

Notes on Using the Federal Census

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CENSUS BASICS

The federal census has been taken every ten years since 1790. Each census is opened to the general public when it becomes seventy-two years old. The census most recently open to general public use is for 1930. Information on individuals from later census records can be obtained on themselves by individuals by writing to Bureau of the Census, P.O. Box 1546, Jeffersonville, IN 47131 (see attached form). Census records are the most often used and consistently used records in American genealogy, providing detailed information on individuals and families without regard to wealth or social status. For 1790-1840, the census gives the head of each free household with a statistical description of the persons within the household, related or not, to the head of each household. (The 1810 census does not include Indians in the statistics, however.) The 1850-1870 federal censuses list each person in each free household, along with information on each person's age, sex, race (usually only black, white, or mulatto), and place of birth. Starting with the 1880 census information on place of birth of parents and other information is also included. For general information on the federal census see Loretto Dennis Szucs and Mathew Wright, *Finding Answers in the U. S. Census Records* (Orem, Ut.: Ancestry, 2002) and Thomas Jay Kemp, *The American Census Handbook* (Wilmington, De.: Scholarly Resources, 2001).

Censuses are numbered and identified by number (e. g., the 1850 census is the Seventh Census of the United States) and are arranged by census, then by state and county. Each census represents the United States population on only one day. Those days are: the first Monday in August, 1790-1820; June 1, 1830-1900; April 15, 1910; June 1, 1920; and April 1, 1930-2000. Census takers recorded information on households, in the order in which they traveled about the county, thereby indicating neighbors (and potential relatives) by the order in which people appear in the census. Remember in considering possible relatives that "true love may know no bounds but usually your ancestor married someone next door." Many federal census records have not survived, including the 1790 census for several states and almost all of the 1890 census. See William Thorndale and William Dollarhide, *Map Guide to the U.S. Federal Censuses 1790-1920* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1987) and also Ann B. Hamilton, *Researcher's Guide to United States Census Availability 1790-1920* (Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, 1992) for specific states and counties.

The original records of the federal census for 1790 to 1870 are in the National Archives in Washington, DC. The original cards of the 1880 Soundex is in the regional branches of the National Archives. Duplicates of census records and the originals of the 1880 census are in their respective individual state archives. The original records of the 1900 to 1930 federal censuses, and their Soundex/Miracode indexes, 1900-1930, were destroyed by the National Archives after microfilming. For census records 1930 to present write to Bureau of the Census, P. O. Box 1545, Jeffersonville, IN

47131. Information from censuses 1940 to present is only open to individuals and not to the general public.

Individual state archives also have duplicate contemporary copies of some federal census records and, often, some state created census records that can contain information on persons that were omitted from the federal copies of the census records. For lists of state census records see Ann S. Lainhart, *State Census Records* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1992). Many non-census records, especially tax digests, have been published as census substitutes and supplements, often without clearly explaining that the names come from sources other than official census returns.

Statistics from the federal censuses, 1790-present, are available in print, even when the original census records have not survived. Copies of these books of statistics are found in Federal Government Record Depositories at major public and university libraries. Specific book titles can be found in Suzanne Schulze, *Population Information in Nineteenth Century Census Volumes* (Phoenix: Oryx Press, 1983) and idem., *Population Information in Twentieth Century Census Volumes: 1900-1940* (1985). The National Archives has microfilm of the boundaries used for census districts in each federal census (National Archives micropublications T1210 for 1900 and T1224 for 1830-1890 and 1910-1950); also see J. Cayle Parker, *City, County, Town and Township Index to the 1850 Federal Census Schedules* (Detroit, Mi.: Gale Publishing, 1979).

FINDING AND NOT FINDING SOMEONE IN THE CENSUS

The census records are available, with indexes on the Internet web sites Ancestry.com and HeritageQuest. (We have subscriptions to both sites.) Ancestry.com has tried to index all surviving census records, 1790-1930. Heritagequest has done the heads of families for most censuses and has images of all census pages, 1790-1930, even when it does not provide an index to the census, such as for 1850. We can also order microfilm of any census records and soundexes on interlibrary loan.

Census records are not complete or infallible. Census takers frequently relied on second hand information from neighbors rather than interviews with family members. Many names are misspelled in the census records. Some people were omitted from the census (especially Southerners in the 1870 federal census), sometimes because they were traveling and other times because they lived in isolated areas. Conversely some families were accidentally recorded twice in the same census, even within the same county. Native Americans ("Indians") prior to 1870 might be listed as black, white, mulatto, or not at all.

Many people have been missed or their names misread in the indexes. When an individual cannot be found in this way, sometimes he or she turns up in the various published and microfilm indexes. Some census microfilm is more readable than other copies. Indexes to surviving census records, except for those on the Internet, are to heads of households and, starting in 1850, also to people of different last names than the head of their respective households. The indexes through 1870 are in book form although some are also on computer CD-ROM disks. A nation-wide index to the surviving federal census records for 1790-1850 is on microfiche. The indexes for the censuses of 1880 and 1900 to 1920 are on microfilm. When handwritten, these indexes are called the Soundex and when typed they are called the Miracode. All states have a Soundex or a Miracode for 1920 but not every state has these for every census for 1880-1910, or 1930. The Soundex/Miracode indexes surnames by

a phonetic code that solves most of the problems of census misspellings. Census indexes on computer CD-ROM disk allow you search by surname, given name, Soundex code, or any combination of the above. The 1880 Soundex only indexes the families that had children under age eleven although all families are included in the census itself. The 1910 soundex for each state is in two parts, one for the major cities and the other for rural areas. Names were misread or omitted in the indexes on the Internet. In a printed state-wide census index for Georgia in 1840, for example, the surname of "Williams" appears in a dozen different places because of typos, transpositions, and other errors. Names are also accidentally omitted by indexers, frequently when the person appearing previously on the census page has the same surname as the person skipped.

INFORMATION ON INDIVIDUAL CENSUSES

Whenever possible, use a pre-printed form for recording census information. By using the form, you will likely copy all of the information on the census, including the year, county, enumeration district (1880 census and later), and the page/sheet needed to find the information again. Remember when you find someone in the Soundex/Miracode (1880 census and later) that you are looking only at an index card and not the census that potentially contains more information.

1790-1840 *Census Day: 1790-1820, the first Monday in August; 1830-1840, June 1.*

These censuses list the head of the household with the a statistical description of the members of the household, including non-relatives. Some of the census records, especially for 1790-1820, do not survive. Some states also have special, separate, manufacturers schedules for 1810 and 1820. The 1840 federal census has a special column for listing Revolutionary War pensioners. The pensioners were later published geographically in *A Census of Pensioners* (Washington, DC: Blair & Rives, 1841) but not the non-pensioners listed in this column by mistake. The 1840 federal census frequently has pages bound backwards. To catch this error, add up the number of people in the household and see if it equals the total given on the page that follows. The 1840 federal census also has a special schedule of county statistics (no names). These special schedules are being prepared by the National Archives for microfilming. **Indexes:** Aside from indexes by individual states, we have complete indexes to what survives of the 1790 and 1800 federal censuses in book form, and on CD-ROM computer disk for the 1800 census. We have on microfiche and on the Internet on Ancestry.com a nation-wide index (and images) for 1790-1850.

1850-1870 *Census Day: June 1.*

Provides the name, age, place of birth, marriage (if within the previous year of the census), and other information on each free person. The 1850 and 1860 censuses have separate census schedules that name slave owners while statistically describing the slaves. The 1850-1880 censuses, for most states, have special schedules listing information on individual persons regarding agriculture, mining, and mortality (death) during the census year. The 1850-1870 censuses also have separate "social" schedules of county statistics. Sometime the pages of the 1870 census are bound and numbered out of order. Pages in this census can be hard to read due to census takers watering down ink in order to pocket money given to them as an ink allowance. Because of the difficult times of Reconstruction, more than one million southerners are believed to have been omitted from the 1870 census. This particular census also indicates foreign birth of parents. **Indexes:** Aside from indexes for individual states and counties, we have the index for the 1860 census in book or CD-ROM form for many states; a nation-wide index for 1850 on microfiche; and all of the state indexes for 1870 on CD-ROM. These

indexes are only to heads of household and people within the household of a different last name than the head of the household. We have complete indexes and images on the website Genealogy.com for 1850 and 1870; and for 1850 and much of 1860 on Ancestry.com.

1880, 1900-1930 *Census Day: 1880-1900, June 1; 1910, April 15; 1920 to present, April 1.*

The population schedules of these censuses give the same information as the censuses of 1850-1870 but also add place of birth of parents (but not the names of the parents), relationship to head of the household, special naturalization information (AL means alien, PA means papers for naturalization have been filed, NA means person is naturalized), and other data. These censuses have indexes on microfilm called Soundex/Miracode (see previous page). The 1870 census indicates when a parent is foreign born and the 1880 census gives month of birth if the person was born during the census year. The Soundex for the 1880 census only indexes families with children under age eleven. The 1880 census also has a separate schedule for the insane, criminals, and other persons held in confinement. Almost all of the 1890 census was destroyed as the result of a fire. The few pages that survive from the 1890 census are indexed in Helen Swenson, *Index to 1890 Census of the United States* (Round Rock, TX: The Author, 1981). A special census of federal (and some Confederate) pensioners of the Civil War survives for 1890 for the states of Kentucky (partial) through Wyoming. The 1900 federal census gives for each person their month of birth. We have a street index to the 1910 federal census. Federal census records, 1900-1930, give number of years in the country and number of years naturalized. We have a machine searchable CD ROM transcript of the whole 1880 census and Internet indexes (see below) for 1790 to 1930. For more information on the 1930 census see Thomas Jay Kemp, *The 1930 Census: a Reference and Research Guide* (North Salt Lake, Ut.: HeritageQuest, 2002).

Census Indexes at Wallace State

We have indexes to census records on the Internet and in book, cd-rom, microfilm, and microfiche. When we have indexes for the same census in different formats, often it is the same index. A notable exception is the 1860 census indexes for Georgia. The book and the cd-rom versions were compiled by different people. Some of the "census" indexes listed below, especially for early years, are actually tax lists.

On our census book shelf is a copy of William Thorndale and William Dollarhide, *Map Guide to the U. S. Federal Censuses 1790-1920* (1987), which shows the counties that existed in each census year and if the Federal census survives for those counties.

Censuses and Census Indexes on the Internet

We have a subscription to Ancestry Library and Heritage Quest Internet web sites that include printable copies of all surviving census records, 1790-1930. Ancestry Library has tried to index all of these census records by every name and Heritage Quest provides indexes to the heads of household of most of these censuses. The website FamilySearch.com has a transcript of the entire 1880 U.S. census and others for Great Britain and Canada. However, all of these indexes contain omissions and misreadings, necessitating using alternative indexes.

Census Indexes on CD-ROM Computer Disks

All of these disks are labeled Automated Archives or Family Tree Maker. *In addition to the disks listed below we also have the entire 1810 census index, the 1870 census indexes (by state), and the entire 1880 census on CD-ROM computer disks. The 1880 census disks can be searched by any name that appears in the census.* These disks can be searched by first surname, given name, soundex code, or any combination:

CD164 **Mortality records for the U.S., 1850-1880**
Jefferson County, Alabama, 1870
CD49 **Texas 1860-1890 and Social Security Death Index**
CD136 **Colonial and United States Pre-1790**
CD151 **Great Lakes, South and Mid-Atlantic 1791-1809**
CD150 **Mid-Atlantic, South, and Mid-West 1810-1819**
CD154 **Great Lakes, South and Mid-Atlantic 1820-1829**
CD148 **Great Lakes, South and Mid-Atlantic 1830-1839**
CD152 **Southern States 1840-1849**
CD153 **Great Lakes and Mid-West 1840-1849**
CD45 **Southern States 1850**
CD44 **Kentucky and Tennessee 1850**
CD40 **New England 1850**
CD305 **Pennsylvania 1850**
CD24, 26, 318 **Southern States 1860**
CD318 **Arizona 1860**
CD318 **California 1860**
CD318 **Conneticut 1860**
CD318 **Delaware 1860**
CD27, 318 **Illinois and Indiana 1860**
CD318 **Iowa 1860**
CD318 **Kansas 1860**
CD318 **Kentucky 1860**
CD318 **Maine 1860**
CD318 **Massachusetts 1860**
CD 318 **Maryland 1860**
CD318 **Nebraska 1860**
CD318 **New Jersey 1860**
CD21, 318 **New York 1860**
CD318 **Nevada 1860**
CD318 **Pennyslvania 1860**
CD318 **Utah 1860**
CD318 **Washington State 1860**
CD318 **Vermont 1860**
CD318 **Wisconsin 1860**
CD319 **Alabama 1870**
CD319 **Arizona 1870**
CD320 **Arizona 1880**
CD319 **California (San Francisco)1870**

CD319 **Delaware** 1870
CD319 **District of Columbia** 1870
CD319 **Florida** 1870
CD319 **Illinois** (Chicago) 1870
CD319 **Indiana** (Indiapolis) 1870
CD319 **Iowa** 1870
CD319 **Kansas** 1870
CD319 **Louisiana** 1870
CD319 **Montana** 1870
CD319 **Minnesota** 1870
CD319 **Nevada** 1870
CD289 **North and South Carolina** 1870
CD319 **South Dakota** 1870
CD34, 319 **Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, North Carolina** 1870
CD320 **Colorado** 1880
CD320 **Idaho** 1880
CD320 **Illinois** (Chicago) 1880
CD320 **Nevada** 1880
CD320 **North Dakota** 1880
CD20 **Ohio** 1880
CD320 **South Dakota** 1880
CD320 **Washington State** 1880
CD320 **Wyoming** 1880
Alaska, 1900, 1910

Census Indexes in Book Form

United States: 1790, 1800, 1890 (fragments of surviving census; also on microfilm)
Alabama: 1810, 1811-1819, 1816, 1819-1829, 1820, 1830, 1830-1839, 1840, 1850, 1850 mortality, 1860, 1860 mortality, 1870, 1910
Alaska, 1870-1907
Arizona, 1860, 1864, 1870
Arkansas: 189-1829, 1820, 1823, 1829, 1830-1839, 1840, 1860
California: 1850
Connecticut: 1790
Delaware: 1665-1697, 1800, 1810, 1820, 1830, 1840, 1850
District of Columbia: 1800, 1820, 1830, 1840, 1850
Florida: 1830, 1840, 1850, 1860, 1870, 1885, 1910
Georgia: 1790* (reconstructed from other sources, very incomplete), 1820, 1830, 1840, 1850, 1850 mortality, 1860, 1870, 1910
Illinois: 1820, 1830, 1840, 1870
Indiana: 1820, 1830, 1840
Kentucky: (1787 see Virginia) 1810, 1820, 1830, 1840, 1850, 1910
Louisiana: 1810, 1820, 1830, 1840, 1850
Maine: 1790, 1800, 1810, 1820, 1830, 1840

Maryland: 1776, 1778, 1790, 1800, 1810, 1830, 1840, 1850

Massachusetts: 1790, 1800, 1810, 1820, 1830

Michigan: 1799, 1806, 1827, 1830

Minnesota: 1850

Mississippi: 1810, 1820, 1830, 1840, 1850, 1860, 1870, 1910

Nebraska: 1860

New Hampshire: 1663-1699, 1732, 1790, 1800, 1830

New Jersey: 1824-1832, 1830, 1840, 1850

New Mexico: 1850

New York: 1790

North Carolina: 1784-1787, 1790, 1800-1850

Ohio: 1850, 1860

Oregon: 1850

Pennsylvania: 1790, 1800, 1810, 1820, 1830, 1840, 1850

Rhode Island: 1782

South Carolina: 1790, 1800, 1810, 1820, 1830, 1840, 1850, 1860

Tennessee: 1810, 1820, 1830, 1840, 1850, 1860, 1870, 1910

Texas: 1820-1829, 1821-1845, 1829-1836, 1830-1839, 1841-1849, 1850, 1910

Utah: 1850, 1860, 1870

Vermont: 1771, 1790

Virginia: 1787 (kept with the Virginia books), 1790 (reconstructed from miscellaneous tax records, very incomplete), 1810, 1820, 1830, 1840, 1850

Wisconsin: 1836, 1840, 1850

Wyoming: 1870

Census Indexes on Microfiche and Microfilm

On *microfiche* (plastic cards) we have nation-wide (A-Z) indexes for what survives for the whole United States for 1600-1850. Also included in this microfiche are indexes for : **Arizona** 1862, 1866; **Colorado** 1870, 1880; **Kansas** 1860; **Michigan** 1854; **Minnesota** 1860, 1870; **Nevada** 1880, 1882; **New Mexico** 1855; **North Dakota** 1875, 1880; **Ohio** 1851; **South Dakota** 1875, 1880; and **Washington State** 1870, 1871, 1880. We have separate indexes on microfiche for **Alabama** 1870; **Kansas** 1855; and **Georgia** 1870.

We have on *microfilm* the index of the fragments that survive for the 1890 census. We also have on microfilm indexes for **Kansas** 1856-1858; **Maine** 1790; **Maryland** 1790; **New Hampshire** 1790; **New York** 1790; **Pennsylvania** 1790; **Rhode Island** 1790; and **Vermont** 1790. We have soundexes on microfilm for the 1880 and 1900-1920 censuses of **Alabama**, **Georgia**, **Mississippi**, and **Tennessee**. We have the soundexes for **Arkansas**, 1900-1920; **Florida**, 1880-1920; **Kentucky**, 1880, 1900-1910; **Louisiana**, 1880-1920; **Missouri**, 1920; **North Carolina**, 1900; **Oklahoma**, 1900-1920; **Ohio**, 1900 and 1920; **South Carolina**, 1900; and **Texas**, 1880-1920.