

The Federal Census is one of the most valuable sources of family information as you begin your genealogical research.

# Why the Census?

Beginning in 1790, the U.S. federal census is conducted every 10 years. Mandated by the Constitution, the census provides data used to determine the allocation of federal funding and the number of seats each state holds in the House of Representatives.

For genealogists, these records document the movement and changes of American families each decade. Census records can help piece together a timeline of your family history.

	LOCATION		1 1	HOUSEHOLD DATA			NAME	RELATION		PERSONAL DESCRIPTION			EDUCATION		ON	PLACE OF BIRTH		CITI- SHIP	RESIDENCE, APRIL 1, 1935					
	, ele.	(See and towns)	beld in order of	r rested (3)	ward, or mostily realed	d live on a farm!	Name of each person whose usual place of residence on April 1, 1940, was in this household. BE SURE TO INCLUDE:	Relationship of this ye son to the head of thousehold, as will daughter, father mother-in-law, gran- son, lodger, lodger wife, servant, hir	her.	male (f)			tatus- arried (M), Diversed (D)	college any time 107 (You or No)	hool completed	0	If born in the United States, give State, Territory, or possession.  If foreign born, give coun- try as which birthplace was situated on January 1, 1987.		resign born	IN WEAT PLACE DID THIS PRINCON LIVE ON APRIL 1, 1993.  For a person with, on April 1, 1814, but brings in the name houses as an expense, enter in Col. 17 "came houses", and for cost friven in different house tool in the same offer or twent, which, the lived in a different species, content of the same offer or twent, and the content of the limit of the different place, content of per of twent, months, and then, and many content in the limit outliness them the limit of the different place, content of per otware, sometry, and then, and many different persons of the content of the limit outliness of the limit of the limit outliness of the limit of the limit outliness of the limit of the limit of the limit outliness of the limit				
Line No.	Street, avenue, real	Rouse number (in	Number of house	Home ewned (0) o	Value of heme, if o	Dees this bruselol (Year	1. Persons temporarily absent from household Writh "Ab" after names of such persons. 2. Children under 1 year of aga. Write "Infant if child has not been given a first name.  Enter & after name of person furnishing information.	hand, etc.	CODE Leave	Sex-Male (M), Po	Celar or race	Age at last birthis	Single (S), N	Attended school or since March I, 19	Righest grade of a		i, 1987. Distinguish Canada- Prench from Canada- English and Irish Free State (Eire) from North- ern Ireland.	CODE Genre blas	Okizenship of the	City, town, or village having 2,500 or more inhabitants. Enter "E" for all other places.	COURTY	STATE (or Territory or feroign courtry)	On a farm? (You or No)	CODE Gauve blank)
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The information collected in the census has increased over time. As more states were added to the Union, they were also added to the census. The 1790 census included 13 states and additional territories and districts. Only the head of household was listed by name, with remaining household members and slaves tallied by age and/or gender categories. By 1850, the census contained names of all household members.

Information you might find on the federal census includes:

- Name
- Age
- Birthplace (state or country)
- Parents' birthplace
- Relationships (may be actual or inferred)
- Year of immigration; naturalization
- Residence
- Marriage status
- Occupation
- Education

Tip: Keep track of the information available on each census: Ancestry provides <u>a guide</u><sup>1</sup> for each census year and Rootsweb provides <u>a comparison chart</u><sup>2</sup>. <u>Blank census forms and headings</u><sup>3</sup> are also available.

## **Searching the Census**

All <u>PPLD genealogy databases</u><sup>4</sup> have varying access to U.S. census records (e.g. availability may be limited by certain date ranges).

## **Basic Search Strategy**

- 1. Start with a broad search. Fill in the information fields you know, but it's okay to leave fields blank.
- 2. You can narrow your search with more details, but this can also unintentionally exclude an ancestor from your search if the details are incorrect, misspelled, or transcribed incorrectly.

## Not finding an ancestor? Try these tricks:

- A name may have been misspelled, misheard, or miscopied:
  - Use alternate spellings
  - Remove the surname from your search
  - Use wildcards: ? replaces a single letter, \* replaces zero/more letters
  - Use the <u>Soundex Indexing System</u><sup>5</sup> to search for surnames based on how they sound instead of their spelling
  - o Remove names entirely and search only using other fields
- Remove or broaden your ancestor's age
- Start with the most recent relevant census, then work backward in time
- Browse the census by enumeration district (the geographic area covered by an enumerator)
  - Discover your ancestor's address through other sources and use this website<sup>6</sup> to convert the address to an enumeration district.
- If an ancestor was missed during the initial enumeration, check:
  - The end of the census
  - Special schedules of the federal census (e.g. agricultural)
  - State or local censuses (usually mid-decade e.g. 1865)
- Search for family members (your ancestor may have lived with them) or neighbors (they may be relatives)
- Some census data has not yet been indexed, or even digitized (check with local repositories for printed indexes)

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Tip: Take census records with a grain of salt. Names, ages, occupations, etc. could have been incorrectly recorded. When relationships are included, these are likely, but not proof of, family relationships.

### Not all census records survive

Fires and other disasters have destroyed portions of some of the earlier censuses. Most of the 1890 census was destroyed in a fire and varying areas and years are missing from the 1790-1820 censuses.

## **Errors happen**

Census enumerators may have made mistakes due to illiteracy and misspelling, or were supplied incorrect information by the informant. 1790-1840 census enumerators occasionally made duplication errors when they were required to make two copies of the census.

## It's worth searching multiple databases

Some databases:

- have higher quality images that are easier to read
- have indexing errors
- allow users to make index corrections
- may have missing census data

### Not all census records are available

The most recent federal census record available to the public is the 1940 census. A 72-year privacy rule limits access to more recent censuses.

### **State and Special Censuses**

Governments at the <u>state and local levels</u><sup>7</sup> conducted their own censuses. All levels used <u>non-population</u> <u>schedules and special censuses</u><sup>8</sup> to gather specific information (mortality, veterans, slaves, agriculture, etc.).

#### **Counties changes**

County borders shifted and new counties emerged, affecting the census. Use the *Census Map Guide* on <u>HeritageQuest's</u><sup>9</sup> main page to see these changes over time (requires PPLD library card number and PIN).

#### Learn more

For more about the history of the census, other census types, schedules, etc., visit Rootsweb<sup>10</sup>.