U.S. CENSUS RECORDS

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UNITED STATES CENSUS RECORDS

- Inventory of everyone living in the United States to determine representation in the House of Representatives (U.S. Const. art. I, §2)
- Also called population schedules
- "Snapshot" of a family on a certain day
- Federal Census has been taken every 10 years from 1790 to the present.
- Census is not released until 72 years after it is taken
- 1890 census was destroyed by fire
- State censuses

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OFFICIAL CENSUS DATE – CENSUS DAY

- 1790: Aug. 2
- 1800: Aug. 4
- 1810: Aug. 6
- 1820: Aug. 7
- 1830: June 1
- 1840: June 1
- 1850: June 1
- 1860: June 1
- 1870: June 1
- 1880: June 1
- 1890: June 1
- 1900: June 1
- 1910: April 15
- 1920: Jan. 1
- 1930: April 1 (Oct. 1, 1929 in Alaska)
- 1940: April 1
VALUE OF CENSUSES

- Follow a family over time
- Determine family relationships
- Clues to other locations where the family lived
- Relatives living next door or nearby
- Clues to finding other records

FamilySearch Wiki
NON-POPULATION SCHEDULES

• Agricultural Schedules
• Defective Schedules
• Indian Schedules
• Institutions
• Manufacturing or Industrial Schedules
• Merchant Seamen
• Military / Naval Forces
• Mortality Schedules
• Slave Schedules
• Social Statistics Schedules
• Veterans Schedules

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CLUES

- Name
- Age
- Alien or Naturalized, year of immigration, year of naturalization
- Birthplace, birthplace of parents
- Color
- Education, literacy
- Farm or house; Home ownership; House, family, and dwelling number
MORE CLUES

- Languages
- Marital status
- Mother of how many children, number of these children living
- Number of years married
- Occupation

FamilySearch Wiki
CENSUS INDEX SEARCH STRATEGIES

- One census year at a time: Only search one census year index at a time rather than all the censuses at once.

- Try different spellings: Try spelling the first or last name differently. It may have been indexed incorrectly.

- Wildcard searching: Try a wildcard search substituting a question mark (?) for one letter or an asterisk (*) for several letters.

- Try using surname or first name only: If you have an idea of where the ancestor should be, such as a specific county, try using just the surname and do an exact search with the county and state. Or if the first name is fairly uncommon, try using just the first name and do an exact search with county and state.

- How to treat middle names: Often a person who has both a first and middle name will appear with his first name in one census and his middle name in another census. Try searching both ways.
MORE CENSUS INDEX SEARCH STRATEGIES

- Look for initials: Sometimes the individuals were listed with only the initials of their first and/or middle names, so look for an initial in the index.

- Try maiden name and married name of women: When searching for a woman, make sure to search for her under her maiden name and under each of her married names.

- Try other relatives: If you can’t find the particular person for whom you are looking, try searching for siblings, children, parents, or other family members who may be living nearby. Also try neighbors from previous or later censuses.

- Try a different index: If you can’t find your ancestor in one census index, go to a different website and search their census index. Another website may have indexed the census with a different group of people.

- Get creative!

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Search every census: Look for your ancestor in every census in which they could appear because each census asked for different information and something new will be learned about the ancestor and their family in each census where they can be found.

Changing family configuration: Look for your ancestor in every census in which they could appear because the configuration of the family changes over time. Children are born, family members marry, family members die, an older couple may live with adult children, or extended family members may live with the family.

Other families with same surname: Also look through the census in the county where your ancestral family lived for other families with the same surnames who may be related.

Use actual images: Look at all the information on the actual image of the census—not just the information that was indexed. The other information will help you know what other kinds of records to search for your family. These records could be vital, church, cemetery, court, land/deeds/taxes, military, immigration, or naturalization records.
ACCURACY ISSUES

- Enumerator error: The information on the census is only as good as how the enumerator recorded the information—there may be errors in the information—especially with ages and spelling of names. The enumerator was sometimes not competent and was paid low wages.

- Phonetics: Look for all phonetic spellings of a name. Spellings were not standardized until the 1900's. Enumerators wrote what they heard, and didn't always ask how names were spelled.

- Informant errors: The information on the census record is only as good as the information that was provided by the person who was asked the questions. The person answering the questions may have been an older child or a neighbor and may not have known the answers to the questions being asked. Sometimes the family or the persons being questioned did not know the answers to the questions being asked.

- Foreign language issues: There may also have been a lack of communication between the enumerator and immigrants who did not speak English well, which resulted in errors in recording names and birthplaces.

- Secretive or dishonest informants: There was a lack of cooperation from some citizens--some did not want to answer all those questions and some deliberately gave false information.
MORE INACCURACY ISSUES

- Name variations: Nicknames and middle names were substituted for first names and initials were used instead of full names.
- Missing records: Some people were missed when the census was taken. Some census schedules were never returned to the Federal Government and are missing.
- Reading difficulties: Legibility and poor penmanship make census records difficult to read. Poor storage, moisture, faded ink, insects, or rodents result in difficult-to-read entries.
- Indexing errors: The readers indexing records sometimes interpret handwriting incorrectly. Or, when transferring the information into the index database, typing errors can occur.

FamilySearch Wiki
WHERE TO FIND CENSUS RECORDS

- FamilySearch - free
- Ancestry
- FindMyPast
- MyHeritage
- NebraskaAccess – free access to MyHeritage
Genealogy: It can cause you to lose your census!