

Chapter 9

Settlement Patterns

9.1 Introduction

9.2 Early settlement history of Erie

The first recorded inhabitants of the coastal area along Lake Erie were the Erie Indians.¹ Their tribe was defeated in battle in 1654 by the Senecas, who killed many of the Eries and scattered those remaining alive among neighboring tribes. The Senecas remained the main inhabitants of the area up until the turn of the 19th century. The British and French each did establish forts in the area, and were vying for control of this strategically important bridge between the eastern and western settlements. However, neither the French or the British established non-military settlements.

American control over the area started in 1784 when Pennsylvania acquired the rights to the land through a treaty with the Six Nations. The British did not leave their military forts immediately, but were out-maneuvered by the American military who were able to establish alliances with the Senecas. The first American settlers arrived in 1795, aided by

¹The brief summaries in this section are drawn from more detailed descriptions in Sanford (1894), Muller (1991), and Lechner (1994).

inexpensive land grants through the Pennsylvania Population Company. However, relations with the Senecas cooled drastically as American settlers began to move in, and the frequent violent raids discouraged settlement in the first years. However, military reinforcements were quickly sent to the area, and they dealt harshly with the hostile Senecas. This paved the way for a rapid increase in the population in the early 19th century.

Erie was incorporated as a borough in 1805, and experienced a sizeable growth in population throughout the 19th century. Table 9.1 shows the population growth in the city of Erie and Erie County for this time period (Sanford 1894, FWP 1938).

Year	City Pop.	County Pop.
1800	81	1,468
1810	394	1,358
1820	635	8,553
1830	1,329	17,041
1840	3,412	31,344
1850	5,858	38,742
1860	11,113	49,697
1870	15,516	
1880	27,737	
1890	40,634	

Table 9.1: Population growth in the city of Erie and Erie County, 1800–1890

In considering the effect of settlement patterns on the subsequent linguistic system in Erie, it is necessary to consider the geographical origins of the early settlers. It has been known for some time among cultural geographers that a small group of the earliest settlers in a region can have a profound and lasting impact on the culture of the region. This was formulated clearly by Zelinsky (1973:13–14) as the Doctrine of First Effective Settlement:

Whenever an empty territory undergoes settlement or an earlier population is dislodged by invaders, the specific characteristics of the first group able to effect a viable, self-perpetuating society are of crucial significance for the later social and cultural geography of the area, no matter how tiny the initial band of settlers may have been...Thus, in terms of lasting impact, the activities of a few hundred, or even a few score, initial colonizers can mean much more for

the cultural geography of a place than the contributions of tens of thousands of new immigrants a few generations later.

Recent studies have also shown that this is true for linguistic structure: Mufwene (1996) formulated a similar idea which he called the Founder Principle, and demonstrated its applicability to creole genesis; Labov (2007) provides an explanation of the diffusion of the New York City short-/æ/ system to Cincinnati based on early settlement data; and Dinkin (2008) correlates the early preponderance of Dutch settlers in Amsterdam and Oneonta in eastern upstate New York to the fact that these two towns are not participating in the Northern Cities Shift.

As Chapter 2 has shown, the earliest linguistic evidence indicates that Erie originally patterned with the North. Thus, we would expect a large portion of the earliest settlers to have arrived from sources similar to the ones that settled nearby cities in the North such as Buffalo and Rochester. Published sources indicate that there were two main sources of early settlers to Erie County: New England and Southeastern Pennsylvania. The New Englanders who arrived in Erie were for the most part of British origin, and came to Erie through New York state primarily from Massachusetts and Connecticut. On the other hand, the settlers arriving from Southeastern Pennsylvania were of either Scots-Irish or German descent.

However, published sources do not provide the information necessary to account for the early linguistic patterns, namely, the proportion of the two groups among the early settlers. FWP (1938:23) does state that most of the settlers prior to 1800 came from New England and New York, and that subsequent migrations were also from the same sections. However, the authors provide no specific data to support this claim. On the other hand, Sanford (1894) claims that the early settlers were a mix of New Englanders and Scots-Irish: “the first settlers in Erie County were mostly...from moral, thrifty, intelligent New England; or...perhaps a more numerous class, of the illustrious, historic race of Scotch-

Irish.” However, she also does not provide any specific numbers to support this claim.

Two primary sources were consulted in an attempt to document the early settlement history of the region more accurately: a publication documenting the location of the burial sites for all of the “Revolutionary Patriots” interred in Erie County, and an early history of the county with biographical information for the prominent early settler.

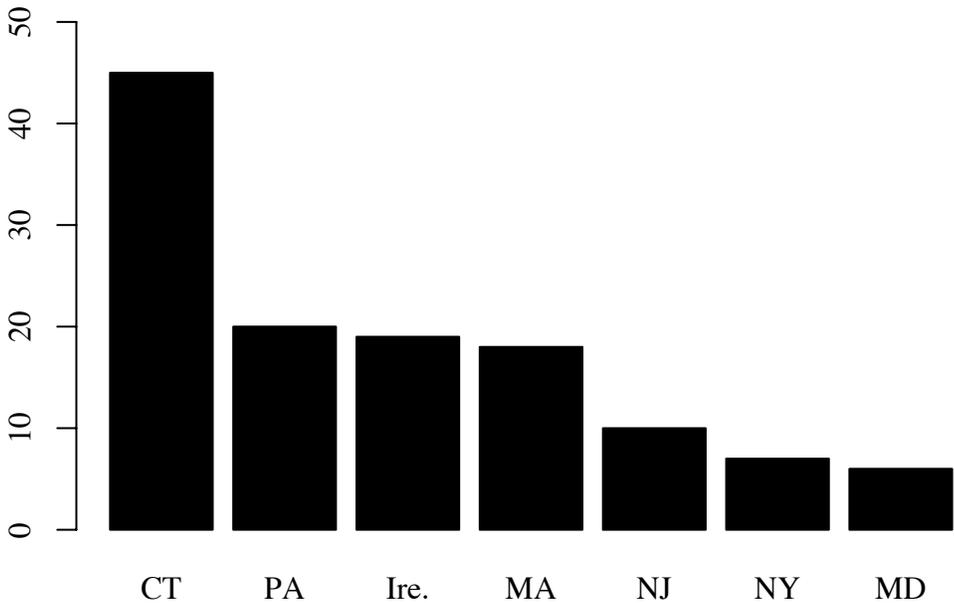


Figure 9.1: Place of birth of Revolutionary Patriots from Erie County

The first source is entitled *Revolutionary Patriots in Erie County, PA*, and was published by the Sons of the American Revolution as an aid in genealogy. The National Association of the Sons of the American Revolution defines a Revolutionary Patriot as an individual who has given “acceptable service to this nation”. Examples of such service include (but are not limited to) such actions as: signing the Declaration of Independence, serving in the Revolutionary army between April 19, 1775 and Nov 26, 1783, serving in the Continental

Congress, etc. The Erie Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution compiled a list of all known Revolutionary Patriots who resided in and were buried in Erie County. Out of the 212 such Patriots, the place of birth is known for 143. Figure 9.1 summarizes this information by listing the most common birth places for the Revolutionary Patriots. By far the most common place of birth was the state of Connecticut, which claimed 31% of them (45 out of 143). Among foreign countries, Ireland was the only one with a sizeable number of Revolutionary Patriots, with 19 (England and Germany produced 2 each, Holland and Wales produced 1).

When the data in Figure 9.1 are grouped into three representative regions (North, Mid-Atlantic, and Europe), it is clear that settlers from the North far outnumbered those from other areas. For these purposes, the North is defined as New England plus New York state, and the Mid-Atlantic region includes Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Maryland. Grouped together this way, the majority of the Revolutionary Patriots came from the Northern states, 57.3%, while a sizeable minority came from the Mid-Atlantic states, 25.2%. 17.5% of the Revolutionary Patriots came from Europe (as mentioned above, nearly all of these were from Ireland).

The average year of birth for all of these Revolutionary Patriots is 1754, and the average year of death is 1833. Thus, this group must have been among the very first settlers in the region, since Erie's first non-indigenous settler arrived in 1795.

A further source on the settlement of Erie County comes from a history of the county written in 1884, whose second volume contains biographies of 1,077 important residents of the county at the time of writing (Sanford 1894). Of these, 615 were born outside of Erie County, and can thus provide evidence for the geographic origin of a larger group of early settlers than the Revolutionary Patriots. The places of birth for these 615 prominent Erie County residents are presented in Figure 9.2 (excluding those locations that are represented by 10 or fewer settlers).

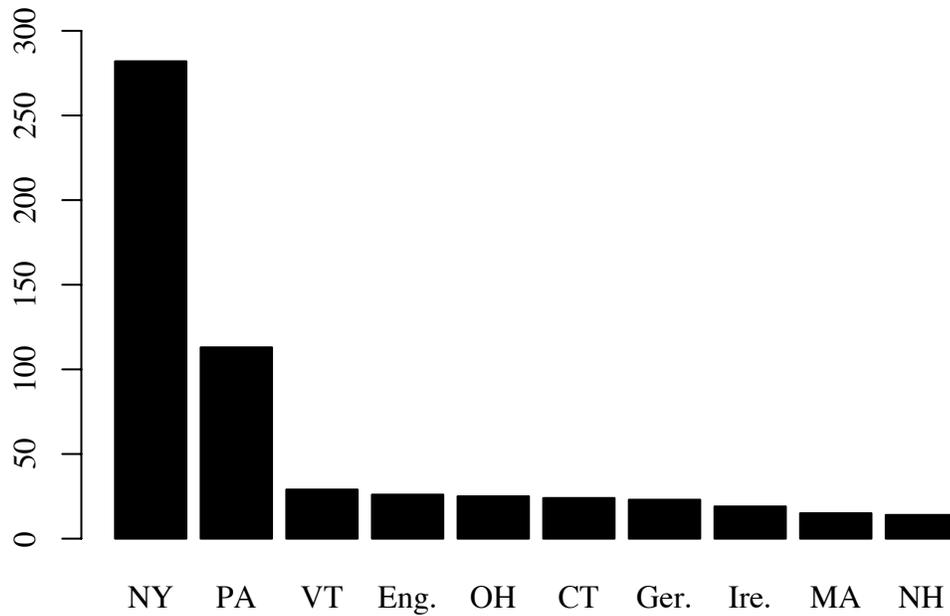


Figure 9.2: Place of birth of prominent 19th century Erie County residents

The data from this group of prominent residents represents a later stage of immigration than the Revolutionary Patriots data—the average year of birth for the residents considered in the 1884 book is 1825, a good three generations later than the earlier group. However, the proportion of Northern settlers to Mid-Atlantic and European ones remains quite similar: 60.1% to 19.9% to 13.0%, respectively. Again, the North contributes the majority of settlers, but a sizable portion also comes from Pennsylvania. The Northern settlers in this later group are dominated by those born in New York (as opposed to Connecticut for the Revolutionary Patriots). This reflects the massive westward migration from New England into New York state in the early / mid-nineteenth century, due, in large part, to the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825.

These two sources of evidence for the early settlement history of Erie (the Revolutionary Patriots and the list of prominent Erieites contained in Sanford (1894)) thus agree in locating the area of origin for the majority of the settlers in the North. The early Northern lexical and phonological patterns exhibited by the speakers from Erie County in PEAS (see Chapter 2) are thus a result of this settlement history. On the other hand, both sources also demonstrate that Erie County has always had a sizeable contingent (greater than 40%) of non-Northern settlers, especially the Scots-Irish, often via other original settlement locations in Pennsylvania. This mixed early settlement history likely explains Erie's receptiveness to non-Northern linguistic features.

Under this explanation, Erie's was never completely a Northern city, as an initial examination of the evidence from (Kurath and McDavid 1961) and (Kurath 1949) would suggest. As was discussed in Section 6.10 the two LAMSAS speakers who provided the data from Erie County for these two atlases were from small farming communities near the border with New York. It is quite likely that their speech was not representative of the speech in the county as a whole, especially the urbanized portion. The archival evidence from H.O. Hirt and the Seasonal Workers in Viticulture oral history project support this: the merger of /o/ and /oh/ spread to the city of Erie before it spread to the small, rural communities elsewhere in the county.

Two distinct groups thus co-existed in Erie County during the first portion of its history, coinciding roughly with the 19th century. From the onset, the contingent of merged settlers was likely large enough that their children did not acquire the distinction. This corresponds to Stage 2 of Johnson (2007:425)'s Migration Hypothesis, under which the proportion of natively-merged children entering the peer group is high enough that children entering school meet enough merged peers to be able to retain it (and not acquire the distinction from their unmerged peers). The proportion of merged Erieites then eventually grew large enough towards the end of the 19th century that natively-unmerged children came into con-

tact with enough merged children in their peer group that they began to acquire the merger as well. This situation corresponds to Stage 3 in Johnson (2007:426)'s Migration Hypothesis. The proportion of early Erie settlers originating from merged regions is consistent with the empirical data provided by Johnson (2007:436) for the spread of the merger to Seekonk and South Attleboro, MA. Furthermore, it is also greater than the figure of 22% suggested by Yang (2009)'s statistical model based on population structure to be the minimum necessary to cause the spread of the merger.

This hypothesis thus proposes that the settlement history of Erie was qualitatively different than the settlement history of other Northern cities, such as Buffalo and Cleveland. Those cities almost certainly had larger percentages of their original settlers from the North, and smaller percentages from the Midland. Crucially, the early contingent of Scots-Irish settlers in these other cities is hypothesized to be much smaller. Further archival research into the settlement histories of these cities will be necessary to confirm this hypothesis.