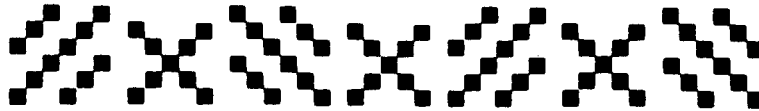


## The 1900 Federal Census: A Note on Availability and Potential Uses

*Robert G. Barrows\**



The National Archives has recently announced the removal of all restrictions on access to the manuscript population schedules of the 1900 census. Although this census has been "open" for several years, potential researchers had to fulfill certain requirements before access could be granted; in addition, this census was available for examination only at the National Archives in Washington or at one of the regional Federal Records Centers. With the lifting of these restrictions, the manuscript population schedules of the 1900 census and the accompanying index are available for purchase in microfilm form. The Indiana portion of the census schedules fills fifty-eight rolls of microfilm, the index another 254 rolls. At a price of twelve dollars per roll, most individuals desiring access to the entire collection will have to rely on appropriate repositories. (Both the Genealogy Division of the Indiana State Library and the Fort Wayne Public Library have made arrangements to purchase all 312 rolls of Indiana material.) Persons concerned with a particular town, township, city, or county, however, may wish to purchase the roll(s) of microfilm covering their area of interest—or to encourage their local historical society, genealogical society, or public library to do so. For additional information and ordering procedures write: 1900 Census, National Archives and Records Service, General Services Administration, Washington, D.C. 20408.

As noted in an earlier issue of the *Indiana Magazine of History*, the manuscript censuses are a valuable source for students of state and local history.<sup>1</sup> The nineteenth century schedules (excepting those of 1890, almost all of which were destroyed by fire) have been used increasingly in recent years.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert G. Barrows, "The Manuscript Federal Census: Source for a 'New' Local History," *Indiana Magazine of History*, LXIX (September, 1973), 181-92.

This is especially true of the 1850 and succeeding censuses, in which the *individual* instead of the family or household was the basic unit of enumeration. In general, the schedules became more detailed during the late nineteenth century as the enumerators were directed to ask an increasing number of questions. The 1900 census followed this pattern, and the schedules contain a variety of data useful for local and family historians.

The 1900 census of population repeated most of the questions asked in 1880. For each individual the enumerators recorded name, age, sex, race, and place of birth. Marital status, nativity of parents, occupation (for those ten years of age and over), and months unemployed during the preceding year were also recorded. In addition, one column on the schedule asked for the relationship of each household member to the head of the household (e.g., wife, son, boarder), while three others inquired whether persons ten years of age and over could read, write, and speak English.

Several questions appeared on the 1900 census schedule that had not been included in previous decennial enumerations. Briefly, these included:

- 1) Street names and house numbers (in towns or cities with a street numbering system);
- 2) If married, number of years married to current spouse;
- 3) For women, mother of how many children and how many of those children still living;
- 4) For immigrants, how many years since emigration and current citizenship status (alien, taken out "first papers," or naturalized citizen);
- 5) For those of school age, number of months of school attendance during the preceding year;
- 6) Whether dwelling was owned or rented; if owned, mortgaged or owned free.<sup>2</sup>

Local historians might make use of this information in a variety of ways, and the following suggestions are intended only as illustrations. Persons desiring to explore aspects of the social geography of a turn-of-the-century urban area, especially one for which city directories are not available, will find the house numbering information of value. By combining the cen-

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<sup>2</sup> For a detailed listing of all the questions asked on the 1900 census schedule and the instructions provided to the enumerators, see Robert G. Barrows, "Instructions to Enumerators for Completing the 1900 Census Population Schedule," *Historical Methods Newsletter*, 9 (September, 1976), 201-212. Copies of this article are available for use in the Genealogy Division, Indiana State Library.

TWELFTH CENSUS OF

*Illustrative Example of the Method of Making*

SCHEDULE NO. 1.—

State, Illinois  
 County, Bureau

Township or other division of county, Princeton township

[Insert name of township, town, precinct, district, or other civil division, as the case may be. See instructions.]

Name of incorporated city, town, or village, within the above-named division, Princeton city  
 Enumerated by me on the 1st day of June, 1900,

1	LOCATION.			3	4	PERSONAL DESCRIPTION.								
	In cities	House number.	Number of dwelling-house, in the order of visitation.			Number of family, in the order of visitation.	5	6	Date of birth.		8	9	10	11
2	Street.				Relationship of each person to the head of the family.	Color or race.	Sex.	Month.	Year.	Age at last birthday.	Whether single, married, widowed, or divorced.	Number of years married.	Mother of how many children.	Number of these children living.
1		214	1	1	Harper, Wm. H.	Head	W	M	May	1870	30	M	5	
2					Sarah N.	Wife	W	F	Apr.	1872	28	M	5	2
3					Robert	Daughter	W	F	Jan.	1898	2	S		
4					Henry	Son	W	M	July	1899	18	S		
5		216	2	2	Steve, James	Grand	W	M	Oct.	1899	20	M		9



THE UNITED STATES.

A

Returns on Schedule No. 1.—Population.

POPULATION.

Supervisor's District No. 1 } Sheet No.  
 Enumeration District No. 25 } 1

Name of Institution, \_\_\_\_\_ x  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Ward of city, 1

John Blank, Enumerator.

Place of birth of each person and parents of each person enumerated. If born in the United States, give the State or Territory; if of foreign birth, give the Country only.	NATIVITY.		CITIZENSHIP.			OCCUPATION, TRADE, OR PROFESSION of each person TEN YEARS of age and over.	Months not employed.	EDUCATION.				OWNERSHIP OF HOME.			
	Place of birth of FATHER of this person.	Place of birth of MOTHER of this person.	Year of immigration to the United States.	Number of years in the United States.	Naturalization.			Attended school (in months).	Can read.	Can write.	Can speak English.	Owned or rented.	Owned free or mortgaged.	Farm or house.	Number of farm schedule.
13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
Canada (Eng.)	Canada (Eng.)	Canada (Eng.)	1898	7	41	Upholsterer	0		Yes	Yes	Yes	R	H		
England	England	England	1896	5					Yes	Yes	Yes				
Massachusetts	Canada (Eng.)	England													
Illinois	Canada (Eng.)	England													
Ireland	Ireland	Ireland	1886	14	41	Day laborer	2		No	No	Yes	O	F		
Ireland	Ireland	Ireland	1890	10					Yes	No	Yes				
Connecticut	Ireland	Ireland	41 42 43 44					2			Yes				

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7

China	China	China	1875	25	At	Occupation	0	Yes	Yes	No	R	H	12
China	China	China	1880	20	At	Laundryman	0	Yes	Yes	No			13
Canada (Eng.)	England	Wales	1891	9	Na	Salesman	2	Yes	Yes	Yes	O	M	14
Scotland	Scotland	Scotland	1895	7				9	Yes	Yes			15
Japan	Japan	Japan	1899	1		At school		Yes	Yes	Yes			16
Sweden	Sweden	Sweden	1892	8	Pa	Fresco painter	3	Yes	Yes	Yes	R	H	17
Sweden	Sweden	Denmark	1895	5				4	Yes	Yes			18
Sweden	Denmark	Sweden	1892	8		Nurse	4	Yes	Yes	Yes			19
Norway	Norway	Norway	1880	30	Na	Silver plater	1	Yes	Yes	Yes			20
Canada (Fr.)	Canada (Fr.)	Canada (Fr.)	1892	8	Na	Express driver	0	Yes	Yes	Yes			21
North Carolina	North Carolina	North Carolina				Whitewasher	3	No	No	Yes	R	H	22
North Carolina	North Carolina	North Carolina				Laundress	0	No	No	Yes			23
Illinois	North Carolina	North Carolina				Servant	0	Yes	Yes	Yes			24
Michigan	Michigan	Michigan				Dealer (patent medicine)	0	Yes	Yes	Yes	R	H	25
Michigan	Michigan	Michigan						Yes	Yes	Yes			26
Mississippi	Georgia	Georgia				Barber	0	Yes	Yes	Yes	O	F	27
South Carolina	South Carolina	South Carolina						8	Yes	Yes			28
Illinois	Mississippi	South Carolina				At school							29
Germany	Germany	Germany	1896	34	Na	Farmer	0	Yes	Yes	Yes	O	F	30
Austria	Austria	Austria	1896	34				5	Yes	Yes			31
Germany	Germany	Austria	1866	34		Dressmaker		Yes	Yes	Yes			32
Illinois	Germany	Austria						Yes	Yes	Yes			33
Illinois	Germany	Austria				Farm laborer	0	Yes	Yes	Yes			34
Illinois	Germany	Austria				Farm laborer	0	Yes	Yes	Yes			35
Germany	Germany	Germany	1888	17	Pa	R. R. laborer	3	Yes	Yes	Yes			36
England	England	England	1853	47				Yes	Yes	Yes	O	M	37
Iowa	Scotland	England				Carpenter	0	Yes	Yes	Yes			38
Illinois	Scotland	England				Plumber	0	Yes	Yes	Yes			39
Illinois	Wales	Wales						Yes	Yes	Yes			40

sus data and a contemporary map, social data could be analyzed in terms of their spatial arrangement. For example, the residential dispersion of different nationality groups might be plotted with considerable precision.

The questions on the census regarding maternity permit examination of fertility and infant mortality in a given community. And when these data are combined with the information regarding age and duration of marriage, a number of other demographic questions could be explored.

The specific information requested of immigrants concerning their length of residence in the United States and their citizenship status should allow consideration of the precise time of arrival and growth of nationality groups in a community. This should be especially useful in places too small to have warranted publication of such information in the printed census. In addition, one might construct indexes to measure ethnic differences in the speed and degree of "assimilation" based upon the rapidity of naturalization. And since the "new" immigration from southern and eastern Europe was well underway by 1900, fruitful comparisons between "old" and "new" ethnic groups should be possible for some localities.

Responses to the question concerning school attendance will be of value to those interested in education. The differing school attendance patterns of rural and urban children or of the native- and foreign-born might be examined. And combining children's ages with the information concerning their school attendance should permit analysis of the average duration of schooling at the beginning of this century.

Finally, the data dealing with homeownership provide an opportunity for the community historian to explore a number of interesting questions. How widespread was homeownership? Were there significant differences in real property acquisition between age groups, ethnic groups, rural and urban residents, and so on? What percentage of an area's homeowners owned their dwelling outright, and what percentage had assumed a mortgage?

To repeat, the subjects for inquiry suggested here are not inclusive; local historians will think of many other uses for this census data, either as a result of their own particular interests or because a unique situation in their community demands attention. And the census manuscripts, it should be stressed, have little or no relevance to numerous historical questions that deserve to be asked and answered. Still, the detail contained on the schedules of the 1900 census makes it a particularly valuable source. The lifting of restrictions on its use is an event of utmost importance for family and community historians.