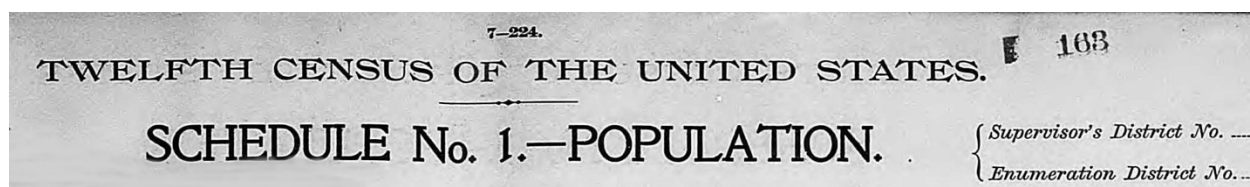


# Did My Family Get Skipped?

## Mining Census Records for Missing Ancestors



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*Did your family get skipped in a census? Learn how timelines, city directories, and creative searches can help you find those “lost” ancestors.*

By all accounts, the Charles Stevens family should have been enumerated in Chicago in 1900. They should have been there, but they were not found. So how do we go about finding people in the census who don't show up where, or how, we expect? Finding the Stevens family serves as a helpful guide for building timelines, finding, and using city directories, and getting creative with census searches.

### Getting Started

#### Laying the Foundation: building a timeline for your target family

What do you know about your research subject/s? Not, what do you *THINK* you know, but what can be documented? Put it all in a timeline to see where any gaps or conflicts might be present.

#### Fill in information for the census years with city directories

- a. City directories are great sources for placing your research subjects in a specific location at a specific time, often in between federal census enumerations. If you know where your subject was living in 1880 but can't find them in 1900, go for the city directories to make sure you're looking in the right place. City directories can also often indicate when a head of household died by including a note in the listing for the widow, providing additional evidence for why someone might not be found in a census,

- b. Ancestry, FamilySearch, Fold3, HathiTrust all have a large collection of city directories available but don't forget repositories like state archives and local libraries. Also, keep in mind that there is a whole wide world of information out there that is not online. Local historical societies and libraries are often willing to search and copy records for nominal fees and can mail or email the copies to you so there's no excuse to ignore them in your search.

When people aren't found where they should be, it's time to get creative with your searching

- a. Get creative with your searches by thinking about name variations and nicknames, searching for specific individuals from the household, eliminating/utilizing certain search criteria, etc. Might your chances be better by searching for John's wife, Veronica, rather than John Smith? If you're unsure whether Rupert was born in Indiana or Ohio, maybe leave the birthplace field blank in the search bar. If you still can't find your subject/s, try the neighbors.
- b. Don't forget about tools available online created specifically to help you find your people in the federal censuses. These include the various tools available on the Steve Morse website, as well as tools available from NARA. Also, be keep in mind any geographic issues such as boundary changes or topographic obstacles which might have impacted the enumeration and/or where your subject might appear.
- c. Could legibility or condition be the reason why you're not finding your subject? Remember there were different copies of the censuses so if the one you're looking at has damaged pages or is illegible in places, try to find another copy. If there's an issue with legibility, etc., remember that Ancestry isn't the only website with online images. FamilySearch and InternetArchive also have census images so take a look at those images to see if one might be better than the other.

**\*Some extra help\***

- ⇒ Knowing the background and understanding how the federal censuses were enumerated can help you understand what you're seeing (or what you're not) and what to look for.
- ⇒ Look for examples of other "missing" households and how researchers either found or got around the issues of locating their research subjects.

## Tips and Tricks

- \* Avoid the 'census taker skipped my family' attitude trap  
Mills, Elizabeth Shown, "Census Techniques and Strategies for Finding Elusive Ancestors," [https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Census Techniques and Strategies for Finding Elusive Ancestors](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Census_Techniques_and_Strategies_for_Finding_Elusive_Ancestors)
- \* Look for methodology inspiration in published articles:  
Hatten, Ruth Land, "Finding 'Missing Men' on Early Census Records: The Example of Thomas Russell," NGSQ 81 (March 1993): 46-50.
- \* Blogs can also provide excellent inspiration on creative census searching solutions:  
<https://vitabrevis.americanancestors.org/2019/04/census-taker-missed/>
- \* NARA offers helpful tools using ED maps and more:  
<https://lisalouisecooke.com/2017/01/21/missing-census/>
- \* For issues with legibility and possible transcription errors, you can also check the same page on InternetArchive through their census collection:  
[https://archive.org/details/us\\_census](https://archive.org/details/us_census)
- \* There were different instructions for absent households (nobody was home) and enumerators may or not have done what the instructions indicated, so know what the instructions say, follow up on those instructions, and be open to any other possibilities. For instance, in 1950:  
<https://historyhub.history.gov/thread/14816>
- \* If you're having trouble finding someone in the population schedule, it may be worth trying the other schedules, such as the agricultural and mortality schedules.

## References and Resources:

Franklin, W. Neil, comp. *Federal Population and Mortality Census Schedules, 1790-1890, in the National Archives and the States: Outline of a Lecture on Their Availability,*

*Content, and Use*. Special List no. 24, National Archives and Records Service. Washington: General Services Administration, 1971.

<https://www.familysearch.org/library/books/records/item/199961-federal-population-and-mortality-census-schedules-1790-1890-in-the-national-archives-and-the-states-outline-of-a-lecture-on-their-availability-content-and-use>

Greenwood, Val D. *The Researcher's Guide to American Genealogy*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2017.

Hinckley, Kathleen W. *Your Guide to the Federal Census: For Genealogists, Researchers, and Family Historians*. Cincinnati: Betterway Books, 2002.

Kratz, Jessie. "Public Access to Census Records at the National Archives." National Archives and Records Administration. *Pieces of History*, 17 March 2022. <https://prologue.blogs.archives.gov/2022/03/17/public-access-to-census-records-at-the-national-archives/> : 2022.

Szucs, Loretto Dennis and Matthew Wright. "Census Records." Loretto Dennis Szucs and Sandra Hargreaves Luebking, eds. *The Source*. Provo: Ancestry Publishing, 2006. Pages 157-218.

Thorndale, William and William Dollarhide. *Map Guide to the U.S. Federal Censuses, 1790-1920*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2009.

Steve Morse census tool

<https://stevemorse.org/index.html>

ED maps available on FamilySearch

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2329948> to be used with NARA ED descriptions: <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/721175>

Census Instructions

[https://www.census.gov/history/www/through\\_the\\_decades/census\\_instructions/](https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/census_instructions/)

NARA main census resource site

<https://www.archives.gov/research/census>