

George W. Francis

Marshal, Activist, Leader

The U.S. Census Bureau is proud of its history of continually evolving to ensure an accurate count of the people of the United States. To accomplish this, the Census Bureau has long embraced the hiring of a diverse workforce representative of local communities and the people who were a part of the neighborhoods that they counted. For this reason, census work was often one of the few government jobs open to minorities. Beginning with the 1870 Census (the first after the abolition of slavery), the Census Bureau began hiring African Americans as enumerators and data processors. With the creation of a permanent Census Bureau in 1902, Black workers and statisticians found an environment with an inclusiveness far greater than many contemporary institutions.

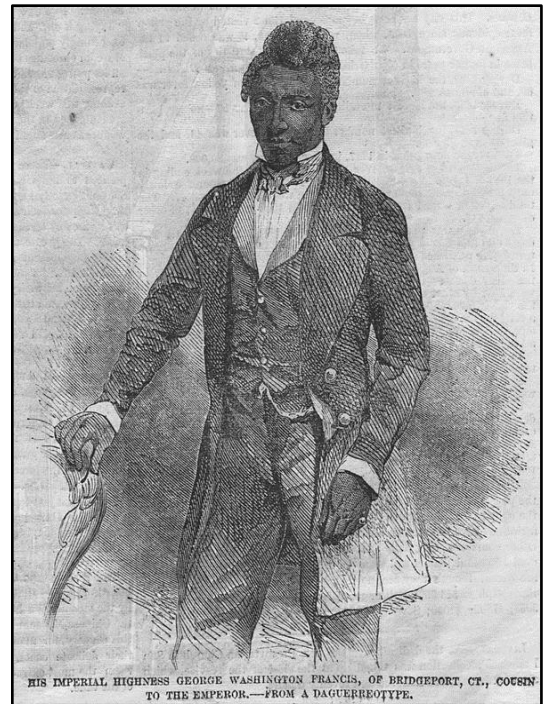
NAME	SEX	AGE	COLORED	INDIAN	PAUPERS
George W. Francis	M	30			
Charity Francis	F	28			
George Francis	M	3			
Thomas Francis	M	1			

Francis Family, 1850
Census

George Washington Francis was born in 1820, in the state of New York. Much of George's early life remains buried or lost in the historical record. Early rumors that George had relations in the Haitian aristocracy do not appear later in his life, either due to the downfall of the emperor or from a better understanding of his genealogy. In 1850, the first year in which all individuals, except slaves, had their names listed in the census, George appeared in Bridgeport, Connecticut—where he worked as a barber and lived with his wife, Charity, and their two sons, George and Thomas. The previous year, in September 1849, George attended the Connecticut State Convention of Colored Men at New Haven

where he represented Bridgeport and held several official positions. As an active supporter for the rights and social uplift of African Americans, George once again represented Bridgeport at the State Colored Convention in 1854 held in Middletown, Connecticut.

On June 21, 1858, tragedy struck the Francis family when Charity passed away. George had company in his grief—Catherine Beach, a white woman and wife of a well-to-do Bridgeport merchant who lost her husband in December 1858. Catherine and George's friendship evolved and they set up a dry goods store together. They then eloped in New York in October 1859. When Catherine's friends found out about the marriage several months later, they had her committed to an insane asylum.



HIS IMPERIAL HIGHNESS GEORGE WASHINGTON FRANCIS, OF BRIDGEPORT, CT., COUSIN TO THE EMPEROR.—FROM A DAGUERRETYPE.

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library, "His imperial highness George Washington Francis, of Bridgeport, Ct., cousin to the emperor; from a daguerreotype," *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*, 1853, accessed November 1, 2017 <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47df-9dc1-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>.

The Bridgeport Amalgamation Case.
From the Hartford Press, March 13.
Mrs. Catherine Beach, widow of a respectable merchant of Bridgeport, possessed of about \$7,000, about middle age, with two children respectably married, and two aged about eight and ten respectively, and a woman of more than ordinary beauty and intelligence, fell in love with Mr. Francis, a colored barber of Bridgeport, smart, intelligent, and black as jet. She first set him up in business in a fancy dry goods store, and in October they visited New York, and were privately married. They returned to Bridgeport, seeing each other but seldom, and keeping the marriage from the knowledge of her friends. Not long ago the secret leaked out, and she acknowledged that she was his wife.
The Selectmen appointed a Mr. Hays conservator over her, and took her to the Retreat for the Insane in this city, by direction of her friends. Dr. Butler refused to receive her, as she was not legally committed. She was taken back, and her friends joined in procuring certificates from four physicians that she was insane, and yesterday she was brought here again. Friends of Francis, the negro, telegraphed to him in New York, where he has lately established himself, and this morning he met his wife and her conservator as they again took her to the Retreat. He had with him Julius L. Strong, Esq., as his counsel. He claimed his wife. Dr. Butler said the certificates were all right, but, if she acknowledged Francis to be her lawful husband, he (Dr. B.) had no authority to detain her. She declared that he was truly and legally her husband, and that she would stick to him through thick and thin. Mr. and Mrs. Francis accordingly stepped into the hack in waiting, and rode to the United States Hotel, took dinner, and left on the steamboat City of Hartford, bound for New York, at 2 P. M.

Detroit Free Press (Detroit, MI) 23 March 1860

A Colored Census Marshal Speaks.
TO THE EDITOR OF THE HERALD:—
 I saw in your paper of to-day an article headed "Census," at the bottom of which was signed George W. Francis, of the Eighth ward. I wish to deny in the most positive terms that the article was written with my knowledge. In the first place, I have taken the census of 7,500 persons in the Fourth and Eighth Election districts, and have not been broomstricked nor have had any indignity offered me sufficient to inform General Sharp, of which he can testify. Though I am a man of caste, yet our citizens were not long in discovering they were waited upon by a man clothed in authority and with common sense, and gave the necessary information. I now challenge any district in the city at New York to give a more correct statement of our population, as I have been from cellar to the garret, and feel confident that in my case the government has been served faithfully, though I admit I have not made even a subsistence; but as it was the first time one of my people was appointed to the post of danger, which I considered the post of honor, I felt if I could perform the same I would establish one fact—that a black man could do something else well aside from hewing wood or drawing water.
GEORGE W. FRANCIS, Census Marshal,
EIGHTH WARD, New York.

The New York Herald (New York, NY) 14 Sep 1870

George, who had been in New York City attending to his business concerns, quickly arrived and secured Catherine's freedom. The same day they left Bridgeport and settled on Sullivan Street in New York City, where they would live for the rest of their lives. George operated a restaurant and continued with a myriad of business dealings, including as a fancy goods dealer. By 1870, George had not only found business success, but had become involved with politics. In May of 1870, George represented his district of New York City at the State Republican Convention. He associated with eminent men, such as showman and Connecticut politician, P.T. Barnum. In fact, Barnum provided a reference letter for George in February of 1870 that may have been used to help procure his first government patronage job—that of census marshal and census clerk for the 1870 Census.

Despite the diligence displayed by George in his census taking, many other politically appointed census marshals did not have the necessary skills or work ethic to complete the job. New York City, as well as Philadelphia, St. Louis, and Indianapolis, all received a second enumeration late in 1870. This marked the first time addresses appeared on census surveys in New York City as an early form of quality control. Following the conclusion of the 1870 decennial operations, George's performance and connections earned him a job in the U.S. Customs House. George worked in the same offices and hallways as notable coworkers like author Herman Melville, and he served under Customs House boss and future U.S. president Chester A. Arthur. As president, Arthur helped to enforce civil service reforms that ensured qualified, rather than well-connected, individuals received jobs. Some of these jobs included census enumerators, who underwent professional training and testing for the first time in 1880.

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 Schedule 1—Inhabitants in the 8th Ward, in the County of New York
 enumerated by me on the 25th day of July, 1870.
 Post Office: New York
 Geo W Francis, Asst Marshal

No.	Name	Address	Color	Sex	Age	Profession, Occupation, or Trade	Place of Birth	Married	Value of Real Estate	Value of Personal Estate	Value of Real and Personal Estate	Other
1	James W. Francis	170 1/2 E 8th St	Black	Male	35	Census Marshal	New York					
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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.

George and Catharine's 1870 Census, enumerated by George

George continued his work within the Republican Party. He participated in rallies and demonstrations to advance the cause of African Americans throughout the 1870s, and the Republican association in his New York district bore his name as its official title. George used his political power to work towards the rights and social improvement of his fellow



Merchant's Exchange, 55 Wall Street, home of the U.S. Customs House where George worked from 1871–1878 (Library of Congress)

African Americans, and celebrated successful gains such as the passage of the 15th Amendment. In 1872, George and several other notable black leaders gathered together to celebrate in their progress on the birthday of Thaddeus Stevens, a notable abolitionist and equality crusader. Catherine passed away in 1873, and after a lifetime of hard-won success, George followed her on January 18, 1878. The Census Bureau is proud to count George among the ranks of its alumni.