

# Olive M. Riddleberger

*An Expert Statistician*

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 had 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 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment granted national women's suffrage, over 50 percent of the Census Bureau's 624 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 by appointing the first five female supervisors, as well as the first three female expert chiefs of divisions.

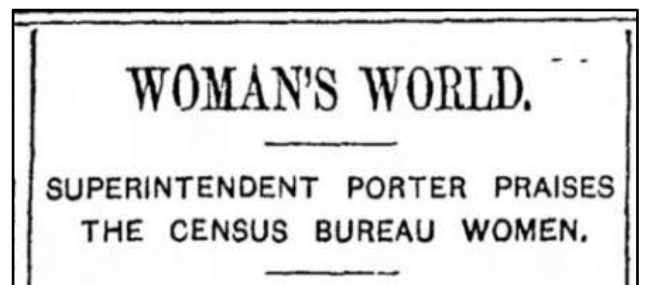


Washington Evening Star (Washington, D.C.); 2 Jan 1916

Riddleberger Family 1880 Census

Olive Mizpah Riddleberger was born on January 21, 1870, in Woodstock, VA, the second of seven children in a notable political family. Her father, Harrison Holt Riddleberger, was a former Confederate officer, lawyer, and well-known Virginia politician. He was elected as a third party candidate for the Readjusters (a coalition of Republicans, conservative Democrats, and African-Americans). Harrison was in state politics from 1871 to 1882, and served as a U.S Senator from 1883 to 1889. Harrison had a particularly fiery temper—he once fought two duels in one day, and had multiple detentions or arrests, the most memorable of which occurred on his last day in the Senate. Olive attended the Shenandoah Female Institute for most of the 1880s and after graduation she gained employment with the Census Office in 1889 as a stenographer.

Olive's employment began a career that spanned almost 50 years. In 1892, Olive advanced to the position of computer. She helped handle the calculations and computations facilitated by the groundbreaking Hollerith counting machine, which the Census Office employed for the first time during the 1890 census. Starting in 1897, Olive pursued higher education in her free time and studied mathematics and statistics at Columbian University (later George Washington University) for two years. Although she did not get a degree, the advantages of her extra education changed the direction her career.



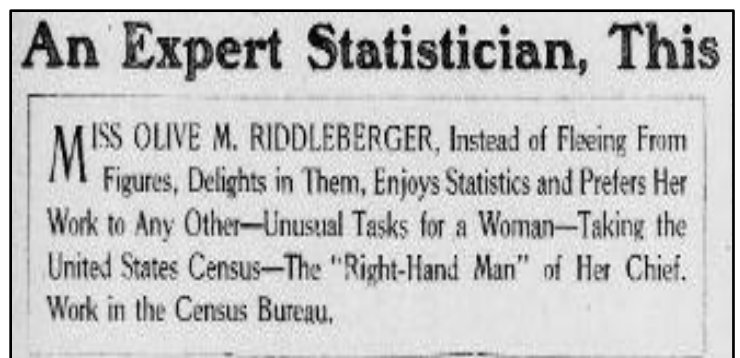
The Sandusky Register (Sandusky, OH); 19 Dec 1890



**Columbian University, where Olive attended classes for two years, became George Washington University in 1904.**

With over two decades of experience in the Census Bureau, Olive encompassed all of the attributes an expert chief of division would need. In 1920, Olive received the appointment as expert Chief of the Geography Division, and oversaw the complete and accurate mapping and assignment of census districts. After this success, Olive did not slow down. In 1930 she became the assistant chief statistician for the Population Division. In this role, Olive oversaw the collection of data from the final returns, along with her assistant, Alice V. Hagan. She, along with Chief Statistician Dr. Leon E. Truesdell, supervised the statistical calculations and final reports for the Fifteenth Census of the United States. Olive also prepared other statistical reports such as the *Topical Index of Population Census Reports, 1900-1930*. She was an active member of the American Economic Association and the American Statistical Association.

In 1901, Olive advanced to the position of clerk and, in 1902, was one of the original members of the Census Bureau when it became a permanent agency under the Department of Commerce and Labor. As Olive's career with the Census Bureau flourished, she expanded her work duties. In 1908, she worked as a clerk on the Cuba Census and in 1909, she received a promotion to clerk in the populations division. By 1916 Olive was an expert statistician at the Census Bureau and the protégé of chief statistician William C. Hunt. In this role, Olive used her extensive knowledge of the counting machines and assisted in the preparatory planning of the 1920 Census, including the handling of the returns and their statistics.



*Washington Evening Star (Washington, D.C.); 2 Jan 1916*

 The image shows two pages of a 1940 census record. The top page is the 'Schedule C - Family Schedule' and the bottom page is the 'Schedule D - Individual Schedule'. Both pages contain a grid of columns for various demographic and economic data points, with handwritten entries for the Riddleberger family. A red box highlights a specific section of the data on both pages.

**Riddleberger Family 1940 Census**

In 1936, after five decennial censuses and 46 years with the Census Bureau, Olive retired from public service. Having lived a life devoted to her work, Olive never married or had children. Instead, she found happiness in her later years living with her brother Frank, her nephew, and grandnieces and nephews. Olive spent her remaining days in her hometown of Woodstock, Virginia, and passed away on 8 January 1958, just a few weeks short of her 88<sup>th</sup> birthday. Olive's groundbreaking path through the Census Bureau relied on education and hard work, an example many have since been able to follow.