
CHAPTER 2: NOBLE'S PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Noble's future depends partly on the decisions made, by its leaders and everyday community members, in its past. This chapter describes the history of the place that came to be called "Noble" and eventually the "city of Noble," and looks at key population and economic data for the city. It compares Noble to Cleveland County and the state as a whole. It concludes with the development of population projections to 2025 and a discussion of the study's choice of three future population scenarios: 1,000, 2,000 and 4,000 additional people in the next twenty years.

History

Ancient Noble

Mammoths and other prehistoric animals roamed the Noble area as early as 12,000 years ago. Over the next 11,000 years, the first humans – cave dwellers – became sedentary and began to plant corn, beans and squash. These individuals can be considered the first farmers in the City of Noble. Eventually, tribes from the plains region of the United States began to roam throughout the area (Speer 1988).

Settling of Noble

Around 1200 A.C.E., four Native-American tribes began to settle in present-day Cleveland County and the Noble Area. The Caddo, Wichita, Pawnee and Apache tribes all settled and roamed through the Noble area at one point in time (Speer 1988). Beginning in the 1600s, the area that is now the State of Oklahoma changed hands among European colonial powers. First, the Spanish claimed the area. The French then gained control of the area from the Spanish during the French and Indian War in 1682. The Spanish then regained control in 1763, but the French again took over the area in 1800. In 1803, the French sold the area to the United States government under the Louisiana Purchase (Speer 1988).

Thomas Jefferson, president at the time of the Louisiana Purchase, settled five tribes in the Louisiana Purchase area – Choctaws, Cherokees, Seminoles, Chickasaws and Caddos. This action was in response to complaints from western settlers dealing with Native Americans who did not wish to give up their land to settlers. The treaty was signed in 1817, and the Cherokees settled in the area first. Within the next 15 years, the remaining four tribes moved to the Louisiana Purchase (Speer 1988).

The Choctaw tribe was the first to settle in Cleveland County land in 1833. Later, the land was awarded to the Seminole Tribe in a joint title with the Choctaws. However, the Seminoles were finally awarded the land, minus the Choctaws. The Chickasaw

Tribe and the Choctaws occupied land between the Canadian River and the Red River (Speer 1988).

During the Civil War, the five tribes signed a treaty with the Confederacy. When the war ended in 1865, the American government was angry that the tribes sided with the Confederacy. Thus, the tribes were forced to donate a portion of their land to other tribes moving from the east (Speer 1988).

Pre-Statehood Settling and Development

The first known “white” explorer of Cleveland County was Major Stephen Long. In 1820, he traversed the county and noted the masses of prairie dogs, elk, deer, and bears (Speer 1988).

In 1848, at the time of the California “Gold Rush,” a wagon trail named “California Road” was constructed from Ft. Smith, Arkansas to Santa Fe, New Mexico. This wagon road was thought to have crossed the Canadian River somewhere near Norman. Additionally, a cattle trail – Arbuckle Trail – passed through Cleveland County and the future site of Noble from Texas to Kansas. This trail was necessary because railroads were not allowed to pass through the tribal lands at the time (Speer 1988).

Before Noble officially opened, it was a cattle range. The first man to settle in the town was Charley Campbell, who found his place by the Canadian River. Slowly, settlers – known as “Boomers” – began to illegally homestead the unassigned portions of Indian Territory, including present day Noble. The Boomers demanded that they be allowed to homestead the unassigned land – and the government finally responded. The president announced that on April 22, 1889, the Springer Bill would be adopted and that settlers could homestead 160 acres each in the Oklahoma Area. This day is also known as the famous “land run of 1889” (Speer 1988).

In anticipation of the land run, the government gave the railroads permission to build through the unassigned lands. Two railroad lines were constructed in present day Cleveland County. The Santa Fe railroad was among these lines laid in Cleveland County. This line is still used today. At the time, the Santa Fe line hosted eight trains per day traveling north and south through the County. The advent of the railroad through Oklahoma made Noble a prime location for the development of a townsite (Speer 1988).

Also, one unique characteristic of the land run in Cleveland County is that single women (over 18 years old) were allowed to homestead 1,300 half-mile quarter-sections. Married women were not allowed to participate. 130 women in all participated in this unique event. However, many of the areas that the women

staked were unwanted by others in the “cross-timber” section (which was hard to settle because of the density of trees) (Womack 1983).

Post Land Run

Bonnie Speer, author of *Cleveland County: Pride of the Promised Land, An Illustrated History*, refers to Noble as the “Town that was Never Meant to Be.” By that, she means that Santa Fe Railroad Company originally designated an area two-miles south of Noble to be a town called “Walker.” However, a man with a vision changed history when he picked Noble’s actual location (Speer 1988).

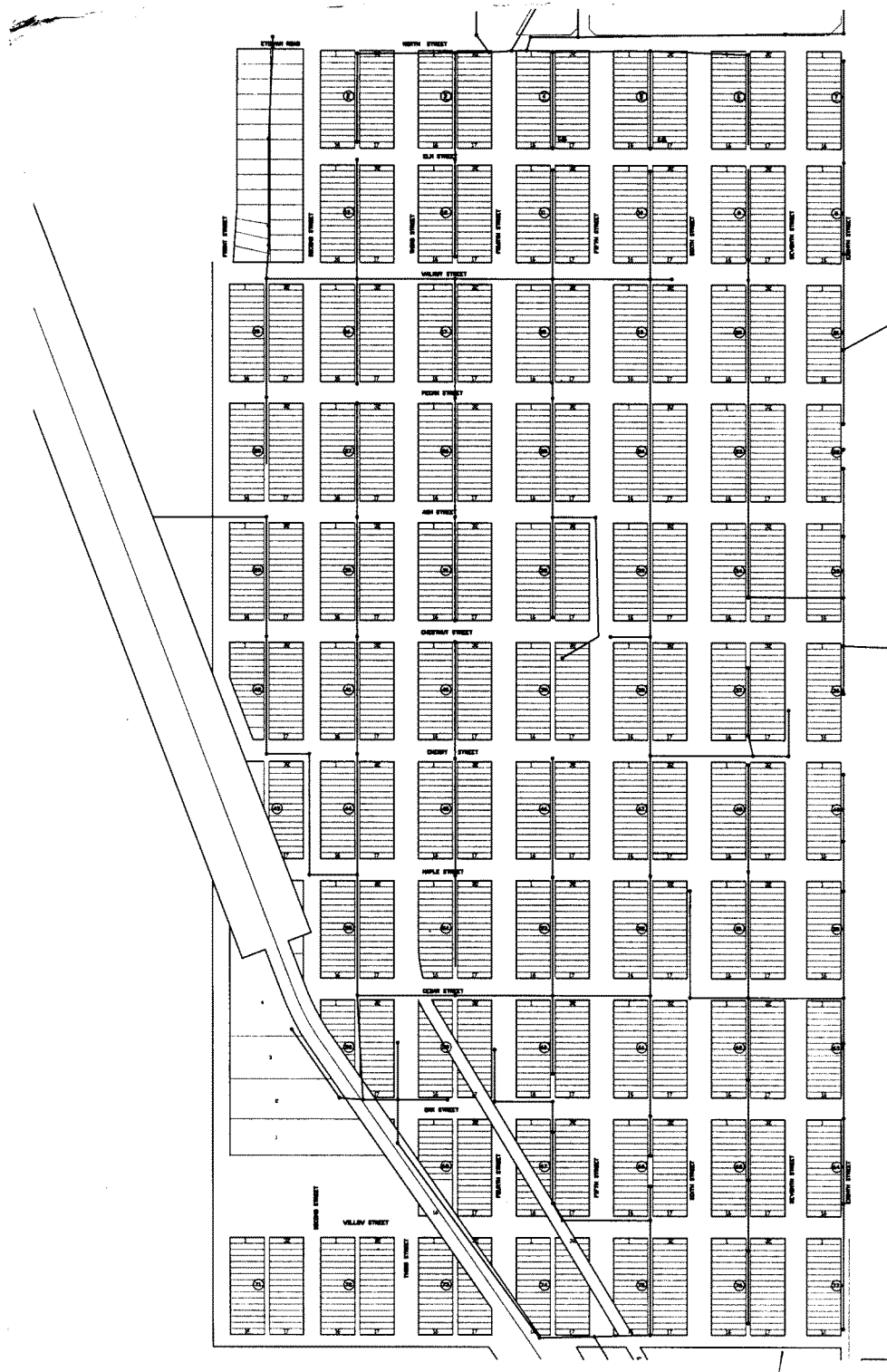
Albert Rennie was this man with a vision. He had traveled through the Noble area quite often over the years and thought the area would be perfect for a town site. He convinced the Railroad company to change the location of their proposed townsite, and he drew the first plat of Noble. Rennie decided to name the town “Noble,” after the Secretary of the Interior, John Noble, who greatly contributed to the land run (Speer 1988).

Thus, Rennie and other businessmen acquired the 160 acres that were the original townsite of Noble, Oklahoma. The 160 acres were platted in 1889 containing blocks of about 101,000 Square Feet each. Thirty-two lots made up each block. The townsite was designed as a traditional grid-style street pattern with major streets running north to south and east to west.

Rennie and the other founders envisioned Noble as the County Seat of Cleveland County. They also dreamed of Noble being a national trade center. The first of the founders’ dreams was never realized because the founders kept lot prices too high. As a result, most new businesses moved to Norman, which became the County Seat. The second was realized when Noble became a major shipping point for cattle from East and West of the Canadian River. However, when the major access point was demolished in the 1904 flood, this dream ended (Speer 1988).

The population of Noble in 1889 was less than 100 people. As access through Oklahoma improved, the population grew congruently. The first bridge across the Canadian River in Cleveland County was at Noble. The bridge was suspension-style, was 264 feet long, and had 400-foot approaches. It was dedicated in 1890 as a toll bridge, but it only survived for five-years. A second bridge was built a quarter-mile south. The bridge was swept away in the Flood of 1904, and after farmers began damming the river, the water level decreased too much for ferries to continue crossing it (Speer 1988).

Figure 2.1: Noble's Original Plat



Source: City of Noble

The town grew steadily after it opened. A general store, two cotton gins and a grain elevator all opened soon after the town opened. Additionally, a subscription school opened for a few months in 1890 (Speer 1988).

The town witnessed a series of schools and newspapers. The school district changed four times by 1911. The schools ranged from one-room elementary schools to a twelve-grade school between Chestnut and Cherry Streets. The newspaper, on the other hand, changed dramatically from 1889 to 1916. The newspaper changed names and owners eleven times until its ultimate demise in 1916 (Womack 1983).

Fire protection, in the early years of Noble, was not adequate. A fire in 1905 destroyed half of the business buildings on one side of Main Street, and in 1906, fire destroyed businesses on the opposite side of the street. Thus, the town instated a volunteer fire department (Speer 1988).

Post-Statehood (1907 and beyond)

After Oklahoma became a State, the area and Noble began to grow and change. The residents began demanding more services from the Town. Sidewalks and the telephone system were among the first improvements in Noble. In 1912, water mains were installed in town; next, electricity, paved streets and natural gas became available for Noble residents (Speer 1988).

The Noble Nursery was one of the first businesses to locate in Noble. In fact, this business still exists today but is known as "Brockhaus Nursery." Also, a distillery that existed one and a half miles northwest of town closed. This site has remained an important landmark for the City of Noble (Speer 1988).

The last passenger train traversed Noble in 1944. However, in the peak of Oklahoma's Oil Boom in the 1970s, the City of Noble experienced a building boom. The new population growth posed the need for a new high school, which was built in 1970 (Speer 1988).

Noble officially became a city on June 13, 1990 and has continued, since the 1960s, to grow east and north of the Original Town Plat. Only more recently has development begun south of this area. The city's total area is 8,309 acres, according to the study's mapping of existing land uses. Developed acres total 3,790 acres, with 3,160 acres in residential use. Land considered undeveloped comes to 4,519 acres.

Past and Present Population

Population data from the U.S. Census give insight into Noble's development history. Noble never experienced the boom and bust cycle of many small town communities

in Oklahoma; on the contrary, its population has grown steadily over time. For its first six decades Noble’s population stayed consistent with a small, rural village. Noble was relatively unaffected by growth in the rest of Cleveland County. With the exception of the 1920s, its population grew slowly until about 1960. In the 1960s and 1970s, Noble’s population showed a notable increase, as the town became a desirable location for residents working in Norman and the Oklahoma City metropolitan area. Noble began to gain a greater share of Cleveland County population growth, although Cleveland County’s population began to outpace Noble’s again in the 1990s. In the year 2000, 5,260 people resided in the city of Noble.

Table 2.1: Population of Noble and Cleveland County, 1900-2000

Year	Noble’s Population	Change in Population (from previous decade)	Percent Change	Cleveland County’s Population	Noble as a Percent of Cleveland County
1900	349			16,388	
1910	403	54		18,843	
1920	497	94		19,389	
1930	463	-34		24,948	
1940	536	73		27,728	
1950	724	188		41,443	
1960	995	271	37%	47,600	2.1%
1970	2,241	1,246	125%	81,839	2.7%
1980	3,607	1,366	61%	133,173	2.7%
1990	4,710	1,100	31%	174,253	2.7%
2000	5,260	550	12%	208,016	2.5%

Source: US Census Bureau

Noble’s population grew by 31% in the 1980s and slowed to 12% in the 1990s. Using standard rates of natural increase (expected births minus expected deaths), the city actually experienced net out-migration during the 1990s. This statistical out-migration was overwhelmingly male. This helps explain why Noble’s female population grew to 52% of the population in 2000. Noble’s population also aged. Its median age in 1980 was 26.1; it was 33.9 in 2000. The percent of population 65 or older also increased in the twenty years from 8.4% to 10.9%.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, a comparison of Noble to Cleveland County and to the entire state shows that Noble’s population is less racially diverse, more female, younger, and more likely to be in families. Noble’s population is overwhelmingly white, showing less racial diversity than both Cleveland County and the state as a whole. American Indian is Noble’s second largest racial group. Noble’s percent of population under age 20 is slightly larger than both the county and state figures, while its population over age 64 is a higher percentage than

Cleveland County's overall, but less than the state figure. Thus, although Noble's population is aging, it is not aging as fast as the state as a whole.

Figure 2.2: Noble's Population History

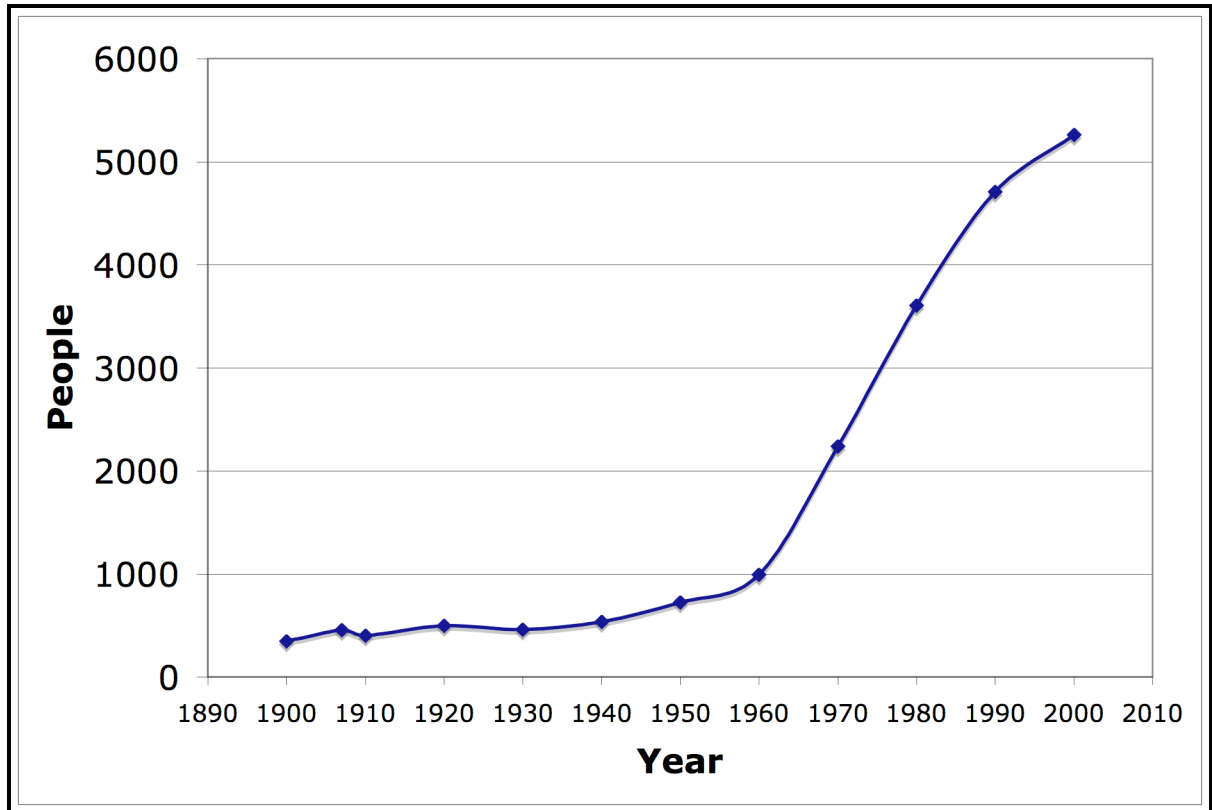


Table 2.2: Demographic Information, 1980, 1990 and 2000

City of Noble	1980	1990	2000
Population	3,607	4,710	5,260
Households	1,266	1,675	1,956
Average Household Size	2.85	2.81	2.69 ¹
Percent Female	51.4%	50.8%	52.0%
Percent 65 & Older	8.4%	8.9%	10.9%
Percent White		93.6%	90.3%
Percent American Indian		5.2%	7.7 ²

Source: US Census Bureau

¹ Please note: the US Census Bureau, using a slightly different method, calculates the 2000 average household size to be 2.63.

² In the 2000 Census, respondents were allowed to choose more than one race. The Percent American Indian includes those who listed American Indian as their single race or as one of two races.

Table 2.3: 2000 U.S. Census Data Compared for Noble, Cleveland County and the State of Oklahoma

Demographic Information	Noble	Cleveland County	Oklahoma
Population	5,260	208,016	3,450,654
Percent White (alone)	90.3%	83.6%	76.2%
Percent Female	52.0%	49.8%	50.9%
Percent of Population < 20 years old	31.3%	28.7%	29.0%
Percent of Population > 64 years old	11.0%	8.4%	13.2%
Number of Households	1,956	79,186	1,342,293
Average Household Size	2.63	2.51	2.49
Percent Family Households	76.0%	68.0%	68.7%
Percent Married-couple Families	58.5%	54.4%	53.5%
Percent Female Householders, no husband present	13.3%	10.0%	11.4%
Percent Female Householders, with own children under 18 years	8.1%	6.2%	7.0%

The number of households grew faster, since 1980, than the population, leading to a declining average household size in the city. This is part of a statewide trend, and Noble’s average household size in 2000 was still larger than both Cleveland County’s or the state’s average household size. Connected to the larger average household size is the significantly larger percentage of Noble households made up of families compared to both the county and the state. Noble’s percentages of married-couple families, female householders and female householders with children are also higher than the county or state figures. Over three-quarters of Noble’s households are families.

Existing and Future Economy

Noble and the Regional Economy

Noble’s economy is made up of two broad factors: the businesses, and their employees, located in the city and the employment and income of Noble’s residents. Most Noble residents do not work in Noble, but find employment in the larger region of Cleveland County and the Oklahoma City metropolitan area. Many of Noble’s business establishments are also tied to the larger economy. The construction industry, the largest industry in Noble in terms of establishments, is an example.

A recent study (Miller, 2004) of the Oklahoma City metropolitan area’s economy concluded that it is recovering from the 2001 recession better than other metropolitan areas in the nation. Like other areas, however, manufacturing employment in the OKC metro area continues to decline and worker productivity

outpaces employment growth. Natural Resources and Mining employment, which includes energy-related jobs, has been a source of employment growth. Construction employment is also a growth sector for the metropolitan area. Other significant growth sectors include the Service sectors (Professional and Business Services, Educational and Health Services, and Leisure and Hospitality). Real estate and government sectors, though, are weak. All in all, since the 2001 recession, the OKC metro region’s employment growth rate is better than state and national figures.

Below is a summary of the economic data for the city and its residents. More detail can be found in Chapter 4, Working.

Noble Residents’ Occupation and Income

The occupation and industrial data from the 2000 Census records the types of occupations and industries in which Noble residents work. “Occupation” refers to Noble residents’ job descriptions, while “industry” refers to the types of businesses they work in. Management and professional occupations pertain mostly to those positions with some management responsibility. Service occupations include many jobs that provide support services for professional occupations. Cashiers and retail occupations are included in the sales and office occupational areas. Construction occupations include any occupation that deals with building maintenance or repair. As seen in Table 2.4, almost three-quarters of Noble residents are in management, professional, service or office occupations, in other words in typical white-collar or pink-collar jobs. A little over one-quarter of Noble residents work in the typical blue-collar jobs of construction, production or transportation.

Table 2.4: Noble Residents’ Employment by Occupation in 2000

Noble’s employed civilian population 16 years & over	2,615	100%
Sales and office occupations	703	26.9
Management, professional, and related occupations	590	22.6
Service occupations	584	22.3
Construction, extraction, and maintenance occupations	455	17.4
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	283	10.8
Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations	0	0
Source: 2000 US Census		

Table 2.5 lists the industries in which Noble residents work. The education, health and social services industry employs the largest proportion, at 24.4%, of Noble’s residents, followed by employment in construction and retail trade industries.

Table 2.5: Noble Residents' Employment by Industry in 2000

Noble's employed civilian population 16 years & over	2,615	100%
Educational, health and social services	639	24.4
Construction	376	14.4
Retail trade	320	12.2
Professional, scientific, management, administrative and waste management services	222	8.5
Manufacturing	223	8.5
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	188	7.2
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services	185	7.1
Public administration	139	5.3
Finance, insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing	135	5.2
Other services (except public administration)	77	2.9
Wholesale trade	58	2.2
Information	34	1.3
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	19	0.7
Source: 2000 US Census		

While working in these occupations and industries, Noble residents have historically earned more than the state average, but less than Cleveland County residents as a whole. However, during the 1990s Noble outpaced the statewide growth in income and began to catch up with Cleveland County. While in 1989 Noble's median household income was 102% and 81% of the state's and Cleveland County's median household incomes respectively, in 1999 it climbed to 106% and 84% (Table 2.6). Despite these gains, Noble's median household income still puts it in the middle of the pack of communities in the OKC metropolitan area along US 77 (Table 2.7).

Table 2.6: Median Household Income, 1989 and 1999, Compared for Noble, Cleveland County and the State of Oklahoma

Year	Noble	Cleveland County	Oklahoma
1989	\$24,146	\$29,975	\$23,577
1999	\$35,250	\$41,846	\$33,400

Source: U.S. Census, 1990 and 2000.

Noble's poverty rates, on the other hand, are quite a bit lower than the rates for the region and for the comparison communities, an indicator of Noble's economic health. The income level to be classified as living below poverty is different from year to year. In 1999 (2000 US Census), the level of income per year to be classified as below poverty was \$8,499 for a household of unrelated individuals. The rate for two related people was \$10,864 for a household. Noble's lower rates, less than half the statewide rate in 1999, is also less than half the rate across demographic categories when compared to the comparison communities (Table 2.7). While

Noble's median household income may be more modest than surrounding areas, its level of poverty is also less severe.

Table 2.7: Noble's 1999 Median Household Income Compared to Selected Oklahoma Regions and Communities

Region or Community	1999 Median Household Income
Cleveland County	\$41,846
Oklahoma City Metropolitan Statistical Area	\$36,797
Norman	\$36,713
Slaughterville	\$35,815
Noble	\$35,250
Purcell	\$33,283
Lexington	\$27,538

Source: US Census, 2000.

Figure 2.3: Poverty Rates Compared for Noble, Cleveland County and the State of Oklahoma

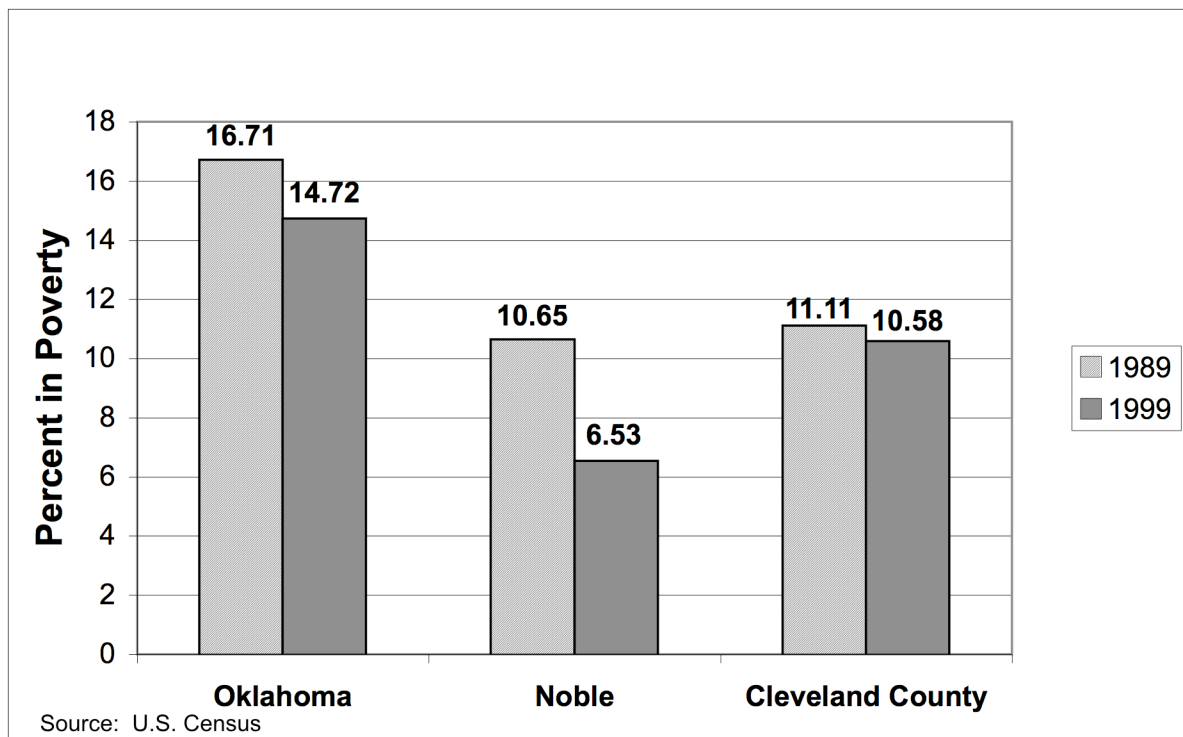


Table 2.8: 1999 Poverty Rates Compared for Noble and Selected Neighboring Communities

	Noble	Norman	Slaughter-ville	Lexington	Purcell
Overall	6.5%	15.0%	12.8%	15.5%	14.4%
Families	4.5%	7.8%	11.1%	13.1%	12.5%
Families with female householder, no husband present	16.7%	24.6%	24.6%	34.0%	21.1%

Source: US Census

Jobs and Businesses in Noble

The following analysis is based on data for zip code 73068, which includes the city of Noble. US Census Bureau data for the city alone exists, but is much less complete. The Noble zip code is larger than the city itself. Its population in 2000 was 10,500, about twice that of the city. The Census Bureau data is also limited to private sector business establishments. Important public sector employers, such as the Noble Public Schools, are not included. Indeed, if the Noble Public Schools were included, with its nearly 300 employees, it would be the city's largest employer.

Table 2.9: Business Establishments in Zip Code 73068 in 2004

Types of Establishments	Total	Establishments by Number of Employees					
		1-4	5-9	10-19	20-49	50-99	100-249
All	139	91	26	12	6	3	1
Mining	2	2	0	0	0	0	0
Construction	35	29	4	2	0	0	0
Manufacturing	3	1	0	1	0	1	0
Wholesale trade	4	3	0	0	0	1	0
Retail trade	19	8	7	3	1	0	0
Transportation & warehousing	4	4	0	0	0	0	0
Finance & insurance	6	3	1	1	1	0	0
Real estate & rental & leasing	3	2	1	0	0	0	0
Professional, scientific & technical serv.	11	9	2	0	0	0	0
Management of companies, enterprises	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Admin, support, waste mgt remediation	4	3	0	0	1	0	0
Health care and social assistance	17	8	6	0	1	1	1
Arts, entertainment & recreation	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
Accommodation & food services	12	6	2	2	2	0	0
Other services (except public admin.)	13	9	2	2	0	0	0
Unclassified establishments	4	4	0	0	0	0	0

U.S. Census, *Zip Code Business Patterns*, 2004.

In terms of business establishments, construction businesses (35) are the largest single category of businesses in Noble's zip code area in 2004, followed by retail

trade (19) and health care and social assistance (17) enterprises. Small businesses dominate: 65% of Noble’s businesses had less than five employees and 84% had less than ten employees. The percentages of small businesses are greater than the corresponding Cleveland County figures of 58% and 76%. Most of the construction establishments and retail establishments are small businesses with less than 10 employees. At the other end of the employee spectrum, there were only four businesses with more than 50 employees in Noble’s zip code area. They were in manufacturing (1), wholesale trade (1), and health care and social assistance categories (2). No private sector businesses show more than 250 employees. See Table 2.9.

In comparison to Cleveland County (see Table 2.10), the business establishments in Noble’s zip code area in 2004 showed a greater proportion of small businesses and construction businesses. The percent of establishments in retail trade, health care and social assistance, and accommodation and food services match or nearly match the county figures. The percent of professional, technical or scientific enterprises is lower than the county figure.

Table 2.10: Private Sector Business Establishments in Zip Code 73068 Compared to Cleveland County, 2004

Types of Establishments	73068	Cleveland County
Number of Establishments	139	4,778
Percent < 5 Employees	65%	58%
Percent Construction	25%	13%
Percent Retail Trade	14%	15%
Health Care & Social Assistance	12%	12%
Accommodation and Food Services	9%	8%
Professional, Technical, and Scientific Services	8%	12%

U.S. Census, County Business Patterns, 2004.

The study also looked at the change in business establishments, employees and payroll in the Noble zip code for the years 1998 to 2004 (Table 2.11). The number of establishments hit a low of 124 in 2000 and a high of 141 in 2003. Noble lost a large employer in 1998, causing a fall in employees and payroll, from which it has not completely recovered. The total employee range is highest in 1998 (1,279) and lowest in 2004 (1,020). The number and proportion of businesses by industry has remained stable over time, with the exception of construction businesses, which have shown steady growth from 28 in 1998 to 35 in 2004. While the number of businesses has grown since 1998, total employment and payroll has fallen.

Table 2.11: Private Sector Business Establishments in Zip Code 73068, 1998-2004

Year	Establishments	Percent < 5 Employees	Total Employees	Annual Payroll (in millions)
1998	127	58%	1,279	\$26,097
1999	129	63%	1,059	\$19,904
2000	124	55%	1,051	\$21,115
2001	127	61%	1,181	\$22,481
2002	139	62%	1,100	\$23,429
2003	141	62%	1,041	\$22,119
2004	139	65%	1,020	\$20,673

U.S. Census, *County Business Patterns*, 1998-2004.

Population Projections

Population forecasts are a key element of the planning process; we cannot plan adequately for the future without them. Forecasts account for the natural increase of the population and the migration of people in or out of the city. In order to achieve a reasonable forecast for the population of Noble in the year 2025, three different methods were employed, and their results were compared to provide a likely range of population. First, though, given the quickly dated nature of the 2000 population census total and knowledge of the residential building activity in Noble since 2000, a 2005 population estimate was calculated by multiplying the sum of residential building permits during the period 2000-2005 by an average household size of 2.689. The 2005 population estimate used in this study is 5,782.

Table 2.12: Population Projections for the City of Noble

Forecasting Method	2025 Population	Growth in Population 2005 – 2025
1) Cohort Survival	6,699	917
2) City : County Ratio	6,686	904
3) Building Permit	7,696	1,915

The cohort survival method provides a breakdown of future population by age and sex and is based on fertility rates, survival rates and net migration rates. US Census population data for the decade from 1990 to 2000 were used as the base for the forecast. The fertility and survival rates are provided by the Oklahoma State Department of Health. The net migration rate is calculated using 1990 to 2000 migration rates. Although the population *increased* modestly during this decade, Noble experienced *net out-migration*. In other words, there were fewer people in Noble in 2000 than one would expect based on fertility and survival rates. Net out-migration was greater for males than females. Males left Noble at a rate of about 4.9 percent, while females left at a rate of about 0.5 percent. While most age cohorts and

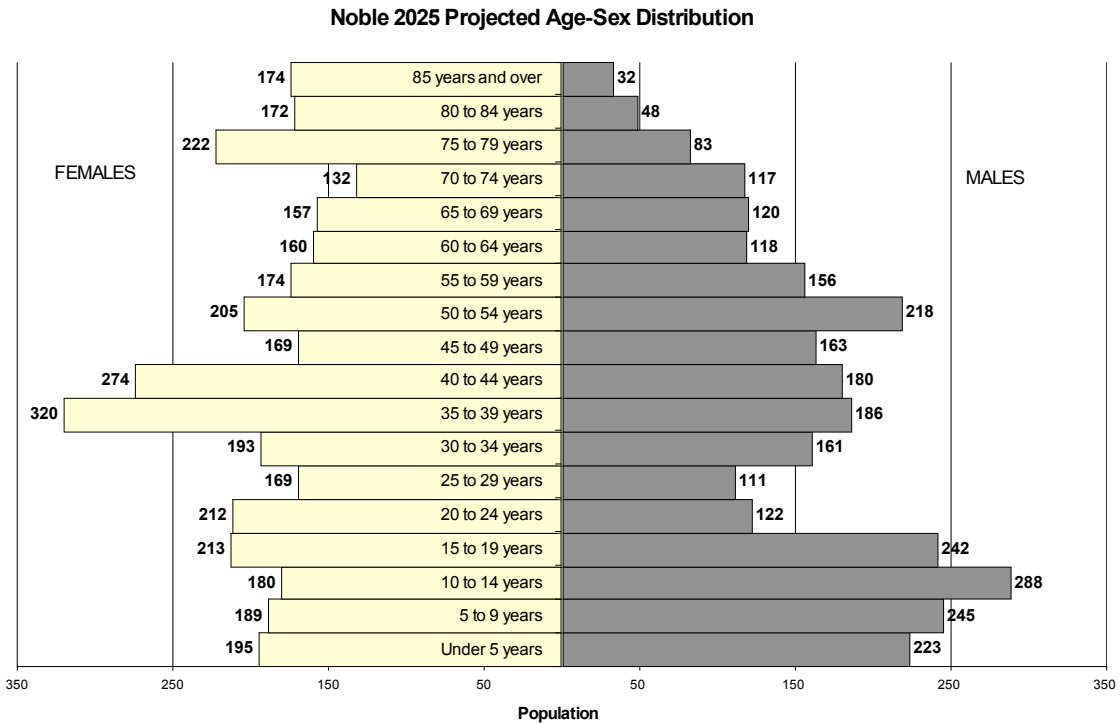
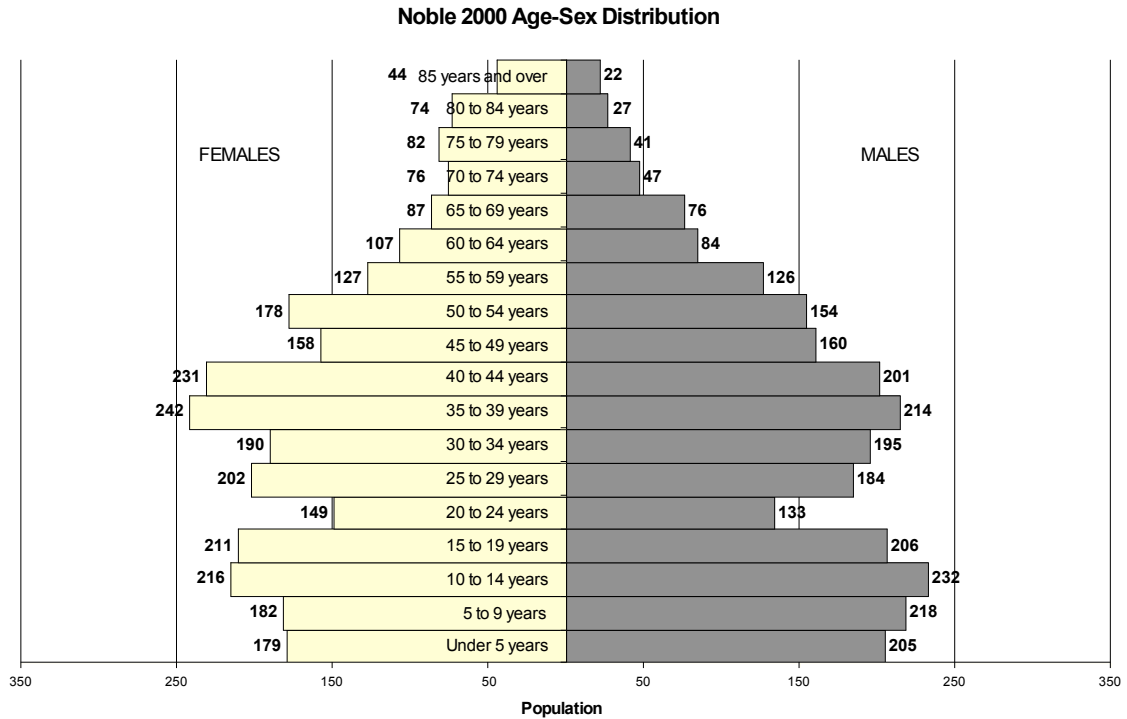
the population, as a whole, experienced net out-migration between 1990 and 2000, a few groups experienced net in-migration. The 30 to 39 age group had the greatest net in-migration, and net in-migration also occurred among the 10 to 14 age group and the 60 to 64 age group. The largest age cohorts in 2000 were the 35 to 44-year-olds and the 10 to 19-year-olds.

In the forecast, these rates are assumed to apply to future years to arrive at a population of about 6,699 for the year 2025. By 2025 the forecast predicts that the population will grow older as a whole, and those over the age of 60 will not only grow in absolute numbers but will comprise a greater proportion of the population than they do today. Each year's forecast can be presented in the form of a graph called a population pyramid, which shows a breakdown of the five-year age-sex cohorts. The population pyramids for 2000 and 2025 are presented in Figure 2.4

The city : county ratio method takes advantage of the Oklahoma Department of Commerce's population projections for Cleveland County. It is produced using a similar age-cohort method as described above, in five-year increments. The population of Noble since 1960 has comprised about 2.6 percent of the population of Cleveland County. This method adds 2.6% of Cleveland County's projected population growth between 2005 and 2025 to the study's 2005 population estimate for the city. Assuming that the 2.6 percent ratio continues to hold true, Noble's population in 2025 would be 6,686.

The building permit method involved an examination of trends in annual residential building permits to forecast annual incremental growth in the housing stock through the year 2025. Annual population growth was determined by taking the number of permits in each of the last ten years (1996-2005), averaging the highest five years, and multiplying the resulting number of permits by the average household size (2.689). This method forecasts a 2025 population of 7,696.

Figure 2.4: Population Pyramids for 2000 and Projected for 2025



Discussion

Noble: From Past to Future

Noble's status as an 1889 land run city has bestowed it with a 160-acre original town plat in a grid of east-west and north-south streets and narrow residential lots. Thus, Noble has a small, but "traditional" downtown, and many of its key institutional buildings remain located in or near the original town plat. As a speculative city founded with high aims, it did not reach its goals. Floods of the Canadian River and fires in its downtown also stymied Noble's development in its early years. Noble remained a small village while Norman became the county seat and largest city in the county. At first, good railroad access and highway access tied Noble into the rest of the region. However, the Canadian River on the city's western border, first seen as an advantage, became a barrier to Noble's easy integration to the growing region when I-35 was built west of the Canadian River.

Despite its relative isolation from the interstate highway system, Noble began attracting significant population growth in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Its total area grew to 8,309 acres, according to the study's mapping of existing land uses. 3,790 acres are developed, with 3,160 acres in residential use. 4,519 are considered undeveloped. Population growth slowed in the 1990s. Although the city's population increased during this decade, calculations indicate the city actually experienced net out-migration. Permitting for new residential development since 2000 indicate that the slower growth of the 1990s may not be the future trend.

The new population Noble attracted was, by and large, living in family households. The city's average household size is declining, but is still larger than the average household size for both Cleveland County and the state. Its proportions of family households and married-couple households are greater than these proportions for the county and the state. Greater too is its percentage of female householders, including female householders with children.

Noble's population, by and large, does not work in Noble. In 2000, Noble's employed population numbered 2,615, while private sector employment in the Noble zip code numbered 1,051. Noble's population earns, in terms of median household income, more than the state figure, but less than the county figure. However, in the 1990s, Noble pulled even further ahead of the state median income and gained on the county median income. Noble's poverty rates also declined in the 1990s and the city posts the lowest poverty rates among its comparison communities, even given its percentage of female householders and female householders with children. While Noble's household income may be more modest than surrounding communities, its level of poverty is also less severe.

Noble's economy is inextricably linked to that of the larger region. The occupations and industries of most employed Noble residents appear, in the short run at least, to be in the stable or growth sectors of the Oklahoma City metropolitan area economy. Noble's strength in construction employment and establishments also, in the short run, appears to match well with region's economic sectors that are growing. Noble's large percentage of small business establishments and relatively few large employers has advantages and disadvantages. Small businesses show an entrepreneurial spirit, but also are risky ventures. Large employers provide a community more stability, until something goes wrong, in which case the effects can be serious. The different vulnerabilities of both are somewhat mitigated by the fact that Noble's population, as a whole, is not dependent on these businesses for their jobs.

Future Population Scenarios

Which of the three population forecast methods are most likely? The first and second method described above, being dependent on the same set of fertility and survival rates and the 1990-2000 net migration rates at the city or county level, yield similar forecasts. The 1990s were not a "boom" time for the city, yielding modest growth projections. The building permit forecast method captures the recent upswing in residential development and in-migration, and assumes it will continue. If the residential building continues to be single-family houses, Noble could expect to continue to attract families with working age adults. The implications, on the other hand, of the age-cohort forecast method is that Noble's existing population will age and will therefore increase demand for the types of housing and services that support an aging population. If not supplied, an increase in out-migration might result. In addition, as the population ages, there will be an increasing supply of existing, aging and affordable housing for new families. It is possible, even likely, that Noble will experience the dynamics found in both forecast methods. New housing development will continue to attract new families, while at the same time the existing population will age.

While these three forecasts are useful, they are based on past trends. They do not take into account external factors or circumstances that could influence the rate of population growth in the future. Growth can be strongly influenced by actual or perceived conditions relating to the local economy and business climate, social and cultural factors, the environment and a number of quality-of-life issues. Noble serves as a bedroom community on the outskirts of large metropolitan area and thus competes with other similarly located communities. For example, since Noble is predominantly a city of families, the quality of schools compared to surrounding school districts will probably influence the choices families make when they decide whether to move to or to stay in Noble. By the same token, the quality of family-oriented recreational opportunities, such as parks and playgrounds, may affect

future location decisions. Access to jobs throughout the metropolitan region, through convenient or affordable transportation, may affect the future location decisions, especially with uncertain gasoline prices. Noble has attracted those who desire opportunities for entrepreneurship through small businesses. Noble's business climate and capacity for job growth may influence location decisions for families and businesses. A range of issues, from water quality to crime levels, will bear on people's location decisions.

For planning purposes, this study uses *three 2025 growth scenarios* and examines how each interact with land development and infrastructure. The low scenario, 1000 additional people or 375 additional households, corresponds to the first two forecast methods. The medium scenario, 2000 additional people or 750 additional households, corresponds to the building permit forecast method. The high scenario, 4000 additional people or 1,500 additional households, assumes an increasing number of building permits issued annually. The high scenario serves to test the capacity of Noble's available land and infrastructure.

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