

Nannie May Lancaster

Census Clerk, Community Activist, Journalist

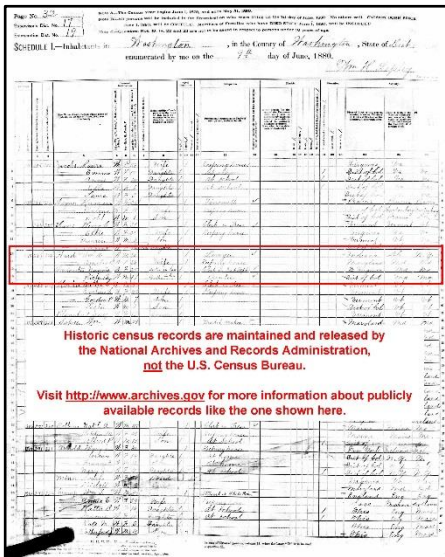
The U.S. Census Bureau has always been ahead of the curve when it comes to employing women. Ever since 1880, when it started using professional enumerators rather than U.S. marshals, the Census Office has employed women in that role. With the advent of the Hollerith tabulating machine in 1890, women moved into the role of keypunchers. By 1909, 10 years before the 19th amendment granted national women's suffrage, over 50 percent of the Census Bureau's 624 permanent employees were women. As women proved themselves as capable as the men, and with the increasing number of women in the workforce, it became harder for the Census Bureau to justify assigning all supervisory positions to men. By 1920, the Census Bureau would once again push forward appointing the first five female supervisors, as well as the first three female expert chiefs of divisions. Many of these pioneering women who worked on the census in these early years also broke through in other fields, such as law, medicine, education, activism, journalism, and the arts.



MISS NANNIE LANCASTER.

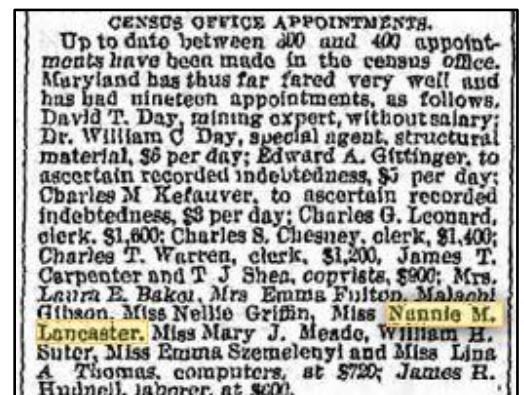
The Evening Star (Washington, DC)
October 27, 1930

Nannie M. Lancaster was born on May 21, 1853, in Alexandria, VA. At just 1 month old, Nannie's family moved across the Potomac River to Washington, DC, where Nannie would make her home for the rest of her life. Nannie's father, John, held several government positions, including temporary postmaster and as a clerk in the treasury and auditor's departments. Later in life, he worked as a merchant. Nannie's mother, Rosetta, kept house and took care of Nannie and her seven brothers and sisters. Rosetta died in 1863. Nannie's father remarried, giving Nannie three more half-siblings before he passed away in 1876. Although there is little information on Nannie's early education, based on her later social mobility, career, and affiliation with the Catholic church and religious charities, it is most likely that she attended a prestigious Catholic girls school—like her sister Amelia, who attended the Academy of the Visitation in Georgetown, DC.



Nannie's 1880 census, showing her working for the Department of the Interior, which included the temporary 1880 census office.

By 1870, at the age of 17, Nannie had moved in with her sister Amelia and her husband. That same year, Nannie attended a dance academy in Georgetown—considered a necessity for the social education of young women in those days—and spent her youth and early adulthood polishing her music and writing skills. In 1880, Nannie joined the U.S. Interior Department, where she worked as a copyist and computer on the decennial census. The 1880 Census marked an impressive expansion over previous censuses and the results, encompassing demographic, social, and economic statistics, as well as special reports on Alaska and American Indians, filled 22 volumes.



The Baltimore Sun (Baltimore, MD) January 13, 1890

WOMEN PRESS WORKERS.
A National League Organized for Mutual Benefit.
 At a meeting held at the home of Mrs. Mary A. Denison, the author, on Saturday, June 26, 1897, at 8 p. m., a body of active press women and authors organized the League of American Pen Women, with the following as charter members: Margaret Sullivan Burke, Anna Sanborn Hamilton, Marian Lengfellow O'Donoghue, Margaret Temple Bayard, Mary A. Denison, Tillie Orr Hays, Ada Tower Cable, Bell V. Sherwood, Margaret Wade, Abbie G. Baker, **Nannie M. Lancaster**, Alice R. Morgan, Mattie Hamilton Flick, Virginia King Frye, Emma V. Triepell, Jennie S. Campbell and Anna B. Patten. The object of this league is "to unite press women and authors for mutual benefit and the strength that comes of union." The eligibility clause reads as follows: "Only such persons as are actively engaged in journalistic or press work, or who are authors, are eligible to membership in the League of American Pen Women."

The Evening Times (Washington, DC) July 10, 1897

By 1883, the vast majority of temporary census workers had completed their work, and while many found work in other sectors of the government, like the treasury, patent, or pension offices, Nannie decided to pursue her passion of writing. Some of Nannie's earliest stories appear in Washington's *The Evening Star*, as well as other regional papers in the mid-1880s, and several featured women. To help support herself during her freelance writing and journalism career, Nannie also taught music.

In 1890, Nannie once again found herself drawn to government work as a computer for the 11th Census of the United States. The 1890 Census revolutionized census taking through the use of Herman Hollerith's tabulation machine, which greatly reduced the amount of time needed for compiling raw census data.

However, the 1890 Census took a similar amount of time as previous census to complete the tabulation due to the increased amount of information collected.

In fact, 1890 marks the high point for the amount of queries conducted as part of a decennial census. In addition to the same subjects as those from the 1880 Census, new entries included questions about ownership and indebtedness of farms and homes and detailed questions of surviving Union veterans and their widows. Another new question dealt with race and included "Japanese" as a category for the first time.

Following her work with the 1890 Census and the subsequent drawdown of temporary employees, Nannie returned to teaching music and freelance journalism. Several newspapers, including *The Washington Times*, *The Washington News*, and *The New York Tribune* published her work. As part of her dedication to her profession, Nannie helped establish an industry group for women, The National League of American Pen Women, in 1897. In 1905, Nannie began her career at *The Evening Star*, one of Washington's leading local papers, and worked there for 25 years. Although Nannie wrote articles on a variety of subjects, she also had charge of two weekly society columns, "Around the City" and "News of the Clubs," for which she received the most recognition. Nannie's timely updates on club business helped inform the variety of women's groups who spearheaded some of the major social changes of their day, such as prohibition, social work, and the women's suffrage movement.



Miss Nannie Lancaster and flowers presented to her today by her friends on *The Star* as a token of their affection and appreciation on the twentieth anniversary of her coming to this newspaper.

The Evening Star (Washington, DC) November 18, 1925

In addition to her reporting about women's clubs, Nannie also held membership in several organizations, such as the Women's City Club, the 20th Century Club, the Catholic Women's Circle, the Women's Relief Committee (a Grand Army of the Republic affiliate) and the Susan B. Anthony Foundation. Nannie worked at *The Evening Star* until her passing on October 27,

AROUND THE CITY
 —By Nannie Lancaster—
News of the Clubs
 —CONDUCTED BY NANNIE LANCASTER—

Two of Nannie's most popular columns from *The Evening Star*

1930, in Washington, DC. The Census Bureau is proud of Nannie's pioneering civil service, journalism, and contributions to her community.