

Population Trends in the Washita Basin

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The Washita River Basin is being used as the "guinea pig" for the Arkansas-White-Red River Basin Authority. As such it is being studied in detail in all of its various phases. However, since much of the proposed development depends upon its future population trends and totals, special emphasis has been given this factor. The projected population figures used in this paper have been determined after a detailed study of past population statistics and trends. Physical, historical and economic factors have also been taken into consideration. The method used to arrive at the projected population figures is the same as that used by the Bureau of Census for making population predictions. This method projects a low, medium and high figure. For this paper, however, only the medium figure will be used.

In 1910 the Washita Basin had a population of 178,223, or 8.9% of the state's total population. (Table I.) Between 1910-1920 the rate of

TABLE I
Per Cent of Oklahoma Population in Washita Basin

YEAR	OKLAHOMA TOTAL POPULATION	WASHITA BASIN TOTAL POPULATION	PERCENT IN WASHITA BASIN
1910	1,657,155	178,223	8.9
1920	2,028,283	189,643	8.9
1930	2,396,040	229,320	9.5
1940	2,336,434	207,902	8.9
1950	2,233,351	171,853	7.6
1960	2,296,000	161,868	7.0
1975	2,451,000	165,124	6.7

population increase in the basin was the same as that for the state as a whole. Again, in 1920, the basin contained 8.9% of the state's total population. In 1930 the basin attained its greatest population with a total of 229,320. During the 1920-1930 decade the basin gained more rapidly than the state as a whole, thus in 1930, it contained 9.5% of the total population of Oklahoma. During the 1910-1930 period the basin had a total gain of

51,097 persons. Very favorable climatic conditions for agriculture, the discovery of new oil fields, and general national prosperity account for most of the population growth.

The period from 1930-1950 is almost a direct contrast with the two previous decades. The state and the basin both lost population during the twenty-year period. The decline in the basin has been greater than that in the state as a whole. In 1940 it had again dropped to 8.9% of the total population of the state. By 1950 this had further decreased to 7.6%. During the 1930-1950 period the total loss was 57,461 persons, or 6,370 more than the gain during the 1910-1930 period. Many years with unfavorable climatic conditions for agriculture, the closing down and restricting of production in various oil fields, a depression period, and the movement of people to war production centers are the principal causes for the decline.

The projected population figures for 1960 indicate that the population of the Washita Basin will continue to decrease until 1960 even though the state as a whole shows a slight increase. By 1975 the total population of the basin should begin to increase slightly, but not as rapidly as that for the entire state. It is estimated that in 1975 the basin will contain only 6.7% of the state's total population. As projected, the population of the Washita Basin in 1975 will be 13,099 persons less than it was in 1910. Many factors, especially increased water supplies for agriculture and industrial useage, would make drastic revisions of these figures necessary.

The Washita Basin has followed the trend of the state and nation in the shift of population from rural to urban centers. (Table II.) The 1910 census classed 72% of the total population of the basin as rural, 28% as urban. Between 1910-1940 the shift was gradual, changing about 3% per decade. In 1940 approximately two-thirds of the total population of the basin was classed as rural, one-third as urban. During the 1940-50 period the shift was accelerated by war conditions. Thus, in 1950, the population was almost equally divided between farm and incorporated communities. In spite of population loss for the entire Washita Valley from 1930-1950 the total urban population gained.

TABLE II
Urban-Rural Population Distribution

YEAR	WASHITA BASIN		PER CENT		PERCENT	
	POPULATION	POPULATION	RURAL	POPULATION	URBAN	URBAN
1910	178,223	128,474	72	49,749	28	
1920	189,643	130,983	69	58,660	31	
1930	229,320	153,620	66	75,700	34	
1940	207,902	128,938	62	78,964	38	
1950	171,853	86,390	50.3	85,463	49.7	
1960	161,868	72,776	45	89,092	55	
1975	165,124	69,930	43	95,194	57	

The projected figures for 1960 to 1975 indicate that the rural population will continue to decrease, the urban to increase. By 1960 it is estimated that 55% of the total population of the basin will be living in incorporated communities, and that by 1975 approximately 95,000 of the basin's 165,000 projected population will be urban dwellers.

Although there has been a total gain in the number of persons living in urban areas, this does not mean that all urban areas have gained. In 1910 there were 37 incorporated places in the Washita Valley. By 1940 the number had increased to 46. Two more were formed between 1940-1950. Between 1930-1940 twenty-one incorporated communities recorded losses in population; twenty-five recorded gains. Between 1940-1950 only eighteen increased in population while thirty registered losses. Most of the

losses or gains during both decades were less than 25 per cent. Of the thirty incorporated communities of the Washita Basin having less than 1,000 people, twenty-seven lost population between 1940-1950. In 1950 eleven cities of the basin had populations of 2,000 or more. Only one of these, Sulphur, showed a loss between 1940 and 1950. The larger urban centers are gaining in population at the expense of the smaller incorporated communities as well as the rural areas.

The places making the greatest actual gains were the five largest cities in the Washita Basin—Ardmore, Chickasha, Clinton, Pauls Valley and Anadarko (Table III). In 1910 these centers had a total population of

TABLE III
Population of Largest Urban Centers

CITY	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1975
Anadarko	3,439	3,116	5,036	5,579	6,184	6,833	7,558
Ardmore	8,618	14,181	15,185	16,885	17,890	19,020	21,275
Chickasha	10,320	10,179	14,099	14,111	15,842	16,446	17,449
Clinton	2,781	2,596	7,512	6,736	7,555	7,573	7,634
Pauls Valley	2,689	3,694	4,235	5,104	6,896	8,161	10,499

27,847. In 1950 the population of the five cities was 54,367, or almost double the 1910 figure. Only two of these places, Ardmore and Pauls Valley, have had continuous gains. Chickasha, Clinton and Anadarko all lost population during the 1910-1920 period. Clinton also lost population in the 1930-1940 decade. The projected figures indicate, however, that all should make gains by 1960 and 1975. Ardmore and Pauls Valley should have the greatest rate of increase, Clinton the least. All should have populations greater than 7,500 by 1975.

Population decrease in the rural areas will probably continue. There are 130 different townships or parts of townships in the Washita Basin. Between 1930-1940 decreases in population occurred in 103 of the 130 townships. From 1940-1950 there were losses in 128 of the 130 rural areas. Fifteen townships lost over fifty per cent of their people between 1940-1950. The greatest numerical losses were in oil regions where the limits of the fields had been reached. Three townships have lost population continuously since 1910, four others since 1920, and 91 more since 1930.