

The Census - A Veritable Smorgasbord of Facts and Clues

Jeanne Koniuszy, October 2015

Chart of Data Found in the 1850-1940 census

Where to find clues in the 1850-1940
census records <http://sumo.ly/77zZ> via
@GenealogyByBarry

Name & Personal Description	1850	1860	1870	1880	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940
Names of all individuals	Yes								
Relationship to family head				Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sex	Yes								
Color	Yes								
Age	Yes								
Year of birth					Yes				
Month of birth					Yes				
Month of birth that year			Yes	Yes					
Place of birth	Yes								
Deaf, blind, insane, idiotic	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes			
Marital Description	1850	1860	1870	1880	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940
Married that year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes				
Marital status				Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
No. of years present marriage					Yes	Yes			
Month of marriage that year			Yes						
Number of Children	1850	1860	1870	1880	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940
Number of children living					Yes	Yes			
Mother how many children					Yes	Yes			Yes
Education	1850	1860	1870	1880	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940
Attended school that year	Yes								
Highest grade completed									Yes
Read or write	Yes								
Months attended school					Yes				

Real Property	1850	1860	1870	1880	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940
Value of real property (Land)		Yes	Yes						
Owned or rented home/farm						Yes	Yes	Yes	
Owned property with mortgage or mortgage free						Yes	Yes		
Value of home or monthly rental								Yes	
Real estate value	Yes	Yes	Yes						Yes
Personal estate value		Yes	Yes						
Military Service	1850	1860	1870	1880	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940
Revolutionary War Veteran						Yes			
Civil War Survivor									
Military Service								Yes	
Immigration & Naturalization	1850	1860	1870	1880	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940
Year of immigration to USA					Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
No. of years in USA					Yes				
Male citizen over 21 years			Yes						
Male over 21 denied vote			Yes						
Naturalization status					Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Year person naturalized							Yes		
Foreign-Born Parents	1850	1860	1870	1880	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940
Father of foreign birth			Yes						
Mother of foreign birth			Yes						
Father's birthplace				Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mother's birthplace				Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Occupation	1850	1860	1870	1880	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940
Profession or occupation	Yes								
No. of months unemployed				Yes	Yes				

Content for the chart is sourced to www.archives.gov.

(Barry Ewell (noted above) was a source of much of the data for the facts and clues in the handout)

The following data is representative of facts found in each census year as well as suggested clues for further research. Many of the clues for the early censuses will apply to the later censuses as well, and therefore will not be repeated in the clues given for successive censuses. Only new clues, which did not apply to earlier census records, will be added as you work from 1790-1940.

1790

Facts

The Head of household is the only given name. All persons (including head of household) are listed under age and group categories. This could also include relatives, friends, employees, visitors and boarders.

No children were recorded after August 2, 1790. No matter when the census taker came (between August 2, 1790 and May 1, 1791), he was to record who was in the house as of August 2, 1790.

Clues

Check heads of household for possible military pensions from the Revolutionary War. Also check for bounty land records. Search for a bounty land application.

If the head of household male is missing - look for a death record, will or probate record.

Make a chart for the known and/or suspect family members. Chart the age ranges by male and female with their estimated birth years. This will help you to know if you have the right family group in the correct locale.

If your family had slaves, it might be an indication of their wealth. If there were slaves, you should check estate, property records and tax records.

Check Colonial records (church records, voting lists, property tax lists, etc.) for the family before 1790, as well as census substitute records

1800

Facts

No matter when the census taker came, he was to record who was in the house as of August 4, 1800. The census lasted from August 4, 1800 - May 4, 1801.

There were more age groups for free white males and free white females than in the 1790 census. By combining the age category with records such as probate inventories and tax lists, you may be able to determine family member names and birth order.

Clues

When you see age gaps in children it could hint that a child could have died, a mother could have died with a second marriage occurring and merging families. Search for death records or a second marriage record.

Tax lists are one of the more common census substitutes for the 1800 census.

Search for military records and pension applications. Applications usually provide the most information and can include supporting documents such as marriage, birth and death records/certificates, pages from family Bibles, family letters, dispositions of witnesses, affidavits, discharge papers, etc.

Check for bounty land applications for service during the Revolutionary War (1775-1783)

1810

Facts

No matter when the census taker came, he was to record who was in the house as of August 6, 1810. The census lasted from August 6, 1810 - June 6, 1811

In the 1810 census, most census takers recorded the households in the order they were visited. A few census takers took notes and created a form listing the individuals in close alphabetical order. If your census was in order of households visited, you can begin to build the circle of influence for your ancestors.

Clues

When you have trouble finding your family, see if you can follow neighbors. Neighbors were often more than just neighbors, they were often related (in-laws, a married sibling, etc.)

The locality where the census was taken becomes critical when we look to expand our research to other records.

Because the 1810 census was broken down by counties, try to find a map that shows the boundaries at the time your ancestor lived there. The boundaries may have been different and you will need to know the location of the records and repository for that year. Google - "us states and territories maps" for map images

A portion of the 1810 federal census was destroyed, so check on state censuses if there was one taken in the off years between Federal censuses. It varies by state.

Soundex and the Census

Until recent years, the fastest method for finding names in the 1880 census for most states was to use the Soundex, a partial index that includes only households with children ten years old and under in residence. Compiled by the Work Projects Administration (WPA), the Soundex index was designed to identify those who would be eligible for Social Security.

The Soundex system is a method of indexing names in the 1880, 1900, 1910 and 1920 US Census. This method of search is somewhat outdated with the newer search engine capabilities

You may find Soundex useful when trying to discover alternate spellings for the surname you are searching for. RootsWeb has a Soundex Converter. Enter the Surname and it will give you the Soundex Code, plus other surnames/spellings sharing the same soundex code.

<http://resources.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/soundexconverter>

1820

Facts

No matter when the census taker came, he was to record who was in the house as of August 7, 1820. The census lasted from August 7, 1820 - September 7, 1821.

The 1820 census has two columns in the free male category (males 16-18 and males 16-25). The column 16-18 was specifically added to help determine how many males could qualify for military service. This column was not to be included in the total count. So double check the total number of persons to make sure that the number in the 16-18 male column was not included.

The 1820 census specified those in Agriculture, Commerce and Manufacturing. If the person listed was in manufacturing, a separate schedule was prepared which expanded on information for that industry.

Clues

The 1820 census asks how many are not naturalized. There were 52,434 foreigners not naturalized in this census. Thus, you may want to search for documents at a nearby courthouse where they lived (e.g. naturalization papers, emigration information, ship passenger lists)

Make it a practice to extract all the persons with the same surname living in the same county. If your family lives near a state or county border, extract persons with the same surnames from neighboring counties.

Use wildcards (question mark or asterix) when doing a name search for possible spelling variations.

Look for military records for males between the ages of 40 and 60+ for Revolutionary War records or pension. Also look for military records of men serving in the War of 1812 between the ages of 21 and 60+. You can also check for military records of men serving in the Early Indian Wars who are between the ages of 0 and 60 in the 1820 census.

1830

Facts

No matter when the census taker came, he was to record who was in the house as of June 1, 1830. The census lasted from June 1, 1830 - June 1, 1831.

This was the first census when the government provided pre-printed forms.

Enumerators were asked to send the original or a copy to Washington. If the handwriting is the same when you cross boundary lines (e.g., cities, towns, counties), you are most likely reading the copy.

There were 108,887 foreigners not naturalized in the 1830 census.

Clues

The 1830 census is the second census with questions relating to deaf, dumb and blind. If your ancestor was included in this category, there may be related guardianship or institutional records.

Search for military records from the Revolutionary War and/or War of 1812 for the head of household. Search for pension applications and records of pension payments for veterans, widows and heirs. Also check for Bounty land

applications the federal government provided for service in the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Mexican American War (1846-1848) and Indian wars between 1755 and 1855. New York, Pennsylvania and Virginia set aside tracts of bounty land for Revolutionary War veterans.

1840

Facts

No matter when the census taker came, he was to record who was in the house as of June 1, 1840. The census lasted from June 1, 1840 - December 31, 1841.

This is the second census when the government provided pre-printed forms.

This is the first census to ask a military related question (name and age of Revolutionary War pensioners)

This is the last census where only the head of household is listed with members of the household being counted.

The 1840 census expanded questions relating to deaf, dumb and blind to include insane or idiot and whether they were cared for by a public institution or at home.

Clues

Military records and pensions to search for men in the 1840 census:

Revolutionary War (those ages 70 - 80+)

War of 1812 (ages 41-80+)

Early Indian Wars (ages 10-80)

Mexican War (ages 7-55)

Civil War (ages 0-40)

1850

Facts

This was the first census to want the names of people who usually lived in the residence as of June 1, 1850, whether they were in the house at the time of the census taker's visit. The census lasted five months, starting from June 1, 1850. If they died since June 1, they were to be entered and described as if living. If they were born since the 1st day of June they were not included in the census.

This is the first census to record names of every person in a household and an individual's place of birth.

There were six schedules prepared for the 1850 census: (1-6) Free Inhabitants, slave inhabitants, mortality, production of agriculture, products of industry, social statistics

This census denotes if the individual was married within the year (i.e., June 2, 1849 - June 1, 1850)

Clues

Contact historical and/or genealogical societies in the county to learn about the community, records for the area and connect with other genealogists researching the same surname

Look for churches, cemeteries, courthouses, libraries and archives in the area where they were enumerated.

Compare number of households and number of families to discover multiple families in one building or house.

Follow your family through censuses during their lifetime. Search all census pages for the town, city or county you find your ancestors in. Extract all surnames that are the same as your family's.

Look at the ages of children and place of birth. This might provide clues of where the parents were married or from where the family migrated.

Look carefully at the person's occupation/trade. If a merchant, look for a business license, business/professional directory, newspaper ads for the business, etc. If a farmer, look at Schedule 4 which was the Agricultural Census for that year.

Place of birth may lead you to search immigration records

Look for signatures or marks in relation to the information as to whether your ancestor could read and write.

If deaf, dumb, blind, insane, idiotic, pauper or convict it can lead you to institutional or guardianship records, court records or jail records.

Check the mortality schedules for those who died during the twelve months prior to the census (June 2, 1849 to June 1, 1850).

1860

Facts

The census day for 1860 was June 1, 1860 and lasted 5 months. Children born after June 1, 1860 were omitted from the census.

This was the first census that had a "value of personal estates" asked

This is an important pre-Civil War census before families were split from one another

There were six schedules prepared for 1860 and were the same as in the 1850 census

Clues

If a husband died and the woman remarried, she will have a different last name. Start your search in the county where they resided prior to the war.

Search court records for guardianship papers.

Search court records, especially for ancestors in the South because many court battles exist to reclaim land that was confiscated during the war. Also check court records regarding freed slaves.

1870

Facts

The census day for 1870 was June 1, 1870 and lasted 5 months. Children born after June 1, 1870 were omitted from the census. Those who died after June 1, 1870 were not included.

For the specific country of birth (e.g. Germany), the enumerator was to be specific to the area of the country rather than just listing the country, though this instruction was not consistently followed.

The actual date that the census taker was at the place of residence is listed, though the family was to provide who was in the home as of June 1, 1870.

Five schedules were prepared for this census: (Schedules 1-5) General Population, Mortality, Agriculture, Products of Industry, Social Statistics.

This is the first census where those previously listed on slave schedules are listed by name and age (the Emancipation Proclamation was enacted January 1, 1863).

This census has more indication of color - White, American Indian, Black, Chinese (included all east Asians), Mulatto.

This census asked if a male, over 21 years of age had been denied the right to vote.

This census asked if a person was born within the census year or married within the census year.

The Social Statistics Schedule conducted from 1850-1870 includes information about real estate, annual taxes, cemeteries, school statistics, libraries, newspapers, and churches.

Clues

One should check the Freedmen's Bureau records if you have African American ancestry. There are three sets of records to search: Commissioner's records, Superintendent of Education, and Field office records (the most valuable for genealogy)

This is the first census after the U.S. Civil War. It defines who lived and who were survivors after the war. Search military records and pension records.

Because of extensive destruction of the war or broadened vistas, there may be increased migration. Changes may have occurred which include: relocation of the family, change in living space, a mix of extended families, mix of friends and neighbors (two widows with children now living together), single soldiers now marrying, remarriages of women due to death of a husband.

Check an earlier census for place of birth. Many moved back home to be with parents or grandparents.

Check for guardianship papers.

Those who are omitted may have been migrating.

Check courthouses for documents - slaves, as free men, now could register real names and record land deeds. Check court records, land, wills and probate records for post-war family changes.

Look for neighbors when you can't find your family. There may have been a name change due to remarriage, but they are still living next door to long-time neighbors.

This is the first census to ask if parents were foreign-born. If yes, check ship passenger lists, immigration, etc. Search for naturalization records.

Use clues about male citizenship over 21 with right to vote to look for voter rolls, deed records, etc.

1880

Facts

The census day for 1880 was June 1, 1880 and lasted 1 month. The shorter duration of the census numeration resulted in less people being missed as in prior census periods.

Five schedules were prepared: Population, Mortality, Agriculture, Social Statistics, Manufacturing.

This was the beginning of the 72 year privacy rule. In previous years, the census was posted for those who were literate to check for errors and omissions.

Enumeration Districts were created for this census. There were five times more enumerators hired for this census. Separate enumerators were hired to complete the supplemental schedules.

Name of street, house number, dwelling number in order of visitation and family number in order of visitation is in this census.

This is the first census that asked for relationship to head of household.

The Indian Population Schedule, in the bottom half is specific to Indians with additional questions regarding other names they are known by, tribe, parents, degree of white blood, type of dwelling, if they are being taxed and whether living in polygamy.

Clues

Indian families may appear in the general population census. Make sure to check the special Indian schedules.

Search all males in the family over age 30 for military records and pensions. Search not only your direct line but also siblings, uncles, brother-in-laws and cousins. Important information can be found in pension files of extended family.

This census asks if the ancestor was married within the census year so search for civil as well as church marriage records.

If the person was widowed since the 1870 census, consider looking for wills and probate records, military pensions, death event records.

If the person is divorced, search court records for divorce proceedings.

1885

Facts

There was an 1885 Special Census for Colorado, Florida, Nebraska, New Mexico and the territories of Dakota. These schedules were conducted: Population, Agriculture, Products of Industry and Mortality.

1890

Facts

Much of the 1890 census was destroyed by fire in 1921. Less than 1% survived, covering 6,160 individuals.

Veterans Schedule - In 1890 there was a special schedule created for Union Civil War veterans which also includes many Confederate veterans. Nearly all records for the states of Alabama through Kansas and the western half of Kentucky were lost. The schedules for the remaining half of Kentucky and the states of Louisiana to Wyoming are available.

1900

Facts

The census day for 1900 was June 1, 1900 and lasted 1 month for rural districts and two weeks for populations over 8,000.

There were seven schedules prepared for the 1900 census: Population, Native American Population, Agriculture, Manufacturing, Mortality, Social Statistics, Crime. However, Schedules 3-7 were abstracted for data and then destroyed.

Special enumerations included military and naval personnel (conducted through the Departments of War and Navy), "Indian Territory" (Commissioner of Indian Affairs), and "institutions" (prisons, hospitals, etc.)

This is the only census that provides month and year of birth.

This census asks how long an immigrant had been in the country and whether they were naturalized.

This is the first census where U.S. citizens living abroad were enumerated. It is also the first census to be conducted outside the continental U.S.

Clues

Since there has been a twenty year gap in available census records, use the state, county and community source documents you will be able to find to piece together information to bridge to the next census.

This census asks the number of children born to the mother and how many are still living. Make special note of this column to locate missing children from your family group who may have died. Look for obituaries or death certificates. Check church and cemetery records. Look at the number of years the couple has been married. Look for gaps in the family ages. Check to see if there are school records with additional information.

When looking for Native American Schedules, look first for the Indian schedules at the end of the county schedule and look at the end of the state schedule.

The 1900 census is very important for providing you with dates and places to search for marriage records, birth records of children and deaths of children.

Check for indications of status of naturalization: A or AL - Alien; NA - Naturalized; NR - Not Reported; PA - First Papers Filed.

Look for military records for those serving in the Spanish American War who are 20+ in the 1900 census. Be aware that many of the males between the ages of 1-20 in the 1900 census will most likely be involved in the future World War I. Those under the age of 10 in the 1900 census will likely be involved or register for the draft in future World War II.

1910

Facts

The census day for 1910 was April 15, 1910 and lasted 1 month for rural districts and two weeks for populations over 5,000. Individuals who died or birth of children born after April 15, 1910 were not included in the census.

Some of the 1910 census microfilming was of poor quality, particularly for Mississippi. Some of the states' censuses were rendered unreadable and were not indexed for computer searches. Go to the original view of the census page to see if your ancestor was omitted.

In 1910, most counties began to record vital records (births and deaths)

The 1910 census asks for the number of children born and how many were still living.

In 1910, the enumerator asked for the year of immigration and if they were naturalized citizens.

Clues

Males who are 1 could be searched for possible future service in the military for World War II. Continue to check for military for past service in previous wars. Men 60+ could have served in the Civil War.

There is a good chance many individuals did not have civil birth records. Check for civil birth records and then turn to church records. See the genealogical/historical society for that area as a starting point.

Don't assume that children of the same age are twins. Make sure they are not cousins being raised together, or that they are not children of a blended family.

Look for enumerator marks such as M1, M2, M3 for multiple marriages. Look back on previous census records for children associated with the mother.

If widowed, consider looking for wills, probate records, military pensions, death event records of a spouse.

Recorded fractions in a marriage column indicates they were married within the year. Search civil records and then church records for the same location.

Real Estate value can be a good clue to finding tax and land records.

Train travel now spans nationwide. The mobility of family is beginning to expand beyond horse and wagon. Look for sale of land/home in 1900 location and date of purchase for land/home in the 1910 location. There may be gaps and by charting on a map between the two locations, you may find additional records in the interim.

As children grow and leave the home, look for neighbors and land records to see if there has been a marriage, land purchase and move close to home.

1920

Facts

The census day for 1910 was January 1, 1920 and lasted 1 month for rural districts and two weeks for populations over 2,500+. Individuals who died or birth of children born after January 1, 1920 were not included in the census.

This is the first census following World War I. Following the war, many boundaries changed in Europe. If the enumerators spelled out the name of the city, state, province or region (as instructed) you will be able to find the exact towns or regions from which they emigrated.

Institutions are normally found at the end of the enumeration sections and servicemen were to be listed as members of their duty posts, not in the family enumeration.

The 1920 census included Native Americans in the general population schedule.

A special statistical study was conducted in 1923 on coal miners listed in the 1920 census.

Birthplace and mother tongue are included in the enumeration.

Clues

By 1920 most counties had started recording vital records (birth and death). By 1925 vital records were recorded in all U.S. counties. Most persons recorded in this census will have a birth/death certificate.

If your ancestor is listed in this census, make sure you check the Social Security Death Index.

Continue to search for military records for men listed in the census.

This census asked for the year of immigration and whether naturalized. Look for ship records and naturalization records.

1930

Facts

The census day for 1930 was April 1, 1930 and was completed by May 31, 1930. Individuals who died or birth of children born after April 1, 1930 were not included in the census.

The numeration date for Alaska began on October 1, 1929 and had fewer questions.

It is possible that your family wasn't counted. Up to 15% of any one census could have been missed.

This census asked if the family had a radio set. This was used to help gauge consumerism, mass communication, and mass culture in the U.S.

Clues

If your ancestor was listed in the 1930 census and lived past 1935, make sure to check the Social Security Death Index. The Social Security Act was signed by FDR on 8/14/35. Taxes were collected for the first time in January 1937. Check for delayed birth certificates for those who had no birth certificates, but who applied for Social Security.

This was the first census to include seamen on U.S. flag merchant vessels. Do a Google search on "1930 Census of Merchant Seamen".

If you are trying to find the enumeration district your family lived in, do a Google search for "finding enumeration district maps." Enumeration districts were an area that could be covered by a single enumerator in one census period.

1940

Facts

The census day for 1940 was April 1, 1940 and was completed by May 31, 1940. Individuals who died or birth of children born after April 1, 1940 were not included in the census.

Questions new to the census included residence five years earlier, income, highest level of school completed and new detailed questions on unemployment history. Many of these questions were added to measure the effects of the Great Depression.

People living in tourist homes, trailer camps or one-night lodging houses were included in the census and enumerated on April 8th. People living in hotels were counted on April 9th and can be found on separate pages.

An "X" placed by the name of a person indicates who the informant for the census was. If a neighbor gave the information, the enumerator was to write the name of the person in the left-hand margin.

This census asked what the highest grade of education was completed. This was toward the end of the Depression and tied in with unemployment and job opportunities. In 1940 the minimum wage was 43¢ an hour and the average income was \$1299.00. In 1940, just under 1 adult of 20 had completed at least 4 years of college.

The question regarding place of residence was the Census Bureau's desire to learn about migration in the US during the 1930's commonly due to the Depression.

Clues

The name of the street and house number in urban areas was listed in the census. See if you can find the address in Google maps to determine if the house may still exist today. When you enter the address in Zillow.com or Realtor.com, it will give you some history to when the house was built and the specs for the home.

Children under the age of 1 (born after April 1, 1939) were represented months as fractions with the following dates:

April 1939 (11/12)

August 1939 (7/12)

December 1939 (3/12)

May 1939 (10/12)

September 1939 (6/12)

January 1940 (2/12)

June 1939 (9/12)

October 1939 (5/12)

February 1940 (1/12)

July 1939 (8/12)

November 1939 (4/12)

March 1940 (0/12)