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## An Analysis of Divorce in Nebraska

Kenneth L. Cannon

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UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE  
AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION

W. V. LAMBERT, Director

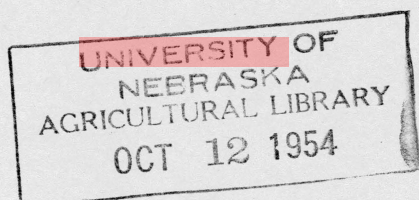
M. L. BAKER, Associate Director

*Research Bulletin 174*

An Analysis of Divorce in Nebraska

KENNETH L. CANNON

*Department of Home Economics*



LINCOLN, NEBRASKA

JANUARY, 1954



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## SUMMARY

### 1. Rate and extent of divorce in Nebraska:

a. Divorces totaled 29,130 for the years 1940 to 1950, with a high of 4,504 in 1946 and a low of 1,805 in 1942. The number of people (husbands, wives and children) affected by divorce was between 73,000 and 86,000.

b. Divorce rates ranged from 1.4 to 3.4 per 1,000 population per year.

c. There was one divorce for every 5.4 marriages in Nebraska during this period.

### 2. Increase in divorce in Nebraska:

a. Divorce numbers were 37.9 per cent higher for the 1940-1950 period than they were for 1930-1940.

b. Divorce rates per 1,000 population increased 40.8 per cent.

c. Divorces per 100 marriages increased 18.5 per cent.

### 3. Comparison of divorce rates in Nebraska and the United States as a whole:

a. In each year from 1940 to 1950, divorce rates were substantially lower in Nebraska than in the United States. On the average the difference was .8 of a divorce per 1,000 population per year.

b. Increases in divorce from 1930-1940 to 1940-1950 were higher for the United States than for Nebraska by the following percentages: divorce numbers 47.2, divorce rates per 1,000 population 26.3, and divorces per 100 marriages 18.2.

### 4. Relationship between divorce rates and urbanism for groups of Nebraska counties:

a. In Nebraska, divorce rates per 1,000 population for groups of counties are directly proportional to degree of urbanism. This relationship was found for each year from 1940 to 1950 as well as for the entire period.

b. Divorce rates per 1,000 population for the period 1940-1950 were more than four times higher for the most urban group of counties than they were for the most rural group of counties.

c. A statistically highly significant correlation was found between divorce rate and urbanization for the 35 urban counties in the state. The  $r$  obtained was .60.

d. Divorces per 100 marriages were found to be consistently related to urbanism for groups of counties.

### 5. Areas where divorce is increasing most rapidly in Nebraska:

a. Divorce in Nebraska is increasing most rapidly in the group IV counties (largest cities having 10,000 to 25,000 population), whereas

the increases are the least rapid in group I counties (largest town under 2,500).

b. Four counties in Nebraska had divorce rates which were 50 per cent or more higher for 1940-1950 than they were in 1930-1940. These included Adams, Red Willow, Box Butte, and Gage. The increase in Adams County was over 100 per cent.

6. The counties and areas in Nebraska where divorce rates are highest:

a. Four counties in Nebraska had divorce rates of 30 or higher per 1,000 population for the period 1940-1950. They included Douglas, Hall, Lancaster, and Dawes.

b. When counties were compared with others in their groups, the result was a concentration of high quartile counties in northwestern Nebraska and a concentration of low quartile counties in sections of eastern Nebraska. Thus, substantial differences were found between sections of Nebraska which were not attributable to the rural-urban differential.

# An Analysis of Divorce in Nebraska

KENNETH L. CANNON

## INTRODUCTION

EACH YEAR the State of Nebraska compiles and publishes a considerable amount of data on marriage and divorce. An analysis of these data—such as a study of the extent, increase, and rate of divorce—offers a factual basis for determining how the family is faring in certain important aspects. Some indication of the probabilities of divorce may also be gained. The areas in a state where family breakdown is least and most pronounced may be located, and by comparing these areas, factors associated with high rates of divorce may be determined. The location of the areas may point out where research is most needed and where it is apt to be most productive. Opportunity is also provided to test theories and hypotheses concerning the relationship of certain factors to divorce.

Numerous studies have focused attention on the statistical aspects of divorce and have pointed out differences between sections of the nation, between states, and between counties and areas within states. Recent studies of this type include: Mangus' study on marriage and divorce in Ohio,<sup>1</sup> Cannon's studies on marriage and divorce in Iowa<sup>2</sup> and a comparison of divorce rates for selected areas of Utah and Iowa,<sup>3</sup> a Missouri study on divorce,<sup>4</sup> and an analysis of data on divorce in Illinois.<sup>5</sup>

These studies have been in reasonable agreement with respect to the general upward trend of divorces, which reached its climax in 1946 and declined in 1947. The studies also substantially agree that divorce rates may differ markedly between counties in the same state. However, a comparison of the results of these studies indicates that the consistency of the relationship between urbanization and divorce varies markedly and that the general level of divorce may also be considerably higher for some states than for others.

In order to determine the divorce situation in Nebraska and its various counties, the study described here was carried out.

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<sup>1</sup> Mangus, A. R., "Marriage and Divorce in Ohio," *Rural Sociology*, 14: 128-137.

<sup>2</sup> Cannon, Kenneth L., "Marriage and Divorce in Iowa, 1940-47," *Marriage and Family Living*, 9: 81-84.

<sup>3</sup> ———, "Changes in Divorce Rates for Selected Rural and Urban Areas in Utah and Iowa," unpublished M.S. thesis, Iowa State College, 1948.

<sup>4</sup> "Missouri Marriage and Divorce Statistics, 1940-1947," *Journal of the Missouri Bar*, 4 (March, 1948): 38-39.

<sup>5</sup> Cavan, Ruth Shonle, *The American Family* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1953), p. 476.

## THE PROBLEM

The general objective of this study was to determine how the family in Nebraska is faring with respect to stability. To accomplish this, it was necessary to set up specific subobjectives as follows:

1. To determine the rate and extent of divorce in Nebraska.
2. To ascertain the increase of divorce in the state.
3. To compare divorce rates in Nebraska with those for the United States as a whole.
4. To determine whether a consistent relationship between divorce rates and urbanization exists for groups of Nebraska counties.
5. To determine whether divorce increased more rapidly in the rural areas than it did in the urban areas of Nebraska.
6. To ascertain the counties and areas in Nebraska where divorce rates are highest.

Data on marriage and divorce for Nebraska and its counties were obtained from annual mimeographed releases from the Nebraska Department of Health. Similar data for the United States were obtained from releases on marriage and divorce issued by the U.S. Public Health Service. Population data were obtained from the U.S. Censuses.

The years selected for the major part of this study were those of 1940 to 1950, inclusive. This selection was made on the basis of the availability of accurate data on population for the census years with which the period began and ended. This factor contributed to the making of reasonable population estimates for the in-between years. The period was as recent as possible, included both war and postwar years, and was long enough to provide some perspective in relation to changes and trends. In order to measure the increase in divorce, the period 1930 to 1940 was selected for comparison. The overlap of one year for the two periods was regrettable, yet the advantages seemed to outweigh any possible disadvantages.

Population estimates were made on the assumption that population change was constant from year to year, that is, one tenth of the population change between census years was allotted to each year. Average populations for the periods were computed by adding the populations for the two census years with which the period began and ended, and dividing the sum by two.

Divorce rates per 1,000 population *for each year* were calculated by dividing the number of divorces by the estimated population and multiplying the result by 1,000.

Divorce rates per 1,000 population were calculated *for the periods* 1930-1940 and 1940-1950 by dividing the number of divorces in the period by the average population and multiplying by 1,000. Conse-

quently the divorce rates for the periods were larger, as they represented a rate for 11 years rather than an annual rate.

Marriage and divorce rates for the United States were computed on the Federal estimates of total population, in order to make the rates comparable with those of Nebraska.

The rural-urban differential was thought of in terms of degree rather than as a dichotomy, and five categories or groups of counties were set up, based on the size of the largest city in the county. This basis was selected as a result of preliminary testing which indicated that it was usable and well adapted to Nebraska conditions. It had previously proved satisfactory in the Iowa study.<sup>6</sup> The groups thus formed were as follows:<sup>7</sup>

- Group I, 58 counties, largest city under 2,500 (most rural)
- Group II, 18 counties, largest city between 2,500 and 5,000
- Group III, 8 counties, largest city between 5,000 and 10,000
- Group IV, 7 counties, largest city between 10,000 and 25,000
- Group V, 2 counties, largest city over 25,000 (most urban)<sup>8</sup>

Actually all of the counties in groups II to V might be labeled urban counties, inasmuch as they contain cities with over 2,500 residents.

## RESULTS

### Rate and Extent of Divorce in Nebraska

In the 11 years 1940 to 1950, divorces in Nebraska totaled 29,130 and marriages 156,897. Taking into account the husbands, wives, and children who were involved in divorce actions during this period, the actual number of people affected by divorce is estimated at 73,000 to 86,000.<sup>9</sup> This number is approximately equal to the 1940 population of Lincoln, the capital of Nebraska and its second largest city.

The number of divorces per 100 marriages during the period was 18.6. Rates per 1,000 population averaged 2 divorces and 10.8 marriages per year.

Figure 1 presents data and a bar chart showing the number of divorces and marriages, and the number of divorces per 100 marriages

<sup>6</sup> Cannon, "Marriage and Divorce in Iowa, 1940-47," p. 81.

<sup>7</sup> Data from 1940 Census.

<sup>8</sup> Omaha, the largest city in Douglas County, had a population of 223,844. Lincoln, the largest city in Lancaster County, had 81,984.

<sup>9</sup> If the estimate of one child for every two divorces is used, the total involved would approximate 73,000. However, in 1949 and 1950 the Nebraska average was .95 child per divorce. Using this as an estimate, the total approximates 86,000.



for each year in Nebraska. For the period, the annual divorce total ranged from 1,805 in 1942 to 4,504 in 1946. From 1940 to 1946, with the exception of 1942, the trend in divorce numbers was upward. Following 1946, the trend was downward, but the decrease showed signs of leveling off in 1949 and 1950. In general, divorces increased during the war years and decreased in the postwar years.

In 1939, two neighboring states, Colorado and South Dakota, made blood tests a legal requirement for marriage. In 1941, another neighboring state, Iowa, did the same. These changes increased the number of marriages in Nebraska during the years of 1941 and 1942. In September of 1943, blood tests were made a legal requirement for marriage in Nebraska and this explains in part the sharp decline in

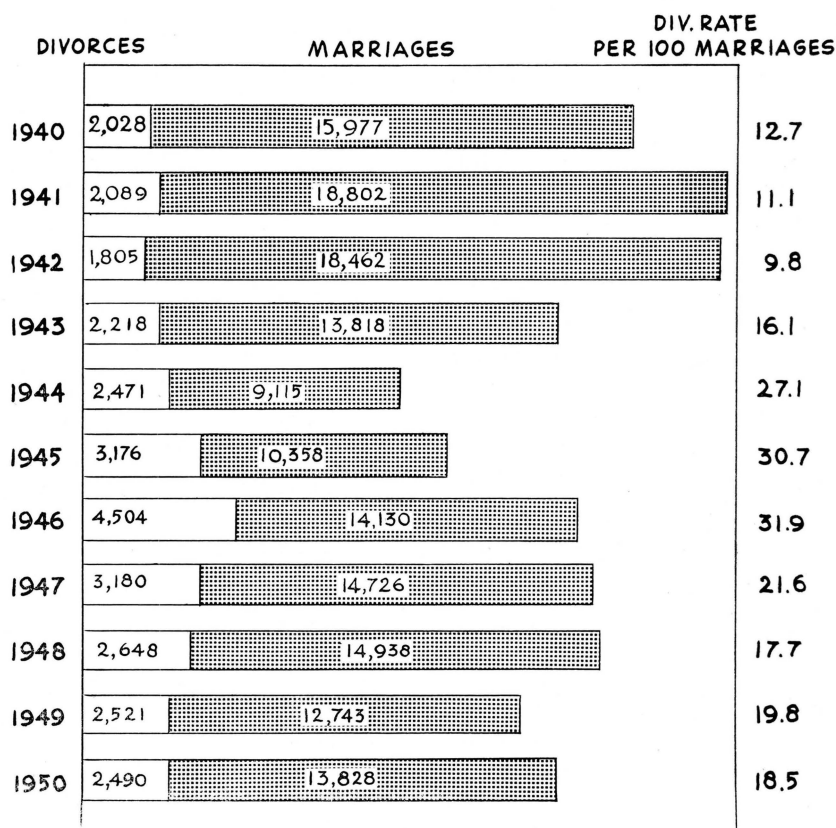


FIGURE 1.—Number of divorces and marriages, and rate of divorce per 100 marriages, for Nebraska, 1940-1950.

marriages in 1943 and 1944. The effect of a change in marriage regulations is thus demonstrated.

The number of divorces per 100 marriages ranged from a low of 9.8 in 1942 to a high of 31.9 in 1946, with an average of 18.6 for the entire period. This is probably the best single estimate of the probability of divorce. Stated in terms of a ratio, it is 1 divorce for every 5.4 marriages.

Data on marriage and divorce rates per 1,000 population, given in table 1, indicate that divorce rates ranged from 1.4 in 1942 to 3.4 in 1946; whereas the range in marriage rates was from 14.3 in 1941 to 6.9 in 1944.

TABLE 1.—Nebraska marriage and divorce rates, 1940 to 1950.

Year	Marriage rate per 1,000 population	Divorce rate per 1,000 population
1940	12.1	1.5
1941	14.3 (high)	1.6
1942	14.1	1.4 (low)
1943	9.5	1.7
1944	6.9 (low)	1.9
1945	7.8	2.4
1946	10.7	3.4 (high)
1947	11.1	2.4
1948	11.3	2.0
1949	9.6	1.9
1950	10.4	1.9
Average:	10.8	2.0

### Increase of Divorce in Nebraska

The divorce total was 8,012 higher for 1940-1950 than it was for 1930-1940, an increase of 37.9 per cent. The corresponding increase in the divorce rate per 1,000 population was 40.8 per cent. In contrast, divorces per 100 marriages increased only 18.5 per cent due to an increase in marriage rate which somewhat offset the increase in divorce rate. Data are given in table 2.

TABLE 2.—Increase in divorce in Nebraska from 1930-1940 to 1940-1950.

	1930-1940	1940-1950	Percentage increase
Average population	1,346,898	1,320,672	
Total marriages	134,546	156,897	16.6
Total divorces	21,118	29,130	37.9
Divorces per 100 marriages	15.7	18.6	18.5
Marriage rate per 1,000 population	9.1	10.8	19.0
Divorce rate per 1,000 population	1.4	2.0	40.8

### Rate and Extent of Divorce in the United States

During the period 1940-1950, a total of 4,405,144 divorces were granted in the nation, with marriages numbering 19,047,553 for the same years. Approximately 11,012,860 people<sup>10</sup> (husbands, wives, and children), were directly involved in the divorces. The number—greater than the population of any state except New York—suggests the extent of the influence of divorce.

There were 23.1 divorces for every 100 marriages, or a ratio of 1 divorce for every 4.3 marriages, which indicates the probability of divorce during this period.

Figure 2 presents for each year from 1940 to 1950 the number of divorces and marriages, and the number of divorces per 100 marriages. For divorce, two short trends are distinguishable. One is a trend toward increased divorce during the years 1940 to 1946, ending with a peak of 610,000 divorces. Following 1946, a downward trend started which continued through 1950, although it showed signs of leveling off during 1949 and 1950. There were 121,144 more divorces in 1950 than in 1940, which is a reasonable estimate of the actual change in divorce numbers during this period. This change probably reflects the long-term trend upward in divorce.

The years when divorce increased or decreased were the same for the nation as they were for Nebraska with the exception of 1942. In that year divorce increased in the nation, but decreased in Nebraska. Iowa<sup>11</sup> had a decrease similar to Nebraska's, whereas Ohio<sup>12</sup> had an increase similar to that for the United States. The first full year of participation in World War II was 1942, and it is possible that the social dislocation produced by war was greater in the more highly urbanized states.

Marriages were at their lowest level in 1944, totaling 1,452,394. The highest level was reached in 1946 when marriages numbered 2,291,045. Many couples probably postponed marrying until the war was over and the man was released from the service, accounting for the large number of marriages in this year.

The number of divorces per 100 marriages steadily increased from the low of 16.5 in 1940 to the high of 30.1 in 1945. In the three following years the number declined. In 1950, 23.1 divorces occurred per

<sup>10</sup> This assumes an average of one child for every two divorces, which is probably low. For 1948, there were "roughly three children for every four marriages dissolved." Winch, Robert F. and McGinnis, Robert, *Marriage and the Family* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1953), p. 523.

<sup>11</sup> Cannon, "Marriage and Divorce in Iowa, 1940-47," p. 81.

<sup>12</sup> Mangus, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

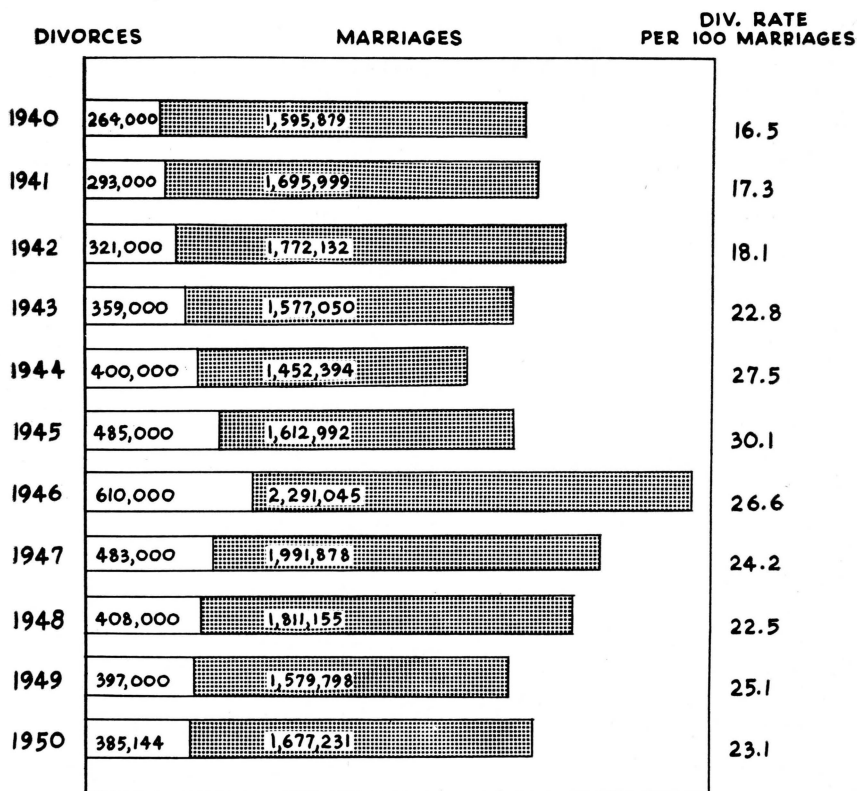


FIGURE 2.—Number of divorces and marriages, and rate of divorce per 100 marriages, for the United States, 1940-1950.

100 marriages. This was also the average for the period. In 1945 and 1946, the number of divorces per 100 marriages was higher for Nebraska than for the United States. In each of the other years the number of divorces per 100 marriages was higher in the nation.

Data on marriage and divorce rates per 1,000 population are given for the United States in table 3 and indicate that divorce rates ranged from 2 in 1940 to 4.3 in 1946, with an average of 2.8 divorces for the period 1940-1950. Marriage rates ranged from 10.5 in 1944 to 16.2 in 1946, with an average of 12.2 for the period.

Figure 3 presents a graph showing divorce rates per 1,000 population for the United States and Nebraska for the years 1940-1950. In each year the Nebraska rate is lower and the difference appears to be

TABLE 3.—Marriage and divorce in the United States, 1940 to 1950.

Year	Marriage rate per 1,000 population	Divorce rate per 1,000 population
1940	12.1	2.0
1941	12.7	2.2
1942	13.2	2.4
1943	11.6	2.6
1944	10.5	2.9
1945	11.6	3.5
1946	16.2	4.3
1947	13.9	3.4
1948	12.4	2.8
1949	10.6	2.7
1950	11.1	2.6
Average:	12.2	2.8

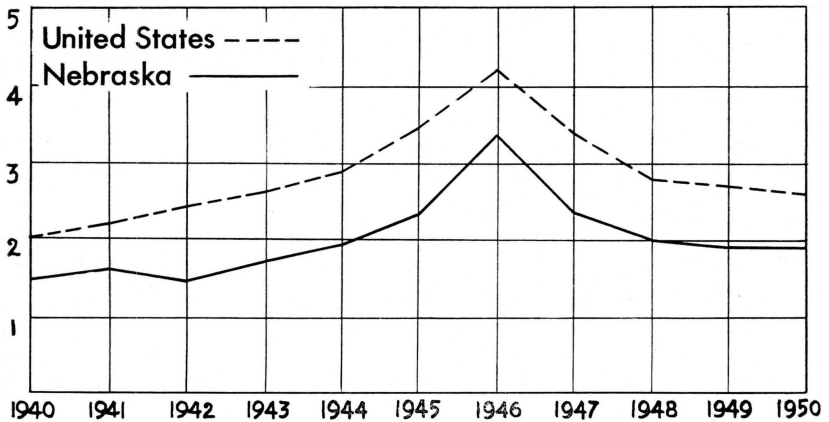


FIGURE 3.—Divorce rate per 1,000 population.

relatively constant. The difference in divorce rates per 1,000 population varied from .5 of a divorce in 1940 to 1.1 in 1945. With the exception of 1942, as already noted, the changes in rates follow the same pattern, increasing and decreasing in the same years.

Marriage rates in the United States and Nebraska, as depicted in figure 4, show quite different trends. For the United States, marriage rates increased in 1941 and 1942, the first years of the war. During these years many young people married either in hope of obtaining deferment from military service or because impending service was about to force their separation. There was another very sharp increase in 1946, when many marriages were made possible by the return of

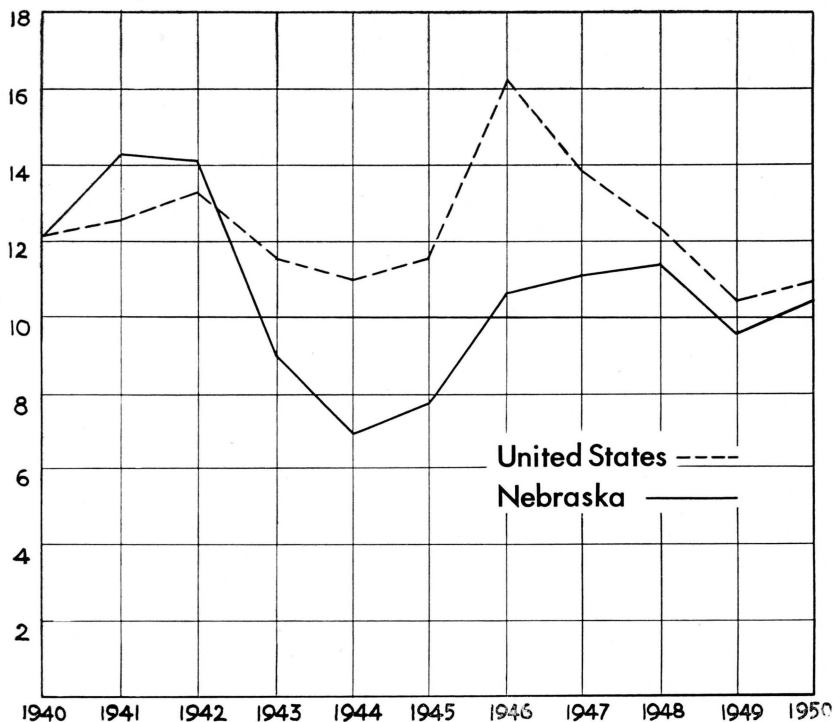


FIGURE 4.—Marriage rate per 1,000 population.

servicemen to their homes. The marriage rate leveled off in 1949 and 1950.

For the years 1943-1947 marriage rates in Nebraska were much lower than marriage rates in the United States as a whole. The explanation for this difference probably is to be found in the fact that Nebraska made blood tests a legal requirement for marriage in 1943, whereas until 1947 the neighboring state of Kansas did not have such a requirement and did a booming marriage business—thus causing a lower marriage rate in Nebraska.

In 1948, the first year after the Kansas law became effective, there was another increase in marriages in Nebraska. With similar blood test laws effective in Nebraska and all surrounding states from 1948 to 1950, it is probable that the data for these years more accurately depict the actual number of Nebraska residents who married than do the data for the previous eight years. This opinion is verified by the similarity of Nebraska's marriage trend to that of the nation during



these years. In Nebraska, also, a leveling-off period in marriage rates is noticeable.

Table 4 shows the increase in divorce and marriage for the United States from 1930-1940 to 1940-1950. Data on percentage increases for the nation and Nebraska are presented in figure 5 for purposes of comparison.

In the United States the divorce total for 1940-1950 was 2,025,939 higher than the total for 1930-1940—an increase of 85.1 per cent. For

TABLE 4.—Increase in divorce in the United States from 1930-1940 to 1940-1950.

	1930-1940	1940-1950	Percentage increase
Average population	127,515,443	141,325,753	
Total marriages	14,047,261	19,047,553	35.6
Total divorces	2,379,205	4,405,144	85.1
Div. rate per 100 mar.	16.90	23.10	36.7
Average annual marriage rate per 1,000 pop.	10.01	12.25	22.4
Average annual divorce rate per 1,000 population	1.70	2.84	67.1

## UNITED STATES

## NEBRASKA

### PERCENTAGE INCREASES

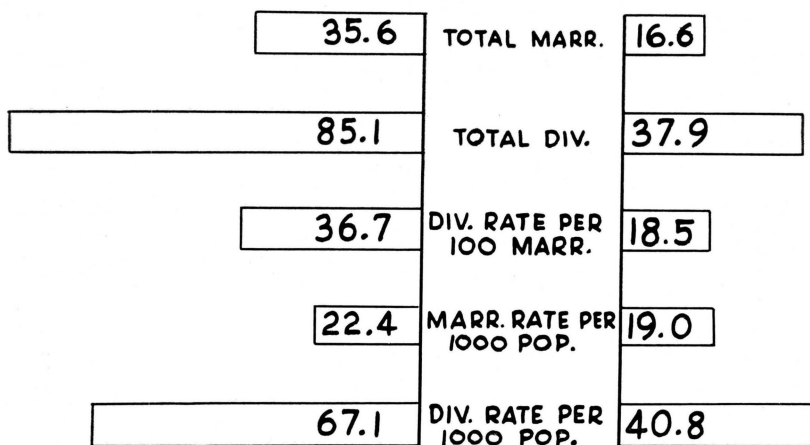


FIGURE 5.—Comparison of the United States and Nebraska with respect to increase in divorce, 1930-1940 to 1940-1950.

the same periods the divorce rate per 1,000 population increased 67.1 per cent and the number of divorces per 100 marriages increased 36.7 per cent. The increase in marriage numbers was 35.6 per cent and the increase in marriage rate per 1,000 population was 22.4 per cent. It is startling to realize that divorce numbers have almost doubled for the nation in a very short time.

In each case the increase in divorce in the nation was considerably greater than the increase in Nebraska, as shown by the following percentages: divorce numbers—47.2 per cent, divorce rates per 1,000 population—26.3 per cent, and divorces per 100 marriages—18.2 per cent. Since Nebraska divorce rates were lower and increased less than those of the United States during this time, it would seem that family life was more stable in Nebraska than in the nation as a whole.<sup>13</sup>

### Divorce Rates and the Urban Factor

Previous work in four states—Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, and Ohio—had produced conflicting answers to the question of whether divorce rates are proportional to urbanization. To determine the situation in Nebraska, divorce rates were computed for each group of counties, which had been divided on the basis of the size of the largest city in the county. The results, given in table 5, indicate the differences were distinct and in proportion to urbanization. The lowest divorce rate<sup>14</sup> was for the most rural group of counties, group I, and stood at 9.2 per 1,000 population for the period 1940-1950. Divorce rates increased with urbanization, the highest rate being 40.4 divorces per 1,000 population for group V, the most urban group of counties.

TABLE 5.—Divorce rates for groups of Nebraska counties, 1940 to 1950.

Group	No. of counties	Total average population	Total divorces	Divorce rate per 1,000 population
I	58	385,480	3,540	9.2
II	18	232,020	3,057	13.2
III	8	133,661	2,501	18.7
IV	7	195,056	4,891	25.1
V	2	374,455	15,141	40.4

<sup>13</sup> This should not be construed to mean that divorce rates in Nebraska were lower than the rates for comparable groups in the nation, such as farmers, etc., as differences in population make-up might account for Nebraska's lower divorce rate.

<sup>14</sup> It should be recognized that this is the rate for a period of 11 years rather than for one year, hence its larger size.

Viewed a little differently, group I, with 29.2 per cent of the population for the years 1940-1950, contributed 12.2 per cent of the divorces, whereas group V, with 28.4 per cent of the population, had 52 per cent of the divorces.

Table 6 presents the results obtained when divorce rates were computed for the five groups of counties for each year from 1940 to 1950.

TABLE 6.—Divorce rates per 1,000 population by years for groups of Nebraska counties.

Group	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949	1950
I	.7	.7	.6	.6	.7	.9	1.4	1.1	.9	.9	.8
II	1.0	1.1	.8	.9	1.0	1.3	2.2	1.5	1.2	1.1	1.2
III	1.3	1.2	1.2	1.4	1.4	1.9	3.0	2.3	1.8	1.7	1.5
IV	1.6	1.6	1.4	2.0	2.3	2.9	4.2	2.6	2.2	2.2	2.1
V	3.0	3.1	2.7	3.3	3.7	4.6	5.9	4.1	3.5	3.2	3.2

The relationship between divorce and urbanization is readily apparent and the differences were distinct in every case.

A coefficient of correlation was computed for the 35 urban counties<sup>15</sup> between the county's divorce rate for the period and the population of its largest city. The  $r$  thus obtained was .60 and exceeded the value needed to be significant at the 1 per cent level.<sup>16</sup>

Thus the conclusion may be reached that for counties in Nebraska a highly significant statistical relationship exists between divorce rate and urbanization (as measured by size of largest city in the county). Data on Nebraska directly support the findings in the Iowa and Ohio studies, as in each case divorce rates were found to be directly proportional to urbanization for groups of counties. The findings in the Missouri and Illinois studies are summarized by Cavan in the following words:

A Missouri study, however, shows a different pattern of rates. For 1947, 33 rural counties with no city of 2,500 population had a divorce rate of 2.2 per 1,000 population; 7 counties with cities of 10,000 or more had a rate of 7.5; St. Louis County (containing the city of St. Louis), however, had a rate of only 5.7. A similar study of Illinois showed great irregularity of rates, with the lowest rate (1.8) in the most rural counties having no cities of 2,500 population and the highest rate (4.5) in counties with cities of between 2,500

<sup>15</sup> The 58 rural counties were eliminated as the result of a preliminary correlation which gave an  $r$  of .018.

<sup>16</sup> The 1 per cent level with 33 degrees of freedom requires an  $r$  of .431 or greater. See G. W. Snedecor, *Statistical Methods* (Ames, Iowa, Collegiate Press, 1938), p. 133.

and 25,000. Counties with larger cities had rates that fell between these extremes. Cook County, containing the city of Chicago, had a rate of only 2.8.<sup>17</sup>

It is possible that ethnic and religious communities in larger cities have many of the social pressures found in the rural communities. Large numbers of Catholics and low income groups may also contribute to the conflicting results. These differences point out the need for consideration of factors other than the rural-urban differential.

The number of divorces per 100 marriages was used as an additional measure of the relationship between urbanization and divorce. Data were eliminated for the years 1940 to 1943,<sup>18</sup> and for four counties that had unreasonably high marriage rates,<sup>19</sup> in order to make a more accurate comparison. For the years 1944 to 1950, divorces per 100 marriages were then determined. These data, presented in table 7,

TABLE 7.—Marriages and divorces for groups of Nebraska counties, 1944 to 1950.

Groups	Counties	Marriages	Divorces	Divorce rate per 100 marriages
I	55	17,839	2,387	13.4
II	17	12,749	2,063	16.2
III	8	8,597	1,811	21.1
IV	7	14,153	3,640	25.7
V	2	29,210	10,851	37.1
Total	89	82,548	20,752	
Average				25.1

indicate that divorces per 100 marriages were proportional to urbanization, in spite of the fact that marriage rates are subject to a good deal of variation. Part of this variation is due to factors such as differences in requirements for marriage and the presence of counties where marriage licences may be obtained and ceremonies performed at any time, day or night.

Between the groups of counties the range in divorce per 100 marriages varied from 13.4 in group I counties to 37.1 in group V counties.

The ratio of divorce to marriage varied from 1 divorce for every 2.7 marriages in group V to 1 divorce for every 7.5 marriages in group I.

<sup>17</sup> Cavan, *op. cit.*, p. 476.

<sup>18</sup> 1940 to 1943 were eliminated because they involved too many migratory marriages prior to September, 1943, when blood tests became a legal requirement for marriage in Nebraska. Marriages declined 9,347 from 1942 to 1944. In ten small counties the number of marriages declined from 6,678 in 1942 to 1,082 in 1944.

<sup>19</sup> Sarpy, Kimball, Banner, and Dakota were eliminated because their marriage rates were over 185 per 1,000 population for 1944 to 1950.

Table 8 shows that this difference was not due to an abnormally low number of marriages in group V, inasmuch as the marriage rate per 1,000 population was 75.9 for this group of counties, in contrast to the rate of 50 for group I.

The data indicate a consistent, positive relationship between divorce rates and urbanization for groups of Nebraska counties.

TABLE 8.—Marriages by groups of counties, 1944 to 1950.

Group	Counties	Marriages	Population est. (1947)	Marriage rate per 1,000 population
I	55	17,839	357,011	50.0
II	17	12,749	220,107	57.9
III	8	8,597	133,080	64.6
IV	7	14,153	197,439	72.6
V	2	29,210	384,978	75.9
Total	89	82,548	1,292,615	
Average				62.3

### Reasons for Rural-Urban Differences in Divorce

What explanations can be offered for the rural-urban differences in divorce? Nimkoff has made the following statement:

The reasons that there are fewer divorces in the country are doubtless many. The lower income of farmers deserves some mention, since it undoubtedly affects the ability to buy a divorce. More important probably is the phenomenon of social pressure, which operates more stringently and relentlessly in small groups of familiars than in the larger aggregates of strangers. An associated phenomenon is the greater persistence in the smaller places of traditional religious restraints and sanctions which, supported by the great social pressure, keep discordant couples together when they might otherwise separate. A basic factor is the great economic importance of marriage on farms. Where husband and wife work together as partners in business, the disruption of the relationship becomes a particularly serious matter, since the economic as well as the affectional organization is disturbed by the change.<sup>20</sup>

In discussing the same problem, Mangus made the following explanations for the differences:

1. There are fewer young married couples living on farms and in small towns than in large cities. Many couples who marry in the rural areas move to cities. Their divorces, when they occur, are then chargeable to the city.

2. Many rural people continue to view marriage as a sacred institution for the achievement of ends higher than those of the happiness and satisfaction of

<sup>20</sup> Nimkoff, Meyer K., *Marriage and the Family* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1947), p. 152.

individual husbands and wives. Hence, incompatible couples in rural areas are apt to be held together by the forces of public opinion, religion, and cultural expectations.

3. Family ownership of property tends to hold farm couples together even when there is considerable marital discord and alienation.

4. Fewer farm than city couples remain childless, and the presence of children makes divorce a more difficult procedure.<sup>21</sup>

It is possible that another form of migration contributes to the high urban divorce rate. There may be a tendency on the part of some people in rural areas who are facing divorce to migrate to urban areas before obtaining a divorce. By such a move they may get away from some of the social pressures against divorce which are likely to be present in the rural community. The adjustments which divorce necessitates may be made in changed surroundings and away from the close surveillance of friends and relatives. A degree of anonymity is procurable in an urban area which is not possible in the rural community.

Evidence that points to this factor is found in the Iowa study<sup>22</sup> where it was determined that the counties surrounding Polk County (the most urban county in Iowa) had relatively low divorce rates in comparison with other counties in their groups. Figure 8, page 25, indicates a similar condition in Nebraska. There is not a single high quartile county bordering on Douglas, Hall, or Lancaster—the three counties with the highest divorce rates in Nebraska.

Other factors which might contribute to the lower divorce rate in rural areas because of their effect on the interpersonal relations of married people include:

1. The husband and wife roles of rural people are apt to be more fully defined, complementary, and accepted. This is particularly true for farm families.

2. Because the work worlds of rural husbands and wives are more visible to both marriage partners, rural couples are more apt to share a community of interests in this respect than are urban couples.

3. More of the living is produced by rural people, and less of the living is bought. More of the relationships with people are likely to be on a personal face-to-face basis in the rural community than in the urban community. Hence rural living is apt to be less insecure.

4. Rural living may produce fewer tensions than living in urban areas and may provide better ways of releasing accumulated tensions.

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<sup>21</sup> Mangus, *op. cit.*, pp. 131-132.

<sup>22</sup> Cannon, "Marriage and Divorce in Iowa, 1940-47," p. 82.



For example, the rural person is not apt to be governed by a rigid time schedule.

The significance of the striking rural-urban differences in divorce would be greatly increased if one could be assured that they were an accurate indicator of differences in marital happiness. The actual end "good" desired is family stability in which couples desire to stay together because of mutual satisfaction, rather than because of community pressures.

### Increases of Divorce in Rural and Urban Areas

In discussing the family in a changing society Burgess has stated:

Urbanization involves much more than the concentration and growth of population. It includes commercialization of activities, particularly recreational; specialization of vocations and interests; the development of new devices of communication; telephone, telegraph, motion pictures, radio, the daily newspapers, and magazines of mass circulation. All these still further promote the urbanization and secularization of families residing not only in cities but even in remote rural settlements.<sup>23</sup>

What is the effect of these influences on the differences between rural and urban people with respect to divorce? A reasonable hypothesis is that the differences are diminishing. It was possible to test this hypothesis through a comparison of the increases in divorce for the various groups of counties.

When the comparison was made for the five groups of counties, it was found that in each group divorce rates per 1,000 population had increased from 1930-1940 to 1940-1950. For groups I to IV the increase was consistent—the more urban the group of counties, the greater the increase in divorce. Group V was an exception, however, as its percentage increase was greater than that of groups I and II, but smaller than that of groups III and IV. These data are given in table 9.

In the Iowa study<sup>24</sup> the most rural groups of counties had the lowest increase and the most urban group had the highest increase in divorce, but the relationship was not consistent for the in-between groups.

It is readily apparent that the data tend to refute rather than to support the hypothesis that differences between rural and urban people are diminishing—at least with respect to divorce.

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<sup>23</sup> Burgess, Ernest W., "The Family in a Changing Society," in Winch, Robert F. and McGinnis, Robert, *Marriage and the Family* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1953), p. 40.

<sup>24</sup> Cannon, "Marriage and Divorce in Iowa, 1940-47," p. 83.

TABLE 9.—Divorce rate increases for groups of counties.

Group	1930-1940			1940-1950			% increase of divorce rate
	Ave. pop.	Div.	Div. rate	Ave. pop.	Div.	Div. rate	
I	433,397	3,375	7.8	385,480	3,540	9.2	17.9
II	243,757	2,477	10.2	232,020	3,057	13.2	29.4
III	139,863	1,850	13.2	133,661	2,501	18.7	41.7
IV	189,156	3,305	17.5	195,056	4,891	25.1	42.9
V	340,729	10,111	29.7	374,455	15,151	40.4	36.0
Total	1,346,901	21,118		1,320,672	29,130		
Average			15.6			22.1	

### Nebraska Counties and Divorce

When the increases in divorce for individual counties were computed, it was found that in one county—Adams—divorce rates had increased over 100 per cent and in three others—Box Butte, Red Willow, and Gage—rates had increased more than 50 per cent. These counties are listed in table 10. They offer to the interested investigator an opportunity to determine the factors which have produced the striking local increases in divorce.

TABLE 10.—Counties with highest percentage increase in divorce rates.

County	1930-1940		1940-1950		Percentage increase
	Divorces	Div. rate	Divorces	Div. rate	
Adams	327	12.9	694	26.0	101.6
Box Butte	179	15.8	310	26.9	70.3
Red Willow	207	16.0	338	27.1	69.4
Gage	354	11.8	530	18.4	55.9

Divorce rates per 1,000 population were calculated for each of the 93 counties in the state and ranged from a high of 43.9 for Douglas to a low of 3 for McPherson.<sup>25</sup> The divorce rate for each county is shown in figure 6.

Four of the counties have divorce rates over 30 per 1,000 population. They include Douglas, Hall, Lancaster, and Dawes. These four counties accounted for 16,478 of the 29,130 divorces granted in Nebraska during the years 1940 to 1950. Research in these counties might contribute to an understanding of the reasons why divorce rates are

<sup>25</sup> Douglas County is the most urban in Nebraska, whereas McPherson County is a small rural county with a population of less than 1,000 in 1950.

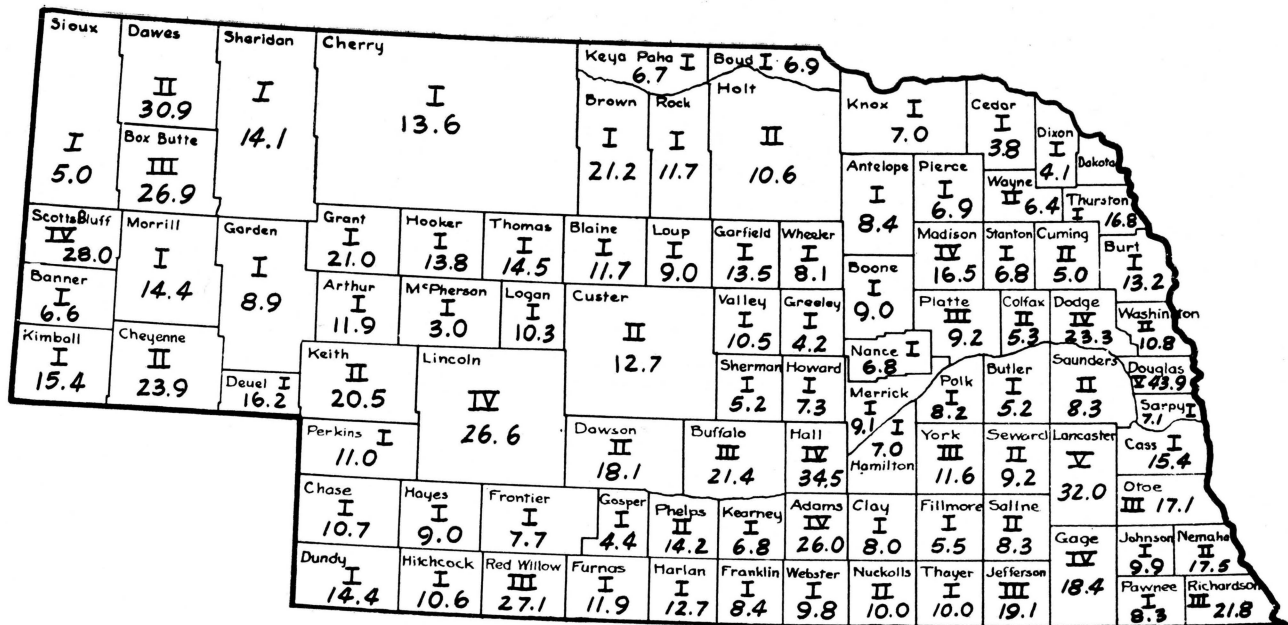


FIGURE 6.—Group number for each county, and divorce rate for period 1940-1950.

so much higher in certain areas than in other areas. Dawes County particularly might be studied, as it has the fourth highest divorce rate in the state, although it is a Group II county.

The counties were arranged in the order of their divorce rates, and divided into quartiles. The limits for the quartiles are presented in table 11.

TABLE 11.—Quartile limits of divorce rates for groups of counties, 1940 to 1950.

Quartile	No. of counties	Lowest divorce rate in quartile	Highest divorce rate in quartile
1st (highest)	23	16.8	43.9
2nd	23	10.7	16.5
3rd	24	7.7	10.6
4th	23	3.0	7.3

The counties in each of the quartiles are shown in figure 7. The high quartile counties are principally the urban counties, as might be expected. However, there seems to be some concentration of counties in the higher quartile along the Missouri River, in southeastern Nebraska, and in western Nebraska. A number of counties in the lower quartiles are concentrated in a section of eastern Nebraska.

The above approach ignores the important rural-urban factor, which may be held relatively constant if counties are compared with others in their same group. On this basis, the counties in each group were arranged in the order of their divorce rates and divided into quartiles. In figure 8, the high and low quartile counties in each group are designated.

Two areas in figure 8 stand out from the rest of the state. The enclosed area in northwestern Nebraska has a definite concentration of counties in the highest quartile and the enclosed area in eastern Nebraska has a similar concentration of counties in the lowest quartile.

When the differences between the two sections are examined they are found to be particularly striking. With the same number of group I (most rural) counties—15—the section in eastern Nebraska has a divorce rate of 7, in contrast to 13.4 for the group I counties in the northwestern section. The divorce rate for all the counties in the eastern section is 8.8 per 1,000 population in contrast to 20.9 for the counties in the northwestern section. Thus, not only is the rural-urban differential important, but the section of the state as well. Differences occur within the rural areas as well as between rural and urban portions of the state. Divorces in the northwestern section

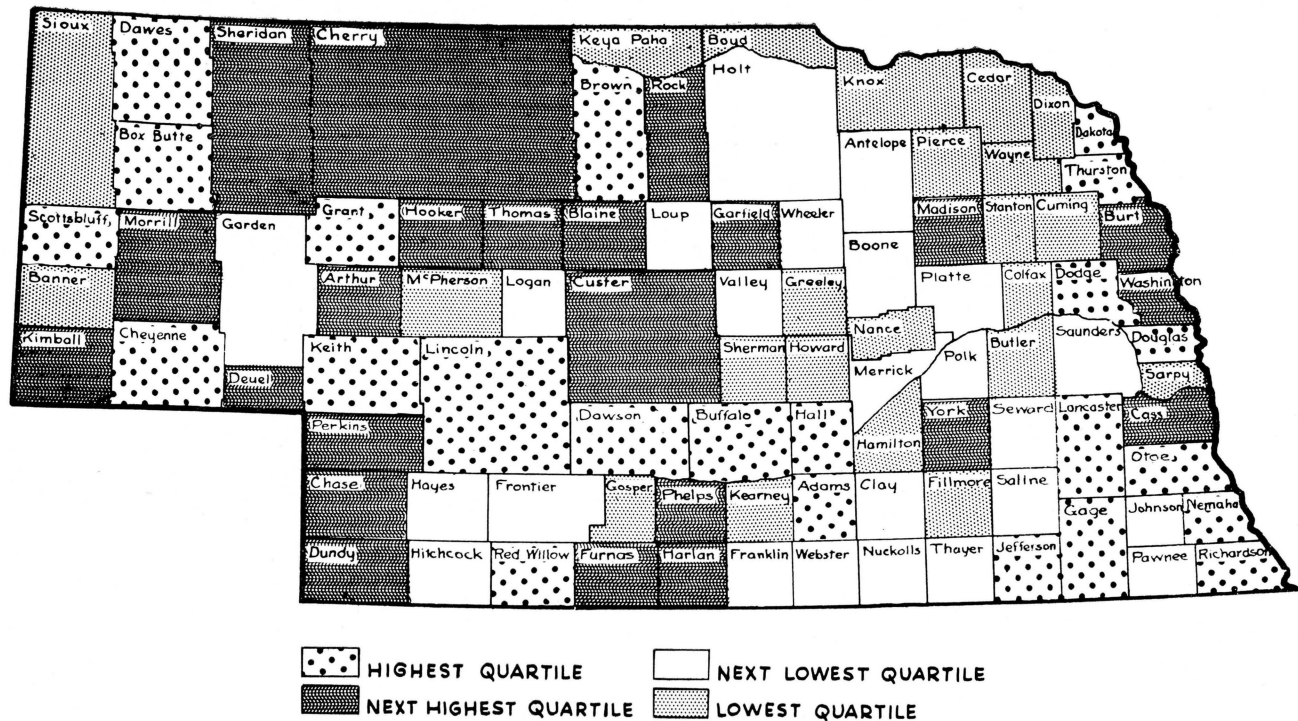


FIGURE 7.—Quartile placement of counties with respect to divorce rate, 1940-1950.

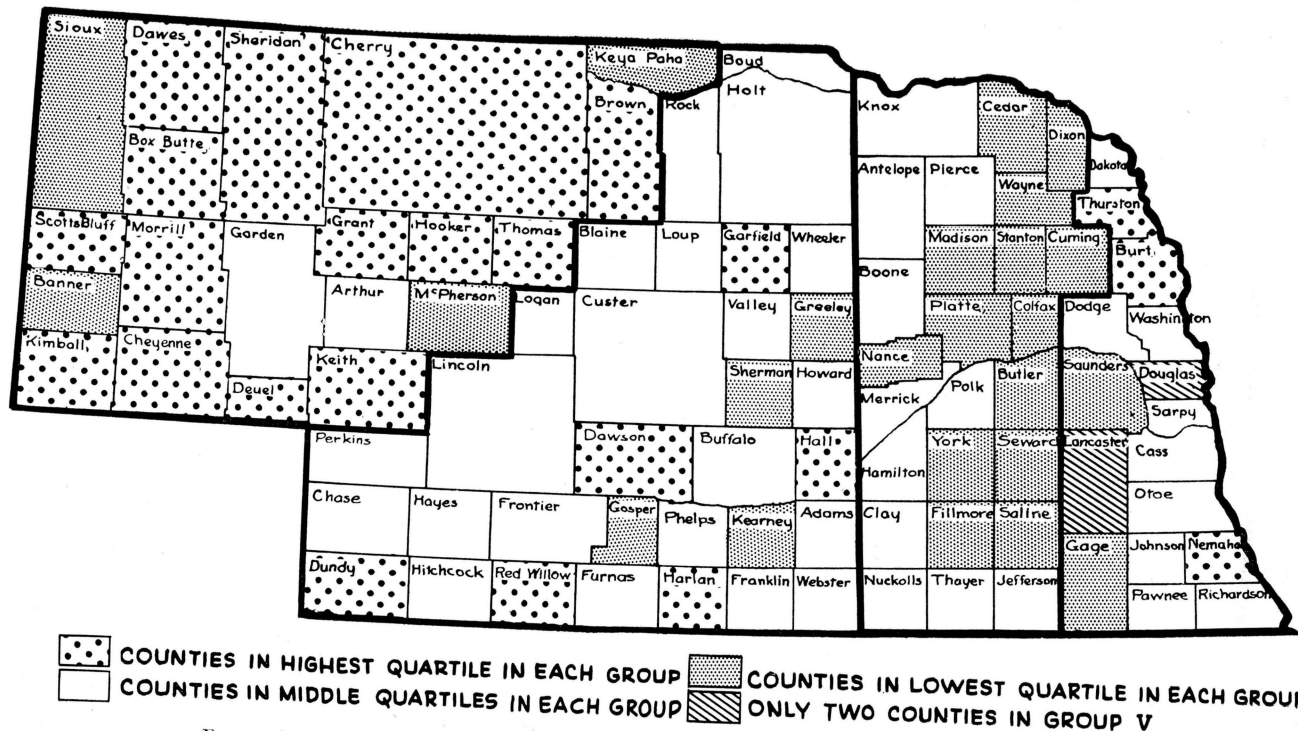


FIGURE 8.—Quartile placement of counties by groups with respect to divorce rate, 1940-1950.



actually outnumber divorces in the eastern section, even though the latter's population is more than twice as large.

An explanation for the differences in divorce rates might be tied in with the type of agriculture through its effect on community life. Northwestern Nebraska is predominantly a wheat and cattle ranching area with some intensive farming in a few irrigated sections. The population density as a whole is rather low, perhaps being too low for effective social pressures. The church is none too strong in the rural areas of northwestern Nebraska.<sup>26</sup> In eastern Nebraska, the rainfall is heavier and as a result farms are much smaller. The population density is greater, and the churches seem to be stronger (which might be reflected in greater social control). Differences in income, nationality backgrounds, proportion of population affiliated with organized religious groups, and similar factors might contribute to the differences in divorce rate. A comparison of these two areas with respect to such factors might help to determine which ones are associated with high divorce rates.

Such a comparison might also be made between the counties in the highest and lowest quartiles of each group. These factors will be explored in a forthcoming paper.

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<sup>26</sup> The Methodist Church is attempting to bring organized religion into the lives of the people residing in the Sandhills section of northwestern Nebraska. An ordained minister spends most of the year traveling from ranch to ranch, holding services. He has a station wagon equipped with the latest audio and visual aids for teaching religion.