

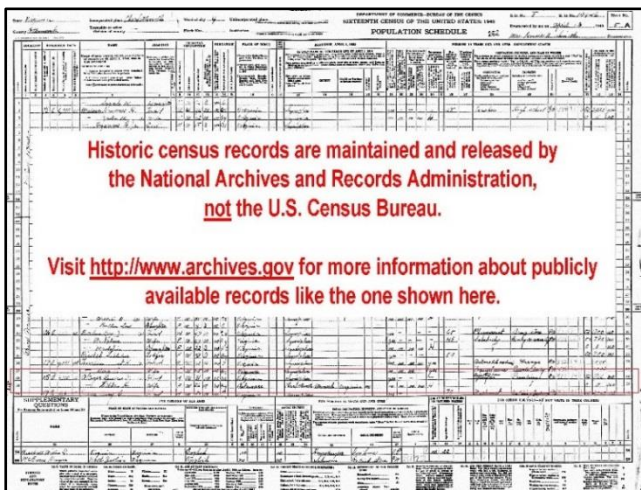
Hilda Lynch Altizer

Keypunch Operator and Deaf Advocate

The U.S. Census Bureau is proud of its history of employing people with handicaps and disabilities. Prior to the establishment of a permanent Census Bureau in 1902, many disabled war veterans received appointments as assistant marshals, census superintendents, supervisors, and enumerators. As the census became more complex in the late 19th century, a larger office force became necessary to compute and compile census reports. This led to more openings for people with disabilities that did not inhibit office work. Eventually, the Census Bureau fell under several mandates, such as the 1947 Executive Order 9644, which facilitated the hiring of disabled veterans, well before the national implementation of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.



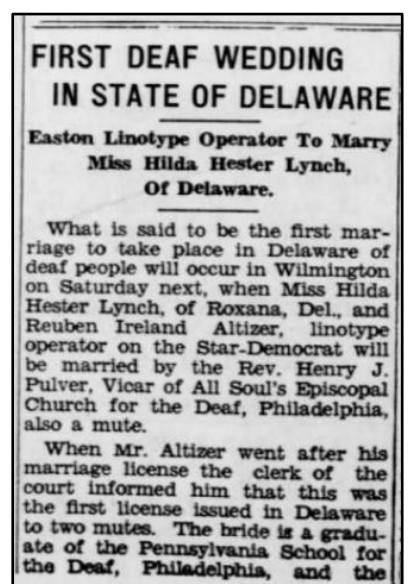
Hilda and Reuben on their wedding day.
Virginia Association of the Deaf, <www.vad.org/Obituaries.html>, accessed August 31, 2018.



Hilda and Reuben's 1940 Census.

Hilda Hester Lynch was born on February 27, 1914, in Delaware. Her family lived in Roxana, where her parents, Edgar and Carrie, ran a farm and raised Hilda and her four siblings. Hilda was born deaf, and attended the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf, which still serves children from early education through high school. A few years after her graduation, Hilda married Reuben I. Altizer on May 2, 1936, in a wedding that made news as the first completely deaf wedding, including the officiant, in Delaware. Reuben, a Virginia native and Gallaudet University graduate, worked as a typesetter.

Reuben also advocated for the deaf, and at the time of his marriage, he served as president for the alumni association of the Virginia School for the Deaf, and as secretary of the Virginia Association of the Deaf (VAD). Together, Hilda and Reuben traveled the world and had three children: Doris, Marlene, and Reuben. They also worked tirelessly, expanding options and opportunities for deaf people throughout Virginia and the Washington, DC area. Hilda and Reuben first settled in Charlottesville, VA, and Hilda joined the VAD, where Reuben continuously organized activities, such as their annual meetings. The couple relocated a few years later to Washington, DC, where in 1942, Reuben began working at the U.S. Government Printing Office. In 1948, the family moved to Arlington, VA. After raising her children, one of whom tragically died young, Hilda decided to enter the professional workforce. In 1964, at the age of 50, she began working at the Census Bureau.



The Star-Democrat
(Easton, MD), May 1, 1936.

Hilda was part of a joint program with Gallaudet University, which sought to place the deaf and hard of hearing in areas with high noise levels. These programs had been attempted at various times throughout the history of the Census Bureau, and evolved along with the changes in clerk work, tabulating equipment, and in the case of Hilda, the implementation of computers. Hilda worked as a data key operator in the Computer Services Division, and she soon mastered the binary code system. Between 1968 and 1975, Hilda earned 25 raises or cash bonuses for both her high rate and quality of work. She also helped train other census employees.



HILDA ALTIZER, one of the 10 outstanding handicapped federal employees for the year 1974, receives honorary plaque from Vice-President Nelson A. Rockefeller while James L. Pate, Assistant Secretary for Economic Affairs, Department of Commerce, looks on.

Hilda and Vice President Nelson Rockefeller, 1975.
The SESA Inquirer, May 1975.

In 1975, the United States Civil Service commission recognized Hilda, and nine other disabled federal government employees, for their exceptional service and performance. Vice President Nelson Rockefeller presented Hilda with her award, and she received a tour of the White House. Vice President Rockefeller noted that the strengths of the nation and the civil service included the benefits brought by those with different abilities.



Hilda (back row, third from the right) learning to work a keypunch at the Census Bureau, 1964.
Census Bulletin, June 16, 1964.

Hilda left the Census Bureau soon after she received her recognition in 1975. Although she had already done so much in her life, Hilda and Reuben still sought to help the deaf community. In 1945, Hilda and Reuben helped to establish the Northern Virginia Association of the Deaf (NVAD), an offshoot of the VAD. In 1981, NVAD named Hilda “Mother of the Year.”

Furthermore, in 1976, Hilda and Reuben realized that in addition to advocacy, deaf people needed an organization specifically to provide social functions, and they helped found the Happy Hands Club—a social group

for senior citizens who use American Sign Language. This club still thrives today and offers workshops, trips, monthly luncheons, and other activities.

In 1981, Reuben served on a local taskforce aimed at solving the lack of resources for deaf community members. This taskforce led to the creation of the Northern Virginia Resource Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons, where Hilda cut the ribbon in an opening ceremony in 1988. She received an honorary life membership in 1992 when she dedicated a room to the memory of her husband, who had passed away in 1984. In addition, Hilda was a member of the National Fraternal Society of the Deaf. Hilda passed away in Mathews, Virginia, on April 11, 2010. The Census Bureau is thankful for Hilda’s contributions, and of the contributions of all the members of our diverse workforce throughout the years.



Hilda, left, celebrating her 80th birthday.
The Northern Virginia Resource Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons, <<https://nvrc.org/about/nvrc-history/>>, accessed August 31, 2018.