

FLORIDA'S POPULATION IN THE MID 1980s: LOOKING BACK AND AHEAD

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Florida has always been a growth state. Since the first census of the territory in 1830, population increases of less than 30 percent have occurred in only two decades, 1910-20 and 1930-40. The 1950s showed the largest percentage increase, 78 percent, although the largest numerical increase occurred in the 1970s. Following the 1970 census, demographers nationally were surprised that a state which started with a base of 5 million people in 1960 had grown at the rate of 34.7 percent. They were more surprised when the 1980 census showed that, with a base population of 6.8 million, Florida grew over 42 percent. Compared with other states during the last decade, only Nevada, Arizona, and Wyoming had larger percentage increases than Florida, and only California and Texas had larger numerical growth. Florida is the only state to rank in the top five in both percentage and absolute increase during the 1970-80 period.

The 1980 population was 9.7 million. Population in April 1986, was 11.5 million, which makes Florida the sixth largest state. The percentage increase between 1980 and 1985 was 15 percent, which is 3 percent per year compared with 3.6 percent per year during the 1970s. The State Data Center in the Governor's Office estimates that in 1988 Florida will rank fourth in the nation in population.

Growth Igniters

Several growth igniters can be identified for Florida. In general, military actions have had a positive impact on Florida's population growth. The Spanish American War, World Wars I and II, and, to some extent, even the Seminole Wars and the Civil War, had strong impacts on population growth. Mar of the military men who served in Florida during these wars later returned as tourists and finally as residents. More recently the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and, to a minor extent, other social uprisings in the Caribbean have brought immigrants to the nearest friendly soil, which happens to be Florida.

Two other early growth igniters were Henry Flagler and Henry Plants. These gentlemen built railroads in Florida, and in order to have people and products to utilize their railroads, they developed agriculture, forestry, tourism, and other economic activities. They were our earliest comprehensive planners.

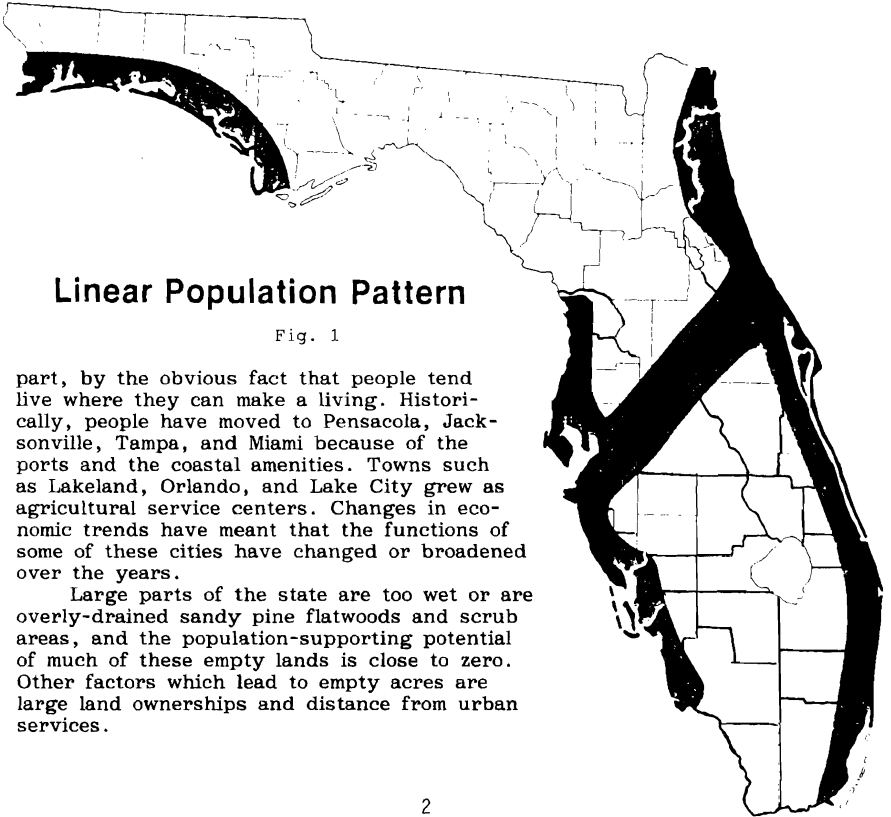
During the 1950s growth came from economic stability. Social Security, union movements in the north, assured retirement programs, early retirement, and disposable income for vacations all contributed to Florida's growth. In the 1960s, the space program and the associated expansion of electronics industries fueled much of Florida's growth. Interestingly enough, both economic booms and busts in the national economy have motivated people to move to Florida. Over the years, improvements in transportation and in technology, such as air conditioning, as well as publicity campaigns, have had positive impacts on growth. Finally, the low cost of a high quality of life in Florida has attracted people who also wish to benefit economically from homestead exemptions, no income or inheritance taxes, and the relatively low total tax burden.

Natural Increase and Net Migration

There are two causes of population growth, natural increase and net migration. Natural increase is the number of births minus the number of deaths, and net migration is the difference between the number of people moving into the state and the number moving out. In Florida, natural increase has been declining steadily over the past twenty years. This is because of (1) the age characteristics of Florida's population, (2) the high cost of raising children, (3) the economic need for a two-person income in a family, and (4) the professional goals of women. Florida's substantial growth is explained by net migration figures rather than natural increase. Five years ago, we felt that the natural increase, which was at that time less than 20,000 a year, would become negative sometime during the mid-1980s. This has not happened.

Population Distribution and Density

Florida's population distribution is well known to observers of the state. Major urban areas and growth corridors contain the bulk of Florida's residents, whereas many areas of the state are virtually or actually uninhabited (Figure 1). Florida's population distribution is explained, in



Linear Population Pattern

Fig. 1

part, by the obvious fact that people tend to live where they can make a living. Historically, people have moved to Pensacola, Jacksonville, Tampa, and Miami because of the ports and the coastal amenities. Towns such as Lakeland, Orlando, and Lake City grew as agricultural service centers. Changes in economic trends have meant that the functions of some of these cities have changed or broadened over the years.

Large parts of the state are too wet or are overly-drained sandy pine flatwoods and scrub areas, and the population-supporting potential of much of these empty lands is close to zero. Other factors which lead to empty acres are large land ownerships and distance from urban services.

The location of population is more difficult for demographers to explain today because many Floridians make their living by going to the mail box for a retirement or dividend check. Further, in today's mobile society, light, high value industry can be located where people want to live, and high speed roads allow people to commute longer distances to work.

Between 1973-83, the counties with the highest growth rates (those over 93 percent) were located on the Sun Coast, an area which is continuing a rapid growth started in the 1960s, or they were satellites to major urban centers. Satellite growth explains the increase in many of the high-growth counties (over 50 percent). People move to satellite counties to get away from the crowding, to enjoy a lower cost of land and lower taxes, and to take advantage of amenities such as a larger lot for a kitchen garden. Of course, as the population increases in these counties, people begin to lose the benefits they went there to achieve. An interesting case is Broward County, which grew 62 percent between 1970 and 1980, starting with a base of 620,000 and increasing to just over a million. This numerical increase was larger than the individual increase of twenty-four separate states.

Density, a function of area and total population, is for some uses more helpful to consider than just a numerical total. Density shows the population supporting potential of an area, but it also suggests the pressure of people on the natural systems. Population density in Florida, which has a statewide density of 196 people per square mile, ranges from 5.2 in Liberty County to over 2800 in Pinellas County. Such a high density places a tremendous pressure on land and water supplies, social services, utilities, and transportation. Density pressures on land have policy implications for the protection not only of environmentally fragile areas, but of water and agricultural land, which are important resources to Florida's economy. In the last several years, Florida has lost many thousands of acres of agricultural lands to urbanization. At this time, this is not necessarily a critical problem, but one which the Department of Agriculture and the Legislature might want to study.

Figure 1 provides a better understanding of population location and can help us make some more useful observations. Although there are definite population nodes or centers, these centers coalesce into a ribbon of linear development along the high energy coasts and the I-4 corridor. Eighty percent of Florida's population lives in coastal counties. Trends indicate a continuation of this pattern.

Over 80 percent of Florida's citizens live in urban areas. The urban increase has not only been due to immigration from other states and nations, but also from movement during the 1950s, 60s, and 70s of people from farms to cities. This movement has put pressure on welfare systems, low-cost housing, recreation programs, and schools, and it has caused competition for unskilled low-paying jobs. This situation is causing some upper income people to begin the reverse move into high-value, planned communities away from the urbanized core. The present lower cost of living and a more rural lifestyle in some northern counties are beginning to attract not only migrants from out of state, but Floridians from southern counties.

Population Structure

Age characteristics of a population are of prime importance to policy makers in many areas of government, including employment and education and other social service departments. Two ways to look at age characteristics are the population pyramid and the dependency load of a particular area.

Population Pyramids

The population pyramid for Florida (Figure 2) very definitely shows the low birthrate in the state, the large number of baby-boomers in their twenties, and the large number of individuals over fifty. The pyramid is not wholly an unhealthy one; it just shows some specific problem areas. The Dade profile (Figure 3) again shows the lower birthrate and a more healthy number of people in the productive ages, between fifteen and sixty-five. The very large number of people in the over-sixty group is softened because of the large population base in Dade County. Leon County (Figure 4) appears to have an unusual age distribution until we realize that the large group from fifteen to thirty-five is due to the existence of two universities, a junior college, and the state government which employs a large number of young people. The larger percentage of very young people shows a higher birthrate here than most counties and the lower percentage of people in

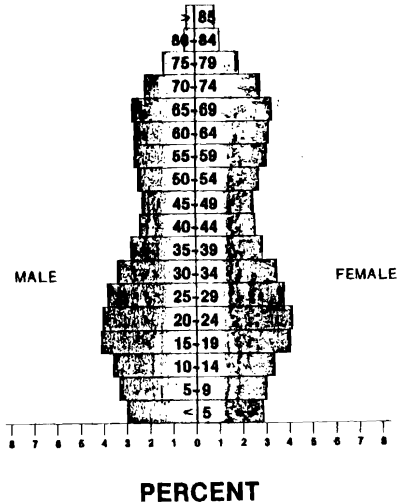


Fig. 2. Population Pyramid for Florida.

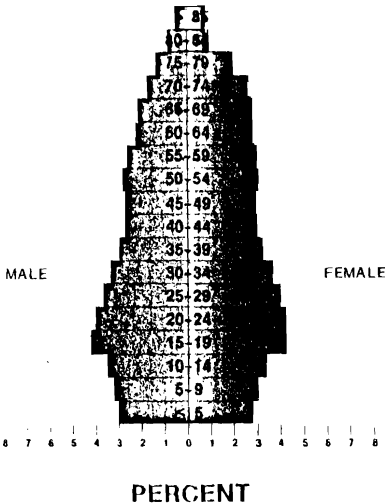
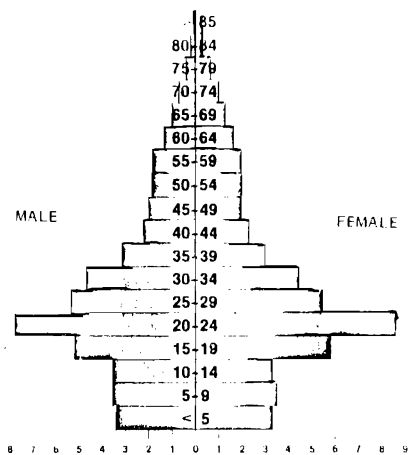


Fig. 3. Population Pyramid for Dade County.

the elderly age groups indicates that the retirement group has not found Leon County.

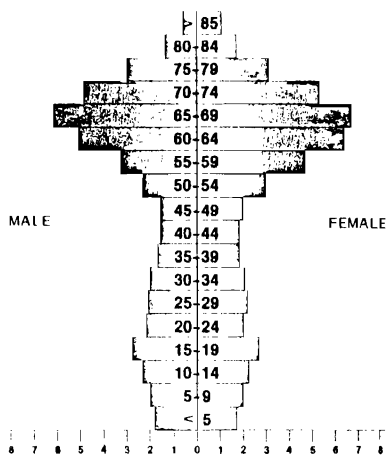
The primary characteristic of Charlotte County (Figure 5) is the very heavy predominance of retirees. The group aged sixty-five to sixty-nine is the largest. Such a large percentage of the population beyond the normal income-earning years might place a strain on the younger cohorts to support the elderly. However, many retirement checks from outside the area support many if not most elderly individuals.

Suwannee County (Figure 6) is typical of an agricultural county in which the birthrate is healthy, but the number of people in the productive age group is low because at about twenty years of age many people leave home for educational or economic reasons and do not return. The large number of young males in Union County (Figure 7) is explained by the large state prison located there, whose inmates are counted as part of the county's population.



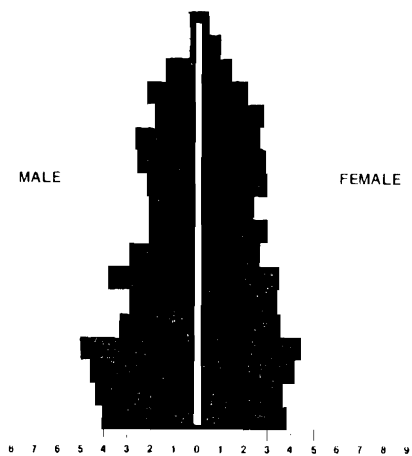
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Fig. 4. Population Pyramid for Leon County.



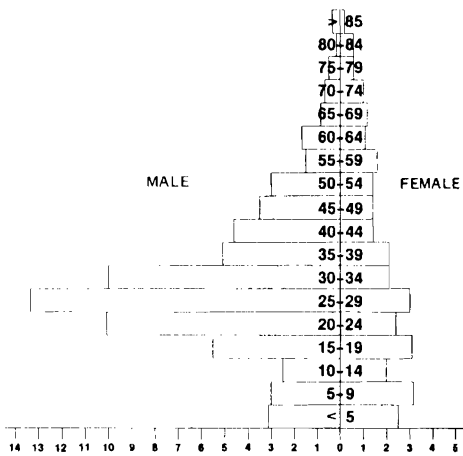
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Fig. 5. Population Pyramid for Charlotte County.



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Fig. 6. Population Pyramid for Suwannee County.



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Fig. 7. Population Pyramid for Union County.

Dependency Load

A second way to look at population is a dependency ratio or dependency load (Figure 8). Those counties such as Dade, Brevard, and Escambia -- with

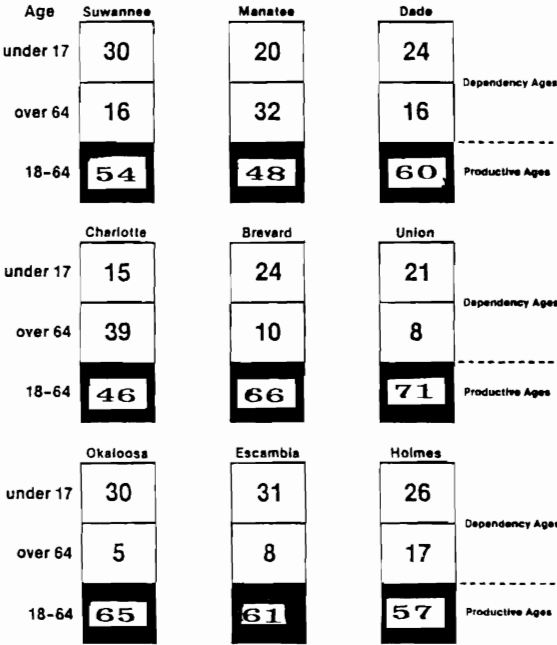


Fig. 8. Estimated Dependency Loads for Selected Counties, 1979. The number in the black square is the percentage of the population of productive ages (18-64).

above. In 1980, Charlotte County had a median age of 57.4. Older people tend to be less progressive, more resistant to change, and more apt to oppose bond issues for education or other public projects. A number of population questions are raised when we look at this age characteristic of our population. These policies need to be addressed, in part, because as the number of older people increases, their political power increases. They are conservative, but on the other hand, they often require a great deal of governmental services. They, like members of other age groups, require education, health, protection, and recreation, but their requirements take a different character than those of other groups. A problem in some Gulf counties is that the elderly compete with the unskilled and with teenagers for minimum wage jobs. The Governor's Committee on Aging will help us better understand this age group. The Legislature might also consider strengthening the Local Government Planning Act by requiring a demographic or social planning element in local plans.

Futurist John Neisbett indicates that Florida is a bellwether state in several areas, one of which is the age-youth ratio. He indicates that by 1995, the entire U.S. population will have the same age-youth ratio that Florida has

over 60 percent in the productive age group -- are very healthy, whereas the counties of Manatee, Charlotte, and Suwannee are less healthy. Union County is an exception to this rule as the prison inmates account for a large portion of the 71 percent of the county population in the "productive age."

During the 1970s, the sixty-five and older group in Florida grew 71 percent, nearly twice the rate of the rest of the population. In the 1980s, this rate of growth is predicted to increase to 85 percent. Florida is now, with 34.7 percent of its population sixty-five and older, the "oldest state" in the nation.

Florida counties with the highest percentage of older people are on the Gold coast, whereas the counties with the largest number of older people are Dade and Broward on the Atlantic. Florida has ten counties in which more than a quarter of the population is age sixty-five and

now, and by carefully watching what is happening now in Florida, the country will learn a great deal about the problems and opportunities the whole nation will face in the future.

Social Characteristics of the Population

Several other characteristics of Florida's population warrant discussion. Causes of death in Florida have historically been heart disease, stroke, cancer, and respiratory disease, as well as accidents. These data do not indicate that Florida is an unhealthy state. The rates of all but the last are heavily influenced by our large older population. Most of these people have not contracted these diseases in Florida, but have brought their cancers and respiratory ailments to Florida from other states. In general, Florida has an advanced health care delivery system. In terms of education, Florida is ahead of other states on the basis of per capita years of schooling. However, much of the expense of this favorable statistic has been borne by other states. Largely the result of a dynamic population, Florida's crime rate is significantly higher than other states, but I believe part of this is due to the fact that our reporting system is also better. In terms of poverty, state statistics show that approximately 13.5 percent of our population is living in poverty.

Florida's marriage rate is a bit higher than the nation as a whole, and nearly half of all Florida marriages are remarriages. Florida's divorce rate is nearly 50 percent higher than that of the U.S. as a whole. Data on ethnic groups show that the percentage of blacks in Florida has fallen from 40 percent in 1900 to 14 percent in 1980, while the percentage of Hispanics has increased from 5 percent in 1950 to 18 percent in 1980. Of more importance is the localized character of this trend. For example, Dade County is over 36 percent Hispanic. (For more on Florida's and Dade County's Hispanics, see Boswell et al. 1986, Stafford 1986, and Webster and Webster 1986).

In the future, Florida's population will continue to increase at a rapid rate, although not as rapidly as it did during the 1970s. Demographers have projected a population of over 15 million by the year 2000. Expectations are that the only differences in the age, sex, or ethnic mix will be slight increases in the over-sixty age cohort and in the Hispanic groups.

Generalizations, Conclusions, Recommendations

Several generalizations from geography should be considered when we evaluate Florida's population growth. First, the physical environment suggests and limits human activities but does not dictate them. Second, the impact of the physical environment is a function of people's attitudes, objectives, and technical skills. In Florida our wetlands, our fragile coasts -- including estuaries, barrier islands, and dunes -- might suggest to us that few people if any would live in these difficult environments. Nevertheless, people have chosen to live in the coastal region where wetland modification, dune destruction and erosion, and potable water problems are simply viewed as challenges we accept, dealing with them through growth management, including selective preservation and appropriations at the local or state level.

Third, when humans modify the physical environment, they must pay an economic price to replace its natural functions or suffer the loss or a decrease in the quality of the environmental service. An important need is to be able to identify the thresholds beyond which human occupancy is too costly.

There is a new breed of environmental economist who specialize in developing formulas to use to calculate these thresholds.

Fourth, are the implications of growth to the problem of regulation and freedom, which might be summarized by a principle such as "as more people are added to a given area, even assuming a steady level of technology, more rules are needed to maintain social order."

Florida's leaders have shown that they know the importance of population planning, but due to the inevitability of unforeseen events we must be skeptical of trend lines and build into our plans an ability to cope with crises we cannot control. We must be aware of the fact that national economic health, immigration laws, weather patterns, and even the nation's foreign policy produce impacts on Florida's population over which the state has little control. For example, a social or political uprising in the Caribbean is apt to create another unplanned influx of people. A change in our federal policy toward Cuba could also have an impact on south Florida's population, as could migration policies associated with an energetic federal Caribbean initiative. In very few, if any, other places in the world do we find a sharper division between wealth and poverty in such a short distance as we find between Florida and our Caribbean neighbors.

In several places in this paper the dynamic character of Florida's population has been mentioned. We benefit from the skills, new ideas, and energy from Hispanics, from tourists, and new citizens from other states, but we also need to realize that most of Florida's citizens lack a common history and unifying background. This diversity tends to work against state pride and unity and can foster regionalism, which makes it more difficult for the Legislature to make rational decisions for the good of the whole state.

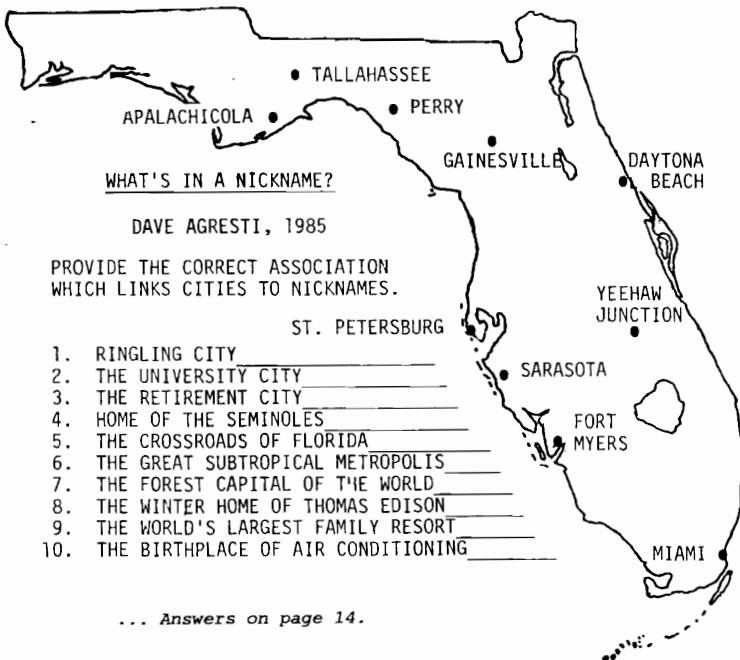
A final policy problem concerning population trends and characteristics is the accounting of the "de facto" population in contrast to the formal census population. In Florida it is important to note the number of tourists that occupy an area at a given time -- to understand what their ages, economic status, means of travel, and other characteristics imply for the state. This tourist population provides Florida with the highest per capita retail sales in the country. Each year 40 million people visit, spend over \$16 billion, and leave. However, while they are here, they make a heavy impact on recreation, transportation, utilities, and housing resources. This demand is seasonal and the situation presents policy problems that cannot be addressed by yearly data or by data that are not site specific. It is estimated that Broward County has an additional 350,000 people during the peak tourist weeks. It is also reasonable to assume that winter-long visitors have different needs than two-week tourists. State and local agencies need to know more about these two tourist groups.

In conclusion, it is recommended that an advisory group be formed to discuss the data needed by governmental agencies to handle the many demographic problems in the state. As important as population growth and migration are to Florida, little is known about these topics. In the State University System are several universities which have excellent demographic centers that could aid in the collection and analysis of these data.

The difficult legislative decision is how much or how little government is needed to protect individual and collective rights and quality of life in an efficient manner. To balance proactive planning against the often costly reaction to growth problems, and to decide which level of government can best do the job is difficult, certainly, but necessary nonetheless.

References

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WHAT'S IN A NICKNAME?

DAVE AGRESTI, 1985

PROVIDE THE CORRECT ASSOCIATION WHICH LINKS CITIES TO NICKNAMES.

1. RINGLING CITY _____
2. THE UNIVERSITY CITY _____
3. THE RETIREMENT CITY _____
4. HOME OF THE SEMINOLES _____
5. THE CROSSROADS OF FLORIDA _____
6. THE GREAT SUBTROPICAL METROPOLIS _____
7. THE FOREST CAPITAL OF THE WORLD _____
8. THE WINTER HOME OF THOMAS EDISON _____
9. THE WORLD'S LARGEST FAMILY RESORT _____
10. THE BIRTHPLACE OF AIR CONDITIONING _____

... Answers on page 14.