NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION HEADQUARTERS AND REGIONAL BRANCHES

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 Census: From 1790 to 2000 (Washington, DC, 2002) provides a history of each census and reproduces the questionnaires and instructions given to enumerators for each census. You can download this publication at <www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/cen2000.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 not publicly available. For the 1800s, the records are so rare that you would need to contact each archivist to find out about extended hours.

NARA—Rocky Mountain Region

Denver Federal Center, Building 48
2640 23rd Ave.
Denver, CO 80210-8300

NARA—Northeast Region (Pittsfield)

10 Conte Dr.
Pittsfield, MA 01201-8230

NARA—Northeast Region (New York City)

201 Varick St., 12th Floor
New York, NY 10014-4811

NARA—Northeast Region (Seattle)

200 Second Ave.
Seattle, WA 98101-0021

NARA—Pacific Alaska Region (Seattle)

654 West Third Ave.
Seattle, WA 98104-1350

NARA—Pacific Alaska Region

3606 23rd Ave.
Anchorage, AK 99506-5275

NARA—Pacific Region

4901 10th St., Suite 1200
Annapolis, MD 20701-0030

NARA—Pacific Alaska Region (Seattle)

501 West Felix St.
Seattle, WA 98115-0212

NARA—Pacific Region (San Francisco)

1015 Pershing Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94108-2400

In 1960, people with the same soundex key were soundexed for 1910 for 21 states, principally in the South. Ten southern states, plus a few counties in West Virginia and Kentucky were soundexed for 1920. Alphabetic indexes to the 1790–1860 and most of the 1870 censuses are available in microfiche and on-line. 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.

Some 19th century industrial, agricultural, and mortality census schedules survive, mainly in state archives, although the National Archives has film for some states. These non-population schedules generally are available on microfilm. These records frequently can be related to individual lists in the population censuses.

Microfilm Rental and Sales

Rental. The National Archives rents microfilm copies of historical records to libraries and individuals. These copes are of federal population censuses 1790–1930; Soundex indexes, 1880–1930; Revolutionaries 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 (NCW), P.O. Box 30, Annapolis Junction, MD 20701-0030, or 1-866-272-6727. 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 or 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

Census Schedules Available to the Public
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 area.

Birth and death records, Americans overseas.

Birth, death, marriage, and divorce records, foreign.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
"Where to Write for Vital Records"
1-800-233-3755
www.cdc.gov/nchs/

Passport Services—Vital Records Section 111 19th Street, NW Suite 510 Washington, DC 20522-1705
1-888-267-9711
www.travel.state.gov

American Passport—Vital Records Section 111 19th Street, NW, Suite 510 Washington, DC 20522-1705
1-888-267-9711

Where to Write for Vital Records

Department of Homeland Security 
Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services

1-800-375-5283 TTY 1-800-767-1833
www.uscis.gov

Immigration or naturalization records, 1906 to present (earlier records are held by local courts)

Birth records of aliens, children adopted by U.S. citizens

Death records of members of the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, or Coast Guard

Military records from World War I and later (those prior to World War I are in the National Archives)

Selective Service records, born on or before Jan 1, 1900

Selective Service Records

Army, Navy, Air Force, or Coast Guard personnel whose service ended after 1909

U.S. Government civilian personnel whose service ended after 1909

National Personnel Records Center (Military Personnel Records)
9700 Page Avenue
St. Louis, MO 63120-3100
314-801-0800 Fax 314-801-9915
www.archives.gov/veterans

Military Records Division National Personnel Records Center
9700 Page Avenue St. Louis, MO 63120-3100
314-801-0800 Fax 314-801-9915

Selective Service System National Headquarters
Arlington, VA 22209-2425
847-688-6888 www.sss.gov/records.htm

NARA—Archival Programs PO. Box 28089
St. Louis, MO 63132-0898

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

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

Supplemental schedule for persons who died during the year.

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

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

Not in the censuses:

• 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 in relationship to the householder, and—where requested—race. If obtained in the censuses after 1860, includes age at the time of enumeration (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 the household to which a person belongs. The files cannot be used to locate missing persons unless an address (as expressed by law in any case), or even discover how many people have the same surname. The Census Bureau publication...

Census Bureau 
2000
Address: name; household relationship; sex; race; marital status; birthplace if born foreign; naturalized; employment status; hours worked in week; occupation; industry, and class of worker.

1930
Address: name; relationship to family head; sex; 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 a survivor of Union or Confederate army or navy; occupation; industry, and class of worker; for women, number of children born and number now living; 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 a survivor of Union or Confederate army or navy; occupation; industry, and class of worker.

1920
Address: name; relationship to family head; sex; age; marital status; sex; race; age; birthplace if born foreign; year of immigration to the U.S.; number of years of present marriage for women; number of children born and number now living; birthplace and mother tongue of person and parents; birthplace of parent and mother; mother tongue of foreign born; sex; occupation; industry, and class of worker; for women, number of children born and number now living; 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 a survivor of Union or Confederate army or navy; occupation; industry, and class of worker; for women, number of children born and number now living; 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 a survivor of Union or Confederate army or navy; occupation; industry, and class of worker.

2010
Address: name; relationship to family head; sex; 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 a survivor of Union or Confederate army or navy; occupation; industry, and class of worker; for women, number of children born and number now living; 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 a survivor of Union or Confederate army or navy; occupation; industry, and class of worker; for women, number of children born and number now living; 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 a survivor of Union or Confederate army or navy; occupation; industry, and class of worker.

Birth Search Application (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/gfr-09-pub.html.

Factfinder for the Nation

Inquiries about census data. The Census Bureau publishes data summaries, factbooks, and other products (as distanced from information about...
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/vsrr>

Passport Services—Vital Records Section 1111 19th Street, N.W. Suite 510 Washington, D.C. 20522-1705

Birth and death records, Americans overseas


American citizens traveling outside the country in question

Department of Homeland Security

Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services

1-800-375-5283 TTY 1-800-767-1833

Death records of members of the armed forces on active duty in the armed forces or at sea

National Personnel Records Center

Missouri National Cemetery

9700 Page Avenue

St. Louis, Mo. 63120-4000


Military records from World War I and later (those prior to World War I are in the National Archives)

Selective Service Records

National Personnel Records Center

9700 Page Avenue

St. Louis, Mo. 63120-4000


Selective Service System

Arlington, Va. 22209-2425

703-897-5200 Fax 314-801-9195 <www.archives.gov/veterans>

Selective Service records

Selective Service System

9700 Page Avenue

St. Louis, Mo. 63120-5100

314-877-5200 Fax 314-801-9195 <www.archives.gov/veterans>

U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force or Coast Guard

National Archives and regional branches (see page 4)

National Archives and regional branches (see page 4)

National Archives

Library of Congress

Division of Rare Book and Special Collections

101 Independence Ave., S.E.

Washington, D.C.

20540-4660

202-707-5563 <www.loc.gov/rbrc/ark>

National Archives & Records Administration

700 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Washington, D.C. 20408-0001

1-866-225-7288 <www.archives.gov>

Detailed information on Archives’ holdings of the above and other useful materials about individuals can be found in ‘Using Civil 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, and various Indian tribes. See page 4 for a list of archives in your area.

| National Archives and regional branches (see page 4) | Many social security and post offices have blank forms |

Population Census Items 1790-2000

(Supplements any other information collected for one individual in a given census (see above for questions) | Collects only those supplemental schedules still in existence; excludes questions asked on a basic form questionnaire.)

1790

Name of family head; free male whites of 16 years and up; age; free females; slaves; other free 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; slavery; industry (agriculture, commerce, and manufactures).

1830

Name of family head; age; sex; race; number of free and slave persons in each family employed in each of six classes of industry and one of occupation; literacy; pensions for Revolutionary or military service.

1840

Name of family head; sex; race; place of birth and doubt, blind, insane, or idiotic; value of real estate; occupation; birthplace; whether married within the year; school attendance; literacy; whether a pauper or common laborer.

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

1860

Name of family head; 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 parent were foreign born; months of birth of both parents; number of months marriage terminated within the year; school attendance; literacy; whether deaf and dumb, blind, insane, or idiotic; name of family head and number now living; birthplace and mother tongue of person and parents; if foreign born, year of immigration, whether naturalized, and ability to speak English; if any slave, why; if nonslave, month of marriage; if married; kind of family; 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; number of months not employed in manufacture or labor; whether at work or on public emergency work, duration of unemployment; occupation, industry, and class of worker; week worked last year, income last year.

1820

Name; age; marital status; birthplace if foreign born, whether naturalized; employment status; hours worked in week; occupation, industry, and class of worker.

1870-1900

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

1910

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

Supplemental schedules for persons who died during the year.

1920

Name; age; marital status; birthplace if foreign born, whether naturalized; employment status; hours worked in week; occupation, industry, and class of worker; sex; race; age; marital status.

1930

Address; name; relationship to family head; home or nonemergency government work, or in public emergency work (WPA, CCC, NRA, etc.); if in private 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; sex; race; marital status; birthplace if foreign born, whether naturalized; employment status; hours worked in week; occupation, industry, and class of worker.

1960-1990

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

2000

Address; name; household relationship; sex; age; birth date; race; Spanish/Hispanic/Latino origin or descent.

Address Search Information

(www.census.gov/history/www/agesearch.html) or from the following:

(BC-600) may be obtained from

For more information, please contact the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, D.C., 20408-0001 or from the following:

1-866-225-7288 <www.archives.gov>

For facilitation of the search, the following may be obtained from

Inquiries about census data.

The Census Bureau publishes data summary tables and other products available in multiple forms (as distinguished from information about
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

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 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, Measurement America: The Decennial Census 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 not available directly to the public for the first 72 years following the end of the census-taking years, by law (Title 44, U.S. Code). Thus, April 2012 is the scheduled date for the National Archives to open the 1940 census 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, DC (www.archives.gov) and its 13 regional archives (see page 4), and also in 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 by the 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 1910. Alphabetic indexes to the 1790–1860 and most of the 1870 censuses are available in the microcassette libraries. Most states began keeping birth records in the late 19th century and death records in the early 20th century. Researchers may find two Census Bureau publications useful; most major librarians 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 and addresses. A Century of Population Growth—1790–1990 (Washington, DC, 1949, reprinted 1965–1970) includes the incurrence of states from 1790 to 1970, and a variety of summary tables from colonial censuses from 1790 to 1900.

A number of state and territorial censuses were taken in the intradeclarative 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 1965–1975) and the Census Records, Ann S. Lainhart (Baltimore, MD, 1992). An appendix to the Dubester book tells about the state censuses (some including names) were located; copies of many can be obtained commercially on microfilm.

Some 19th century industrial, agricultural, and mortality censuses were also taken. The population schedules were available in many libraries, although the National Archives has filed copies 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 cop- ies are of federal population censuses 1790–1930; Soundex indexes, 1880–1930; Revolutionary War-commissioned military service records; and pension and bounty-land warrant application files, and Freedman’s Records. For details, contact the National Archives Microfilm Rental Program, P.O. Box 30, Annanpolis, Maryland 20701-0030, 301-604-3699.

Sales. Microfilm copies of census schedules, 1790–1930, and Soundex indexes, 1880–1930, can be purchased from the Customer Service Center (NVIS). For purchases, call 1-800-923-8282 or 1-866-271-7272. 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 in gain access to confidential census records or avoid the search fees through these acts. Transcript application forms

Availabilty of Census Records About Individuals

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION HEADQUARTERS AND REGIONAL BRANCHES

Washington, DC Headquarters
800 & Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20408
202-357-5400 or 1-866-325-7208
www.archives.gov
Email: inquire@nara.gov
Reference Branch
202-357-5400
Customer Services Center
800-234-5740
Fax: 301-837-0483
Services Office
800-234-5740 or 1-866-325-7208
www.archives.gov

U.S. CENSUS BUREAU
Helping You Make Informed Decisions
U.S. Department of Commerce Economics and Statistics Administration
NATIONAL ARCHIVES
Helping You Make Informed Decisions
U.S. Department of Commerce Economics and Statistics Administration
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U.S. Department of Commerce Economics and Statistics Administration
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U.S. Department of Commerce Economics and Statistics Administration