

10 Census Questions That Lead to More Answers

You'll get more than just answers in a census record: you'll also find clues in each one that point you to other record collections at Ancestry.com. Here are 10 of our favorite next-step clues from the census. Use them to learn more about your family's history and craft a few new searches, too!

1 - CENSUS QUESTION: Free white males; free white females; other free persons; slaves

Years appeared: 1790-1840 (question changed slightly through the years)

Where it leads: Other census records

In the first six censuses, only heads of household were listed by name. All other people in the household are noted through tick marks. Here are two ways to use those:

- Say in 1830 your ancestor's home includes a tick mark for a young male. But the 1840 census doesn't have someone who would fit the same characteristics living in the household. This can be a clue that the young male started his own household. Search for the family surname nearby.

- A slave under the age of 26 in 1820 may have lived to be enumerated by name in 1870. Work backwards from 1870 searching for the former slave's surname to see if any slave owners with that surname lived in the area. Then see if their households included a slave with matching criteria.

1810 United States Federal Census about Abraham	
Name:	Abraham Simpson
Home in 1810 (City, County, State):	Lexington, Fayette, Kentucky
Free White Persons - Males - Under 10:	2
Free White Persons - Males - 10 thru 15:	1
Free White Persons - Males - 16 thru 25:	1
Free White Persons - Males - 45 and over:	1
Free White Persons - Females - Under 10:	4
Free White Persons - Females - 10 thru 15:	1
Free White Persons - Females - 16 thru 25:	1
Free White Persons - Females - 26 thru 44:	1
Numbers of Slaves:	3
Number of Household Members Under 16:	8
Number of Household Members Over 25:	2

2 - CENSUS QUESTION: Street name; house number

Years appeared: 1880 and 1900-1930 (note: the census today still includes street addresses)

Where it leads: City directories

Look to the far left column on census forms (years listed above) and you'll find the name of the street. The box to the right of the street name is the house number. Put those two together and you have your family's street address.

Street name, lot, blk.	PLACE OF ABODE			
	House number (in cities or towns)	Number of dwelling houses in order of visitation	Number of family in order of visitation	Number of family in order of visitation
	1	2	3	4
51	110	44	44	
52				
53	114	42	42	
54				
55	200	43	46	
56				
57				
58	266	44	47	
59				
60				
61				
62	215	45	48	

Use the street address to help you pare down possible matches in city directories. Also add addresses from the census and city directories to a timeline for a better look at your family's migratory patterns. Bonus: Adding discoveries to family members in your Ancestry.com family tree creates a quick timeline you can use, too.

3 - CENSUS QUESTION: Age at first marriage; number of years in present marriage

Years appeared: Age at first marriage, 1930; number of years in present marriage, 1900-19100

Where it leads: Marriage indexes and records; previous censuses

These sound like innocuous - and, frankly, nosy - questions. But "age at first marriage" and "number of years in present marriage" can be very revealing.

At first glance, they're both straightforward: simple math can lead you to marriage indexes and other marriage records. Age at first marriage, however, could lead you to a different story.

Say a husband was born in 1885 and his 1930 census record indicates his age at first marriage was 20 - his first marriage, therefore, was 25 years ago. His wife, who was born in 1902, was also age 20 at her first marriage - but that would make her first marriage just eight years

prior. While neither answer indicates that the current marriage is the first one, the fact that the husband initially wed 17 years before his wife means you have at least one additional marriage to search for. Start your search for the husband's previous marriage in marriage indexes. Also

check the first census following what would have been his initial marriage to see if he's listed with a former wife.

Sex	Color or race	Age at last birthday	Marital condition	Age at first marriage
11	12	13	14	15
M	W	60	M	
M	W	42	M	20
F	W	32	M	25

PERSONAL DESCRIPTION				
Sex.	Color or race.	Age at last birthday.	Whether single, married, widowed, or divorced.	Number of years of present marriage.
5	6	7	8	9
F	W	42	M	
M	W	55	M	18

4 - CENSUS QUESTION: Mother of how many children born; how many children living

Years appeared: 1910

Where it leads: Death records, birth records, obituaries

Who knew two small boxes could hold so many clues? On the 1910 census, mothers were asked to list the number of children born and the number of children still

living. First, a quick count will tell you if every child born to a mother is listed with her on the census page. Missing some of the living children? That leads to additional 1910 census searches for them. (Start locally; even married children often remained in close proximity to dear old Mom.) Never heard of other children? Mom may have had a previous marriage that no one mentioned, or a child may have been institutionalized or disowned. Search for Mom in earlier census records to see if you can learn more. A discrepancy between the number of children born and the number living leads to death indexes, death certificates, and obituaries. Tip: You may be able to focus your search for death records by looking for gaps of more than two years between the ages of the living children - often a sign that a child is missing. However, don't assume that all discrepancies are related to children who died young. Search for death certificates and other information from the time Mom entered childbearing years through 1910. And remember to look for all of the children in birth records.

PERSONAL DESCRIPTION.						
Sex.	Color or race.	Age at last birthday.	Whether single, married, widowed, or divorced.	Number of years of present marriage.	Mother of how many children.	
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
F	W	31	M			
F	W	58	M		6	3

5 - CENSUS QUESTION: Place of birth; naturalization status; immigration year

Years appeared: Birth (1850-1930); immigration year, naturalization status (1900-1930)
Where it leads: Immigration and naturalization records

There are some census questions that are pretty straight-forward, like place of birth: if it's a foreign country, you know immediately that you'll want to find a passenger list or border crossing - or possibly even both.

Naturalization status can lead you to naturalization records filed prior to the census day and year (in 1920, you'll also find the naturalization year). Pay particular attention to the years associated with each person in

the family - it wasn't unheard of for family members to arrive in America at different times, on different ships, and through different ports. Passenger lists were not standardized (prior to September 1906, neither were naturalization documents), so details listed for two different family members could vary greatly. Locate immigration-related records for everyone in the family and you may land on even more answers.

NATIVITY.			CITIZENSHIP.		
Place of birth of each person and parents of each person enumerated. If born in the United States, give the State or Territory; if of foreign birth, give the Country only.					
Place of birth of this PERSON.	Place of birth of FATHER of this person.	Place of birth of MOTHER of this person.	Year of Immigration to the United States.	Number of years in the United States.	Naturalization.
13	14	15	16	17	18
Germany	Germany	Germany	1866	34	Pa.
Germany	Germany	Germany	1866	34	

6 - CENSUS QUESTION: Owned house or rented

Years appeared: 1900-1930
Where it leads: Land records; tax records; homestead records

Did your ancestor own his home? Search through land records and tax records to see if you can find more details about what he owned. If you're really lucky, you'll discover your ancestor homesteaded - keep an open mind since homesteading wasn't limited to just western and plains states. You'll find homestead applications in the U.S. General Land Office records.

Relationship of this person to the head of the family.	Home owned or rented.	If owned, free or mortgaged.
6	7	8
son		
Head	R	F
wife		
Head	O	M
wife		



7 - CENSUS QUESTION: Age; gender

Years appeared: the census today still asks for gender as well

Where it leads: World War I draft registration cards; other military records

Pay careful attention to the age of a male ancestor: it could lead you to military records. For example, males ages 20 – 48 in the 1920 census would have registered for World War I if they lived in the United States during World War I, whether or not they were U.S. citizens. A quick search of the World War I Draft Registration Cards could turn up a registration card with lots of additional details about an ancestor.

Military records are often quite detailed and can hold a few surprises. For example, you'll find men way outside of the traditional draft-age range in World War II draft registration cards. The fourth registration, was often deemed "the old man's draft" because it targeted men ages 45 to 64.

	Personal Description.		
	Color—White, W.; Black, B.; Mulatto, Mu.; Chinese, C.; Indian, I.	Sex—Male, M.; Female, F.	Age at last birthday prior to June 1, 1920. If under 1 year, give months in fractions, thus: 3/4.
3			
Foster Jeremiah B.	W	M	45
- Rahama	W	F	46
- Homer	W	M	19
- Emma	W	F	15

8 - CENSUS QUESTION: Military veteran; veteran of which war

Years appeared: 1840, 1910, 1930

Where it leads: Military records; pension records; 1890 Veterans Schedules

Finding a clue in the census that says an ancestor served in a specific war can speed up your search for associated military records. In 1840, you'll find names of Revolutionary War veterans. In 1910, you'll get information about Civil War service.

Look in the far right column of the 1930 census and you'll also see a small notation about which war an ancestor took part in. Note that any service associated with the Civil War in 1910 or 1930 should point you to the 1890 Veterans Schedule, one of the few census-related records that didn't perish as a result of the fire that destroyed nearly all of the 1890 census.

PERSONS FOR REVOLUTIONARY OR MILITARY SERVICES INCLUDED IN THE FOREGOING.		AGE
NAME	WAR	
Thomas Clinton	81	

NT	VETERANS	
	Whether a veteran of U. S. military or naval forces	What war or expedition?
line per schedule	30	31
	No	
	No	
	Yes	N.W.

9 - CENSUS QUESTION: Deaf, blind, insane, pauper, convict, etc.

Years appeared: 1850-1880 (question changed slightly over time); 1840 (without names)

Where it leads: Defective, Dependent, and Delinquent (DDD) schedules; Special Census on Deaf Family Marriages and Hearing Relatives; penitentiary records

A mark in the deaf, blind, insane, pauper, convict box of the 1880 census is a quick clue that there may be more information out there. First, take a look at the bottom of the census page for notes that may have been written about the person's condition. Then search through the Defective, Dependent, and Delinquent census schedules - supplemental schedules that included anyone labeled as such on the census form.

Deaf individuals may have also been enumerated on the Special Census on Deaf Family Marriages and Hearing

Relatives (1888-1895) where you'll find details about the person and other family members. Finally, if the person you're interested in was incarcerated, check penitentiary records, where you may learn where, when and why.

Place of Birth, the State, Territory, or Country.	Married within the year.	Attended School within the year.	Persons over 90 yrs of age who cannot read & write	Whether deaf and dumb, blind, insane, idiotic, pauper, or convict.
10	11	12	13	14
lund			/	✓
England				
Illinois		/		

10 - CENSUS QUESTION: Name

Years appeared: Every year (from 1790-1840, head of household only)

Where it leads: Marriage records; census records; a great story

Oh for the simpler days when you didn't have to leave the neighborhood to find a suitable spouse. Luckily, that also means you usually don't have to go far to find the spouse of an ancestor. Look up and down the census page—and a few pages forward and back—that your ancestor is enumerated on in the last census in which he or she was single. Does anyone fit the name/age/birthplace profile of your ancestor's future spouse? Use birth (of child), marriage, and death records, and later censuses to compare additional details about your ancestor's spouse to see if you've landed on a great story about how your ancestor married the girl (or boy) next door.

The name of every person whose usual place of abode on the first day of June, 1860, was in this family.	DESCRIPTION.		
	Age.	Sex.	Color, { White, black, or mulatto.
3	4	5	6
Unoccupied			
Samuel Weeks	51	m	✓
Mary "	36	f	✓
Helen "	16	f	✓
George "	11	m	✓
Jane "	9	f	
Francis "	7	m	
Alice "	4	f	