

Vermont: Lewis R. Morris

While a majority of the first U.S. marshals had been appointed by President Washington in the fall of 1789, Lewis R. Morris did not become a marshal until March 4, 1791. Prior to this, Morris grew up in New York where he worked as an aide for both General Phillip Schuyler and General George Clinton during the American Revolution. When the war ended in 1783, Morris then worked as a secretary for Robert Livingston, the Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs under the Articles of Confederation government, during which the attendees negotiated the terms of the upcoming census.²³

By 1786, Morris had left New York and settled in the Vermont territory. In the five years, between moving to Vermont and his appointment as a U.S. marshal, Morris became a successful businessman and local politician. His influential friends from the Revolutionary War, his success in local politics, and his role in helping Vermont become the fourteenth state, all helped Morris secure his U.S. marshal's appointment from President Washington.^{24 25}



Engraved Portrait of Lewis R. Morris, c. 1798.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Since Vermont did not become a state until March 4, 1791, Congress passed special legislation on March 2, 1791 for its enumeration.²⁶ The census of Vermont started on April 4, 1791 and ran through September 4, 1791. The official 1790 census schedule does not clearly show whether Morris utilized deputies to assist in the enumeration process nor is there indication of the exact completion date.²⁷ However, we do know that Secretary Jefferson received Morris' returns by October 24, 1791, so it is probable that he either completed the enumeration by the deadline set by Congress or shortly thereafter.²⁸ According to the 1790 Census Report, Vermont had a total population of 85,539 people, including 16 slaves.²⁹

²³ "History - The First Generation of United States Marshals/The First Marshal of Vermont: Lewis R. Morris," U.S. marshals Service, last estimated release October 11, 2019, <https://www.usmarshals.gov/history/firstmarshals/morris.htm>. (Accessed October 11, 2019).

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ "To George Washington from Lewis R. Morris, 22 February 1791," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-07-02-0238>. (Accessed October 11, 2019).

²⁶ United States, Cong., House of Reps, "An Act giving effect to the laws of the United States within the state of Vermont," March 2, 1791, 1st Cong. 3rd sess., in *The Public Status at Large of the United States of America...*, ed. Richard Peters (Boston, MA: Charles C. Little & James Brown, 1845), pg. 197. PDF. Retrieved from <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/statutes-at-large/1st-congress/c1.pdf>. (Accessed October 11, 2019).

²⁷ "Summary of population, by counties and towns [Vermont]: 1790," *Heads of Families/1790/A Century of Population Growth Maine, New Hampshire, & Vermont*, 1:9-10.

²⁸ "Schedule...," *Return of the whole number of persons within the several districts of the United States: according to "An act providing for the enumeration of the inhabitants of the United States," passed March the first, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-one* (Philadelphia: 1793), pg. 3. PDF. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/content/census/en/library/publications/1793/dec/number-of-persons.html>. (Accessed November 7, 2019).

²⁹ "Vermont," *Return of the whole number of persons within the several districts of the United States: according to "An act providing for the enumeration of the inhabitants of the United States," passed March the first, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-one*, pg. 11. PDF. Retrieved from

These slaves are a matter of some dispute since, in 1777, Vermont had abolished slavery for women over 18 and men over 21. In 1870, the Chief Clerk of the Census Office, Colonel George D. Harrington, who was from Vermont, changed the reported status to 16 “Free colored” because “an examination of the original manuscript returns shows that there were never any slaves in Vermont.”³⁰ In addition, in his introduction the 1908 book *Heads of Families/1790/A Century of Population Growth Maine, New Hampshire, & Vermont*, Simon N.D. North, Director of Census Bureau from 1903-1909, also suggested that the enumerator/s, local clerks, or some



While the current Statehouse of Vermont (pictured above) was built in the mid-1800s, Lewis R. Morris may have overseen the construction and/or completion of Vermont’s first statehouse in 1808.

Courtesy of
<https://statehouse.vermont.gov/home>

other government official accidentally classified some of Vermont’s “Freed Colored” people as enslaved.³¹ Additionally, there was a mathematical error in some of the initial returns that caused Vermont to have a total population of 85,539 people, as opposed to the actual population of 85,425 people.^{32 33} Regardless of the mistakes associated with Vermont’s 1790 census returns, Morris continued to serve his state and nation as a U.S. marshal for four years.

After leaving the U.S. Marshal Service, Morris served his state and nation in numerous different ways including, as a three-term congressman in the U.S. House of Representatives (May 22, 1797-March 3, 1803) and as the speaker of Vermont’s House of Representatives (1803-1808).³⁴ Ultimately, Lewis R. Morris permanently retired from a life of public service in 1817 and spent the rest of his life at his home in Springfield, VT, where he died on December 29, 1825.

<https://www.census.gov/content/census/en/library/publications/1793/dec/number-of-persons.html>. (Accessed November 7, 2019).

³⁰ Table II Population by Counties 1790-1870 Ninth Census—Volume I: *The Statistics of the Population of the United States* (Washington, DC: 1872), p. 68.

³¹ “Population of the United States as returned at the First Census, by states: 1790,” *Heads of Families/1790/A Century of Population Growth Maine, New Hampshire, & Vermont*, 1:8.

³² *Ibid.* pg. 3. There is not a clear date for when the error was discovered, but Director North noted the mathematical error in a footnote in his introduction section to *Heads of Families/1790/A Century of Population Growth Maine, New Hampshire, & Vermont* in 1908.

³³ “Population of the United States as returned at the First Census, by states: 1790,” *Heads of Families/1790/A Century of Population Growth Maine, New Hampshire, & Vermont*, 1:8.

³⁴ “Morris, Lewis Richard,” Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, last estimated release October 11, 2019, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=M000983>. (Accessed October 11, 2019).