Census Basics for Genealogical Research

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Census records are a genealogists best friend. They provide names, ages, and family relationships. Censuses show the growth and movement of families over time. They also provide clues for locating other records, including birth records, marriage records, passenger lists, and naturalization records. They can be used to prove or disprove preconceived ideas about our ancestors.

U.S. Census records are relatively easy to find. They are searchable on *Ancestry.com* or *AncestryLibrary Edition*. *HeritageQuestOnline*, *Fold3* (1860 and 1930 only). *FamilySearch*, and *FindMyPast* also provide access. *Ancestry* has the easiest to use interface. *HeritageQuest*, which is owned by *Ancestry* have the exact same interface. This is important because *HeritageQuest* is always available for home use in the St. Louis Metropolitan Area with a valid St. Louis County Library Card.

HeritageQuest also has tools to help you learn more about the census. Its research tab has several links to helpful information including Historical Censuses, Census Indexes, and the non-population schedules. These are all excerpts from *The Census Book: A Genealogist's Guide to Federal Census Facts, Schedules and Indexes; With Master Extraction Forms for Federal Census Schedules, 1790-1930.*[1] Likewise, the maps tab you will find a digitized version of *Map guide to the U.S. federal censuses, 1790-1920*[2] This book shows county changes in each of the states over time. This can be quit helpful placing your ancestors geographically so you can find them in the census.

POPULATION SCHEDULES
The U.S. Constitution mandates a census every 10 years for the purpose of apportioning seats in the House of Representatives. The first U.S. Census took place in 1790. The most recent in 2020. Access is restricted for 72 years to protect the privacy of the respondents. This means the most recent one available is from 1940. The 1950 census will be released in April of 2022.

Each decade's census asks different questions. For example, the 1930 Census asked if the household owned a radio. They did not ask that question before 1930 because radios were not very common. They do not ask it now because they know everyone has one. Typical questions include name, age, gender, marital status, occupation, state (or foreign country) of birth and state (or foreign country) of his or her parents' birth.

Searching census records is relatively easy. Start with the 1940 Census and work backward in time to 1930, 1920, 1910, and so on. As you move backward in time you will see parents becoming children and living with their own parents.

The biggest challenge most researchers encounter in this process is the absence of the 1890 census. That census was stored in the basement of the Commerce Department in Washington DC. The building caught fire in 1921. The firemen put out the fire but in the process sent gallons of water down into the basement. This water destroyed most of the Census. Because of this loss researchers must traverse a 20 year gap between 1900 and 1880.

Moving back earlier than the 1850 census presents another challenge. Instead of listing everyone's name, only the head of the household's name was recorded. Everyone else was represented by a tick mark. This can make identifying individuals very difficult. Nevertheless, individual families can be identified.

In order to facilitate the correlation of data on the census forms, the Census Bureau developed a number of codes. Space was left on the form for the code and the codes were added when the form was returned to the office. Steve Morse has a page on his website to decipher the codes.[3]

CENSUS NON-POPULATION SCHEDULES
As the census takers made their rounds, they collected other information too. They compiled this data into other schedules that provided information to government agencies on the status of various aspects of American life.

AGRICULTURE SCHEDULES (1850, 1860, 1870, 1880) documents the work of everyone involved in farm production during the census year. It records the production of land owners, but also tenant farmers and sharecroppers. This schedule shows crops raised, and numbers of farm animals. It also reports the number of acres under cultivation. Although the form is not directly useful for genealogical research. it can give interesting glimpses into the lives of your ancestors.

DEFECTIVE, DEPENDANT, AND DELINQUINT SCHEDULES (DDD) (1880) provide information on on people with some type of handicap. They might be institutionalized or they might live at home. It includes people who are blind, deaf-mutes, paupers, indigent, homeless children, idiots, insane and prisoners. History & Genealogy has an index to St. Louis records in this schedule on our website.[4]

 INDUSTRY AND MANUFACTURING SCHEDULES (1850, 1860, 1870, 1880) gathered information about the growing industrial production in the United States. It captured information about the capitalization of the business, raw materials used, type of power used, and the amount paid in wages to male and female employees.

MORTALITY SCHEDULES (1850, 1860, 1870, 1880) enumerate everyone who died in the 12 months preceding the census. The purpose of this effort was to discover significant causes of death in the country that could possibly be addressed by efforts at public health. Because enslaved people were enumerated by name in this schedule, it can be a very early existence in the census records for people who might otherwise be nameless in public records.

SLAVE SCHEDULES (1850, 1860) are considered to be non-population schedules although they do, in fact, count people. These schedules exist because of Article 1, Section 2, Clause 3 of the

United States Constitution. It provides that enslaved people would be counted as 3/5 of a person for the purposes of apportioning representation in the House of Representatives and for purposes of direct taxation. To calculate this the number of enslaved people in an area needed to be known but not necessarily their names. Consequently enslaved people were typically not enumerated by name. Occasionally, the census taker did not follow their instructions. The 1860 Slave Schedule for Boyd County, Kentucky, and the 1850 Slave Schedules for Bowie County, Texas and Utah County, Deseret list enslaved people by name. Are there others? Who knows. Prior to 1850, enslave people were counted as tick marks in the household of the slave owning families.

SOCIAL STATISTICS SCHEDULES (1850, 1860, 1870) were designed to gather information from particular geographic areas within a county. Information collected included the value of real estate and personal property, information about schools and libraries, poorhouses, criminals, average monthly wages, and the cost of housing.

VETERANS SCHEDULE (1840, 1890) The 1840 Enumeration of Pensioners for Revolutionary or Military Service was conducted by the enumerators as part of their regular count of the population in 1840. The information was recorded on the back of the census form. In 1841 the Census Bureau compiled an transcription of the information of all of the men who had been enumerated. This document is online at the Census Bureau's web page.[5]

In 1890 a separate schedule was created to enumerate surviving Union soldiers, sailors, and marines who had served in the "war of the rebellion" or their widows. Unfortunately, the January 1921 fire in the Commerce Department Building destroyed the 1890 Veterans Schedule for all states alphabetically from Alabama to part of Kentucky.

The Non-Population Schedules can be challenging to locate. Many, but not all are available on *Ancestry*. Dollerhide's book provides locations for them on pages 102-124.[6]

STATE CENSUSES
Many of the states (and territories) conducted their own censuses for state purposes. They can be a great asset tracking a family who moved multiple times between the years of the Federal census. A state census might ask different questions and therefore proved information you cannot find anywhere else.

State censuses can also be used as a substitute for the 1890 census if the state conducted a census (or more) between 1880 and 1900. Colorado (1885), District of Columbia (1885, 1888, 1892, 1894), Florida (1885, 1895), Iowa (1885, 1895). Kansas (1885, 1895), Minnesota (1885, 1895), Nebraska (1885), New Jersey (1885, 1895). New Mexico (1885), New York (1892), North Dakota (1885), Oregon (1895), Rhode Island (1885, 1895), South Dakota (1885, 1895), Utah (1895), and Wisconsin (1885, 1895) all took state censuses during this critical time frame.[7]

Many of the state censuses have been digitized *on Ancestry*. If they are not available there, Ann S. Lainhart, in *State Census Records*, tells where copies can be found.[8]

CENSUS RECORDS FROM OTHER COUNTRIES
Many countries have taken censuses of their populations. We will consider some of the most available of them below.

CANADA follows the pattern of census taking of the United Kingdom. The census is taken the first year of each decade beginning in 1851. The areas of the modern country enumerated depend on what parts were part of Canada at the time. Prior to the 1867 confederation, for example Canada would have consisted of modern Ontario and Quebec. Newfoundland did not join

until 1949. The census records can be found on *Ancestry, FindMyPast*, and *FamilySearch*.

FRANCE conducted a census every five years beginning in 1801. Not all of the records survived. Those that do are located at the departmental archives. Most (possibly all) of them have digitized and placed their historic census records online. To find them, do a Google search for Departmental Archives [name of department]. If the quality of your French Language skills is not great you can use Google Translate to produce an English version of the website.

GERMANY did not have a nationwide census until 1867. Prior to that the individual states took a census as early as 1816. To learn how to use and find these records, see Minert, Roger P., *German Census Records 1816-1916.*[9]

IRELAND (including Northern Ireland) conducted censuses beginning in 1821, but due to a miscommunication with the census office in London, the records prior to 1901 were largely destroyed. The 1901 and 1911 censuses are searchable on the National Archives of Ireland website.[10] They are also indexed on *FamilySearch*.

UNITED KINGDOM took its first census in 1841 and every 10 years thereafter. The 1911 census is the most recently released. They can be found on *Ancestry* by searching for "England Census," "Wales Census" or "Scotland Census." The Census records for Northern Ireland during this time frame are with those of the Irish Republic (see above). They are also on *FindMyPast*.

Census records probably exist for other countries too. Search *Ancestry, FamilySearch*, and Google to see what you can learn.

CONCLUSIONS
Census records are one of the best tools available for family history research. Learn to understand and use them to facilitate your research.

Notes:
[1]Dollarhide, William, *The Census Book: A Genealogist's Guide to Federal Census Facts, Schedules and Indexes; With Master Extraction Forms for Federal Census Schedules, 1790-1930.* Bountiful, Utah: Heritage Quest, 1999. St. Louis County Library Call no. R 929.1 D665C.

[2]Thorndale, William, and William Dollarhide, *Map Guide to the U.S. Federal Censuses, 1790-1920.* Baltimore: Genealogical Pub. Co., 1987. St. Louis County Library Call no. 911.73 T498M

[3]https://stevemorse.org/census/codes.html

[4]https://www.slcl.org/content/index-defective-dependent-and-delinquent-schedules-1880-federal-census-st-louis-missouri

[5]https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1841/dec/1840d.html

[6]Dollarhide.

[7]Lainhart, Ann S., *State Census Records.* Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing, 1992. St. Louis County Library Call no R 929.37 L187S and 929.37 L187S

[8]Lainhart.

9Minert, Roger P., *German Census Records 1816-1916: The When, Where, and How of a Valuable Genealogical Resource.* Orting, WA: Family Roots Publishing Co. LLC, 2016. St. Louis County Library Call no. R 943 M664G or 943 M664G

[10]http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/search/

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