

HOW TO USE CENSUS RECORDS

Census records are a common tool for researching individuals. They can provide invaluable information for the writing of histories, including an individual's age, spouse, children and location at the time of the census.

WHERE TO FIND CENSUS RECORDS

Census records are available at many large libraries that have microfilm collections. Small libraries may have census records on their own county and on surrounding ones. The following are libraries that have extensive census record collections:

- Texas State Library, Austin
- Clayton Library (Center for Genealogical Research), Houston
- Dallas Public Library, Dallas

HOW TO LOOK UP CENSUS RECORDS BY HAND

1. The library will have census record indexes. Find the index for the state and year you need.
2. The index will provide names, counties, states, page numbers and the location where the census was taken.
3. Write down the name, county and page number. Take this to the census records.
4. The census records are on microfilm. If you cannot locate the records, ask the librarian.
5. After locating the microfilm, you can take it a reader and you should be able to make copies.

HOW TO LOOK UP CENSUS RECORDS ON THE INTERNET

The Texas State Library and Archives Commission offer the TexShare online database, which includes census records. To be able to use this, you must be a Texas resident and either register at the Texas State Library in Austin, or with a local library that has access to the database. The database that you will need to use is "HeritageQuest Online."

1. Once accessing HeritageQuest Online, you will need to "search census records."
2. In the fields provided, you can provide a surname, given name, census year and state. If you do not have all of this information, you will most likely receive a greater amount of results from your search.
3. After getting your results, select the surname of the person you are researching. The census record will load, which you read and print.

HOW TO LOOK UP CENSUS RECORDS USING THE SOUNDIX SYSTEM

Another way to look up census records is to use the Soundex system, which was instituted to organize the censuses of 1880, 1900, 1920 and part of 1910. This index is organized by the first letter of the last name and then by a three-digit code, with the idea that variations of surname spellings would still be filed in the correct area. However, it also means that several different surnames will be filed under the same code.

This is the key to the Soundex code:

1 – B, P, F, V

2 – C, S, K, G, J, Q, X, Z

3 – D, T

4 – L

5 – M, N

6 – R

No code assigned – A, E, I, O, U, Y, W and H

The following are rules in finding the code for the surname you are seeking:

1. Begin the code with the first letter of the surname (this letter will not be assigned a number).
2. Use the code above to assign a number to the succeeding letters until you create a three-digit number.
3. Skip vowels and the letters Y, W and H.
4. Double letters (ex. “mm” in “Simmons”) are given just one number (ex. 5 for “mm”).
5. Two consecutive letters in a name that share a code number are given just one number (ex. “ck” in “Peck” is assigned a “2,” not “22”).
6. If there are not enough letters in the surname to create three digits, zeroes are used in the remaining places (ex. Keynes is given the code “K520”).

Here are some examples:

1. Sanders: S536
2. Sayers: S620
3. Gregg: G620
4. Romanowski: R520
5. Johnson: J525
6. Cho: C000

ADDITIONAL TIPS REGARDING CENSUS RECORDS

- There are books available that explain in greater detail how to look up census records and how to use them. One such book, published by the Census Bureau, is entitled Twenty Censuses: Population and Housing Questions, 1790-1980.
- Census records from 1790 until about 1840 list only the head of household and statistical information. Beginning in 1850, records list everyone in the household.
- 1890 census records are sparse, as a 1921 fire in Washington D.C. destroyed most of the records.

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