Detroit and 300 Years of Metropolitan Growth

SEMCOG . . . *Local Governments Advancing Southeast Michigan*

Southeast Michigan Council of Governments

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Mission

SEMCOG's mission is solving regional planning problems — improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the region's local governments as well as the quality of life in Southeast Michigan. Essential functions are:

- providing a forum for addressing issues which extend beyond individual governmental boundaries by fostering collaborative regional planning, and
- facilitating intergovernmental relations among local governments and state and federal agencies.

As a regional planning partnership in Southeast Michigan, SEMCOG is accountable to local governments who join as members. Membership is open to all counties, cities, villages, townships, intermediate school districts, and community colleges in Livingston, Macomb, Monroe, Oakland, St. Clair, Washtenaw, and Wayne Counties.

Responsibilities

SEMCOG's principal activities support local planning through use of SEMCOG's technical, data, and intergovernmental resources. In collaboration with local governments, SEMCOG has responsibility for adopting regionwide plans and policies for community and economic development, water and air quality, land use, and transportation, including approval of state and federal transportation projects. Funding for SEMCOG is provided by federal and state grants, contracts, and membership fees.

Policy decision making

All SEMCOG policy decisions are made by local elected officials, ensuring that regional policies reflect the interests of member communities. Participants serve on one or both of the policymaking bodies — the General Assembly and the Executive Committee.

Prior to policy adoption, technical advisory councils provide the structure for gaining input on transportation, environment, community and economic development, data analysis, and education. This deliberative process includes broad-based representation from local governments, the business community, environmental organizations, and other special interest citizen groups.

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Abstract

This report presents an overview of the growth of Detroit and the Southeast Michigan region over the 300 years since its founding. Included are data on key measures of growth and expansion — population, employment, and urban development.

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Introduction

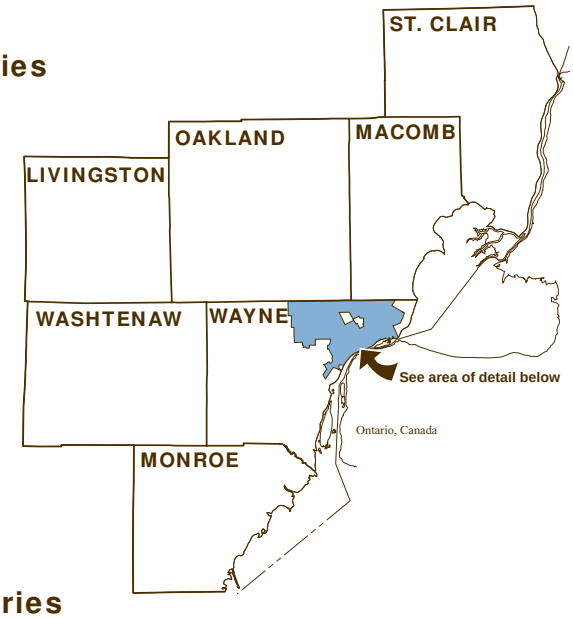
The founding of Detroit in 1701 as a French outpost on the Detroit River began the development of a city and its metropolitan region that would grow to include almost five million people after 300 years. This report celebrates the anniversary of Detroit's beginning with an overview of its growth. Here, Detroit is viewed as the historic and present-day vital core of what is now a seven-county metropolitan region. This is the planning area covered by SEMCOG, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments. It includes Livingston, Macomb, Monroe, Oakland, St. Clair, Washtenaw, and Wayne counties.

Job growth paralleled growth in population. Detroit, which began as a military outpost and trading center, has today matured into a global economic power with 2.8 million jobs. Although vehicle manufacturing is its most significant industry, the region supports a diverse economy, with 39 percent of jobs now in services.

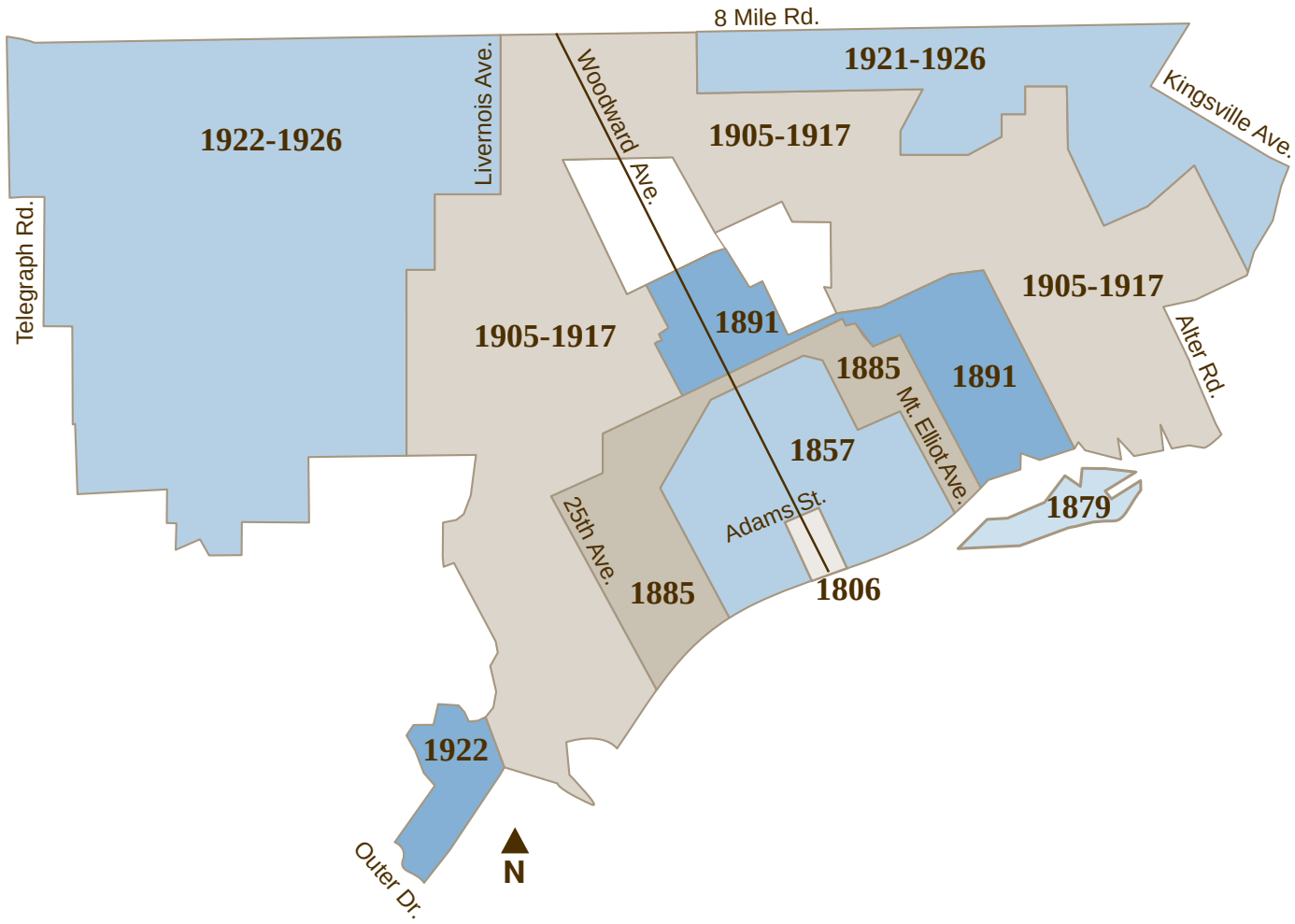
The initial settlement by Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac — Fort Pontchartrain — occupied an area of about one acre. As population and economic activity expanded, then exploded in the early 20th Century, so did the developed area of Detroit, and the region's other urban centers. The report shows this expansion of Detroit up to the present time, when in 1995 the seven-county metropolitan area included 975,000 acres of developed land (or 33 percent of the land area). Figure 1 shows the seven counties included in the Southeast Michigan region. These boundaries were established by 1840, and have changed little since. In addition, the map shows the city limits of Detroit for selected years, beginning with the original boundary line of 1806, and ending with the current boundary line established in 1926. While the boundaries of the City of Detroit have been stationary for 75 years, the region's urbanized areas continue to expand. To fully illustrate urban evolution and development, this report uses data about population, employment, and urbanized land for both Detroit and the entire Southeast Michigan region.

Figure 1

Southeast Michigan Counties and the City of Detroit's Changing Boundaries



The City of Detroit's Changing Boundaries



Source: Conot, *American Odyssey*; and Detroit City Planning Commission, "Annexation Map City of Detroit," no date; and SEMCOG Data Center.

Population

Over the span of three centuries, Detroit and the Southeast Michigan region have grown from a settlement of a few hundred persons to a world metropolis approaching five million. The population history of city and region, as captured in census data every 10 years, is summarized in Table 1 and illustrated in Figure 2. The data reveal several historic phases or periods that can be summarized, as follows:

Period	Change
Prior to 1840	Gains fluctuating with losses, ending with 9,000 persons in Detroit, 103,000 in the total region; most people live on farms.
1840 - 1900	Both city and region grow at a good rate. As manufacturing and trading economy rapidly expands, Detroit gains 277,000 (more than 30 times its 1840 population); region gains 479,000 (more than five times its 1840 total).
1900 - 1930	Rapid growth in both as automobile manufacturing booms. Detroit gains 1,283,000 persons (a five-fold increase); region gains 1,800,000 (a four-fold increase).
1930 - 1940	Relatively little growth, due to economic stagnation, drop in birthrate, and limited residential construction during the Great Depression. Detroit gains 55,000 (four percent); region gains 232,000 (10 percent).
1940-1950	Economic recovery, World War II defense production, wartime restrictions slow non-defense construction, and post-war boom begins. Detroit's gain of 626,000 (a 14 percent increase) comprises 86 percent of the total region's gain of 731,000 (a 28 percent increase).
1950 - 1970	Diverging trends. After reaching a peak population of 1,850,000 in 1950, Detroit's population begins to decline. The city has a net loss of 338,000 (seven percent), while the region gains 1,391,000 (42 percent).
1970 - 1990	Oil embargoes, global competition, and the severe recession of 1979-1982 hit hard, causing out-migration from region. Population losses in both areas. Detroit loses 484,000 (32 percent), region loses 146,000 (three percent).
1990 - 2000	Another divergence. Detroit population loss slows, but still is 77,000 (seven percent), while region gains 243,000 (five percent).

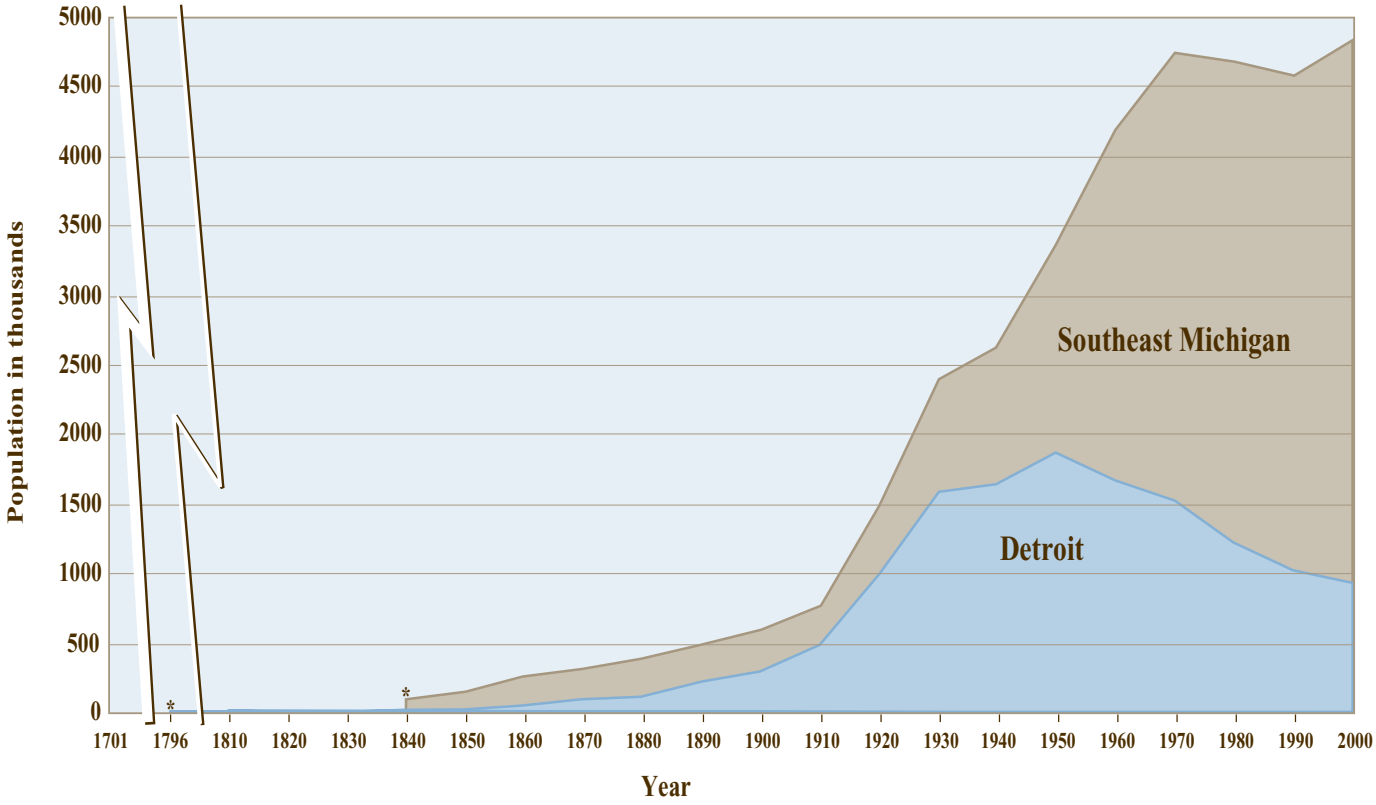
Whenever population has increased in Detroit and Southeast Michigan, in-migration has been a major component. Over the decades, the area has drawn people from rural areas of the United States — in earlier times from New England, Michigan, other parts of the Midwest, and the rural South. Immigrants have also come from other countries — Canada, Mexico, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia.

In terms of Hispanic origin, based upon just-released Census 2000 data, the region had 136,136 Hispanic persons — mainly of Mexican origin — comprising 2.8 percent of the total population. Regarding immigration, early 19th Century immigrants mainly came from Great Britain, Ireland, and Germany; later (late 19th Century and early 20th Century), immigrants came from Eastern and Southern Europe, as well as from the Middle East.

The varied origins of the region's population are also reflected in Census 2000 data on race. The region's racial diversity is shown in Figure 3. The predominant racial groups are whites at 3,481,652 (72.0 percent) and blacks or African-Americans at 1,057,674 (21.9 percent). The remaining population is made up of these groups: Asians, Hawaiians, or Pacific Islanders, 125,145 (2.6 percent); American Indians, 16,452 (0.3 percent); persons of other races, 51,016 (1.1 percent); and persons of two or more races, 101,554 (2.1 percent).

Figure 2

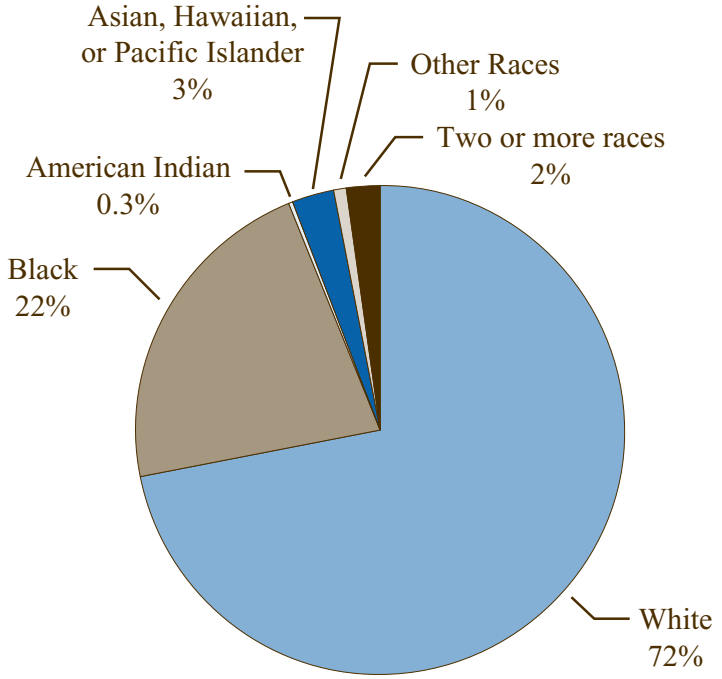
Population Trends, City of Detroit, since 1796; Southeast Michigan since 1840



* No data for Detroit prior to 1796; no data for Southeast Michigan prior to 1840.
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1840-2000.

Figure 3

Racial Diversity, Southeast Michigan, 2000



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000.

Table 1

Trends in Population for Detroit since 1796; for Southeast Michigan since 1840

Year	Population	
	Detroit	Southeast Michigan
1701	no data	no data
1796	500	
1810	770	
1820	1,442	
1830	2,222	
1840	9,192	103,064
1850	21,019	156,726
1860	45,619	237,385
1870	99,577	312,435
1880	116,340	383,528
1890	205,876	477,682
1900	285,704	582,236
1910	465,766	761,481
1920	993,675	1,467,964
1930	1,568,662	2,382,196
1940	1,623,452	2,613,844
1950	1,849,568	3,344,793
1960	1,670,144	4,181,354
1970	1,511,482	4,736,008
1980	1,203,339	4,682,726
1990	1,027,974	4,590,468
2000	951,270	4,833,493

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1840-2000.

Employment

Except for periods of economic downturns, job growth has tended to parallel population growth. Table 2 presents data on the region's employed residents between 1840 and 1990, divided where possible between manufacturing and all other economic activity, grouped as nonmanufacturing. The numbers are illustrated in Figure 4. Because employment totals are like snapshots taken only once every 10 years, they do not indicate important economic fluctuations between census years. For example, the severe recession of 1979-1982 is "ironed out" by the general trend line. The one partial exception is the Great Depression that began in 1929 and dominated much of the 1930s. But even this appears as a nearly horizontal plateau, when in actuality it was a deep valley. (Note that the numbers in this section are in terms of employed residents, and will be lower than a count of jobs, because a person holding more than one job will still be counted only once.)

In 1840, agriculture was the dominant economic activity, accounting for 87 percent of total employment. Manufacturing comprised 10 percent of the total. All other industrial classes equaled only three percent of total employment. One hundred years later in 1940, 29,000 residents were employed in agriculture, but this accounted for only three percent of total employment. With the auto industry in full swing, manufacturing jobs employed 46 percent of workers, while 51 percent of workers were employed in the other industrial classes.

Table 2
Employment in Southeast Michigan, 1840-1990

Year	Total	Manufacturing	Nonmanufacturing
1840	27,800	2,878	24,922
1850	45,921	no data	no data
1860	74,776		
1870	106,540		
1880	133,468		
1890	174,354		
1900	217,756		
1910	301,546		
1920	590,122		
1930	948,114		
1940	968,784	446,032	522,752
1950	1,308,891	597,843	711,048
1960	1,474,926	586,428	888,498
1970	1,772,802	649,942	1,122,860
1980	1,927,425	594,346	1,333,079
1990	2,091,829	506,038	1,585,791

Source: U. S. Department of the Census, 1840-1990.

Because data on employed residents by county were not available in published reports for census years 1850-1930, employment growth in the Southeast Michigan region could not be outlined. In order to illustrate the role of Detroit in the region's economic growth, and the changes in manufacturing and other employment, the report will compare the State of Michigan and the City of Detroit for the years 1870 and 1900.

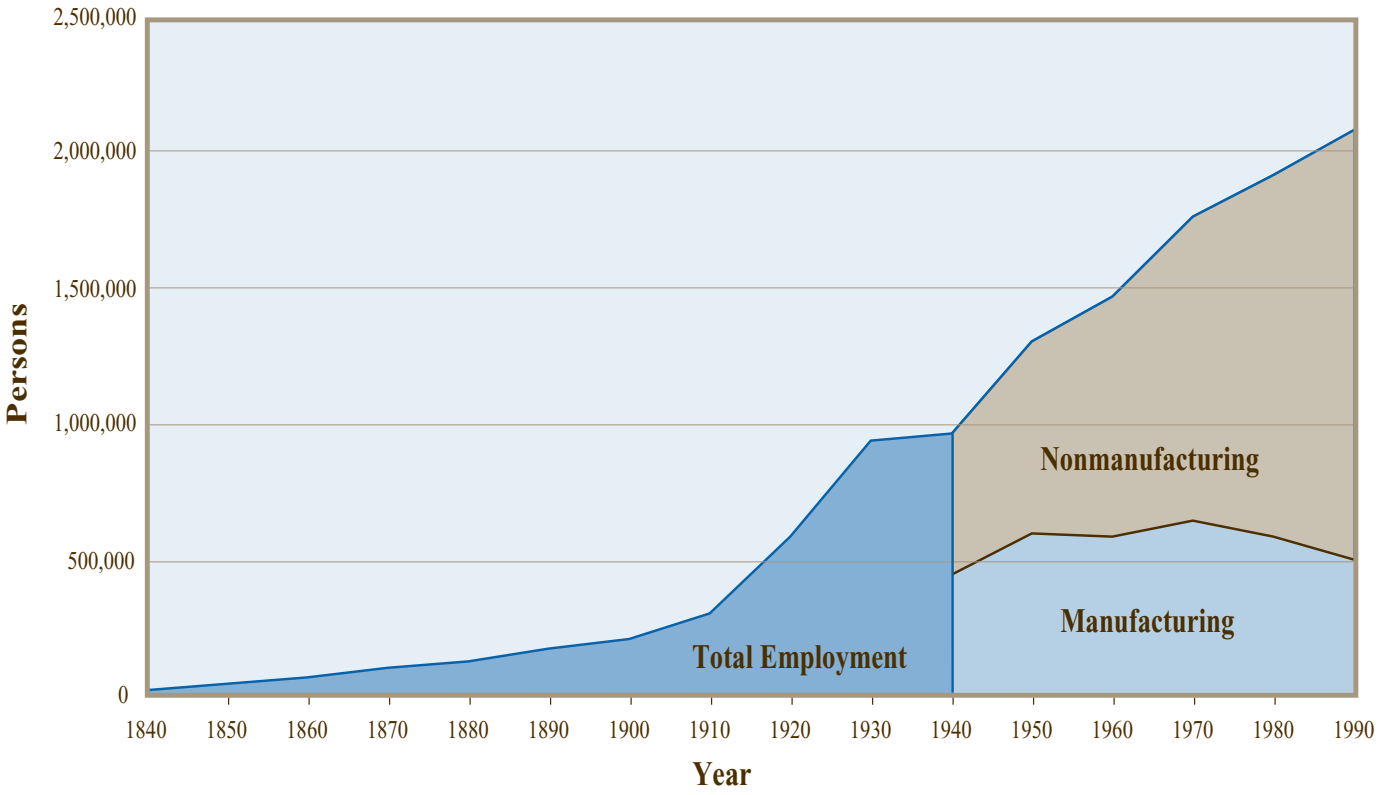
In both 1870 and 1900, Detroit represented 13 percent of Michigan's total employment. However, during this 30-year period, Detroit's share of Michigan's manufacturing jobs grew from 14 percent to 24 percent. While manufacturing now equaled 18 percent of state employment, it made up 33 percent of Detroit's jobs. The growing presence of manufacturing employment in Detroit would prove to be the major factor driving the demographic and economic growth of both the city and the region.

From 1940 on, employment is shown as two basic groups — manufacturing and nonmanufacturing. Manufacturing jobs in Southeast Michigan show a general growth trend, gaining 204,000 (46 percent) between 1940 and 1970, but then losing 143,000 jobs (22 percent) from 1970 to 1990.

Nonmanufacturing jobs in the region show strong growth over the entire 50 years (1940-1990), gaining three times the 1940 nonmanufacturing employment. This trend shows the region diversifying its job base, with less dependence on automotive-related manufacturing industries.

SEMCOG estimates of jobs in the region for the period 1990-2000 show this pattern of diversification continuing. The number of jobs in manufacturing held steady in this decade, while nonmanufacturing jobs grew 17 percent.

Figure 4
Employed Residents in Southeast Michigan, 1840-1990



Source: U. S. Department of the Census, 1840-1990.

Urbanization and Transportation

The region's growth has demanded vast amounts of land for housing and nonresidential buildings. Over time, these demands have evolved to mean not only more land for total growth, but also increased space for each individual. In Southeast Michigan, some of the additional space has been provided by building up, but most has been provided by building out — converting rural land to urban uses. During the past 150 years, transportation innovations have increased travel speed and decreased travel cost, opening land to potential development, and thereby facilitating these demands. The result is an urbanized area that simultaneously increases in area and decreases in density.

Figure 5 portrays three centuries of urban development in Southeast Michigan, beginning with the 1701 original settlement. By 1806, 105 years later, Detroit's city limits enclosed one-third of a square mile. Also around that time were the beginnings of other settlements — especially the seats of the recently organized counties. The map illustrates the extent of urbanization as of 1890, 1950, and 1995. This urban, or built-up, land consists of tracts of houses, other buildings, and associated open land, as well as streets, railroads, and other transportation facilities. By 1890, the bulk of the region's urban development was within Detroit's boundaries. In addition, there was urban development along the Detroit River — residential suburbs in the Grosse Pointes, and industrial and associated residential areas downriver. Other urban areas were formed by the region's smaller cities and villages.

Up to 1890, most movement of people and goods for shorter distances was done on foot and by horseback and horse-drawn vehicles, including horse-powered streetcars. Between 1892 and 1895, the horsecar lines were converted to electricity, thereby increasing speed, capacity, and range. For longer distance travel, steam railroads served the entire region, linking it to the rest of the country. Steam-powered boats operating on the Detroit River, St. Clair River, Lake St. Clair, the Great Lakes, and beyond supplemented the railroads. The availability of convenient transportation encouraged dense, compact, urban development. Where such convenient transportation was not available, urban development was not possible.

Between 1890 and 1950, the urbanized area increased from roughly 1.5 percent of the region's total area to nine percent. The developed area as of 1950 had expanded five-fold since 1890. During the first 30 years (1890-1920), growth was still very dependent on rail transportation — railroads, local electric streetcar lines, and electric interurban lines that extended like spokes from the downtown Detroit hub, traversing, and even extending beyond the region.

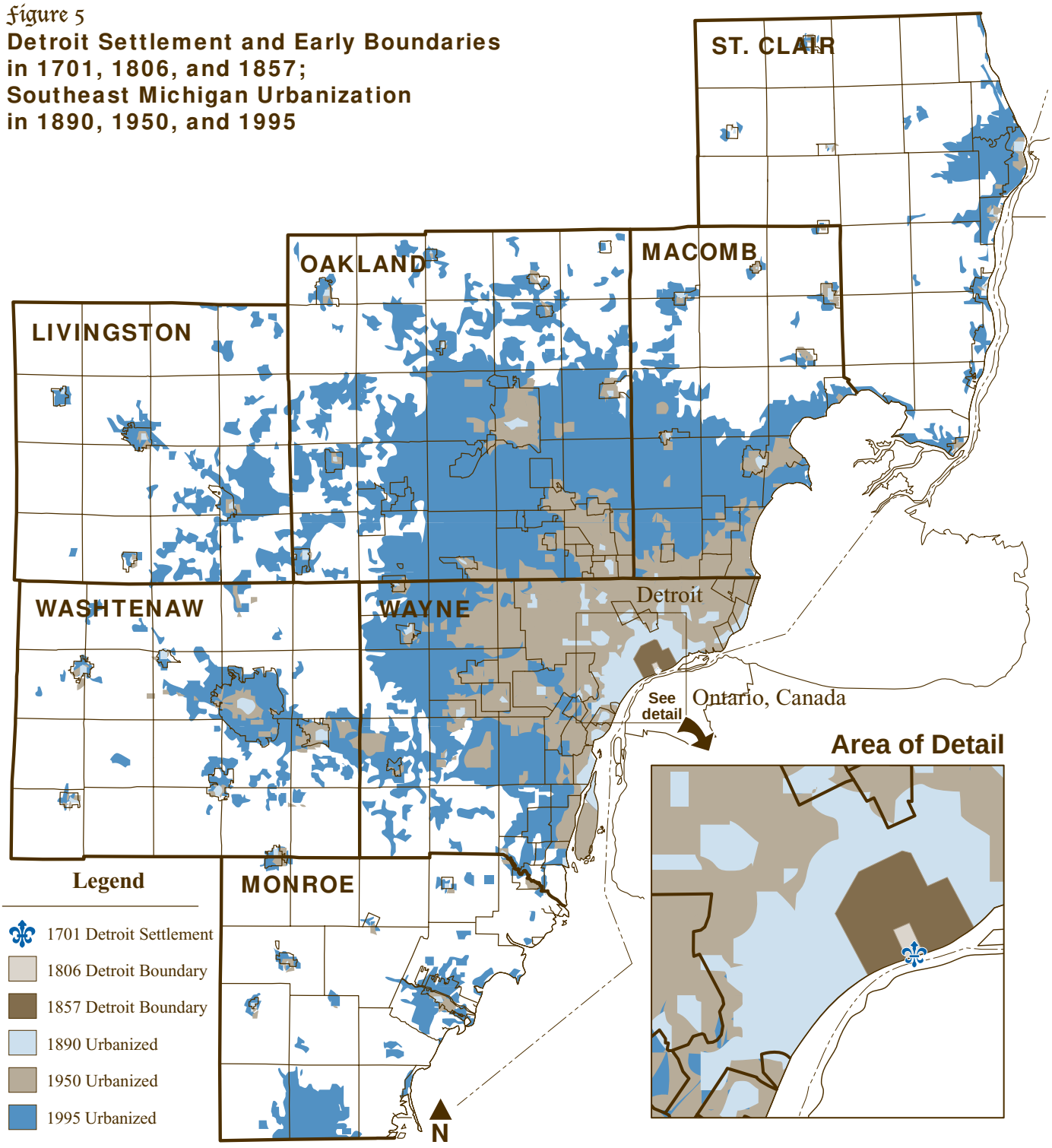
A new transportation revolution began about 1920. It was a combination of motor vehicles — automobiles, buses, and trucks — and an expanding system of paved roads. Where once the location of rail systems played a dominant role in the location of most households and businesses, the advent of motor vehicles and region-wide paved roads began to change this pattern. All around Detroit, the earlier corridors of urban development that had grown along the rail lines in a rough star-shaped pattern was metamorphosing into a gigantic amoeba-like mass of development. By 1950, Detroit itself was almost completely developed, and urbanization had overridden the 1926 city limits in all directions, with some extensions going five or more miles beyond Detroit. Outside this primary urban area, the smaller urban centers throughout the region were also experiencing varying degrees of expansion.

The "rubber-tire revolution" that began around 1920, and the resulting urban expansion, greatly accelerated around 1950. Major contributing factors were the construction of freeways and increased auto ownership. In 1950, the region had less than one-tenth of the freeway system that exists today. During this same period, the railroad network decreased, rail passenger transportation virtually disappeared, and bus ridership shrank. Post-1950 development has been predominantly suburban in both location and composition, characterized by shopping malls, outlying office buildings, and industrial parks, accompanied by large areas of lower-density residential

development. By 1995, urbanized land covered 33 percent of the region's land area, close to four times the size of the 1950 urbanized area.

At the conclusion of its first 300 years, Detroit and its metropolitan region are still expanding. Growth rates of people and jobs are now moderate, but the urban expansion that began in 1701 now is most evident in the human imprint on the land itself.

Figure 5
Detroit Settlement and Early Boundaries in 1701, 1806, and 1857; Southeast Michigan Urbanization in 1890, 1950, and 1995



Source: Conot, *American*, 1974; Moon, 1976; SEMCOG, *Business*, 1991; SEMCOG, *Land Use*, 1999.

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