

II. CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY EMPLOYMENT AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS

EMPLOYMENT TRENDS

Employment in the construction industry² increased from 3.6 million workers in 1950 to 4.6 million workers in 1965, an increase of 28 percent. However, most of this gain occurred between 1950 and 1952 when employment rose to 4.2 million persons. Employment fell to 3.8 million in 1955 and, since then, employment has been increasing gradually, except for a few years in the early 1960's. By 1965 employment in the construction industry had reached an all-time high, and indications in early 1966 were that employment would go even higher. Increased State and local public works construction has been an important factor in the 1950-65 increase in construction employment. Construction labor requirements for State and local public works increased from 1950 to 1965 by about 300,000 man-years (table 1). However, the proportion of the total increase in construction employment attributable to State and local construction activity would be even greater than implied by the 300,000 increase in man-year requirements because the average construction worker did not work a full man-year.

The proportion that wage and salary workers make up of all workers in the construction industry between 1950 and 1965 has been relatively constant at about 70 percent. On the other hand, there was some reduction in the proportion of self-employed and unpaid family workers and an increase in the proportion of government workers.

SKILL DISTRIBUTION

Between 1958 and 1965, total blue-collar workers—craftsmen, operatives, and laborers—accounted for about four-fifths of construction industry employment during the period. Construction craftsmen alone maintained a relatively consistent 50 percent of employment in the construction industry.³ (See table 3.) Operatives increased slightly and construction laborers declined slightly as a proportion of construction employment. In the white-collar group, clerical workers increased their share slightly. Professional, managerial, and sales workers had relatively stable shares up to 1965 when professional workers increased as a percent of construction employment and managerial workers decreased somewhat.

SELECTED SKILLED OCCUPATIONS

Because of the changing mix of construction activity and because of changing construction techniques, some construction craft occupations between 1950 and 1965 grew faster than others and some even declined. Employment of carpenters in the construction industry

² The construction industry includes establishments engaged in contract construction and government agencies engaged in construction and related activities such as highway maintenance and land reclamation. The contract construction industry on the other hand includes wage and salary workers in private establishments performing construction activities, including new construction and maintenance and repair, on a contract basis.

³ The 1950 and 1960 Censuses of Population indicate that the proportion of craftsmen in the construction industry declined somewhat between these years. However, these census data are not directly comparable with the BLS data (Monthly Report on the Labor Force) because the Census of Population data are for April only, a seasonally low month for construction. Also, there are some conceptual differences between the two sources. The census data are also not comparable with data based on establishment surveys. See footnote on table 2.