



**Union Pacific Railroad Cars in North Platte's Bailey Yard**

## PEOPLE<sup>28</sup>

In 1800, before Lewis and Clark traveled past Nebraska, several Native American tribes, mainly the Pawnee, Ponca, Omaha, Oto, Sioux, Cheyenne and Arapaho, lived in the area. The largest and most powerful tribe, the Pawnee, had about 6,000 members. In 1913, only 4,784 Indians of all tribes remained in Nebraska because others were moved to reservations in other states. Approximately 19,000 Native Americans live in Nebraska today, with nearly 11,000 residing within two tribal service areas and on the state's three reservations — the Santee Sioux, Omaha and Winnebago reservations, all in northeastern Nebraska. These reservations are supervised by the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The first Nebraska census in 1854 counted 2,732 residents. At the time, the area was a territory that included parts of present-day North Dakota, South Dakota, Colorado, Montana, Idaho and Wyoming. The 1870 census, taken after Nebraska achieved statehood in 1867, counted 122,993 people.

In the late 19th century, many European immigrants came to Nebraska seeking free land under the federal Homestead Act of 1862. By 1900, Germans accounted for 15 percent of the state's entire population. Other ethnic groups included the Swedes, Danes, Bohemians, German Russians, Poles, French, Irish, English and Italians. State-wide railroad construction spurred development of the communities where immigrants settled. Following the Civil War, black people migrated to Nebraska, and some of them tried homesteading. Most were lured to urban areas, where chances for finding work were better. The 1880 census showed a total of 2,385 black people living in the state. By 1900 that number had increased to 6,269. Omaha's black population doubled between 1910 and 1920.

<sup>28</sup>Information for this section compiled from the following sources: Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Commerce; "The Negro in Nebraska," Eldora Francis Hess, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Department of History, 1932; Nebraska State Historical Society; Nebraska Indian Commission; *The Nebraska Databook*, Nebraska Department of Economic Development; *Omaha World-Herald*.

## Nebraska’s Population Today<sup>29</sup>

Nebraska is the 37th most populous state. In 2022, the U.S. Bureau of the Census estimated 1,967,923 people living in Nebraska, an increase of 7.8 percent since 2010.

Census data from 2021 showed that over half of the state’s residents live in the three largest counties — Douglas, which includes Omaha, the state’s largest city; Lancaster, which includes Lincoln, the state’s capital city; and Sarpy, which has a growing suburban population. Douglas County alone contains more than a quarter of the state’s population.

Nebraska’s population is mostly white. In 2021, 78.5 percent of the state’s people identified as white, compared to 75.8 percent for the entire nation. The data also showed the main ancestry of Nebraskans to be German, Irish, English, Czech, Swedish and Polish.

People of Latino origin accounted for 11.9 percent of Nebraska’s population in 2021 and are the state’s fastest growing ethnic group. Blacks were 6.3 percent of the state’s population; Asians, 3.4 percent and American Indians and Alaska Natives, 2.4 percent. In addition, 8.7 percent of the state’s population reported two or more races.

In 2021, Nebraskans younger than 18 made up 24.6 percent of the state’s population, while people 65 and older accounted for 16.4 percent of the population. The state’s population was 50.2 percent male and 49.8 percent female.

Nebraska’s 10 largest cities, according to 2021 population estimates, are:

Omaha .....	491,715	Fremont .....	27,141
Lincoln .....	291,089	Norfolk .....	25,865
Bellevue .....	64,212	Hastings .....	25,154
Grand Island .....	53,140	Columbus .....	24,028
Kearney.....	33,792	North Platte.....	23,390

## Trends in Nebraska’s Population

Since Nebraska became a state, its total population has grown steadily, with the 2020 population higher than in any previous census. The only decade in which Nebraska lost population was 1930 to 1940, when the Great Depression and drought created economic hardships.

In 1870, most of Nebraska’s population was rural. However, urban living has become the norm. Between 2010 and 2020, Nebraska’s population increased 7.4 percent, but 69 of the state’s 93 counties lost population. While rural populations dwindle, Nebraska’s larger cities and counties continue to grow. Between 2010 and



Downtown Omaha

<sup>29</sup> For more detailed population figures for counties and municipalities, see Pages 791 and 796.

2020, the population of Douglas County — home of Omaha — increased 13 percent, while neighboring Sarpy County grew 20 percent.

Nebraska's population is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. The most significant growth has occurred in the Latino population, which is now the state's largest minority group. From 2010 to 2020, the state's Latino population increased from 9.2 percent to 12 percent, growing at a rate of slightly more than 40 percent. The Black population also grew from 4.5 percent to 4.9 percent during that time.

While Nebraska's median age increased slightly from 36.2 in 2010 to 36.4 in 2020, the number of Nebraskans age 65 and older also increased during the same time period, from 13.5 percent in 2010 to 15 percent in 2020.

## RECREATION AND PLACES OF INTEREST<sup>30</sup>

### National Areas<sup>31</sup>

Nebraska has two national forest areas with hand-planted trees: the Bessey Ranger District of the Nebraska National Forest in Blaine and Thomas counties, and the Samuel R. McKelvie National Forest in Cherry County. The Pine Ridge Ranger District of the Nebraska National Forest in Dawes and Sioux counties contains native ponderosa pine trees. The U.S. Forest Service also administers the Oglala National Grassland in northwest Nebraska. Within it is Toadstool Geologic Park, a moonscape of eroded badlands containing fossil trackways that are 30 million years old. The Hudson-Meng Bison Bonebed, an archaeological site containing the remains of more than 600 prehistoric bison, also is located within the grassland.

Agate Fossil Beds National Monument in Sioux County contains animal fossils. Homestead National Historic Park near Beatrice was built on one of the first pieces of land claimed under the U.S. Homestead Act of 1862. Scotts Bluff National Monument near Scottsbluff is an 800-foot bluff that was a landmark for pioneers on the Oregon Trail. Chimney Rock National Historic Site, a 500-foot spire carved by the elements, is near Bayard. It also served as a landmark for Oregon Trail travelers.

The Niobrara National Scenic River is a popular canoeing river. The Missouri/Niobrara/Verdigre Creek National Recreational Rivers and the Missouri National Recreational River offer land and water recreation and views of the waterways similar to those the Lewis and Clark expedition saw as they crossed the Great Plains. Nebraska also is home to five national Historic Trails: the California Trail, Oregon Trail, Mormon Pioneer Trail and Pony Express Trail.

<sup>30</sup>Information for this section compiled from the following sources: Nebraska Department of Economic Development; Nebraska Game and Parks Commission; Nebraska Indian Commission; National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior; U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture; Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>31</sup>For more information about the areas in Nebraska administered by the U.S. Forest Service and the National Park Service, see Pages 100-102 and 146-147.