

Digitizing the Census of Religious Bodies

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Introduction

- The U.S. government documented the financial, material, and human resources of every religious organization in the country in 1890, 1906, 1916, 1926, and 1936
- Quantitative historical data for more than 200 denominations and 220,000 congregations
- Dr. Melissa Wilde, along with Tessa Huttenlocher and Elena Van Stee, aim to increase the accessibility of the CRBs by digitizing these volumes and making them publicly available on the American Religious Data Archive
- Research questions spurred by the data go beyond religion to explore social reproduction for almost the entire U.S. population

Methods

- Data entry into Excel Spreadsheets from PDF scans of the CRB volumes
- Data cleaning with “IF” function
- Merging data into databases
- Graphing data for further analysis

Results

- Most of the 1916 and 1926 CRBs have been entered by research assistants
- The 1916 database is currently being created
- Specialized tasks for UGAS included denomination lists, comparisons to the American Religious Data Archive, variable lists, and more

Figure 4. Geographic Distribution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, 1926 (As a Percent of Total Members by County)



GENERAL TABLES.													337
EACH STATE, BY DENOMINATIONS: 1916—Continued.													
DENOMINATION.	DEBT OF CHURCH PROPERTY.			PARSONAGES.		EXPENDITURES FOR YEAR.		SUNDAY SCHOOLS CONDUCTED BY CHURCH ORGANIZATION.					
	Total value of real estate.	Number of real estate parcels.	Amount of debt reported.	Number of parsonages reported.	Value of parsonages reported.	Number of parsonages reported.	Amount reported.	Number of original reports reported.	Number of original reports reported.	Number of original reports reported.	Number of original reports reported.		
WYOMING.													
All denominations.....	353	71	\$85,912	106	\$99,058	205	\$261,875	209	345	2,714	21,120		
Adventist belief.....	3	0	0	0	0	0	6,905	8	4	62	222		
Baptist belief.....	15	3	9,250	7	12,250	32	21,000	32	33	315	3,400		
Episcopal belief.....	2	0	0	0	0	0	1,952	3	1	42	202		
Methodist belief.....	10	2	11,750	11	70,000	34	26,100	34	36	345	3,100		
Presbyterian belief.....	105	2	1,500	0	0	0	6,714	0	0	0	0		
Other denominations.....	218	45	69,412	86	60,808	139	207,863	139	271	2,312	17,416		

Section of a table from the 1916 CRB with data about religious organizations in Wyoming

Conclusion/Discussion

- Ongoing project
- Started analyzing data from the 1916 edition
- Comparing data from different cities, states, and regions across every denomination in the early twentieth century in the U.S.
- Insight into social reproduction across Black and immigrant congregations

References/Acknowledgement

<https://web.sas.upenn.edu/mwilde/digitizing-the-census-of-religious-bodies/>