger congregations in the future.

#### Change in Facilities

Just as membership and leadership can influence a church's activities, so can its physical facilities. Additions and new buildings reflect the needs of the congregation or parish and the willingness of the people to meet the needs.

The general picture in Jefferson during the study was expansion and growth. The community spent at least a half a million dollars on new and improved church buildings.

The picture in other Greene County communities was less impressive. Expansion in Grand Junction and Scranton was only moderate.



Table 3. Change in Church Groups, Programs, and Activities in Three Communities of Greene County, Iowa, 1950 to 1958.

Church Groups, Programs, and Activities	Jefferson 1950-58			Grand Junction 1950-58			Scranton 1950-58		
	No. un- changed	No. dropped	No. added	No. un- changed	No. dropped	No. added	No. un- changed	No. dropped	No. added
Weekly Sunday morning services	10			4			4		
Weekly Sunday evening services	4						2		
One or more regular weekday services	5	1		1		1	4		
Adult Bible Study Group	7		1	1		3	2		1
Men's organization		2	3	1			1		
Women's organization	8			4			4		
Young People's organization	8		1	3		1	3	1	
Missionary Society	5		1	3			3		
Church choir	6			3		1	3		1
Vacation Bible School	9	1		4			4		
Representation in Local Federation of Church Women or similar Inter- denominational group	4		1	1			1		
Fellowships (family)			2				2		
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>25</b>		<b>6</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
Total number of groups existing									
1950		70		25			42		
1958		75		31			43		

Table 4. Church Facilities Available in Three Greene County, Iowa, Communities, 1950.

Facilities	Number of Churches Having Facilities					
	Jefferson 1958		Grand Junction 1950		Scranton 1958	
Total churches	10	9	4	4	5	5
Separate buildings or rooms for Sunday School	7	5	2	1	2	1
Separate building or rooms for recreation	5	4	3	2	3	2
Kitchen and eating facilities	8	6	4	4	4	4

The operating budgets of the churches of each community roughly followed membership trends. Jefferson churches spend most with Scranton and Grand Junction following respectively.

#### The Problems--The Changes

There were several indications of church problems in Greene County.

A total of 42 churches--or about one for every 100 families--suggested that the county was "over-churched." The "ideal

medium" for church membership is about 1,000 persons. This means that the county has between two and three times as many churches as necessary.

Of course, it is a value judgment to say that churches should consolidate. But in terms of healthy social organizations, it appeared that the continuation of small churches exacts a price. During the study, many small churches did not have a full-time minister and depended on the willingness of ministers from larger churches to perform services.

The smaller churches are also not able to perform the range of services and activities that are increasingly expected of churches today.

In sharp contrast to the smaller churches were the churches of Jefferson. In this sole growing area of the county there was growth, expansion and signs of vitality. Churches were offering many services and activities and seemed to be enlarging their offerings.

The remainder of the county has lost population. Here churches were marked by declining membership, lower budgets and lack



of improved facilities. They have not kept pace with the national trend toward increased church services, activities and special groups.

The difference between churches in Jefferson and the rest of the county seemed directly related to out-migration.

From outward appearance, it would seem that declining churches are rather passively accepting their fate. The study revealed no evidence of a clear recognition of the effects of population loss or of a positive adjustment program.

If people in areas of population loss desire to maintain their churches and are willing to stand financial and other costs involved, this, of course, is their right. But some dissatisfaction was observed in the study. Jefferson ministers reported that they were attracting young people of their denominations from the smaller churches.

This apparent dissatisfaction and general decline of church membership cannot continue indefinitely. Open country or other small churches may soon become too small to permit operation.

#### APPENDIX

##### A word about the larger study

The 1950-1960 decade was one of unprecedented population growth for the United States, but despite this growth about half of the nation's counties lost population during this period. Such tremendous population redistribution does not occur without far-reaching social and economic consequences.

This population movement and its social and economic consequences are the subject of a larger regional study of which the Greene County, Iowa, study forms but one part. The larger study was initiated by members of the North Central Technical Committee - Number 18 (NC - 18), which is composed of population analysts from the states of the North Central Region and Kentucky. The NC - 18 committee first charted the actual population changes for the region, and the results of this analysis may be found in the first two re-

gional publications cited in the bibliography.

The next step in the NC - 18 regional program was to initiate a series of field studies, on the county level, to determine the effects of population change upon the social institutions of the counties which had experienced various kinds and amounts of migration. The counties were selected on the basis of the direction and amount of net migration which had occurred in the 1940-1950 decade, the extent of industrialization (as measured by the per cent of the labor force employed in manufacturing), and the local condition of agriculture (as measured by farm operator level-of-living index). Research was initiated in counties selected according to the above criteria. The following three combinations were investigated:

- (1) High out-migration, low farm operator level of living, and low industrial development (Out-lo-lo): Aitkin County, Minnesota; Price County, Wisconsin; Ontonogan County, Michigan; and Marshall County, South Dakota.
- (2) High out-migration, high farm operator level of living, and low industrial development (Out-hi-lo): Greene County, Iowa.
- (3) High in-migration, high farm operator level of living, and high industrial development (In-hi-hi): Franklin County, Ohio, and Kenosha County, Wisconsin.

A regional report is being prepared which will summarize the results of the individual county studies.

The selected bibliography which follows is presented for the benefit of those who may wish to gain a better appreciation of the regional population situation and the results of varying degrees of migration upon counties with differing industrial and agricultural conditions. The final items of the bibliography are general references on the church and society.



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