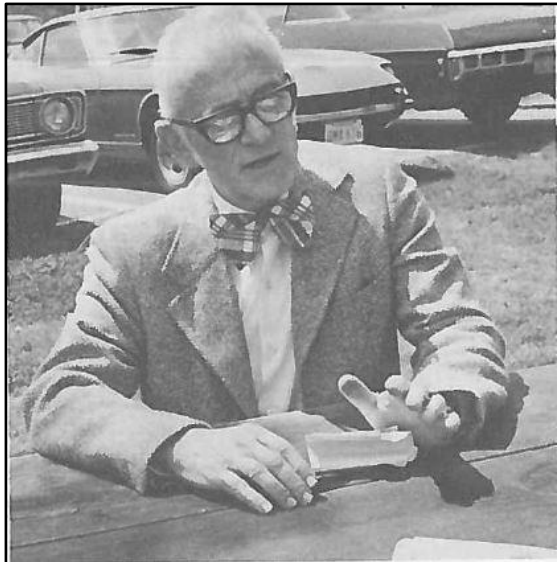


Wilson H. Grabill

Influential Statistician and Advocate for the Deaf



Wilson at the Census Bureau, 1975.
Census Bulletin, August 1975

The U.S. Census Bureau is proud of its history of 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 workforce became necessary to compute and compile census reports. This led to more openings for people with disabilities. 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.

Wilson Henry Grabill was born on December 13, 1912, in Evansville, Wisconsin, to Dell Q. Grabill, a postmaster, minister, and executive at a farm equipment company, and Elizabeth “Bessie” Wilson Grabill, the daughter of a prominent physician who held leadership positions in her local Women’s Clubs. At the age of 5, Wilson began showing signs of a serious illness that diminished his hearing, and he was completely deaf by 12 years old. Wilson attended the historic Wisconsin School for the Deaf, and following graduation from high school he travelled to Washington, DC, to attend Gallaudet University— a university established for the deaf. While attending Gallaudet University, Wilson excelled and became deeply involved with many aspects of the school, something which he would continue to support his entire life. Wilson wrestled, held positions on the athletic association, founded a Movie Club, acted as business manager for the school newspaper, and joined the Kappa Gamma fraternity.



Wilson at Gallaudet University, 1934.
The Buff and Blue (Washington, DC),
Vol. 42, No. 8, June 1934

In 1934, Wilson graduated from Gallaudet University with his bachelor’s of science degree, and soon began working for the federal government in a career that would last 41 years. During his first few years of government employment at various agencies, Wilson could not achieve professional status due to his hearing impairment. However, within 2 years of transferring to the Census Bureau, his supervisors granted him professional status and the associated benefits. The Census Bureau had long worked with the deaf and hard of hearing. When Congress established a permanent Census

Bureau in 1902, noted deaf advocate Alexander Graham Bell served as a special agent and hired Gallaudet graduates to help compile his report for the 1900 Census, *The Blind and The Deaf*.

A scan of a 1940 U.S. Census form for Wilson H. Grabill. The form includes fields for name, age, sex, race, marital status, and occupation. The occupation listed is 'Statistical Clerk'. A note at the bottom of the form reads: 'Historic census records are maintained and released by the National Archives and Records Administration, not the U.S. Census Bureau. Visit http://www.archives.gov for more information about publicly available records like the one shown here.'

Wilson’s 1940 Census, listing him as a statistical clerk at the Census Bureau.

U. S. Birth-Rate Decline Is Noted

Washington, May 8.—(U.P.)—The birth rate is rapidly declining from January 1943, wartime peak and will continue to fall until the war ends, perhaps reaching a point too low to replace the population, according to Wilson H. Grabill, fertility analyst for the census bureau.

Grabill, a deaf mute, prepared a paper which was read at a joint meeting of the American statistical association and the institute of mathematical statistics.

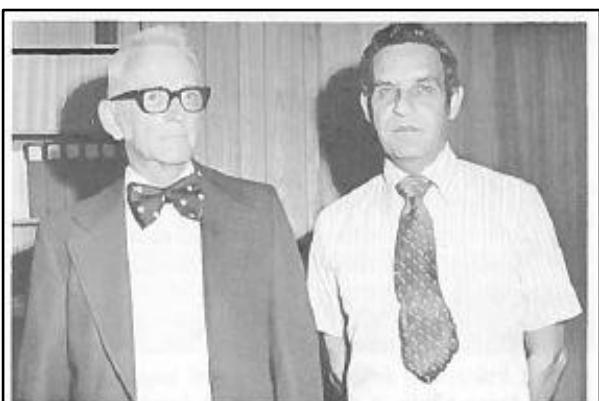
He predicted that by November 1944, the birth rate, which in January 1943 had reached 105 births per 1,000 women of child-bearing age, will have fallen to 75 per 1,000. If the number of men sent overseas reached 6,500,000, the 1943 baby crop of 3,000,000 will fall to about 2,000,000 this year, he said.

*The Billings Gazette (Billings, MT),
May 9, 1944*

At the Census Bureau, Wilson started as a junior clerk in the Division of Special Tabulations and specialized in developing statistical equations for population estimates. He also worked on his education, and in 1942, he received his master's degree in statistics from American University. At the same time, the outbreak of World War II caused several changes at the Census Bureau. In addition to moving out of Washington, DC, to Suitland, Maryland, the Census Bureau also focused on providing economic and population statistics to help the war effort. Wilson's work illustrated the influence the war had on demographics, most notably on declining birth rates as more men were overseas fighting. Despite not being able to serve in the military, Wilson contributed to the war effort not only with his statistical work, but also by being a consistent blood donor. During the war, he contributed over a gallon of life-saving blood, and throughout his career he would be one of the Census Bureau's most dedicated donors, reaching a lifetime contribution counted in multiple gallons.

As Wilson's career advanced, he focused on the statistics of fertility and helped to produce one of the first census fertility reports based on decennial data in 1940. Wilson became the branch chief of the Fertility Statistics Branch in the Population Division, and he received recognition as one of the most prominent voices in the field of fertility statistics with the publication of *The Fertility of American Women* in 1958. In 1962, he received the Department of Commerce's Silver Medal and a position on the board of directors of the Population Association of America. Throughout his career, Wilson served on several committees as a fertility expert, such as the U.S. Board of Civil Service Examiners and the U.S. National Committee for Health and Vital Statistics. In addition, he was a presenter at several conferences.

While Wilson shaped the field of fertility statistics, he also helped shape the culture at the Census Bureau. Known as a helpful and friendly coworker, Wilson commonly communicated with speaking individuals using speech, and pen and paper when understanding became difficult. However, his outgoing attitude soon influenced several of his coworkers to begin learning American Sign Language. His assistant, Peggy Payne, started teaching sign language classes at the Census Bureau after she completed classes at Gallaudet University. Wilson also contributed as an advocate for deaf causes outside of the Census Bureau, including the Wisconsin Association of the Deaf, the National



LENGTH OF SERVICE awards were given recently to Census Bureau employees. Pictured above is Wilson Grabill (POP), 1, who received a 40 year length of service emblem from Daniel Levine (DIRS).

Wilson, left, recognized for 40 years of service at the Census Bureau.

The SESA Inquirer, September 27, 1974

13 CENSUSITES HONORED BY DEPARTMENT



The Fourteenth Annual Honor Awards Program of the Department of Commerce was held in the Departmental Auditorium on Wednesday, February 14, 1962. Recipients from the Bureau were the twelve persons shown above and one other who was not present when the picture was taken. In the picture (l. to r.) are: (seated) Evelyn Jett (DPSD), Manila Ramier (EOD), Ethel Gomber (Ind), Mary Ivins (DOD), Elva Marquard (SRep); (standing) Wilson Grabill (Pop), Arthur Horowitz (Ind), Herman Fasteau (SRes), Murray Dessel (ADRD), Wilson Duckett (AdS), Sigmund Schor (Pop), and William Milligan (Pop), each of whom received the Meritorious Service Award. Not shown is Francis Wilmer (Fld-Den) who also received the Meritorious Service Award.

Wilson, standing left, received the Department of Commerce's Silver Medal in 1962.

Census Bulletin, March 2, 1962

Foundation for the Deaf, and as an officer on Gallaudet University's Board of Directors. He also helped establish the National Health Care Foundation for the Deaf, now known as Deaf-REACH, which established the Wilson Grabill Center to provide housing to deaf people in need.

After several decades with the Census Bureau, Wilson retired in 1975, and received the Department of Commerce's Gold Medal for his outstanding career. Wilson passed away on January 30, 1983, survived by his wife Edna, a fellow Gallaudet University graduate, and their son. The Census Bureau is thankful for Wilson's contributions, and of the contributions of all the members of our diverse workforce throughout the years.