Getting the Most Out of Census Records

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1. Why did the U.S. Government want a census?

    -   To determine how many seats states get in the House of Representatives and how many Electoral College votes each state receives.
    -   Statistics were needed to assess our changing country so we would have a basis for planning.
    -   The content of the census changed to assess those changes in our country.

2. What years was the census taken?

    -   Starting in 1790, every ten years to 1950.

    -   1960 Census will become available in 2032.

3. Are any census records missing?

    -   1800, 1810 Census many states records have been lost.

    -   All of the 1890 census, except the Veteran Schedules and some fragments, were destroyed in a fire.

4. Why are census records important?

    -   It is your best way to see a family group captured in time.

    -   By tracking a family from census to census, you can see changes in that family group.

    -   Using census records points us to an exact location and time frame to find other genealogical records.

5. Is there wrong information on censuses?

    -   Census information could be incorrect.
    -   It is only as good as the person giving the information.
    -   This person could be a neighbor, a child, or an extended family member living in the home.

6. Census review

    -   Every census has something special to offer.
    -   Let's explore some census records by subject matter to see what we can learn about your ancestors.

7. Family Group – 1900-1910 censuses

    -   The 1900 and 1910 census report how many children the mother had and how many of those children were still living. These clues can help determine whether you have identified all children in a given family and whether any were deceased at the time of the census enumeration.
    -   The 1900 and 1910 censuses also recorded how many years the couple were married. The 1910 census shows how many times a person was married.
    -   The most important difference in the 1900 census is the reporting of the month and year of birth for each person in the household.

8. Family Group – Births

    -   The 1870 and 1880 censuses indicate the month the person was born if born within the year.

9. Family Group – Marriage

    -   The 1850-1880 censuses indicate whether the person had married within the year.

10. Family Group – Education

- Many census records report if a person could read or write or attended school during the last census year from 1850 through 1950.
- The 1940 and select people in the 1950 census enumerated how many years of school the person completed.

11. Sick or Disabled

- We all seek additional insight into our ancestor's lives. Knowing about a disability or sickness can help paint a picture of a family's struggles and trials. The 1850-1880 censuses all report the sick and disabled population.

12. Social Standing and Wealth

- Besides the land and personal estate values reported in the 1850-1870 censuses, censuses can provide information about the family's social status and economic wealth, such as the 1930 census. Column 7 indicates whether a person owned (O) or rented (R) their home or farm; in column 8, the value of the home or monthly rent was reported. If the person owned or rented property, check deed or mortgage records for that county to learn more about them.

13. Censuses other than Population Schedules

- Mortality Schedules - List people who died within the last year. Mortality schedules were created as a supplement to the 1850 through 1880 censuses. This schedule shows the person's name, age, birthplace, month, and cause of death. This can be used as a substitute for a vital record.
- Agricultural schedules - Have you ever wondered about the farm your ancestors owned or rented? What did they grow on their land, what livestock did they have, and were they successful in their harvest? From 1850 to 1880, various states kept Agricultural Schedules and population schedules. In addition to Agricultural Schedules, this database includes industry/manufactures, social statistics, and supplemental schedules that vary by state and year.
Find the collection on Ancestry at: https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1276/

14. "Dependent, Defective, and Delinquent Classes"

- In 1880, a supplemental schedule called "Dependent, Defective, and Delinquent Classes" was created. This schedule included different forms to enumerate the following classes of individuals: "Insane, Idiots, Deaf-mutes, Blind, Paupers and Indigent persons, Homeless children, Prisoners."
- Find the collection on Ancestry at: https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1634/

15. 1850-1860 "Slave" Schedules

- Another schedule created by enumerators in the southern United States were "Slave" Schedules. These two schedules record enslavers and a list of the enslaved people that they held in their households. The schedule reports the approximate age and gender of each enslaved person. No names of the enslaved were recorded, only the name of the enslaver. You can follow up by finding the enslaver in the Population schedule for the same year and then learn more about them before and after Emancipation.

16. Military Service – 1910 Census

- The 1910 census (column 30) indicates whether the person was a "survivor of the Union or Confederate Army or Navy." The answers are "UA" for Union Army, "UN" for Union Navy, "CA" for Confederate Army, and "CN" for Confederate Navy. Knowing your ancestors were veterans, search for their military service and pension records.

17. Military Service – 1890 Veteran Schedule

- A few fragments of the 1890 Population Schedule and this year's Veteran Schedule were saved. The Veteran Schedule reports the residence of Union Army and Navy veterans only, not Confederate veterans. Being a veteran does not mean that they received a pension.

18. Military Service – 1930 and 1950 Censuses

- The 1930 census (column 31) indicates military service in other wars with "Sp" for the Spanish-American War, "Phil" for the Philippine Insurrection, "Box" for the Boxer Rebellion, "Mex" for the Mexican Expedition, and "WW" for World War I. Select Veterans in the 1950 census reported their service.

19. Military Service – 1840 Census

- The 1840 census reported the names and ages of "Pensioners for Revolutionary or Military Services." Along with the name of a soldier, their widow could also be listed. Follow this lead by searching for Revolutionary War military service and pension records. Notice that the pensioner does not have to be the head of house to be enumerated.

20. Foreigners and Immigrants – 1820 census

- The 1820 census reported the number of "Foreigners not naturalized" in each household

21. Foreigners and Immigrants

- The 1870 census (columns 11-12) reports if the person's parents were "of foreign birth." The 1870 census also reports if a male over 21 is a U.S. citizen (column 19).

22. Foreigners and Immigrants

- The 1900 census (column 16), 1910 census (column 15), 1920 census (column 13), and 1930 census (column 22) each list the year a person immigrated to the United States. This information should help in locating a ship passenger arrival list. The 1900 census (column 18), the 1910 census (column 16), the 1920 census (column 14), and the 1930 census (column 23) indicate the person's citizenship status. The enumerator reported "Al" for alien, "Pa" for "first papers," and "Na" for naturalized. Again, you can use this information to find passenger lists and naturalization records.

23. Migration

- Notice the birthplaces of all members of the household. A household with different birthplaces is evidence that the family has migrated. Look at the birth state (or country) and the age of each household member and create a timeline of residences. Then, search that county's records to find information about the family.

24. Neighbors

- Identifying neighbors in census records can help trace your family back in time. If you doubt whether you have isolated your ancestors through many years of census records and many people with the same names, look at their neighbors. Look for those older neighbors who appear wealthy and find those families ten years earlier. If there is a misspelling or mistake in indexing, this technique can help you find your ancestors.

25. Blank census forms

- If the census column headings are difficult to read, blank forms for each census year are available. The National Archives, FamilySearch, and Ancestry all have these blank forms in their databases.
- The quickest way to find these forms is just conducting a Google search for: [desired year] census form. Example: 1940 census form.

26. Locate specific census records on FamilySearch and Ancestry

- On Ancestry, select CENSUS & VOTER LISTS in the SEARCH drop-down menu. From the Census & Voter List page, choose U.S. FEDERAL CENSUS in the NARROW BY CATEGORY box (in the right sidebar). Then, on the U.S. FEDERAL CENSUS COLLECTION, scroll down to the bottom of the page and choose the desired census year.
- On FamilySearch from the SEARCH HISTORICAL RECORDS home page, scroll down to the bottom and click BROWSE ALL COLLECTIONS. In the collection title search bar, type "[desired

year] census." The collections lists will be refined as you type. Then, find the census in the refined list.
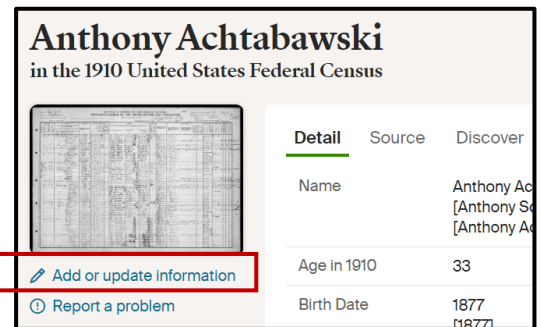
27. Search Techniques

- When searching for an ancestor with a common name and having trouble finding your ancestor amongst many people with the same names, perhaps search for another household member with a different or unusual name.
- On FamilySearch and Ancestry, a wildcard (*) can be used in the search boxes to replace one or more letters in a person's name.

28. Both Ancestry and FamilySearch allow you to narrow your search results by race

- However, note that searching for a "Black" ancestor does not also return results for ancestors reported as "mulatto." Various ethnicities could be written as "mulatto" or had their ethnicity recorded incorrectly. Search multiple variations or omit the race from the search parameters if the desired results are not listed.

29. Correct Transcription Errors

- On Ancestry, from the census indexed page, click on Add or update information and choose from the drop-down menu the field that needs to be corrected (i.e., name, birthdate, birthplace). This corrected or updated name or other field will be displayed in brackets under the originally indexed field.

- On FamilySearch, from the census-indexed page, click on edit. Then, click the Pencil Icon in the Essential Information sidebar and update the person's information as needed.

30. Be aware of historical boundaries, county creations, and adjacent counties when searching for a specific area on a census. Ancestry and FamilySearch search engines do not use historical boundaries. Consider this when searching for adjacent counties or a county that has not yet been created.

For example:

- Sumter County, Alabama, was created in 1832 from the Choctaw Cession of 1830.
- Choctaw County, Alabama, was created in 1847 from Washington and Sumter Counties.
- Therefore, searching for Choctaw County in the 1840 census will not return any results because it did not exist this year. Instead, search for your ancestors in the parent counties of Washington and Sumter.

31.   Browse through a neighborhood if all else fails.

- When you cannot find your ancestors, they may be missed, recorded wrongly by the enumerator, or indexed incorrectly.
- First, search for known neighbors, then search pages on either side of that neighbor to see if you can find your ancestor.
- If you know the name of the town where your ancestors lived in a certain year, you can search for them page by page. This is only doable when the family lived in a smaller town.

32.   Instructions to Enumerators

- If you have questions about specific columns in census records or the answers reported by enumerators, read the instructions given to enumerators that census year. Once at the website, choose the desired census year.

  https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/technical-documentation/questionnaires.1790_Census.html#list-tab-1168974309

33.   Deciphering Census Codes from 1930 to 1950

- From 1930 through 1950, enumerators used various codes to report additional information such as occupation, language, and nativity.
- You can search for the meaning of each code at Stephen P. Morse, Ph.D.'s website: https://stevemorse.org/census/codes.html