A Brief History of Immigration in Wisconsin

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Earliest “Wisconsin” Immigrants?

Taken from Wisconsin’s Past and Present: A Historical Atlas
Main Points

- Push-Pull Factors and Chain migration
- Changing opportunities: economies, policies and other conditions
- Tensions surrounding “assimilation” and tolerance
- Immigration is not a new story
- Regionalism within Immigration History: Northern and Western Europe, Southern and Eastern Europe, and finally Asia and Latin America
- Growing interdependence w/ Mexico – border enforcement
Why people immigrate

Push Factors
- Poverty / limited economic opportunity
- Population pressure & displacement
- Political oppression or instability
- Religious intolerance or persecution

Pull Factors
- Land and farming opportunities
- Economic opportunities
- Access to education
- Family reunification
- Religious & political freedoms

Chain migration: Social or familial networks established between sending countries and Wisconsin
Policy Factors

Historically:
- Wisconsin Office of Emigration (1852-1855)
- Bennet Law in 1890
- World War I: Anti-German sentiment and the Espionage Act

More Recently:
- Guest Worker Programs, Displaced Persons Act, Family Reunification, Immigration Reform and Control Act, Immigrant Responsibility Act,…
- NAFTA & Growing Mexico-US economic interdependence
Origins of Wisconsin’s Foreign Born

1800-1820: Start of major German immigration.

1840: By 1850, 44,000 Norwegians in state.

1850: Swedes start coming to Wisconsin.

1860: By 1860, 44,000 Norwegians in state.

1870-1890: Large numbers of Poles start coming to Wisconsin.

1880: Italians come to state, mostly to cities in SE.

1890-1910: WWI - war and prewar policies curtail immigration.

1900-1920: Displaced Persons Act - spurs some immigration.

1920: WWII and Depression limit and constrain immigration.

1930-1940: WWII and Depression limit and constrain immigration.

1940: Mexican migrant workers come to Wisconsin in large numbers.


1960-1980: Large numbers of Latinos start.


2000: Mexican migrant workers come to Wisconsin in large numbers.

500,000 Foreign Born Population

Pioneers & Homesteaders: 1st waves of immigrants from Europe (Irish, English, Norwegian, etc.).

Large numbers of Poles start coming to WI.
Wisconsin’s U.S. and Foreign Born Population

- 36% around the time of statehood
- 31% before the turn of the century
- 21% just before WWI
- WWI, Depression and WWII: decline in immigration
- 4.4% in 2008
- Increase in immigration from Asia and Mexico
**Immigrants then and now**

Top Ten Countries of Birth among Wisconsin's Foreign-Born 1900 & 2000

- **1900**
  - Germany
  - Norway
  - Canada
  - Poland
  - Sweden
  - Ireland
  - England
  - Denmark
  - Bohemia
  - Switzerland

- **2000**
  - Mexico
  - Laos
  - Germany
  - India
  - China
  - Thailand
  - Korea
  - United Kingdom
  - Poland
Regional Origins of Wisconsin’s Foreign Born

Foreign Born Persons by Region of Birth: 1950 - 2006
First settlements in 1838, by 1850s large communities in Rock, Waukesha, and Jefferson County. Then, because of employment in farming, movement to wheat frontier of Western Wisconsin (Crawford north to Barron).
Geographic Legacies: Polish Ancestry

Came in large numbers in the 1870s and 1880s. Many settled in Milwaukee County for employment in manufacturing but also in rural areas and farm districts, most notably in Portage County.
Geographic Legacies: Swiss Ancestry

Most came before 1870. Green County was largest center of Swiss farming in United States and became known as Swissconsin
Geographic Legacies: Swedish Ancestry

Main period of immigration was 1860s to 1900. Many arrived after best farmland already taken so turned to farming and lumbering in northern half of the state. Also employed in construction of bridges, highways and railroads. Distinct pattern of settlement in NW Wisconsin counties.
Hmong In Wisconsin Today

- Came to Wisconsin as refugees
- Hmong started to arrive in late 1970’s
- Wisconsin has 3rd largest Hmong population in the United States
- Resettled in about 10 cities in Wisconsin
Mexican immigrants and migrants in Wisconsin since 1910

Small permanent numbers through 1950s and 60s but many came as migrant or seasonal workers

- In early 1950’s estimated that 12,000 migrant workers came each summer to work in Wisconsin

- Latino communities formed in cities and became linkages for subsequent migration

- Latinos today comprise a greater share of Wisconsin’s foreign born than Asians or European. Among Latinos about 2/3 are Mexican descent
Patterns of Growth in Latino Population

Heavily Concentrated in urban counties

Growth Across the State
Impact on WI Labor Force

Many industries in Wisconsin are heavily reliant upon documented and undocumented immigrant workers, yet in the face of recession and high unemployment these workers face an increasingly inhospitable social and political climate.
Impact on local service provision
Unauthorized among the Foreign Born
**Status of US Foreign Born**

**2008 Estimated U.S. Foreign Born Population by Status**

- **naturalized citizens**: 14.2 Million (36%)
- **legal permanent residents**: 12.3 Million (31%)
- **legal temporary migrants**: 1.4 Million (3%)
- **unauthorized status residents**: 11.9 Million (30%)

*Source: A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States, Jeffrey Passels & D’Vera Cohn, Pew Hispanic Center 2009*
For More Info:

- US Census Bureau: 
  http://factfinder.census.gov/
- Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau 
- APL Population Notes Issue on Wisconsin Foreign Born 
- Pew Hispanic Center:
  http://pewhispanic.org/
- WI Historical Society: Turning Points 
  http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/

Thank you!

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