

**POPULATION TOTALS BY TOWNSHIP AND PLACE  
FOR CALIFORNIA COUNTIES: 1860 TO 1950**

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### **POPULATION TOTALS BY TOWNSHIP AND PLACE FOR CALIFORNIA COUNTIES: 1860 TO 1950**

## Introduction

This report shows decennial census data on the population of California counties by minor civil division (usually townships) and place from 1860 to 1950, which is the period for which data on township population were published for California. This period also covers major historical developments in California's settlement patterns and population distribution as the State's population grew extremely rapidly in most decades, from 380,000 in 1860 to 10.6 million in 1950. Townships refer to judicial townships, and places include, for example, incorporated cities and towns, and unincorporated places. For each county, the data are shown in hierarchal fashion, with townships and their component places (or place parts). In addition, places in each county are listed in alphabetical order, with township parts where places crossed township boundaries. (In general, the term township is used in this text when referring to California; however, as discussed later, other minor civil divisions were reported in some censuses for some California counties.)

The data shown in this report serve two general purposes. The first is to facilitate the study of local history, including demographic history, by providing geographically detailed information on population trends in California over a major portion of the State's history. The second purpose is to facilitate genealogical research by providing information on population size for townships and places and on township formations and dissolutions during this period. This information is particularly useful in working with microfilm or online versions of census schedules, which are made available for historical and genealogical research 72 years after a census was taken (and thus available through the 1930 census when this report was written).

## Townships in California

Article XI, Section 4, of the 1850 Constitution of California makes general reference to governmental units below the county level; however, detailed legislation regarding the organization and regulation of townships was not enacted until 1862 (Sutton, 1914, Legislative Council (California), 1921). The townships in California were judicial townships that served primarily as election districts for justices of the peace and constables. These judicial townships, the boundaries of which were defined by the county, did not own property or collect tax and thus had limited governmental functions in comparison with civil townships found in many other states. In the 1880 census, which was the first to list in detail the types of minor civil divisions of counties for which population data were published, California was the only state for which judicial townships were used to show data for minor civil divisions.

Judicial townships were phased out in California throughout the mid-20th century with the development of the Municipal Court system, which replaced township Justice Courts (Berg-Anderson, no date). At the same time, the Census Bureau was switching away from the use of minor civil divisions in those states in which minor civil divisions had limited governmental functions, had lost some or all of their local governmental functions, had frequent boundary changes, or were not well known locally. For the 1960 census, the Census Bureau defined census county divisions (CCDs) in 18 Southern and Western states, including California. CCDs are defined for statistical purposes and are not widely known locally since they have

no governmental functions, and they have not always had stable boundaries over time. In any case, population data for judicial townships in California were last shown in census reports for the 1950 census.

### Census Data on Minor Civil Divisions and Places

While the total populations of counties by state have been shown in census publications since the first decennial census of the United States in 1790, the total populations of counties' minor civil divisions, such as townships, were shown less consistently, especially in early censuses. In addition, total populations for places, such as cities, towns, and villages, were not shown consistently. The 1870 census was the first census in which data were shown for minor civil divisions for counties in each state with data for places shown by minor civil division. It should be noted that the census designations of the legal status of places as cities, towns, or villages may not always be accurate. For data on population of counties and places in California from 1850 to 2000, including year of incorporation for incorporated places, see Lykins, no date.

The first decennial census in California in 1850 and the special state census in 1852 were both seriously deficient. Ironically, the 1852 state census was taken because of problems with the 1850 census and because of dissatisfaction with the results of the 1850 census as a basis for determining representation in Congress. For the 1850 census, returns for Contra Costa County and Santa Clara County were lost, and returns for San Francisco were destroyed by fire. For the 1852 census, the population of El Dorado County, believed to be the most populous county in the state, apparently was never enumerated. In addition, census-taking in much of California during the early years of the Gold Rush was especially difficult given the unsettled living conditions of much of the population. Population totals for cities, towns, and mining settlements (but not for townships) were shown for a few counties in these two censuses, especially for 1850. For information about the 1850 and 1852 censuses, see U.S. Census Office, 1853; Executive Department (California, 1853), and Thompson, 1955.

In the 1860 census, data for California were shown for townships in most counties and for places in some counties; however, coverage within these counties was not always complete, and the two types of areas were not identified explicitly, nor were places identified as incorporated or unincorporated. Data were not shown hierarchically, and thus it is not always clear in which township a place was located. In addition, data were not always shown for a place and the balance of the township when they had the same name. Fortunately, 1860 census data for townships and places were published hierarchically in the 1870 census, and this information is used in the presentation of 1860 data in this report. In addition, the 1870 census included 1860 populations for townships and places in some cases where these data were not published in the 1860 census. These 1860 township populations first published in the 1870 census do not always add precisely to the official 1860 county population total. In these cases, the township populations are shown in italics and footnoted.

In the 1870 census, data were shown for counties by township and by place within each township; however, the status of places was not clearly specified. In particular, no systematic distinction was made between incorporated places and unincorporated places.

The 1880 census was the first to state explicitly that the minor civil divisions used for California were judicial townships; however, the comparative population figures shown for 1870 in the 1880 census and for 1860 in the 1870 census suggest that judicial townships were used starting in 1860 for most counties then in existence. In addition, the 1880 census was the first to include the type of geographic area (e.g., township, city, or town) with each area's name.

The 1880 census distinguished incorporated places, identified as cities or towns, from unincorporated places for which population totals were shown in a separate table with county and minor civil division indicated. As in subsequent censuses for which population totals were shown for unincorporated places, it was noted that the populations were only approximate, given the lack of explicit boundaries. It is also apparent that the designation of unincorporated places was not systematic, with the result that many unincorporated places that could have been identified were not reported in those decennial censuses reporting populations for unincorporated places. Starting with 1880, the tables in this report identify the status of each place as reported in the census (e.g., "c" for city). Symbols used in the tables are listed later.

In the 1890 census, incorporated and unincorporated places were not distinguished, unfortunately, and the minimum population threshold for showing a place was generally 200. Each place was identified as a city (presumably incorporated), as a town (may or may not have been incorporated), or as a village (most likely unincorporated). In addition, a few places were designated as "colony." Each reported village or colony had a population under 1,000. The population threshold of 200 was adopted for general use in this report. A place had to have had a reported population of 200 or more in at least one census to be included, and if included, reported populations below 200 in other censuses are shown also.

In the censuses of 1900 through 1930, population totals were shown for incorporated places only, and thus populations of unincorporated places were not shown at all. As a result, the tables include many places with a population in 1880 and/or 1890 with no population reported for 1900 through 1930. In the 1920 census only, the population of places were shown separately from the populations of townships, with the result that data were not published on the population of place parts in those cases where places were in more than one township.

In the 1940 census, population totals for unincorporated places (of 500 or more inhabitants) were published for the first time since 1890, although populations by township for unincorporated places were not reported for those places that crossed township boundaries. There are numerous cases in which an unincorporated place was reported in the 1940 census that had last been reported in the 1880 or 1890 census.

In the 1950 census, population totals were shown for unincorporated places of 1,000 or more inhabitants, but only if they were outside of urbanized areas. Urbanized areas, which were first used in the 1950 census, were generally defined as a central city (or central cities) of 50,000 or more population together with the surrounding urban fringe (incorporated places and densely settled unincorporated territory). In California, the unincorporated territory in urbanized areas had a population of 1.2 million and thus represented over one-tenth of the State's population of

10.6 million, and no doubt included many unincorporated places recognized locally by place name. The unfortunate result is that many unincorporated places in the urban fringe in 1950 that were identified in 1940 (or that would have been identified using 1940 census procedures) were not identified by name in the 1950 census. As a result many of the unincorporated places shown in this report with a 1940 census population do not have a reported 1950 population.

For further information on the geographic detail for which population totals for townships and places were shown for counties in California in censuses through 1950, see the references listed in Decennial Census Publications.

### Types of Minor Civil Divisions in California, 1860 to 1950

While judicial townships were far and away the most frequently used minor civil division for reporting census data in California in the 1860 to 1950 period, a few other types of minor civil divisions were used. Supervisor's districts and voting precincts were used in a few cases prior to 1900 and were replaced by townships. Supervisor's districts were used for Lake County in 1870 and for Santa Cruz County from 1860 to 1880. Precincts were used for Lake County in 1880, for San Bernardino County prior to 1900, and for San Diego County in 1890 (although townships were used prior to 1890 in San Diego County). In some cases, cities were reported as independent (i.e., not in a township or other minor civil division). These include Sacramento (1860-1910 and 1950), San Diego (1860-1870 and 1890), and San Francisco (1860-1950), which was coextensive with San Francisco County. In many cases, cities were reported as coextensive with townships.

The final type of minor civil division used was Indian Reservations. Indian Reservations were reported in 1870 as within, but with population separate from, townships. In the other years in which Indian Reservations were reported, 1900 to 1920, they usually were reported separately from townships, although their geographic location relative to townships was frequently noted. For consistency of presentation, Indian Reservations are shown in this report as separate minor civil divisions in all years. Indian Reservations were reported in the census in Humboldt County (1900-1920), Imperial County (1910-1920), Klamath County (1870), Mendocino County (1870, 1900-1920), Riverside County (1900), San Bernardino County (1920), and San Diego County (1870, 1900, 1920).

It should be noted that census coverage of the American Indian population was not all consistent prior to 1900, apart from questions about how consistently persons with any American Indian ancestry were identified by race from one census to the next. From 1860 to 1880, in general, only Indians who were taxed and living in settled conditions were enumerated, although small populations were reported on a few Indian Reservations in California in 1870. In 1890, the Census Bureau attempted to enumerate the entire Indian population; however, Indians living on reservations were not included in the general enumeration and thus were not included in county populations. Since 1900, all Indians have been included in the general enumeration. California's Indian population as reported in the census was 17,798 in 1860, 7,241 in 1870, 16,277 in 1880, 11,517 in the general enumeration and 16,624 total in 1890, and 15,377 in 1900. The proportionate fluctuations by county frequently were much greater. The most extreme changes occurred in San Bernardino County and San Diego County in which Indians represented

over one-half of the reported population in 1860, but less than one percent of the reported population in 1870. It is not clear how much these fluctuations reflect real changes versus changes in census coverage of the Indian population (Snipp, 2000, and Gibson and Jung, 2002).

### Geographic Boundaries and Comparability

Changes in county boundaries due to the formation of new counties since 1860 (or the annexation of Klamath County by other counties) are indicated in the tables with footnotes. This information is taken from census publications and from Forstall, 1996, and Thorndale and Dollarhide, 1987. Per Forstall, if there is more than one specified source county or receiving county, they are listed in the approximate order of importance, based on available information on land area and population. Information on the year of county formations, which is taken from census publications, may not always be accurate. A few changes in boundaries for existing counties are noted when the affected townships were specified; however, in general, minor changes in county boundaries are not noted.

Similarly, changes reported in the census in township boundaries due to the formation of new townships or the annexation of existing townships by other townships are indicated by footnotes. Minor changes in township boundaries are not noted, and in fact, documentation on these changes in census publications is not complete. In those cases where a county was redistricted between censuses or there were clearly extensive changes in township boundaries without documentation to describe them, a double vertical line is used in the tables to highlight this situation and the lack of comparability between censuses. Since documentation of boundary changes is not complete, especially prior to 1900, it should not be assumed that township boundaries are totally comparable between censuses based on information published in the census.

Data for places reflect the boundaries at each census. Most incorporated places have annexed territory over time, reflecting population growth beyond corporate boundaries or in anticipation of future growth. For incorporated places, the boundaries by definition are not official and may vary considerably between censuses.

Data for land area are shown for 1940, the only year in the 1860 to 1950 period for which measurements of land area were published in the census for minor civil divisions and places. In the case of places, the data are available only for incorporated places of 1,000 or more population.

### Other Items Concerning Presentation in the Tables

In the case of name changes, the most recent name of a geographic area is used, with the former name indicated when significantly different. Since some name changes may not have been reported in the census, there may be cases where data for a single geographic area are reported under more than one name. Minor changes in spelling or misspellings are not noted.

In general, populations of places in a township do not add to the township total because



the population of the balance of the township, which can be obtained by subtraction, is not shown. The populations of places in a township add to the township total when the entire population of a township is in places shown. This occurs most frequently when a single place is coextensive with a township.

### Symbols Used in the Tables

The following symbols (including abbreviations) are used in the tables in this report.

- Not enumerated. The geographic area (county, township, or place) did not exist or was not identified if it did exist.

(NA) Not available. This refers to land area in 1940 where places were enumerated, but measurements of land area were not produced, as noted earlier.

(NRS) Not reported separately. This refers to cases where census publications noted that a geographic area existed at a specified census, but its population was not reported separately. Examples include the population of two townships being reported together or the population of a place not being distinguished from the population of the township in which it was located.

c City. This refers to a place reported as a city (and presumably incorporated.). In some cases, the legal status of a place that included “City” in its name was not reported. In these cases, it is assumed that the legal status was as a city if the place had never been reported as a town (e.g., Culver City). If the legal status of a place reported as a town in one or more censuses was not reported at other censuses, it is assumed that its legal status was as a town in preceding censuses, and its legal status in subsequent censuses is reported with a (-) to represent legal status not specified (e.g., Nevada City).

P Precinct. This designation is used in data columns only for 1890 in the table for San Diego County. The designation is used to highlight the fact that San Diego County was reported by township in all prior and subsequent censuses and because in many cases the same names were used in San Diego County for townships and precincts.

prec Precinct. Abbreviation used on occasion for reasons of space.

t Town. This refers to a place reported as a town. For 1900 to 1950, this refers only to incorporated places. In 1880 and 1890, the legal status of a place reported as a town is not clear.

twp Township. Abbreviation used on occasion for reasons of space.

u Unincorporated. This refers to a place reported as unincorporated in 1880, 1940, or 1950.

v Village. In 1880 and 1890, the two censuses in which this designation was used, the legal

status of a place reported as a village is not clear, although they clearly were usually unincorporated since the large majority were very small and were not reported as incorporated places in 1900.

y Colony. This designation was used for a few small places in 1890.

### Accuracy of the Data

The data shown in the tables are based on a census designed to enumerate the entire population and thus are not subject to sampling error. However, the data are subject to non-sampling error, which may be introduced during any of the operations used to collect, process, or publish data. The data presented here on total population with geographic detail are particularly subject to two specific types of non-sampling error. One is under-enumeration in areas that are remote or sparsely settled or hard-to-enumerate for any other reasons. (Over-enumeration due to double counting is possible, but historically less likely.) The second is geographical coding errors, which occur when population is enumerated but is not assigned to the correct geographical area. Examples include assigning enumerated population to the wrong township, or assigning enumerated population to a place when that population was not within the place's boundaries. See Fay et al, 1988, and Robinson et al, 1993, for more information on the accuracy of census data.

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