

United States Federal Census

1790-1940

General Information:

The US Federal Census is taken every 10 years beginning in 1790. The primary reason for the census is for the apportionment of members of the U.S House of Representatives. However, each census asks slightly different questions, depending on the time period and these are of interest to the genealogist. For example, in 1930, a question asks whether the household owns a radio and beginning in 1900, specific citizenship questions were asked.

From 1790 to 1840 only the head of household is named, and all others are accounted for by general ages and sex demographics. Beginning in 1850, all household members are named with age, sex, race, and occupational information. In all census years, the count was done by household in order of visitation by the census taker. If a family was not at home, they were re-visited later. That way they probably appear next to their neighbors, but they could also appear at the end of the district listing. In many census years, there were also separate pages for listing residents of hotels, lodging houses, trailer camps, etc.

Some Census years had special schedules such as the agricultural schedule (most years, not always available), slave schedules (1850 and 1860), and a veteran's schedule (1890).

Please note that except for about 6,100 records, the 1890 Census was destroyed by fire. Some states, especially some midwestern and western states took a state census during various periods and these may help fill in the gap for the missing 1890 Census. One example is the Kansas State Census. Kansas had a census every 10 years on the 5, from 1855 to 1925.

Definitions:

Enumerator: The person who went door to door gathering the answers from each household; also known as the census taker,

Enumeration District (ED) Number: An enumeration district number is typically displayed as a combination of a county number and a district number separated by a dash (ex. 37-29).

Researchers can locate an enumeration district number to browse census images for a particular location.

Find out more about the Census through each decade at

www.Census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/1790.html