

# Demps Whipper Powell

## Civil War Veteran, Enumerator, Patriarch

The U.S. Census Bureau is proud of its history of continually evolving to ensure an accurate count of the people of the United States. To accomplish this, the Census Bureau has long embraced the hiring of a diverse workforce representative of local communities and the people who were a part of the neighborhoods that they counted. For this reason, census work was often one of the few government jobs open to minorities. Beginning with the 1870 Census (the first after the abolition of slavery), the Census Bureau began hiring African Americans as enumerators and data processors. With the creation of a permanent Census Bureau in 1902, Black workers and statisticians found an environment with an inclusiveness far greater than many contemporary institutions.



DEMPs W. POWELL  
Afro-American (Baltimore, MD) 5 April 1941

TWELFTH CENSUS OF THE UNITED STATES. 29 A 67

SCHEDULE No. 1.—POPULATION.

State South Carolina (Beaufort) (Beaufort) (Beaufort)

Enumeration District No. 29 Sheet No. 67

Name of Institution X Word of city 1447

Enumerated by one on the 26th day of June, 1900. Demps Powell Enumerator.

LOCALITY	NAME	RELATION	PERSONAL DESCRIPTION	MARRIAGE	LANGUAGE	SPEECH, HEARING, OR OTHER DEFECT	INDUSTRY	SEX AND AGE	
								Male	Female
1	Demps Powell	Head	Male, 45, colored	Married	English	None	None	0	0
2	Frances Powell	Wife	Female, 40, white	Married	English	None	None	0	0
3	William J. Whipper	Son	Male, 15, white	Single	English	None	None	0	0
4	John Powell	Son	Male, 12, colored	Single	English	None	None	0	0
5	Mary Powell	Daughter	Female, 10, colored	Single	English	None	None	0	0
6	James Powell	Son	Male, 8, colored	Single	English	None	None	0	0
7	Elizabeth Powell	Daughter	Female, 6, colored	Single	English	None	None	0	0
8	Demps Powell	Son	Male, 4, colored	Single	English	None	None	0	0
9	Frances Powell	Daughter	Female, 3, colored	Single	English	None	None	0	0
10	Demps Powell	Son	Male, 2, colored	Single	English	None	None	0	0
11	Demps Powell	Son	Male, 1, colored	Single	English	None	None	0	0
12	Demps Powell	Son	Male, 0, colored	Single	English	None	None	0	0
13	Demps Powell	Son	Male, 0, colored	Single	English	None	None	0	0
14	Demps Powell	Son	Male, 0, colored	Single	English	None	None	0	0
15	Demps Powell	Son	Male, 0, colored	Single	English	None	None	0	0
16	Demps Powell	Son	Male, 0, colored	Single	English	None	None	0	0
17	Demps Powell	Son	Male, 0, colored	Single	English	None	None	0	0
18	Demps Powell	Son	Male, 0, colored	Single	English	None	None	0	0
19	Demps Powell	Son	Male, 0, colored	Single	English	None	None	0	0
20	Demps Powell	Son	Male, 0, colored	Single	English	None	None	0	0
21	Demps Powell	Son	Male, 0, colored	Single	English	None	None	0	0
22	Demps Powell	Son	Male, 0, colored	Single	English	None	None	0	0
23	Demps Powell	Son	Male, 0, colored	Single	English	None	None	0	0
24	Demps Powell	Son	Male, 0, colored	Single	English	None	None	0	0
25	Demps Powell	Son	Male, 0, colored	Single	English	None	None	0	0
26	Demps Powell	Son	Male, 0, colored	Single	English	None	None	0	0
27	Demps Powell	Son	Male, 0, colored	Single	English	None	None	0	0
28	Demps Powell	Son	Male, 0, colored	Single	English	None	None	0	0
29	Demps Powell	Son	Male, 0, colored	Single	English	None	None	0	0
30	Demps Powell	Son	Male, 0, colored	Single	English	None	None	0	0

Historic census records are maintained and released by the National Archives and Records Administration, not the U.S. Census Bureau.

Visit <http://www.archives.gov> for more information about publicly available records like the one shown here.

Powell Family, 1900 Census, enumerated by Demps

Demps Powell was born into slavery in 1851 in Louisville,

Georgia. Demps' mother was a house slave and his father was most likely the plantation owner. As a result of his mother's duties, Demps spent most of his childhood in the "big house" as opposed to being in the fields. As a young teenager, he saw the U.S. Civil War engulf the nation, and his father went to serve in the Confederate Army. When Union General

William Tecumseh Sherman launched his famous March to the Sea across Georgia in 1864, Demps, along with thousands of other slaves, fled to the Union forces and freedom. Despite his young age, Demps joined the Union ranks for the final days of the war and lost contact with his family.

In 1865, Demps, only 15 years old, worked as an office boy in the provost court offices in Beaufort, South Carolina. While sitting in the office door one day, William J. Whipper, a prominent African-American lawyer, former Union noncommissioned officer, and future judge and politician, found the boy and recognized him as a fellow veteran. When he realized that Demps had no family and no safe place to stay, William sent Demps to his house to have breakfast. William's wife, Frances, grew so fond of the bright young man that they eventually adopted him. Although he wished to change his last name to Whipper, William convinced Demps to keep his last name in case he wished to find his birth family, and Demps instead added Whipper as his middle name.



## COURT OF GENERAL SESSIONS.

The February term of Court for this County opened on Monday; but in consequence of the absence of jurors no sessions business was transacted. Messrs. Whipper, Williams and Solicitor Lee, were appointed by the Court to act as a Committee to examine applicants who petitioned for admission to practice before the court. S. D. Gilbert, J. W. Collins, L. S. Langley, A. G. Thomas, A. H. Ezekiel and D. W. Powell were examined in open court after which they were duly sworn as attorneys.

*The Beaufort Tribune and Port Royal Commercial*  
(Beaufort, SC) 8 February 1877

William Whipper greatly influenced the young Demps. Around 1873, Demps attended Claflin University where he studied printing and used these skills to help his adopted father's newspaper, *The Beaufort Tribune*, as well as the *Beaufort Gazette*. After receiving his education, working as an office boy in the court, and studying under William in his law office for many years, Demps eventually became an attorney in 1877, although he would only practice law sporadically. In 1882, Demps received an appointment for postmaster of Coosaw, a town in Beaufort County, where he served for 4 years. In 1890, Charleston received a contract to build the Charleston Navy Yard to help spur economic regrowth in a South Carolina economy still crippled by the Civil War. The U.S. Navy took control of the yard in 1901 and

Demps worked there from its inception, in a job that lasted several decades.

In 1890, Demps received another government appointment as enumerator for the Eleventh United States Census. Unfortunately, the details of Demps' enumeration district, or districts, or the number of people he counted are unavailable. In 1921, a fire in the U.S. Department of Commerce building destroyed the vast majority of the 1890 population schedules along with other census records, including the 1890 Census of Union Veterans.

Demps once again received an appointment to take the census in 1900. On the census form for which he enumerated himself, Demps lived with his wife, Mary E., a school teacher who Demps married in 1879, and seven of their children. In the district of Beaufort which he enumerated, Demps counted 2,876 people, for which he received the enumerator pay rate of 2 cents per person.

Following his extensive service to the United States government—as a member of the Union Army, as a postmaster, as a census taker, and as a worker in the Navy Yard—Demps retired to Washington, DC, where many of the Whipper family



Charleston Navy Yard, c. 1900, where Demps worked for many years  
(Library of Congress)

## D.C. Family Boasts of 3 Generations of Warriors



Warrant Officer Albert Winthrop of the Merchant Marine (left) shown with his grandfather, Demps W. Powell, 94 (center), who marched to the sea with General Sherman, and his father, Joseph Winthrop, who served in World War I.

*Afro-American* (Baltimore, MD) 10 March 1945

had also moved. Demps remained active in his garden and the church, which named a club in his honor. Demps' family descendants were similarly successful: several children and grandchildren served in the military and one son became a career employee at the U.S. Postal Office. Just short of his 102<sup>nd</sup> birthday, Demps passed away on March 14, 1953, and is buried in Lincoln Memorial Cemetery, next to Census Bureau Headquarters in Suitland, Maryland. We are grateful to Demps for his extensive service to the U.S. Census Bureau and our country.