



# Genealogy U.S. Census Records



## Federal Census

### History

- The Founding Fathers included the use of a census in the Constitution to appoint representatives and direct Taxes.
- “Representatives... shall be apportioned... according to their respective Numbers. The actual Enumeration shall be made within three years after the first Meeting of the Congress of the United States, and within every subsequent Term of ten Years, in such Manner as they shall be Law direct” (Article 1, Section 2)
- 1st federal census was completed in 1790
- An official date was set to do the census and a time to get it done. The enumerator had to record information as if time had stopped

The federal census is an important part of American History. The Founding Fathers included it in Article 1, Section 2 of the Constitution. Fortunately, it is also a valuable genealogical research tool

### History 2

- 1790-1840: Census information was completely public. In 1850, the government stated to use it for more purposes
- 1790-1870: census was conducted by assistant federal marshals of the U.S. Federal Court System
- 1880: specially hired and trained census-takers replaced the U.S. Marshals. They also had to take an oath not to disclose the information
- 1890 census had 13,161 questions covering 22 subjects – agriculture, crime, insurance, mines, manufacturing, and transportation. Most households only answered 45 questions. Only 1% survived the fire in 1921
- 1954: A mandate was made to keep census information unavailable to the public for 72 years. The 1950 census will be available in April 2022

## What is in the Census???

### Census Content

- Name
  - Might be listed in a number of different ways
- Age/Date of Birth
  - Search +/- 1-3 years
  - Age could be different based on when in the year the census was taken
    - i.e. before or after their birthday
  - People might not know/could lie about their actual age

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- Place of Birth
  - Normally just lists state or country if foreign
  - Will not have city or county
- Date of Marriage
  - Could be years married instead of specific date
- Number of Children
- Relationship to Head of Household
- Race
- Others: Slaves, Indians, Citizenship, Ethnicity, Nationality, Year of Immigration, Occupation, etc.

## Different Years, Different Information

- 1790-1840: Free males and their households who paid taxes and had the right to vote were counted
- 1850: Each household member listed with data
- 1850-1930: Place of birth reported
- 1880-1930: Place of Birth for parents of each person listed
- 1880: Begin identifying relationship to the head of household
- 1900-1930: Massive influx of immigration to United States

## Census Examples

- **1790**
  - Name of each head of household
  - Number of free White males aged under 16 years
  - Number of free white males of 16 years and upward
  - Number of free White females
  - Number of other free persons
  - Number of slaves
- **1870**
  - Number of dwelling house, by order of visitation from enumerator
  - Number of family, by order of visitation from enumerator
  - Name
  - Age
  - Sex
  - Color
    - Enumerators could mark "W" for White, "B" for Black, "M" for Mulatto, "C" for Chinese [a category which included all east Asians], or "I" for American Indian
  - Profession, occupation, or trade
  - Value of real estate
  - Value of personal estate
  - Place of birth (State or territory of the United States or foreign country)

- Was the person's father of foreign birth?
- Was the person's mother of foreign birth?
- If the person was born within the last year, which month?
- If the person was married within the last year, which month?
- Did the person attend school within the last year?
- Can the person not read?
- Can the person not write?
- Is the person deaf and dumb, blind, insane, or idiotic?
- Is the person a male citizen of the United States of 21 years or upwards?
- Is the person a male citizen of the United States of 21 years or upwards whose right to vote is denied or abridged on grounds other than "rebellion or other crime?"
- **1930**
  - Street the enumerated person lives on
  - House number of enumerated person (in cities and towns)
  - Number of dwelling house in order of visitation by enumerator
  - Number of family in order of visitation by enumerator
  - Name
  - Relationship to head of family
  - Is the person's home owned or rented?
  - Value of home, if owned, or monthly rental, if rented
  - Radio Set
  - Does this family live on a farm?
  - Sex
  - Color or Race  
Enumerators were to enter "W" for white, "Neg" for black, "Mex" for Mexican, "In" for American Indian, "Ch" for Chinese, "Jp" for Japanese, "Fil" for Filipino, "Hin" for Hindu, and "Kor" for Korean. All other races were to be written out in full
  - Age at last birthday
  - Marital condition
  - Age at first marriage
  - Has the person attended school at any time since Sept. 1, 1929?
  - Can the person read and write?
  - Person's place of birth
  - Person's father's place of birth
  - Person's mother's place of birth
  - Language spoken in home before coming to the United States
  - Year of immigration into the United States
  - Is the person naturalized or an alien?
  - Is the person able to speak English?
  - Trade, profession, or particular kind of work done?

- Industry or business in which at work
- Class of worker
- Whether the person is actually at work?
- Record line number for unemployed
- Whether the person is a veteran of the U.S. military or naval forces mobilized for any war or expedition?
- If yes, which war or expedition?

Enumerators were to enter "WW" for World War I, "Sp" for the Spanish-American War, "Civ" for the Civil War, "Phil" for the Phillipine insurrection, "Box" for the Boxer rebellion, or "Mex" for the Mexican expedition

- Number of farm schedule

## How to Find Your Ancestors

### Search Tips

- Get organized first
  - Choose an ancestor to research
  - Gather facts you already have
    - Search with the information that you know for sure
    - Search strategy can be changed based on the results
  - Decide on which Census year to start your search
    - Begin with most recent census record and work backwards
    - Search on census year at a time
    - 1790-1940 Censuses currently available
    - 1950 Census will be available April 2022
- Be open to searching/finding different name spellings
  - Try a wildcard search
    - ? for one letter; \* for several letters
    - Examples:  
Anders?n would find Anderson/Andersen  
Will\* would find William/Williams/Willie/Willis/Willamette/etc.
  - Try searching by just the surname or first name only
    - If you know the middle name try it
  - Try both maiden and married name for women
- Try searching related information
  - Other relatives or address may lead you to find more information about your ancestor
  - Immigration data can also provide new leads
  - Look at everyone on the page – families often lived near each other! Be sure to go a few pages backwards and forwards
- Track your research
  - Make copies of the pages you find

- Cite your sources!

## Special Populations

- Native Americans
  - Not identified in the 1790-1840 censuses
  - 1860: Native Americans living in the general population were counted for the first time
    - Those living on reservations were not counted, because they aren't taxed
  - 1900: Enumeration on reservations as well as the general population began
- Slaves, Blacks, Colored Persons
  - Before 1870: only listed as free or slaves
  - 1870: first time listed by name
  - 1850 & 1860: Slave schedules were done as part of the censuses in southern states
    - ONLY New Jersey and District of Columbia submitted returns
    - Name of slave owner is listed with a personal description of the slave
- Clergy
  - Catholic Sisters (nuns) and Brothers (monks) discontinue the use of their birth name
  - Sister or Brother may be listed as surname
- Military
  - Could be listed at the base\* where they were stationed AND at their home
    - (\*or ship for Navy)
  - Veteran Status reported in 1840, 1890, 1910, and 1930 censuses
  - 1900: Active-Duty military were first counted as population abroad
  - State military censuses conducted as well

## Beware!!!

- Records are only as good as the informant, enumerator, and transcriber
- Possible Issues:
  - Legibility of enumerator's handwriting
  - Interpreting the information written
  - Spelling
  - Names transposed
  - Errors in original record
  - Foreign language/couldn't speak English
  - Secretive/dishonest informants

## What if I Can't Find What I'm Looking for?

### Incomplete Information

- 1890 census was lost in a fire in 1921. Only 1 % of the records survived
  - Records had been stored in the basement of the Commerce Building. The fire helped lead to the creation of a National Archive, where census records are now held
  - 1% = ~6000 individuals (1890 population: 63mil)
- Physical copies of the 1900-1940 censuses were destroyed in 1956 to save space. However, some had been poorly filmed and are completely illegible (especially the 1910 census)

### Substitutes

- Examples of Substitutes
  - State censuses
  - City and county directories
  - Voter lists
  - Alumni directories
- Often needed for 1890 & 1790 censuses

### Open Census Records

- Pre-1790 Census
  - Louisiana
  - Mississippi
  - Michigan
  - Maryland
  - Delaware
  - Illinois
  - New Mexico
- Gold Miners
  - 1852: California
  - 1862-63: Montana
- Military Censuses
- State Censuses
- School Censuses

### Non-Population Schedules

- What are non-population schedules?
  - They are similar to the general population census, but have more specific information about their topic
    - I.E. the agriculture schedule will have detailed information regarding farms (who owned, acreage, livestock, etc.)
- Agriculture, 1850-1885
- Defective, Dependent, Delinquent Classes: 1880

- Industry and Manufacturing: 1810, 1820, 1850-1885
- Mortality: 1850-1885, 1900 (Minnesota only)
- Social Statistics: 1850, 1860, 1870
- Veterans: 1890

## Census Finding Aids and Indexes

- Maps
- Enumeration District Descriptions and Maps
- Catalogs
- Indexes
- Transcripts with index by societies or individuals
- Soundex and Miracode
- Soundex is a phonetic index that groups together names that sound alike but are spelled differently, for example, **Stewart** and **Stuart**. This helps searchers find names that are spelled differently than originally expected, a relatively common genealogical research problem
- Some states of the 1910 census are indexed by soundex, and other states are indexed by miracode. Miracode is a slightly different form of soundex. The code numbers are formed in the same way, but the cards are arranged differently
- Only twenty-one (21) states were soundexed or miracoded for 1910. They are: Alabama Kentucky Oklahoma Arkansas Louisiana Pennsylvania California Michigan South Carolina Florida Mississippi Tennessee Georgia Missouri Texas Illinois North Carolina Virginia Kansas Ohio West Virginia

## Other Tidbits (A Clue! A Clue!)

- Census records lead you toward other records
- Examples: vital, cemetery, church, court, land, probate, military, immigration, naturalization records
- Leads you to how many children there could be for a family
- Birthplace helps locate family in earlier censuses and possibly where the marriage record may be
- Divorcees and widows listed can lead to divorce, court, probate, death, and cemetery records
- Immigration clues come from the birthplace being listed as outside the US
- Military clues could appear on some of the censuses
- Occupation clues and Land records can be discovered

## Where to Find Census Records

- Free
  - Family Search [Link](#)
  - Ancestry Library Edition (available in library only) [Link](#)
  - Heritage Quest [Link](#)
  - fold3 (available in library only) [Link](#)
  - USGenWeb [Link](#)
  - National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) [Link](#)
- Paid (individual subscriptions)

## Genealogy: U.S. Census Records

- Ancestry.com [Link](#)
- Findmypast [Link](#)
- fold3 [Link](#)

### **Additional Information**

Explore additional resources on our [website](#) and blog [Plano Library Learns](#), including information about library [databases](#) and [Genealogy Center Resources](#)