

I - GROWTH OF THE CITY

(A) THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND

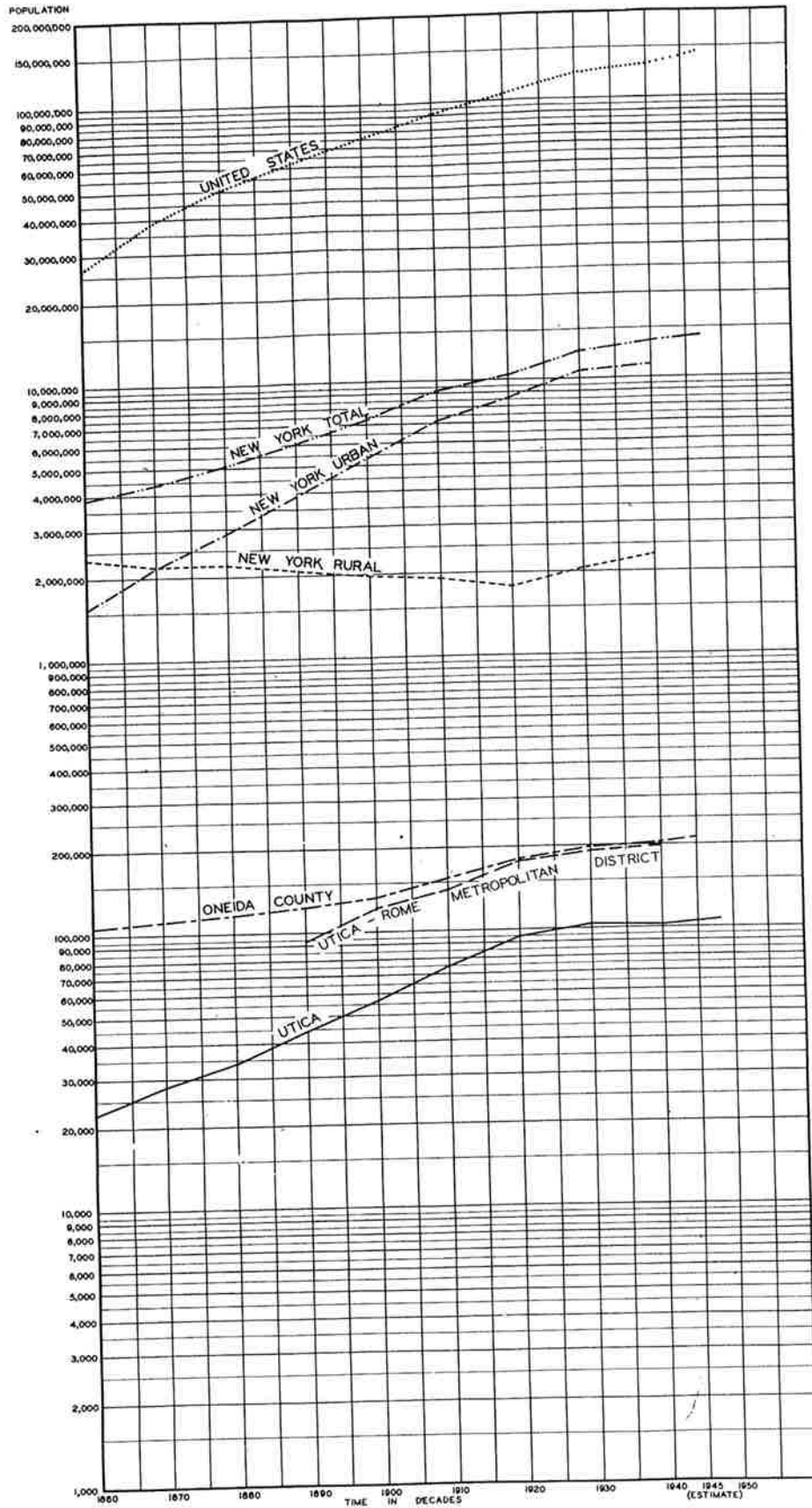
Communities, like people, have distinctive personalities and characteristics. The physical, economic and social forces which have moulded the growth and pattern of the City will exert strong influences upon its future development. It is important, therefore, that an inventory be made of those forces before undertaking to plan for the future.

The history of Utica has been greatly influenced by its location at the crossing of pioneer and modern transportation routes; by the natural physical advantages and handicaps of the site itself; and by the extent and nature of the resources which have contributed to the financial strength of the community.

The economic background of Utica reflects the use which has been made of waterways and valleys for development of transportation facilities; the use of water and power resources; and the advantageous geographical position of Utica near the center of the state and adjacent to a fertile agricultural area. The economic structure is also based upon the availability and skills of labor to operate the looms, molds and presses of the city's industries; and upon the extent and character of wholesale and retail trade outlets which distribute the goods of the area.

The social background of Utica is built upon the ethnic characteristics of the population, the trend of growth, the number and size of families and the age of the population. It is also built upon the quality of housing, for the condition, supply and production of homes vitally affect individual and community aims and potentialities. The character of the community is also closely related to its educational and recreational resources.

Three factors have combined to produce the present City of Utica, namely: transportation, trade and industry. The location of the City at the crossing of major land and water



POPULATION GROWTH
 UTICA, ONEIDA COUNTY
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CITY PLANNING BOARD
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SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS OF POPULATION

transportation routes provided the first stimulus for settlement. The break in transportation routes provided the opportunity for local and regional trade, the second stimulus. The demand for manufactured goods, and the availability of raw materials, fuel, labor, and markets provided the third stimulus. Expansion of manufacturing to produce goods for interstate commerce, not merely for the adjacent agricultural and inland needs, developed from determination of local business men a century ago to expand their industrial horizon. A quickening of business and a new spirit of enterprise permeated the City during several ensuing decades.

Physical characteristics of the site of the City have influenced the pattern of Utica. The City is built in the two-mile wide valley of the Mohawk River, and on land which rises gently from an elevation of four hundred feet at the river to six hundred feet in the outskirts. Four streams entering the Mohawk River from the south provide drainage; and in addition have determined the location of streets, railroads, residential and industrial areas.

The winter climate of Utica is rigorous. Average temperatures are low, cloudiness is excessive and snowfall is heavy. The summer climate is mild and pleasant, rainfall is well spaced and adequate, but the growing season is short. Snow removal, movement of transit and transportation facilities, heating of homes, offices and factories, provision of warm clothing, and suitable recreational habits are problems peculiar to Utica's climate.

Following national and state population trends, the rate of growth in Utica has been decreasing during recent decades. The City appears to be approaching a stable population. The metropolitan area of Utica is increasing in population gradually, but at a diminishing rate.

In spite of the declining rate of population growth in Utica, the number of families has been increasing constantly. The number of persons per family, meantime, is decreasing. The greater number of families is one factor causing the critical housing shortage in Utica, and the smal-

ler size of family is a factor in the demand for smaller homes.

The population in Utica is growing older. The percentage of the population in the older age groups has been increasing. The greater proportion of older persons must be considered in planning for such community services and facilities as housing, schools, parks and other recreational areas, as well as social, welfare and employment policies.

Utica is a melting pot for immigrants from troubled European countries. In 1910 more than a quarter of the people were foreign born. In 1940, the number of foreign-born had decreased to about seven per cent. Italy, Poland, Ireland and Wales have provided most of the immigrants to Utica in recent years.

The industrial plants in Utica are of medium size and the employment is distributed through numerous plants. The average annual wage for each employee and the value added by manufacture have been relatively low. The high percentage of women in the labor force is reflected in the low average annual wage. The manufacture of textile products is the major industrial activity in Utica; and the manufacture of iron and steel products employs the second largest number of workers.

Wholesale and retail trade are an important part of the economic structure of Utica. There is a relatively large number of trade establishments per capita, but the value of sales per store and per capita is low. Wages in wholesale and retail trade are about average for upstate cities, although wages in wholesale trade are considerably higher than in retail trade.

Utica has a high percentage of two-family dwellings - one flat above the other. Dwelling units in multiple-family structures and single-family houses are about equally divided. The percentage of dwellings in mixed-use structures is high.

Residential structures in Utica are older than in most cities of the State and a high percentage of substandard housing is indicated thereby. Home-ownership declined during the last decade and in 1940, less than a third of the dwellings

were owner-occupied.

The quantity, quality and variety of parks in Utica is good and a few additions in unserved neighborhoods will provide the City with a park system of high standards.

School attendance, and completion are generally lower in Utica than in the neighboring cities of Schenectady, Binghamton and Syracuse. The percentage of persons in Utica who never attended school is high, and the percentage over 25 years of age in 1940 who completed high school and college is lower than in the other three cities.

Utica is now in a favorable financial condition as shown by the A rating in the municipal investment index. A planned program of debt reduction has aided the City in reducing its bonded indebtedness from twelve to four million, eight hundred thousand dollars between 1935 and 1949. Expenditures for schools parks and recreational services, libraries, and general governmental costs, have been relatively low.