

"A Just and Perfect Enumeration:" Genealogy and the Census, 1790-1940

Value of Census Records

1. Help trace families over multiple generations.
2. Determine relationships.
3. Establish a family's residence over many years.
4. Provide details about everyday lives of family members.
5. Lead researchers to other records.

Census Access

1. Maintained by the National Archives and Records Administration.
2. Ancestry.com
3. Familysearch.com
4. Released every 72 years.
5. Census records 1950-present are restricted to individual named on the record or his/her legal heir.

Decennial Population Censuses, 1790-1840

1790 Census

- First U.S. Federal Census.
- Enumerators were U.S. Marshals.
- Only head of household listed by name.
- Only white males sorted in age categories.
- All other persons, free or enslaved, were not broken down into age categories.

1800-1820 Censuses

- Only head of household listed by name.
- White men and women were sorted into broader age categories.
- Slaves were not broken down into age categories.
- 1820: Number of people engaged in agriculture, commerce, or manufacturing.

1830 & 1840 Censuses

- 1830: White men and women sorted into broader age categories.
- 1830: All other persons, free or enslaved, were sorted into age categories.
- 1830: Uniform, printed schedules used for the first time.
- 1840: Names and exact ages of Revolutionary War pensioners listed.

1850-1870 Censuses

- 1850: All free persons in each household were listed by name.
- 1850: Age, race, profession, value of real estate, and place of birth were listed for each household member for the first time.
- 1860: Value of personal estate recorded.
- 1870: Former enslaved people were enumerated by name.
- 1870: Recorded whether father or mother was of foreign birth.

1880-1890 Censuses

- 1880: Relationship listed between the head of the household and each household member.
- 1880: Recorded birthplaces of parents, marital status, street name, and house number listed.
- 1890: Majority of the census was destroyed in a fire in 1921.
- 1890: 1890 Civil War Union Veterans Census survived.

1900-1930 Censuses

- 1900: Citizenship information recorded: immigration year, number of years in the U.S, and if naturalized.
- 1900: Month and year of birth recorded for all persons.
- 1900: Recorded the number of years married, mother of how many children, and how many children were living by 1900.
- 1910: Native language of household members, trade/profession, and nature of business.
- 1920: Native language of the parents of household members recorded.
- 1930: If a veteran, and if yes, in which war/expedition he served.
- 1930: Recorded whether or not families owned radio sets.

1940 Census

- Residences of household members on April 1, 1935 were recorded.
- Highest grade completed listed for each household member.
- 5% of the population was asked supplemental questions, including birthplaces of parents, native language, and whether or not he/she was enrolled in social security.
- Census informant identified for the first time.

Supplemental Population Census Schedules

1850 & 1860 Slave Censuses

- Enslaved people enumerated on separate censuses, but their names were not recorded.
- Identified by tick marks in the age, gender, and race categories.
- Enslaved people arranged by slave owner and in age order, not family groups.

Censuses of Native Americans

- Decennial Censuses: 1790-1840 not identified, 1860 Native Americans in general population identified, 1900 enumerated on reservations and in general population.
- Special Census, 1880: Native Americans in general population identified on separate census. Included Indian name, dwelling type, tribal ancestry, and languages spoken.
- Indian Census Rolls, 1885-1940: Native Americans living on reservations.
- Dawes Rolls, 1898-1907: Identified Native Americans belonging to the Five Civilized Tribes.
- Enrollment of Eastern Cherokee, 1908-1910: Native Americans eligible for funds under old Treaties between the U.S. and the Eastern Cherokee.

1880 Defective, Dependent, and Delinquent Classes

- Individuals suffering from physical or mental disabilities were recorded on a separate census.
- Identified people living in the general population and in institutions.

Mortality Census Schedules, 1850-1880

- Information about individuals who died within in the previous census year was recorded, Including month of death, profession, cause of death, and number of days ill.

Non-Population Census Schedules

Agriculture & Industry/Manufacturing Census Schedules

- Provided statistics on farms, plantations, and businesses.
- Organized by owners.