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Vital Statistics, Historical Demography and Population Change in Cumberland, Maine: Vital Records as Source Documents for Local History

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VITAL STATISTICS, HISTORICAL DEMOGRAPHY AND POPULATION CHANGE IN CUMBERLAND, MAINE:
Vital Records as Source Documents for Local History
by Thomas C. Bennett
Vital Statistics, Historical Demography and Population Change in Cumberland, Maine: Vital Records as Source Documents for Local History

A PROJECT ESSAY
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AMERICAN AND NEW ENGLAND STUDIES

BY
Thomas C. Bennett

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**Introduction**

This volume contains the essay component of my American and New England Studies project. The project’s other part was the compilation of birth, death, and marriage records published in the Annual report of the municipal officers of the town of Cumberland from 1893 through 1960. I used Microsoft Access to create and populate three separate databases with 992 birth notices, 2,427 death notices and 310 marriage notices. The three databases combined contain the names of 5,320 individuals, since all of the births and some of the deaths include the names of parents. Additionally, event dates and, in most cases, occurrence location, are included in the compilation. The assemblage of vital records was published in 2005 by Picton Press of Rockport, Maine, as Vital records from town reports of the Town of Cumberland, Maine: 1893-1963, and has been sold by Picton Press, Prince Memorial Library, the Chebeague Historical Society and others to those interested in the town and its people.

Compiling the vital records led to the creation of tables and graphs that display patterns of birth, death, median age at death, and population increase and decrease that differentiate the town from the State of Maine as a whole. The questions raised by those distinctions resulted in an introduction to the field of historical demography and the contributions it can make to the writing of local history. The interpretations of the data from an historical demographic perspective add to the written body of work on Cumberland’s history, while the analytical process has helped to identify and appreciate some of the hazards inherent in working with local records and information registration systems.

T.B.
Cumberland’s Early History

The town of Cumberland, Maine, located on Casco Bay in Cumberland County 11 miles northeast of the city of Portland, was incorporated on March 19, 1821, after a successful secession effort by the residents of the northwestern section of the town of North Yarmouth. In addition to Cumberland, North Yarmouth originally comprised the present day towns of Yarmouth, North Yarmouth, Pownal, Freeport, Harpswell, and a small part of Brunswick. North Yarmouth was first settled by the English as early as 1635, and was originally known by the Indian name Westcustogo. Following the conclusion of King Philip’s War in 1678, North Yarmouth was incorporated in 1680 as the eighth town in Maine.¹

The early history of North Yarmouth included much conflict with the area’s native populace, resulting in a twenty-five-year period beginning in 1690 during which the town was devoid of white settlers. Colonists began returning to the area around 1715, some of them constructing garrison houses for protection during continuing conflicts with the native population. In 1727, the town’s boundary with Falmouth was re-established, and one hundred home lots were created, sixty-four of which were to be drawn by lot for new settlers. Later land divisions resulted in the creation of lots of between one hundred and four hundred acres in size. The area that was to become the town of Cumberland was comprised primarily of the one hundred-acre lots in the southwestern corner of North Yarmouth.²

The 1764 Lords of Trade census showed North Yarmouth to be the third most populous town in Cumberland County, with 1,097 inhabitants, including 18 blacks and 188 families, and 154 houses. The Massachusetts Tax Valuation List of 1771, which stemmed from an act of the Massachusetts General Court requiring municipalities to elect assessors whose duty it was to prepare a list of all taxpayers and taxable property in the town, counted 264 male polls 16 years and older. The First Census of the United States in 1790 created a complete count of the heads
of families in the country, and listed 303 such individuals for North Yarmouth. It also counted 640 other free white males, 948 free white females and 14 individuals categorized as “other free persons.” The 1790 census did not count any slaves among the town’s total population of 1,905.\(^3\)

In April 1775, the town raised a company of 49 men for the Cumberland County contingent, in response to the Provincial Congress of Massachusetts’ vote to supply men to protect the colony against British aggression. The North Yarmouth men helped guard Boston, and many joined the Continental Army upon its formation in 1776.\(^4\)

The years following the Revolutionary War witnessed the clearing and settlement of the western section of the town, as well as the establishment of the Second Social Library of North Yarmouth, in 1793, and the Second Church (called variously the Northwest Congregational Society of North Yarmouth, the Northwest Religious Society of North Yarmouth, and the North Western Religious Society of North Yarmouth) in 1794, both in the hamlet that was to become Cumberland Center. In 1812, the area that later became Cumberland Foreside was the location of the Spear shipyard, started by David Spear and carried on by his son David Jr. until 1859.\(^5\)

The establishment of the Second Church stemmed from the 1791 religious revival that saw the conversion of around one hundred and fifty individuals in the western section of North Yarmouth, mostly young people, and their desire to worship closer to home. Being some five miles from the First Church, known as the Church Under the Ledge and located in present-day Yarmouth on Route 88, one hundred and thirty petitioners received from the Massachusetts Legislature the right to incorporate the new church, which later was renamed the Congregational Church in Cumberland. The desire of the residents of the western section of North Yarmouth to be closer to their place of worship was mirrored in the 1820
petition filed in the newly minted Maine Legislature and signed by one hundred and seventy-six male residents seeking the division of the town. The petition says North Yarmouth “comprises an extensive territory, to the amount of eight square miles, or thereabout;” with “town meetings…held,…town offices kept,…and the town business done at North Yarmouth Corner,…subjecting your petitioners to the necessity of extensive travel, some of them at least a distance of nine miles to attend a town meeting, and perform the ordinary duties of a citizen.” The Legislature granted an Act of Incorporation the following year, despite the objections of many residents in the eastern part of the town.⁶

The town has four distinct areas: Cumberland Center, Cumberland Foreside, West Cumberland and Chebeague Island. Cumberland Center, the site of the Second Congregational Church of North Yarmouth prior to the secession in 1821, is the center of government and education, and is situated roughly in the geographical middle of the town’s boundaries. Cumberland Foreside is the town’s coastal mainland area, and although strictly residential for most of the history of the town, was the location of the former Poland’s Corner neighborhood, which had some business enterprises, and the aforementioned Spear’s shipyard on Broad Cove. The Route 1 corridor, although not directly on the coast, is part of the Foreside, and is today the fastest growing commercial zone within the town. West Cumberland, centered on the Route 100 corridor in the northwest corner of the town, today hosts two commercial districts, and is home to a variety of small businesses. Chebeague Island is the largest island in Casco Bay and one of only fifteen year-round island communities in Maine, and, in addition to being famous for the stone sloops that carried granite from many of Maine’s island quarries, has traditionally been a fishing, lobstering and seagoing community. Chebeague, whose population increases dramatically during the summer presently one of, in 2006 was granted its independence from the Town of Cumberland by the Maine Legis-
lature, and will become a town on July 1, 2007.\textsuperscript{7}

The new town, which included twenty-two square miles on the mainland and eighteen offshore islands, had a population of 1,386, a figure that increased to 1,713 by 1860, a gain of nineteen percent, or 327 inhabitants. Cumberland then registered steady population declines through 1920, when census figures show a populace of 1,150, a loss of 563 residents from 1821. Between 1920 and 1960, when the number of inhabitants reached 2,765, population increases averaged twenty-five percent each decade, with the biggest percentage gains occurring after 1940.\textsuperscript{8}

During the 1860s, Maine and New Hampshire were the only states registering absolute population declines. Numerous explanations are given to clarify Maine's population losses, including the Civil War resulting in many of the 73,000 Mainers who fought in the war being enticed by what they saw beyond the state's borders; the decline of lumbering within the state; the promise of cheap and productive lands out West; and the lure of the city. Coupled with those reasons is the root cause of climatic stress and its impact on agriculture, the mainstay of the state's economy.\textsuperscript{9}

Maine's climate from 1765 through 1880 was normally cool, interspersed with short periods of more moderate conditions. The decade of the 1820s was one of the climatically benign periods, raising expectations among farmers and prompting the introduction of new cash crops, including such exotic ones as silkworms. A return to cooler temperatures in the early 1830s, coupled with an increase in precipitation that lasted for nearly fifty years, brought the state's farmers back to reality, and an acceptance that the temperate conditions of the 1820s were an anomaly. New cash crops were proposed, as well as new agricultural methods, public education, and the establishment of the Maine State Board of Agriculture in 1856 and the University of Maine in 1865. The change to new crops and methods
and other efforts to assist agriculture helped the state’s farmers somewhat, but the unforgiving environment and railroad competition from the West limited recovery. Maine’s remaining farmers, including those in Cumberland, survived by practicing a subsistence strategy that included diverse crop and livestock production, nonfarm work, and nontraditional products and crafts.¹⁰
Social and Agricultural History

Mainland Cumberland’s economy has traditionally included farming and shipbuilding, and the town was home to dozens of saw, grist and stave mills. In 1861, fifty-eight percent of the eighty-six Cumberland businessmen subscribing to what purported by be “a very full Directory of persons engaged in the industrial pursuits of the State” identified themselves as farmers. Business listings for Cumberland in the Maine Register over the years also attest to the rural nature of the town. The 1891 edition, under the heading of “Manufacturers,” includes carriages; smiths; painters; carpenters and builders; canned goods; and saw, stave and grist mills. Occupations and businesses listed in later registers include meats and provisions; lobster traps; poultry and eggs; grain and feed; fruit and confectionary; florists; cattle breeder; boat builder; and lumber manufacturer. Business in the town was unmistakably of an extractive nature, or supportive of agricultural endeavors.11

Each year during the third week of September, thousands of people flock to the intersection of Blanchard and Bruce Hill roads in Cumberland for the Cumberland Fair. Presented by the Cumberland Farmers Club at the Cumberland Fairgrounds, 2006 saw the 135th edition of the event that started as the Cumberland Center Fair. The harness racing that now occurs on a standard track at the Fairgrounds once took place on Main Street, which also was the site of the ox pulling and other events. The fair was moved from Cumberland Center to West Cumberland in 1875, not without controversy and acrimony, and currently features seven full days of livestock exhibits and competitions, an exhibition hall, the Annual Maine State Pumpkin and Squash Weigh-in Contest, tours of the Farm Museum, midway rides, and competitions in art, photography, baking, canned goods, crafts, needlework and other categories.12

The Cumberland farmers who attended the Cumberland Fair in the late
1800s grew a variety of products, most notably potatoes, hay and corn. At least two canneries supported agriculture over the years. Merrill Brothers established a canning factory in 1881 at Cumberland Junction, with the capacity for 3,000 cans a day, and was in operation through the early 1900s. Charles E. Herrick and his son Horatio operated a corn canning factory in the late 1890s that provided seasonal employment for many of the town's young people. Both facilities canned primarily corn, but also other vegetables, fruits and meat.\(^{13}\)

Apples were, and continue to be, an important piece of the agricultural heritage of the town. As early as the 1830s, Samuel and Amasa Sweetser were grafting trees and developing new strains of apples. Samuel's son Frederick Sweetser was an early member of the Maine Pomological Society, and his son, Herman, was a professor of horticulture at the University of Maine at Orono who returned to Cumberland to run the family orchard. Herman's son Dick, along with his wife Connie, continues to operate the Apple Barrel store on Blanchard Road in Cumberland Center to this day. The Double T Orchard, founded by the Terison brothers in the 1950s in West Cumberland, is still in operation, but current plans are to develop much of the orchard into Orchard Hill Estates, which would include 18 house lots.\(^{14}\)

Poultry farming had become one of the leading industries of the town by 1900, with the principle breeds being White Wyandottes, Plymouth rocks and Rhode Island reds. There were at least three main poultry dealers and processors in town, with their product going to the urban markets by express rail shipment through Cumberland Junction. Gilbert Strout, Harvey Blanchard, and Willis and Walter Thurston packed barrels with poultry and ice for shipment to Boston and elsewhere. The workers processing the birds were mostly female.\(^{15}\)

In the early 1890s Frank and Arno Chase had a greenhouse in Cumberland and sold their product under the Chase Brothers name. By 1904, the town had
four large greenhouses boasting 28,000 feet of glass, producing flowers, primarily carnations, for the state's wholesale trade. Howard C. Blanchard built two small greenhouses in 1914, and later constructed two larger houses with 30,000 square feet of glass. Just as with the town's poultry businesses, the proprietors of Cumberland's flower operations depended on the 40 trains a day that passed through Cumberland Junction, some of them providing express service to Bangor, Portland, Boston and New York. Another relatively recent endeavor in town in the early 1900s was trout farming, and the Roland and Rowe's ponds were said to be stocked with in excess of 5,000 fish.¹⁶

Dairy farming and beef cattle were also mainstays of the area's farms. Spring Brook Farm was started in the early 1800s by Beza Blanchard, and began commercial operations under Frank Blanchard after his service in the Civil War. The farm initially concentrated on producing butter, but switched over to wholesale milk in 1931. Spring Brook Farm on Greely Road currently sells glass bottle milk and other dairy products, eggs, beef and pork, as well as vegetables and fruits in season, both at the farm and at the Cumberland Farmers' Market. Sunrise Acres Farm, begun in 1948, is also still operating, and is now a certified organic farm. It has recently expanded its Community Supported Agriculture program, under which its offers produce subscriptions that allow buyers to receive a weekly or monthly basket of produce, flowers, fruits, eggs, milk, or other farm products. Sunrise Acres sells certified organic chicken, mixed vegetables, heirloom tomatoes, and pasture-raised beef and lamb from both its roadside stand and the Farmers' Market.¹⁷

The self-sufficient nature and varied agricultural enterprises of many of the town's residents in 1900 is demonstrated in the recounting of one man's holdings and activities. At the turn of the last century, Nat Cole, former manager of one of the town's canneries, had 13 cows, two sows, and forty trees on 35 acres bear-
ing numerous types of apples as well as a few pears. His cows were pastured on a neighbor's property because he had planted his in potatoes and sugar beets, and he had to hire a neighborhood youth to help him get the cows to pasture and back each day. He kept three kinds of wagons and a sleigh for winter travel, three horses to pull them, and put up 50 ton of hay for his livestock. Cole's house was close to the rail line, and he was known to make a bit of cash by meeting the traveling salesmen at the railroad station and driving them with their sample cases throughout the area.18

One phenomenon in 1900 was the tendency of the residents to refer to Main Street, also known as the North Yarmouth Road, as SHE Street. The residents of SHE Street were mostly female, widowed or unmarried, with nary a male amongst them. As early as 1871, nine of the thirty-two residences on Main Street were listed under the names of women.19

By 1920, there were two mills remaining in town, one a saw, stave and grist mill and the other a saw and stave mill. Other businesses included a sausage maker, a painter, a stone cutter, a mason, and canned goods. The number of merchants and the types of their goods was relatively unchanged from 1891. The arrival of the tourist industry was evident in 1920 by the listing of eight hotels, all of them on Chebeague Island. By 1930, there were two golf courses in town, one in Cumberland Center and one on Chebeague; a decade later, the one on the mainland was no longer listed, and the number of hotels on Chebeague had dropped to five. The rest of the business listings included many of the same businesses and business types as in 1920.20

In 1900, Cumberland Junction was the center of economic activity within the town. The many trains that stopped there each day not only took the local product to market, they delivered to the town's residents their dry goods, furniture and other items ordered from the stores in Portland, the wharves in Bath and the
mail order businesses in other parts of the country. The town had two lines running through it, with the earliest, the Atlantic and St. Lawrence Railroad, opening in 1848. The Atlantic and St. Lawrence later became the Grand Trunk Railway, while the town’s second rail line was merged with the Maine Central Railroad system in 1871. Half of the 40 trains passing through Cumberland Junction during the early 1900s were passenger trains.\textsuperscript{21}

The steam rail lines were joined in servicing the good citizens of Cumberland in 1894 with the chartering of the Portland and Yarmouth Electric Railway, which ran along what is currently Route 88 in Cumberland Foreside. The line began operations in August 1898, and soon had service every half hour from 6 am until nearly midnight. The Portland-Lewiston Interurban Railroad, chartered in 1907, began service through West Cumberland in 1914. In addition to passenger service, including monthly commuter tickets, the line allowed West Cumberland’s farmers to ship their milk and farm produce to Portland and the Lewiston-Auburn area. Both rail lines allowed area residents to commute to the cities for work and errands, and both ended service on June 28, 1933.\textsuperscript{22}

In addition to the Congregational Church, which stood at the geographical and religious heart of the town, three Methodist churches and the Universalist Church in West Cumberland serviced the spiritual needs of the town’s residents over the years. The Methodist meetinghouse on the Foreside, which straddles the Cumberland-Falmouth line, was the site of religious services as early as 1789. Sermons and spiritual advice were first heard in a log building, with the present edifice rising on the site in 1811. In the church’s early years, the congregants from Cumberland and Falmouth sat on their respective sides and brought their own fuel to feed each town’s stove within the church, and the pastor would preach from both sides of the pulpit, in order to sermonize within both towns. The church became the Foreside Community Church in 1944, when the Methodists withdrew
their interest, and joined the United Church of Christ in 1968.\textsuperscript{23}

The West Cumberland United Methodist Church was originally formed as the First Methodist Episcopal Church Class in 1800. In 1813, the Universalists joined with the First Methodist Episcopal Church in erecting the original Meeting House, which was rebuilt 35 years later. In 1847, the Universalist Society received land on Morrison Hill in West Cumberland for its own church. The Universalist church was sold to the Pentecostal Society of the Apostolic Challenge in 1958, while the First Methodist Episcopal Church, after years of inactivity, was resurrected in 1963. A new Parish Hall was built on Methodist Road in 1969. The town’s third Methodist congregation, the Tuttle Road United Methodist Church, was built in 1882, and its inter-denominational congregants joined the Methodist Conference in order to share a minister with the Foreside church. It later shared ministerial support with Methodist churches in Yarmouth, Portland and South Portland.\textsuperscript{24}

Cumberland appropriated $550 for education when it held the first town meeting in 1821, and the town’s 15 school districts accepted all students from age five through 25. In 1858, one of its native sons left the sum of $27,500 to the town for the establishment of a school for young people aged 12 through 21. Eliphalet Greely, born on Greely Road in Cumberland in 1784, was president of Casco National Bank for 33 years and mayor of Portland for ten. His death led to the foundation of Greely Institute, which was dedicated in September 1868 and saw its first graduating class in 1880. The town supported Greely Institute over the years, and in 1913 it was incorporated by the Maine Legislature. The town took control of the school in 1953 for the establishment of a free high school, and upon the formation of Maine School Administrative District 51 in 1966 it became Greely High School. Greely Institute in 1902 was joined in educating the town’s youth by Chebeague Island’s high school, which operated until its closure in 1956.\textsuperscript{25}

On the cultural front, Cumberland in 1921 was bequeathed a brick-and-
mortar library. The town had benefited from having a lending library when it was part of North Yarmouth, possibly as early as 1747. The Second Social Library of North Yarmouth was founded in December 1793 and incorporated on January 13, 1817, and the First Social Library of Cumberland was founded shortly after the town seceded in 1821. The books were kept in various households, and by 1897 subscribers had their own personal catalogues, consisting of 10.5 x 14.7 cm. card-stock printed front and back, with two punch holes so they could be tied together with string. Each card contained as many as 70 titles with author, and new cards were printed as each new batch of books was added. By 1921, the printed catalogue included 675 titles, including biographies, histories and novels.26

In 1920, Carroll D. and Annie L. Prince bequeathed $35,000 to establish a library in Cumberland. Carroll Prince, a wood buyer for S.D. Warren Paper Mills in Westbrook, was a native of Cumberland. He and Annie, who had no children, died within six weeks of each other in the fall of 1920, and in November 1921 Prince Memorial Library was incorporated due to their largesse. Dr. and Mrs. John R. Thomas donated a four-acre parcel on Main Street in Cumberland, and the Georgian-Colonial style brick library opened for business on January 7, 1923. The library operated as a private corporation with town support, and became a department within town government in 1982.27

In addition to the Cumberland Farmers Club, early social organizations included the white fraternal society Sawga Tribe #20 of the Improved Order of Red Men, and its sister organization, Indianola Council 44, Daughters of Pocahontas. Sawga Tribe #20 held its first meeting in October 1889, and built the Red Men’s Hall in Cumberland Center in 1914. The hall, the site of many community dances, amateur theatrical presentations, parties and meetings, was later used as a satellite elementary school, and in 1974 was renovated for use as the Town Hall. Not long after the establishment of Sawga Tribe #20, in 1894, a group of women established
We Neighbors, an educational and recreational assemblage that was formally organized into a Women’s Literary Club in 1904. Younger women could join the Cumberland-Falmouth Girl’s Glee Club, which gave weeknight performances that, in one instance in 1927, included piano and mandolin solos, readings, and songs from the chorus and soloists. Residents also met in less formal settings, gathering together in private homes for songs, drama and charades. The meetings that occurred in the neighborhood schools prior to the Civil War by 1900 had moved to the houses of the musically and theatrically disposed, creating the opportunity for gatherings of merriment in the midst of neighbors.²⁸

Cumberland got its first automobile around 1905, a Cadillac owned by Webster Dyer. By some accounts, the automobile spelled doom for the ways of the town. Fred Adams, who shoed horses and forged iron wheels at his shop two doors down from the Congregational Church, hosted most of the men of the town in his spare waiting room, who discussed frivolities and weighty matters as Fred attended to their needs. The new automobile culture doomed Fred’s business, as it did the passenger business of the steam and electric rail lines that ran through the town.²⁹

The 1920 U.S. Census numbered the town’s residents at 1,150; the previous decade had seen an 18% decrease in Cumberland’s population. The town had reached its 20th century population nadir, leaving the populace at virtually the same number as were present at the community’s founding nearly a century prior. The next four decades would bring population increases of between eight and thirty-six percent per decade, resulting in a total population of 2,765 in 1960. The rapid growth was one reason behind the creation of the Cumberland Planning Board in 1955, and the board’s membership in the Greater Portland Regional Planning Commission. One of the new board’s first significant actions was the issuance of the 1958 Comprehensive Plan, which described the community as a “bedroom
town” whose residents were as likely to work in Portland as in Cumberland. In 1956, fifty-three percent of employed males and fifty-eight percent of employed females living in Cumberland worked outside of the town; of those both working and living in Cumberland, a substantial number were farmers, woodsmen, craftsmen, laborers and fishermen.30

Cumberland’s history as related hitherto is drawn from the volumes previously written on the town and area. To delve further into the story of the settlement, and to gain some insight into the composition of the populace and possible causes for the swings in population numbers over time, a foray into the field of historical demography is warranted. Using some of the sources consulted by historical demographers, in particular local vital records registration systems, can aid in reconstructing and understanding the town’s population. Additional sources, notably the decennial federal census, local personal property tax assessments and other municipal records, can be exploited to great effect in supporting theories postulated based on the vital records data. As will be demonstrated, some data sources should only be utilized with caution, as a thorough understanding of the data sources and the methods used in compiling them is necessary prior to accepting in full the conclusions they may seem to support.
Historical Demography

Demography, the systematic study of human populations, examines the size and composition of populations, the changes within those populations, and the mechanisms behind those changes. Demography concerns itself with the fixed and the active aspects of population, and encompasses both the components of population dissimilarity and change as manifested in births, deaths and migration and the larger population studies that analyze the relationship between population changes and social, economic, political and other variables within and outside of the society.\textsuperscript{31}

The study of humans can be undertaken from a purely biological perspective, with the focus being the individual, human diversity or the distribution of population groupings. Social scientists frequently focus on the group, and often call attention to those cultural or societal factors that construct and define populations. The number of population variables evident cross-culturally emphasizes the need to study populations outside the bounds of customary academic disciplines. Examining population numbers and changes, and interpreting the causes, patterns and consequences of the births, deaths and migrations that underlie those numbers and changes, requires alternate disciplinary approaches from within the discipline, and an understanding of the concepts and methodologies across disciplines.\textsuperscript{32}

Demographers consider populations within the framework of boundaries, frequently political or otherwise administrative districts or regions that constitute arbitrary constructs which have little or no bearing on the interaction between population groups. In contrast, some social scientists are more interested in the social, cultural or ethnic characteristics that populations use to define themselves. Separating human populations into groups through the use of objective criteria and defining populations biologically is nearly impossible. What is important, and
necessary for the study of populations regardless of the disciplinary approach, is considering how members of a given population view that population, and whom they include or exclude when defining it.\textsuperscript{33}

The demographer’s primary data sources are census and vital records systems that record population numbers; changes within a population as a result of births, deaths and migration; biological characteristics such as sex and age; and social characteristics such as marital status, livelihood, and religious affiliation. Portraying those numbers, changes and characteristics in merely quantitative terms is valid from a purely demographic standpoint, but doing so results in a narrow statement that makes no attempt to explain the factors behind the figures and changes and their relationship with what is occurring in society as a whole. Demography essentially has two components, a quantitative and statistical portion that presents the data in a technical fashion, and a multidisciplinary side that evaluates the data in a processual manner relative to other biological and social sciences.\textsuperscript{34}

Reconstructing past societies and their composition and analyzing population changes within a community are basic to the understanding of a community’s history. Knowledge of the demographic characteristics and patterns of a locale are essential to exploring the population of a minor civil division or other political administrative district, and provide critical information for understanding most aspects of local history.\textsuperscript{35}

Demographic analysis of a community establishes its settlement, population changes over time, and population composition, distribution and density. Recreating the constituent parts of a community allows the researcher to examine the different types of families and households and detail the size, age and sex structure, average age at marriage and death, and rates of fertility and mortality within family units. Analyzing demographic data across time presents a dynamic
picture of a community and contributes to the analysis of the effects of outside influences on a population group.\textsuperscript{36}

Vital records have long been used in historical demographical studies. Lacking systematic, large scale censuses, parish registers and civil registrations of births, baptisms, marriages and deaths provide practical evidence that has been used to study population size and growth, social networks, literacy rates, religious conformity, employment, industrialization, the relationship between conception and the agricultural calendar, and the effect of food supplies on female fecundity. Practitioners of historical demography in non-industrial societies have produced good demographical data using ecclesiastical parish records. The registration of births, baptisms, marriages and deaths was widespread in many Christian parishes from the 16\textsuperscript{th} century on, in both Europe and the countries colonized by Europeans.\textsuperscript{37}

The use of registration statistics raises the question of the reliability of the data and the efficiency of the registration systems in place when the statistics were compiled. Countries where compulsory registration of significant life events has been established since the mid- to late 1800s, as in Great Britain and some other European countries, show relatively little under-registration. Under-registration of births has been reported as high as six percent for the 1931 census in Canada and around eight percent for the 1940 United States census. The latter figure varied from state to state and among the different racial categories. Under-registration of deaths has been found to be more prevalent in the southern and western states of the U.S., where the registration of vital statistics was implemented later than in the Northeast. Age at death and cause of death have also been shown to be problematic, depending on the community in which registration occurred or the race of the individual involved. Lateness in or failure of reporting events, the untimely exchange of non-resident data between states, errors with the initial recording of
data and copying the record for inclusion in state reports also presented opportunities for problematic information. 38

Significant difficulty surrounds the matter of births and deaths of non-residents. Accurate birth and death rates within a community should relate strictly to the resident population. A country with a highly mobile population, such as the United States, could present problems in determining accurate rates, particularly in light of the practice of enumerating births and deaths based on the individual's "usual place of residence," as opposed to a de facto place of residence or a place of occurrence. Although statewide data for place-of-occurrence births or deaths and place-of-residence births or deaths is generally equivalent, the comparability of smaller data sets present considerable problems. A hospital in a metropolitan center could serve a number of smaller municipalities or an entire county, and births and deaths at that hospital would reflect non-residents events. The municipality hosting a hospital, birthing center, hospice or other medical facility would show a higher number of births or deaths than the actual number experienced by its residents, reflecting the use of those facilities by nonresidents. Generally, place-of-residence births and deaths for urban areas with a population exceeding 2,500 are lower than actual place-of-occurrence rates, while rural areas will typically have place-of-occurrence rates lower than place-of-residence rates. In 1960, 98.8 percent of the 22,995 live births recorded in Maine occurred in hospitals and licensed maternity homes. Recording those births under a place-of-occurrence system would generate vastly different local birth data than recording the births based on usual place of residence of the mother. 39
Technical Considerations

Demography analyzes the changes in size and structure of a given human population. In discussing a population, demographers most often use geographical delimiters, such as the population of Liechtenstein, the citizens of Maine or the residents of the hamlet of Little Winging. Populations can be defined further than just their residential affiliations, and can be divided, for example, by age, race, or ethnicity, such as the black population of Lewiston or the childbearing age women of Iceland.  

Assessing change within a given population requires determining the rates of birth, death and migration. The natural increase or decrease of a population is the difference between natality and mortality; net migration is determined using the numbers of immigrants and emigrants. The crude birth rate and the crude death rate of a given population, representing the number of births and deaths divided by the total population during a specific time frame, is a ratio of the particular event to the number of individuals at risk of experiencing the event, and is typically presented as a rate per thousand of population. Birth, marriage, divorce, stillbirth and death rates allow comparing different populations, regardless of their respective sizes, geographical location or composition.

Population structure delimits the characteristics of a group of individuals. The most important characteristics are age and sex, but others include ethnicity, nativity, occupation, literacy, class and gender. Demographic analysis typically involves the birth, death and migration rates of specific subgroups within a population, the most common being defined by age.

If we ignore migration, we can examine the relationships between fertility, mortality and population growth rates. Within a closed population, one in which there is no immigration or emigration, fertility and mortality are inextricably linked to the rate of growth, and the age structure determines the growth rate and
mortality. Population growth within a closed society is most dependent on fertility levels, and relies on the number of females of childbearing age more than any other subgroup. The average number of children born to a woman, the sex of the children and the likelihood of females surviving to reproductive age are critical to growth within a given closed population.43

A population’s age structure is determined by its rates of growth and death, and displays past fertility and mortality. Thus we see an aging population among current day native Europeans and North Americans, displaying the effects of the post-World War II baby boom followed by declining fertility rates in the 1970s. In contrast, the developing world has large numbers of citizens under 25, reflecting high rates of natality, and thus fertility. In Maine during the 1920s, more than 40,000 people left the countryside for life in the city, either within the state or in another state. The remaining rural population was older, had fewer babies, and died at a higher rate than their fellow Mainers in less rural areas.44
The Decennial Federal Census

Demographic studies in the United States rely heavily on the decennial federal census, first conducted in 1790. The published federal census volumes provide information supplied by individuals, institutions, businesses and local governments, and present statistical data for the country as a whole and the individual states, as well as minor political divisions such as counties, cities and towns. The 1790 census lists the names of heads of households, and gives total household numbers of free white males, free white females, all other free individuals, and slaves. Later census volumes do not present the names of heads of households, and contain or exclude various categories, including numbers of free whites by sex in age groups, age groups for free blacks, occupational statistics, number of military pensioners, and citizenship and nativity data.45

The censuses for different years are important for different reasons, depending on what they include or omit. For instance, the 1890 census presents what was to that time the most complete census records on Native Americans ever published, while the 1870 census is believed to have omitted more than one million former slaves from the return in the southern states.46

The census volumes include vital statistics, but these are of limited value. The 1850 through 1900 censuses provide mortality figures for the year preceding the census, and natality data is lacking below the state level. Researchers are cautioned to exercise care when using both data sets.47

Whereas the published census volumes provide basic information sufficient for background data for more extensive research on local history, the original census manuscript returns have all of the data contained in the published volumes plus specific information on individuals, families and households. Where available, the extant original manuscripts or facsimiles thereof provide the detailed and specific inquiries and interpretation instructions used by the census takers in the
field, as well as the returns. The data is specific down to the ward and precinct level, and allows, for example, the researcher to study household structure similarity and difference within a town or across a county. Depending on the census, manuscript returns detail relationships of individuals within households, year of entry and place of birth of immigrants, occupations (if any) of women and children within a household, literacy, home ownership, and the number of children born to a married woman. Demographic analyses of minor civil divisions are greatly enhanced by the availability of the original census manuscripts. Although some census manuscripts have not survived in their original form, all have been microfilmed, and many are now available in compact disc format.

Potential problems with the federal decennial census data include errors made by the census taker, under-enumeration of individuals and deliberate misrepresentation. Individuals who moved within or between census districts might not have been counted due to omission, while some categories of individuals, including blacks, immigrants and laborers, were frequently underreported. Ages of individuals were frequently misreported, due to rounding off, the passage of time between the census taker’s visit and reporting the data, and inaccuracies due to the individual being very young or very old. Other problems include misspellings, omissions and transcription errors. Comparisons from one census year to another can be hindered by changing census district boundaries, and the difficulty in reconstructing those boundaries over time.
Vital Statistics Registration in the U.S.

The U.S. Bureau of the Census began collecting mortality statistics on an annual basis in 1900, and Maine was one of the original ten states (plus the District of Columbia) comprising the initial death-registration system. The national birth-registration system was launched in 1915, with the same ten states represented in the death-registration system. With the admission of Texas to the systems in 1933, both the birth- and death-registration systems included all the states in the contiguous U.S.\(^{50}\)

The individual states were required to adopt comprehensive birth and death registration legislation prior to their admission to the national registration systems. The effectiveness of each state’s legislation in providing accurate natality and mortality statistics for the individual states and the country as a whole has varied both within and among states across time. The comprehensiveness of death registration prior to 1940 was never tested, but is thought to have been more complete than that of the registration of births. The Census Bureau analyzed the completeness of birth registration data in 1940 by comparing births registered for the December 1939 through March 1940 period with the infants enumerated during the census of April 1, 1940. The analysis showed that birth registration for the United States as a whole was 92.5 percent accurate. Maine registered 96.1 percent accuracy, the lowest percentage among the nine New England and Middle Atlantic states. Maine conducted a birth registration test in 1950 to check the accuracy and completeness of statewide data, and found around 1.2 percent of births in the state were not recorded.\(^{51}\)

The use of vital records data in historical demographical analyses is limited for the United States due to the late date at which statewide registration began in most states. Registration records are often incomplete, and contain varying levels of accuracy, particularly for the initial years of a registration system. Despite
these shortcomings, and the likelihood that birth registrations were less accurate than those of deaths, vital records can be used to great effect in historical studies, especially when used in conjunction with the manuscript census returns and other location specific data, such as county marriage registration records, city directories and parish records.\textsuperscript{52}
Vital Statistics, Historical Demography and Population Change in Cumberland, Maine

Vital Statistics Registration in Maine

Systematic registration of births, deaths, and marriages on a state-wide level began in Maine in the year 1892, with the passage of legislation requiring the state’s municipalities to report such data to the Secretary of State. The new law replaced a similar one that had been repealed in 1887. The 1892 through 1894 Maine Department of Vital Statistics registration reports specifically mention some of the problems inherent in assembling life event statistics from the 456 municipalities collecting and reporting the data. Although the 1892 report stated that it was “gratifying to be able to report that a large majority of the clerks made their returns promptly,” and that all but one of the state’s cities, towns and plantations submitted reports, so many municipalities were apparently overdue in submitting their records as to postpone the final tabulation of the state’s data. A desire on the part of the state office for the data to be as accurate as possible resulted in more than 2,000 death records and a smaller number of birth records being returned to the town clerks, physicians and others responsible for submitting them. The extra care taken in checking the first-year records for errors and omissions was justified based on the belief that a greater degree of comprehensiveness and accuracy would amplify their value in comparing them with figures from later years, and those comparisons would be the final judge in how inclusive the first year’s work turned out. The final goal as stated in the 1892 report was that the work would be at least as accurate as that of the registrars of other states.53

The 1893 report was also delayed due to the effort required to correct errors and eliminate problems with the returns. Optimism was again evident that the later years’ work would improve as the local registrars become more familiar with the requirements of the state Department of Vital Statistics. The following year, however, the growing impatience of the state is evident in both the tone and the content of the introduction to the report. Although most town and city clerks
apparently submitted their returns in a prompt fashion, some were sufficiently late in making the June 1895 deadline for the 1894 returns that they were referred to the county attorneys. The process of examining the submitted returns for omissions and deficiencies is described, and includes ascertaining whether each return is signed by the proper authority, whether each occurred within the calendar year for the current reporting period, whether each occurred within the reporting municipality, and whether “there are indications of carelessness and the absence of facts that may have been obtained.” Potential problems with the returns are highlighted, and include unsigned documents, problematic dates, problems with place-of-occurrence, and discrepancies with cause of death. The report’s introduction ends with a defense of the necessity of postponing the issuing of the report in order to best eliminate deficiencies, stating that the verity of the data is more important than the timeliness of the report.54

Initially, births and deaths in Maine were assigned to the place of the event, regardless of the residence of the decedent, newborn or birth mother. Beginning with 1935, natality and mortality events were recorded based on residence rather than place of occurrence. In the introduction to the registration report for 1935, it is noted that the change in assigning the event to place of residence as opposed to place of occurrence “should ensure as near a true rate as possible and have a marked effect on municipalities which are large hospital centers. These cities and towns have been charged with a high rate and small communities without hospital facilities have been charged with a low rate.” The Standard Certificates of Birth, Death, and Stillbirth, adopted in 1939, replaced the arbitrary rule of one year of residence with the “usual place of residence,” as determined by the attending physician or mortician. The 1950 report clarifies the matter of residence and occurrence even further, stating that the figures contained within the report include only Maine residents, and that it is understood that there will be some interchange
among vital records events between the state and the provinces of Canada and the other New England states.\textsuperscript{55}
The Cumberland Data

One result of the 1892 Maine legislation governing vital records registration was the publishing of vital records in municipal annual reports in the state. In Cumberland, vital records were published in the town Annual Reports for the period 1893 to 1960. Death notices for Cumberland residents appeared in the reports beginning in the 1893 report and ending in that of 1960. Births were included in the 1893 report and in the reports of 1908 through 1944. From 1928 through 1944, the reports contained marriage notices.

The 1893 annual report covers the period January 7, 1892, to January 23, 1893. Subsequent reports cover years ending at various dates in the month of February, and are dated one year behind (i.e., the 1905 report covers the year ending February 6, 1905, with most of the data for 1904). There are two annual reports dated 1912: the first covers the municipal year ending February 15, 1912, the second covers the municipal year ending February 15, 1913. The total number of annual reports for the years 1893 through 1960 is 69.

Death notices for the report years 1893 and 1894 were broken down by those occurring on the mainland (designated Cumberland), those occurring on Chebeague Island, and those occurring elsewhere. For report years 1895 and 1896, the reports only stated the total number of deaths. The report years 1897 through 1960 listed all places of death.56

All vital records appearing in the 1893-1960 Town of Cumberland Annual Reports were compiled into databases using Microsoft Access. The three databases created include 992 birth notices; 2,427 death notices; and 310 marriage notices. The every-name index created includes 5,320 names, since all of the births and some of the deaths provided the names of the individual’s parents or parent. The compilation of vital records was published in 2005 by Picton Press of Rockport, Maine.57
The data for the Town of Cumberland, as reported in the Annual report of the municipal officers of the town of Cumberland, when compared with similar data for the State of Maine, present four interesting patterns: the birth rate; the death rate; the median age at death; and the decrease in the number of deaths occurring within the town, and the corresponding rise in the number of deaths being reported from out of town. Of equal interest is the overall population growth of the Town of Cumberland compared to the state as a whole, and the changes within Maine's rural population compared to the town and Cumberland County.
Methodology

Since the Cumberland vital records were reported by fiscal year, the individual reports might give a total for births and deaths that vary from the figure used in this analysis. All birth and death totals and rates presented here, and not attributed to the Maine Vital Statistics, use the data compiled in the digitized databases, with the records sorted by date instead of by report year. For example, the 1930 town report states that there were 29 deaths recorded for the fiscal year ending February 1, 1930, with an additional 10 deaths reported from other towns and cities, for a total of 39. The actual number of deaths for calendar year 1930, both in Cumberland and reported from other towns and cities, published in the 1929 and 1930 Cumberland annual reports, is 42.\textsuperscript{58}

In discussing the birth and death rates for Maine and Cumberland, as presented in the Maine Vital Statistics, the intercensal figures are disregarded, since these depend on estimated population data. Death rates for the counties and the state for the period 1892 to 1939 were recalculated based on population re-estimations after the 1940 U.S. Census, and, since they depend on estimations, may or may not be correct. The town data presented in the state reports for the intercensal years to 1919 is based on the town’s population as recorded during the previous decennial census, a clearly faulty method of estimation. For example, the 1915 death rate for Cumberland is calculated using the 1910 population of 1,403, a method which assumes that the 18% population decline registered by Cumberland between the 1910 and 1920 decennial censuses occurred wholly in the years between 1916 and 1920. The 1935 state report uses an estimated population for the town data; as with the estimated intercensal county and state population figures, the estimated town population data may or may not be correct.\textsuperscript{59}

Births were reported in the annual reports by number for all report years, but the names and dates of individual births were only included in the 1908
through 1944 reports. Since an accurate statement of the number of births during a given calendar year requires sorting individual births by date and not by report year, the analysis of Cumberland’s birth rate using the town report data examines only the period from 1910 through 1940.60

The median age at death is presented in five-year increments, since the median is a compilation of all deaths occurring in both the town and the state as a whole, and is not dependent on any estimated figures as are intercensal birth and death rates. For Cumberland, median age at death was computed by sorting the annual report death data by the year in which the death occurred, then exporting the reported ages at death for each calendar year to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, and computing a median for the figures. Median age at death for the state was not published in the Maine Vital Statistics, but was obtained by request from the Maine Department of Human Services’ Office of Data, Research & Vital Statistics.61

Place of death statistics are presented for every year from 1900-1960, to fully display the changing patterns over time.
Birth Rate

For the period 1910 through 1940, Maine’s birth rate ranged between 18.04 per thousand (in 1940) and 22.78 per thousand (in 1920), and averaged 21.42. For the same period, Cumberland’s rate, using the data culled from the town annual reports, varied between 17.39 and 22.10 per thousand, and averaged 20.16. Cumberland’s birth rate was initially higher than Maine’s, then dropped considerably for 1920. Cumberland’s rate then surpassed Maine’s rate for both 1930 and 1940.62

![Chart 1. Maine and Cumberland birth rates, 1910-1940.](image)
Death Rate

The death rate for Maine for the period 1900 through 1960 showed a steady and near continuous decline, from 16.4 per thousand in 1900 to 11.08 per thousand in 1960. Cumberland’s rate, however, increased from 1900 through 1920, from 19.94 per thousand to 33.91 per thousand, after which the rate declined from its high but fluctuated, eventually reaching 14.83 per thousand in 1960.\textsuperscript{63}

Median Age at Death

The median age at death for the period 1900 through 1960 was consistently higher in Cumberland than in Maine. The exception to this was in 1910, when the median age at death for the state was one year higher than for Cumberland, and 1940, when Maine and Cumberland both had the same median age at death.  

Place of Death

The total number of deaths reported for Cumberland residents in the town reports each year between 1900 and 1960 ranged from a low of 22 in 1908 to a high of 49 in 1957, with an average of 35.6 individuals expiring during each of the 61 years. Looking at the place of death, we see a decline in the number of deaths occurring within the Town of Cumberland, and a corresponding rise in the number of deaths being reported from out of town.

Chart 5 shows the relative proportions of deaths of Cumberland residents occurring in Portland, Maine, and those (labeled “Elsewhere”) occurring in Cumberland, on Chebeague Island, and in localities other than Portland. The percentage of deaths occurring in Portland, which range from a low of 2.78% in 1903 to a high of 55.26% in 1956, equaled or exceeded 40% during nine of the 61 report years; four of those nine years were the period 1956 through 1959.

For the report years 1900 through 1929, the average percentage of total reported deaths of Cumberland residents occurring outside of the town was 35.91%; for the period 1930 through 1960, the percentage increased to 59.08%. The percentages of deaths occurring in Portland for the same periods were 15.26% and 33.98%. Clearly, a shift had occurred, resulting in more Cumberland residents...
dying outside of town than within the town; by the latter part of the study period, more people were dying in Portland than in either Cumberland or elsewhere.\textsuperscript{65}

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\textit{Chart 5. Deaths of Cumberland residents, 1900-1960, occurring in Portland and elsewhere.}
Population Growth

Between 1900 and 1960, Maine’s population increased from 694,466 to 970,689, for a gain of 37.8%. During the same period, the population of Cumberland increased 240%, from 1,404 to 2,765. However, while Maine’s population growth occurred in a continuous upward rate of between 3.45% and 7.99% for each ten-year period, Cumberland’s growth was confined to the years after 1920. Initially, Cumberland’s population fell 18%, from 1,404 in 1900 to 1,150 in 1920, after which it grew at a rate of between 8.2% and 36.21% for each ten-year period leading up to 1960.66

![Chart 6. Population growth rates Maine and Cumberland, 1900-1960.](image-url)
Comparability Problems

For natality and mortality rates for the town of Cumberland, two separate and distinct sets of data are available. The birth and death rates for the town presented so far are based on the compilation of the vital statistics appearing in the Cumberland annual reports. The Maine Department of Vital Statistics, however, presents birth and death rates for the town that vary with those reported by the Cumberland Town Clerk, and allocates both fewer and more births and deaths to the town, depending on the year. The following chart shows the birth rates reported for the town of Cumberland by the Cumberland Town Clerk and by the Maine Department of Vital Statistics. The rate reported by the town is higher than that reported by the state in both 1910 and 1930, and is lower in 1940. The rate reported by both is the same for 1920.67

![Chart 7. Cumberland birth rate, 1910-1940, as reported by Cumberland Town Clerk and by the Maine Dept. of Vital Statistics.](image)

A similar situation exists for death data, although in the case of death rates the town consistently reports higher rates for its residents than acknowledged by the state.
Chart 8. Cumberland death rate, 1900-1950, as reported by Cumberland Town Clerk and by the Maine Dept. of Vital Statistics.
Comparing Cumberland and North Yarmouth

Examining comparable data for the town of North Yarmouth can assist in establishing if the discrepancies between the two data sets lay with just the Cumberland data and the state’s interpretation of it or whether the incongruity is due to the individual towns registering life events in a manner incomparable with the state’s methodology. The Town of North Yarmouth recorded the life events of its citizens in a similar fashion as did Cumberland. All vital records appearing in Town of North Yarmouth, Maine, Annual Reports for the period 1893 to 1963 were entered into a Microsoft Access database in an identical manner as the Cumberland records. The compilation of vital records was published in 2004 by Picton Press of Rockport, Maine. 68

In the North Yarmouth Annual Reports, death notices for North Yarmouth residents appeared in the reports beginning with the 1893 report and ending in that of 1963. Births were included in the reports for the years 1893 through 1945. From 1894 through 1945, the reports contained marriage notices. Over the 71 years of reporting deaths, the notices presented different amounts of information, including the name of the individual, the date of death, the age of the individual, the cause of death and the place of death. Birth notices for all years included the names of the parents; for years 1942 through 1945 the reports stated the place of birth. Marriage notices for all years included the residence of the individuals and for years 1942 through 1945 the place of marriage and the person performing the marriage. As with the Cumberland reports, the time span covered by each North Yarmouth report varied over the years. 69

If we compare the number of births North Yarmouth reported for the town for the census years from 1900 through 1940 to the figures reported by the Maine Department of Vital Records, we see that for 1900 and 1910 the figures were similar, while for 1920 the town reported more deaths than did the state. The figures
were again similar in 1930, and diverged again for 1940, with the state figures outpacing those reported by the town.\textsuperscript{70}

![Chart 9. North Yarmouth birth rate, 1900-1940, as reported by North Yarmouth Town Clerk and by the Maine Dept. of Vital Statistics.](chart)

A comparison of the death rates reported for North Yarmouth by the town and by the state also shows discrepancies between the two data sets, although in the case of deaths the town consistently reported a higher death rate for its residents than did the state.\textsuperscript{71}

![Chart 10. North Yarmouth death rate, 1900-1940 as reported by North Yarmouth Town Clerk and by the Maine Dept. of Vital Statistics.](chart)
The following charts show the discrepancy rate between what the towns reported for births and what the state reported. By taking the town reported rate and dividing it by the state reported rate, we get a discrepancy rate. Since Cumberland and the state both reported 20 births and a 17.39 birth rate for the town for 1920, there is no discrepancy and the discrepancy rate is 1.00. For 1920, North Yarmouth reported 19 births while the state credited it with eight, generating a discrepancy rate of 2.38. In 1940, both Cumberland and North Yarmouth were reporting fewer births within their towns than the state was crediting them with, resulting in rates of less than 1.00. As the chart shows, both towns reported higher numbers of births for 1910 and 1930, while 1940 had the state reporting more births than did the towns.

![Chart 11. Cumberland and North Yarmouth birth rate discrepancy factor.](image)

A similar deviation is noted when we look at death rates. The following chart presents all deaths reported by Cumberland compared to those reported by the state (AR/VSR); deaths reported by Cumberland as occurring within Cumberland compared to those credited to the town by the state (AR(C)/VSR); and all deaths reported by North Yarmouth compared to the state's figures (AR/VSR). The
deaths reported by Cumberland as occurring within the town compare most favorably to the state’s data, indeed matching it for two of the five reporting years. The other two data sets, representing all the deaths reported by the towns of Cumberland and North Yarmouth, have discrepancy rates of between 1.2 and 2.33 over the five reporting periods. Interestingly, the trajectories of the two sets are remarkably similar, displaying parallel discrepancy rates over the years.

Chart 12. Cumberland and North Yarmouth death rate discrepancy factor.

Comparing the reporting of local vital events by Cumberland and North Yarmouth with the state’s figures for the two towns does not present a firm rule for factoring error rates; indeed, no general pattern is readily discernible. What is noticeable, however, is that when considering births a change occurs in the data patterns after 1930. For example, Cumberland and North Yarmouth both reported higher birth rates among their residents than did the state up to and including 1930, after which the two towns reported fewer births than the state credited them with. Regarding death rates, the number of deaths reported by both the Cumberland and North Yarmouth town clerks are consistently higher than the numbers of deaths credited those towns by the state, with Cumberland reporting between
six and 24 more deaths than the state and North Yarmouth reporting between two and 12 more deaths than the state. The number of deaths in both towns, as reported by the towns and the state, decrease between 1930 and 1940, after which Cumberland and the state both show an increased death rate in that town. North Yarmouth reports an increase in deaths between 1940 and 1950, while the state reports that the town’s death rate decreased for the period.

The difference between the birth and death data for the towns as reported by the towns and by the state appears to center on the matter of assigning life events to place of occurrence or the usual place of residence. As noted, the state in 1935 began recording natality and mortality based on residence rather than place of occurrence. Interestingly, the change of pattern identified by comparing the local data with the data reported by the state occurs after 1930. Clearly, it is this difference we are seeing when examining the two data sets. The discrepancies noted can only be rectified by examining the original birth and death certificates, and recreating the process by which the state assigned the events to a particular locale. The fact that both Cumberland and North Yarmouth consistently reported more deaths than the state credited the towns with seems to indicate that the two communities continued to consider former residents who had moved away as members of the society, and speaks to the issue of how the members of a given society view and define their population.
Cumberland, Demographically

If we disregard the birth and death rates culled from the Cumberland Annual Reports and accept the state statistics, we see that Maine's birth rate is higher than Cumberland's through 1930, after which Cumberland outpaces the state. The birth rate calculated using the town data and the rate reported by the state both have Cumberland lagging behind the state in natality up until 1930, after which the two data sets differ in how Cumberland's rate compares to Maine's. Both sets of data both present patterns consistent with the premise that Cumberland's older, less fecund population had proportionately fewer births through 1920 than that of Maine as a whole, followed by a period when immigrants both younger and more fertile than the town's residents joined the community, changing the population and its composition through their presence and higher birth rate.

The Maine Department of Vital Statistics did not report birth and death rates for the individual towns for the 1960 report; therefore, the comparison of birth and death rates using the state data for Cumberland covers the period 1900-1950.

![Chart 13. Maine and Cumberland birth rates, 1910-1940.](image)
The Cumberland annual reports and the Maine Vital Statistics both report death rates that, though dissimilar in the exact rates, present comparable patterns. In both sources, Cumberland’s death rate increases from 1900 through 1920, after which it declines for both 1930 and 1940. Both sources register an increase in the death rate for 1950. Although the data from the two sources exhibit different trajectories, and the state data has Cumberland’s rate lower than Maine’s for 1930 and 1940, both data sets are consistent with a community that had an older population through 1920, after which immigration infused the town with younger residents.

**Chart 14.** Maine and Cumberland death rates, 1900-1950.

The compilation of place-of-death statistics for Cumberland from the town annual reports is similarly problematic due to the discrepancies between the annual report data and the information appearing in the state’s assemblage. Without examining each of the individual death registration forms and determining which actually were credited to Cumberland, it is nearly impossible to report accurately on the place of occurrence for those individuals whom the state determined were residents of the town when they expired. It is safe to say, however, that the increase in the number of deaths occurring out of town coincides with the pattern
evident statewide of an increase in the percentage of births taking place in hospitals and birthing centers, which may or may not have been within the municipality where the newborn and birth mother had their usual place of residence. The growing incidence of deaths nationwide occurring in hospitals and nursing homes is reflected in the trend evident in the Cumberland data; the specific percentage of deaths occurring in any given locality is incidental to the overall change of patterns of death and societal acceptance of the movement of the death process from inside the home into the hospital or other medical facility.\textsuperscript{72}
Cumberland in the 1920s and 1930s

Although the original conclusions drawn from the compilation of vital records from the Cumberland annual reports are tempered somewhat by the discrepancies with the data published in the state reports, the major premise, that Cumberland’s loss of population beginning in 1860 resulted in an older and less fertile populace by 1920, still stands. Examining the changes in the composition of the town, particularly after 1920 when population increases began to reverse the 60-year decline in the number of Cumberland residents, requires the use of supporting documents, and allows the placement of Cumberland’s experience within the context of the composition of the State of Maine as a whole and the changes being experienced by the larger populace.

The rural population of Maine in 1930 was older and more religiously and ethnically homogeneous than the populace of the state’s urban centers. The analysis of Cumberland’s natality and mortality rates published by the state, which shows that the town had a lower birth rate and a higher death rate leading up to 1930, implies that Cumberland residents were older than Maine as a whole, and thus is in line with the general pattern of an older rural populace. In addition, the 1920 federal census shows that heads of household in Cumberland had a median age of 53. An older population results in lower fertility and natality rates, which is again evident in the Cumberland data.73

More than three-fourths of the state’s rural residents were native born of native parentage, the highest percentage of any state, and an equal proportion was Protestant. The 1920 census returns for Cumberland show that the town was similar to rural Maine in this respect. The 1920 census identified 447 heads of household in Cumberland, and of those, 362, or 82.1%, reported being born in Maine. That proportion varies little with the 1910 returns, which showed that 84.44% of the 482 heads of household in the town were native born.74
The state’s small farmers in the 1920s were nearly self-sufficient, and combined specialized farming, mixed crops and livestock with non-farm occupations such as lumbering, fishing and tourism related activities. There were, however, differences across the state. Aroostook County farmers, with a loamy, fruitful soil and flatter topography that contrasted with the rocky earth and hilly terrain of the central and southern regions of the state, focused their efforts on potatoes. As farmers, they were more successful and more modern than their counterparts outside the County, and used half of the state’s tractors in producing nearly 15 percent of the nation’s potato crop in the early 1930s.75

Outside of Aroostook, Maine’s increasingly part-time farmers kept livestock and raised vegetables for consumption and sale, and provided the cities with dairy products, apples, poultry and other products. The state’s egg business, centered in York and Cumberland counties, was part of the progressively more specialized nature of Maine farming that competed with Midwestern beef and pork products and Vermont’s dairy industry. Farmers in the coastal counties were more likely than their brethren elsewhere in Maine to abandon their farms during this period.76

Cumberland participated in the trend toward specialized produce and self-sufficient farming. As previously mentioned, the town produced a variety of goods, including potatoes, hay, corn, eggs, apples, flowers and fish. The town’s poultry farmers maintained their flocks for the period 1924 through 1935, with the number of chickens in town ranging from 8,474 in 1927 to 12,326 in 1929, for an annual average number of chickens of 10,467 for the 12-year period. The number of cows kept by the town’s farmers declined during the 1930s, either due to the improved dairying methods that resulted in fewer animals producing higher yields or a partial abandonment of dairy farming. Significantly, the number of bulls remained static, implying that the propagation of the herd was still important.77
The decline in population that affected so many rural Maine communities during the 1920s was less evident in Cumberland County. The 26 municipalities comprising Cumberland County in 1920\(^7\) included 20 that had populations under 2,500, which the U.S. Census classified as rural. Of those 20 towns, 11 registered population increases between 1920 and 1930, including Cumberland. The growth rates experienced by those 11 towns ranged from 2.24% to 54.89%, while actual growth ranged from 26 in Gray to 842 in Cape Elizabeth. The average growth rate for the 11 towns was 21.21%.\(^7\)

Cumberland County’s population increased by 23.51% from 1900 to 1920, from 100,689 to 124,358. During the same period, the population of Portland grew by 38.14%, from 50,145 to 69,272. That growth was bound to impact the county’s rural towns, particularly since a tripling of the number of automobiles in the state during the 1920s made commuting to work much easier. The population increase in Portland would have put a strain on the ability of the city to house the influx of people, and more of the immigrants arriving in the city would have spilled over into the county. In addition, ten of the towns that registered population increases between 1920 and 1930 had lost population between 1910 and 1920; conceivably, there was a surfeit of housing available in those towns, which attracted new residents.\(^8\)

The changing economy, and the appeal of the city that drew so many of Maine’s young people off the farms and out of the state’s rural communities, left many residents with the sense that the Depression that took hold in 1929 was just more of the same. But the “communism of the poor,” that independent mindset that dictated that neighbors and towns take care of their own and relief from the state or federal governments was not an option, was supplanted by at least a partial willingness to accept help from other than the normal places. The Cumberland Overseers of the Poor saw their caseload increase from zero in 1929 to 43 cases.
comprising 163 individuals in 1935. Total dollars spent on the poor averaged $3,844 a year for the period 1930 through 1940; of that, some was reimbursed by other municipalities, the state or the federal Work Projects Administration.\textsuperscript{81}

Another indication of trouble in the rural communities of the “Yankee commonwealth,” where paying taxes and avoiding debt went hand in hand with an aversion to mortgages and a reliance on antiquated farm machinery, was an increase in the amount of uncollected taxes in Cumberland. The total amount of uncollected taxes in the town in 1929 was $398; by 1935, $855 went uncollected. The figure decreased the following two years before it peaked again in 1938, at $822. Between 19\% and 89\% of the unpaid taxes, or an annual average of 53\%, were still on the books the year following the year they were due.\textsuperscript{82}

The leaving behind of the rural communities by what was typically their youngest and most enterprising residents threatened the very existence of Maine’s rural communities. That abandonment took place in Cumberland starting in 1860 and continued through to at least 1920, a 60-year period when the town lost nearly one-third of its populace.\textsuperscript{83} The remaining population was older and less fecund than it would have been had the out migration not occurred. The town’s lower rate of natality and higher rate of mortality could not sustain the populace; if Cumberland had been a closed society in 1920, with no influx of migrants to bolster the overall numbers and change the balance between births and deaths, the community would have eventually died out. There are numerous examples of populations that have significantly increased or decreased through migration. The town of Cumberland, which sustained a 33\% decrease in population from 1860 to 1920, followed by a 240\% increase in population from 1920 through 1960, is an example of both.\textsuperscript{84}
Final Thoughts

Using local vital records registration information for a historical demographical investigation of a town or region can produce good data that may contribute to the reconstruction of the composition of a society and the characteristics of its inhabitants and an analysis of the changes affecting the community or region. The problems inherent in vital records registration systems, including the under- and over-reporting and misrepresentation of life events, mandate that the data stemming from such recording systems be checked against and supported by information from other sources, including federal and state census records, the original vital record registration forms, business directories, municipal reports and/or other sources of local information, if available. By maximizing the number of original sources used in reconstructing the local population, the makeup of and changes affecting that populace can be more successfully analyzed. Realizing the particular nuances of any given registration system, such as Maine’s switching from a place-of-occurrence to a residence based vital records registration system in 1935, allows a better understanding of the limitations of any given data source.

In the end, the picture that emerges of Cumberland in 1930, when the country had just entered the Great Depression and the town’s population was within eight residents of the number it had on its founding more than a century before, is of a small town where the inhabitants do what they need to survive. Subsistence farming and diversified livestock production help sustain the residents, and the town’s proximity to Portland allows the inhabitants the luxury of working in the city while living in a rural setting. As it had before, when its numbers increased 19% during the years between its founding in 1821 and its first population apogee in 1860, Cumberland welcomed new residents, many of them of different ethnic stock than those already there. The new inhabitants did little to alter the town, joining the churches that were in existence rather than starting their own, chang-
ing the community’s framework by their numbers and birth rates and not their bloodlines and institutions. The town’s farmers, like all farmers in Maine, had responded before to necessity, and would continue to do so, just as those who previously rode the electric cars into Portland or Lewiston or Yarmouth would now use the ubiquitous automobile for their transportation needs.

Welcoming newcomers, adapting in the face of want, taking care of one’s own, were the hallmarks of community evident in small towns throughout the country. Cumberland, borne of North Yarmouth and since surpassing its mother town in terms of population and economic activity, would recover from its own loss of populace and shift in agricultural fortunes, welcoming new residents to what would become another of Portland’s bedroom communities, allowing its inhabitants to benefit from the nearness of Maine’s largest city while residing in a pastoral location.

The following poem by longtime resident Nellie L. Sweetser sums up her feelings for the town, and probably the feelings of many of its inhabitants, since it was included in the municipal history printed for Cumberland’s centennial celebration in 1921. It evokes images of pastoral beauty, domestic pleasure and New England frugality, of commonplace people following the ways of their forebears. Their ethics might be average, their language earthier than some, but the rule of order is steadfast, and the hometown and its institutions and folk are beloved. Cumberland professed no claim to fame, a fact that did little to dispel the emotions its residents held for it, since its remembered ways and familiar feeling made it one large domestic unit, a native community whose members felt quite comfortably at home.
Cumberland.

“Graceful elm and maple trees
Waving gently in the breeze;
Winding road of heated sand
Cumberland.

Greener lawns and houses neat,
Children playing in the street,
Signs of thrift on every hand,
Cumberland.

Skies as blue as anywhere,
All you need of purest air,
Room enough at your command,
Cumberland.

Water? Plenty when it rains,
People, ordinary brains,
Country lads and lasses tanned,
Cumberland.

Morals? Not so very bad,
Better practice might be had,
But for precepts, those are grand,
Cumberland.

Little church and schoolhouse too,
With their teaching kind and true;
Reaping what the fathers planned,
Cumberland.

Just a little country town,
No resort and no renown,
Nothing great and nothing grand,
Cumberland.

Little word of letters four,
Makes me love it more and more,
Ye who feel it understand,
Cumberland.

All its well remembered ways,
Traversed from our childhood days,
Dearer far than cities grand,
Cumberland.

Home is more than house can be,
Broader than a family;
Native town long may it stand,
Cumberland.”

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Endnotes


27. Sweetser, *Cumberland, Maine*, 222-26; Hutchinson, *History; Norton, Norton’s hand-hewn history*, 49; “Cumberland Center to have handsome public library through wills of Woodfords couple,” *Maine Sunday Telegram*, July 9, 1922, p. 5A.


46. Stephens, Sources for U.S. history, 64-83.

47. Stephens, Sources for U.S. history, 64-83.


52. Linder and Groves, Vital statistic rates, 95-100; Stephens, Sources for U.S. history, 93-97.


60. Town of Cumberland, Annual report.


63. Town of Cumberland, Annual report; Maine Dept. of Vital Statistics, Annual report, 1940.

64. Town of Cumberland, Annual report; Hilton, email message.

65. Town of Cumberland, Annual report.


67. Town of Cumberland, Annual report; Maine Dept. of Vital Statistics, Annual report, 1940.


70. Maine Dept. of Vital Statistics, Annual report.

71. Town of North Yarmouth, Annual report; Maine Dept. of Vital Statistics, Annual report, 1940.


77. Town of Cumberland, Annual report.

78. The Town of Otisfield, part of Cumberland County in 1920, joined Oxford County in 1978.


83. The out migration could have ended in 1920, when the population reached its recorded nadir of 1,150. It is more likely that the following decades of growth included patterns of both immigration and emigration, with net immigration gains masking the continuing outflow of some of the native youth.

84. Hinde, “Demographic perspectives.”

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