



## Growth of County Population From 1790 to 2010

New Jersey has undergone many changes in business, in fashion, and in population since 1790 when the first national census was conducted. To a certain extent, many of the changes that occurred are reflected in the population shifts documented every 10 years by the Census. This article tracks county population changes from the nation's first Census in 1790 to the latest Census of 2010.

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From the earliest days as one of our nation's original 13 states, the Garden State has progressed from an agrarian economy to a manufacturing economy to today's innovation and information economy. Along the way, the state has gone from 13 counties to being divided into 21 counties and from a statewide population of less than 200,000 to nearly 8.8 million residents. In 2010, only six of New Jersey's 21 counties had fewer residents than the entire state had 220 years ago.

- From a total of 184,139 residents in 1790, New Jersey's population grew by more than 4,600 percent to a level of 8,791,894 in 2010.
- Hunterdon County, the most populous county in the first Census, was the fourth least populous county in 2010.
- Between 1824 and 1857, New Jersey's original 13 counties were divided to create eight additional counties.

- New Jersey's population took 90 years to first reach 1 million residents (in the 1880 Census) and was nearly nine-times larger in the 2010 Census.

### 1790 – 1830: A Garden State of Rural Counties

It may be hard to imagine the nation's most densely populated state the way it was in 1790 when the nation's first Census was conducted. That first Census found that New Jersey, divided then into 13 counties at the time, had 184,139 residents or about 25 persons per square mile. Hunterdon had the largest population with 20,153, closely followed by Sussex (19,500 residents). Cape May was the least populated county with just 2,571 residents.

New Jersey continued its growth as a largely rural state with 277,575 residents in 1820. The state saw population increases in most counties between 1790 and the Census of 1820 and by the Census of 1830, one new county had been created by splitting one county into two.



Between 1800 and 1810, Cumberland's 33 percent growth rate was the fastest while Essex edged out Sussex to become the most populous county in New Jersey. Sussex, however, became the state's population growth leader

in the 1810s with a net gain of 7,203 (or +28.2%) residents and also was the most populous county in 1820 with 32,752 residents.

New Jersey Decennial Population: 1790 to 2010			
Year	Population	Year	Population
1790	184,139	1910	2,537,167
1800	211,149	1920	3,155,900
1810	245,562	1930	4,041,334
1820	277,575	1940	4,160,165
1830	320,823	1950	4,835,329
1840	373,306	1960	6,066,782
1850	489,555	1970	7,171,112
1860	672,035	1980	7,365,011
1870	906,096	1990	7,730,188
1880	1,131,116	2000	8,414,350
1890	1,444,933	2010	8,791,894
1900	1,883,669		

Source: US Census Bureau

After the 1830 Census, with 320,823 residents, New Jersey was starting to move away from its rural roots and was headed toward growth in the state's urban centers.

### Dividing New Jersey Into 21 Counties

Changes that began in 1824 saw New Jersey's original 13 counties re-aligned. Portions of the state's original 13 counties were split off to create eight new counties between 1824 and 1857. The creation of these additional counties eventually divided New Jersey into the present level of 21 counties.

The move toward more and smaller counties began in 1824 when Sussex, the county with the state's largest population in the 1820 Census, had a portion split off to create Warren County.

Dividing larger counties to create new counties continued through 1857. Between 1830 and 1840 four new counties were established. Atlantic County was created from portions of Gloucester; Hudson was created by splitting off portions of Bergen; Mercer was formed

from portions of Hunterdon, Middlesex and Somerset counties; and Passaic was formed from portions of Bergen and Essex counties.

Camden County was formed from portions of Gloucester in 1844, and Ocean was created from portions of Monmouth in 1850. The last county to be established in New Jersey was Union County which was created in 1857 by splitting off portions of Essex.

### The Rise of the Cities

From 1830 to 1900, the rise of the cities characterized growth in New Jersey. Essex and Hudson counties were population magnets between 1850 and 1900. Numerous immigrants to the United States found homes in the swelling North Jersey cities such as Newark, Jersey City and Elizabeth.

Hudson became the second most populous county in the state by 1860, as the county's population growth (+187.4%) almost tripled between 1850 and 1860. Rural Sussex's 3.7 percent population growth between 1850 and 1860 was the slowest among the 21 counties. Overall, the state enjoyed population growth of 37.3 percent in the decade just before the Civil War and from 1850 to 1900 New Jersey would see an average decennial population growth of 31 percent.

Workers and families drawn to the cities resulted in strong population growth particularly in Essex and Hudson counties between 1860 and 1900. The Census of 1900 showed that nearly 40



***New Jersey's population exceeded the one million mark by 1880.***

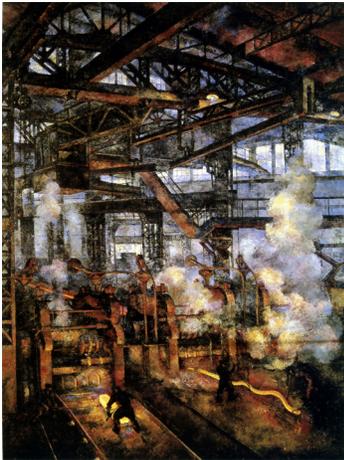
percent of all New Jersey residents lived in those two northern counties by the turn of the century. By 1890 Passaic joined Essex and Hudson as counties with more than 100,000 residents.

As prospering manufacturing employers attracted residents Camden County's population surpassed the 100,000 resident mark in the 1900 Census.

Overall, the state's population exceeded the one million mark by 1880.

### **The First Half of the 20th Century: The Golden Era of the Industrialized Northern Counties**

New Jersey, like the entire United States, was shaped in the years from 1900 to 1950 by two World Wars, the Great Depression and industrialization. The state's population was concentrated largely in the northern, urban counties during this half century.



Substantial population growth in Bergen, Passaic and Union counties reflected the state's 20th Century industrialization and urbanization. Together with Essex and Hudson, they represented the state's five most populous counties between 1920 and 1950 with approximately 60 percent of

New Jersey's population residing in the five-county cluster.

By 1910, New Jersey had eight counties with more than 100,000 residents — Hudson, Essex and Passaic were joined by Bergen, Camden, Mercer, Middlesex and Union.

New Jersey's total population grew by an anemic rate of 2.9 percent during the 1930s, due, at least in part, to the "Great Depression." By the 1930 Cen-

sus, Hudson County reached a peak of 690,730 residents but the county experienced substantial population loss (-38,690 or -5.6%) from 1930 to 1940 while two coastal resort counties, Atlantic and Cape May, also saw population decrease in the decade.

With the exception of Hudson, population grew in every county in New Jersey during the 1940s. The state's population increased by 16.2 percent between 1940 and 1950. Population in Burlington County exceeded 100,000 for the first time and the number of Essex county residents surpassed 900,000 in 1950.

### **The second Half of the 20th Century: The Rise of the "Suburban" Counties**

After the end of World War II, New Jersey felt the impact of the "baby boom" that would continue to shape the state's population into the present.

Population declined or grew slowly in the northern industrialized counties, while "suburb" counties like Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean, Somerset and Gloucester experienced hefty population gains during this period. The impact of the "baby boom" was part of the population growth in the '50s and '60s. New Jersey gained more than 1.2 million in population during the 1950s and had another substantial population gain of 1.1 million during the 1960s.

Five counties gained more than 100,000 residents each between 1960 and 1970 — Middlesex, Monmouth, Morris, Bergen and Ocean. Both Essex and Union counties reached their historical population peaks at 932,526 and 543,116 residents, respectively, in 1970.

New Jersey's overall population growth decelerated during the 1970s to only 2.7 percent — the lowest rate for any decade since the first Census. Five industrialized counties in the state's northern region experienced population declines during this decade: Bergen,

Essex, Hudson, Passaic and Union, as population expanded into the suburbs.



Between 1980 and 1990, four northern industrialized counties — Bergen, Essex, Hudson and Union — continued to shed population although Bergen became the state's most populous county in 1990, replacing Essex. From 1990 to 2000, Hudson gained population for the first time in six decades. In fact, population increased in all counties in this decade, except Salem (-1.5%). By Census 2000 Cape May and Warren counties each included more than 100,000 residents for the first time, leaving Salem as the only county with a population below the 100,000 mark. Cape May would not maintain the 100,000 resident level for long, falling to 97,265 in the 2010 Census.

Between 2000 and 2010, population growth was strongest in Gloucester County (+13.2%), Ocean continued to be a population magnet gaining 65,651 and Middlesex became the second most populous county in 2010, surpassing Essex.

### County Legacies

Although it is common for a county's population to grow over time, Camden and Mercer are the only two counties in New Jersey to experience no population decline at all in any decade throughout

their history. Hudson, on the other hand, had the longest spell of population decline losing residents each decade from 1930 to 1990.

Cape May was the least populated county in New Jersey from 1790 to 1970. That distinction has belonged to Salem since 1980.

The state's population grew 4,674 percent from 1790 to 2010. Only four counties had higher long-term growth rates than the state: Bergen (+7,083% since 1790), Hudson (+6,588% since 1840), Ocean (+5,647% since 1850), and Middlesex (+4,976% since 1790). Warren's 483 percent growth (since 1830) was the slowest among the state's 21 counties.

On average, New Jersey's population increased by 19.2 percent per decade for the past 22 decades. Ocean had the fastest per decade growth rate (+28.9%, during its 16-decade history), followed by Hudson (+28.0%, during its 17-decade history). On the other hand, Salem (+8.7%) and Hunterdon (+8.8%) have the lowest growth rates per decade (during their 22-decade histories).

### Data For the Population Timeline

Research for this article was conducted by Sen-Yuan Wu, Research Economist. Historical Census population counts for the state's 21 counties and 566 municipalities are available by clicking: [New Jersey Population Trend: 1790-2010](#). For more information, contact the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Division of Labor Market & Demographic Research, P.O. Box 388, Trenton, NJ 08625-0388. Telephone: (609) 292-0076, e-mail: [sywu@dol.state.nj.us](mailto:sywu@dol.state.nj.us).

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