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On the revision of  
" *Historical Statistics of the United States, 1789-1945*;

A Report of the  
Committee of the Economic History Association,  
(Advisory to the Bureau of the Census)  
G. Heberton Evans, Jr., Chairman

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Committee of the Economic History Association on the Revision of  
Historical Statistics of the United States, 1789-1945

(Advisory to the Bureau of the Census)

G. Heberton Evans, Jr. (Chairman), The Johns Hopkins University

Arthur H. Cole  
Harvard University

T. C. Cochran  
University of Pennsylvania

Shepard Clough  
Columbia University

Solomon Fabricant  
National Bureau of Economic  
Research  
New York University

Note: Shepard Clough participated in the early discussions but was abroad when this final draft was prepared and had no opportunity to approve it.

## Part I

### SUGGESTIONS OF A GENERAL NATURE

1. General Comment on Scope. --While Historical Statistics is a fine piece of work and is one of the most useful reference works, there is complaint about its breadth and depth. On the score of depth, the following, written by a historian, is typical.

"Let me cite my experience of the other day in connection with the preparation of a lecture. I turned to the population section to get a breakdown of population growth in the 19th century by states - nothing available. At another point I wanted to get figures on the expansion of the flour milling industry so I turned to the index: Flood control, floor coverings, flounder catch, food - but nothing on one of our major industries of the 19th century. (Editorial note: The flour illustration is unfortunate since the historian could have found data had he looked in the index under "wheat flour." This particular point merely reveals an imperfection of the index; his general point, however, is still good.) Again, I thought I would check data on power - I have Daugherty's compilation so this look-see was purely for curiosity's satisfaction. The power data turned out to be too generalized to serve my need.

"I do not know under what space and cost limitations this reference book is confined but I should like to see it expanded several times in volume and made more historical in character. By this last I mean this: With relatively few exceptions the series simply extend into the past the data relating to current economic activities. Branches of economic activity which have passed out of the picture or have ceased to have importance in terms of current interests are generally ignored. This is understandable enough in view of the official sources of data and the official agencies which have been responsible for the preparation of most of the series. But there is a great wealth of historical statistical data, mostly the compilation of private scholars, which ought to have an important place in this volume."

The ultimate aim for this compendium should be a large volume (or two volumes) that would contain many discontinued series as well as the early figures on series currently published in such volumes as the Statistical Abstract. The compendia then that deal with relatively current materials could refer to Historical Statistics for the earlier portions of their series.

2. Bibliographical Notes.--Wherever possible, bibliographical notes (preferably signed as are the articles in many biographical dictionaries) should accompany the published series so that users of the volume may be led directly to similar series that cannot be included for want of space. It would be desirable for these notes to be as intensive and as critical as possible. They should describe the scope of alternative series, the conceptual differences between them and the printed series, etc. Such procedure would incidentally place the producers of Historical Statistics under less responsibility for justifying their choices - relieve them of explaining, for example, why the NBER mining output series are apparently preferred (probably by reason of greater accuracy) to the WPA series, which go back further and which underlie the mining productivity indexes presented elsewhere in the current volume.

3. Arrangement of Data.--Historians prefer tables in which the early data are presented before the more recent data. Whether or not the expense involved in this change can be justified is questionable.

4. Discontinued Series.--It seems unwise to avoid inclusion of discontinued series. Many of these are of great importance to the historian.

5. Regional Breakdowns.--Breakdowns by state or region have been suggested by a number of scholars. The topics most frequently mentioned in this connection are population, agriculture, industry, and transportation. Some specific suggestions on this point are embodied in the various sections of Part II of this report.

For the period prior to say 1880, state data are essential supplements to the national figures. There exist, for example, some very important statistical data in the state censuses of Massachusetts, New York, and Iowa, in the statistical reports of Ohio, and Indiana, and in some private publications as e.g., the reports of the Rhode Island Society for the Encouragement of Domestic Industry. Perhaps such state materials could be handled in the bibliographical notes.

6. "Tie-ins" with Other Statistical Compendia.--The series presented in Historical Statistics should, whenever possible, be expressed in the same units as those employed in such current publications as the Statistical Abstract. For example, production series should not appear in one place in long tons and in another in short tons.

7. Deflation.--Some of the current dollar series should also be presented adjusted for price changes when such adjusted series are available.

8. Sources.--More emphasis should be given to sources. Each table should be credited to its originator or compiler, even if the notes at the beginning of each section (which users of the volume often fail to read carefully) should be adequate. In addition to the subject and time-period indexes, there should be an index of sources.

There is much variation in the adequacy of qualifying and explanatory footnotes. In general, more such notes are desirable, since users may not go back to sources.

9. Consistency Between Sections.--Annoying inconsistency in the scope of the various sections should be avoided. For example, output indexes are presented for manufacturing and mining but none for agriculture - which is covered, however, by two productivity indexes.

10. Number of Digits.--In many tables the number of digits used could be decreased.

11. Paper for Volume.--The book should be printed on paper that will permit the writing of notes in ink on the margins.

## Part II

### PROPOSALS FOR REVISION OF SECTIONS OF PRESENT VOLUME

(General note: Much work is in progress and should be included if brought to a conclusion prior to publication of revised edition.)

#### Section A. Wealth and Income:

1. Some of the more reliable deflated national income series should be used, including one on the per capita basis.

2. Per capita income by states should be included.

3. It might be worthwhile to include some annual data on gross national product and its major components prior to 1929. If the Department of Commerce has nothing available that is comparable to the current series, there are at least the old, unrevised data. Further possibilities are the series of Kuznets and Barger. Incidentally, Barger has revised his quarterly estimates back to 1923 for greater comparability to the current Commerce series.

4. The constant dollar gross national product material published in the recent national income supplement should be included.

5. The Department of Commerce series on business plant and equipment expenditures, together with the earlier data of Terborgh and the Federal Reserve, might be added.

#### Section B. Population Characteristics and Migration:

1. State figures should be added if the budget permits. Such data can be combined in various ways by scholars interested in many different regional problems.

2. Figures on metropolitan areas, particularly if they could be run back to 1900, would be useful.

3. Population data for the 10 or 20 largest cities for the period 1790-1900 should be added.

4. Tables on p. 28 of present volume purport to cover period 1790-1940, but they do not. Is it possible to extend backward any or all of these series?

Section C. Vital Statistics, Health, and Nutrition:

1. Add birth rate statistics for years prior to 1915 even if available for only one or two states. Cf. Mass. death rate series.

Section D. Labor Force, Wages and Working Conditions:

1. See Section J#1 below for suggestion that a table be added to show numbers of wage earners in major manufacturing categories.

2. Present Series D 79. This total series should also be divided, if possible, so as to distinguish between self-employed proprietors and officials.

3. Add an index of weekly money and real wages. Hansen's compilation for 1820-1923 could be used (American Economic Review, 1925).

4. Add index of average hourly wage rates exclusive of agriculture. Use could be made of NICB data for 1840-1940 (Studies in Enterprise and Social Progress).

5. Use Lebergott's 1890-1946 statistics for earnings of non-farm employees (J. A. S. A., March 1948).

6. Add Douglas' unemployment series published in his Real Wages.

7. Add labor turnover data. (Might use Bezanson's, Brissenden's, and Slichter's figures.)

8. Use NBER data to extend backward and give wider coverage to productivity series.

Section E. Agriculture:

1. Agricultural data on a nation-wide basis should be supplemented with breakdowns by states or regions.

2. Series E 70-71 on farm productivity should be replaced or supplemented by series based on man hours published recently in "Gains in Productivity of Farm Labor," Tech. Bul. 1020.

3. Series E 105-110 would be made far more useful by inclusion of data on use of steam power on farms while data on manufacture of plows, reapers, etc., annually are important and available, at least for a period.

4. Should there not be data on farm organizations: Number? Type? Membership?

Section E. Agriculture--Continued.

5. Should not the revision of this section be made in the light of the plans for Agricultural Statistics to be published by the Dept. of Agriculture in 1952?

6. It would be desirable to include series analyzing capital equipment on farms by states.

Section F. Land, Forestry, and Fisheries:

1. The following is a comment prepared by Prof. Wm. G. Rector, of Southern State Teachers College, Springfield, S. D.:

"The history of the Forest Products Industry in the United States reveals a number of significant trends, the most important of which is the exploitation of the forests by regions. New England, for instance, was the major forest producing area during most of the 19th century, however, in the latter part of the century it was displaced by the Lake States and soon, they too, were displaced. Forests in the United States are regional. The difference between white pine production in Maine, cypress in Louisiana, lodgepole in Montana, and redwood in California is great - different woods, different methods of production, different uses, and, for a long time different markets. The price structure was quite different. This changing of the major forest areas is irrevocably tied up with the development of the nation and coupled with it is the rise and decline of production in most of the regions. In 1878 the Lake States produced 3,629 million feet of pine, by 1880 it had risen to 5,651 million feet and then to 7,935 million feet in 1884. After a drop during the recession years of 1885 and 1886, production climbed again until peak production was reached in 1892 when 8,934 million feet were produced. Production declined sharply so that in 1903, only thirteen years later, it dropped below the five billion mark and sixteen years later it dropped below one billion board feet.

"Unfortunately, the census figures give production statistics for only one year in ten until 1904, after which annual figures are available in Henry B. Steer, Lumber Production in the United States, 1799-1946, U. S. Dept. of Agriculture, Miscellaneous Publication no. 669 (Washington, 1948). Annual figures for the Lake States, 1873-1892, were published in the Northwestern Lumberman, (Chicago) February 4, 1893, and for 1892-1904 are cited in the American Lumberman, January 21, 1905, p. 28. The editors of the Twelfth Census republished these statistics in U. S. Census, 1900: Manufactures, Pt. 3, 830.

Section F. Land, Forestry, and Fisheries--Continued

Annual statistics of the other major regions prior to 1905 are available in the files of their leading lumber trade journals, although I have seen none as complete as the Lake State statistics. A thorough check of the Northwestern Lumberman statistics will reveal that they are as accurate as can be determined at this date. In fact, the correspondence of the lumbermen indicates that they are as accurate as the census figures. A controversy still rages as to whether the statistics on lumber production published in the Eleventh Census were for 1899, 1890, or 1893, with many people coming to the conclusion that 1893 would be the proper year.

"This migration of the lumber industry, then, is the first important factor that must be shown in any statistical work concerning the industry. For statistical and administrative purposes the Forest Service has divided the nation into eight regions, with full data after 1904, and partial data prior to that date. These regions are, I - New England, II - Middle Atlantic, III - Lake, IV - Central, V - South Atlantic and East Gulf, VI - Lower Mississippi, VII - Rocky Mountain, VIII - Pacific Coast. The regional lines run along state boundaries. This method would probably be the most feasible. However, the Forest Service has divided the nation into ten forest regions, i.e. 1 - Northeast, 2 - Lake States, 3 - Southern Appalachian Hardwoods, 4 - Southern Pine, 5 - Lower Mississippi Hardwoods and Cypress, 6 - Rocky Mountain, 7 - Inland Empire, 8 - Pacific Coast Fir, 9 - California Pine, and 10 - Redwood. Statistics based upon the forests would be better than along the regions - forest areas overlap state boundaries - but there are not as many statistics available from the Forest Service, see Steer, as by the regional method. All tables should be set up on a regional basis.

"The second major factor which a statistical work should show is the changes in the utilization of species. Data along this line is available after 1904 in Steer and there is also some data in William B. Greeley, Timber Depletion, Lumber Prices, Lumber Exports, and Concentration of Timber Ownership, Report on S. R. 311, U. S. D. A., Forest Service, Washington, 1920. As pine production in the nation diminished, the lumbermen turned to species that he once scorned and our whole lumber using economy changed.

"The third major factor is the increasing prices of lumber, particularly since 1900 . . . .

Section F. Land, Forestry, and Fisheries--Continued

"The fourth major factor is Fire Loss, the fifth factor is the development of Federal and State Forests, while the sixth major factor is the comparatively recent development of Tree Farms, Industrial Forests, etc. These should all be cited on a regional basis.

"The present chart on prices is well nigh worthless. At the present it gives Stumpage, Log, and Lumber prices, U. S. average, since 1900. Each category is broken down into All Species, Softwoods, Hardwoods. For 1900 it gives a softwood stumpage price of \$0.78 per M, yet in Michigan that year the stumpage prices for pine ranged from \$8.00 to \$12.00. In Wisconsin they ranged from \$5.00 to \$8.00 and in Minnesota they ranged from \$3.50 to \$8.00. It is impossible to average southern pine, Maine spruce, white pine, red pine, Douglas fir, and Christmas trees and obtain an average that satisfies anything other than a arithmetical yearning. It will be inaccurate enough to run averages by regions in two categories, softwood and hardwood, but that would be the practical thing to do.

"As for lumber prices, rather than the present meaningless average, I suggest that short dimensions, Chicago market, close of navigation, cargo market be taken. Switching terminology as the market changed this could give a price on a similar product since the 1850's, (Chicago Board of Trade, Annual Reviews.) For all statistical and historical purposes it would be better to have the price range on a standard item, timbers and joists suffered less changes due to changes in grading, than did flooring, siding, etc. The reason I suggest Chicago is that from the 1850's to about 1900 it was the principal lumber market in the nation. By using this method, too, account could be taken of deflation and an adjusted price made. Any long range price of lumber will run into quality change due to grading change as lumber grades did not become standardized until the 1920's.

"To summarize, all tables except F 123-131 should be put on a regional basis. F 109-122 must be completely revised. This table is the heart of the whole section. It would be better to revise this table thoroughly and dispense with some of the other tables than to let this remain as it is. Two more tables should be added (1) a table on Tree Farms and Industrial Forests and (2) a table on Changing Species in Retail Lumber stock, example in Table 15, page 43 of Timber Depletion, Lumber Prices, Lumber Exports, and Concentration of Timber Ownership."

Section F. Land, Forestry, and Fisheries--Continued

2. Could and should figures on erosion be added?
3. Should include data on wood used for fuel; a long series is available in a Forest Service study.
4. Add data on area covered by timber (preferably by state or region).
5. Concerning Series F 8-18 (p. 119), especially footnote 8, the question has been raised: Were not all public lands withdrawn from private entry during 1935-40?
6. Series F 19 might be supplemented with a value series, and both series might be broken down by public land offices.

Section G. Minerals and Power:

1. Is the citation for American gold production correct? Should line 11 of p. 138 not read Economic Paper Number 6?
2. Use Leong's 1880-1948 mineral output indexes, J.A.S.A., March 1950.

Section H. Construction and Housing:

1. Federal expenditures on housing do not seem to be treated adequately.
2. Mortgage loans outstanding cover only one to four family homes (Series H 113 to 127). The U. S. Dept. of Commerce, as part of its debt estimates, has published data on total mortgage residential debt from some time in the 1920's to date. An even longer span of time is covered in R. W. Goldsmith's as yet unpublished estimates which form part of his "Savings and Capital Market Study."  
  
Leo Grebler, of Columbia University, will soon have available a revised "Goldsmith" series, which is being prepared as part of a project for the National Bureau of Economic Research. Which one of these series might be used will probably depend on availability.
3. Results of the 1950 Census of Housing should be used.

Section J. Manufactures:

1. Add a table showing value added and number of wage earners in each major industrial group, 1899-1939. See: S. Fabricant, The Output of Manufacturing Industries, 1899-1937 (New York, NBER, 1940), pp. 635-636, and Employment in Manufacturing, 1899-1939 (New York, NBER, 1942) pp. 211-2.
2. Present Series J 14. Substitute Frickey's new index of output for Warren M. Persons' index up through 1914. Also show some of Frickey's main groups.
3. Present Series J 49-148. Kuznets' and Shaw's data could be expressed also in constant prices, at least for the total and major groups.
4. A distribution of establishments by number of wage earners, including data on value added, would be helpful. (Note: Similar material is suggested for the proposed new section on Business Organization.)
5. A series on capital assets held by manufacturing industries would be desirable. See: S. Fabricant, Employment in Manufacturing, 1899-1939 (New York, NBER, 1942), pp. 256-7; and Statistics of Income beginning with 1926.
6. Several important production series dealing with particular products might be added.
7. Should follow up A. F. Burns' sources and try to get more data prior to 1870. See also Kuznets' Secular Trends in Production and Prices.
8. If production data are not available, as is sometimes the case for early years, industrial capacity might be given.

Section K. Transportation:

1. Give rates on grain for Chicago to New York by rail, rail and water, and water since 1867.
2. Include some data on steamboat traffic on western rivers. Use could be made of tables (particularly 1, 9, and 22) in Louis C. Hunter's Steamboats on the Western Rivers (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1949). See also Frank R. Dixon's study published as a government document.

Section K. Transportation--Continued

3. Tonnage on some canals (the Sault Sainte Marie as well as the Erie) should be given.
4. Add rates on ocean traffic from U. S. ports to such centers as Liverpool.
5. Try to improve passenger traffic data - numbers and revenues, by type of conveyance.
6. Use Barger's series for 1889-1946.
7. A table might bring together accident data for various kinds of transportation.
8. Delete Series 174.

Section L. Price Indexes:

1. Add some long price series for important single commodities - for example, the price of upland cotton in New York, 1789-1897 (see M. B. Hammond's Cotton Industry). If possible, the non-current series that extend far back in time should be brought up to date.
2. A long series on prices received and paid by farmers seems to be available and might be included.
3. Add Miss Bezanson's Philadelphia Wholesale Price Index, 1700-1895. (Annual data would be sufficient.)

Section M. Balance of Payments and Foreign Trade:

1. Data on the physical volume of important exports by destination and imports by origin would be helpful to the historian.
2. Add Krep's and Department of Commerce's indexes of physical volume of imports and exports.
3. Add annual series on net capital imports-exports, available back to Civil War.
4. Add Department of Commerce's ratio of exports to value of movable goods produced. Fabricant has extended the series back to 1869.

Section N. Banking and Finance:

1. Is Erastus B. Bigelow's series on interest rates good enough to include? See his book on the tariff.

Section P. Government:

1. Civilian Government Employment. Data on the numbers of employees in the Federal Government - the total together with figures for each of the larger agencies, classified by sex - would be of interest to a number of historians. Fabricant has some figures on state and local governments.

2. Military Data. Data should be included on: Total military strength; numbers of personnel on active duty with the Army, the Air Force, the Navy, and the Marine Corps; annual expenditures for the Armed Forces; and deaths in military engagements and wars.

3. Series P 107 is too inclusive to be of value and might be broken down for a few dates.

4. Welfare and Social Security payments, as well as federal grants in aid to states and localities, should be shown here or under Part III, Section 8.

5. Can Series P 138 be carried back through the use of A. Piatt Andrew's, Statistics of the United States, 1867-1909?

Appendix I. Monthly and Quarterly Indicators of Business Conditions:

1. Might reproduce Frickey's "standard cycle." See his Economic Fluctuations.

### Part III

#### SUGGESTED NEW SECTIONS

##### Section 1. Business Organization:

1. Business units in existence, classified by function, legal form, and size, judged by number of employees, invested capital, or production.
2. Add annual data on number of business failures with industrial classification.
3. Give incorporation series, including Evans' indexes. See G. H. Evans, Jr., Business Incorporations in the U. S., 1800-1943 (NBER, New York, 1948).
4. Add Thorp's series on mergers, brought up to date by Federal Trade Commission.

##### Section 2. Colonial Statistics:

1. Comment by Oscar Handlin (endorsed by Committee):

"On the whole I would be disposed not to include a separate section on colonial statistics in the revised volume. Several reasons induce me to make this recommendation. First, the available data are rather sparse and not high in reliability. Second, they are rarely comparable in any way to the kind of data presented in the tables of the present volume. Third, whatever colonial statistics do exist are largely in print and available in works familiar to specialists in the colonial field. Finally, in the isolated cases where the data before 1789 do offer a basis of comparison with the figures after 1789, I should think it preferable simply to run back the existing series. This would not happen very often and would be more useful I think than a separate section."

2. The following might be worked into the appropriate sections elsewhere:

- a. Johnson's data on trade between Great Britain and the American Colonies, 1697-1776 (E. R. Johnson, History of Domestic and Foreign Commerce of the U. S., vol. 1, pp. 120-121).

- b. E. B. Greene and Virginia Harrington's population figures for period prior to 1790.

Section 3. Communications: The following subsections are proposed.

A. Telephone Industry (Principally Bell System)

1. Total number of telephones, 1879 - 1951.
  2. Total number of subscribers. (American Telephone and Telegraph Company to be consulted as to availability of data.)
  3. Average daily conversations, local and toll, 1884 - 1951.
  4. Local subscriber rates in one or two major cities, 1885 - 1951. (Data probably available at American Telephone & Telegraph Co.)
  5. Three minute station-to-station toll rates.
    - New York to Boston
    - New York to Chicago
    - New York to San Francisco
- (Data should be available for long time series at A.T. & T.)

B. Telegraph and Cable

1. Number of messages of Western Union Telegraph Company, 1865 - 1951.
2. Number of cable messages and cable rates.

C. Radiobroadcasting

1. Number of authorized stations, 1922 - 1951. (AM, FM, television)
2. Radio families and total radio sets, 1922 - 1951.

D. Mail Service

1. Number of letters delivered.
2. Postal rates.

E. Periodicals

1. Data on circulation of periodicals.

Section 4. Education:

1. Are figures available on: Numbers of children in school by grade? On public school, private school, and college enrollments? On degrees conferred? State figures are important at the school level.

Section 4. Education--Continued

2. Are there state breakdowns showing formal education of the population?
3. Add series on illiteracy rates.
4. Add local, state, and federal expenditures on education. (Some of this appears in Section P.)
5. Data on teachers -- number, education, and sex by level of educational institution.
6. Add regional data on public and private libraries.

Section 5. Insurance:

1. Life insurance in force, distinguishing private companies and the government.
2. Benefit payments on life policies.
3. Assets of U. S. life insurance companies.
4. Data on other forms of insurance to parallel figures for 1, 2, and 3 above.

Section 6. Marketing and Trade:

1. Add number of each major type of store, with number of employees and estimated sales.
2. Some statistics on chains and supermarkets.
3. Annual statistics of advertising -- dollar values by media.

Section 7. Religious Data:

1. Include data from federal census of religious bodies for 1916 and 1926, with explanatory notes.
2. Include value of church properties, if possible.

Section 8. Welfare and Correction:

1. (See Section P, No. 4).
2. Poor relief data in Russell Sage and other studies.

Section 8. Welfare and Correction--Continued

3. Prison and other institutional populations.
4. Homocide and suicide data.

Section 9. An Additional Appendix:

1. An Appendix listing other statistical compendia containing series of interest (e.g., Handbook of Labor Statistics) would also be helpful to users of Historical Statistics.