

Heather A. Haveman – The Magazine Project

Notes on gathering and preparing data on religious congregations

I collected these data in collaboration with Marissa King. State-level data on most religious groups were available in the 1850 and 1860 censuses (Burke 2006). The 1850 census included a number of churches as “minor sects.” We followed the advice given in the census itself: “the minor sects must be divided between the denominations mentioned by name and [those very few in number] not specifically referred to in the tables” (US Census Bureau 1854: footnote, p. 133).

Two secondary sources provided information for the earliest years: Gaustad’s atlas (1962: 167) had very complete data for 1750; Finke and Stark (1992: 277–88) recorded the number and type of congregations in 1776. From these two sources we obtained data for the eight largest denominations in 1750 (Baptist, Catholic, Congregational, Dutch and German Reformed, Episcopal, Lutheran, and Presbyterian) and twelve denominations in 1776 (the aforementioned eight plus Dunker, Methodist, Moravian, and Quaker). We also found data on the five largest denominations (Baptist, Congregational, Episcopal, Methodist, and Presbyterian) in official yearbooks and annual reports. We made every effort to obtain data on smaller religious groups but had only limited success. Our quest for these data was, however, aided by the fact that “smaller congregations tended to congregate, rather than scatter” (Gaustad 1962: 163). Thus, the smaller groups for which we have data at the beginning of the study period did not tend to disperse geographically before the Civil War. This fact proved helpful in estimating their trajectories of growth or decline.

In the paragraphs below, I sketch the history of twenty-five faiths and describe the data sources that we used to piece together counts of congregations in each state for them. To create annual records, we filled gaps between observed data points by means of linear interpolation. Similarly, we filled gaps between the first observed data points and the start of the statistical analysis period by extrapolating backward to known origin points for each faith.

(Seventh-Day) Adventists, Millennialists, and Millerites. All of these sects shared a belief that the Second Coming of Christ (the Advent) would occur soon and the world would then end. Millerites

began to congregate around 1839. When the date for this second coming prophesied by William Miller passed uneventfully in the fall of 1844, many community members drifted away; others joined a group that offered a less precise date for the Advent. In 1864 this group formally organized as the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. A separate group of Millennialists were active from about 1848 onward. Alas, we found no data on Adventists before the 1860 census.

Baptists. Although there were Baptist congregations in America from 1637 onward, almost all of this denomination's growth came from evangelism during and after the Great Awakenings. The *American Baptist Yearbook* (1874: 79) contained most of the data used in this analysis. It reported the number of Baptist congregations in 1812, 1832, and 1840 for all states in the Union. We found complete data for 1790 in Asplund (1792: 5–42). The *Abolition Intelligencer and Missionary Magazine* (1822: 5) listed the number of Baptist churches across the United States in 1822. We found two additional sources for the early nineteenth century: Sweet (1931: 24, 26, 27, 34) contained data on the number of Baptist congregations in Kentucky in 1800 and 1820, in Missouri in 1800 and 1840, and in Tennessee in 1802. Armstrong and Armstrong (1979: 111) provided the number of Baptist churches in Virginia in 1800. Since Baptists were heavily concentrated in the South, these sources greatly improved the quality of the data on this denomination.

Catholics. Although this faith was planted in America in 1634, when Maryland was granted to Lord Baltimore, its adherents were barely tolerated during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It is not surprising, then, that there were few official sources of data on Catholic churches. To augment data from the censuses, Gaustad (1962), Finke and Stark (1992), and Dorchester (1888: 334) provided data on several states (Florida, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, and Wisconsin) in 1810.

Church of God. Under the leadership of extreme revivalist John Winebrenner, this group split from the German Reformed Church in 1830. It was mostly in Pennsylvania, with a few congregations in neighboring states. Probably because it was always very small, we could find no data on this denomination apart from the 1860 census.

Congregationalists. Because this was the official state-sanctioned church in the New England colonies, excellent data were available for the years before 1850 from Quint and Cushing (1873:

103–73). While this publication first appeared before 1873, earlier editions do not list the date of establishment for each congregation but instead list only extant congregations. We used founding dates given in the 1873 edition to calculate the number of churches per state at ten-year intervals. While this method undoubtedly suffers from survivor bias, because churches that disbanded before 1873 were missing from the records, the Congregational Church experienced continuous growth after the Revolution. Thus, undercounting due to lost data on dissolved churches should be minimal. To assess the extent of undercounting we gathered data from other sources when they were available. Dorchester (1888: 278) records the number of Congregational churches in 1800 in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont. Sweet (1936a: 22–26) contains data on the number of Congregational churches in Tennessee and Kentucky between 1750 and 1850, as well as the number in Indiana in 1834 and Illinois in 1830 and 1836. The statistics reported in these supplemental sources were consistent with the data we constructed using Quint and Cushing, which reinforces our belief that undercounting due to survivor bias is minimal.

Christians/Disciples of Christ/Christian Connection. This network of religious reformers sprang up after 1792 and coalesced into a distinct denomination in the early 1830s. Despite our best efforts, which included corresponding with this denomination's official historian, we were unable to find data on any of their churches before the 1850 census. Because they were concentrated in New England, Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, their impact on antebellum religion is limited to a few parts of the country.

Dunkers/Tunkers/Church of the Brethren. This German Anabaptist sect first gained a foothold in Pennsylvania in 1719; by 1722, Dunker congregations had been founded in Maryland and New Jersey. Throughout the study period, Dunkers remained concentrated in Maryland, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania though they made small inroads into Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia (Mallott 1954; Drury 1924). Dunkers were always few in number. We found data for 1770 in Mallott (1954), which relies on numbers originally reported in John Lewis Gillin's *The Dunkers*. We found no other data, perhaps because, as Mallott notes, this sect did not begin keeping

records until 1880.

Dutch Reformed. This church took root in America in the early seventeenth century. It was heavily concentrated in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania throughout the study period: as late as 1850, nine-tenths of Dutch Reformed congregations were located in New York and New Jersey (Gaustad 1962: 97). The church did not begin to spread westward until the 1840s. Thus, data from Gaustad (1962), Finke and Stark (1992) and the censuses offer excellent coverage of this faith's evolution.

Episcopalians. This was the official state-sanctioned faith in six of the thirteen original colonies, and it had substantial footholds in most of the others. Data sources are plentiful. The number of Episcopal congregations in 1820 and 1830 are recorded in the *Journals of General Conventions of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States, 1785–1835* (Perry 1874). Data for most states (Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, New Jersey, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Virginia) came from reports presented at the convention of 1820 (Perry 1874: 1:528–46). We also used data from reports presented at the conventions of 1817 (1:462–78) for North Carolina and 1822 (2:21–51) for Georgia. Data for most states (Connecticut, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Rhode Island, and South Carolina,) came from the convention of 1829 (2:247–76). We also used data from the convention of 1832 (2:382–408) for Alabama, Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, Maine, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Vermont. Finally, data on all states were reported at the convention of 1835 (2:576–606).

German Reformed. This church also sits theologically between the Calvinist and the Lutheran traditions, and arrived in America in the early eighteenth century. Between 1740 and 1860 it was concentrated in Pennsylvania and the surrounding states. To augment data from Gaustad (1962), Finke and Stark (1992), and the censuses we found data on German Reformed congregations in the Eastern Synod (Maryland, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Virginia) for 1820 in Klein (1943).

Jews. At the end of the colonial period the only synagogues were in Charleston, South Carolina; New York City; Philadelphia; and Savannah, Georgia (Gaustad 1962: 144). Judaism grew

little until the 1840s. Between 1840 and 1850 the number of Jews swelled from four thousand to over fifty thousand (Gaustad 1962: 145). Thus, data from the 1850 and 1860 censuses largely capture the growth of Judaism in America.

Lutherans. This denomination was carried to America by immigrants from four different countries to several locations: from Sweden to Delaware and New Jersey in 1638, from Holland to New York in 1649, from Germany to New York in 1708 and Pennsylvania in 1712, and from England to several states in the early eighteenth century. Lutherans remained concentrated in a handful of states. The *American Quarterly Register* reported that “this church is confined almost exclusively to the German population of the country. The congregations, though found in more than half the States, are principally in Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio, Maryland, and North Carolina” (1832: 224). Thus, data from Gaustad (1962), Finke and Stark (1992), and the censuses capture most of the growth of this denomination.

Mennonites and Swiss Brethren. Almost all members of these closely related Anabaptist faiths, in this era all German speakers, lived in Pennsylvania from the late seventeenth century to the first decade of the nineteenth. These denominations spread to Indiana, Ohio, Virginia, over the eighteenth century, and experienced increases throughout the antebellum era, driven in part by waves of immigration (Gaustad 1962). We were unable to find any data on the number and location of Mennonite and Swiss Brethren congregations outside the 1850 and 1860 censuses. (Censuses put them in a single category.)

Mennonite Brethren. This group was born in 1860 in Pennsylvania, in a split from the main body of Mennonites (Ahlstrom 1972). It had only a single congregation during the antebellum era.

Methodists. This faith began in America in the early 1760s as a revival movement within the Episcopal Church; it became an independent denomination in 1784. The only consistent data we could obtain counted Methodist members, not churches. This is largely a reflection of the Methodist style of organizing, which emphasized the use of circuit riders who traveled from place to place rather than the establishment of permanent churches. Membership data for 1790, 1800, and 1810 came from the *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America from 1773 to 1813, Inclusive*

(Methodist Connection in the United States 1813). Membership data for 1832 are reported in the *American Quarterly Register* (1832: 224) and estimated membership data for 1773 (from the first American Methodist Conference) are reported in Gaustad (1962: 75). We have data on both number of members and number of churches for four states (Indiana, Kentucky, Mississippi, and South Carolina) in 1810. We used these data to translate from number of members to number of churches: on average, there were 343 members per church.

Moravians/Unitas Fratrum. This evangelical branch of Hussites migrated from Germany to Georgia in 1735, then moved to Pennsylvania soon after. The Moravians expanded up and down the East Coast over the course of the eighteenth century, but always remained a small denomination. We found only scattered data on Moravian churches between 1776 and 1850, in the *Quarterly Register and Journal of the American Educational Society* (1829: 182).

Mormons/Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. This sect was born in 1830 in New York State. Its adherents moved west to Missouri and Ohio in 1831, Kentucky in 1834, Illinois in 1838, and finally Utah in 1847. We were unable to find any data on Mormon congregations outside the 1860 census, perhaps because this sect was so marginalized and vilified. To determine the exact dates of the founding and dissolution of Mormon congregations as this sect moved westward, we used narratives by Ahlstrom (1972) and Hatch (1989), as well as official church websites.

Presbyterians. By the 1740s, the Presbyterians had built churches in ten of the thirteen original colonies. Most data on Presbyterian congregations came from the *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (1809, 1819). These data are presented by jurisdictional area (synod and presbytery) rather than by state. We used maps of presbyteries presented in Gaustad (1962: 88) and Sweet (1936b: 50), as well as more general maps and histories of presbyteries, to transform the number of churches per jurisdictional area into the number of churches per state. Note that jurisdictional areas are sometimes split between states. For such cases we divided the number of congregations so as to approximate the land in each state covered by the focal presbytery. To supplement these official church records, Sweet (1936b: 48–51) provides data on the number of congregations in Indiana in 1806 and 1837, Michigan in 1816, and Illinois in 1837.

Dorchester (1888: 282, 385–88) is the source of data for Alabama in 1830, Florida in 1824, Illinois in 1816, Indiana in 1830, Michigan in 1816 and 1830, Missouri in 1816 and 1830, and North Carolina and Virginia in 1800.

Quakers. This denomination first came to Rhode Island in 1637. After William Penn secured his grant for Pennsylvania in 1682, most Quakers moved there. Around 1740 there were also sizable Quaker communities in the Carolinas, New Jersey, and Rhode Island. Unfortunately we could find no data on the number of Quaker congregations between 1776 and 1850, probably because this denomination's authority structure was highly decentralized.

Shakers/Society of Believers in Christ's Second Coming. This sect was established in 1774 in New Hampshire. It remained small and concentrated in New England, but spread west to New York and Ohio by 1860. Alas, we could find no data on the number of Shaker communities before the 1860 census.

Society of the Publick Universal Friend. This sect, which closely resembled the Shakers, started in 1776 in Rhode Island, where its members founded a single utopian community. The community moved to New York in 1794 and died out in 1863 when the last member died; at its peak it had only two hundred members. Data on the single congregation came from Ahlstrom (1972).

Swedenborgians/New Jerusalem Church/New Church. This spiritualist faith came to America in 1798, taking root first in Maryland and later in Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, and other neighboring states. We could find no data on this denomination before the 1850 census, perhaps because it never numbered more than 10,000 adherents (Ahlstrom 1972).

Unitarians. This faith, which began as a liberal wing of the Congregational Church in 1787, became a separate denomination in 1825. Until the 1830s Unitarianism was almost totally confined to a single state, Massachusetts (Dorchester 1888), and John Henry Allen declared, "A radius of 35 miles from Boston as a center would sweep almost the whole field of its history and influence" (quoted in Gaustad 1962: 126) During the 1830s Unitarianism started to spread to Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri, New York, Louisiana, Ohio, and Washington, DC (Gaustad 1962: 126). We found data on Unitarian congregations for 1835 and 1840 in New England in Dorchester (1888:

635).

United Brethren in Christ. The United Brethren in Christ was a German-speaking semi-Methodist movement. This sect split from the German Reformed Church in Pennsylvania around 1767 and was formally organized in 1800. It was always small; for example, the *American Quarterly Register* (1832: 225) reported that there were only thirty United Brethren congregations in America in 1832. Perhaps that is why we could find no data on this sect.

Universalists. This denomination appeared in America in 1779. During its early years, it was highly concentrated in New England and Pennsylvania, especially Boston. Data for 1835 and 1840 presented in Dorchester (1888: 628), which were taken from Universalist yearbooks, bear out this fact. Universalism expanded geographically as conventions were organized in Ohio (in 1814), North Carolina (1824), South Carolina (1830), Virginia (1835), Illinois and Indiana (1837), and Georgia (1838). Universalist conventions followed shortly after in Michigan, Iowa, Kentucky, and Wisconsin. We used data from Gaustad (1962: 130) and the 1860 census to correct 1850 census data on Universalist congregations in Indiana.

Union churches. These were independent nondenominational congregations formed from the merger of two or more existing congregations (Meagher, O'Brien, and Aherne 1979). This category, which is a congeries rather than a religious community, is listed in the 1850 and 1860 censuses. We could find no other data on these churches, which is undoubtedly due to the fact that they were independent of each other and not part of any larger organized body. We included union churches in counts of all churches, but not in counts of churches by denominational group.

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