

A Historical Demography of the Headwaters



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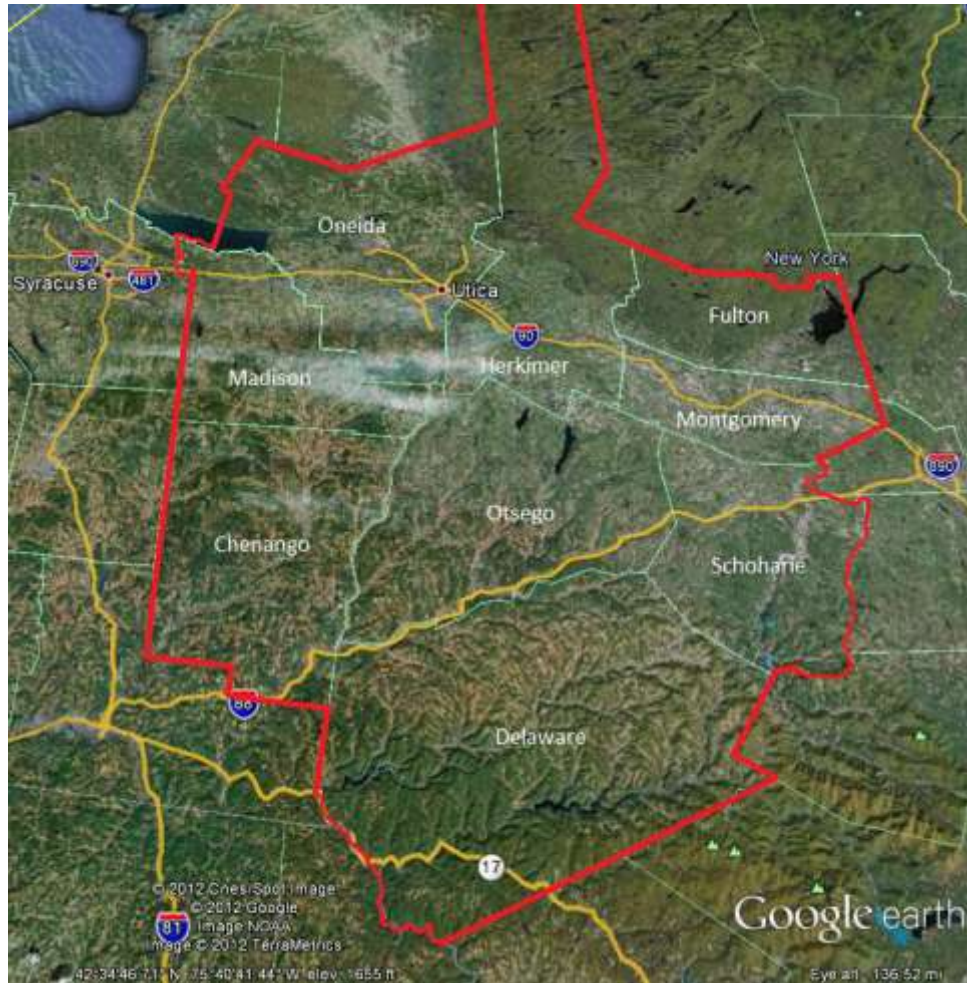
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Abstract

An overview of the demography of the Headwaters Region with an emphasis on the historical development of the region. The Headwaters includes eight counties, straddles the Mohawk River Valley, and is centered on the Utica-Rome metropolitan area. Its population was 672,054 in 2010. Since 1980 the population has become less densely settled.

This report serves as an introduction to the historical demography and current settlement pattern of the Headwaters Region, shown in figure 1. It is intended as a “primer” on the region and its history, and will serve as the basis for future work to be conducted by the Utica Institute. The reference section contains a list of resources for further reading that also serve as the basis for this report.

Figure 1: Aerial Photography of the Headwaters Region



A Population History

The Headwaters Region is located in the east central region of New York State. The region contains nine counties that are roughly centered on the Mohawk River Valley. The counties and their respective populations and land areas are shown in table 1.

Geologically, the Headwaters Region is best understood as the region that lies between the Catskill Mountains to the south and the Adirondack Mountains to the north. The region is composed of rugged hills that envelop the Mohawk River. The north bank of the Mohawk is part of the Laurentian Range, a geological formation that includes the Adirondacks and extends into

Table 1: Population of Headwaters Counties, 1830-2010

County	Land Area	1830	1860	1890	1920	1950	1980	2010
Chenango	893.55	31,215	40,311	37,776	34,969	39,138	49,344	50,477
Delaware	1442.44	26,587	39,834	45,496	42,774	44,420	46,824	47,980
Fulton	495.47		24,162	37,650	44,927	51,021	55,153	55,531
Herkimer	1411.47	30,945	38,244	45,608	64,962	61,407	66,714	64,519
Madison	654.84	32,208	43,545	42,892	39,535	46,214	65,150	73,442
Montgomery	403.04	43,715*	30,866	45,699	57,928	59,594	53,439	50,219
Oneida	1212.43	71,326	105,202	122,922	182,833	222,855	253,466	234,878
Otsego	1001.7	51,372	50,157	50,861	46,200	50,763	59,075	62,259
Schoharie	621.82	27,902	34,469	29,164	21,303	22,703	29,710	32,749
TOTALS	8,136.76	315,270	406,790	458,068	535,431	598,115	678,875	672,054

* Population for Montgomery County also includes that of Fulton County

Quebec. The south bank of the river includes the interior plateau of the Appalachian Mountains. The Mohawk itself flows from the Tug Hill Plateau (also part of the Laurentian Range) south to Rome, whereupon it turns east. On the eastern edge of the Great Lakes plain the Mohawk and Woods Creek, which also flows from the Tug Hill, come within a mile of one another at the city of Rome. Woods Creek flows west to eventually join Lake Ontario and, ultimately, the Gulf of Saint Lawrence. The Mohawk turns east, and fifteen miles downstream, just east of Utica, the plain gives way to the enclosing mountain ranges to form the Mohawk Valley. Its waters eventually flow into New York Harbor. North of the Mohawk a number of streams also flow into either Lake Ontario or the Mohawk, but the streams of the Appalachian Plateau south of the Mohawk begin long journeys toward either Delaware Bay (in the Delaware River system) or Chesapeake Bay (via the Susquehanna River system). Thus, within a 30 mile radius of Little Falls, a drop of rain could find itself ultimately flowing anywhere from the Gulf of Saint Lawrence to Chesapeake Bay.

The Hudson-Mohawk River system provides the only water route through the Appalachian Mountains, and as such has been a major transportation corridor since the Iroquois controlled the region. Prior to the American Revolution, the region was settled by a small number of frontiersmen and explorers. Beginning in the 1750s, the central region was settled in earnest by Palatine Germans who lived in settlements in proximity to the native Iroquois (particularly Mohawk and Oneida). In 1768, as a result of the Proclamation of 1763 at end of the French & Indian War, the British and Iroquois agreed to the Fort Stanwix Treaty line as the western limit for non-native settlement. The line began at Fort Stanwix in present-day Rome and continued southeast to the headwaters of the Unadilla River. It ran along the Unadilla until it flowed into the Susquehanna, and then continued in a straight line to the south; it continues to serve as the western boundaries of Otsego and Delaware Counties today. In part because of the western “boundary” established by the British, Americans revolted against the crown in 1775 and declared independence in 1776. After the Revolution, the region experienced considerable immigration by New England Yankees searching for new lands; most rural townships,

particularly north and south of the Mohawk, grew considerably through 1830, whereupon many experienced population stagnation or decline. In the Mohawk Valley itself, however, many communities experienced more or less continual growth well into the twentieth century, the region lying on the Great Lakes plain becoming the Utica-Rome metropolitan area.

After the Revolution, a number of transportation corridors were established through the region. In the south was the Catskill Turnpike, a toll road that ran from Catskill through Delaware and Chenango Counties. The Western Turnpike ran along the southern ridge of the Mohawk Valley, splitting into two routes at Cherry Valley: a main route that ran approximately along the current U. S. route 20 and a southern route than ran to Cooperstown and then along what is now N. Y. route 80. In what is now Richfield Springs, the main Western Turnpike split again, the southern branch called the Skaneateles Turnpike. Roads were also built on both sides of the Mohawk River; at Utica the Genesee Highway, and later Seneca Turnpike, began its trek westward. The Genesee Highway is today called Genesee Street in all the cities it passes through, including Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo.

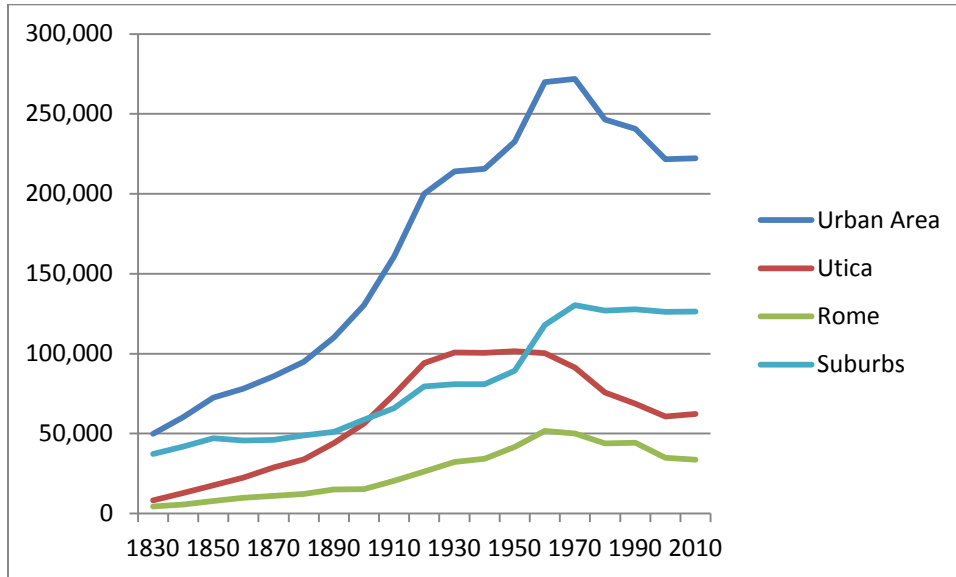
Of course, the major transportation phenomena were the canals and railroads. Engineers had attempted various canals in the late eighteenth century, particularly one designed to move boats around the falls at Little Falls. It was the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, however, that transformed the region and New York State as a whole. In addition to the Erie, the Black River Canal ran north from Rome onto the Tug Hill Plateau, and the Chenango Canal ran south from Utica to Binghamton. An additional feeder canal ran to Oneida Lake from Durhamville. Once these corridors were established, they were followed by railroads: the first through the region, the Schenectady & Utica, was opened in 1832. Other rail lines, such as the Delaware & Hudson, crisscrossed the region. Population centers on these routes tended to grow larger and more rapidly than those that did not have such transportation options, the communities along the Mohawk River growing largest of all.

Figure 2: View of Downtown Utica



a natural fording spot on the Mohawk, and by the early nineteenth century was dubbed “capital of the western district.” The departure point for the Genesee Highway, Utica was primarily a commercial city for the first fifty years of its existence, much of the industrial revolution occurring several miles away in the Sauquoit and Oriskany Creek valleys. It was not until the

Figure 3: Population in the Utica Urban Area, 1830-2010



1840s that the city industrialized with coal-powered mills lining the Erie and Chenango Canals. As the city and associated towns grew, the metropolitan area came to dominate the remainder of the region, the only exception being the Catskill Mountains of Delaware County. In 2010, the census Bureau classified 17 towns and cities as part of the Utica Urban Area.

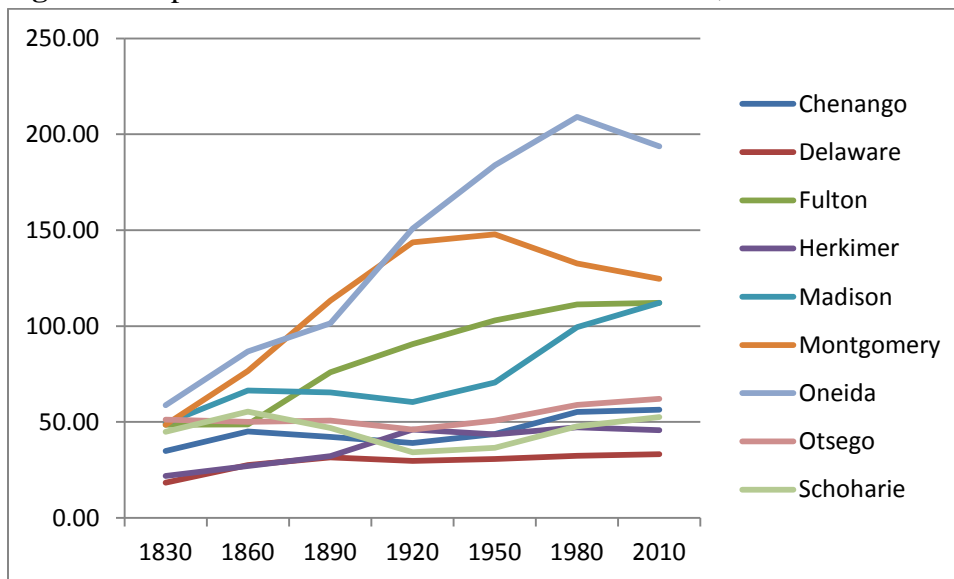
The Utica Urban Area peaked in population at 271,923 in 1970, falling since that period. This has been accompanied by a great shift from central cities to suburbs since World War II: the percent of the population living in Utica and Rome declined from 61.6 percent in 1950 to only 43.2 percent in 2010 (see figure 3). The population trends in the Utica Urban Area are approximately the same as the metropolitan area as a whole (Oneida and Herkimer Counties). The region's population is thus most concentrated in the Utica-Rome Metropolitan Area, although Madison County—part of the Syracuse Metropolitan Area—has grown from 46,214 in 1950 to 73,442 in 2010. However, Montgomery County, which is part of the Albany Metropolitan Area, declined from 59,594 in 1950 to only 50,219 in 2010. Overall, the share of regional population that belongs to the 17 towns and cities included in the Utica Urban Area is shown in table 2.

Table 2: Population for the Utica Urban Area and Region, 1830-2010

	1830	1860	1890	1920	1950	1980	2010
Deerfield	4,182	2,249	1,954	706	1,621	3,934	4,273
Floyd	1,699	1,440	920	663	1,014	3,863	3,819
Frankfort	2,680	3,247	3,988	6,483	6,598	7,686	7,636
German Flatts	2,466	3,940	7,255	14,089	14,106	14,981	13,258
Herkimer	2,486	2,804	4,666	11,982	11,235	11,027	10,175
Kirkland	2,505	4,185	4,852	4,744	6,164	10,334	10,315
Lee	2,514	2,796	1,845	1,134	1,856	6,892	6,486
Little Falls city				13,029	9,541	6,156	4,946
Little Falls town	2,539	5,989	7,512	684	874	1,434	1,587
Marcy		1,687	1,213	1,191	5,210	6,456	8,982
New Hartford	3,599	4,395	5,005	8,646	11,071	21,286	22,166
Paris	2,765	3,762	3,211	3,004	3,459	4,456	4,411
Rome city	4,360	9,830	14,991	26,341	41,682	43,826	33,725
Schuyler	2,074	1,715	1,259	1007	1,169	2,886	3,420
Utica	8,323	22,529	44,007	94,156	101,531	75,632	62,235
Westmoreland	3,303	3,166	2,313	1984	2,811	5,458	6,138
Whitestown	4,410	4,367	5,155	10,163	12,686	20,150	18,667
Utica Urban Area	49,905	78,101	110,146	200,006	232,628	246,457	222,239
(%)	(15.8)	(19.2)	(24.0)	(37.4)	(38.9)	(36.3)	(33.1)
Entire Region	315,270	406,790	458,068	535,431	598,115	678,875	672,054

The pattern of population concentration is also evident in population density through time. Population density for each of the nine counties is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 2: Population Densities in Headwaters Counties, 1830-2010



Population densities for the region as a whole climbed from the initial European settlement until 1980, and since that time have remained at around 83 people per square mile. Population densities are obviously higher in Oneida County, home to Utica and Rome, but they have been falling in the metropolitan area overall. Nevertheless, population density in Oneida County was 194 people per square mile, followed by 125 people per square mile in Montgomery County and 112 in Fulton County (both in metropolitan Albany). Similarly, suburban Madison County has increased its density from 71 people per square mile in 1950 to 112 in 2010.

Toward the Future

The forgoing has been a brief introduction to the historic demography of the Headwaters Region. It is limited by its primary focus on the counties, the only town-level analysis involving only the townships of the Utica Urban Area. The region is home to a number of urban areas and clusters, including those of the outer suburbs and exurbs of Syracuse (Madison County) and Albany (Fulton, Montgomery, and Schoharie Counties). The non-metropolitan counties each have urban clusters, including Oneonta in Otsego County and Norwich in Chenango County. The presence of these places function as caveats for this brief introduction to the region, and as fodder for future study.

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