

POPULATION

# Census Stages Rehearsal

## Uncle Sam's 1940 Event Will Be Biggest and Best; Preview in Indiana Went Off Without a Hitch

By EMILY C. DAVIS

**T**AKING a psychological tip from Broadway's theatrical world, Census Bureau officials are doubly on the alert these days, as they push to completion ambitious plans for the 1940 census.

It's to be bigger and better than ever—the sixteenth United States census. And it has brand new features. So, the Bureau had the bright idea of staging a trial census in a couple of Indiana counties in August.

And now, officials are in the pleased but baffled state of a theatrical producer whose dress rehearsal has run off so smoothly that he had no chance to detect snags likely to occur in the real performance. In show business that means, be extra careful about everything; and the Census Bureau is taking heed.

But the public can relax, if the government can't. After all, no United States census has ever been a flop, and thinking of everything in advance is a Census Bureau specialty.

"Ma—the census man's here!" won't be heard in American homes until April 1940. But what the population enumerator will ask you is now pretty well decided.

You won't have to report that you can read and write. Few Americans are illiterate nowadays. Instead, the enumerator will inquire the last grade in school you attended, which provides far more specific and significant information.

### Where Were You?

You will have to think back, and tell the enumerator where you lived five years ago. That answer obtained in every home in the country will show how much of the population is moving from south to north, out of dust bowl areas and into which states, from farm to city and from city to suburban village. There are trends in this country, but without a nationwide query, business men and governmental and other agencies can see only part of the picture.

And now comes a question that the Census Bureau felt must be asked, but it was uneasy as to whether Americans could take it. The most serious prob-

lems in America are economic. The country has made tremendous strides in health and education, but unemployment of millions is still faced as a giant question mark. The Census Bureau took a long breath and decided to ask American people about their wages and salaries.

To the Bureau's pleasant surprise, few people in the trial census this summer objected to telling what they earned in twelve months preceding. The people most likely to protest, it is indicated, are those making high salaries. Actually, they are not so important for census information on this point, and if they make more than \$5,000, they may simply say so. A few in the trial census could not figure up what they earned, because they had worked so irregularly. Generally speaking, the data collected on wages and salaries are expected to yield valuable statistics. Needless to say, census answers are confidential. It is only the tables of facts and figures that become public.

### How Many Wives?

Also new in the 1940 census will be certain questions on marriage and size of families. This time, the enumerator will ask adults how many times they have been married. Parents will be asked how many children they have ever had, including those who have died but excluding the still-born.

Never before has the census counted tombstones, so to speak. But scientists who specialize in population problems say that it is important for the United States' future to get the facts about American fertility.

Whether children are taken off by sickness or accidents is beside the point for this purpose. Those are losses which medical and safety campaigns may reduce.

But knowing the number of children produced will enable population scientists to figure more wisely whether immigration should be limited or encouraged, and whether America should encourage large families, which Italy and some countries do by taxing bachelors more heavily, for example.

Among new features of the census will be a survey of housing, taken in 25,000,000 homes. This will be particularly interesting to business men, who can profit by knowing how American homes are heated, how lighted, how many have running water, how the home is financed, and so on—a new game of "twenty questions" with a serious and useful purpose.

The censuses of population, housing, and agriculture will start April 1 and take about a month. April is a good time to find Americans at home.

The business census will start ringing doorbells of retailers, wholesalers, innkeepers, theater owners, and other business proprietors on January 2, and will spend six months at it.

### How Rush Methods Work

These time-allowances for fact gathering may seem slow compared to stories you have heard about rapid foreign head counts. The Turks took their first census in 1927 in one huge day. But they did it by ordering people to stay at home, suspending business, stationing armed guards in the streets. At 10:15 p. m., guns announced that the census taking was over, and people could come out. The Soviet Union took its 1937 census in one day, but the schedule of only 14 questions required 1,200,000 workers. That would total somewhat less than three billion questions.

United States enumerators expect to ask seven billion questions in their round of inquiring about population, housing and agriculture.

Counting heads is a minor part of the 1940 census. Director of the Census William L. Austin has already forecast that the United States population will total around 132,000,000. It will be within a half million of that forecast, you can be sure.

Even the first United States census in 1790 was somewhat more than a count to find out how many people the country had. Taken for figuring Congressional representation, the census counted heads in the family, noting the number of free white males over and under sixteen; the free white females—tactfully no questions asked about age; other free persons, grouped together without distinction of sex; and the number of slaves. That was the enumerator's



### THEY ARE COUNTED, TOO

*This is a scene at the dress rehearsal census already completed in Indiana. America's trailer population creates a new task for the census takers.*

whole battery of inquiries; in 1930, the number of questions was up to 30.

Overloading the schedule of questions is regarded by the government bureau as a real danger. Every item added, or left out, in revising the questionnaire is carefully judged. Many people urge the Census Bureau to include information they consider valuable. The Bureau has been asked to count dogs, fence posts, blonds and brunettes, and nursing mothers. None of these can be counted in 1940. Questions are chosen as having greatest usefulness for social and economic problems.

Handling the data that come piling into the Bureau when the harvest of questions is over, is a gigantic statistical project. The Census Bureau is proud owner of the largest battery of unit tabu-

lating equipment possessed by any organization. One of its own employees invented the first machine to tabulate the census of 1890. The system of punching cards, so that they can be sorted according to the holes for tabulating and automatic totalling, is a triumph of machine work.

The Bureau likes to remind you that this machine work on the cards of the 1930 census was the equivalent of handling over 4,700,000,000 cards once.

Maybe that gives you an idea why the Bureau is so busy getting ready for the next, even bigger card crop, and also why it thinks twice and confers with government and business advisers before it decides to ask one more question.

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#### MEDICINE

## Pituitary Gland Failure Held To Be Cause of Sprue

**A** NEW theory of the cause of sprue, a serious disease of the tropics which also occurs in the United States and other temperate regions, was announced by Dr. Edward B. Vedder, of George Washington Medical School, at the meeting of the American Society of Tropical Medicine in Memphis.

Sprue, Dr. Vedder believes, is caused by a failure of the tiny but powerful pituitary gland at the base of the brain. This little gland produces a number of hormones, among them one called prolactin which stimulates milk secretion, and which also has an effect on the digestive tract. It is lack of this hormone

## ● RADIO

Dr. Dean R. Brimhall, assistant to the chairman of the Civil Aeronautics Authority, will describe the research on training of America's flyers of tomorrow as guest scientist on "Adventures in Science" with Watson Davis, director of Science Service, over the coast to coast network of the Columbia Broadcasting System, Monday, December 11, 3:35 p.m., EST, 2:35 CST, 1:35 MST, 12:35 PST. Listen in on your local station. Listen in each Monday.

which Dr. Vedder believes causes sprue, and he would like physicians to try the hormone as a remedy for their sprue patients.

Most effective remedies for sprue at present are liver extract or some other source of the vitamin B<sub>2</sub> complex, but Dr. Vedder believes the gland hormone would prove a better remedy.

Sore mouth, anemia and digestive disorder are characteristic symptoms of sprue. The digestive disorders set up a vicious cycle, because the sprue patient already unable to absorb enough of the B vitamins, has more and more trouble getting enough of these vitamins which he needs to remedy his illness. In severe cases they must be given by hypodermic injections. A number of scientists have concluded that the digestive disorder and vitamin deficiency were important parts of the picture, but no satisfactory explanation for what starts the vicious cycle has hitherto been forthcoming.

The start of the digestive disorder, Dr. Vedder believes, is the failure of the anterior pituitary gland to produce enough prolactin to keep the digestive tract functioning smoothly. Tropical service, he suggests, precipitates the pituitary gland failure in some persons, but such gland failure may occur without the precipitating effect of long periods of tropical heat, which may explain the nearly 200 cases of non-tropical sprue in medical records.

*Science News Letter, December 2, 1939*

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