

## U.S. CENSUS SECRETS

### U.S. Census Background

Census records are fundamental to genealogy research and are often considered the most valuable resource for uncovering family history. The census was conducted every 10 years, and as census takers visited households, they recorded family groups, which help your family history research to connect children to parents. In some cases, multiple generations were listed in the same household. Beginning in 1790, the U.S. Census has been conducted every decade and continues today. However, due to the 72-year privacy rule, the most recent census available to the public is the 1950 census.

### Why the Census Was Created?

Keep in mind that the census was not designed for genealogy purposes. Its original goal was to count the population in each region of the country to determine how many representatives each state would have in the House of Representatives.

### Eight Types of US Census Schedules

The U.S. Census collected several types of schedules, each serving a specific purpose. Here are the eight primary types of U.S. census schedules:

**Population Schedules** – The most commonly used schedule, listing individuals and families.

**Slave Schedules** – Collected in 1850 and 1860, recording information about enslaved people.

**Agricultural Schedules** – Documented farms, crops, livestock, and farm production.

**Manufacturing (Industrial) Schedules** – Recorded information about businesses, industries, and factories.

**Mortality Schedules** – Listed individuals who had died in the year preceding the census.

**Social Statistics Schedules** – Contained data on taxes, schools, property, and other community details.

**Defective, Dependent, and Delinquent (DDD) Schedules** – Collected information on people with disabilities, the impoverished, and those in institutions.

**Veterans Schedules** – The 1890 special schedule that listed Union veterans and their widows (though much of this was also lost in the 1921 fire).



## Special Collections

### [US Indian Census Rolls, 1885-1940 on Ancestry](#)

Today, we will focus on three of these schedules: the Population Schedule, the Mortality Schedule, and the Veterans Schedule as well as some clues and secret codes that will help you read these Census schedules.

## Population Schedules

### 1790 - 1840

(No. 4.) SCHEDULE of the whole number of persons, within the division allotted to *John S. Wright*

NAMES OF HEADS OF FAMILIES.	FREE WHITE PERSONS, INCLUDING HEADS OF FAMILIES.																FREE COLORED PERSONS.																			
	MALES										FEMALES						MALES					FEMALES														
	Under 5	5-10	10-15	15-20	20-30	30-40	40-50	50-60	60-70	70-80	80-90	90-100	Under 5	5-10	10-15	15-20	20-30	30-40	40-50	50-60	60-70	70-80	80-90	90-100	Under 10	10-24	24-35	35-45	45-100	Under 10	10-24	24-35	35-55	55-100		
<i>Georgina Smith</i>	1				1							1	1																							
<i>John S. Wright</i>					1																															
<i>Robert Smith</i>								1																												
<i>John Smith</i>		2	1		2							2	1																							
<i>Mrs. Margaret Blankenship</i>			1																																	
<i>William Blankenship</i>					1							2	1																							
<i>Miriam Vaughn</i>					1							1																								
<i>James Smith</i>					1							1																								
<i>Conrad Adams</i>		2	1		1							1	1																							

Prior to 1850, only the head of the household was named along with the approximate age ranges of all persons living in the house. Those who were not the head of household were counted using a number in the appropriate age column (shown above).

If your ancestor did not move from one decade to the next, use the neighbors to help verify your ancestors as you go back in time. If you can find some of the same neighbors from one census (decade) to the next, then you likely have the right ancestor. Land, probate, and other records often name the neighbors in land boundaries, which may help verify them as well.

If they did move from one decade to another, look for other family members living nearby as they often migrated in groups.

## 1850 – 1950

SCHEDULE I.—Free Inhabitants in District 66th in the County of Waynes State  
of Virginia enumerated by me, on the 30th day of July 1850. M. J. Spurlin Ass't Marshal.

Dwelling-houses numbered in order of visitation.	Families numbered in the order of visitation.	The Name of every Person whose usual place of abode on the first day of June, 1850, was in this family.	DESCRIPTION.			Profession, Occupation, or Trade of each Male Person over 15 years of age.	Value of Real Estate owned.	PLACE OF BIRTH. Naming the State, Territory, or Country.	Married within the year.	Attended School within the year.	Whether deaf and dumb, blind, insane, idiotic, pauper, or convict.	
			Age.	Sex.	White, black or mulatto.							
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1	260 275	Washington Adkins	26	m		Merchant	12.05	VA				
2	268 276	Williams Meigs	30	m		farmer	20	Germany				
3		Francis do	21	f				VA				
4	269 277	Milton Ferguson	48	m		Merchant	9.00	do				
5		Charles do	21	m		D. Surveyor	150	do				
6		Milton J. do	17	m		farmer		do				
7		Joseph M. do	13	m		do		do				
8		Sarah Ferguson	70	f				VA				

Beginning in 1850 the U.S. Census began naming every person in the household (except enslaved prior to emancipation) and asking their age instead of the tick marks for age ranges that appear in previous censuses.

## 1850-1860

Look for Slave Schedules for those enslaved and as well as their white owners in slave states.

## 1850-1885

Mortality Schedules listed persons who died within the preceding 12 months. Not all states had mortality schedules.

## 1850-1930

Beginning in 1850 showed immigration information.

## 1880 - 1950

Relationship to the head of household began to be listed. Remember in prior years, just because they are listed in a household does not mean they are family. Don't assume anything.

## 1890 (Destroyed by Fire)

For those new to genealogy, you will soon discover that the 1890 census was almost entirely destroyed in a fire in 1921.

Unfortunately, only a few county records survived. However, there are several other record collections that can serve as substitutes for the missing 1890 census. I also created a full video on how to navigate this gap in census records.

[Ancestry Link to Surviving 1890 Census](#)

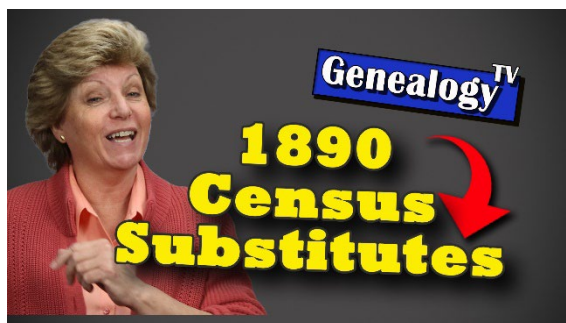
**Census Data of 120 Years  
Ruined by Fire and Water**  
Irreplaceable Records Stored in Basement of  
Commerce Building Destroyed—Two  
Firemen Overcome by Fumes.

[FamilySearch Link to Surviving 1890 Census](#)

### 1890 Census Substitutes

Search the Ancestry Card Catalog by United States and the year 1890. There you will find a list of various state "Census Substitutes."

[LINK TO a Genealogy TV VIDEO FOR 1890 Substitutes](#)



### 1940 – 1950

The 1940 – 1950 had supplemental questions. See the bottom of the page if your ancestor fell on one of the special supplemental question lines.

## Enumeration Dates

It is important to be aware of the enumeration dates found on the top of each census page. This pinpoints where a person was and their age (in most cases) on that date. This helps calculate an approximate birth date range.

1790 Census - August 2, 1790  
 1800 Census - August 4, 1800  
 1810 Census - August 6, 1810  
 1820 Census - August 7, 1820  
 1830 Census – June 1, 1830  
 1840 Census – June 1, 1840  
 1850 Census – June 1, 1850 (Names Household Members)  
 1860 Census – June 1, 1860  
 1870 Census – June 1, 1870 (First to list African Americans by name)  
 1880 Census – June 1, 1880  
 1890 Census – June 2, 1890 (Mostly destroyed by fire)  
 1900 Census – June 1, 1900  
 1910 Census – April 15, 1910  
 1920 Census – January 1, 1920  
 1930 Census – April 1, 1930  
 1940 Census – April 1, 1940  
 1950 Census – April 1, 1950  
 1960- Present Day is not available to the public yet.

Other Schedules of interest might be:

1850-1860 Slave Schedules  
 1850-1900 Agricultural Schedules  
 1850-1900 Mortality Schedules (Those who died in the preceding 12 months.)

## Mortality Schedules

Mortality Schedules were included in the censuses of 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880, and 1885 (in applicable state censuses). These schedules focused on individuals who had died in the year immediately preceding the enumeration. The questions typically covered:

- Name
- Age at the last birthday
- Sex
- Race
- Marital status
- Profession, occupation, or trade
- State, territory, or country of birth (for both the deceased and their parents)
- Length of residence in the county
- Month of death
- Disease or cause of death
- Place where the disease was contracted (if different from the place of death)
- Name of the attending physician

## Where to find the Census Schedules?

[National Archives and Records Administration \(Free\)](#)

[FamilySearch](#) (Free)

[MyHeritage](#) (Subscription)

[Ancestry](#) (Some Free, Some by Subscription)

[Index of free records on Ancestry](#)

If you are an Ancestry subscriber, here are direct links to the US Federal schedules

- [1790 United States Federal Census](#)
- [1800 United States Federal Census](#)
- [1810 United States Federal Census](#)
- [1820 United States Federal Census](#)
- [1830 United States Federal Census](#)
- [1840 United States Federal Census](#)
- [1850 U.S. Federal Census - Slave Schedules](#)
- [1850 United States Federal Census](#)
- [1860 U.S. Federal Census - Slave Schedules](#)
- [1860 United States Federal Census](#)
- [1870 United States Federal Census](#)
- [1880 United States Federal Census](#)
- [1890 United States Federal Census Fragment](#)
- [1890 Veterans Schedules of the U.S. Federal Census](#)
- [1900 United States Federal Census](#)
- [1910 United States Federal Census](#)
- [1920 United States Federal Census](#)
- [1930 United States Federal Census](#)
- [1940 United States Federal Census](#)
- [1950 United States Federal Census](#)
- [U.S., 1880 Federal Census Schedules of Defective, Dependent, and Delinquent Classes](#)
- [U.S., Enumeration District Maps and Descriptions, 1940](#)
- [U.S., Federal Census Mortality Schedules, 1850-1885](#)
- [U.S., Indian Census Rolls, 1885-1940](#)
- [U.S., Selected Federal Census Non-Population Schedules, 1850-1880](#)
- [U.S., Special Census on Deaf Family Marriages, and Hearing Relatives, 1888-1895](#)

## Enumerators Instructions

At the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), you can find and download PDF versions of the Enumerators Instruction Manuals to help you understand the details of each census year from 1790-2020. [Download them here.](#)

## Special Codes in 1950 Census

In the 1940 Census enumerators were instructed to put an X in a circle to notate who was the informant. This helps you understand the accuracy of the information.

0	Mary	Wife	17	W
o	Maloney Jacob C	Head	07	W
	Maloney Helen M	Partner	67	W
o	Scott Warren D.	Head	0M	W
	Beonykes	Wife	17	W
o	Shumate Henry A.	Head	0M	W
	Lushane	Wife	17	W
	Joyce Cheryl	Daughter	27	W
o	Christian Lawrence D.	Head	0M	W
	Rosalie	Wife	17	W
o	Guffin Emma	Head	07	W
	Travis Jammie	Mother	37	W
	Bishop Inez	Sister	57	W

[SteveMorse.org](#) did us a great service. See these links.

[Special Codes Found in 1950 Census](#)

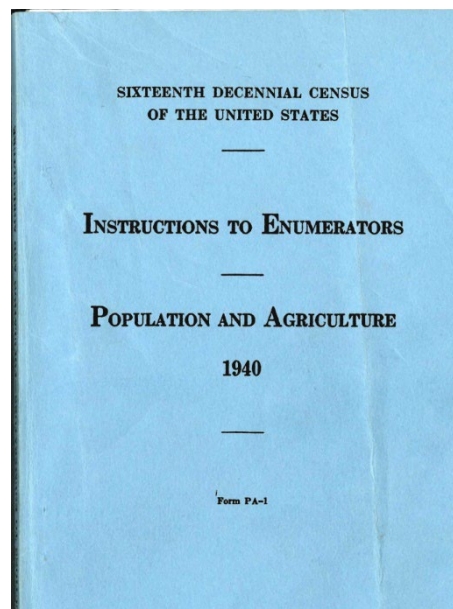
[Deciphering Miscellaneous Codes Appended to the 1950 Census in One Step](#)

## State Census

State censuses were conducted at various times across different states. Be sure to seek State Censuses too at Ancestry and FamilySearch.

At **Ancestry** try searching the **Card Catalog** and **drill down to the state level**, then pick **Census & Voter Lists** in the filters, and if needed, **keyword** search “**State Census**” on the left side.

On **FamilySearch** try **Search, Records**, then in the **Collection Title** (left side of the page), search **State Census** and **scroll** through the list to find your state.



## Clues Found in Census Lead to More Records

There are so many items found in census records that are clues to more records.

For example:

**Real Estate** Value or “O” for Owned – Means there are likely deeds to find.

**Mortality Schedules** – Means you might be able to find death records, probate, etc. to find.

**Children** – Remember to search for several decades in the census to compare records and children together. Using the children can help you verify the right family unit from decade to decade.

**Missing Older Children** – Means they may have moved out or married.

**Age** – Estimate the Birth Year. Remember, the age is the age at the time the census was taken. Note the census enumeration date to give you the prior 365 day range for the birth date. Then calculate backwards a possible birth year.

**Place of Birth** – This might be the first clue you have.

**Military Service** – Several census records have columns about military service. If you have an ancestor who served, there might be more records to find.

**Immigration** – Might be an indicator there are naturalization records to find.

**Foreign-Born Parents** - Census records often include the birth country of an individual’s parents. However, knowing just the country is not enough to begin your research. To effectively find records in the ancestral homeland, you will need to identify the specific district, county, or township where your ancestor lived. Continue researching to gather this detailed information to locate the relevant records.

### Date of Marriage

1850 Census (Column 10), 1860 Census (Column 11), 1870 Census (Column 14), and 1880 Census (Column 12): Indicates whether a person married within the year preceding the census day:

- 1850: Between June 1, 1849, and May 31, 1850
- 1860: Between June 1, 1859, and May 31, 1860
- 1870: Between June 1, 1869, and May 31, 1870
- 1880: Between June 1, 1879, and May 31, 1880

1900 Census (Column 10) and 1910 Census (Column 9): Indicates the number of years of marriage for each married person, thus allowing you to estimate the year of marriage.

## More Secrets of the Census

### Naturalization Abbreviations

- NA = Naturalized Citizen
- AL = Alien (not US Citizen)
- PA = Papers, meaning they had submitted their Paper of Intent, a.k.a. First Papers
- NR = No Record or Not Registered. Typically found on Soundex Cards (Soundex was the indexing system before computers).
- UN= Un-Naturalized or Not Naturalized

## Military Abbreviations

### Civil War

1910 Census: Column 30 asked if a person was a “survivor of the Union or Confederate Army or Navy.”

- UA for Union Army
- UN for Union Navy
- CA for Confederate Army
- CN for Confederate Navy

### 1930 Census

#### Column 31

- CW = Civil War
- SP = Spanish-American War
- PHIL = Philippine Insurrection
- Box = Boxer Rebellion
- Mex = Mexican Expedition
- WW = World War I

[Abbreviations Found in Census](#) (Relationships or Occupations)

[Links to Download Census Schedule Blanks](#)

[Measuring America from 1790-2000](#)

## Ordering Recent Census Records

For Here <https://www2.census.gov/about/policies/bc-600.pdf>

## Extras

[Here is a list of State Censuses Schedules](#)

**U.S. Enumeration Maps** on [Ancestry](#)



## Links To More Videos About the Census

[Hidden Clues in 1880 Census Records](#)

[Extracting Census into Spreadsheets](#)

[1890 US Census Substitutes](#)

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