

The developed world today is faced with an aging population and a reduced pool of family care givers. A similar situation emerged between 1850 and 1880, when census samples from the USA show a decline in the proportion of persons over 65 living with their children. This paper explores the effect of the fertility decline and urbanization in the late 19th century on family forms and adult lives of the children using a longitudinal database derived from genealogies linked to the US census. Most studies of care of the elderly have used only the census. But these only show the people in the household and say nothing about the availability of children who might not be living there. When the rate of co-residence declined, it is not possible to tell if this was due to the lack of available children due to lower fertility and “stopping”, to migration, or both.

Genealogies, however, provide information about both the demographic availability of family members and their migration trajectories. It is possible to link parents and children who did not reside in the same household and therefore know how far away they were. In 1850, over 90% of elderly with living sons over 15 lived in the same town as at least one of them (usually the youngest). Most of these were in the same household. But fertility was high and mortality low, so one son could remain behind while others were able to leave both for the frontier and towns and cities. Sons of men who had pioneered were more apt to be living in the same towns as their fathers who had used the labor of sons to clear large farms which they later divided. In the later census, 1880, declining fertility coupled with urbanization led to fewer elderly living with children, more children returning home to care for the elderly, more cases of elderly moving to be with adult children, and more daughters at home. Longitudinal data makes it possible to place residence near kin at particular points in time within a broader context of an

intergenerational family trajectory. Event history analysis will show how these arrangements affected the future lives of the children and inequality within the family. A preliminary analysis has shown that sons who lived with their parents delayed marriage and had fewer children.