

# MORE THAN JUST NAMES:

ADVANCED US CENSUS RESEARCH

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## OVERVIEW

One of the key genealogical resources in the United States is the census. Taken every 10 years starting in 1790, it produces a snapshot of residents allowing us to track our ancestors through time. It gives us one of the best avenues available to put names to the members of our families. ***But that's not all it does.*** Really mining the census data for everything it can tell us can give us clues to marriage dates, birthplaces, occupations, socioeconomic status, physical ailments, military service and so much more.

## NAMES, YES, BUT...

The population schedules of the United States census will give us the names of family members and, at least starting in 1850, of those with whom they were living. But every single population schedule – even those where everyone except the head of the household is just a tick mark – can provide clues to more information that we can use to accurately reconstruct our families.

***Read the directions!*** Every census had enumerator instructions on who to record, and what information to record. Get the Census Bureau PDF :

\* [https://www.census.gov/history/www/through\\_the\\_decades/census\\_instructions/](https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/census_instructions/)

Once you've carefully read the instructions given to the enumerators, and you've recorded all of the names of family members in the census records, look for these ***additional*** clues – among others – in the population censuses:

- ✓ **1790-1810:** If not alphabetical, lists of neighbors in the same militia district.
- ✓ **1820:** Check mark column for foreigner not naturalized and for worker in agriculture, commerce or manufacture.
- ✓ **1830:** Persons who were deaf, dumb or blind. **Tip:** This census has two pages; make sure to look at the second page!

- ✓ **1840:** Number employed in various industries. Military pensioners and widows. Persons who were insane. School information. **Tip:** This census has two pages; make sure to look at the second page!
- ✓ **1850:** Names of all family members, ages and places of birth. If male over age 15, asked occupation. Value of real estate. If over 20, asked if could read and write. Tick mark for married within the prior year. Pauper or convict tick mark. **Tip:** Separate slave population schedules were taken, listing slave owners by name and slaves by age, sex, color, whether fugitive, number manumitted and disabled.
- ✓ **1860:** Value of personal estate (in southern states, could include slaves). **Tip:** Separate slave population schedules added number of slave houses.
- ✓ **1870:** Tick mark columns for persons whose parents were foreign-born. Month of birth if within the year, month of marriage if within the year. Tick mark columns for male citizens over age 21 and denied rights.
- ✓ **1880:** Relationship to head of household. Marital status. Birthplaces of parents. Months unemployed during year. Sickness or disability.
- ✓ **1890:** Some remnants survive and were microfilmed by NARA as M407.
- ✓ **1900:** Street and house number in cities. Month and year of birth. Years married. Mother of how many children total and now living. Year of immigration, number of years in US, naturalization status. English speaker. Home owned or rented; if owned, whether mortgaged. Farm or house and if farm on what farm schedule. **Tip:** This census may have clues to tribal association of Native Americans.
- ✓ **1910:** Language spoken if not English. Employment status. Tick mark for Union or Confederate Army or Navy survivor.
- ✓ **1920:** Mother tongue of each person and parent of each person.
- ✓ **1930:** Whether the family owned a radio. Age at first marriage. Immigration information including citizenship status. Veteran status. **Tip:** Black migration to the north hit its peak in the decade before 1930. Look here for clues to the southern origins of African American families.
- ✓ **1940:** Marital status code “M7” for a person married but living apart from the spouse. Years of schooling, residence in 1935, basic wage and employment information, foreign birth by country name as of 1937, and a mark (usually an X) identifying who gave the information.

## ALL THE *OTHER* CENSUSES

Most genealogists stop when they have examined all the regular population schedules for their families. But many other types of census schedules exist of enormous value to the genealogist. And there was one special interim census taken in some parts of the country in 1885 that included population and other schedules.

- ✓ **Agricultural (1850-1880):** Separate schedules were created reporting, for each farm, the name of owner or manager, number of improved and unimproved acres, cash value of the farm, farming machinery, types of animals and crops. Most post-1880 agricultural schedules do not survive.

- ✓ **Manufacturing (1810-1820, 1850-1880):** Separate schedules recorded data on manufacturing. In 1810, no directions were given to enumerators and little information was annotated on the population schedules. In 1820 and from 1850 to 1880, the schedules reported the name of the manufacturer, the type of business or product, and details on the business and employees.
- ✓ **Mortality (1850-1880):** Separate schedules recorded persons who died in the year preceding the population census, and noted the name, age, sex, marital status if married or widowed, state or country of birth, month of death, occupation, cause of death, and the length of the final illness.
- ✓ **Social Statistics (1850-1870):** Not reporting individuals but social conditions of the community instead, these schedules reported real estate values, taxes, schools, teachers, and pupils, libraries, newspapers, church denominations, native and foreign-born paupers and criminals convicted, and average wages.
- ✓ **Defective, Dependent, Delinquent Classes (1880):** A special list recorded only in 1880, this schedule included those regarded as insane, idiots, deaf-mutes, blind, homeless children, inhabitants in prison, pauper and indigent.
- ✓ **Semidecennial Census (1885):** Florida, Nebraska, Colorado and the Territories of New Mexico and Dakota took special censuses (population, agriculture, manufactures, and mortality) in 1885. The information on these schedules can fill in the gap left by the loss of the 1890 census.
- ✓ **Veterans (1890):** A special list recorded only in 1890, this schedule included Union Civil War veterans or their widows (though some Confederate veterans were recorded by mistake), the soldier's unit and service information and any disability. Records survive for part of Kentucky and Louisiana-Wyoming.

## KEY TIPS TO ADVANCED CENSUS RESEARCH

- ✓ Don't give up just because your family isn't in the index. Read the records page by page, line by line. Look for household with the same sorts of people even if the names aren't exact. Don't worry about spelling (get creative in your searches!).
- ✓ Don't ever look for one name or even one family. Find the relatives in the area. Find the neighbors. Find all the people your people may have been associating with. Make sure you look across enumeration district and even county and state lines if your family lived near a border. Record everybody in the neighborhood.
- ✓ Always look to see who is recorded in the census who would have been among the record-makers of the community: doctors, lawyers, clergy, bankers and merchants all kept record books that may provide information about your family.
- ✓ Don't stop with one census, or even one type of census. Check all surviving census schedules for the entire time the family was in that place – and look for local, county, state and territorial censuses, school censuses and even religious censuses as well as all the different types of federal census schedules.
- ✓ Combine your census evidence with evidence from other lists. Things like city directories, road orders, tax lists, militia lists, and legislative petitions can be correlated with census data to provide a much deeper picture of a family.

## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

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**All URLs verified as of 10 January 2020.**