The Year Richmond, Indiana,
Got Lost in the Census:
1850 as a Demographic Dilemma

*George T. Blakey**

Historians and demographers have been deeply indebted to the 1850 federal census, but Richmond, Indiana, has resented that seventh counting of the nation's population with equally deep emotions. Never had the country learned so much about itself since the decennial census began in 1790. For the first time the published results revealed data about religious congregations, farm acreage and value, and the geographical origins and migrations of Americans.[1] Despite this rich new information that added flesh and blood to the dry bones of previous headcounts, citizens of Richmond were dismayed to learn that their community had lost 30 percent of its population and had fallen from the ranks of the state's leading cities. The city had recently shown every sign of health, prosperity, and growth, yet the federal tabulations were official and have been cited ever since. Richmond had mysteriously shrunk—and then miraculously rebounded by almost 500 percent in the next census of 1860. Where had all the people gone and why? And how had the city recovered so rapidly within a decade? Answers then lacking to explain this bust and boom phenomenon are now available.

Before the watershed census of 1850 Hoosiers had appeared in only three federal enumerations because Indiana had become a state only in 1816. Prior to statehood demographic data for Indiana are sketchy and anecdotal, but the three subsequent census reports chart a steady, predictable growth. Migrants from the southern and eastern parts of the United States moved into the southern and eastern parts of Indiana and gradually moved north and west. First the Ohio River valley communities developed, then the central flatlands; and finally the northern swamps and dunes gave way to farms and industry. The National Road cut across the state's midsection in the 1830s, bringing in easterners and commerce. The canal mania of the late 1830s and 1840s attracted new people and enterprises along the water routes. German and Irish immigrants began to make their presence felt simultaneously with the federal removal of the last

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[1] Margo J. Anderson, *The American Census: A Social History* (New Haven, Conn., 1988), 37, 44.

Indian tribes. From a population of 147,000 in 1820 to 685,000 in 1840, Indiana rose from the eighteenth largest state to the tenth. The rapid development of railroad transportation in the 1840s and 1850s accelerated this trend.[2]

Early settlement in Indiana was predominantly rural. Although towns began to develop by the mid-nineteenth century, they did not grow at the same pace as the rest of the state. Small by today's standards, these rising centers of transportation, commerce, and industry nonetheless gave focus and structure to Hoosier life. Paralleling settlement in the state, towns and villages developed first in southern Indiana, then in central and northern areas. In the 1830 census no cities in Indiana qualified as urban (defined as incorporated places with at least 2,500 residents), but several were beginning to show promise of population growth. Both Madison and New Albany on the Ohio River had close to 2,000 inhabitants and profited from the flourishing river traffic. Vincennes at nearly 1,500 benefited from its heritage as a commercial and political capital on the lower Wabash River under French, English, and territorial rule. The new state capital of Indianapolis had just over 1,000 people, mainly because of its political status.[3] One decade later, in 1840, considerable urbanization had occurred. New Albany and Madison had doubled in size, and Indianapolis, assisted by its position astraddle the booming National Road, had crossed the line into urbanity at 2,600. Although Vincennes had stalled in the southwest, Richmond was rising fast in the east with a population of 2,070.[4]

Situated on the east fork of the Whitewater River near the Ohio state border, Richmond was settled in 1806 by North Carolina Quakers who sought a new life away from slavery. Rich soil and a good agricultural climate soon attracted more settlers to the community. Incorporated in 1818, the town grew slowly until the National Road inched its way westward from Ohio toward Illinois. Surveyed through Richmond in 1827, with construction beginning shortly thereafter, this east-to-west American thoroughfare transformed the city. When the first bridge across the formidable limestone gorge of the Whitewater River was completed in 1834, traffic moved unimpeded, carrying finished goods from the East and raw materials from the West. In 1836 a new local newspaper, *The Palladium*, commented editorially on this increased traffic: "one hundred 'moving' wagons have passed through this town daily . . . and still they come—the never-ending tide rolls on!"[5] Many of the migrants and construction crews decided to stay, and by the time of the 1840 census 2,070 people called this almost-

[2] U.S., *Seventh Census, 1850,* ix, xlvi.

[3] John D. Barnhart and Donald F. Carmony, *Indiana: From Frontier to Industrial Commonwealth* (4 vols., New York, 1954), I, 418-19. The authors estimated these populations, basing their calculations on local figures and newspaper accounts.

[4] U.S., *Compendium of the Sixth Census, 1840* (Washington, D.C., 1841), 82.

[5] Richmond, Indiana, *Palladium*, September 17, 1836.

urban place home. The town had doubled its size in one decade; it supported many grist and lumber mills, offered livery services and lodging to transients, and published two newspapers. And it was the fastest growing town in the state's most populous county. In 1840 it received a charter as a city and elected its first mayor.[6]

John Sailor, the newly elected mayor of Richmond in 1840, presided for the next twelve years over a city whose economic and religious life appeared to be flourishing. Although official demographic data would not be available to verify this growth until the next federal census in 1850, a representative sampling of new activity during the 1840s charts Richmond's increasing prosperity. The Spring Foundry marketed its first threshing machine in 1841 and expanded rapidly during the decade; the Robinson machine works opened near the river in 1842 as did Armstrong Grimes's new City Hotel; John Boswell introduced Richmond's first photography shop in 1844; and Benton and Fletcher's Hardware store began operations in 1846. Ralph Paige started a new dry goods store in 1847, and Henry Rosa opened his bottling and vinegar works the following year.[7] Religious growth paralleled economic development in the city during this decade. Five new churches were organized, and four others erected buildings of worship. Quakers opened Friends Boarding School in 1847 and soon changed its mission and name to Earlham College.[8]

During the 1840s Richmond was also reaching out to other communities with new transportation and communications networks. The city's leaders had caught Indiana's canal fever. Convinced that a link to the Whitewater Canal at Brookville would bring the traffic and profits of Ohio River business to Richmond, they proposed a thirty-four-mile project of locks, dams, and ditches estimated to cost approximately $500,000. After $45,000 had been spent, a flood in 1847 devastated the project, and it was abandoned.[9] More prosaic but more successful were the three highway projects begun or completed in the 1840s. The road to Williamsburg to the northwest, the turnpike to Boston in the south, and the Richmond-Newport turnpike heading north all indicated that Richmond was expanding its reputation as a commercial hub. And in April, 1848, the first telegraph

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[6] U.S., *Sixth Census, 1840*, 371-73. Richmond's 1830 population is an estimate from two sources: John T. Plummer, *A Directory to the City of Richmond . . .* (Richmond, Ind., 1857), 27; and Interstate Publishing Company, *History of Wayne County, Indiana . . .* (2 vols., Chicago, 1884), II, 43.

[7] Richmond, Indiana, *Jeffersonian*, March 29, 1843; Edwin F. and Walter L. Dalbey, *Pictorial History of the City of Richmond, Indiana . . . 1806–1906* (Richmond, Ind., 1906), 13; Daisy M. Jones, *Richmond: Eastern Gateway to Indiana* (Richmond, Ind., 1959), 72-73; Interstate Publishing Company, *History of Wayne County*, II, 84; Andrew W. Young, *History of Wayne County, Indiana . . .* (Cincinnati, 1872), 367, 446-47; John C. W. Bailey and Company, *Wayne County Gazeteer . . .* (Chicago, 1868), 210.

[8] Interstate Publishing Company, *History of Wayne County*, II, 141-51; Dalbey, *Pictorial History of Richmond*, 9; Young, *History of Wayne County*, 398-408.

[9] Young, *History of Wayne County*, 110.

ST. PAUL'S
EPISCOPAL CHURCH,
RICHMOND, INDIANA

THIS CHURCH BUILDING
WAS PART OF THE
1840S CONSTRUCTION BOOM
IN RICHMOND.
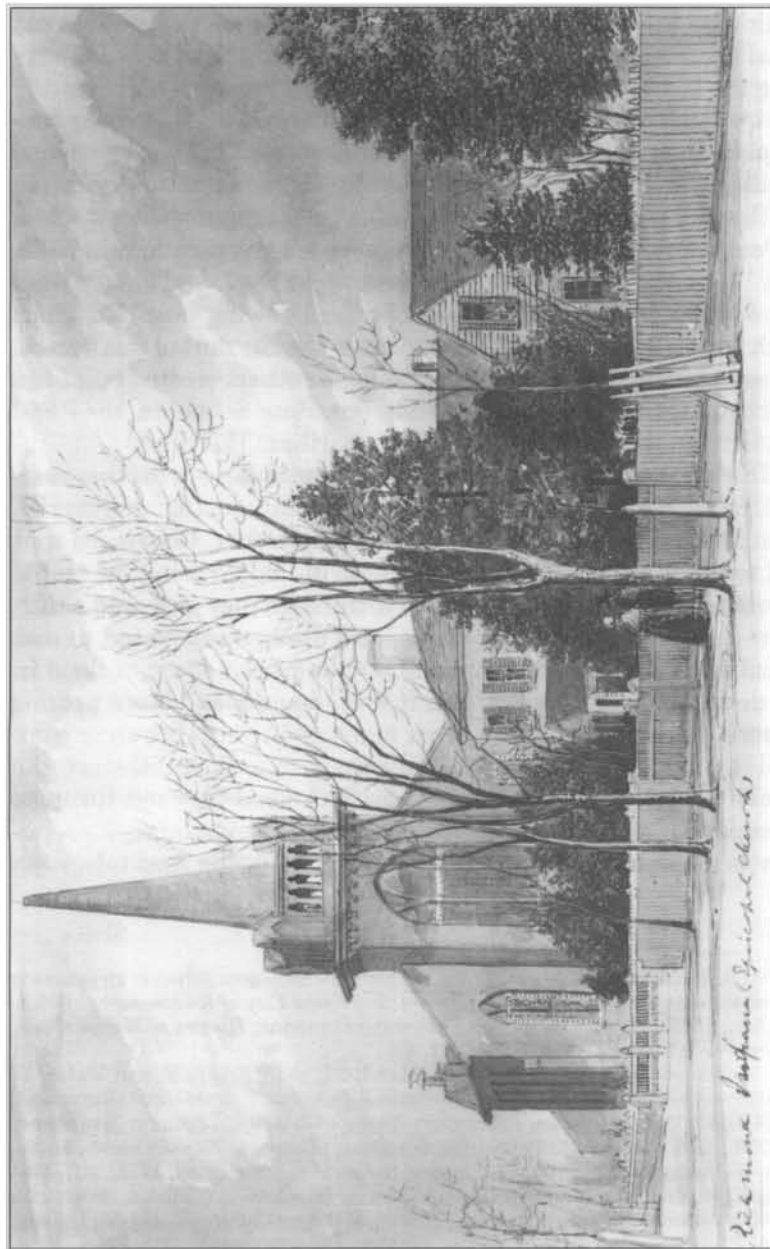
Wash Drawing by Lefevre J. Cranstone.
Cranstone Manuscripts, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington.

office opened in Richmond, linking the city to Dayton, Ohio, and ulti-
mately to the nation.[10]

Increased property values and unofficial population surveys
confirmed that Richmond was continuing to boom in the 1840s.
Assessed property values reveal an upward—albeit erratic—trend
from 1840 to 1850. Official accounts show collective evaluations more
than doubling, from $215,000 in 1840 to $436,000 a decade later.[11] In
1848 Samuel Pierce, a local merchant, conducted his own population
count of the city. A former member of the city council and at the time
city collector, Pierce was in a position to understand population
changes. His findings revealed that Richmond had 2,531 people, an
increase of 500 since the last federal census and enough to make
Richmond officially an urban center for the first time.[12] This figure
was personal and unofficial, but it confirmed what most citizens of
Richmond believed about the city's progress.

The 1850 census revealed much about Indiana that was expect-
ed. The Hoosier state had continued to grow—to a population of
980,000—and had risen from the nation's tenth largest to seventh.[13]
The Miami and Potawatomi tribes had been relocated to the west; thus,
Native Americans did not register in the headcount, not even those
few who had contracted with the government to remain in the Hoosier
state. Immigrants from Germany had become the largest non-native
group in the state with 29,000 tallied.[14] Richmond could testify to the
importance of this influx because of its recently completed St. Andrew's
Catholic and St. John's Lutheran churches, both of which served new
German families. African Americans, designated as "free colored,"
totaled 11,000, and it appeared that Wayne County had the largest
number of any county in the state with 1,000.[15] This racial distribu-
tion could easily have been predicted. Quakers in the upper White-
water valley were active in the Underground Railroad, and some of
the runaway slaves remained in Wayne County because of its hos-
pitable atmosphere. Levi Coffin's work with fugitive slaves in Wayne
County was almost legendary by this time; and Bishop William Paul
Quinn, a spiritual Johnny Appleseed, had planted several African
Methodist Episcopal churches around the Midwest, Richmond's as
early as 1836.

But the 1850 census surprised Richmond because its figures
refuted the apparent growth and progress of the preceding decade.

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[10] Henry Clay Fox, *Memoirs of Wayne County* . . . (2 vols., Madison, Wis., 1912),
I, 493.

[11] Interstate Publishing Company, *History of Wayne County*, II, 54.

[12] Plummer, *Directory to the City of Richmond*, 57.

[13] U.S., *Seventh Census, 1850*, ix, xlvi.

[14] *Ibid.*, xxxvi, xciv. See also Gregory S. Rose, "The Distribution of Indiana's Eth-
nic and Racial Minorities in 1850," *Indiana Magazine of History*, LXXXVII (Septem-
ber, 1991), 224-60.

[15] U.S., *Seventh Census, 1850*, 779, 755-56.

The city, with an official population of 1,443, had not only failed to maintain its position as one of the state's largest towns but it had also lost approximately 600 people or roughly 30 percent of its population since the last census. In light of this reported decline it seemed strange that Wayne County had continued to grow. With a population listed at 25,000, it was still the most populous county in the state, and none of the other towns in the county could compete with Richmond as a retail, banking, or industrial center. The second largest town, Cambridge City, had only 1,200 people. In contrast to Richmond's apparent decline, other Indiana cities had continued to grow. New Albany, Madison, and Indianapolis had each reached approximately 8,000, and new additions to the official urban category were Lafayette, Fort Wayne, Terre Haute, and Evansville, which ranged from 6,000 to 3,000 in the order listed.[16]

The residents of Richmond were more perplexed than outraged at the 1850 census figures. The unofficial results of the Wayne County part of the census appeared in area newspapers as early as September, 1850, and revealed that Richmond's population was just above 2,600,[17] a figure that corresponded to Samuel Pierce's census of 1848. By the time the official, but unbelievable, figure of 1,443 appeared in 1853, another census—this one commissioned by the state and conducted by the townships—contradicted the official count. The 1853 state/township figure for Richmond was 3,800 and indicated that the city had not declined since 1840 but had, in fact, grown rapidly. The discrepancies in the unofficial, the official, and the state/township figures were difficult to understand. Federal census officials cited the state/township numbers in their *Compendium* to the seventh census, published in 1854, but did not repeat them in subsequent publications.[18] The official count of Richmond's population in 1850 remained at 1,443 regardless of its questionable validity. It has continued to be cited and to mislead ever since.

Contemporary chroniclers of Richmond's past generally chose to cite the unofficial population statistics or, a bit later, to focus on the 1860 census, which showed Richmond making a miraculous rebound with a new population of 6,600. The first published history of Richmond appeared in 1857 in the form of a city directory and sixty-three-page historical sketch of the city's founding and growth. Dr. John Plummer, a local physician, compiled and published the book, and researchers have since regarded it as an accurate and indispensable source. Plummer cited Pierce's census of 1848, which listed the population as 2,531, and declared that it had been "carefully taken." He then cited the 1853 state/township population of 3,800 as

[16] *Ibid.*, 779, 757-77.

[17] Richmond, Indiana, *Jeffersonian*, September 27, 1850.

[18] U.S., *Compendium of the Seventh Census, 1850* (Washington, D.C., 1854), 24, 378. Attempts to locate comprehensive state and local records for the 1853 state/township enumeration have proven fruitless.

proof of the continued growth of his city.[19] Subsequent city and coun-
ty directories and gazetteers also chose to omit the troublesome offi-
cial count from 1850 and cite the more positive statistics instead.[20]
Following the release of the 1860 federal census data, the Richmond
Palladium boasted about the city's ascension to 6,600 people, which,
by its reckoning, made Richmond the fourth fastest-growing city in
the nation.[21] Wayne County's first comprehensive history appeared
in 1872, and its author, Andrew Young, cited the official figures for
both 1850 and 1860 with no rebuttal or interpretation, allowing the
raw data to tell their own dramatic story of bust and boom.[22] The
miraculous recovery in 1860 was obviously more important than the
inexplicable and temporary decline in 1850.

  Most twentieth-century historians of Indiana who have dis-
cussed the 1850 census have paid more attention to the new data
that became available than to Richmond's dilemma. Logan Esarey was
one of the first scholars to analyze Hoosier demographic data, and he
briefly described the growth of Richmond. While he cited the 1850 cen-
sus count of 1,443 and the 1860 tally of 6,600, he did not speculate
about the decline and recovery phenomenon.[23] A generation later
John D. Barnhart and Donald F. Carmony did considerable analysis
of urban growth in Indiana, using both newspaper accounts and cen-
sus data to achieve some sense of accuracy for the early years. They
mentioned Richmond as one of the leading cities in 1840, noted its
plummet in 1850, and cited its 1860 rebound; but they offered no
explanation for this anomaly.[24] Demographic historian Stephen S.
Visher offered information from the 1850 census that alluded to why
Richmond might have declined in the 1840s. New data on migration
patterns revealed that Hoosiers had trekked west in sizeable num-
bers during the decade; for example, 25,000 had relocated to Illinois
and 20,000 to Iowa.[25] There is no way of knowing, however, how many
of those had left Richmond in the 1840s. In the 1960s Emma Lou
Thornbrough's study of the state during the Civil War era noted Rich-
mond's rapid expansion between 1850 and 1860. She discussed this
in relation to the attendant railroad boom but did not pursue the
earlier population decline.[26] Both Howard H. Peckham in the 1970s
and James H. Madison in the 1980s addressed the significance of

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[19] Plummer, *Directory to the City of Richmond*, 57.
  [20] H. N. McEvoy, *Wayne County Directory for 1859* (Richmond, Ind., 1859), 16;
Bailey, *Wayne County Gazeteer*, 203.
  [21] Richmond *Palladium*, November 30, 1866.
  [22] Young, *History of Wayne County*, 138.
  [23] Logan Esarey, *A History of Indiana* (2 vols., 1915, 1918; reprint ed., 2 vols.
in 1, Indianapolis, 1970), I, 243, 277, II, 980.
  [24] Barnhart and Carmony, *Indiana*, I, 418-19, II, 15-16.
  [25] Stephen S. Visher, "Population Changes in Indiana, 1840–1940," *Proceed-
ings of the Indiana Academy of Science*, LI (1942), 187.
  [26] Emma Lou Thornbrough, *Indiana in the Civil War Era, 1850–1880* (Indi-
anapolis, 1965), 560-61.

the 1850 census and the rise of urbanization, but neither probed Richmond's unusual situation.[27]

Only two historians have specifically acknowledged Richmond's dilemma and questioned the validity of the 1850 census. Both of these historians once lived in Richmond. Bernhard Knollenberg grew up in Wayne County, became a librarian at Yale University, and spent several years researching and writing *Pioneer Sketches of the Upper Whitewater Valley*, published in 1945. The decline of the city's population did not make sense to Knollenberg. Although the 1853 state/township correction afforded some consolation, it was not enough. Because his location in Connecticut and government service during World War II prevented him from pursuing this topic to his satisfaction, he concluded simply that the 1850 census figure was "presumably too low" and went on to other things.[28] In 1989 the Indiana Historical Society published *Indiana: A New Historical Guide*, with extensive sketches of leading Hoosier cities. The book's major author, Robert M. Taylor, Jr., lived briefly in Richmond, and he probed the subject with more interest and acuity than is evident elsewhere. Taylor found Richmond's alleged decline in 1850 unacceptable but suggested several possible causes for it, including a diminishing number of Quaker migrants into the city, the deadly 1849 cholera epidemic, and the lure of the 1849 California gold rush. Ultimately, Taylor found his own explanations "doubtful" and cited evidence of Richmond's continued growth during the 1840s. For instance, the new business enterprises, church construction, and highway expansion are all well documented. He left the situation thoroughly questioned, but unresolved.[29]

A careful review of the handwritten 1850 census schedules for Richmond and Wayne County provides a partial answer to this question, now more than a century old. Local census marshals located and listed 2,604 residents of Richmond in August and September of 1850,[30] but federal census officials in Washington somehow omitted 1,161 of them from the final tally. The official, printed total was 1,443. How did this happen? The Washington officials probably found the Wayne County returns a confusing collection of fragments and were unable to assemble the parts completely and correctly. Assistant census marshals enumerated the county's townships separately in the late summer of 1850. William Dalby and Theron Park were the two assistant marshals responsible for collecting data for Wayne Town-

[27] Howard H. Peckham, *Indiana: A History* (New York, 1978), 65; James H. Madison, *The Indiana Way: A State History* (Bloomington, Ind., 1986), 95-96.

[28] Bernhard Knollenberg, *Pioneer Sketches of the Upper Whitewater Valley . . .* (*Indiana Historical Society Publications*, Vol. XV, No. 1; Indianapolis, 1945), 137.

[29] Robert M. Taylor, Jr., *et al.*, *Indiana: A New Historical Guide* (Indianapolis, 1989), 82.

[30] U.S., Seventh Census, 1850, Population Schedules for Wayne County, Indiana, 335, 500, 547.

ship (which includes Richmond). The schedules for the Wayne County townships of Jackson, Harrison, Jefferson, Perry, Dalton, Green, Clay, and Boston run sequentially from pages 1 through 281. Then on page 282 Dalby's entries for Wayne Township and Richmond begin.

Dalby entered the names, approximately 42 per page, of residents from the southern one-half of Richmond and Wayne Township. He completed his list on page 335 with a total of 1,401 people for Richmond, broken down into 387 families who lived in 386 dwellings. Then, for unexplained reasons, the Richmond tally is interrupted for 102 pages by entries for Center and Abington townships. Not until page 437 do the Richmond listings resume. At this point Park's entries for the northern one-half of Richmond and Wayne Township begin. From pages 437 to 500 Park entered approximately 42 names per page, totaling 1,161 persons from Richmond, who constituted 498 families living in the same number of dwellings. Again, and for no stated reasons, Richmond is interrupted for another 74 pages. The reader of the schedules must scan data on Franklin and New Garden townships. Not until page 574 does Park submit his final page of 42 additional names for Richmond.[31] The total for the three Richmond sections is 2,604, but the federal census officials apparently counted Dalby's list of 1,401 and Park's second list of 42 and arrived at the official total of 1,443. For whatever reason, they missed or lost or chose not to count Park's first list containing the names of 1,161 people from the northern side of Richmond. Consequently, these names were omitted from the national count.

The fragmented nature of the Wayne County schedules did present a confusing puzzle for official tabulators in Washington. One can understand their confusion and sympathize with their situation. Pages were handwritten, sometimes difficult to decipher. The fact that Richmond was divided into three sections created a problem. On these schedules someone has written notes which indicate that the Richmond data were split and that the tally would continue on later pages. Whether this handwritten cross-referencing was done at the time of the 1850 census or later by someone who figured out the problem is impossible to determine. It is logical to assume that when the 1853 state/township numbers arrived and were printed in the *Compendium*, a compiler might have double-checked the original schedules, assembled the pieces of the puzzle, and entered the cross-reference notation. But this is only an assumption, and by then it was too late for the missing 1,161 Richmond residents.

Who were those missing 1,161? They lived on the northern side of town, and many were among Richmond's most influential citizens. Those enumerated in Richmond but not counted in Washington included John Sailor, Richmond's mayor, and Andrew F. Scott, member of the city council and prominent Richmond merchant, with his wife,

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[31] *Ibid.*
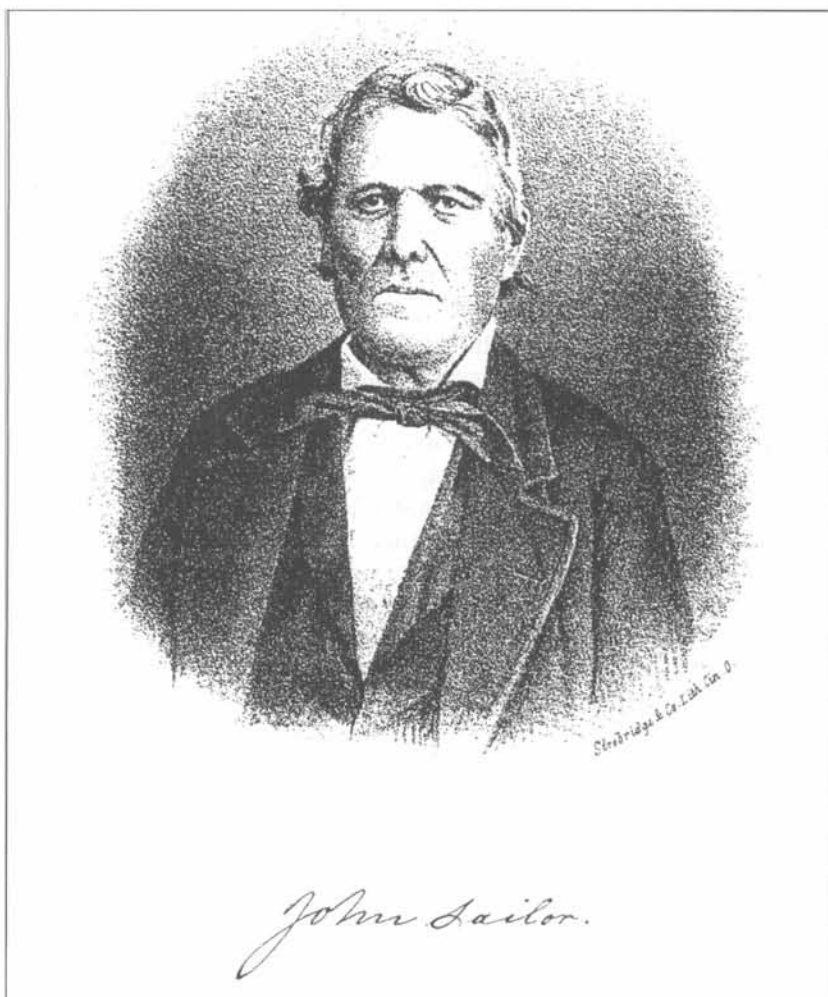
MAYOR OF RICHMOND DURING THE 1840S, SAILOR WAS OMITTED FROM THE CENSUS
OF 1850.

Martha, and three children. Also on the list omitted by federal offi-
cials were the established downtown druggist Irvin Reed; the retired,
but well-known tinsmith Solomon Dickinson; Albert Blanchard, a
local bank president, and Noah Leeds, the town telegrapher. The
exclusion of William Mason, a cabinetmaker from the British West
Indies, and Henry Putthoff, an immigrant papermaker from Ger-
many, caused Richmond to appear less culturally heterogeneous than
it was. Perhaps the most ironic omission of all was the name of Samuel
Pierce, merchant, former city councilman and city collector, and the

unofficial census taker whose 1848 headcount had been so prescient.[32] By failing to count these 1,161 residents, federal officials eliminated Richmond from the list of Indiana's leading cities. Not until the "miraculous" recovery of 1860 would Richmond resume its rightful place as an urban center.

The fragmented Wayne County census schedules from 1850 only partially explain the dramatic decline of Richmond in the national seventh census. A simple mistake in counting—or not counting—made Richmond appear to have lost 600 people, or 30 percent of its population, since the previous count. This jumbled compilation of names does not, however, account for the dramatic increase to 3,800 three years later according to the state/township survey. It could be that assistant marshals Dalby and Park undercounted in 1850; after all, 2,600 represented only a small increase from 2,070 in 1840. Just possibly, Visher's allusions to Hoosiers moving west and Taylor's scenario about disease and migrations are correct, and Richmond's growth had indeed slowed in the 1840s.[33] Another possibility is that the estimate of 3,800 in 1853 was grossly inflated. Only one thing can be said with assurance: a closer reading of the evidence proves that Richmond did not decline during the decade of the 1840s while the rest of the state grew. It was growing, too, but at an uncertain rate. When the railroad boom began for Richmond in 1853, the city's population grew swiftly, and the 1860 count of 6,600 reveals a Richmond whose star was rising as never before. The city had grown slowly on the banks of the shallow Whitewater River, more rapidly along the bustling National Road; on parallel tracks of steel, Richmond accelerated at full speed.

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[32] *Ibid.*, 441-42, 451, 454, 457, 465, 483, 495.

[33] The 1849 cholera epidemic took forty-nine lives in Richmond according to the local Board of Health. Richmond *Palladium*, September 12, 1849. An undetermined number of Richmond men also succumbed to the California gold rush fever that year.