

THE 1930 CENSUS

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In the spring of 1930, the Bureau of the Census temporarily employed nearly 87,800 individuals as enumerators for the Fifteenth Census of the United States. Each was at least eighteen years old, a U.S. citizen, and had successfully filled out a test census schedule. The test included a narrative description of families and farms in a hypothetical community and a blank schedule. Potential enumerators read the narrative and completed the schedule on the basis of its contents. Interestingly, the blank schedule that was part of the test was not the final 1930 census schedule. Thus, the purpose of the test was not to familiarize applicants with the 1930 census questions, but to assess their ability to follow directions and to make sense of people's answers, so as to record the data correctly. The document featured in this article is an example of a completed test population schedule.

The Bureau of the Census mailed 336,890 test schedules to prospective enumerators and received 197,950 completed tests. After they were corrected and graded by the Bureau in Washington, D.C., supervisors across the country were provided with lists of applicants in their district who had successfully passed the test. From these lists, the supervisors, who were responsible for the completeness and accuracy of their district's census, selected enumerators. Preference, wherever possible, was given to veterans. Because the Census Act of June 18, 1929, did not require enumerators to hold civil service status, to a certain extent political patronage played a role in the selection of enumerators.

Once selections were made, the Bureau provided each enumerator with a ninety-page instruction booklet, necessary schedules, blank forms, illustrated examples of completed schedules, a portfolio, a certificate of appointment, and other supplies. The instruction booklet gave enumerators 456 specific instructions.

Instructions ranged from how to care for schedules and deal with untruthful replies to how to contact a supervisor. Enumerators were to keep schedules in a safe place, not to accept false statements, and to communicate with supervisors through the mail—except in cases of emergency, when the use of a telephone or telegraph was authorized. Instruction number 15 gave enumerators their charge: "It is your duty *personally* to visit every family and farm within your territory; to obtain the information required with reference to them; and to enter the same on the census schedule." Instruction number 20 forbade enumerators from communicating to "any person any information" obtained in the discharge of his or her official duties and explained the penalty for doing so.



Disclosing any information could result in a fine of up to \$1,000 and imprisonment for up to two years.

Most enumerators' territories consisted of a single enumeration district. As there were 120,105 separate districts, however, some enumerators were assigned more than one. Enumerators were to devote at least eight hours per day to canvassing, beginning on April 2. They were to work alone and were not to combine their work for the Census Bureau with any other occupation. They were to complete the Popula-

tion Schedule for every household by hand, and other schedules as necessary, including the Unemployment Schedule and the General Farm Schedule. At the end of each day, enumerators were to mail report cards to their supervisor, informing them of the work completed. The enumeration was to be completed within two weeks for districts that had 2,500 inhabitants or more in the 1920 census, and within thirty days in all other districts.

Enumerators were paid a piece rate that amounted to \$.04 or \$.05 per per-

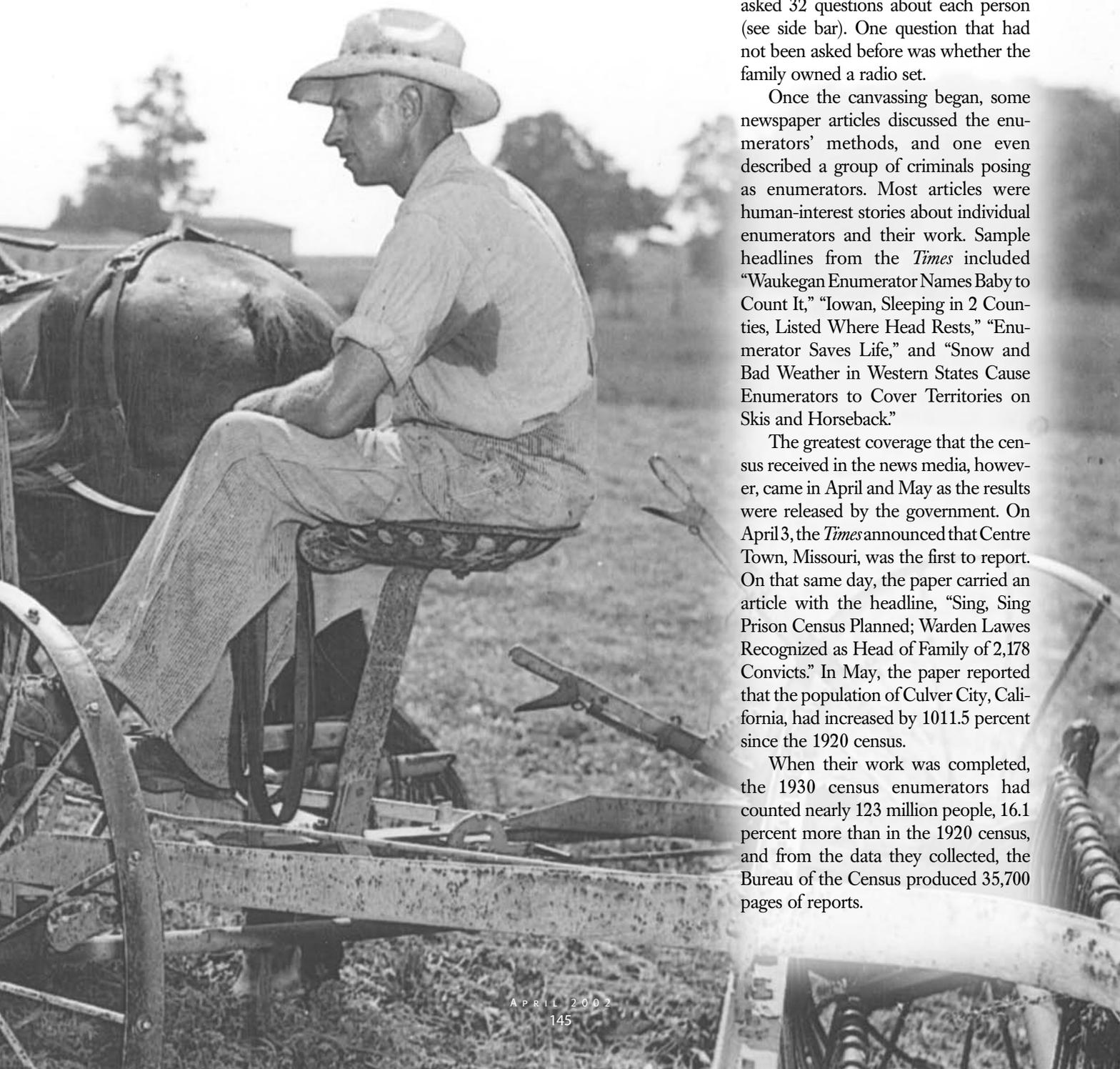
son enumerated and \$.40 or \$.50 per farm enumerated. Under exceptional circumstances, enumerators could earn up to \$.20 per person and up to \$5.00 per farm.

The enumerators' work and the census in general were followed closely in the news media. *The New York Times* alone carried more than 350 articles about the census in 1930. Prior to April 1, articles focused primarily on the appointment of enumerators, efforts to inform the public about the census, and the questions to be asked. The 1930 population census asked 32 questions about each person (see side bar). One question that had not been asked before was whether the family owned a radio set.

Once the canvassing began, some newspaper articles discussed the enumerators' methods, and one even described a group of criminals posing as enumerators. Most articles were human-interest stories about individual enumerators and their work. Sample headlines from the *Times* included "Waukegan Enumerator Names Baby to Count It," "Iowan, Sleeping in 2 Counties, Listed Where Head Rests," "Enumerator Saves Life," and "Snow and Bad Weather in Western States Cause Enumerators to Cover Territories on Skis and Horseback."

The greatest coverage that the census received in the news media, however, came in April and May as the results were released by the government. On April 3, the *Times* announced that Centre Town, Missouri, was the first to report. On that same day, the paper carried an article with the headline, "Sing, Sing Prison Census Planned; Warden Lawes Recognized as Head of Family of 2,178 Convicts." In May, the paper reported that the population of Culver City, California, had increased by 1011.5 percent since the 1920 census.

When their work was completed, the 1930 census enumerators had counted nearly 123 million people, 16.1 percent more than in the 1920 census, and from the data they collected, the Bureau of the Census produced 35,700 pages of reports.



Teaching Activities

- ▶ Direct students to read Article I, Section 2, of the United States Constitution, and ask them to explain why enumeration of the population was important to the framers of our government.
- ▶ Write the words *census*, *enumerator*, *carvass*, and *population schedule* on the board and ask students to define them.
- ▶ Tell students to pretend that the year is 1930 and that they each are applying for a position with the Bureau of the Census to be an enumerator. Prior to photocopying the document for students (p. 146), cover up the italicized sections. Distribute copies of the partial document to students, and explain to them that one of the requirements for being an enumerator was the successful completion of a test schedule. Direct students to read the narrative and independently fill in the form on the basis of the narrative. When they are finished, provide students with copies of the document (including the italicized sections) and ask them to compare their answers with the completed test schedule.
- ▶ Lead a class discussion about the test schedule by posing the following questions: What skills did you employ while completing it? Was some information more difficult than other information to record? What conclusions can you draw from the data you recorded?

Remind students that the information they recorded on the test schedule was based on a hypothetical narrative. Ask them consider the similarities and differences between the demographic make-up of the United States in 1930 and today. Instruct students to draft a hypothetical narrative describing a community today. Encourage volunteers to share their narratives with the class.
- ▶ Provide students with information from the background essay about the 1930 census, the work of the enumerators, and the questions asked in the 1930 census (see figure 1). Divide students into fourteen small groups and assign them to conduct research

FIGURE 1

Questions Asked on the Census

The 1930 census asked thirty-two questions about each person.

Place of Abode

1. Street, avenue, road, etc.
2. House number (in cities or towns).
3. Number of dwelling house in order of visitation [this number supplied by census taker].
4. Number of family in order of visitation [this number supplied by census taker].

Name

5. Name of each person whose place of abode on April 1, 1930, was in this family.

Relation

6. Relationship of this person to the head of the family.

Home Data

7. Home owned or rented.
8. Value of home, if owned, or monthly rental, if rented.
9. Radio set.
10. Does this family live on a farm?

Personal Description

11. Sex.
12. Color or race [White (W), Negro (Neg), Mexican (Mex), Indian (In), Chinese (Ch), Japanese (Jp), Filipino (Fil), Hindu (Hin), Korean (Kor), other races spelled out in full].
13. Age at last birthday.
14. Marital condition [single (S), married (M), widowed (Wd), divorced (D)].
15. Age at first marriage.

Education

16. Attended school or college any time since Sept. 1, 1929.
17. Whether able to read and write.

Place of birth

18. Place of birth—PERSON.
19. Place of birth—FATHER.
20. Place of birth—MOTHER.

Mother Tongue (or Native Language) of Foreign Born

21. Language spoken in home before coming to the United States.

Here follows three columns of "CODE (For office use only. Do not write in these columns)" relating to "State or M.T. [mother tongue]," "Country," and "Nativity." These codes were entered to assist in statistical tabulation and do not provide any information beyond that found in columns 18-21.

Citizenship, etc.

22. Year of immigration to the United States.
23. Naturalization.
24. Whether able to speak English.

Occupation & Industry

25. Trade, profession, or particular kind of work done, as spinner, salesman, riveter, teacher, etc.
26. Industry or business, as cotton mill, dry-goods store, shipyard, public school, etc.
27. Class of worker.

Employment

28. Whether actually at work yesterday (or the last regular working day)—Yes or No.
29. If not, line number on Unemployment Schedule. [Note: Unemployment schedules no longer exist.]

Veterans

30. Whether a veteran of U.S. military or naval force—Yes or No.
31. What war or expedition? [World War (WW), Spanish-American War (Sp), Civil War (Civ), Philippine Insurrection (Phil), Boxer Rebellion (Box), Mexican Expedition (Mex)].

Farm Schedule

32. Number of farm schedule.



1930 Census to Be Released

The National Archives and Records Administration released the 1930 Federal population census schedules for the first time on April 1, 2002. At that time, the microfilmed copies of the census schedules were opened for research at the National Archives Building in Washington, D.C., at thirteen of the National Archives regional facilities across the nation, and through the National Archives census rental program.

The 1930 census consists of 2,667 rolls of population schedules and 1,587 rolls of Soundex indexes for twelve southern states, totaling 4,254 rolls. Even though statistical summaries of the data collected by enumerators are made public shortly after a census is taken, information on individuals and families is restricted by law for privacy reasons for 72 years [92 Stat. 915; Public Law 95-416; October 5, 1978].

into each of the fourteen previous censuses. Ask a spokesperson from each group to share with the class the type of information gathered in the census. Record this information in a large chart on the chalkboard. Ask students to consider the purpose of the questions being asked and compare it to the purpose of the census as described in the Constitution. Encourage students to write a one-page explanation why they think that the questions asked in the census became so much more detailed.

- ▶ Remind students about the 2000 census, how it was taken, and the questions that were asked. (This information is available online from the Bureau of the Census at www.census.gov/dmd/www/2000quest.html.) Ask students to write a one-page

position paper revealing their opinion about the value of the information gathered in 2000 and the information gathered in 1930. Invite student volunteers to share their papers with the class.

- ▶ Inform students that although the Bureau of the Census released statistical summaries based on the census schedules in 1930, because of a 72-year privacy law [92 Stat. 915; Public Law 95-416; October 5, 1978], the actual schedules have been closed to researchers. They became available on April 1, 2002. Ask students to consider the differences between how these documents were used and by whom in 1930, and how the documents will be used and by whom today. 📄

Note

The document featured in this article comes from the Records of Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, and is housed in the National Archives Building in Washington, D.C.

For More Information

Additional information about the 1930 census is available online from the National Archives website at <http://1930census.archives.gov>. Digital images of documents from the 1930 census are available on the Bureau of the Census website at <http://www.census.gov/pubinfo/www/photos/Histforms/1930/His930FQ.html>.

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