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## The Dodge City Census of 1880: Historians' Tool or Stumbling Block?

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by C. Robert Haywood

WHAT TEMPTS TO COUNTING . . . is that for us telling the truth has come to be associated with giving figures. Correct or not, they speak to us with authority; they have rhetorical force.<sup>1</sup> As the computer age matures it appears likely that reverence for counting will grow. Without addressing the pros and cons of quanto-history, it also appears that all historians will be more inclined to use statistics and figures to make and justify conclusions. One of the most accessible sources of historical numbers is the United States decennial census, which has been taken every ten years since 1790. The last federal census, taken in 1980—the most carefully planned and executed thus far—has been described as “the largest sociological research project ever undertaken.”<sup>2</sup> This great expenditure of time and money will provide numbers which will be used as “historical evidence” for as long as historians are interested in the 1980s.

Despite the census's great potential and past services, historians searching for specific information or looking to verify general trends have found the various decennial censuses to be traps about as often as they have been tools. Because of inaccuracies and incompleteness, the reams of paper and miles of statistical charts churned out by the Bureau of the Census have seemed to many people to be scarcely worth the effort. One consequence has been that the Bureau itself has been judged to be “the most ignored” of Washington's agencies.<sup>3</sup> Over the years, the highly publicized underestimation of national population data has led to a certain amount of discrediting of the whole process and

its findings. In recent censuses, the margin of error for the total population has been accepted as more or less constant in absolute terms at 5 million people. Studies estimate that 5.1 million people were not counted in the 1950 census and that twenty years later 5.3 million people were overlooked.<sup>4</sup> The 1980 census, by far the most accurate yet taken, provided for a correctional figure for underestimation even before the census was completed.

If these more recent censuses are flawed to the extent of a 5 million undercount, how useful were those taken a hundred years ago when less discipline and fewer standards marked the process? Certainly, it is easy to believe that conditions in some frontier towns might have generated even greater errors in censuses than were apparent in those made in more settled communities or those taken at a later date. How useful, for instance, is the 1880 census taken in a frontier cattle town such as Dodge City, Kansas?

All nineteenth-century censuses were subject to error in specific information. Misspelled names, wrong names, erroneous ages, and incorrect places of birth are frequently found. Some of these errors resulted from the carelessness or incompetence of the enumerators. Most errors of fact, however, were made by the individuals being surveyed. Some citizens considered the process unnecessary or burdensome and refused to answer or deliberately lied. Others were simply careless in answering. Still others left the matter up to the “head of the household,” who might not have known the facts. Enumerators reported only what they were told. If someone wanted to conceal information, it was easy to do so. The census taker, who worked for a meager fee, did not consider himself a detective, nor

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1. Jacques Barzun and Henry F. Graff, *The Modern Researcher*, 3d ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 201.

2. “Science and the Citizen,” *Scientific American*, April 1981, 78.

3. Charles Gibson on an ABC Special Report, August 2, 1984.

4. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1975), 1.



*Dodge City from the west in 1879, about a year before the census takers began making their rounds.*

did he regard it part of his job to search for the truth. Furthermore, he worked in various uncomfortable, even hostile, settings, using makeshift tables for the oversized ledgers. Haste, at such times, was more important than accuracy.

Taking into account the conditions under which the surveys were made, how complete and accurate was the information that was collected? Can specific items, not supported by other sources, be trusted? What value does a flawed census have? Is information so garnered subject to the computer's warning: "garbage in, garbage out"? In short, when is the census a useful tool and when is it a stumbling block for the historian?

The original 1790 census was in the nature of a head count, and each decade after 1790 saw the census become more sophisticated as new information was added. By 1880, the census was considerably more than a mere enumeration of residents. In that year a new item was added indicating the relationship of every member to the head of the household. This lat-

ter item has proven to be of great use to social historians. The unit shared by a group of individuals, whether related or not, probably has more influence on the nature of society than any other institution. Social historians are aware that the home environment influences both individual behavior and beliefs as well as the society's characteristics. Therefore, this new item made the 1880 census far more valuable than prior enumerations.

The census for 1880 has been preserved in the unpublished manuscript schedules of the Bureau of the Census. These schedules include information, arranged by household, on each individual's race, sex, age, marital status, place of birth, place of birth of both parents, occupation, and extent of employment in the past year; they also indicate whether the individual was sick or temporarily disabled on the day of visitation, whether he or she could read and write, was in school, or was blind, deaf, dumb, idiotic, insane, maimed, or bedridden. Beyond these official requirements, the enumerators in Dodge City listed the street on which the individual lived, as well as certain unusual circumstances, such as "too feeble to work," or some specific affliction, such as "rheumatism."<sup>5</sup>

The 1880 census of Dodge City had the added advantage of good, reliable enumerators. Recommendations for appointments came from Lloyd Shinn, who was coeditor and publisher of the *Ford County Globe*, to Sen. Preston Plumb. Appointments were purely political and, naturally, drew fire from the opposition. Nicholas "Nick" Klaine, editor of the rival *Times*, ran a front-page editorial criticizing Shinn for appointing relatives and cronies.<sup>6</sup> Letters appeared in both papers supporting or condemning the appointments on either political grounds or personal preference. None questioned the qualifications or abilities of the men.<sup>7</sup> Six local residents were appointed, but only two, Walter C. Shinn and Daniel M. Frost, were involved in the canvass of Dodge City and its immediate environs.<sup>8</sup>

Walter Shinn was Lloyd Shinn's brother and had been his partner in publishing the *Times* until they sold the paper to Klaine in December 1877. By 1880, the Shinn brothers were well-known citizens of Dodge City. Both were to serve in other local governmental offices, and Walter later returned to edit the *Globe*-

5. The census is available on microfilm in the Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka.

6. *Dodge City Times*, May 29, 1880.

7. *Ibid.*, June 5, 1880; *Ford County Globe*, Dodge City, June 8, 1880.

8. J. H. Dewess was in charge of the western districts of Ford County, and G. W. Potter and H. P. Myton were in charge of the eastern districts.

B.

Page No. 20

Supervisor's Dist. No. 2

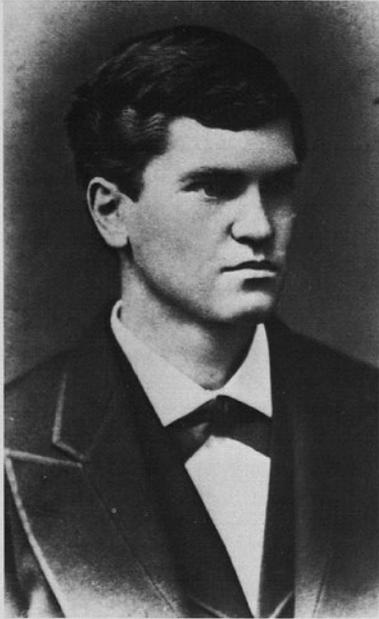
Enumeration Dist. No. 377

Note A—This Census Year begins June 1, 1880, and ends May 31, 1880.  
 Note B—All persons will be included in the Enumeration, who were living on the 1st day of June, 1880. No others will. Children BORN SINCE June 1, 1880, will be OMITTED. Members of Families who have DIED SINCE June 1, 1880, will be INCLUDED.  
 Note C—Childrens Nos. 12, 14, 20 and 21 are not to be added in respect to persons under 10 years of age.

SCHEDULE I.—Inhabitants in Sledge City, in the County of Good, State of Texas, enumerated by me on the 25 day of June, 1880.

W. C. Stone

Dist. No.	Family No.	Name	Sex	Age	Color	Profession, Occupation, or Trade	Education		Reading		Writing	
							Years	Months	Years	Months	Years	Months
233-241	233-241	Amos	M	32	W	Iron chd 2						
		Shadrach	M	41	W	yellow legs						
		John	M	28	W	blacksmith						
		Henry	M	4	W							
		John	M	4	W							
		James	M	4	W							
		John	M	13	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	1	W							
		John	M	1	W							
		Christina	F	19	W	blacksmith						
235-271	235-271	Samuel	M	39	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	34	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	19	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	17	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	15	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	12	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	10	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	7	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	2	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	2	W	blacksmith						
236-242	236-242	John	M	22	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	20	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	18	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	15	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	12	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	10	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	7	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	2	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	2	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	2	W	blacksmith						
237-277	237-277	John	M	20	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	18	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	15	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	12	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	10	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	7	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	2	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	2	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	2	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	2	W	blacksmith						
238-295	238-295	John	M	20	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	18	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	15	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	12	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	10	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	7	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	2	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	2	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	2	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	2	W	blacksmith						
239-296	239-296	John	M	20	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	18	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	15	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	12	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	10	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	7	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	2	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	2	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	2	W	blacksmith						
		John	M	2	W	blacksmith						



Lloyd Shinn, Dodge City newspaper editor, recommended persons to serve as enumerators for the 1880 census.



Daniel M. Frost, coeditor with Lloyd Shinn of the Ford County Globe, was one of two census enumerators for Dodge City and its immediate environs.

Republican in 1892. Walter Shinn was responsible for the canvass of persons within the city limits, beginning on June 1 and finishing on June 28. Daniel Frost came to Dodge City in 1874, served in the state legislature, held a number of minor offices in Dodge, was admitted to the bar, and became editor of the *Ford County Globe* (1878–89) and the *Ford County Republican* (1889–90).<sup>9</sup>

Both Shinn and Frost were men of integrity, with better than average educations and, despite Klaine's political blast at their appointments, were well known and well liked. Both took ample time to complete the census (Frost finished on June 19) and were generally accurate in spelling names and places, although both had some difficulty with place-names in central Europe and Shinn insisted on spelling "brakeman" as "breakman." The one point of carelessness was in checking the item "Is the person sick or temporarily

disabled so as to be unable to attend to ordinary business or duties?" The nearest column asked the enumerator to record unemployment records. Frequently, lines were drawn through both columns, or check marks were extended through two or three columns. The state of Dodge Citizens' health would be hard to judge by reviewing the census. Both enumerators left a record free of personal witticisms and sarcastic innuendo such as appeared in the Ellsworth, Kansas, and other frontier censuses. The status in the community of both men undoubtedly led to easy access to households, where they apparently found good cooperation from those questioned. There is an appearance of studied objectivity in the record they presented to the Bureau. In short, the 1880 census of Dodge City was probably as accurate as any taken in a frontier community.

Estimates of total population of Dodge at the height of its cattle-town reputation have varied widely. Robert M. Wright, who knew his town better than most writers of that day, agreed with a newspaper cor-

9. *History of the State of Kansas* (Chicago: A. T. Andreas, 1883), 1561.

respondent's population estimate of "about twelve hundred" in 1877.<sup>10</sup> The *Second Biennial Report of the State Board of Agriculture* placed the population of Dodge City at 996 and Dodge City Township at 1,854 in 1880.<sup>11</sup> Wright's figure may have been high, if permanent residents only were considered, but the figure is more accurate than that usually accepted. In August 1879, a visitor, impressed with the wild side of the community, reported: "The morals of the city are rapidly improving. There are only fourteen saloons, two dance halls, and forty-seven cyprians in our metropolis of 700 inhabitants."<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, these figures were picked up as authoritative and have been frequently cited since then. The saloon count was accurate, but the writer was better at counting buildings than people.

The census count, even allowing for the accepted error of three to five percent, should be useful in fixing a more reliable figure. But there are problems. For instance, what constitutes Dodge City? Were Dodge Citians just those living within the prescribed city limits? Or were those in the immediate environs also part of the town?

Robert Dykstra, who has heretofore made the only systematic analysis of the 1880 census, used a restricted area. The problem in using a count limited to the city boundaries only is that it misses many individuals who thought of themselves as Dodge Citians and gives a picture of occupations and families, as well as of population, that is not truly representative of the town. Individuals living in what today would be called the immediate suburbs were very important in determining what kind of town Dodge City was. Eliminating them would exclude such well-known townfolk as A. J. Anthony, one-time mayor and one of twelve men who secured the original town charter; A. B. Webster, Morris Collar, Frederick Zimmermann, and other such merchants; Frederick Singer, the undersheriff; and D. M. Frost, the enumerator. Extending the count to all those contacted by Frost, however, would include a fairly large number of freighters and cowboys in camps south of the Arkansas River and the soldiers at Fort Dodge. It would seem more reasonable and accurate to include a somewhat larger boundary than the city limits and to eliminate the temporary camps and soldiers. When this is done, the head count for "greater Dodge City" is 1,279 (see table 1).

10. Robert M. Wright, *Dodge City: The Cowboy Capital and the Great Southwest in the Days of the Wild Indian, the Buffalo, the Cowboy, Dance Halls, Gambling Halls, and Bad Men* (Wichita: Eagle Press, 1913), 262.

11. *Second Biennial Report of the State Board of Agriculture* (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House, 1881), 519.

12. *Ford County Globe*, Dodge City, September 2, 1879.

TABLE 1

1880 Population  
Comparison of Dodge City to the State of Kansas

POPULATION	KANSAS		DODGE CITY	
	No.	%	No.	%
Total population	996,096	100.0	1,279	100.0
Native-born	886,010	88.9	1,110	86.8
Foreign-born	110,086	11.1	169	13.2

This figure, which comes close to the estimate reported by Robert Wright, probably represents a fairly average population, if not an exact accounting of permanent residents. Undoubtedly, some Dodge Citians were missed and many transients were included in the roll. It is doubtful that a large number of permanent residents, however, escaped the enumerators. Dodge was too small a village and the newspapermen too well acquainted for established persons to have been overlooked. Nevertheless, at least one individual was counted twice (reporting a different occupation the second time). The large number of "boarders" reported indicates a substantial number of transient or temporary residents. The figure 1,279, when supported by other evidence, seems near enough the mark to be used with confidence. In all calculations made in this paper, this basic figure is used rather than the more restricted number in Dykstra's calculations.<sup>13</sup>

Within the broad confines of this population, specific items—names, dates, occupations—must remain suspect, as they are in most nineteenth-century enumerations. The overall or composite figures are, in a sense, greater (more accurate) than the sum of their parts. John Mulkey may be reported as both "laborer" and "horse driver" (meaning teamster, wrangler, or trail-herd cowboy?), and "Mich." may be substituted for "Maine" as a birthplace, but the percentage of laborers in Dodge City and the percentage of persons born in New England will be "close to correct." For specific facts, narrative accounts from eyewitnesses or other documented sources need to be found; the census is useful mainly for corroborating other evidence.

Acceptance of this restriction on the census information does not make the census useless. For instance,

13. Robert R. Dykstra, *The Cattle Towns* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 107–11, 246–53.



Published by J. J. Stoner, Madison, Wis.

1. Court House.
  2. School House.
  3. U. S. Signal Service Office.
  4. Odd Fellows Hall.
  5. A. T. & S. F. R. R. Depot.
  6. Post Office, Lloyd Shinn, P. M.
  7. Dodge City Grist Mill, H. F. May & Co., Prop's.
- X—Methodist Episcopal Church.  
 A—Presbyterian            "  
 B—Roman Catholic        "  
 C—Union                    "

BIRD'S EYE  
**DODGE CITY**

COUNTY SEAT OF

188

POPULATION



VIEW OF

# DODGE CITY, KANS.

OF FORD COUNTY

1882

NO. 1200

Beck & Paul, Lithographers Milwaukee, Wis.

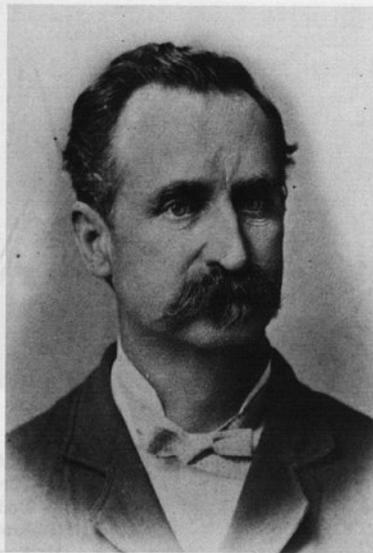
- D—Dodge City Times, N. B. Klains Ed'r and Prop.
- E—Ford Co. Globe, Frost & Shinn, Ed's and Prop's.
- F—Dodge House, Cox & Boyd, Prop's.
- G—Iowa " W. C. Beebe, Prop.
- H—South Side House, South end of Bridge,  
(Wm. States, Prop.)
- J—Great Western Hotel.
- K—Wright House.

the role and extent of certain occupational groups are clarified in a number of instances by the census record. At the very least, the census may warn the researcher to be careful in accepting previous judgments. The extent of prostitution is a case in point. Most narrative accounts of Dodge City during its cattle-town days agree that prostitution was a flourishing business, employing "a significant portion of the cowtown population."<sup>14</sup> The 1880 census does not corroborate that assessment, listing only seven young women as "sporting." Which is correct—the generally accepted picture of a wide-open town supporting a large number of prostitutes or the census documentation of a limited number? Obviously, prostitution was one occupation some individuals would want to conceal. The Dodge City census of 1880, on the other hand, was a particularly frank one. Laura Vaughn was recorded as both "servant and mistress"; five other women had their relationship to the head of the household listed as "concubine"; and Rufus Wells was put down as Ada Robinson's "paramour." In listing the seven young women, ranging in age from eighteen to twenty-five, as "sporting," the census takers were using a euphemism less pejorative than the usual "soiled dove," "scarlet lady," or "demimonde" but still quite clear and specific. As newsmen in a small town with few social secrets, they certainly would have recognized a "soiled dove" or "sporting lady" when they saw one. Shinn undoubtedly could have listed all the prostitutes in town if that had been his assignment. But a number of more respectable occupations were substituted by prostitutes in designating their own trade—terms such as "dressmaker," "laundress," "dance-hall girl," "servant," and "waitress." If these titles had been given to Shinn and Frost by any known prostitute, both men undoubtedly would have recorded them as given, albeit with tongue in cheek.

Women in the work force listed their occupation as "servant" or "waitress" more than any other. Are all, some, or none of these women concealing their true profession? Eight individuals listed "dressmaking" as their occupation. Are eight dressmakers in a frontier village with few affluent families a suspiciously large number? Two young (eighteen and twenty-one), unmarried women (one of whom had been unemployed for six months during the previous year) were living as "boarders" in the same establishment as Mimmie Shepard, who was recorded as a "boarder" and "sporting." Two other young women were living in a separate

household; one was listed as a "dressmaker," the other as "sporting." Can it be assumed that the euphemism "dressmaker" was used in these two cases for the other euphemism "sporting"? Of the other six dressmakers, three were living with husbands and one nineteen-year-old was living with her family. All were from low-income, laboring backgrounds. Does this circumstance of obvious family financial need add to the authenticity of their stated occupation?

In these cases, the social historian would need to turn to other sources for verification of facts. At the same time, narrative accounts are recognized as being very unreliable in reporting matters dealing with prostitution. Frequently, authors wanted their tales to be shockingly lurid, and consequently interesting, or they wanted to underline the moral laxness of the time. Contemporary Dodge Citians were aware of the problem. Nick Klaine, a very proper—even prim—individual, felt many outsiders were guilty of "highfalutin gush over the wickedness of Dodge City." He ridiculed a Kokomo, Indiana, editor who claimed Dodge had 120 prostitutes plying their trade. Divide that number by three, Klaine suggested, to get a more nearly accurate figure.<sup>15</sup> The number most frequently cited, at the time and later, is forty-seven. If the figure



Nicholas B. Klaine, editor of the Dodge City Times, thought that outsiders frequently overestimated the town's wicked ways.

14. Nyle H. Miller and Joseph W. Snell, *Great Gunfighters of the Kansas Cattle Towns, 1867-1886* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), 11.

of seven prostitutes documented by the census is low, probably that of forty-seven is high. Somewhere in between the narrative accounts and the census lies the true figure. The census, even though a frank and objective one, is not very helpful. At best, it may serve only to warn the researcher to be careful in accepting previous conclusions.

The statistics on other occupations, however, are very useful in analyzing the nature of Dodge City's economy (see table 2). All narrative accounts recognize that Dodge was a bustling town in the spring of 1880. The census enumeration of occupations confirms that fact and, more importantly, reveals that not all the activity was taking place in the Lady Gay, the Dodge House, or the stockyards. For instance, Dodge City was experiencing a building boom. The thirty-three men listed in the census as engaged in some form of construction work were barely able to meet the demands for housing for the new settlers. Few, if any, of these carpenters and masons ever carried a gun, and most spent their evenings with their families and not with Miss Kitty at the Long Branch.

Because of the romantic aura surrounding the cowboy and the popular image of the "Cowboy Capital," it has been hard for writers, popular and professional, to remember that Dodge City was above all else a working man's community. Hard work, more than hard drinking, was the order of the day. Of the 643 persons in the work force (more than half the total population), most were not gunslingers, gamblers, cowboys, or dance-hall girls. Nick Klaine reported that people came "to live and get rich—if we can."<sup>16</sup> This was an exaggeration. Most folks were content to make a living. The dry statistics of the census reaffirm that prosaic and unromantic fact and serve as a counterbalance to the more popular image.

The largest occupational group was that of laborer, with 120 individuals representing 18.7 percent of the work force. Servants accounted for another large segment of population. Seventy-three people, both men and women, were listed as "servant" or as performing some type of work normally considered in that classification, such as "table waiter," "chambermaid," "porter," or "cook." Adding servants and laborers to construction workers makes clear that most Dodge Citians earned a modest living by "the sweat of their brow" and "their good, strong backs." Since domestic servants made between \$1.50 and \$3.00 per week, laborers \$1.25 to \$1.75 per day, and skilled carpenters \$2.00 to \$2.50 per day, the majority of Dodge

TABLE 2

*Number and Percentage of Persons in Each Occupation Listed in the Dodge City Work Force*

OCCUPATION	No. of Individuals	% of Work Force
Laborers <sup>a</sup>	120	18.7
Servants	73	11.4
Railroad-related workers <sup>b</sup>	66	10.3
Farmers	54	8.4
Freighters and stage drivers	49	7.6
Herders (cowboys)	38	5.9
Construction workers	33	5.1
Merchants	32	5.0
Clerks	27	4.2
Freight-related workers <sup>c</sup>	27	4.2
Stockmen	24	3.7
Craftsmen	21	3.3
Personal-service workers <sup>d</sup>	21	3.3
Professionals <sup>e</sup>	18	2.8
Bookkeepers	9	1.4
Food processors	9	1.4
Miscellaneous <sup>f</sup>	22	3.4
Total	643	100.0

<sup>a</sup>Excludes railroad-related workers

<sup>b</sup>Excluded from other categories

<sup>c</sup>Includes operators as well as craftsmen

<sup>d</sup>Includes sporting men, musicians, barbers, bartenders, and bootblacks

<sup>e</sup>Physicians, ministers, and lawyers

<sup>f</sup>Includes local city employees, real estate dealers, miners, hunters, etc.

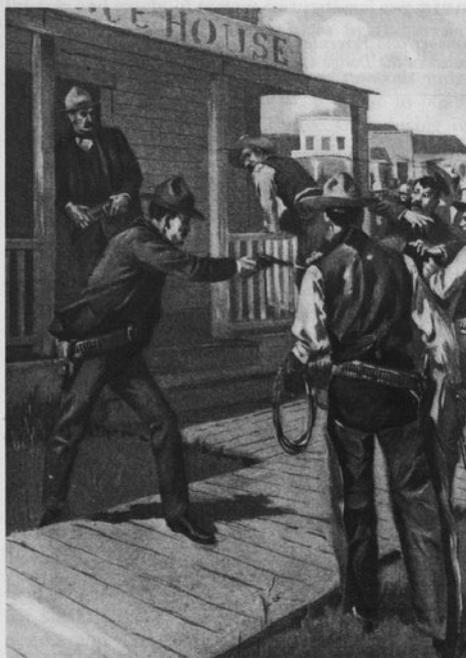
Citians were by no standard getting rich.<sup>17</sup> This was such an obvious reality that most accounts of cowtown Dodge failed to mention it. The census of 1880 brings the point home forcefully.

The uncluttered statistics of the census also remind the researcher that the cowboy and his boss were not the only ones who created Dodge City. What made Dodge was the railroad. Without the shipping yards on the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe line, the Texas trail herds would have had no reason to beat a path to that particular spot on the Arkansas River. The railroad was to remain the major force in the early history

15. *Dodge City Times*, August 17, 1878.

16. *Ibid.*, May 28, 1885.

17. *Second Biennial Report of the State Board of Agriculture*, 285; Leo E. Oliva, *Fort Larned on the Santa Fe Trail* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1982), 62.



"As though to point the question, Mr. Masterson's six-shooter jumped from its belt and exploded—in the direction of Bear Creek Johnson."

Illustrations such as this J. N. Marchand drawing in *Metropolitan Magazine* (1904) helped to create the popular, romantic image of Dodge City, one often at variance with the reality reflected in the 1880 census statistics.

of the town. The citizens of Dodge, if not later historians, realized the town was first and last a transportation center. A brief scanning of the Dodge City newspapers makes the point clear, as there is as much space given to railroad news as there is to cattle news, with special sections carrying headings such as "Railroad Dots."<sup>18</sup> Just how influential the railroad was in the life of the community is clearly revealed in the settlement

18. The number of accidents on the railroad reported in the papers seems to indicate that railroading was as dangerous as any Dodge occupation. Violent death came almost as frequently on the tracks as on the sidewalks of Front Street. The coroner's record of deaths reported before 1900 shows only two fewer deaths caused by railroad accidents than by the victims being "shot" or "killed feloniously." Ford County Coroner's Records, Boot Hill Museum, Dodge City, Kansas.

of the Dodge City Saloon War. The reform spirit which had sparked that clash and divided the community was being steadily eroded by the pro-cattle, status-quo faction when a single threat from one railroad official reversed the trend and ended the reign of the likes of Luke Short and Bat Masterson.<sup>19</sup>

One out of every ten members of the labor force worked for the railroad. Narratives of early-day Dodge may casually include such crochety characters as conductors, and firemen and engineers in the cabs of the locomotives are routinely held up, shot, and pistol-whipped by train robbers in "the westerns," novels, movies, and TV serials. But there is never mentioned a brakeman, machinist, boilermaker, or "boss of the railroad laborers," even by formal historians. Yet the 1880 census lists these occupations along with railroad agents, section bosses, telegraphers, car repairers, and railroad clerks. Sixty-six men gave their occupations as related directly to the railroad. Undoubtedly, others working for the Santa Fe reported their occupations simply as laborers or bookkeepers without indicating the railroad connection.

Railroading was important also because it was a year-round job, in contrast to the seasonal trade generated by the trail herds. Freight receipts remained high throughout the mid-1880s, and so did the level of Santa Fe employment. The winter months saw some reduction in shipping, but in February 1881, the year's slowest month, nearly 2 million pounds of goods were deposited on Dodge City docks. In 1883, the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe unloaded a total of 30,576,575 pounds of civilian freight plus the military freight for the forts in the Panhandle.<sup>20</sup>

The railroad also stimulated other transportation industries, leading to the development of a lucrative wagon-road economy. Beyond its local trade, Dodge City served a large region extending deep into the Oklahoma and Texas panhandles. In Nick Klaine's words, Dodge City's "center of gravitation was equal in extent to that of a state."<sup>21</sup> Freighters were estimated to have hauled, in a single year, 3.5 million pounds of government freight and about 4.5 million pounds of local merchandise for civilian use below the Kansas border.<sup>22</sup> Freightng and related maintenance was an

19. *Ford County Globe*, Dodge City, August 30, 1883; C. Robert Haywood, "The Dodge City War," *Kansas Territorial* 3 (May–June 1983): 14–20.

20. *Dodge City Times*, September 1, 1881; *Ford County Globe*, Dodge City, January 1, 1884. See also Owen D. Wiggans, "A History of Dodge City, Kansas" (Master's thesis, Colorado State College of Education, Greeley, 1938), 42.

21. Quoted in Wright, *Dodge City*, 3.

22. *Ford County Globe*, Dodge City, January 1, 1884.

important source of employment. The wagonyards of Dodge served as a kind of informal unemployment agency where unskilled men and those newly arrived on the frontier could find jobs.

In the 1880 census, forty-nine men listed their occupation as freighter. When the transportation-related activities, such as wheelwright, wagonmaker, and livery operator (twenty-seven individuals), are added to those employed by the railroads, the total number involved in transportation represented 36.5 percent of the work force. Transportation, not cattle, was Dodge City's major industry. While narrative accounts rarely acknowledge that fact, the census of 1880 emphasizes the point.

On the other hand, the census, taken without reference to other information, minimizes the cattle trade to the point of giving a totally wrong impression of the economy. Only thirty-eight men listed their occupation as "herders," i.e., cowboys, and twenty-one were classified as "stockmen," i.e., ranchers. Less than 10 percent of the work force was listed as directly related to the cattle business. The interdependence of cattlemen, the railroad, and Dodge City commercial enterprise determined the nature of life there. Banks, saloons, general merchandising stores, hotels, and restaurants catered to the itinerant cattlemen as well as local residents and the settlers and ranchers in their trade territory. Craftsmen and professionals were dependent on trade with all constituents. Information gleaned from the census sheds little light on the relative importance of any of these groups.

The census tabulation of craftsmen seems normal for a town of twelve hundred serving a large trade area. One painter, four cobblers, a tinker, a cabinet maker, one gunsmith, one tailor, and one saddler would not seem excessive for any town the size of Dodge City, whether or not the men were associated with the cattle industry.<sup>23</sup> Six physicians and five lawyers, however, might indicate a town with considerable action and trouble. But there is little in the census to suggest the nature of the excitement. The notation of only two real estate agents represents an anomaly that is hard to explain, since considerable land was being taken up at the time. The first reaction is to question whether the census takers had overlooked these conspicuous salesmen. However, only one real estate busi-

ness was advertised in the local paper, suggesting that, indeed, the census was not amiss.<sup>24</sup>

A listing of the merchants does give some hint of the entrepreneurial uniqueness of the town. Seventeen individuals listed themselves as merchants. Of these, only seven saloon operators were reported, which hardly matches the known number of at least fourteen saloons. But even the existence of seven saloon proprietors, plus six bartenders, suggests that a normal rural community was not being surveyed.

An understanding of the role of minority groups within the work force is well served by a careful review of the census. Information about women and blacks is highly significant and either fills a void left by most eyewitness and narrative accounts or strengthens previous findings. A surprisingly large number of women were in the work force, representing 10 percent of those employed—as large a group as cowboys and cattlemen. By far the largest single classification of women employees was that of servant, 58 percent. Few women were self-employed: one milliner, one restaurant owner, the sporting ladies(?), some of the nine laundresses, and the dressmakers. Three women were listed as "teacher" or "music teacher," but none of these were included in reports of the public school personnel. Few married women worked outside the home. Most of the employed women were in their late teens or twenties, although nine working women were over forty. Sally Frazier, the lone business proprietor, was sixty-six, and one chambermaid listed her age as seventy. The picture to be drawn from the census of the working women is the generally accepted one for a frontier, semiurban setting. However, the number of women on their own (twenty-three were heads of their own households) suggests a need to review the status of independent women in a frontier town.

The place of blacks in this particular western frontier town is more clearly revealed by the census than by any extant remembrances or, for that matter, any narrative account. As would be expected, the percentage of blacks in western Kansas was lower than in the more settled eastern sections. Blacks represented 4.3 percent of the total Kansas population in 1880.<sup>25</sup> The forty-two individuals recorded in the census as either

23. Dykstra, using twentieth-century occupational classifications established by the Bureau of the Census, found a "relatively large craftsman-foreman group." Undoubtedly, his conclusion came from incorporating railroad-related craftsmen and foremen in his sample. Remove the railroad men and the skilled group appears rather normal. *Cattle Towns*, 110.

24. The explanation of the small number lies in the role of lawyers and merchants who served, and occasionally advertised their services, as real estate operators. A man as busy as Charles Rath, with mercantile houses scattered throughout the region and dozens of freight wagons on southern trails, served as an agent in renting property. See, as an example, Rath's designation as A. J. Springer's agent. *Dodge City Times*, May 6, 1877.

25. Carroll D. Clark and Roy L. Roberts, *People of Kansas* (Topeka: Kansas State Planning Board, 1936), 50.

TABLE 3  
National Origins — 1880

PLACE OF BIRTH	KANSAS			DODGE CITY		
	No. of Individuals	% of Total Population	% of Foreign-born	No. of Individuals	% of Total Population	% of Foreign-born
Germany and Austria	28,034	2.8	27.4	63	5.0	37.2
Ireland	14,993	1.5	13.6	29	2.3	17.2
British Isles	14,183	1.4	12.9	26	2.0	15.4
British America	12,536	1.3	11.4	18	1.4	10.5
All Others	40,340	7.0	34.7	33	2.5	19.5

"Negro" or "Mulatto" represented 3.3 percent of the Dodge City population, a figure higher than is usually recognized. As an ethnic group, blacks were relegated, economically as well as socially, to the lowest stratum of society. There was little upward mobility. Many were employed in the hotels and saloons, but the largest number (fourteen) were employed as domestic servants. None were self-employed. The position of cook was the highest one attainable. Five listed that as their

occupation, and apparently the pay was sufficient to maintain a family, since four of the cooks were the only breadwinners of the household.

Since domestic servants earned less than \$3.00 per week and laborers about \$1.25 per day (\$35.00 by the month), life for most blacks was at the subsistence level. Although a number indicated they had been unemployed sometime during that year, as a group blacks were less frequently without jobs than their

TABLE 4  
Birthplaces of Dodge City Residents in the 1880 U.S. Census

AREA	NO. OF RESIDENTS							
	100	200	300	400	500	600	700	800
Midwestern <sup>a</sup>	630 (49.2%)							
Kansas <sup>b</sup>	136 (10.7%)							
Missouri <sup>b</sup>	100 (7.8%)							
Eastern <sup>c</sup>	183 (14.3%)							
Southern <sup>d</sup>	105 (8.2%)							
Western <sup>e</sup>	69 (5.4%)							
New England	36 (2.8%)							
All Others <sup>f</sup>	77 (6.0%)							

<sup>a</sup> Illinois, Iowa, Indiana, Ohio, Missouri, Kansas

<sup>b</sup> Included in Midwestern

<sup>c</sup> New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Rhode Island

<sup>d</sup> Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, Virginia, Tennessee

<sup>e</sup> Texas, New Mexico, California, Colorado

<sup>f</sup> The miscellaneous states had more representatives from the Great Lakes area.

Indecipherable states, 9 = .07%

white counterparts. If there was little hope to rise above personal service, housework, or common labor, at least the demand for their services was steady. Forced unemployment was rare. Only four housekeepers and two other adults appeared to be unemployed at the time the census was taken.

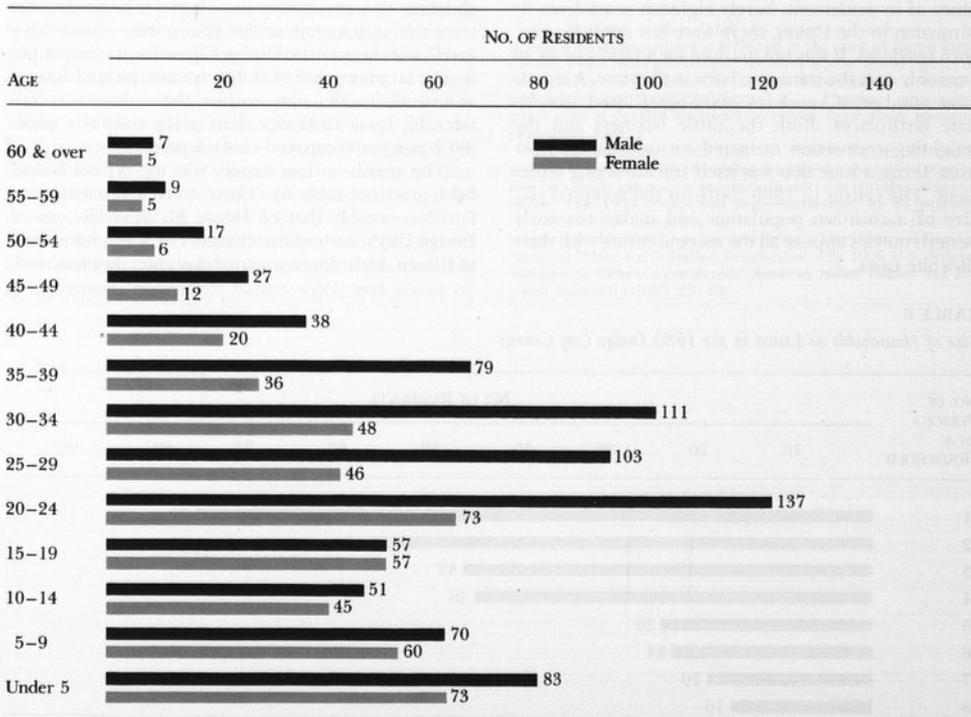
An interesting anomaly in status was Sally Frazier, the only Indian recorded by the enumerators. She may have been, in fact, considered as part of the black (or "colored") community. The census noted that she had adopted a black child.<sup>26</sup> Discrimination was statistically as real as in the daily living; segregation was less strict. Two of the black children were noted by the enumerator as being in school.

As a melting pot, Dodge City tended to follow the population pattern of other Kansas frontier communi-

ties. Foreign-born were never as numerous in Kansas as in other frontier states (see table 3). Slightly more than 11 percent of those living in Kansas in 1880 had been born outside the United States. Despite Dodge City's employment needs, the town attracted only a slightly higher percentage (13.2 percent) of foreign-born than the rest of the state. Nearly all those included in the census as foreign-born came from northern or central Europe, with the largest number coming from the Germanic and Austrian states. Dodge

26. Other sources also indicate that "Aunt" Sally Frazier and her restaurant were unique in the race-conscious society of Dodge. A news story under the heading "Blending the Colors" told of the marriage of Frazier's black cook to a white woman, with the town's patronizing approval. *Ford County Globe*, Dodge City, September 2, 1879.

TABLE 5  
Distribution of Dodge City Residents (1880) by Age and Sex\*



\* Population considered was 1,275. Four ages could not be deciphered.



a grandchild, Beverley's retired father-in-law, a sister, a six-year-old "guest," and three domestic servants. The most frequent variations from the nuclear household were those which were all male, those headed by a woman, and those which took in boarders. The relatively large number of adults, mainly unmarried, living in hotels and private homes would be expected in a community with an imbalance of males to females (61.6 percent males—38.3 percent females). In some instances, it is difficult to tell from the census if an individual was a boarder or whether he was part-owner of the house or was working as a servant. Approximately 11 percent of all those on the census roll were clearly marked as boarders. Seventy-nine individuals, all but three males, lived alone. All-male household units were as large as seven.

The social historian can find much to mine in the 1880 census dealing with family units—size, age, sex composition. No other source is as useful or as accurate as the census. Obviously, the Dodge City census of 1880 has great, largely untapped value in studying broad issues and trends. In understanding the economic pattern and motivation of the town, describing the sociological milieu, and illustrating race, sex, age, and status of collective groups, it has tremendous value.<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, studies in these areas have relied the least on census information. The picture of cattle-town Dodge City's social and economic life has been left largely to contemporary accounts by eyewitnesses, who were not always reliable observers.

The Dodge City census has been most often used as an authoritative source for specific items that are most suspect. Individual names, ages, and places of

birth are frequently subject to error. For specific facts, narrative accounts and other sources are required. The census can be most useful as corroborating evidence. Only when the census is combined with other sources are the results satisfactory.<sup>28</sup> The narrower the category of information sought, the less accurate the census information. However, even in these limited cases, if the census statistics are directly opposed to established judgments, they may serve as a warning to be wary of previous conclusions.

A review of the Dodge City census also indicates a number of areas of research that need to be undertaken to gain a more balanced picture of "The Cowboy Capital of the World." The importance of transportation, both rail and freighting; the role of independent women in the work force and social life; the extent and influence of the "laboring class"; and factors other than individual personalities influencing the reform movement should all begin with an analysis of the decennial census. KH

27. The kind of thoughtful and important conclusions to be drawn from these statistics is reflected in the work of Karen Bode Curths, which relies primarily on the comparative census figures of South McAlester, Oklahoma, at the turn of the century. "Continuity and Adaptation: South McAlester, I.T., a Frontier Community," paper read at the Mid-America Conference, Springfield, Missouri, September 1983, 1.

28. Census statistics are even less reliable for certain ethnic groups. Melissa L. Meyer found that dealing with the Indian population on a single reservation required considerable corroborating evidence. The 1900 census was underenumerated by 84 percent. "Ethnohistorical interpretation of information derived from one census is problematic," was her conclusion. "The Historical Demography of White Earth Indian Reservation: The 1900 U.S. Federal Manuscript Census Considered," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 6 (1932): 29-62.