

Roy James Stewart

Deaf Community Leader, 50-year Federal Employee

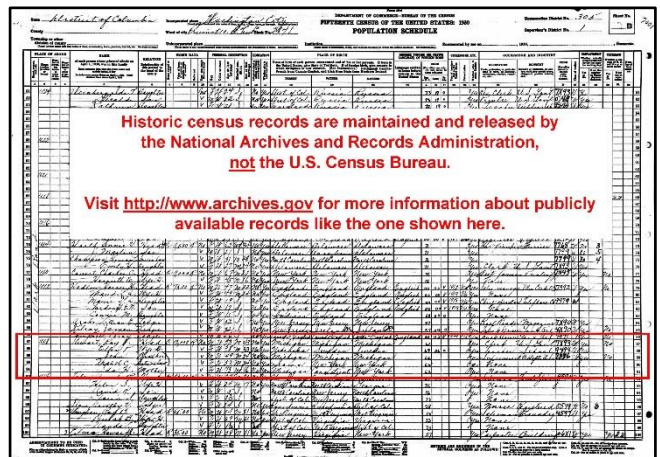


Roy as a student, c. 1899

Gallaudet.edu (accessed 16 August 2017)

The U.S. Census Bureau is proud of its history employing people with handicaps and disabilities. Prior to the establishment of a permanent Census Bureau in 1902, many disabled war veterans received appointments as assistant marshals, census superintendents, supervisors, and enumerators. As the census became more complex in the late 19th century, a larger office force became necessary to compute and compile census reports. This led to more openings for people with disabilities that did not inhibit office work. Eventually, the Census Bureau fell under several mandates, such as the 1947 Executive Order 9644, which facilitated the hiring of disabled veterans, well before the national implementation of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Roy James Stewart was born on January 6, 1878, in Centreville, Michigan. At age 9, Roy lost his hearing in an accident involving a runaway wagon. A few years later, the family moved to Washington, DC when his father accepted a job with the U.S. Post Office. In the District of Columbia, Roy attended the Kendall School, a high school for deaf students affiliated with Gallaudet University. Following high school Roy attended Gallaudet University, where he participated in multiple sports within the athletics department and graduated in 1899.



Roy's 1930 Census

In 1900, Roy began working at the Census Office (after 1902, the U.S. Census Bureau). At first, Roy worked in the tabulation department, where his deafness actually helped him avoid the intense and aggravating sounds the machines caused. Roy's timing was also fortuitous—in 1900, Census Director William R. Merriam decided to revolutionize the counting of disabled people by appointing a special agent who understood the community, Alexander Graham Bell. Bell, who also had ties to Gallaudet University, quickly recruited Roy to his team. This was not Bell's first involvement with the census—he had sent recommendations for the disability schedule for the 1890 Census—but under his supervision the 1900 Census would make the most accurate count of disabled Americans.



Roy graduated from Gallaudet University in 1899



Roy at his niece's graduation—Gallaudet University , 1943

Gallaudet.edu (accessed 16 August 2017)

In addition to more precise statistics, such as the level of blindness, deafness, and speech impediments, and the age at and cause of the disability, one of the most important changes to the survey focused on the manner in which enumerators asked the questions. Based on personal experience, Bell knew that people had sensitivities to the disabilities of their loved ones, and would more readily answer properly phrased questions. In particular, enumerators needed to differentiate those with hearing, speaking, or sight impairment from those with mental or physical disabilities. Following the completion of the final report in 1906, Roy moved to vital statistics, where he continued to work with tabulating machinery.

Working at Census Bureau headquarters allowed Roy to remain active at his alma mater and its alumni association. Roy became known as Gallaudet University's number one sports fan, so much so that he is in the Gallaudet Athletic Hall of Fame as a noted supporter. In his later years, Roy had the distinction of being the alumni supporter from the oldest class.

In addition to his activities in support of the athletics department, Roy also served as the alumni editor to Gallaudet University's student publication *The Buff and Blue* for over 30 years. Additionally, in 1914, Roy served as chair of the Motion Picture Committee for the National Association of the Deaf, a group which worked to preserve Gallaudet University's archive of sign language-based films from the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Roy signed up for the draft during World War I and World War II, but was turned down due to his deafness.

Determined to still do his part, Roy helped organize a committee to buy and outfit an ambulance to send to France during WWI. During WWII, Roy's multiple Victory Gardens (the backyard gardens grown to help supply additional food on the homefront while most mass produced food went to the troops) won awards for the amount and quality of their produce.



The Washington Evening Star (Washington, D.C.)
31 August 1950

In 1943, the Budget Bureau recommended separating the Division of Vital Statistics from the Census Bureau, and in

1946, this plan came into fruition when the U.S. Public Health Service formed the National Office of Vital Statistics. After more than 45 years at the Census Bureau, Roy moved to this new office until his retirement in 1950. Just after his 89th birthday, Roy passed away on March 19, 1967, at his longtime home in Washington, DC. Roy and his wife, Ellen Pearson, who graduated from Gallaudet University in 1917 and taught at the Kendall School for over 35 years, did not have any children, yet they greatly influenced the lives of others. Their niece, Ann Tennis, established an endowment fund in their name at Gallaudet University in honor of their lifetime of dedication and service.



Roy, c. 1950

The Washington Post (Washington, DC)
31 March 1967

The Census Bureau is thankful for Roy's many years of service to both our agency and the American people.