



United States Census 1790 – 1840

They're Better Than You Think!

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Introduction

Have you researched your family back to the 1850 census and hit a brick wall? Try moving into the early census records, 1790-1840, you know the ones with the “tick marks.” Are you wondering if the early census records could even help; after all aren't, they just useless? They can be very helpful. With a few tips and tools, you may be able to find your ancestor and clues to help find additional records for the same individual. They're better than you think!

Objectives

- Understand the value of the early census records.
- Discover how early census records provide clues to other records about an individual.
- Find and use tools for analyzing early census records.

Value of the early census records, 1790-1840

- Place, time and year of birth
- Associates and neighbors
- Military service
- Immigration and naturalization
- Manufacturers
- Occupation and economics
- Health conditions

Clues for other records to search

- Additional records in the jurisdiction.
- Neighbors with same surname and in-law surnames.
- Military records, when indicated or suspected.
- Immigration and naturalization records.
- Agriculture indication leads to land and tax records.
- Occupations can help with recognizing the correct ancestor. Research others in the same industry.
- Health conditions help recognize an ancestor.

Tools for analyzing: Charts, worksheets, forms

- National Archives: <https://www.archives.gov/research/genealogy/charts-forms>
- FamilySearch: https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Census_Forms
- Ancestry: <https://www.ancestry.com/cs/census-forms>
- Google search for *us census forms* or *us census worksheets*
- research log templates: https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Research_Logs

Strategies to remember

Strategy #1 Go from the known to the unknown

Start with a firm foundation for the ancestors that you know. Don't try to push back in the census too quickly. Thoroughly research your known ancestors.

Strategy #2 Find a person in every record

Find each person in every possible record. For example, when looking for death records search for a death certificate or register, obituary, cemetery record and funeral program. Each record can contain different and helpful information.

Strategy #3 Find all known family members

Search for everyone in the family – that includes siblings, aunts, and uncles and sometimes even nieces and nephews. The more you know about the structure of the family, the more success you will have in locating your family in early census records.

Strategy #4 Be aware of name changes

Surnames can have multiple spellings for the same name. Be liberal in your thinking about how a surname is spelled. Names may change over generations. Make a list of all possible variants and search using the versions.

Strategy #5 Keep a research log. This is a must for success.

Helpful Resources for Research Logs

FS Research Wiki article *Research Logs*

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Research_Logs

FS Research Wiki article *Keeping a Research Log*

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Keeping_a_Research_Log

FS Research Wiki article *Document AS YOU GO!*

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Document_AS_YOU_GO!

FS Webinar *Research Logs part 1* by David Dilts

<https://www.familysearch.org/ask/learningViewer/45>

FS Webinar *Research Logs part 2* by David Dilts

<https://www.familysearch.org/ask/learningViewer/46>