



Factfinder for the Nation

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AVAILABILITY OF CENSUS RECORDS ABOUT INDIVIDUALS

Introduction

The U.S. population census records contain a wealth of information about people. They are useful in learning about one's family and local social and economic conditions at various times in history. For more recent years especially, they are official documents for persons who need to prove their age (in the absence of a birth certificate), relationship, citizenship, residence, and other facts in order to qualify for pensions; get jobs, naturalization papers, passports, or insurance policies; establish an inheritance; or trace ancestry. There was a population census taken in 1790 and every 10th year after that. (Page 3 lists the items covered in the existing censuses for each year.) The Bureau of the Census publication, *200 Years of U.S. Census Taking: Population and Housing Questions, 1790-1990* (Washington, DC, 1989), shows the specific questions and the way they appear on the records. It also reproduces instructions given to the enumerators for taking each census.

This *Factfinder* explains what census materials are available and how to obtain them, and also lists the sources for some other useful records about individuals.

Census Schedules Available to the Public

Individual records from the Federal population censuses are confidential for 72 years, by law (Title 44, U.S. Code). Thus, April 2002 is the scheduled date for the National Archives to open the 1930 records to public use.

U.S. Department of Commerce
Economics and Statistics
Administration
BUREAU OF THE CENSUS

Microfilm copies of the original population schedules, from 1790 through 1920 (virtually all of the 1890 records were destroyed in a 1921 fire), are available at the National Archives in Washington (<http://www.nara.gov>) and its 13 regional archives (see p. 4), and many libraries in various parts of the United States. Most have facilities for making paper copies from the microfilm. The National Archives also rents and sells the microfilm rolls (see below). The Textual Reference Branch at National Archives headquarters (see listing on page 4) will accept photocopy orders by mail, given exact page numbers; it will not do research.

There are Soundex (that is, by the sound of the surname rather than its spelling) indexes on microfilm for the 1880, 1900, and 1920 censuses for each State, and for 1910 for 21 States, principally in the South. Ten Southern States, plus a few counties in West Virginia and Kentucky were soundexed for 1930. Alphabetic indexes to the 1790-1860 and most of the 1870 censuses are available in genealogical libraries. Most States began keeping a more accurate birth registration in the early 1920's.

Researchers may find two Bureau of the Census publications useful; most major libraries have copies: *Heads of Families at the First Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1790* (12 vols., Washington, DC, 1907-08, reprinted 1965-75), contains specific names. *A Century of Population Growth—1790-1900* (Washington, DC, 1909, reprinted 1967-1970), includes the incidence of surnames in 1790, and a variety of summary tables from colonial censuses and from 1790 to 1900.

A number of State and territorial censuses were taken in the intradecennial years, particularly in the 19th century. See Henry J. Dubester, *An*

Annotated Bibliography of Censuses Taken After the Year 1790, by States and Territories of the United States (Washington, DC, 1948, reprinted 1969 and 1975) and *State Census Records*, Ann S. Lainhart, Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1992. An appendix to the Dubester book tells where the existing records (some including names) were located; copies of many can be obtained commercially on microfiche.

Some 19th century economic, agriculture, and mortality census schedules have survived, mainly in State archives but generally available on microfilm. These records frequently can be related to individuals listed in the population censuses.

Microfilm Rental and Sales

Rental. The National Archives rents microfilm copies of historical records to libraries and individuals. These copies are of Federal population census schedules 1790-1920; Soundex indexes, 1880-1920; Revolutionary War compiled military service records, and pension and bounty-land-warrant application files. For details, contact the National Archives Microfilm Rental Program, P.O. Box 30, Annapolis Junctions, MD 20701-0030, telephone 301-604-3699.

Sales. Microfilmed copies of census schedules, 1790-1920, and Soundex indexes, 1880-1920, can be purchased from National Archives Product Sales, Washington, DC 20408, telephone 202-501-5235 or 800-234-8861. The office has catalogs, prices, and ordering information.

Access to Closed Records

The Census Bureau can release details from recent files in the form of official transcripts, but only to the named persons, their heirs, or legal representatives. There is a congressionally mandated fee for this service. Since by law, this census information is

confidential and collected only for statistical purposes, it is exempt from the disclosure provisions of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and the Privacy Act. This means that no one can gain access to confidential census records or avoid the search fees through these acts. Transcript application forms (BC-600) may be obtained from the following:

- Personal Census Search Unit
Bureau of the Census
P.O. Box 1545
Jeffersonville, IN 47131
812-285-5314
Fax: 812-288-3371
- History Staff
Bureau of the Census
Washington, DC 20233
301-457-1167
Fax: 301-457-3005
- Census Bureau regional offices

Atlanta, GA	404-730-3832
	Fax: 404-730-3835
Boston, MA	617-424-0500
	Fax: 617-424-0547
Charlotte, NC	704-344-6142
	Fax: 704-344-6515
Chicago, IL	708-562-1350
	Fax: 708-562-1788
Dallas, TX	214-640-4400
	Fax: 214-640-4433
Denver, CO	303-969-6750
	Fax: 303-969-6777
Detroit, MI	313-259-1158
	Fax: 313-259-5045
Kansas City, MO	913-551-6728
	Fax: 913-551-6789
Los Angeles, CA	818-904-6393
	Fax: 818-904-6427
New York, NY	212-264-3860
	Fax: 212-264-3862
Philadelphia, PA	215-597-4920
	Fax: 215-597-7507
Seattle, WA	206-728-5300
	Fax: 206-728-5336
- National Archives and regional archives (see p. 4)
- Many Social Security and post offices have blank forms

Transcripts ordinarily show age (not birth date) at the time of the census, gender, relationship to the householder, and—where requested—race. If obtained in the particular census, State or country of birth (but not place), citizenship, or occupation can be listed as well. A “full schedule” showing all of the information collected for one individual in a given census (see p. 3 for questions) can be ordered at extra cost.

The records are organized geographically, rather than by name, so except for those censuses that have indexes (see p. 1), addresses are necessary to find them. Thus, the Bureau’s files cannot be used to locate missing

Other Sources

Some of the major types of information not found in census records, and their sources, are the following:

Birth, death, marriage, and divorce records, U.S. and outlying areas	See U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ annual “Where to Write for Vital Records...,” DHHS Publication (PHS) [year]–1142 (Customers may purchase this through GPO)
Birth and death records, Americans overseas	Correspondence Branch Passport Services U.S. Department of State Washington, DC 20522-1705
Birth, death, marriage, and divorce records, foreign	<i>American citizens:</i> Correspondence Branch Passport Services U.S. Department of State Washington, DC 20522-1705 <i>Aliens:</i> Nearest consular office of the country in question
Immigration or naturalization records, 1906 to present (earlier records are held by local courts)	Immigration and Naturalization Service U.S. Department of Justice Washington, DC 20536
Birth records of alien children adopted by U.S. citizens	
Death records of members of U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, or U.S. Coast Guard	National Personnel Records Center (Military Personnel Records) 9700 Page Ave. St. Louis, MO 63132-5100
Military records from World War I and later (those prior to World War I are in the National Archives)	Military Records Division National Personnel Records Center, 9700 Page Blvd. St. Louis, MO 63132
Selective Service records	Records Manager National Headquarters Selective Service System Washington, DC 24035
U.S. Government civilian personnel whose service ended after 1909	Civilian Personnel Records National Personnel Records Center 111 Winnebago St. Louis, MO 63118
Historical map records, family and local histories, and other historical records	Geography and Map, and Local History and Genealogy Division Library of Congress Washington, DC 20540
Homestead applications, ships’ passenger lists, American Indian tribal census rolls	Textual Reference Branch National Archives and Records Administration Washington, DC 20408

Detailed information on Archives holdings of the above and other useful materials about individuals can be found in “Using Records in the National Archives for Genealogical Research,” NARA/General Information Leaflet No. 5 (Rev. 1990; free), “Military Service Records in the National Archives of the U.S.,” NARA/General Information Leaflet No. 7 (Rev. 1985); *Guide to Genealogical Research in the National Archives* (Rev. 1985; for sale) and other NARA family history research tools. Available from Product Sales (see p. 4).

Besides these Federal sources, persons interested in researching their families or communities also should consider some of the following: local and State historical societies, local and State libraries, the American Association for State and Local History in Nashville, TN, Ancestry, Inc., in Salt Lake City, UT, and various other associations, bookstores, and publishers.

Population Census Items 1790-1990

(Includes only those supplemental schedules still in existence; excludes questions asked on a sample basis only.)

1790

Name of family head; free white males of 16 years and up; free white males under 16; free white females; slaves; other persons.

1800

Name of family head; if white, age and sex; race; slaves.

1810

Name of family head; if white, age and sex; race; slaves.

1820

Name of family head; age; sex; race; foreigners not naturalized; slaves; industry (agriculture, commerce, and manufactures).

1830

Name of family head; age; sex; race; slaves; deaf and dumb; blind; foreigners not naturalized.

1840

Name of family head; age; sex; race; slaves; number of deaf and dumb; number of blind; number of insane and idiotic and whether in public or private charge; number of persons in each family employed in each of six classes of industry and one of occupation; literacy; pensioners for Revolutionary or military service.

1850

Name; age; sex; race; value of real estate; value of personal estate; occupation; birthplace; whether married within the year; school attendance; literacy; whether deaf and dumb, blind, insane, idiotic, pauper, or convict.

Supplemental schedules for slaves, and persons who died during the year.

1860

Name; age; sex; race; value of real estate; value of personal estate; occupation; birthplace; whether married within the year; school attendance; literacy; whether deaf and dumb, blind, insane, idiotic, pauper, or convict; number of slave houses.

Supplemental schedules for slaves, and persons who died during the year.

1870

Name; age; race; occupation; value of real estate; value of personal estate; birthplace; whether parents were foreign born; month of birth if born within the year; month of marriage if married within the year; school attendance; literacy; whether deaf and dumb, blind, insane, or idiotic; male citizens 21 and over, and

number of such persons denied the right to vote for other than rebellion.

Supplemental schedules for persons who died during the year.

1880

Address; name; relationship to family head; sex; race; age; marital status; month of birth if born within the census year; occupation; months unemployed during the year; sickness or temporary disability; whether blind, deaf and dumb, idiotic, insane, maimed, crippled, bed-ridden, or otherwise disabled; school attendance; literacy; birthplace of person and parents.

Supplemental schedules for persons who died during the year.

1890

General schedules—destroyed. Supplemental schedules for Union veterans of the Civil War and their widows.

1900

Address; name; relationship to family head; sex; race; age; marital status; number of years married; for women, number of children born and number now living; birthplace of person and parents; if foreign born, year of immigration and whether naturalized; occupation; months not employed; school attendance; literacy; ability to speak English; whether on a farm; home owned or rented and if owned, whether mortgaged.

1910

Address; name; relationship to family head; sex; race; age; marital status; number of years of present marriage; for women, number of children born and number now living; birthplace and mother tongue of person and parents; if foreign born, year of immigration, whether naturalized, and whether able to speak English, or if not, language spoken; occupation, industry, and class of worker; if an employee, whether out of work during year; literacy; school attendance; home owned or rented; if owned, whether mortgaged; whether farm or house; whether a survivor of Union or Confederate Army or Navy; whether blind or deaf and dumb.

1920

Address; name; relationship to family head; sex; race; age; marital status; if foreign born, year of immigration to the U.S., whether naturalized, and year of naturalization; school attendance; literacy; birthplace of person and

parents; mother tongue of foreign born; ability to speak English; occupation, industry, and class of worker; home owned or rented; if owned, whether free or mortgaged.

1930

Address; name; relationship to family head; home owned or rented; value or monthly rental; radio set; whether on a farm; sex; race; age; marital status; age at first marriage; school attendance; literacy; birthplace of person and parents; if foreign born, language spoken in home before coming to U.S., year of immigration, whether naturalized, and ability to speak English; occupation, industry, and class of worker; whether at work previous day; (or last regular working day); veteran status; for Indians, whether of full or mixed blood, and tribal affiliation.

1940

Address; home owned or rented; value or monthly rental; whether on a farm; name; relationship to household head; sex; race; age; marital status; school attendance; educational attainment; birthplace; citizenship of foreign born; location of residence 5 years ago and whether on a farm; employment status; if at work, whether in private or nonemergency government work, or in public emergency work (WPA, CCC, NYA, etc.); if in private work, worked in week; if seeking work or on public emergency work, duration of unemployment; occupation, industry, and class of worker; weeks worked last year; income last year.

1950

Address; whether house is on farm; name; relationship to household head; race; sex; age; marital status; birthplace; if foreign born, whether naturalized; employment status; hours worked in week; occupation, industry, and class of worker.

1960 and 1970

Address*; name; relationship to household head; sex; race; age; marital status.

1980 and 1990

Address*; name; household relationship; sex; race; age; marital status; Spanish/Hispanic origin or decent.

2000

Address*, name, household relationship, sex, race, age, marital status, Hispanic/Latino/Spanish origin or descent.

*While the original questionnaires contained addresses, the pages microfilmed did not. Therefore, only county and State of residence can be identified on census transcripts for these years.

persons, obtain addresses (prohibited by law in any case), or even discover how many people have the same surname.

The Census Bureau publication, *Age Search Information* (Washington, DC, 1990), has details about this service

and also discusses other possible sources of data about individuals.

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Inquiries about census data. The Census Bureau publishes data summarized for various geographic units (as

distinguished from information about individuals) in considerable detail in printed reports (paper or microfiche), on computer tape and cartridges, diskettes, compact discs, and on-line through the Bureau's Internet site (<http://www.census.gov>). These statistics

are useful in assessing local, regional, and national conditions at the time of a census. The latest publications (most of them sold by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402) are described in the Bureau's annual *Census Catalog and Guide*; a separate catalog available in many libraries lists reports covering the period 1790 to 1972. There are over 1,500 Federal and Census depository libraries in the United States that have reference collections of these materials. The Bureau's regional offices and State data centers and the International Trade Administration's

district offices also have current reports on hand.

Questions about these and other Census Bureau products may be directed to:

Customer Services
Administrative and Customer
Services Division
Bureau of the Census
Washington, DC 20233
301-457-4100
(Fax: 301-457-4714)

For more information. Two *Factfinders* in this series explain the Census Bureau's past and present,

respectively—CFF 4, "History and Organization," and CFF 18, "Bureau Programs and Products." CFF 5, "Reference Sources," includes prices and ordering information for some publications useful to family and local historians. Single copies of *Factfinders* may be obtained free from the History Staff (see p. 2).

Questions, comments, or suggestions about any of the Bureau's activities are welcomed and may be addressed to:

Director
Bureau of the Census
Washington, DC 20233

National Archives and Records Administration Headquarters and Regional Archives

(Business hours: 9:00 am-4:30 pm, M-F; contact each office to find out about extended hours)

Washington, DC Headquarters

7th & Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20408
User Services Branch,
Telephone 202-501-5400
Textual Reference Branch,
Telephone 202-501-5400
Product Sales,
Telephone 202-501-5235 or
800-234-8861

Regional Archives and Areas Served

New England

380 Trapelo Road
Waltham, MA 02154
Telephone 617-647-8100
archives@waltham.nara.gov
(Serves CT, ME, MA, NH, RI, VT)

Pittsfield

100 Dan Fox Drive
Pittsfield, MA 01201
Telephone 413-445-6885
archives@pittsfield.nara.gov
(Microfilm only)

Northeast

201 Varick Street
New York, NY 10014
Telephone 212-337-1300
archives@newyork.nara.gov
(Serves NJ, NY, PR, VI)

Mid-Atlantic

9th & Market Streets
Philadelphia, PA 19107
Telephone 215-597-3000
archives@philarch.nara.gov
(Serves DE, MD, PA, VA, WV)

Southeast

1557 St. Joseph Avenue
East Point, GA 30344
Telephone 404-763-7477
archives@atlanta.nara.gov
(Serves AL, FL, GA, KY, MS,
NC, SC, TN)

Great Lakes

7358 S. Pulaski Road
Chicago, IL 60629
Telephone 773-581-7816
archives@chicago.nara.gov
(Serves IL, IN, MI, MN, OH, WI)

Central Plains

2312 E. Bannister Road
Kansas City, MO 64131
Telephone 816-926-6272
archives@kansascity.nara.gov
(Serves IA, KS, MO, NE)

Southwest

501 W. Felix Street, P.O. Box 6216
Fort Worth, TX 76115
Telephone 817-334-5525
archives@ftworth.nara.gov
(Serves AR, LA, NM, OK, TX)

Rocky Mountain

Bldg. 48-Denver Federal Center
P.O. Box 25307
Denver, CO 80225-0307
Telephone 303-236-0817
archives@denver.nara.gov
(Serves CO, MT, ND, SD, UT, WY)

Pacific Sierra

1000 Commodore Drive
San Bruno, CA 94066
Telephone 415-876-9009
archives@sanbruno.nara.gov
(Serves CA [except southern CA], HI,
NV [except Clark County], Pacific
Ocean area)

Pacific Southwest

24000 Avila Road
Laguna Niguel, CA 92677
Telephone 714-360-2641
archives@laguna.nara.gov
(Serves AZ, southern CA counties of
Imperial, Inyo, Kern, Los Angeles,
Orange, Riverside, San Bernadino,
San Diego, San Luis Obispo, Santa
Barbara, Ventura; Clark County, NV)

Pacific Northwest

6125 Sand Point Way, NE
Seattle, WA 98115
Telephone 206-526-6507
archives@seattle.nara.gov
(Serves ID, OR, WA)

Alaska

654 W. 3rd Avenue
Anchorage, AK 99501
Telephone 907-271-2441
archives@alaska.nara.gov
(Serves AK)