



Availability of Census Records About Individuals

Introduction

The United States 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 tenth year after that. (Page 3 lists the items covered in the existing censuses for each year.) The U.S. Census Bureau publication, *Measuring America: The Decennial Censuses From 1790 to 2000* (Washington, DC, 2002) provides a history of each census and reproduces the questionnaires and instructions given to enumerators for taking each census. You can download this publication at www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/ma.html.

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 2012 is the scheduled date for the National Archives to open the 1940 records to public use.

Microfilm copies of the original population schedules, from 1790 through 1930 (virtually all of the 1890 records were destroyed as a result of a 1921 fire), are available at the National Archives in Washington (www.archives.gov) and its 13 regional archives (see page 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 Reference Branch at National Archives headquarters (see listing on page 4) will accept photocopy orders by mail or through orders online, 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 1920s.

Researchers may find two Census Bureau 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, 1907–1908, 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 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 (Baltimore, MD, 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 industrial, agricultural, and mortality census schedules have survived, mainly in state archives, although the National Archives has film for some states. These nonpopulation schedules generally are 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 1790–1930; Soundex indexes, 1880–1930; Revolutionary War–compiled military service records; and pension and bounty-land-warrant application files, and Freedman's Bureau records. For details, contact the National Archives Microfilm Rental Program, P.O. Box 30, Annapolis Junction, MD 20701-0030, 301-604-3699.

Sales. Microfilmed copies of census schedules, 1790–1930, and Soundex indexes, 1880–1930, can be purchased from the Customer Service Center (NWCC2), College Park, MD 20740; 301-837-2000 or 1-866-272-6272. 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 www.census.gov/genealogy/www/agesearch.html or from the following:

- **Personal Census Search Unit**
U.S. Census Bureau
P.O. Box 1545
Jeffersonville, IN 47131
812-218-3046
Fax: 812-288-3371

- **History Staff**
U.S. Census Bureau
Washington, DC 20233
301-763-1167
www.census.gov/history/

- **Census Bureau regional offices:**
Atlanta, GA 404-730-3832 or
1-800-424-6974 Fax: 404-730-3835
TDD: 404-730-3963 E-mail:
atlanta.regional.office@census.gov

Boston, MA 617-424-4501 or
1-800-562-5721 Fax: 617-424-0547
TDD: 617-424-0565 E-mail:
boston.regional.office@census.gov

Charlotte, NC 704-424-6400 or
1-800-331-7360 Fax: 704-424-6944
TDD: 704-424-6963 E-mail:
charlotte.regional.office@census.gov

Chicago, IL 630-288-9200 or
1-800-865-6384 Fax: 630-288-9288
TDD: 708-562-1791 E-mail:
chicago.regional.office@census.gov

Dallas, TX 214-253-4400 or
1-800-835-9752 Fax: 214-655-5362
TDD: 214-655-5363 E-mail:
dallas.regional.office@census.gov

Denver, CO 303-264-0202 or
1-800-852-6159 Fax: 303-969-6777
TDD: 303-969-6767 E-mail:
denver.regional.office@census.gov

Detroit, MI 313-259-0056 or
1-800-432-1495 Fax: 313-259-5045
TDD: 313-259-5169 E-mail:
detroit.regional.office@census.gov

Kansas City, MO 913-551-6728 or
1-800-728-4748 Fax: 913-551-6789
TDD: 913-551-5839 E-mail:
KC.regional.office@census.gov

Los Angeles, CA 818-267-1700 or
1-800-992-3530 Fax: 818-267-1711
TDD: 818-904-6429 E-mail:
LA.regional.office@census.gov

New York, NY 212-584-3400
or 1-800-991-2520 Fax: 212-478-4800
TDD: 212-478-4783 E-mail:
new.york.regional.office@census.gov

Philadelphia, PA 215-717-1800 or
1-800-262-4236 Fax: 215-717-0755
TDD: 215-717-0894 E-mail:
Philadelphia.Regional.Office@census.gov

Seattle, WA 206-381-6200 or
1-800-233-3308 Fax: 206-381-6310
TDD: 206-381-6318 E-mail:
seattle.regional.office@census.gov

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	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services "Where to Write for Vital Records" 1-800-232-4636 < www.cdc.gov/nchs >
Birth and death records, Americans overseas	Passport Services—Vital Records Section 1111 19th Street, NW, Suite 510 Washington, DC 20522-1705
Birth, death, marriage, and divorce records, foreign	American citizens: Passport Services—Vital Records Section 1111 19th Street, NW, Suite 510 Washington, DC 20522-1705 Aliens: Nearest consular office of the country in question
Immigration or naturalization records, 1906 to present (earlier records are held by local courts) Birth records of aliens, children adopted by U.S. citizens	Department of Homeland Security Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services 1-800-375-5283 TTY 1-800-767-1833
Death records of members of U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, or Coast Guard	National Personnel Records Center (Military Personnel Records) 9700 Page Avenue St. Louis, MO 63132-5100 314-801-0800 Fax 314-801-9195 < www.archives.gov/veterans >
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 Avenue St. Louis, MO 63132-5100 314-801-0800 Fax 314-801-9195
Selective Service records Men born on or after Jan 1, 1960	Selective Service System National Headquarters Arlington, VA 22209-2425 847-688-6888 < www.sss.gov/records.htm >
Selective Service Records Men born pre-1960	NARA—Archival Programs P.O. Box 28989 St. Louis, MO 63132-0989
U.S. Government civilian personnel whose service ended after 1909	National Personnel Records Center Civilian Personnel Records 111 Winnebago Street St. Louis, MO 63118-4126 314-801-9269 Fax 314-801-9269 < www.archives.gov/st-louis/civilian-personnel/index.html >
Historical map records, family and local histories, and other historical records	Library of Congress History & Genealogy Division 101 Independence Ave., SE Thomas Jefferson Bldg., LJ G42 Washington, DC 20540-4660 202-707-5537 < www.loc.gov/rr/askalib/ >
Homestead applications, ships' passenger lists, American Indian tribal census rolls	National Archives & Records Administration 700 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW Washington, DC 20408-0001 1-866-325-7208 < www.archives.gov >
Detailed information on Archives' holdings of the above and other useful materials about individuals can be found in "Using Civilian Records for Genealogical Research in the National Archives," Reference Information Paper 110; "Guide to Genealogical Research in the National Archives" (Third Edition; for sale), and other NARA family history research tools available from Archives Customer Services Center (see page 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 (www.aaslh.org), and various other associations, bookstores, and publishers.

Population Census Items 1790–2000

(Includes only those supplemental schedules still in existence; excludes questions asked on a sample basis only—the long-form questionnaire.)

1790 Name of family head; free white males of 16 years and up; free white males under 16; free white females; slaves; other free persons.	Supplemental schedule for persons who died during the year.	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.
1800 Names of family head; if white, age and sex; race; slaves.	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, bedridden, or otherwise disabled; school attendance; literacy; birthplace of person and parents.	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, hours 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.
1810 Name of family head; if white, age and sex; race; slaves.	Supplemental schedules for persons who died during the 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.
1820 Name of family head; age; sex; race; foreigners not naturalized; slaves; industry (agriculture, commerce, and manufactures).	1890 General schedules—destroyed.	1960-1970 Address; name; relationship to household head; sex; race; age; marital status.
1830 Name of family head; age; sex; race; foreigners not naturalized; slaves; industry.	Supplemental schedules for Union veterans of the Civil War and their widows.	1980-1990 Address; name; household relationship; sex; race; age; marital status; Spanish/Hispanic origin or descent.
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.	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.	2000 Address; home owned or rented; name; household relationship; sex; age; birth date; race; Spanish/Hispanic/Latino origin or descent.
1850 Name; age; sex; race; whether deaf and dumb, blind, insane, or idiotic; value of real estate; occupation; birthplace; whether married within the year; school attendance; literacy; whether a pauper or convict.	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.	
Supplemental schedules for slaves, and persons who died during the year.	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.	
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.		
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.		

- National Archives and regional branches (see page 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 above 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 page 1), addresses are necessary to find them. Thus, the Census Bureau’s files cannot be used to locate missing 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, 2000), has details about this service and also discusses other possible sources of data about individuals. You can download this publication at <www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/gen-ref.html>.

Factfinder for the Nation

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), compact discs, DVDs, and online through the Census Bureau's data dissemination and inquiry system, American Fact-Finder®, which can be accessed from the agency's Internet site <www.census.gov>. PDFs of the latest publications can be downloaded from the Census Bureau Web site or the publications can be purchased directly from the agency. They are described in the Census 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 Bureau depository libraries in the United States that have reference

collections of these materials. The Census Bureau's regional offices and state data centers and the International Trade Administration's district offices make census data available in a variety of formats.

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

Customer Services Center
Customer Liaison and Marketing
Services Office
U.S. Census Bureau
Washington, DC 20233
1-800-923-8282 or 301-763-4636
Fax: 301-763-4636

For more information. CFF-4, "History and Organization," another Factfinder in this series, explains the history of the Census Bureau and its programs. A PDF file of the publication can be obtained from the following page on the Census Bureau Web site <www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/gen-ref.html>.

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

Director
U.S. Census Bureau
Washington, DC 20233

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION HEADQUARTERS AND REGIONAL BRANCHES

(Business hours: 9 a.m.–4:30 p.m., M-F. Contact each office to find out about extended hours.)

Washington, DC Headquarters

800 & Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20408
202-357-5400 or 1-866-325-7208
www.archives.gov
E-mail: inquire@nara.gov

Reference Branch

202-357-5400

Customer Services Center

800-234-8861
Fax: 301-837-0483

NARA—College Park, MD

8601 Adelphi Rd.
College Park, MD 20740
301-837-2000 or 1-866-272-6272
www.archives.gov
E-mail: inquire@nara.gov

Regional Archives

NARA—Pacific Alaska Region (Anchorage)

654 West Third Ave.
Anchorage, AK 99501-2145
907-261-7800
www.archives.gov/pacific-alaska/
anchorage/
E-mail: alaska.archives@nara.gov
Serves Alaska

NARA—Pacific Region (Laguna Niguel)

24000 Avila Rd.
Laguna Niguel, CA 92677-3497
949-360-2641
www.archives.gov/pacific/laguna
E-mail: laguna.archives@nara.gov
Serves AZ, Southern CA, and Clark County,
NV

NARA—Pacific Region (San Francisco)

1000 Commodore Dr.
San Bruno, CA 94066-2350
650-238-3501
www.archives.gov/pacific/san-francisco

E-mail: sanbruno.archives@nara.gov
Serves northern and central CA, NV (except
Clark County), HI, American Samoa, and the
Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands.

NARA—Rocky Mountain Region

Denver Federal Center, Building 48
West 6th Ave. and Kipling St.
P.O. Box 25307
Denver, CO 80225-0307
303-407-5740
www.archives.gov/rocky-mountain
E-mail: denver.archives@nara.gov
Serves CO, MT, NM, ND, SD, UT, WY

NARA—Southeast Region

5780 Jonesboro Rd.
Morrow, GA 30260-3806
770-968-2100
www.archives.gov/southeast/
E-mail: atlanta.archives@nara.gov
Serves AL, FL, GA, KY, MS, NC, SC, TN

NARA—Central Plains Region (Kansas City)

2312 East Bannister Rd.
Kansas City, MO 64131-3011
816-268-8012
www.archives.gov/central-plains/
kansas-city
E-mail: kansascity.archives@nara.gov
Serves AL, FL, GA, KY, MS, NC, SC, TN

NARA—Great Lakes Region

7358 South Pulaski Rd.
Chicago, IL 60629-5898
773-948-9001
www.archives.gov/great-lakes/chicago
E-mail: chicago.archives@nara.gov
Serves IL, IN, MI, MN, OH, WI

NARA—Northeast Region (Boston)

380 Trapelo Rd.
Waltham, MA 02452-6399
866-406-2379
www.archives.gov/northeast/waltham/
E-mail: waltham.archives@nara.gov
Serves CT, ME, MA, NH, RI, VT

NARA—Northeast Region (Pittsfield)

10 Conte Dr.
Pittsfield, MA 01201-8230
413-236-3600
www.archives.gov/northeast/pittsfield/
E-mail: pittsfield.archives@nara.gov
(Microfilm only)

NARA—Northeast Region (New York City)

201 Varick St., 12th Floor
New York, NY 10014-4811
866-840-1752
www.archives.gov/northeast/nyc
E-mail: newyork.archives@nara.gov
Serves NJ, NY, Puerto Rico, and the U.S.
Virgin Islands

NARA—Mid Atlantic Region (Center City Philadelphia)

900 Market St.
Philadelphia, PA 19107-4292
215-606-0100
www.archives.gov/midatlantic/
E-mail: philadelphia.archives@nara.gov
Serves DE, MD, PA, VA, WV

NARA—Southwest Region

501 West Felix St.
P.O. Box 6216
Ft. Worth, TX 76115-0212
817-831-5620
www.archives.gov/southwest/
E-mail: ftworth.archives@nara.gov
Serves AR, LA, OK, TX

NARA—Pacific Alaska Region (Seattle)

6125 Sand Point Way, NE
Seattle, WA 98115-7999
206-336-5115
www.archives.gov/pacific-alaska/seattle
E-mail: seattle.archives@nara.gov
Serves ID, OR, WA