

Clues in Census Records, 1850-1930

NOTE: This article was written in 1998, so the latest census at that time was 1930. The 1940 census is now available.

Experienced genealogical researchers use clues found in one record to find **other** records about the same individual. This article describes some of the clues found in census records.

Date of birth

- The **1900** census (column 7) indicates the person's month and year of birth; the **1850-1880** and **1910-1940** censuses indicate the person's age.
- The **1870** census (column 13) and **1880** census (column 7) indicate the month in which the person was born, if born "within the year," that is between June 1, 1869 and May 31, 1870 for the 1870 census, or June 1, 1879 and May 31, 1880, for the 1880 census. The official census day was June 1 in both 1870 and 1880, although the enumerator may have visited the household at a later date.
- While the person's age is not an exact date of birth, it at least provides a "ballpark" figure useful (1) for tracking the person from one census to the next, especially if other people have the same name, and (2) for locating the person in any existing vital records.

Place of birth

- The **1850-1930** censuses indicate the person's state or country of birth, which helps narrow the geographic scope of search for the specific town of birth.

Date of marriage

- The **1850** census (column 10), **1860** census (column 11), **1870** census (column 14), and **1880** census (column 12) indicate whether the person had married within the year.
- "Within the year" means during the year before the official census day, that is, between June 1, 1849 and May 31, 1850, for the 1850 census; between June 1, 1859 and May 31, 1860, for the 1860 census; between June 1, 1869 and May 31, 1870, for the 1870 census; and between June 1, 1879 and May 31, 1880, for the 1880 census. The official census day was June 1 in each of these census years, although the enumerator may have visited the household at a later date.
- The **1900** census (column 10) and **1910** census (column 9) indicate the number of years of marriage for each married person.

Number of children

- The **1900** census (column 11) and **1910** census (column 10) indicate how many children were **born** to each woman. The **1900** census (column 12) and **1910** census (column 11) indicate how many of those children were **still living**. These clues can help determine whether the researcher has identified all children in a given family, and whether any were deceased when either census was taken.

Immigration

- The **1900** census (column 16), **1910** census (column 15), **1920** census (column 13), and **1930** census (column 22) each indicate the person's year of immigration to the United States. This information should help in locating a ship passenger arrival list.

Naturalization

- The **1870** census (column 19) has a check mark for "Male Citizens of the U.S. of 21 years of age and upwards." If the person was a foreign-born citizen, this means that he had become naturalized by 1870.
- The **1900** census (column 18), the **1910** census (column 16), and **1920** census (column 14), and **1930** census (column 23) indicate the person's naturalization status. The answers are "Al" for alien, "Pa" for "first papers," and "Na" for naturalized.
- The **1920** census (column 15) indicates the year in which the person was naturalized.

These clues may lead to naturalization records.

Foreign-born parents

- The **1870** census (columns 11-12) have check marks if the person's parents were "of foreign birth."
- The **1880** census (columns 25-26), **1900** census (columns 14-15), **1910** census (columns 13-14), **1920** census (columns 21 & 23), and **1930** census (columns 19-20) indicate the person's parents' birthplaces.

Military Service

- **Service in Union or Confederate Army or Navy**
 - The **1910** census (column 30) indicates whether the person was a "survivor of the Union or Confederate Army or Navy." The answers are "UA" for Union Army, "UN" for Union Navy, "CA" for Confederate Army, and "CN" for Confederate Navy. These clues lead to military service and pension records.
 - A word of caution: On the 1910 census, columns 30-32 are often "overwritten" with numbers like 2-1-0-0 or 6-9-0-0. These numbers are **not** the answers for columns 30-32, but were data summaries used by Census Bureau tabulators in Washington, DC, to compile statistical data.
 - The **1930** census (column 31) indicates Civil War veterans with the abbreviation "CW."
- **Military Service, 1898-1918, in Major Wars**
 - The **1930** census (column 31) indicates military service in other wars with "Sp" for Spanish-American War, "Phil" for Philippine Insurrection, "Box" for Boxer Rebellion, "Mex" for Mexican Expedition, and "WW" for World War I.

Real property

- The **1850** census (column 8), **1860** census (column 8), and **1870** census (column 8) indicate the value of real property (land) owned by each person.
- The **1900** census (column 25), **1910** census (column 26), **1920** census (column 7), and **1930** census (column 7) indicate whether the person owned ("O") or rented ("R") the home or farm.
- The **1900** census (column 26), **1910** census (column 27), and **1920** census (column 8) indicate whether home and farm owners owned their property with a mortgage ("M") or free of mortgage ("F").
- The **1930** census (column 8) indicates the value of home, if owned, or the monthly rental, if rented.

These clues should lead researchers to the county recorder's office or equivalent agency for deeds, mortgages, and property tax records.

Economic data.

- The **1850** census (column 7), **1860** census (column 7), **1870** census (column 7), and **1880** census (column 13) all indicate the person's occupation. If the answer is "**farmer**," the researcher should look for information about the farmer's land ownership, crops, and livestock in the agricultural census schedules. If the person was a saw or grist miller, cheese maker, or other "**manufacturer**," the researcher should check the manufacturing census schedules.
- Agricultural census schedules exist for 1850-1880; manufacturing census schedules exist for 1820 and 1850-1880.

Conclusion.

Researchers who use these and other clues in census records will be more successful--and thorough--in their genealogical research.