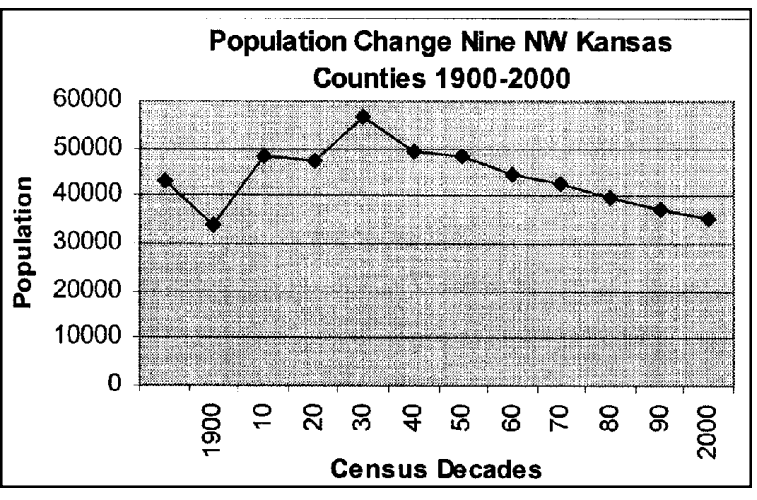
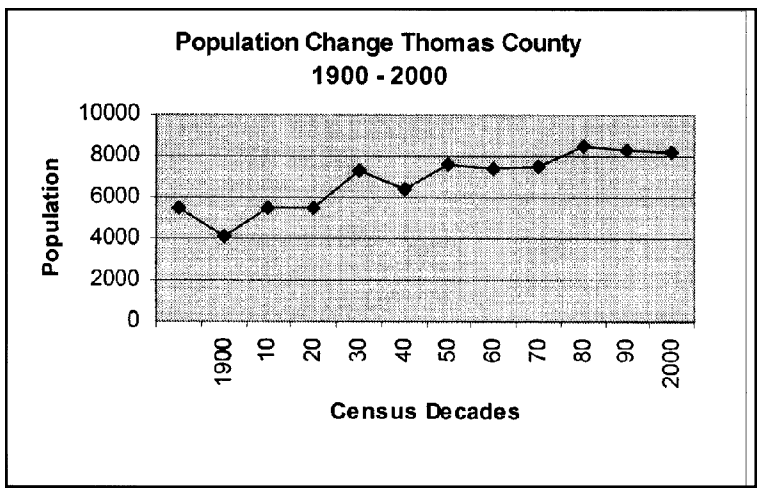
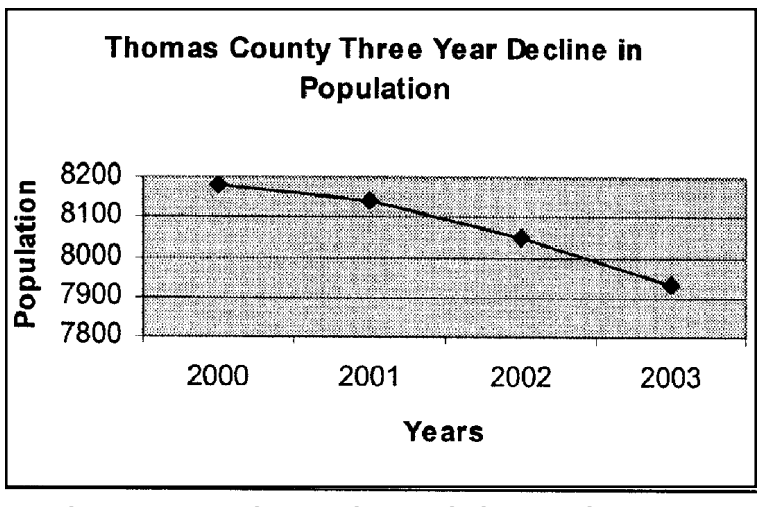


Graph 1 — Population changes for a century



Graph 2 — Changes in Thomas County during same period



Graph 3 — Recent changes in population trends

Our challenge is to repopulate the northwest corner of Kansas

Gerry Fulwider

● A View From the Range

This article is the first in a series examining economic and demographic changes currently occurring in northwest Kansas.

Reliable demographic data provides both business managers and community planners with essential tools to assist in decision making processes. Decisions to build, expand or close a business are not predicated on what happened yesterday, but what the decision maker believes will happen in the future. Nonetheless, in the absence of other information, the best predictor of future events remains past performance. This is especially true of data that is substantiated by a well defined trend line.

Of all the data used by planners, population is usually the first to be analyzed. The number of people living in an area determines the need for government services and the demand for consumer goods. Conversely, the numbers of people residing in an area reflect the number of people who will share the tax burden in providing needed government services.

Of all the statistics of which we cherish, it seems that population should be the easiest to account for. Simply count the people; we do it formally every 10 years and in the interim we use estimates. How hard can it be? According to a recent report, 4,000 people a week currently move into the Las Vegas area. Each week, 1,500 of the disillusioned move out. That equates to a net gain of 10,000 residents per month.

At that rate, how do the counters count? How do the planners plan? If the City of Lights sustains that growth rate for 10 years, the population base will have increased by 1.2 million people. How many new schools do you need to accommodate 400,000 new families?

In our communities of northwest Kansas the counting is much simpler. The planning however is no less crucial. Imagine: our neighbor sells his small business and decides to join the pilgrimage to Las Vegas. As we wave good-bye to our neighbor, his wife and four children, a tear comes to our eyes. We realize that we are losing a good neighbor, a member of our church and active volunteer in civic organizations. His children are good athletes and would have undoubtedly contributed to next year's championship. We lament our loss but wish them well in their new adventure.

Suddenly we remember that, with the loss of four students, our school system will loose $18,000 of financial aid from the state. Our good neighbors will no longer share in the tax burden required to maintain our schools, police and fire departments and other government services. The fact that they are no longer a part of our community will not result in a proportional reduction in the cost of these services. As we watch the lights of their U-Haul head out of town, I hear my wife murmur, "and may all your jackpots be small ones".

So what does the future hold for northwest Kansas? Have we established an irreversible trend? Just how bad do the numbers look?

Sociologists refer to a prolonged loss of population from a geographic area as out-migration. Type in 'out migration' in the search engine of your computer and you will find that "out-migration R us." We are not alone. Much of the farm belt has similar concerns. Public policy makers have identified and named the problem but, as yet have failed to identify an effective solution.

The following graph was created using data derived from the U.S. Census Bureau and clearly portrays the trend in population growth for the combined nine counties of northwest Kansas. (Cheyenne, Rawlins, Decatur, Sheridan, Thomas, Sherman, Wallace, Logan and Gove) The graph summarizes the population changes for a century of living in northwest Kansas.

(See graph #1 above)

January 1, 1900, a total of 33,968 northwest Kansas residents gathered together to celebrate the beginning of a new century and a new year. One hundred years later, January 1, 2000, the population had grown to 35,219. That's a growth of 1,251 people in 100 years.

Today, the latest census estimates, place this area's population at 33,351.

Not all of these nine counties have suffered the same fate. Some, blessed by I-70 traffic or irrigated farm land, have fared better than their neighbors. The following graph presents the same historical period for Thomas County.

(See graph #2 above)

Registering 4,112 residents in 1900, Thomas County peaked in the 1980 Census with 8,451 people.

Is population growth the end all to prosperity? Many communities throughout the nation have more people than jobs. High unemployment, a high demand for public services and a low tax base unquestionably represents the worst kind of pain a community can suffer. The larger the population, the larger the problem.

So then it is not population but income and tax base that define a vibrant economy, right? Not necessarily; there are communities blessed with rich natural resources that enjoy significant individual wealth and a monumental tax base. Such communities often boast large oil and gas reserves or nuclear power generating facilities. Given such wealth, it would seem that such a community would be a natural catalyst, attracting people wanting to build homes, invest in business and raise children. Not always true. Other factors — such as the location of the community in relation to another more established community — can substantially retard growth of a seemingly blessed community.

Conversely, there are Kansas counties that enjoy the benefits of significant wealth but fail to attract new families willing to build homes, invest in businesses and raise children. Some counties blessed with large producing oil and gas fields or nuclear power plants benefit from low property taxes and abundant government services but find it difficult to attract the people and outside retailers required to build the vibrant economy they desire.

Thomas County has indeed been blessed with water, a big highway and forefathers who were innovative visionaries with the courage to plan and invest in our future. Recently, Dr. Joe Astrip, Chairman of the Political Science Department at Kansas State University, speaking at a wKREDA strategic planning conference, presented a scenario in which both Thomas and Ellis Counties will boast a 2050 Census population of 50,000. No guarantees, no odds, but a solid prediction that he hopes will generate some thought.

Now for a downer; one last graph.

(See graph #3 above)

That's right, after a century of relative population growth; Thomas County has suffered three years of population decline. A net loss of 247 people in three years.

Is this a big deal? Either we are growing or we are declining. Nothing increases forever and seldom do things decrease forever.

However, population growth is a big deal. Today's businessperson realizes that in this competitive environment, growth is not an option. It is a must. A business that fails to increase production or reduce costs by an amount equal to or greater than inflation is charted on a course into dangerous waters.

Sadly, many businesses, located in areas of high out-migration, are restricted in their ability to increase revenues; as the number of potential customers decline, so do the hopes for increased sales. Their options appear limited.

Many of us would prefer to see Thomas County today in the same way that we remember the Thomas County of our youth. But alas, that's not realistic, and if we are not aggressive in the growth and promotion of our communities, we too will be but a fading memory.

If Dr. Joe's prediction is plausible and the resources exist for Thomas County to grow to 50,000 people by 2050, we are truly an Oasis of Opportunity and maybe, just maybe we will be successful in creating jobs, attracting people and the repopulating of northwest Kansas.

*****

Gerry Fulwider is executive director of the Thomas County Economic Development Alliance.

Check each issue of the Free Press for additional TV Listings

TV LISTINGS sponsored by the *COLBY FREE PRESS*

WEEKDAYS — AUGUST 10 - AUGUST 16

	6 AM	6:30	7 AM	7:30	8 AM	8:30	9 AM	9:30	10 AM	10:30	11 AM	11:30
KLBY/ABC 4 6	News		Good Morning America				Make-eover	Make-eover	The View		Holly-wood	News
KSNK/NBC 8 9	News Cont'd		Today						Live With Regis and Kelly		Martha Stewart Living	
KBSL/CBS 12 11	News				The Early Show		The 700 Club		The Price Is Right		The Young and the Restless	
K15CG 3	World News	Yoga	Body Electric	Caillou	Boohbah	Barney-Friends	Dragon Tales	Lions	Sesame Street		Clifford-Red	Teletub-bies
WGN 13	Chang-ing	Believer Voice	Celebrity Justice	Hillbil-lies	Hillbil-lies	Happy Days	Matlock		In the Heat of the Night		Rockford Files	
NICK 29	Oddpar-ents	Rocket Power	Rugrats	Spon-geBob	Max & Ruby	Maggie-Beast	Dora the Explorer	Blue's Clues	Dora the Explorer	Blue's Clues	Rugrats	Rugrats
FAM 30	Bey-blade	Digimon-Digital	Power Rangers	Spider-Man	Varied	Living the Life	The 700 Club		7th Heaven		Full House	Full House
USA 31	Varied Programs								Movie			Varied
TBS 37	Saved by Bell	Saved by Bell	Movie				Dawson's Creek		Dawson's Creek		Saved by Bell	Cosby Show
TNT 38	The Lost World		The Pretender		Charmed		ER		ER		Judging Amy	
DSC 42	Paid Program	Paid Program	Paid Program	Paid Program	Varied Programs		Double Agents		Designer Guys	Designer Guys	Rally Round the House	
A&E 47	Varied Programs		Movie				Murder, She Wrote		Third Watch		City Confidential	
ESPN 49	SportsCenter		SportsCenter		Sports-Center	Varied	SportsCenter		SportsCenter		Outside-Lines	Baseball Tonight
HBO 7	Movie Cont'd	Varied	Movie		Varied Programs							
DISN 17	Koala Brothers	Stanley	The Wiggles	JoJo's Circus	The Wiggles	Stanley	Rolie Polie	Rolie Polie	Out of the Box	PB&J Otter	Koala Brothers	The Wiggles
MAX 21	Movie Cont'd	Varied Programs							Movie		Varied	Movie

WEEKDAYS — AUGUST 10 - AUGUST 16

	12 PM	12:30	1 PM	1:30	2 PM	2:30	3 PM	3:30	4 PM	4:30	5 PM	5:30
KLBY/ABC 4 6	All My Children		One Life to Live		General Hospital		Dr. Phil		Judge Judy	Judge Judy	News	ABC Wld News
KSNK/NBC 8 9	News	Family Feud	Days of Our Lives		Passions		Inside Edition	Family Feud	Million-aire	Jeop-ardy!	News	NBC News
KBSL/CBS 12 11	News	Bold, Beautiful	As the World Turns		Guiding Light		The People's Court		Oprah Winfrey		News	CBS News
K15CG 3	Reading Rainbow	Mister Rogers	Varied Programs			George Shrinks	Beren. Bears	Liberty's Kids	Cyber-chase	Arthur	Zoom	Busi-ness
WGN 13	News		In the Heat of the Night		Street Smarts	Street Smarts	Cosby Show	Cosby Show	Fresh Prince	Fresh Prince	Home Improve.	Will & Grace
NICK 29	Varied Programs						Oddpar-ents	Jimmy Neutron	Spon-geBob	Amanda	SPLAT!	Rugrats
FAM 30	Family Matters	Family Matters	Step by Step	Step by Step	Switche-d!	Knock First	7th Heaven		Boy Mts. World	Boy Mts. World	Full House	Full House
USA 31	JAG Cont'd	Varied Programs			Movie				Walker, Texas Ranger		Walker, Texas Ranger	
TBS 37	Fresh Prince	Fresh Prince	Steve Harvey	Steve Harvey	Drew Carey	Drew Carey	Yes, Dear	Home Improve.	Home Improve.	Ray-mond	Ray-mond	Seinfeld
TNT 38	Law & Order		NYPD Blue		NYPD Blue		Judging Amy		Angel		Charmed	
DSC 42	Surprise by Design		Surprise by Design		Rally Round the House		Double Agents		Varied Programs			
A&E 47	American Justice		Movie				Murder, She Wrote		Third Watch		City Confidential	
ESPN 49	Varied Programs		Year-book	Year-book	Year-book	Varied Programs		NFL Live	Around the Horn	Interrup-tion	SportsCenter	
HBO 7	Movie Cont'd	Varied Programs										
DISN 17	JoJo's Circus	Stanley	House of Mouse	House of Mouse	Recess	Recess	Lilo & Stitch	Lilo & Stitch	Kim Possible	Proud Family	Even Stevens	Lizzie McGuire
MAX 21	Movie Cont'd	Varied Programs		Movie		Varied Programs		Movie	Varied Programs		Movie	Varied

THURSDAY — AUGUST 12

	6 PM	6:30	7 PM	7:30	8 PM	8:30	9 PM	9:30	10 PM	10:30	11 PM	11:30
KLBY/ABC 4 6	(5:59) News	Ent. Tonight	Extreme Makeover (CC)		Extreme Makeover (CC)		Primetime Thursday (CC)		News (CC)	Nightline (CC)	Jimmy Kimmel Live Rodney Dangerfield.	
KSNK/NBC 8 9	News	Wheel of Fortune	Will & Grace	Scrubs (CC)	Last Comic Standing (N) (CC)		ER (CC)		News	The Tonight Show (CC)		Late Night
KBSL/CBS 12 11	News (CC)	Friends (CC)	Big Brother 5 (Live) (CC)		CSI: Crime Scene Investigation		Without a Trace Shadows (CC)		News (CC)	Late Show (CC)		Golf
K15CG 3	The NewsHour With Jim Lehrer (N)		Sun-flower	Kansas Spotlight	The New This Old House Hour (CC)		Frontline The Plea (CC)			Keeping Up	Charlie Rose Michael Porter. (CC)	
WGN 13	Will & Grace	Home Improve.	McCloud Night of the Shark New York mobsters attempt to infiltrate Australia.				WGN News at Nine (CC)		Becker (CC)	Becker (CC)	Elimi-date	The 5th Wheel
NICK 29	Jimmy Neutron	Oddpar-ents	Spon-geBob	Grown Up	Full House	Full House	Rose-anne	Rose-anne	Rose-anne	Rose-anne	Rose-anne	Rose-anne
FAM 30	7th Heaven Lost Souls (CC)		Movie: The Karate Kid ★★½ (1984) A Japanese handyman teaches a teenager to defend himself.					Whose Line?	The 700 Club (CC)		America's Funniest Home Videos (CC)	
USA 31	JAG Port Chicago (CC)		Law & Order: Special Victims		Movie: Six Days, Seven Nights ★★½ (1998) A pilot and a high-strung editor are marooned on an island.					Movie: Sabrina ★★½ (1995, Comedy) *Harrison Ford.* (CC)		
TBS 37	Friends (CC)	MLB Baseball: Milwaukee Brewers at Atlanta Braves. Turner Field. (Live) (CC)						Movie: Cool Runnings ★★★ (1993, Comedy) *Leon, Doug E. Doug.* (CC)				Movie: CaptRon
TNT 38	Golf: PGA Championship		Law & Order Corpus Delicti		Law & Order Shadow (CC) (DVS)		Law & Order I.D. (CC) (DVS)		Homicide: Life on the Street		Movie: The Program ★★ (1993)	
DSC 42	High School Boot Camp: Mission		Prehistoric America		Seven Wonders Of... Ancient Greece		First Olympian (N)		Prehistoric America		Seven Wonders Of... Ancient Greece	
A&E 47	American Justice: Susan Smith		Cold Case Files A woman's fall from a cliff leads police to uncover a series of murders.				The First 48 (N) (CC)		Crossing Jordan John Doe (CC)		Cold Case Files (CC)	
ESPN 49	NFL Live (Live) (CC)		NFL Preseason Football: Atlanta Falcons at Baltimore Ravens. M&T Bank Stadium. (Live) (CC)						SportsCenter -- Old School (Live) (CC)		Rome-Burning	Outside-Lines
HBO 7	(5:15) Movie: A Mighty Wind (2003)		Movie: Malibu's Most Wanted ★★ (2003) *Jamie Kennedy.*			Death in Gaza (N) (CC)			Cathouse 2: Back in the Saddle (CC)		Da Ali G Show	Movie:
DISN 17	Sister, Sister	That's-Raven	Movie: Cadet Kelly ★★½ (2002, Comedy-Drama) *Hilary Duff.* (CC)				That's-Raven	Sister, Sister	Bug Juice	Lizzie McGuire	Boy Mts. World	Even Stevens
MAX 21	(5:00) Movie: Blood Work ★★½ (2002)		Movie: Alien Resurrection ★★½ (1997, Science Fiction) *Sigourney Weaver.* (CC)				Movie: Femme Fatale (2002) A sexy jewel thief double-crosses her violent partners.				Movie: Busty Cops (2004) *Nikki Nova.*	

FRIDAY — AUGUST 13

	6 PM	6:30	7 PM	7:30	8 PM	8:30	9 PM	9:30	10 PM	10:30	11 PM	11:30
KLBY/ABC 4 6	(5:59) News	Ent. Tonight	George Lopez	8 Simple Rules	Hope & Faith	Less-Perfect	20/20 (CC)		News (CC)	Nightline (CC)	Jimmy Kimmel Live (CC)	
KSNK/NBC 8 9	News	Wheel of Fortune	XXVIII Summer Olympics Athens, Greece. (CC)								News	Tonight Show
KBSL/CBS 12 11	News (CC)	Friends (CC)	NFL Preseason Football: Kansas City Chiefs at New York Giants. Giants Stadium. (Live)						News (CC)	Late Show Halle Berry; Maria Mena.		Golf
K15CG 3	The NewsHour With Jim Lehrer (N)		Wash. Week	Wall-Fortune	Market-Market	Baxter Black	Now With Bill Moyers (N) (CC)		BBC World	Red Green	Charlie Rose Brad Pitt. (CC)	
WGN 13	Will & Grace	Home Improve.	Movie: Portrait of a Dead Girl (1970) U.S. Marshal McCloud stalks an escaped killer.				WGN News at Nine (CC)		Becker (CC)	Becker (CC)	Elimi-date	The 5th Wheel
NICK 29	Jimmy Neutron	Oddpar-ents	The Adventures of Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius (CC)			Teenage Robot	Full House	Full House	Full House	Full House	Full House	Full House
FAM 30	7th Heaven A Cry for Help (CC)		Movie: Major League II ★½ (1994, Comedy) *Charlie Sheen, Tom Berenger.*				Whose Line?	Whose Line?	The 700 Club (CC)		Paid Program	Paid Program
USA 31	JAG Tribunal (CC)		Law & Order: Special Victims		Law & Order: Special Victims		Monk Mr. Monk and the Game Show (N)		Law & Order: Special Victims		Monk Mr. Monk and the Game Show	
TBS 37	Friends (CC)	MLB Baseball: St. Louis Cardinals at Atlanta Braves. Turner Field. (Live) (CC)						Movie: Die Hard 2 ★★★ (1990, Drama) (PA) An L.A. cop battles terrorists in Washington. *Bruce Willis.* (CC)				
TNT 38	Golf: PGA Championship		Law & Order Who Let the Dogs Out		Movie: Shaft ★★½ (2000) A former cop vows to bring a murderous racist to justice.				Law & Order Good Girl (CC) (DVS)		Movie: Shaft ★★★ (1971) (CC)	
DSC 42	Great Biker Build-Off (CC)		Alaskan Crab Fishing		Monster Games Athletic accomplishments.				Alaskan Crab Fishing		Monster Games	
A&E 47	American Justice		Biography: Andre the Giant		Biography: Hulk Hogan		Biography: Mick Foley		American Justice Death of a Bride		Biography: Andre the Giant	
ESPN 49	Sports-Center	Stump-Schwab	Mike & Mike in the Morning... at Night		2004 World Series of Poker Las Vegas.		2004 World Series of Poker Las Vegas.		SportsCenter (Live) (CC)		Outside-Lines	Baseball Tonight
HBO 7	(4:30) Movie:		Movie: Swimfan ★½ (2002, Suspense) *Jesse Bradford.*		Movie: Cradle 2 the Grave ★★ (2003, Action) *Jet Li, DMX.* (CC)				Real Time (Live) (CC)		Entou-rage	Def Poetry
DISN 17	Phil of Future	Phil of Future	Movie: Bug's Life ★★★ (1998, Fantasy) *Voices of Dave Foley.*			Movie: Bug's Life ★★★ (1998) Animated. A misfit ant seeks to save his colony. (CC)				Lizzie McGuire	Boy Mts. World	Brace-face
MAX 21	(5:00) Movie: True Lies ★★★ (1994) *Arnold Schwarzenegger.*			Movie: Ballistic: Ecks vs. Sever ★ (2002, Action) (CC)			Movie: Bad Boys II ★★ (2003, Action) Two detectives battle a drug kingpin in Miami. *Martin Lawrence.* (CC)					Black Tie Nite