

George H. Sharpe

Military Intelligence Officer, Politician, and U.S. Marshal

The U.S. Census Bureau has always been a home to veterans of the U.S. armed forces. The first superintendent of the census, William Augustus Weaver, appointed in 1840, received wounds as a combat veteran in the War of 1812. Francis Amasa Walker, the highly influential superintendent of the 1880 Census was a veteran of the Civil War and former prisoner of war. In 1890, census legislation made it clear that honorably discharged veterans of the armed services would receive preference for employment as census takers—a practice that continues to this day and one that has been further strengthened and expanded through civil service reforms. In 2015, for instance, the U.S. Department of Commerce, to which the Census Bureau belongs, employed 5,684 veterans (12 percent of workers at the Department of Commerce). The Census Bureau is proud to utilize the proven discipline and motivation of this unique and patriotic workforce.

Born on February 26, 1828, in Kingston, New York, to Henry Sharpe and Helen Hasbrouck Sharpe, George H. Sharpe served his nation and state for over 4 decades in roles that included lawyer, diplomat, Union intelligence officer, and state congressman, among many others. Prior to beginning his extensive professional career, a 19-year-old George graduated from Rutgers University before attending Yale Law School. After passing the New York bar examination in 1849, George began serving as the Secretary of the United States Legation in Vienna, then part of the Austrian Empire. He remained in Vienna for a couple of years before returning to his law practice in New York.

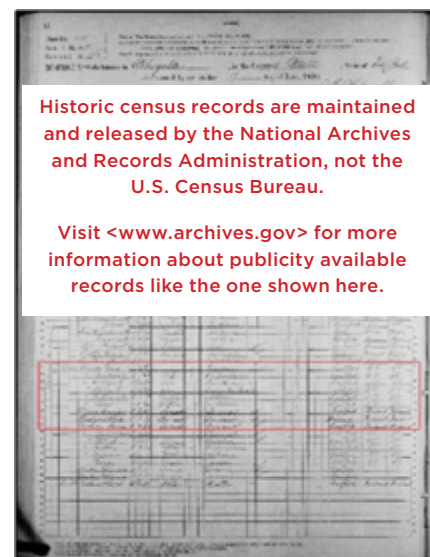


Major General George H. Sharpe (c. 1864)

At the initial outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861, George served as the captain of a New York militia unit for just 3 months. However, in 1862, at the request of New York Governor Edwin Morgan, George raised the 120th New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment, became its colonel, and led his regiment in the Battle of Fredericksburg. A year later, General Joseph Hooker, Commander of the Army of the Potomac, appointed Colonel Sharpe to the position of deputy provost marshal general and placed him in charge of the recently created Bureau of Military Information (BMI). As leader of the BMI, George deployed scouts and enlisted civilian agents to report on activities behind enemy lines. He and his assistant analysts also interrogated prisoners, deserters, and refugees, and analyzed open-source intelligence documents, such as letters and newspapers. By performing these actions, the BMI served as the U.S. military's first "all-source" intelligence organization

and contributed valuable intelligence to Union forces during the battle of Gettysburg, the 1864 Overland Campaign, and the final campaign against the Confederacy in 1865.

After the war, George returned to his law practice in New York and began pursuing a host of local political interests. Following Lincoln's assassination in April 1865, George served as a special agent of the U.S. State Department and went to Europe to locate and investigate Americans who might have been involved in the assassination plot. Specifically, William Seward, the secretary of state (1861-1869), tasked George with finding John Surrat, one of John Wilkes Booth's alleged co-conspirators, and Judah Benjamin, the former Confederate secretary of state. Having discovered the location of both persons-of-interest but failing to find evidence that these men participated in the plot to assassinate Lincoln, George



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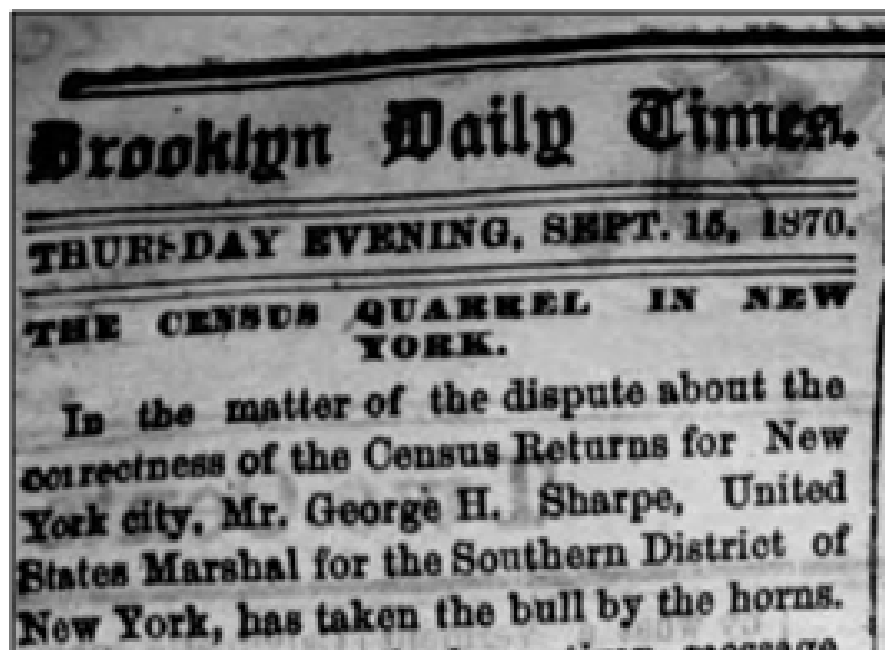
According to his 1880 Census record, George lived with his wife, three children, mother, and three servants when the enumerator recorded his household's information.

returned to New York and became immersed in the local Republican party's political apparatus.

In 1870, President Ulysses S. Grant appointed George as the U.S. marshal for the Southern District of New York. Among other duties, George and his assistant marshals served as census takers for the 1870 Census—the last time U.S. marshals would perform as such. George and his assistants counted 1,466,717 people living in Manhattan, the Bronx, Westchester, Putnam, Rockland, Orange, Dutchess, and Sullivan Counties.

The 1870 Census marked the first time when addresses appeared on census surveys as an early form of quality control. This helped identify some deficiencies, and New York City was one of several cities that had to be reenumerated. Following this, George continued to serve as a U.S. marshal for 2 years before resigning in 1873 and accepting a position as Surveyor of the Port of New York, under Collector of Customs, and future U.S. President Chester A. Arthur.

President Rutherford Hayes removed George Sharpe from his position as Surveyor of the Port of New York 2 years after the presidential election of 1876. Despite his removal, George's career in politics and public service continued for another 11 years. He won election to the New York State Assembly in 1878 and even served as the Speaker of the Assembly between January 1880 and December 1881. After losing his seat in 1882, George reentered federal service and served as the head of the U.S. Commission to Central and South America. Beginning in July 1884, George and the other members of the commission promoted positive commercial relations between the United States and Central/South American countries. After resigning



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from this position and failing to win election to the Republican Party's 1884 Presidential Convention, George then accepted a presidential appointment to the recently established Board of General Appraisers, the precursor to the U.S. Court of International Trade, in 1890. George served on the Board of General Appraisers until he resigned on March 1, 1899.

George passed away on January 13, 1900, in Manhattan, New York, while visiting his daughter, Katherine Lawrence Sharpe. George's children continued to uphold his legacy of public service. His older son Severyn Bruyn Sharpe served as a county judge. His younger son Henry Granville Sharpe was a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army. Katherine Sharpe supported her husband Congressman Ira Davenport throughout his political career. We are grateful for George's long service to his community, the Census Bureau, and the United States.



The unveiling of the Sharpe Civil War monument dedicated by Major General Sharpe to the men of his regiment (the 120th NY Infantry) on October 17, 1896, in Kingston, NY.

Image courtesy of the Friends of Historic Kingston.