

Finding Answers in the Census

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Types

- Federal Population, every 10 years: 1790-2020. Released to the public 72 years after enumeration making 1790-1950 available now.
- Mortality 1850-1885: Persons who died between June 1st of the year before the census & May 31st of the census year
- Revolutionary War Veterans 1840
<https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1841/dec/1840d.html>
- Slave Schedules 1850 & 1860
- Agriculture & Manufacturing Schedules
- State Censuses
- 1890 Veterans' Schedule & Reconstructed Censuses
- Census Substitutes

Missing Census

- 1790 census schedules for Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, New Jersey, Tennessee and Virginia were burned during the War of 1812
- Most of the 1890 census was destroyed in 1921

Missing Persons

- Families in remote areas or refused to answer questions
- False Entries
- Undercounting
- People were missed in the census. It is possible you can't find your person because he/she is just not there. 1990 missed an estimated 5 million people.
- Since anyone could have given information to the census taker, errors are common. Take what you find as clues, not as the absolute truth.
- Census workers were not necessarily good spellers nor did they all have legible handwriting. Consult handwriting books like Kip Sperry's *Reading Early American Handwriting*
- Some census used first name initials rather than given names
- People often used nicknames or middle names instead of their "real" names
- Information dependent on family member or neighbor giving the information
- County Boundaries changed over time

All U.S. 1790-1950 censuses are now indexed online.

Using the Census

- Use the search capability on Ancestry and Familysearch to locate your people. You may need to be very creative, as many people are mis-indexed for a variety of reasons.
- Continue to search actual schedules even though a name does not show up in the index.
- Follow your ancestors through every available census, beginning with the most recent available, 1950, and working backward.
- Ancestry re-filmed many of its images, as some were not very good. If you viewed an image years ago, you may want to look again.
- Always search 5 pages ahead and behind to locate more family members.
- Check page numbers because pages were sometimes filmed out of sequence.
- Pay attention to the people living near your ancestor, as families tended to be close to each other.
- Relying on printed transcripts may cause you to miss important information – always consult the original schedules available on microfilm.

Information in the census often points to other sources:

- City & County Directories
- County Histories
- Voter Records
- 1885 & 1895 State Census
- Tax Lists
- Land Records / Land Patents / Deeds
- Court Records / Probate & Guardianship /
- Church/Congregation Census / Records
- School Lists
- Business / Trade / Occupation Lists
- Military / Militia / War / Service & Obituaries & Funeral Home records / Pension Records
- Migration & Ship Records
- Naturalizations & Declarations of Intent
- Obituaries & Funeral Home Records / cemeteries

Measuring America: The Decennial Censuses From 1790 to 2000 is a 149 page publication by the U.S. Department of Commerce detailing the questions asked and the directions to enumerators. Available at:

https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2002/dec/pol_02-ma.html