

## Facts About the U.S. Census

### [Video Link](#)

The U.S. Census is one of the most important resources for family historians. Taken every ten years since 1790, it not only tracks the population but also captures valuable details about our ancestors — where they lived, their families, occupations, property, immigration, and much more. Today, we're diving into some fascinating facts you might not know about the U.S. Census — and how it can unlock new clues in your genealogy research!

### 1. Early censuses recorded almost no details

The 1790–1840 censuses only named the head of household; everyone else was just a tick mark by age and gender.

### 2. The census day wasn't always June 1

In 1790, Census Day was August 2. It wasn't until 1830 that it shifted to June 1, and later to April 1 in 1930.

### 3. Census takers could take months (or longer)

Enumerators had up to nine months or more to complete their rounds, meaning recorded ages could be off by a year or two.

### 4. Some census years had special "slave schedules"

In 1850 and 1860, separate Slave Schedules listed enslaved individuals by age and sex — but rarely by name.

### 5. The 1890 census was almost completely lost

A 1921 fire destroyed most of the 1890 census, creating a major gap for genealogists.

### 6. Some states conducted their own censuses

States like New York, Iowa, and Kansas took their own censuses between federal censuses, often recording more detail. Check the FamilySearch Wiki for what state censuses are available in the area you are researching.

### 7. 1850 was the first time all *free* individuals were named

Everyone — not just the head of household — was individually named starting in 1850.

#### Official Census Dates

1790 Census - August 2, 1790  
 1800 Census - August 4, 1800  
 1810 Census - August 6, 1810  
 1820 Census - August 7, 1820  
 1830 Census - June 1, 1830  
 1840 Census - June 1, 1840  
 1850 Census - June 1, 1850 (Names Household Members)  
 1860 Census - June 1, 1860  
 1870 Census - June 1, 1870 (First to list African Americans by name)  
 1880 Census - June 1, 1880  
 1890 Census - June 2, 1890 (Mostly destroyed by fire)  
 1900 Census - June 1, 1900  
 1910 Census - April 15, 1910  
 1920 Census - January 1, 1920  
 1930 Census - April 1, 1930  
 1940 Census - April 1, 1940  
 1950 Census - April 1, 1950  
 1960- Present Day is not available to the public yet.



*1921 Fire Destroyed most of the 1890 US Census*



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**8. Relationships to head of household (HOH) were not recorded until 1880**

Before 1880, relationships were not listed, so you had to infer them from other clues. Not everyone in the household were children or a spouse of the head of household. Be mindful there might be siblings, nibblings, parents or in-laws living in the household. Don't assume the younger members are the children of the HOH.

**9. Some censuses recorded military service**

The 1840 census included a list of Revolutionary War veterans and widows.

**10. 1930 and 1940 censuses recorded if you owned a radio**

A sign of the communications progress of the era. Radio ownership was an actual census question.

**11. Native Americans weren't fully counted until 1900**

Prior to 1900, Native Americans living on tribal land were often excluded from the census.

**12. Incorrect Info? Enumerators under pressure to complete their job often asked the neighbors for information on the household next door.** If people weren't home, census takers often asked neighbors, leading to many errors. Even teenagers or elderly who were home may have provided incorrect information.

**13. Ancestors might appear in more than one place**

People with multiple residences — like college students or travelers — were sometimes counted twice.

**14. Some censuses asked about immigration and naturalization**

The 1900, 1910, 1920, and 1930 censuses asked when immigrants arrived and if they were naturalized.

**15. Economic questions became common over time**

Later censuses asked about mortgages, rents, employment, and work hours.

**16. Race categories evolved over time**

Terms and classifications changed across decades, sometimes adding or removing categories.

**17. Some 19th-century censuses recorded disabilities**

Starting in 1830 and detailed more in 1880, disabilities like deafness, blindness, or insanity were noted.

**18. Not every state was included early on**

Territories and new states like Texas weren't always counted early on. Check the FamilySearch Wiki for when your state started keeping census records.

**19. The 1940 census asked about where you lived in 1935**

Helpful for tracking Great Depression-era migrations. Add that to your timeline and research notes!

**20. The 1950 census added questions about education and income**

It was the first to ask how many years of schooling someone had completed and to record detailed income.

**21. The original 1790 census was handwritten by U.S. Marshals**

Federal marshals and assistants, not census bureau employees, conducted the early censuses.

**22. Some 1790–1820 censuses were lost permanently**

Entire state records (like New Jersey and Georgia) were lost, many during the War of 1812.

**23. Women sometimes acted as enumerators**

Although rare early on, women increasingly served as census takers by the late 1800s.

**24. Prisoners, patients, and military members were counted separately**

Special institutional schedules captured people living in prisons, asylums, and military barracks.

**25. The 1850 and 1860 census had "Mortality Schedules"**

They listed people who died in the year prior, including cause of death, age, and birthplace.

**26. The 1930 census asked about veterans' service**

It asked if a person was a veteran and which war they served in.

**27. 1840 included data about schooling and literacy**

It recorded whether household members attended school or could read and write.

**28. Census workers or supervisors sometimes corrected their own forms**

Handwritten corrections, scratch-outs, and edits are visible on many census pages.

**29. Errors in transcription are common in indexes**

Digital indexes often have spelling mistakes from misread handwriting — always check the original images.

**30. The census tries to count the homeless**

Even historically, efforts were made to count transient populations, though imperfectly.

**31. Some Native American censuses were separate**

The Indian Census Rolls (1885–1940) were separate from federal censuses.

**32. The 1860 census included personal property and real estate values**

This shows economic standing even when no land was owned.

**33. Some territories conducted censuses outside the 10-year cycle**

Places like Dakota and New Mexico territories sometimes took extra censuses.

**34. The 2020 Census was the first done primarily online**

Most households submitted their 2020 census response digitally for the first time.

**35. Census records are sealed for 72 years**

Due to privacy laws, census records are withheld for 72 years before being publicly released. The next U.S. census release will happen on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2032.

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