

# A Timeline of Census History

Legend  
Staff Population Geography Economy Technology and Innovation Research and Methodology

## Census Supervisors



**Thomas Jefferson**  
(U.S. Secretary of State)

Population  
**3,929,214**

Under the leadership of the Secretary of State, U.S. Marshals conduct the nation's first census, which asks six questions.



New York is the nation's largest city with a population of 33,131.



**John Marshall**  
(U.S. Secretary of State)

Population  
**5,308,483**

Temporary census headquarters moves from New York City, NY, to Washington, DC.



**Robert Smith**  
(U.S. Secretary of State)

Population  
**7,239,881**

U.S. Marshals collect data on U.S. manufacturers while conducting the 1810 Census.



**John Quincy Adams**  
(U.S. Secretary of State)

Population  
**9,638,453**



U.S. Marshals make the first agriculture inquiries by collecting data on families' "agricultural pursuits."



**Martin Van Buren**  
(U.S. Secretary of State)

Population  
**12,860,702**

U.S. Marshals use uniform, printed schedules to collect census data. They do not collect manufacturing data due to its poor quality in 1810 and 1820.



**William Augustus Weaver**  
(1840–1842)

Population  
**17,063,353**

1849 Congress establishes a census board to oversee data collection.

U.S. Marshals resume collection of manufacturing data, as well as data on mining and fisheries.

1849 The U.S. Department of the Interior assumes control of census operations from the Department of State.



**Joseph C. G. Kennedy**  
(1850–1853)

Population  
**23,191,876**

The census records the names of all free persons in the household.



**J. D. B. DeBow**  
(1853–1855)

Population  
**23,191,876**

1854 Superintendent J. D. B. DeBow publishes the first map in a census publication.

Six questionnaires collect population, slave, mortality, agriculture, manufacturing, and government data.



**Joseph C. G. Kennedy**  
(1860–1865)

Population  
**31,443,321**

The census enumerates American Indians not living on tribal lands in own racial category.



**Francis Amasa Walker**  
(1870–1872)

Population  
**38,558,371**

The census records the name of every person living in a household.

1872 Charles W. Seaton introduces a mechanical tallying machine to speed tabulation of census data.

1874 Census Office publishes first Statistical Atlas of the United States.

1878 Census Office publishes the first annual Statistical Abstract.



**Francis Amasa Walker**  
(1879–1881)

Population  
**50,189,209**



**Charles W. Seaton**  
(1881–1885)



Specially trained supervisors and enumerators replace U.S. Marshals to collect census data.



**Robert Percival Porter**  
(1889–1893)

Population  
**62,979,766**



**Carroll D. Wright**  
(1893–1897)



Herman Hollerith's electric tabulator speeds tabulation of data.

First use of administration records to collect data on the recorded indebtedness of private corporations and individuals.

## Census Directors



**William Rush Merriam**  
(1899–1903)

Population  
**76,212,168**

1902 The U.S. Census Bureau becomes a permanent agency within the U.S. Department of the Interior. The next year it moves to the U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor.



**Simon Newton Dexter North**  
(1903–1909)

Population  
**92,228,496**

Questions about "Mother-Tongue" and Civil War veteran status asked.



**Edward Dana Durand**  
(1909–1913)

Population  
**92,228,496**

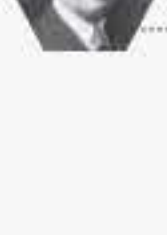
The Census Bureau conducts "emergency censuses" of vital industries, including steel, wool, leather, and explosives to support the war effort.



**William J. Harris**  
(1913–1915)

Population  
**106,021,537**

First time majority of U.S. population lives in urban areas.



**Samuel Lyle Rogers**  
(1915–1921)

Population  
**106,021,537**

1921–1927 Economic growth and need for economic data result in biennial censuses of manufacturing in 1921, 1923, 1925, and 1927.



**William Mott Steuart**  
(1921–1933)

Population  
**123,202,624**

1933 Census of selected service industries conducted as part of the New Deal programs.



**William Lane Austin**  
(1933–1941)

Population  
**132,164,569**

The Census Bureau studies the use of statistical sampling and conducts a census of unemployment.



**James Clyde Capt**  
(1941–1949)

Population  
**132,164,569**

First use of statistical sampling during a decennial census.



**Roy Victor Peel**  
(1950–1953)

Population  
**151,325,798**

1951 The Census Bureau receives UNIVAC I, the first nonmilitary computer.



**Robert Wilbur Burgess**  
(1953–1961)

Population  
**151,325,798**

1953 The Census Bureau develops the Film Optical Sensing Device for Input to Computers (FOSDIC) to replace punch cards.



**Richard M. Scammon**  
(1961–1965)

Population  
**179,323,175**

1963 Populations in urban areas receive questionnaires by mail before enumerator visits.



**A. Ross Eckler**  
(1965–1969)

Population  
**179,323,175**

1967 Congress changes economic census years to those ending in "2" and "7."



**George Hay Brown**  
(1969–1973)

Population  
**203,302,031**

1972 Hispanic-origin asked of 5 percent of U.S. population.



**Vincent P. Barabba**  
(1973–1976)

Population  
**203,302,031**

1976 Introduction of the Survey of Minority-Owned Businesses



**Manuel D. Plotkin**  
(1977–1979)

Population  
**203,302,031**

1977 Introduction of the Survey of Women-Owned Businesses



**Vincent P. Barabba**  
(1979–1981)

Population  
**226,542,199**

Hispanic-origin asked of all households.



**Bruce Chapman**  
(1981–1983)

Population  
**226,542,199**

95 percent of U.S. households receive mailout/mailback questionnaires.



**John G. Keane**  
(1984–1987)

Population  
**226,542,199**

1987 The Data Processing Division opens in Jeffersonville, IN.



**Barbara Everitt Bryant**  
(1989–1993)

Population  
**248,709,873**

1997 Topologically Integrated Geographic Encoding and Referencing (TIGER) system creates a digital geographic database of the nation.



**Martha Farnsworth Riche**  
(1994–1998)

Population  
**248,709,873**

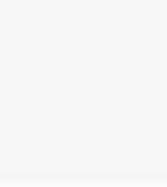
1998 The Data Processing Division in Jeffersonville, IN, changes its name to the National Processing Center.



**Kenneth Prewitt**  
(1998–2001)

Population  
**281,421,906**

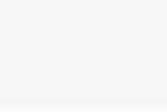
2001 Multiple responses to the race question permitted. First use of a paid advertising campaign.



**Charles Louis Kincannon**  
(2002–2008)

Population  
**308,745,538**

2005 The annual American Community Survey replaces the decennial census long form.



**Steve H. Murdock**  
(2008–2009)

Population  
**308,745,538**

2007 Publication of first statistical Atlas of the United States since 1920.



**Robert M. Groves**  
(2009–2012)

Population  
**308,745,538**

Releases of 5-year American Community Survey estimates.



**John H. Thompson**  
(2013–2017)

Population  
**308,745,538**

Releases of first same-sex household data.



**Steven D. Dillingham**  
(2019–2021)

Population  
**331,449,281**

Enumerators use handheld devices to upload collected information directly to database.



**Robert L. Santos**  
(2022–)

Population  
**331,449,281**

Majority of households answer the decennial census via the new internet response option.

65 percent of addresses validated via GIS and satellite imagery.

The Disclosure Avoidance System data enhances protections of individual data.

1790

**JANUARY 8, 1790** President George Washington gives the first State of the Union Address.

**FEBRUARY 20, 1792** Establishment of U.S. Post Office Department

**MARCH 14, 1794** Eli Whitney patents the cotton gin.

**JULY 10, 1797** The United States launches its first naval ship, the frigate *USS United States*.

1800

**APRIL 30, 1803** The United States purchases 828,000 square miles from France for the price of \$15 million.

**MAY 14, 1804** Lewis and Clark Expedition begins.

**1806** Noah Webster publishes the *Compendious Dictionary of the English Language*.

**AUGUST 17, 1807** Robert Fulton makes the first steamboat journey up the Hudson River from New York City, NY, to Albany, NY.

1810

**OCTOBER 11, 1811** Steam-powered ferry service between New York City, NY, and Hoboken, NJ, begins.

**JUNE 18, 1812–FEBRUARY 18, 1815** War of 1812

**SEPTEMBER 13–14, 1814** Francis Scott Key writes *The Star-Spangled Banner*.

**APRIL 4, 1818** Congress adopts twenty stars and thirteen stripes configuration of the U.S. flag, with a star added for each new state.

1820

**NOVEMBER 20, 1820** A whale sinks the whaling ship *Essex* inspiring Herman Melville's 1851 novel, *Moby Dick*.

**DECEMBER 2, 1823** President James Monroe's "Monroe Doctrine" considers future European attempts to recolonize North America as hostile.

**OCTOBER 26, 1825** The first boat leaves Buffalo, NY, en route to New York City, NY, via the Erie Canal.

**FEBRUARY 28, 1827** The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad becomes the first to provide rail transportation for people and goods.

1830

**MARCH 19, 1831** Edward Smith commits the first bank robbery in the United States when he steals \$245,000 from the City Bank of New York.

**JULY 24, 1832** The first wagon train crosses the Rocky Mountains at Wyoming's South Pass.

**FEBRUARY 23–MARCH 6, 1836** The Battle for the Alamo waged in San Antonio, TX.

**FEBRUARY 11, 1839** University of Missouri in Columbia, MO, becomes the first college west of the Mississippi River.

1840

**AUGUST 9, 1842** The Webster-Ashburton Treaty formalizes the U.S.-Canadian border east of the Rocky Mountains.

**MAY 24, 1844** Samuel B. Morse sends the message, "What hath God wrought" over the first telegraph line from Washington, DC, to Baltimore, MD.

**SEPTEMBER 1845** The "Great Potato Famine" begins, resulting in a surge of Irish immigration to the United States.

**JANUARY 24, 1848** A worker discovers gold at Sutter's Mill in California.

1850

**MARCH 20, 1852** Harriet Beecher Stowe publishes the anti-slavery masterpiece, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

**JULY 8, 1853** Commodore Matthew Perry lands in Edo Bay, Japan, and negotiates a trade agreement.

**MARCH 23, 1857** Elisha Otis installs the first elevator in a building at 488 Broadway in New York City, NY.

**OCTOBER 16, 1859** John Brown leads a raid on the armory at Harper's Ferry, VA (now WV).

1860

**APRIL 3, 1860** The first Pony Express riders leave St. Joseph, MO, heading west and San Francisco, CA, heading east.

**APRIL 12, 1861–MAY 9, 1865** U.S. Civil War

**MARCH 30, 1867** The United States buys Alaska from Russia.

**DECEMBER 10, 1869** Wyoming becomes the first state to give women the right to vote.

1870

**MARCH 30, 1870** The 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution gives the right to vote to all men, regardless of race.

**OCTOBER 8–10, 1871** A fire kills 300 people, destroys more than 3 square miles, and leaves 100,000 homeless in Chicago, IL.

**MARCH 1, 1872** Yellowstone Park, which covers parts of Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho, becomes the first national park.

**JUNE 25–26, 1872** Sioux and Cheyenne Indians defeat George Custer and the 7th U.S. Cavalry at the Battle of the Little Big Horn.

1880

**JULY 4, 1881** Booker T. Washington opens the Tuskegee Institute (now Tuskegee University