

MEMORIAL  
OF THE  
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OF NEW YORK  
PRAYING

*That provision be made for collecting Commercial Statistics in taking the Census.*

FEBRUARY 14, 1860.—Ordered to lie on the table and be printed.

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE,  
New York, February 2, 1860.

*To the honorable the Congress of the United States in Senate and House of Representatives convened:*

The memorial of the Chamber of Commerce of the State of New York respectfully represents: That the laws relating to the census of the United States, while they require the collection of copious statistics of agriculture and manufactures, make no provision for those of commerce. This omission your memorialists regard as a serious defect. An inspection of these laws will show that they were designed to secure statistics that would exhibit, among other things, a correct and comprehensive view of the wealth and productive capacity of the nation, but it is manifest that they cannot compass this end without providing for the collection of commercial statistics.

Commerce is one of the most important branches of our productive industry. It is second only to agriculture; and but little, if at all, inferior to that. It employs a vast amount of capital, and produces large annual results to those engaged in it, besides supplying government with revenue. It thus contributes a liberal share to the prosperity of the country, and at the same time enlarges the circle of our enjoyments by placing within the reach of all the products of every other section of the globe.

Your memorialists respectfully submit, that an interest of such magnitude and usefulness should not be overlooked in a professed inventory of the wealth and productive resources of the country. Its statistics are clearly necessary to the completeness of such inventory; and, if properly collected and digested, they will serve as data of the highest value for the guidance of statesmen and merchants; and at the same time, essentially aid the students of social science.

It appears to have been the first intention of Congress to include the statistics of commerce in the census of 1850. The preliminary act in

relation thereto, passed March 3, 1849, established a Census Board, and charged it with the duty of preparing forms and schedules for enumerating the inhabitants, and for collecting such information as to mines, agriculture, *commerce*, manufactures, education, and other topics as would exhibit a full view of the pursuits, industry, education, and resources of the country. It would seem that the Census Board, in performing the duty assigned to it, omitted the schedules for collecting commercial statistics. At least, no such schedules are to be found in the general law providing for that census, and every subsequent one, which was passed at the next session of Congress, while all the others named in the preliminary act are included.

Your memorialists are unwilling to believe that this omission is to be attributed to any want of appreciation of the importance of commerce or of the value of its statistics, on the part of Congress and the census board, but rather to the difficulty encountered in framing questions that would elicit the information desired. This difficulty, it is believed, is rather imaginary than real. The information sought relates to the extent of commerce, the amount of capital employed in it, and its annual results or gross profits. These three leading classes of facts, and others connected with their subdivision, may be readily ascertained by correct answers to a few simple questions, as a glance at the nature and mechanism of commerce will demonstrate.

Commerce consists in the transportation, sale, and distribution of articles produced in other departments of industry. Mining and agriculture supply raw materials; the manufacturing arts fit them for consumption, by modifying their forms; and commerce changes their locality and ownership. In performing this office it produces wealth, by augmenting the value of the articles that pass through its channels. There are those who believe that commerce is unproductive. They perceive that it neither produces commodities nor changes their forms, and thence infer that instead of adding to the volume of wealth it diminishes it by drawing its sustenance from other industrial interests. They forget that a change of locality and a change of ownership are just as essential to the ultimate usefulness of commodities as their production or change of form. A chest of tea is the same, in quantity and quality, when it arrives at New York as when it leaves Canton, but it has more value. Freight charges, insurance, and commissions are superadded, and unless we are willing to pay a price that will cover this additional cost we must forego its use. Nor is this all, we must pay besides, to the tradesman or retailer, a suitable commission for his services and outlays in dividing it up in quantities adapted to our wants. The same is true of every article that passes through the channels of commerce.

From this explanation of the nature of commerce, and the manner in which it aids in the production of wealth, it will be seen that the capital it employs consists—first, in the machinery of transportation, such as railroads, canals, steamboats, and ships; and, secondly, in the means of exchange, such as warehouses, stocks of goods, and money. Its gross earnings consist in the transportation department in freight and charges, insurance, storage, and cartage; in the exchange department of the gross profits and commissions charged on all sales.

A table for collecting commercial statistics should therefore embrace the following inquiries :

1. As to the annual amount of sales.
2. As to the amount of capital employed.
3. As to the gross annual earnings.

And these leading inquiries should be subdivided, so as to ascertain what proportion of the capital is employed in transportation, and what proportion in buying and selling; how much of it consists in real estate, and how much in floating capital; what share of the aggregate earnings is derived respectively from transportation and from commissions and profits on sales; and how much of the capital employed in transportation is appropriated to land carriage, and how much to water carriage.

A schedule framed in accordance with these views is hereto annexed. It embraces but seven distinct questions, and yet your memorialists believe it will secure statistical results more complete and reliable than any that have hitherto been obtained in relation to this interest in any country, and even more complete than those that have been collected in relation to most other interests.

They would, therefore, most respectfully ask your honorable bodies to amend the act providing for the census of 1850 and every subsequent census, passed May 23, 1850, by adding to its tables the accompanying schedule, and making it a part of said act. And as the first day of June next is the period fixed by law for taking the eighth census of the United States, they would also respectfully urge the necessity of prompt action, to the end that those charged with its preliminary duties may have time to prepare and distribute blanks in conformity with the proposed amendment.

By order of the chamber,

P. PERIT. [SEAL.]  
President

*Schedule No. 7.—Commerce.*

Annual sales.	Capital employed.				Annual earnings.	
	In transportation.		In trade.		From transportation.	From trade.
	Water transfer.	Land transfer.	Real estate.	Personal estate.		

