

Census info: Future . . . and past

By Karen Zach, Around the County

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Lately, the scuttlebutt on the Indiana Genealogy Facebook page naturally has centered around the 2020 census. Some are readying to be enumerators; others want to know what will be included for genealogical purposes (like we'll be around to see it released in 75 years) and still others have shown us handwriting examples of their ancestors who were census workers in the distant past.

So, in honor of the upcoming census year, I thought I'd start with my favorite one and tell you about those men who took the enumerations in Montgomery County during July 1859-July 1860.

Samuel McComas passed through the cholera scourge of 1832 living as a young man with his parents in Kentucky near the Ohio River. "People died like sheep around us." He felt some people in his community were even buried alive as relatives would sweep people out of their homes to help "bury the disease." McComas remembered a particularly beautiful young woman who was very sick and pronounced dead and quickly put in the coffin but as the family said their final farewells someone noticed her moving. Frightened but overjoyed, the doctor was called and when he arrived, he found the girl in bed, talking and with his aide was soon up and well. Talk about a narrow escape. Quite an intellect, McComas served as a JP around New Richmond for more than two decades. He not only took the Coal Creek and Madison township portions of the census in 1860, he married during that year as well to Susan Pitts. An active member of the New Richmond Christian Church and an even more active Mason, he was born May 25, 1811 in Lewis County, Kentucky then lived in Adams County, Ohio before coming to Montgomery County. His first wife had been Maria Carr whom he lost the year before his census taking. Altogether, he fathered 14 children. Samuel died November 6 in 1897 thus had lead a good long life of 86 years despite it all.

John Lee who tallied the city of Crawfordsville was born right here in Montgomery County on March 11th in 1826, son of Elder John Lee, a minister in our first Primitive Baptist Church. Much into politics, John served as county treasurer in 1856, did our census in '60 and was appointed deputy US Marshall which he continued during the Civil War. After losing a state senate race, he began an interest in railroading, even serving as president of the Lake Erie & St. Louis road, later owning the same position with two other railroads. At one time he headed the prison in northern Indiana and served on a World's Fair Commission. His wife was Letitia West with whom he had five children, one being the wife of our famous author, (James) Maurice Thompson. In all articles, it noted that he was a warm-hearted, genial man. He passed away in mid-June, 1891 and is buried (photo from findagrave) in Oak Hill Cemetery.

Albert Allen enumerated Brown and Scott townships and is buried at Freedom cemetery (Brown Township) dying 28 June 1892, having been born 3 February 1835. Seven years after doing the census, he married Perlina Hanna on Valentine's Day. Sadly, she lived but two years, having one daughter who passed away at age 22. At the time of his death, it was noted that he left a considerable amount of property but had no one to receive it; however, he was one of seven children born to Joseph and Margery James Allen, Joseph having been a Justice of the Peace for many years, the county sheriff, in the state legislature and a non-tiring Mason. The Masons presided over Albert's funeral.

Paul Hughes was Union, Franklin and Sugar Creek and a versatile and active businessman. He delved into various occupations, including owning a bakery, grocery, delving in property development; farming and active in the Agricultural Association of the community. He had several brothers and sisters, including Gamaliel, Sam, Polly, Jesse and Minerva (children of John and Rhuma Fuller Hughes). He married America VanArsdall and they parented a daughter, Martha who moved to California and Harry, the "sage carpenter for the Danville, Illinois Grand Old Opera House" (from his obit). His father passed away at Harry's home after falling down a flight of stairs. Paul is buried in Oak Hill where much of his family is, as well!

John Price Stover was not born in our county as most of the others were, but hailed from Botetourt County, Virginia and came with his parents, George and Anna Rader Stover when he was quite small. He had eleven brothers and sisters. There was quite a variety of occupations in this family, including carpenters, school teachers, farmers and most graduated from college which was very rare for the times. John Stover was a cabinet maker so carpenter with a specific flare. He married Sarah Webb not long after serving as the census taker (for Walnut and Clark), and had five known children, all daughters. He took his family to Missouri where he died (February 25, 1921) and is buried in Hazelwood Cemetery in Springfield.

James Hanna Watson was born here on the 9th day of November in 1836 and passed here the first day of 1899. He and wife Elizabeth Reynolds (married 15 Jan 1867) had no children but he partially raised his nephew William Watson Vance the two of them being in the carriage making business. He was in Company G Indiana Infantry during the Civil War and his widow received her first payment of his pension on the last day of the month of his death. His father, William P. Watson was a leather merchant as was his mother, working right along with him, rather unusual for the day. They too had a small family for the times.

Lastly, I played "find the census taker," but never did. James O'Brien totaled those living in Union and Sugar Creek, but there is NO James O'Brien anyway I can think of to spell it in that census record here in our county. Found all the others but not him. There is one age two in 1850 but he obviously wasn't going to be taking the '60 census at age 12. Maybe I'll catch him sometime but as of now, I'd guess he was a very sharp Irishman who was working on the railroad, stopped to take the census (which would have been easier and more money) then went on farther to work on building another road. Just an intellectual guess there, though.

Yet, I can suffice to say the census takers at least in Montgomery County, Indiana for the 1860 census were highly intelligent and the cream of the crop of local talent! I surely enjoyed checking out these fellas and hope you enjoyed reading about those who tallied us all up!

Karen Zach is the editor of Montgomery Memories, our monthly magazine all about Montgomery County. Her column, Around the County, appears each Thursday in The Paper of Montgomery County.