



MAKING SENSE OF THE CENSUS

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Census records are typically one of the first records that a genealogist turns to when beginning research on a new ancestor. Census records are the low hanging fruit, the giver of clues, the friend of the genealogist. But often times, researchers ignore researching the early census records with their pesky tick marks or do not look beyond the names, ages, and places of birth in the later census records. But the census schedules provide so much more for the genealogist who will take the time to explore all the information and clues that they contain.

1790 Census

Official census date:	2 August 1790
States and Territories:	13 original states, plus the districts of Kentucky, Maine, and Vermont, and the Southwest Territory (now Tennessee)
Record Losses:	Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, New Jersey, Tennessee, and Virginia
Information of note:	Name of head of household and number of persons living in the household

1800 Census

Official census date:	4 August 1800
States and Territories:	16 states, plus the territory northwest of the Ohio River, Indiana Territory, and Mississippi Territory
Record Losses:	Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky, New Jersey, Virginia, Indiana Territory, Mississippi Territory, and virtually all of the Northwest Territory
Valuable Information:	Expanded age categories for both free white males and free white females

1810 Census

Official census date:	6 August 1810
States and Territories:	17 states, the District of Columbia, and the territories of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Orleans
Record Losses:	District of Columbia, Georgia, Indiana, Michigan, Mississippi, New Jersey, Ohio, Tennessee, and part of Illinois
Valuable Information:	Same expanded age categories for both free white males and free white females as in 1800 census

1820 Census

Official census date:	7 August 1820
States and Territories:	23 states, plus the territories of Arkansas, Michigan, and Missouri
Record Losses:	New Jersey, Arkansas Territory, and Missouri Territory, as well as partial losses for Alabama and Tennessee
Valuable Information:	Expanded age categories for free colored persons and slaves; separate category for free white males aged 16 to 18; foreigners not naturalized

1830 Census

Official census date:	1 June 1830
States and Territories:	24 states and the territories of Arkansas, Michigan, and Florida
Record Losses:	Countywide losses in Massachusetts, Maryland, and Mississippi
Valuable Information:	Further expanded age categories for all inhabitants; category for deaf and dumb or blind persons

1840 Census

Official census date:	1 June 1840
States and Territories:	26 states, Iowa Territory, Wisconsin Territory, and Florida Territory
Record Losses:	No major loss of records
Valuable Information:	New questions on school attendance, literacy, and vocation; name and age of Pensioners for Revolutionary or military services

1850 Census

Official census date:	1 June 1850
States and Territories:	31 states, Oregon Territory, Minnesota Territory, New Mexico Territory, and Utah Territory
Record Losses:	No major loss of records
Valuable Information:	Names and ages of each person in the household; occupation; place of birth; value of real estate owned; whether married within year; able to read and write

1860 Census

Official census date:	1 June 1860
States and Territories:	33 states, District of Columbia, Dakota Territory, Kansas Territory, Nebraska Territory, New Mexico Territory, and Washington Territory
Record Losses:	No major loss of records
Valuable Information:	Value of both real estate and personal estate

1870 Census

Official census date: 1 June 1870
States and Territories: 37 states, New Mexico Territory, Colorado Territory, Idaho Territory, Arizona Territory, Utah Territory, Wyoming Territory, Montana Territory, Washington Territory, Dakota Territory, and Indian Territory
Record Losses: No major loss of records
Valuable Information: Slave schedule was eliminated; parents of foreign birth; month of birth for child born within the year

1880 Census

Official census date: 1 June 1880
States and Territories: 38 states, Arizona Territory, Dakota Territory, Idaho Territory, Montana Territory, New Mexico Territory, Utah Territory, Washington Territory, Wyoming Territory, and non-organized Alaska
Record Losses: No major loss of records
Valuable Information: Relationship to head of household; marital status; place of birth for parents

1890 Census

Official census date: 2 June 1890
States and Territories: 42 states, plus its territories
Record Losses: Most of the 1890 census was destroyed or badly damaged by a fire in 1921.
Valuable Information: Fragments from 10 states and the District of Columbia survive

1900 Census

Official census date: 1 June 1900
States and Territories: 45 states, District of Columbia, Arizona Territory, New Mexico Territory, Oklahoma Territory, Indian Territory, Hawaii Territory, unorganized Alaska Territory, and military personnel in American Samoa, Cuba, Guam, Philippines, and Puerto Rico
Record Losses: No major loss of records
Valuable Information: Month and year of birth; number of years married; for mothers, the number of children and how many were living; year of immigration; home ownership information

1910 Census

Official census date: 15 April 1910
States and Territories: 46 states, District of Columbia, and the territories of Arizona, American Samoa, Guam, Hawaii, New Mexico, Philippines, Puerto Rico, unorganized Alaska, and the Panama Canal Zone
Record Losses: No major loss of records
Valuable Information: Noted a survivor of the Union or Confederate Army or Navy

1920 Census

Official census date: 1 January 1920
States and Territories: 48 states, District of Columbia, and the territories of Alaska, American Samoa, Guam, Hawaii, Philippines, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Panama Canal Zone
Record Losses: No major loss of records
Valuable Information: Year of naturalization; mother tongue of person and parents

1930 Census

Official census date: 1 April 1930
States and Territories: 48 states, District of Columbia, and the territories of Alaska, American Samoa, Guam, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Panama Canal Zone
Record Losses: No major loss of records
Valuable Information: Was a veteran, and if so, which war

1940 Census

Official census date: 1 April 1940
States and Territories: 48 states, District of Columbia, and the territories of Alaska, American Samoa, Guam, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Panama Canal Zone
Record Losses: No major loss of records
Valuable Information: Identified who provided the information to the census taker; residence in 1935; supplemental questions sampling

1950 Census

The 1950 census will be released to the public and available on April 1, 2022.

Official census date: 1 April 1950
States and Territories: 48 states, District of Columbia, and the territories of Alaska, American Samoa, Guam, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Panama Canal Zone, and some of the smaller island territories

Record Losses:	No major loss of records
Valuable Information:	Fewer questions than 1940; increased supplemental sampling from 2 persons to 6 persons (for a 5 percent sample of the population)

The major genealogical websites probably will not have a searchable index immediately available. With no index, it may be necessary to search the census schedules line by line to find your ancestors. By taking a few steps now in preparation for the release of the 1950 census, you may be able to increase your success of finding your ancestors.

- Make a list of names and locations (county and state)
- Identify the address and/or township
- Locate the Enumeration District
- Review the form and headings
- Review instructions given to the enumerator

Recommended Resources for Further Reading

Printed material

Dollarhide, William. *The Census Book: Facts, Schedules & Worksheets for the U.S. Federal Censuses*, 2d edition. Bountiful, Utah: Family Roots Publishing, 2019.

Greenwood, Val J. “Census Returns” and “Using Census Return,” in *Researcher’s Guide to American Genealogy*, 3d edition. Baltimore, Maryland: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2000.

Hinkley, Kathleen W. *Your Guide to the Federal Census for Genealogists, Researchers, and Family Historians*. Cincinnati, Ohio: Betterway Books, 2002.

Szucs, Loretto Dennis and Sandra Hargreaves Luebking, ed.. “Research in Census Records.” in *The Source: A Guidebook of American Genealogy*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Ancestry, 1997.

Thorndale, William and William Dollarhide. *Map Guide to the US Federal Censuses 1790-1920*. Baltimore, Maryland: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1987.

Websites

“Census Forms in the 1950 Census Dataset,” *National Archives*
<https://www.archives.gov/research/census/1950/blank-forms>)

“Enumeration District and Related Maps, *National Archives Catalog*
https://catalog.archives.gov/search?q=*:*&f.ancestorNaIds=821491&sort=naIdSort%20asc)

“Getting Ready for the 1950 Census,” *SteveMorse.org*
<https://stevemorse.org/lectures/Getting%20Ready%20for%20the%201950%20Census.m4v>)

Lowe, J. Mark, “Who is That Tick Mark? Using Early Census Records,” *Ancestry Academy*
<https://www.ancestryacademy.com/who-is-that-tick-mark-using-early-census-records>)

Morton, Sunny, “Learn How to Use U.S. Census Records,” *FamilySearch Blog*, posted 4 September 2018 (<https://www.familysearch.org/blog/en/how-to-use-us-census-records/>)

“Narrowing Dates Calculator,” *The Golden Egg Genealogist*, (<https://gegbound.com/narrowing-dates-excel-tool/>)

“National Archives Genealogy Series: 1950 Census, *National Archives* (<https://www.archives.gov/calendar/genealogy-series/2022>)

One-Step Webpages by Stephen P. Morse (<https://stevemorse.org/>)

“Through the Decades,” *United States Census Bureau*, (https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/)

“Unified 1950 Census ED Finder,” *SteveMorse.org* (<https://stevemorse.org/census/unified.html>)

“United States Census Forms,” *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Census_Forms)

“U.S. Census,” *Cyndi’s List* (<https://www.cyndislist.com/us/census/>)

(All websites active as of 7 March 2022)