

Fast Facts

About the 1920 Census



National Archives and Records Administration
Washington, DC 20408



WHAT ABOUT SERVICEMEN?

Enumerators were instructed not to report servicemen in the family enumerations but to treat them as residents of their duty posts. The 1920 census includes schedules and a Soundex index for overseas military and naval forces.

AND INSTITUTIONS?

Soundex cards for institutions are found at the end of each state's Soundex index. NOTE: On the census, many institutions, even if enumerated at their street addresses, are found at the end of the enumeration section.

HOW CAN I USE THE NATURALIZATION INFORMATION I FIND ON THE CENSUS?

Designations in the "citizenship" column should serve as a guide. "NA" stood for naturalized; "PA" for first papers (declaration of intention); "AL" for alien; and "NR" for citizenship not reported.

Knowing the year citizenship was attained may help in your search for naturalization records. Prior to 1906, most naturalizations were conducted in local and state (non-federal) courts. You should first contact the clerk of the county court in which the individual resided.

In most cases, National Archives facilities retain naturalizations conducted in federal courts in their regions. The available records span the period 1790-1990, but coverage and indexing vary from facility to facility. Contact the individual regional archives for information on their naturalization holdings. General Information Leaflet 22, "The Regional Archives System of the National Archives," lists the addresses and can be ordered from Publication Services, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC 20408.

National Archives or from the General Reference Branch (NNRG), National Archives, Washington, DC 20408.

IS THERE AN INDEX FOR EACH STATE?

Yes. There is a Soundex index on microfilm for each state and territory.

WHAT IS SOUNDEX?

Soundex is a coded surname index to the census schedules. It was prepared by the Works Progress Administration between 1938 and 1940. The code is formed from the first letter of the last name, followed by a three number code representing the remaining consonants in the name (for example, Williams is coded W 452). The Soundex coding system was developed to find a surname even though it may have been recorded under various spellings. See *Using Census Records* for more information on the Soundex coding system; it can be obtained from Publication Services, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC 20408.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I CAN'T FIND THE FAMILY I AM LOOKING FOR ON THE SOUNDEX INDEX?

Doublecheck your Soundex coding. Did you see the surname you seek or a close variation of the presumed spelling? If you did, but did not find your family, you may have to read through the county/city listings line-by-line on the census roll.

IS IT POSSIBLE MY FAMILY WAS MISSED IN THE INDEXING?

Yes! There are no statistics on the rate of error in the index. With almost 106 million individuals listed on the census, it is highly probable that some names were overlooked.

WHEN DID THE 1920 CENSUS OFFICIALLY BEGIN?

January 2, 1920. The date of enumeration appears on the heading of each page of the census schedule. All responses were to reflect the individual's status as of January 1, 1920, even if the status had changed between January 1 and the day the enumerator arrived. Children born between January 1 and the day of enumeration were not to be listed, while individuals alive on January 1, but deceased when the enumerator arrived, were to be counted.

WHEN DID IT END?

The law allowed 30 days for enumeration in rural areas and two weeks in places with populations of 2,500 or more. Influenza epidemics and severe winter weather caused many delays.

HOW ACCURATE IS THE CENSUS INFORMATION?

The answers that appear on the census schedules depended on what the people interviewed told the enumerator. Census enumerators were not authorized to request proof of age, date of arrival, proof of naturalization, or other information. Instructions to the enumerators did not stipulate that they inquire about the correct spelling of an individual's name.

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS IN WHICH THE 1910 AND THE 1920 CENSUS DIFFER?

The 1920 census did not have questions regarding unemployment, Union or Confederate military service, number of children, or duration of marriage. It did include four new question columns: one asked the year of naturalization and three inquired about mother tongue. The 1920 census also asked the year of arrival and naturalization status of every foreign-born person, and inquired about the year of naturalization for those individuals who had become U.S. citizens. In 1920, the census included for the first time Guam, American Samoa, and the Panama Canal Zone.

THE 1920 CENSUS WAS TAKEN SOON AFTER
WORLD WAR I. DID THE WAR AFFECT THE
GATHERING OF CENSUS INFORMATION IN ANY
WAY?

Yes. Due to boundary modifications in Europe resulting from World War I, individuals were uncertain about how to identify their national origin. Enumerators were instructed to spell out the name of the city, state, province, or region of respondents who declared that they or their parents had been born in Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia, or Turkey.

DOES THE 1920 CENSUS INCLUDE SEPARATE INDIAN
POPULATION SCHEDULES?

No. Inhabitants of reservations were enumerated in the general (principal) population schedules.

DO FARM SCHEDULES EXIST?

By authority of Congress, the non-population schedules (including farm schedules) were destroyed. However, agricultural schedules for Puerto Rico, Hawaii, Guam, and the counties of McLean (IL), Jackson (MI), Carbon (MT), Santa Fe (NM), and Wilson (TN) have survived in textual form. For more information about these, contact the National Archives and Records Administration, Civil Reference Branch, NNRC, Washington, DC 20408, (202) 501-5395.

SOME OF THE 1920 SCHEDULES SHOW
HANDWRITTEN CODE NUMBERS IN OR NEAR SOME
OF THE COLUMNS. DO THESE MEAN ANYTHING?

They should be ignored. Census clerks added these codes, which were then punched into cards used to tabulate census results. The codes usually represented household composition, occupation and class of worker, or simply marks made in the coding, punching, or tabulating operations themselves.

WHY ARE CENSUS RECORDS CLOSED FOR 72 YEARS?

In 1952, the Director of the Census and the Archivist of the United States agreed that population schedules were to be transferred to the National Archives "with the provision that they remain closed for seventy-two years after the enumeration date for each census" for privacy reasons. (Title 44, U.S.C., Sec. 2108.) During this seventy-two-year period, schedules and questionnaires from decennial censuses of population and housing can be released by the Census Bureau only to the "named individuals, their heirs (on proof of death), or their legal representatives." To request information from these closed records, contact the Bureau of the Census, P.O. Box 1545, Jeffersonville, IN 47131. There is a \$25.00 fee for a search.

DO THE ORIGINAL 1920 SCHEDULES STILL EXIST?

No. Disposal of the original 1920 census schedules was authorized by the Eighty-third Congress (1st Session, House Report 1076). The 1920 census records have been reproduced on microfilm by the National Archives and Records Administration from the highest quality master negatives available from the Bureau of the Census. The original film includes defects (such as faded print and uneven focus) that affect the legibility of some frames.

I CAN'T VISIT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OR ONE OF ITS REGIONAL ARCHIVES. HOW CAN I OBTAIN 1920 CENSUS RECORDS?

Microfilmed copies of census records are available for use at many large libraries and genealogical societies. In addition, the National Archives in Washington, DC, has a microfilm rental program (301-604-3699); a microfilm purchase program (202-501-5240); and can provide paper copies through the mail of specifically identified pages of the census. To request this photocopying service, use National Archives Trust Fund Form 82 "Request for Copies of Census Records." This form can be obtained from a regional branch of the

READ MORE ABOUT IT...

For additional, more detailed, information on the 1920 census, see the following sources:

Green, Kellee. "The Fourteenth Numbering of the People: The 1920 Census." *Prologue* (Summer, 1991): 131-45.

National Archives. *The 1920 Federal Population Census: Catalog of National Archives Microfilm*. (Washington, DC: National Archives Trust Fund Board, 1991). Introduction and background found on pages 1-13.

National Archives. *Using Census Records*.

Shepard, JoAnne (Bureau of the Census). *Age Search Information*. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1990).

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

The NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION (NARA) establishes policies and procedures for managing U.S. Government records. The National Archives assists Federal agencies in documenting their activities, administering records management programs, scheduling records, and retiring noncurrent records to Federal records centers. The agency also acquires, arranges, describes, preserves, and makes available to the public the historically valuable records of the three branches of Government.

1920 CENSUS

POPULATION SCHEDULE ITEMS

1. Street, avenue, road, etc.
2. House number or farm
3. Number of dwelling in order of visitation
4. Number of family in order of visitation
5. Name of each person whose place of abode was in this family
6. Relationship of person enumerated to head of the family
7. Home owned or rented
8. If owned, free or mortgage
9. Sex
10. Color or race
11. Age at last birthday
12. Single, married, widowed, or divorced
13. Year of immigration to United States
14. Naturalized or alien
15. If naturalized, year of naturalization
16. Attended school any time since September 1, 1919
17. Whether able to read
18. Whether able to write
19. Person's place of birth
20. Mother tongue
21. Father's place of birth
22. Father's mother tongue
23. Mother's place of birth
24. Mother's mother tongue
25. Able to speak English
26. Trade, profession, or particular kind of work done
27. Industry, business, or establishment in which at work
28. Employer, salary or wage worker, or working on own account
29. Number of farm schedule

Compiled by the Regional Archives System
of the National Archives

National Archives and Records Administration
General Information Leaflet 43

1992