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Clues in Census Records, 1790-1840

Experienced genealogical researchers use clues found in one record to find **other** records about the same individual. Although the first six federal decennial censuses taken from 1790 through 1840 contain less data than those taken later, they still contain useful clues that should not be overlooked.

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Date of Birth

The 1790-1840 censuses generally **named** only the head of household but reported the **age** of each household member in age categories. For example, the 1810 census reported the number of free white males and females in these age categories:

"Under ten years of age"

"Of ten years, and under sixteen"

"Of sixteen, and under twenty-six"

"Of twenty-six, and under forty-five"

"Of forty-five and upwards"

While the age range provided by age categories does not indicate an exact date of birth, it at least gives a "ballpark" figure useful (1) for tracking the head of household from one census to the next, especially if other people have the same name, and (2) for tentatively estimating the composition of the family, which the researcher must confirm from other records.

For example, in 1810, the household of Alexander Tackles of Warsaw, Genesee Co., NY, consisted of two males age 16-26 (sons Alexander Jr. and John B.), one male over age 45 (Alexander), one female under age 10 (daughter Sophronia), one female age 16-26 (daughter Polly), and one female over age 45 (wife Philena Howard). The census provided the age ranges of family members; names and exact dates of birth of Alexander's family members were obtained from other records.

The 1840 census reported the name and exact age of Revolutionary War pensioners; examples are given in the next section.

Military Service

The 1840 census asked for the names and ages of "Pensioners for Revolutionary or Military Services, Included in the Foregoing [Household]." Pensioners included both veterans and widows. For example, veteran Alexander Tackels, aged 85, was enumerated in the household of Jonathan

Arnold in Middlebury, Genesee (now Wyoming) Co., NY, and the widow Chloe McCullar, aged 81 1/2, was enumerated in the household of W.W. Blake in St. Albans Township, Licking Co., OH.

This clue should lead the researcher to Revolutionary War military service and pension records. The pension files, which are especially useful, have been reproduced in NARA microfilm publication **M804, *Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Application Files (2,670 rolls)***. Military service records are also available on microfilm; for more information see listings for Record Group 93, War Department Collection of Revolutionary War Records, in ***Microfilm Resources for Research: A Comprehensive Catalog (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1996)***, which is available [online](#) or for [purchase](#).

Since elderly persons usually resided with kinfolk, the pensioners' presence in these households should be a clue that the pensioner may be related to someone in the household. For example, William W. Blake's wife's maiden name was Nancy McCullar; she was one of Chloe McCullar's children.

Immigration and Naturalization

The 1820 census reported the number of "Foreigners not naturalized" in each household; the 1830 census reported the number of "ALIENS--Foreigners not naturalized" in each household. For example, the 1820 census for Geauga County, Ohio, reported that these households included aliens:

Name	Number of Aliens	Township
Thomas Ainslee	2	Parkman
Francis Bark	1	Painesville
Francis Billette	3	Painesville
John Graham 2d	1	Perry
Abel Levins	1	Parkman

Although these censuses do not specify which person or persons in the household were aliens, this clue should alert the researcher (1) to search for known household members in [immigration records](#), (2) to be alert to clues in other records that point to the suspected immigrant's possible foreign origins, and (3) to search for possible later [naturalization records](#) for the suspected immigrant. Unfortunately, however, there are relatively few ship passenger lists (immigration records) before January 1, 1820, when the Federal Government began requiring such lists to be presented to collectors of customs.

Occupation and Economic Data

1810 Census

In 1810, the U.S. marshals and their assistants who took the census were instructed to obtain information about manufacturing. However, since they were not told what questions to ask, the information collected varied widely. For example, Eli Waste of Wilmington, Windham Co., VT, owned one loom that produced the following yards of cloth: 60 woolen, 50 linen, 10 cotton, and 50 mixed fabrics, while James Weston [*sic*, Westurn] of Orwell, Rutland (now Addison) Co., VT, owned seven sheep, one spinning wheel, and one little spinning wheel that produced 25 yards of woolen cloth and 15 yards of linen cloth.

Clues about livestock may lead to personal property tax records, kept by the county treasurer, county auditor, or equivalent official.

1820 Census

The 1820 census reported the number of persons in each household who engaged in agriculture, commerce, and manufacturing.

If household members engaged in agriculture (i.e., were farmers), the researcher should check for deeds and mortgages in the county recorder's office or equivalent agency, and for real and personal property tax records kept by the county auditor, county treasurer, or equivalent official. Not all farmers owned land or livestock, of course, but it is always worthwhile to check all extant records for the place where a person is known to have lived.

If household members engaged in manufacturing, the researcher should examine NARA microfilm publication **M279, Records of the 1820 Census of Manufactures (27 rolls)**. According to the instructions given the U.S. marshals and their assistants, persons engaged in manufacturing included both (1) both employees in "manufacturing establishments" and (2) "artificers, handicrafts men, and mechanics whose labor is preeminently of the hand, and not upon the field." The manufacturing census schedules in M279 include information about:

- The type of business;
- Kinds and quantities of raw materials used;
- Number of persons employed;
- Number and type of machinery;
- Expenditures for capital (equipment) and wages;
- Type and quality of goods produced annually; and
- General remarks.

Three cautions are in order, however:

First, a person listed as a manufacturer in the population census may not be included in the 1820 manufacturing schedules in M279. For example, M279 contains information about 13 manufacturing establishments in Batavia (now Middlefield), Burton, Chardon, and Parkman Twps., Geauga Co., OH, but the population census lists 60 households in the same townships in which one or more persons were engaged in manufacturing!

Second, a household may include only persons "engaged in agriculture" according to the population census, yet have a manufacturing schedule in M279. For example, M279 includes a manufacturing schedule for a pot and pearl ashery owned by "Ives & Doty" of Parkman Twp., Geauga Co., OH, yet the population census reported Jesse Ives and Asa Doty's households only included persons "engaged in agriculture."

Third, persons who are not listed as head of household in the population census may have a manufacturing schedule in M279. For example, Daniel Earle, Oliver Gavitt, and R.W. Scott are all listed in M279 as manufacturers in Parkman Township, Geauga Co., OH, but are not named as heads of household in the population census anywhere in the county.

1840 Census

The 1840 census reported the number of persons in each household who engaged in mining; agriculture; commerce; manufactures and trades; navigation of the ocean; navigation of canals, lakes, and rivers; and learned professions and engineers. Again, researchers should check land and tax records kept by county officials, especially when the household was engaged in agricultural pursuits.

Conclusion

Experienced genealogical researchers use clues found in one record to locate other records about the same individual. However, it is always best to thoroughly exhaust all extant records for the place where the person is known to have lived, as shown by the above analysis of the surprises found in the 1820 manufacturing schedules for Geauga Co., OH.

This essay is adapted from Claire Prechtel-Kluszens, "Clues in Census Records, 1790-1840," ***The Record***, Vol. 4, No. 5 (May 1998).

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Clues in Census Records, 1850-1930

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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 **1910-1930** 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; see [Civil War Records](#) and [Confederate Pension Records](#) for more information.
 - 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.
- For more information and roll lists of nonpopulation census schedules available as NARA microfilm publications, see [Nonpopulation Census Records](#).

Conclusion.

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

This essay is adapted from "Clues in Census Records, 1850-1920," *The Record*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Jan. 1998): 26-27.

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