

# Virginia Hammond Lowder

*Disability Employment Advocate*

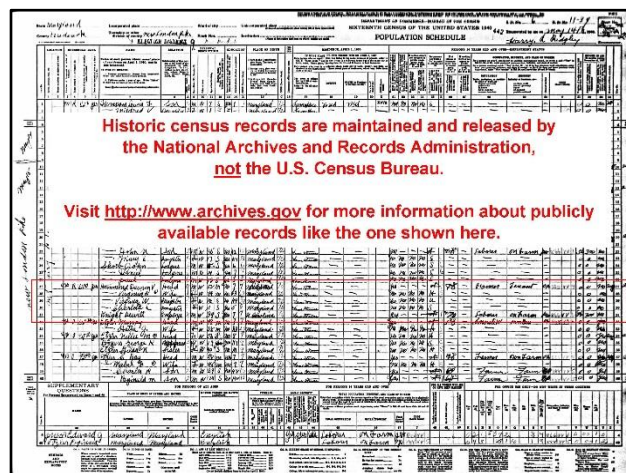


**Virginia at work, 1951**

*Counterparts* 9 November 1951

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 19<sup>th</sup> 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.

Virginia Waters Hammond was born on December 24, 1921, in Frederick, Maryland. Virginia's father, Dawson, had recently completed his service in World War I, while her mother, Sarah, remained active in local social affairs. At 3 years old, Virginia contracted Still's disease, a rare type of inflammatory arthritis, which severely hindered Virginia's mobility, particularly in her hands and feet. Despite multiple hospital visits (including one that lasted 4 years) and surgeries, Virginia was able to graduate from Liberty High School in 1939.



**Virginia's 1940 Census**

After recovering from hospital visits in 1945 and 1946, Virginia moved to Washington, DC with her mother in 1947, where she began to look for work. At first, Virginia focused on work she could do at home, such as handcrafted doll furniture, which she sold nationwide—all the way from FAO Schwartz department store in New York City to her uncle's desk at the Census Bureau. In 1950, after considerable effort, Virginia finally found government employment with the Census Bureau, as a temporary statistical clerk.

The American Federation of the Physically Handicapped is an organization to advance the social and economic welfare of the physically handicapped. Regular meetings of the Washington branch, Lodge 94, are held at St. John's Parish Hall, 819 16th Street, N.W., the first Friday of each month at 8:00 p.m. Interested employees may obtain further information about the organization from Miss Virginia Hammond, Population and Housing Division, Ext. 7370, Bay 2372, FOB 3.

*Counterparts*, 27 April 1951

## Handicapped Group Installs Officers

The local lodge of the National Association of the Physically Handicapped held a meeting Friday at Mount Vernon Place Methodist Church. Eight new members were received and the following officers for 1960-1 were installed:

Elmo E. Beach, president; Virginia W. Hammond, first vice president; Grace H. Ward, second vice president; Kay H. Hand, third vice president; James A. Hayden, treasurer; Elvora Blair, recording secretary, and Elizabeth Biederman, corresponding secretary.

*The Washington Evening Star (Washington, DC)*  
13 June 1960

In 1950, the Census Bureau hired approximately 8,500 temporary statistical clerks to work on the decennial census. Many of these clerks, like Virginia, had 1- to 3- year assignments. Following the completion of the decennial statistics—which in 1950 also included a sample recanvass of 3,500 small areas and 22,000 households to check accuracy—temporary clerks who excelled in their positions usually found permanent jobs at the Census Bureau. This is how Virginia gained permanent employment.

Virginia worked in the Population Census Tabulating Unit of the Processing Operations Section in the Population and Housing Division, where she compiled statistical tables. Despite her limited mobility, Virginia developed a method of using her adding machine by employing a pencil to push the buttons. Virginia's only complaint about the Census Bureau centered around a common theme of workers in the old census building: that the facilities did not have enough room for people, punch

cards, and equipment all together, and that she had to work at a table rather than at her own desk.

A big part of Virginia's life involved activism and her membership in the American Federation of the Physically Handicapped (AFPH). The AFPH and organization president Paul Strachan successfully lobbied the United States Congress and President Truman to create "National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week" in 1945, and helped to significantly expand the program in 1947. This gradually evolved over the next 30 years into the current National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

In 1950, as vice-president of her local AFPH chapter, Virginia represented the organization at the Census Bureau. In 1958, Virginia joined the National Association of the Physically Handicapped as a charter member of the National Capitol Chapter, where she would also serve as vice-president at both the chapter and national level. As part of

her involvement with these organizations, Virginia also worked with other government agencies on various committees and groups dedicated to bringing more physically disabled people into the workforce.

After 3 years at the Census Bureau, Virginia transferred within the U.S. Department of Commerce to the U.S. National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration, where she worked as a negative engraver. In 1961 Virginia married James Golder Lowder, a retired Army veteran. Following 13 years of service to the federal government, Virginia retired in 1963. On December 23, 1964, just 1 day short of her 43<sup>rd</sup> birthday, Virginia passed away from pneumonia at her home in Clinton, MD.

The Census Bureau is thankful for Virginia's years of service to both our agency and the nation.

## Jobs For Handicap Discussed

Western Maryland  
Leaders On State  
Committee Talk  
Over Job Program

Virginia served on this committee in  
1960

*The News (Frederick, MD) October 7, 1960*



*Washington Evening Star (Washington, DC)*  
24 December 1964