

# How to Search the 1790-1840 US Census Successfully

*More than just a number*

Lindsay Fulton

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## How was the Census Enumerated?

It is important to understand the enumeration process, as it can sometimes explain missing records, duplicate enumerations, and mistakes on a census entry.

- **1790-1800-** The enumerators (aka the Assistant) were assigned a specific division, and after tabulating a town/city/region, they were required to make 2 copies of the enumeration to be displayed in the most public places for verification. Once verified, 1 schedule (usually the original enumeration, however there are examples that the displayed copies were used) was filed with the clerk in the respective district court (state) or superior court (territory). The Marshall was then required to file a report with the President of the U.S. (1790) or the Secretary of State (1800). The report was a tabulation of all the statistics and did not include the names of the head of house.
- **1810-1820-** Assistants assigned to a specific division were required to be residents of that particular city or county. Instructions indicated that they were to make an actual inquiry at each dwelling house or with the head of household. Again, 2 copies were to be displayed in the most public places for verification and 1 enumeration (usually original) was filed with the clerk in the respective district court (state) or superior court (territory). The Marshall was then required to file a report with the Secretary of State. The report was a tabulation of all the statistics and did not include the names of the head of house. In 1830, the courts were asked to forward their 1790-1820 census holdings to the Department of State. Because some courts took poor care of the first four censuses, many of these census records have been lost.
- **1830-1840-** Assistants were assigned a specific division, no more than 1 county, but could include 1 or more towns “which should be distinctly bounded.” They were instructed to make an actual inquiry at each dwelling house or through personal inquiry with a head of household. Assistants submitted 1 copy of their enumeration to the Marshall, who forwarded the results to the clerk in the respective district/territory. The clerks were then responsible for making an additional copy to be sent to the Secretary of State. As a result, the microfilmed enumerations of the 1830 and 1840 censuses were made from the copies sent to Washington; the copies retained by the court clerks may still be held on the county level.

### **\*\*Remember\*\***

A household containing more than one family would be enumerated with just one head of house AND the head of household was not always the oldest male

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## What to look for:

- **Match with baptismal/birth records-** The most obvious way to use the 1790-1840 censuses is to cross-reference a specific census enumeration with baptismal/birth records for the period in question. Simply make a graph of the children born to a couple and match up the gender/ages with the census enumeration. This can be especially helpful if they had multiple children. However, if your ancestor's residence is unknown or baptismal/birth records for the children do not exist, this technique may be less effective.
- **Foreigners not naturalized-** In 1820 and 1830, the U.S. Census indicated the number of immigrants who were not yet naturalized. While the column does not indicate the age or gender of the immigrants, you can use this information to locate possible naturalization records. To locate a possible naturalization record, you should examine court records on the county level.
- **Military aged men-** In 1820, census enumerators were asked to specify those males living in the household that were of the ages of 16 and under 18 years old. Therefore, any males born between 8 August 1802 and 7 August 1804 (accounting for some inaccuracies) would be included in this column. These men would also be included in the column, males between the ages of 16-25 years.
- **Revolutionary War pensioners-** In 1840, the census enumerators took the names and ages of those pensioners who were receiving a pension. These names on the second page of the census enumeration and were recorded in addition to head of household information.
- **Children born between 1 June 1820 and 7 August 1820:** Because the 1820 census enumeration began on 7 August 1820 and the 1830 census on 1 June 1830, the enumerations were taken 9 years, 9 months and 25 days apart, rather than a full 10 years. As a result, those children who were born between 2 June 1820 and 7 August 1820 would have been listed in the "under 5 years" category in 1820 and "under 10 years" in 1830.
- **Free colored and slave populations-** The 1820 census is the first census enumeration that identifies slaves and colored populations by gender and age range. Beforehand, these populations were counted without any other identifiable means.

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### Published U.S. Federal Census Resources:

*The Census Book: A Genealogist's Guide to the Federal Census Facts, Schedules, and Indexes* by William Dollarhide (Bountiful, Utah: Heritage Quest, 1999)

*Map Guide to the U.S. Federal Census, 1790-1920* by William Dollarhide and William Thorndale (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1987)

*A Census of Pensioners for Revolutionary or Military Service* by the U.S. Census Bureau (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, 1989)

Portable Genealogist: *Using the Federal Census: 1790-1840* by Lindsay Fulton (NEHGS, 2015)

### Published Geographical Resources:

*Redbook: American State County and Town Sources*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition edited by Alice Eichholz (Provo, Utah: Ancestry, 2004)

*Genealogist Handbook for New England Research*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition edited by Michael Leclerc (Boston, Massachusetts: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2012)

*New York Family History Research Guide and Gazetteer* (New York, New York: New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, 2014)

### Web Resources:

[www.AmericanAncestors.org](http://www.AmericanAncestors.org); [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com); [www.FamilySearch.org](http://www.FamilySearch.org) (and others) provide searchable transcriptions and/or digital images of the U.S. Federal Census from 1790 to 1940.

[www.census.gov/history/index.html](http://www.census.gov/history/index.html)- Maintained by the U.S. Census Bureau – Invaluable resource for U.S. Federal Census instructions 1790-2010, agency history, index to questions for the 1790-2010 U.S. Federal Census, population maps, and more.

<http://www.stevemorse.org/>- While this resource has little for the 1790-1840 U.S. Census, it is a wonderful resource for later Censuses, including a database for enumeration districts, streets, and enumeration district maps.